

INDIA @ UN

NEWS: Recent analysis, based on more than 5,500 UN resolutions voted on by India from 1946 to June 2025, has found that India is altering its voting strategy at the United Nations (UN).

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Overview: Voting in the United Nations (UN)

- **Core of Global Diplomacy:** Voting is fundamental to how the UN functions, providing all member states—regardless of size—an official platform to express their positions on global issues.
- **Instrument of Multilateral Decision-Making:** Votes shape resolutions on peace, security, human rights, development, and sanctions, and often reflect prevailing geopolitical dynamics.

Types of Voting in Major UN Bodies

a. UN General Assembly (UNGA)

- **One Country, One Vote Principle:** All 193 member states have equal voting power, regardless of economic or military strength.
- **Nature of Resolutions:** Resolutions are **non-binding** but carry symbolic and moral weight.
- **Voting Thresholds:**
 - **Simple Majority:** For procedural and most substantive matters.
 - **Two-Thirds Majority:** Required for critical issues like peace and security, membership, and budgetary questions.
- **Consensus & Contention:** While many resolutions are adopted by consensus, divisive matters (e.g., geopolitical conflicts) often go to vote.

b. UN Security Council (UNSC)

- **Weighted Voting System:** 15 members—5 permanent (P5: China, France, Russia, UK, USA) and 10 elected.
- **Veto Power:** Any of the P5 can block adoption by using the veto, regardless of majority support.
- **Adoption Rule:** Requires at least **9 affirmative votes** with no P5 veto to pass any substantive resolution.

c. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

- **Majority Voting System:** Comprises 54 members elected by the General Assembly.
- **Focus Areas:** Development cooperation, human rights, social and economic issues.

d. Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

- **Majority Voting:** 47 elected members vote on resolutions concerning global human rights violations.

- **Significance:** While resolutions are non-binding, they influence global discourse and accountability efforts.

Key Examples: India's Strategic Abstentions

a. Russia–Ukraine Conflict (2022 onwards)

- **UNGA & UNSC Abstentions:** India abstained on multiple resolutions condemning Russia, calling for diplomacy and respect for sovereignty without directly naming aggressors.
- **Rationale:** Balancing ties with Russia (defence partner) and the West (strategic and economic interests).

b. Israel–Palestine Conflict

- **Frequent Abstentions:** India abstained on votes criticizing Israel's actions in Gaza or supporting Palestinian demands.
- **Diplomatic Balancing Act:** India emphasizes a two-state solution but avoids aligning too strongly due to evolving ties with Israel.

c. Myanmar Crisis

- **Post-2017 Abstentions:** On resolutions condemning the Rohingya crackdown and later, the military junta's takeover.
- **Explanation:** Strategic caution due to shared borders, security concerns, and regional balancing with China's influence.

d. China's Human Rights Record

- **Avoiding Confrontation:** India has abstained on critical votes highlighting alleged abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.
- **Strategic Reasoning:** Maintaining a stable but cautious relationship with a powerful and proximate neighbour.

e. Other Sensitive Issues

- **Taliban in Afghanistan:** India abstained on resolutions involving the Taliban's status post-2021 takeover.
- **Islamophobia Resolution (OIC-led):** India abstained, citing issues with terminology and intent.
- **Arms Embargoes & Sanctions:** India abstains when it believes sanctions may disproportionately harm civilians or lack sufficient clarity.

Reasons for India's Strategic Shift Toward Abstention

a. Polarised Global Order

- **Erosion of Consensus:** Intensified power rivalry among major nations (e.g., USA vs China/Russia) reduces common ground in UN debates.
- **India's Middle Path:** Instead of being coerced into choosing sides, India navigates a flexible, interest-based foreign policy.

b. Complex Nature of Modern Resolutions

- **Layered Provisions:** UN resolutions today often bundle multiple issues—e.g., humanitarian aid with political condemnation.
- **Diplomatic Risk in Voting:** A “yes” or “no” may appear to endorse all clauses, including those India may not fully support.

c. Strategic Autonomy

- **Policy of Non-Alignment 2.0:** India’s abstention is an assertion of independent judgment, beyond Cold War–style bloc politics.
- **Sophisticated Signaling:** Abstentions often signal India's discomfort or disagreement without outright opposition.

d. Middle Power Diplomacy

- **Bridge-Building Role:** India leverages abstentions to maintain open ties with both sides of contentious issues (e.g., West and Global South).
- **Interest Maximization:** Abstentions allow India to preserve strategic partnerships while advancing its own long-term goals.

Implications for India’s Global Role

- **Reinforces Issue-Based Diplomacy:** Moves away from ideology-driven voting to a more pragmatic, context-driven stance.
- **Positions India as a Balancer:** Demonstrates India’s capacity to mediate and build consensus on divisive international issues.
- **Preserves Strategic Flexibility:** Allows India to keep diplomatic channels open with conflicting parties (e.g., USA and Russia, Israel and Palestine).
- **Signals India’s Aspiration for Global Leadership:** Abstention reflects a mature, nuanced approach aligned with India’s claim to a permanent UNSC seat.
- **But Also Creates Perception Challenges:** Allies may view repeated abstentions as ambiguity or indecisiveness on moral questions.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/a-useful-tool-annual-share-of-abstentions-in-indias-un-votes-at-all-time-high/article69827249.ece>