



# United Nations: Assessed Budgetary Contributions and Voting Powers

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## **Summary**

- This Insight examines the relationship between financial power and decision-making power in the United Nations, comparing assessed budgetary contributions with formal voting structures.
- By presenting longitudinal data – particularly the dramatic rise of China’s assessments – it highlights how funding patterns shape influence in the Security Council and the General Assembly, and how these trends intersect with current geopolitical shifts and debates on multilateralism.
- A central argument is that China’s ascent to a 20 per cent assessed contribution marks a historic turning point: after 70 years of US dominance as the sole double-digit contributor, two permanent members now exceed the 20% threshold.
- The combined share of the P5 surpasses 50 per cent of the regular budget, raising questions about the alignment between financial weight and structural power, and about possible future reforms – such as adding Germany and Japan or envisioning a hypothetical single European Union seat.
- The analysis shows that although the General Assembly operates on a one-state-one-vote basis, its financial underpinnings are extremely concentrated: just 16 countries provide over 80 per cent of the regular budget.
- Yet a qualified majority can be achieved by 128 states whose combined contributions amount to barely 2.2%, underscoring the disconnect between financial responsibility and voting outcomes.
- By comparing the P5 and the BRICS founding members, the Insight illustrates emerging multipolar configurations. BRICS collectively contributes nearly 25%, but China overwhelmingly dominates this bloc financially.
- The data prompts reflection on whether China may replace the US as the UN’s primary driver, whether Washington’s traditional budget-pressure tactics could be replicated by Beijing, and how funding patterns might reshape multilateral priorities.
- Ultimately, the figures and analyses encourage inquiry into who truly benefits from the UN system – major powers that finance it, or small and medium-sized states that wield proportionally greater voting influence – and whether structural reform, especially of the Security Council, is necessary for fairness and stability.

## The Issue

The impact of certain countries and certain leaders on multilateralism, as we know it, depends on more than one factor and not all of them should be circumstantial. Whatever extraordinary powers and influence we attribute to super-leaders of enormous imprint in history, such as Napoleon, Hitler or Stalin, those powers and influence are also determined by some characteristics of their times and societies.

Therefore, if we have to assess or to predict the impact of a certain more or less spectacular election on multilateralism, we should look at other circumstances and current trends as well.

Within the narrow ambit of this text when we use the term multilateralism as defining the United Nations quintessence of global multilateralism, without ignoring the existence of other forms of multilateralism, limited to less than a universal magnitude, that is 193 Member States.

Unlike other erudite approaches, based on wise judgement, reasoning, hypothesizes and logic, this text will only show figures. Figures can indeed be impersonal and mute, but sometimes they could erupt into eloquence.

The only possible merit of the enumeration of figures below is that they could inspire and help the imagination of the readers and of the learned analysts who try to decipher the implication of the last elections in the United States. When figures represent money, they gain in significance. I count on the only logical connection I can afford, that is between those who pay the bills and those who make decisions.

Where is the power in the United Nations? In the hands of Member States, through two principal organs: the Security Council and the General Assembly for different mandates and means. The United Nations does not have the competence to produce financial resources. Its bills are paid from the contributions collected from the governments of the Member States. The United Nations work is funded through regular budgets, voluntary contributions and funds attracted from private companies and individuals.

### Part 1. The Security Council

The figures below represent exclusively the assessed contributions of the Member States to the regular budgets of the United Nations,<sup>1</sup> as apportioned by the General Assembly of the United Nations, based on the proposals of the Committee of Contributions, a body of experts elected on their personal capacity.

The assessed contributions of the Member States are calculated every three years, using a methodology that starts from the percentage of each member state in the world GNI, as a first step, and continues with nine other steps, which include relief measures and limits to the scale of contributions determined by political decisions. The scale of assessment for 2004-2006, was decided in 2003, the one for 2007-2009 in 2006 etc. In Table 1 the figures below the years represent the percentage of the mandatory contributions of each country to the regular budget.

**Table 1: The assessed contributions of the United States and China**

	2004-2006 %	2007-2009 %	2010-2012 %	2013-2015 %	2016-2018 %	2019-2021 %	2022-2024 %	2025-2027 %
<b>United States</b>	22.000	22.000	22.000	22.000	22.000	22.000	22.000	22.000
<b>China</b>	2.053	2.667	3.189	5.148	7.921	12.005	15.254	20.004

The choice of the two countries is obviously arbitrary, but they were chosen because they represent a moment of historic importance, and an inflexion point in the evolution of the United Nations, where two nations exceed the threshold of 20 per cent, after 70 years when only one country paid a two-digit contribution. The evolution of the assessed contribution of the United States is constant, as it was frozen by the General Assembly at the level of 22 per cent in 2000, the previous one being 25 per cent. The assessed contribution of China is the result of the calculation according to the methodology.

Due to the spectacular increase of the contribution of China, for the first time the total contributions of the five permanent members of the Security Council exceeds half of the regular budget of the United Nations. Before Brexit, one of the controversial points discussed in the context of the reform of the Security Council was the apparent

**Table 2: The contributions of the five permanent members of the Security Council to the regular budget of the United Nations according to the scale of assessments decided for 2025-2027**

United States	China	United Kingdom	France	Russian Federation
22.000 %	20.004 %	3.991 %	3.858 %	2.094 %

contradiction between the idea that the European Union has a single defence and security policy and the presence of the two EU members (France and the United Kingdom) among the permanent members. The same argument was made when the candidature of Germany for a new permanent seat in the Security Council was proposed. After Brexit the issue lost significance as France is now the only EU member with a permanent seat. However, assuming that discussion on the membership of the Security Council will ascend again on the agenda of the General Assembly, it may be useful to anticipate the addition of new figures.

If the European Union had one single voice in the Security Council, the joint assessed contributions of all its member states would be 28.49 per cent.

A plausible hypothesis for a while was the addition of just two permanent members to the Security Council: Germany and Japan.

**Table 3: The Contributions of Germany and Japan to the regular budget of the United Nations according to the scale of assessment decided for 2025-2027**

<b>Germany</b>	5.692 %
<b>Japan</b>	6.930 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.620 %</b>

That will increase the significance of the Security Council in terms of funding powers. Note should be taken that the share the permanent members of the Security Council to the budgets of peacekeeping operations – which are funded separately – will be considerably higher.

In the context of the debate of a needed multipolarism, as an alternative to unipolarism or to a new bipolarism, the group entitled BRICS comes often into discussion.

**Table 4: The contributions of the first five original members of BRICS to the regular budget of the United Nations**

<b>China</b>	20.004 %
<b>Russian Federation</b>	2.094 %
<b>Brazil</b>	1.411 %
<b>India</b>	1.106 %
<b>South Africa</b>	0.251 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.87 %</b>

## Part 2: The General Assembly

The General Assembly is the most representative and democratic organ of the United Nations, while its resolutions cover almost all issues of global interest. It is not just the conscience of the humankind, the highest moral authority, but also it handles through various subsidiary organs the codification of international law. In addition to the conventions and agreements agreed, which turn into binding law, the General Assembly is the source of hundreds of recommendations and the proponent of major global agendas. The General Assembly actually draws the borders between good and evil in international relations.

So, the contribution of all categories of Member States of the United Nations to regular budget deserves also some attention.

A first relevant fact is that more than half of the regular budget is covered by only four countries.

**Table 5: The contribution of the first four largest contributors to the regular budget of the United Nations**

If four countries pay 54.626 % of the bills, one may like to see what happens with the remaining 189 member states.

<b>United States</b>	22.000 %
<b>China</b>	20.004 %
<b>Japan</b>	6.930 %
<b>Germany</b>	5.692 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>54.626 %</b>

**Table 6: Other Member States whose contribution to the regular budgets exceeds 2**

<b>United Kingdom</b>	3.991
<b>France</b>	3.858
<b>Italy</b>	2.813
<b>Canada</b>	2.543
<b>Republic of Korea</b>	2.349
<b>Australia</b>	2.040
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.594</b>

**Table 7: Member States whose contributions exceed 1%**

<b>Spain</b>	1.895
<b>Brazil</b>	1.411
<b>Mexico</b>	1.137
<b>Netherlands</b>	1.298
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	1.217
<b>Switzerland</b>	1.029
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.987</b>

The next table encapsulates the situation at the top of the scale of contributions.

**Table 8: The situation of the top contributors to the regular budget of the United Nations**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Member States</b>	<b>The total of their contributions (%)</b>
<b>Member States that contribute more than 20 per cent</b>	2	42.004
<b>Member states that contribute between 5 and 7 per cent</b>	2	12.622
<b>Member States that contribute between 2 and 4 per cent</b>	6	17.594
<b>Member States that contribute between 1 and 2 per cent</b>	6	7.987
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>80.207</b>

This is a fact: 16 members states cover over 80 per cent of the regular budget of the United Nations. The General Assembly works on the principle *one country, one vote*. The resolutions are adopted by simple or qualified majority. The power of making decisions in the General Assembly belongs to a qualified majority. That invites having a brief look at the bottom of the scale of assessment. Can we have a qualified majority without the vote of the 16 biggest contributors? Or, for that matter, without 60 contributors from the top downwards?

Yes, we can!

**Table 9: The contribution of a hypothetical qualified majority in the General Assembly.**

Level of contributions	Number of states at that level	The total of their contributions
Contribution at the fixed floor level (0.001 %)	28	0.028
Contributions smaller or equal to 0.01 (0.00X) %	62	0.354
Contributions smaller or equal to 0.100 (0.XX0) %	43	1.834
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>2.216</b>

The qualified majority in the General Assembly under its current membership is 128 countries. Therefore, we could have at any time a resolution of the General Assembly adopted by the vote of Member States that contribute together 2.216 per cent of the regular budget.<sup>2</sup>

With those figures at hand the diplomats and political analysts well versed in international political and multilateral organizations could reflect and possibly answer the following questions:

- Is multilateralism an option compatible with the voluntary moves of the new US administration?
- Will China take the place of the United States as a leading force in the United Nations system?
- Will China pressure the United Nations about the size of the budget as the United States has done for decades?
- Will the global agenda be influenced by the new configuration of the funding power?
- Is there a real need to reform the Security Council?
- Would a change in the membership of the Security Council bring more stability, efficiency and fairness in international affairs?
- Who benefits more from the existence of the United Nations, after all? Major powers, in general? Individual countries? Small and medium sized countries?

### Endnotes

1. The source of data used for the entire text and all tables is the United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/259 entitled "Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations" adopted on 24 December 2024. For the additional figures indicated in Table 1, the extra sources were resolutions 76/238, 73/271, 70/245, 67/238, 64/248, 61/237 and 51/1 B of the General Assembly.
2. The budget approved by the General Assembly for the year 2025 is \$ 3.72 billion. The budget of the New York police department for the same year is \$ 5.83 billion. The military aid provided to Ukraine during Biden administration was \$ 65.9 billion.