Putting Mass Atrocities on the Agenda: UNSC Response to Mass Atrocities

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Abstract

Under what conditions can we expect the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to respond to mass atrocity events? While existing literature suggests that the UNSC responds based on the severity of the crisis, significant variation persists even among the most severe cases. While the post-referendum violence in East Timor received two peacekeeping missions within as many months, the atrocities at the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War never even made it onto the UNSC agenda. I argue this variation stems from the political considerations the Council President must make when setting the UNSC agenda, balancing the preferences of the target state, international community, and fellow Council members. To test my argument, I collected new data on the UNSC's response to 24 mass atrocities from 1989 to 2024. I find that the Council President's (CPs) status as a permanent or elected member impacts the number of meetings a mass atrocity event receives in a given month. Furthermore, elected CPs prioritize whether a mass atrocity is ongoing when deciding to place it on the agenda. Permanent CPs, alternatively, consider their relationship with the target state most strongly. Surprisingly, factors like the civilian death toll appear to have no impact on the number of meetings the event receives. These results highlight how institutional constraints and political considerations, rather than the severity of a crisis alone, shape whether the UNSC responds to mass atrocities. This project contributes to international relations literature by demonstrating that, even among cases meeting high thresholds of violence and displacement, political factors, especially the institutional position of the Council President, determine international recognition. By isolating a universe of extreme humanitarian need, I shift the analytical lens from questions of whether the Council acts to how agenda-setting power is exercised under political constraint.

1 Introduction

United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) response to mass atrocity (MA) events remains inconsistent despite its mandate to maintain international peace and security. The UNSC responded forcefully during the 1999 East Timor Crisis, passing a resolution authorizing a non-UN peacekeeping force, International Force East Timor (INTERFET), only 11 days after the onset of the widespread violence against civilians. The following month, in October, the UNSC passed another resolution establishing the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, a UN peacekeeping mission. INTERFET oversaw the removal of Indonesian troops from East Timor, completed by the end of October 1999, less than two months after the onset of violence.

However, the UNSC does not respond to all cases in this manner. Others receive meetings at the outbreak of violence but fade from the agenda despite the crisis continuing. For example, Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis, where airstrikes in the Rakhine state have killed civilians as recently as January 2025, yet the last time the UNSC held a meeting on Myanmar was December 2022. Finally, there are cases that the UNSC never discusses at all. At the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed or unaccounted for. Despite a UN panel finding evidence of war crimes and human rights groups calling on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to take action, only the UNSC could refer the case to the International Criminal Court. The UNSC held no formal meetings to discuss this case, thus preventing any further action on it. These cases highlight the UNSC's pivotal role as a gatekeeper of recognition, legitimacy, and intervention and reveal how its attention to mass atrocities is not determined by humanitarian severity alone. While previous research emphasizes civilian deaths, displacement, and regional instability as primary drivers of UNSC response (Lundgren & Klamberg 2023, Binder & Golub 2020), these factors do not explain why some of the most severe mass atrocities remain entirely absent from the Council's agenda.

This article builds on the idea that response begins with recognition. A UNSC meet-

ing, even without resolution passage, is the first step toward international action. Council meetings function not only to deliberate policy but also to signal priorities, respond to international pressure, and legitimize concern. In this sense, agenda-setting is a fundamental act of political judgment with strategic consequences.

I argue that variation in whether the UNSC discusses MA events stems from the strategic considerations of the Council President (CP), who holds the monthly rotating agenda-setting role on the Council. The CP holds procedural power as the agenda-setter, but operates under constraints imposed by internal and external audiences; their fellow Council members, the target state, and the international community. These actors have conflicting preferences towards UNSC response to an MA event, forcing CPs to weigh the reputational and diplomatic costs of holding, or avoiding, meetings on these events. I argue that the CP is incentivized to side with the preferences of one of these audiences, bearing the cost imposed by the displeased audience. Whichever of these audiences can most benefit the CP or incur the least cost on the CP will have their preferences enacted. I propose three hypotheses based on each audience's preferences and the conditions required for the CP to act in their favor. I argue that when the CP-Target state relationship is strong, meetings on the corresponding MA event will decrease, buoyed by the international community's discussion of the MA event.

Returning to the Sri Lankan example, Russia and China had already signaled their reluctance to take action on the crisis within the UNSC. With two veto players demonstrating intentions to block action, the Council President, the member state setting the agenda for the month, must weigh the cost of spending plenary time on an issue unlikely to result in a resolution over issues that are more agreeable to the Council as a whole. This bargaining scenario is complicated further by the international community and their calls for action as well as the Council President's relationship with the target state. As seen with the response to the crisis in Gaza, strong international community calls for action can increase the benefit of calling meetings on an issue unlikely to result in a resolution as the international community praised those that put the crisis on the agenda, such as Brazil, and condemned

those that prevented the passage of ceasefire resolutions, the United States. By relaxing the assumption that UNSC meetings must result in resolutions or be considered wasted plenary time and acknowledging that even holding a meeting on an MA event is accomplishing the goal of signaling to the international community, greater variation can be identified and analyzed in these cases, especially between cases that have and have not received meetings.

This analysis defines MA events that surpass a high threshold of severity, selecting for cases with 1,000 or more civilian deaths by state forces per year. This design isolates the impact of political considerations by holding humanitarian need constant. By narrowing the scope to crises where the humanitarian conditions are severe enough to warrant UNSC response, I reveal that in the most extreme cases Council attention is shaped by position and relationships, not by severity alone. To test my argument, I construct an original dataset of UNSC meeting behavior across 24 MA events from 1989 to 2024. I combine new monthly-level data on formal meeting with measures of bilateral relationships, international discussion, and Council position. I utilized an OLS model with fixed effects at the MA event level to test my argument. My findings show that the CP's institutional position, whether elected (E10) or permanent (P5), significantly shapes their agenda-setting behavior. E10 members are more likely to place ongoing MAs on the agenda, while P5 members are more constrained. Moreover, once a meeting has occurred on an MA event, the path to subsequent meetings becomes easier, demonstrating a path-dependent dynamic in Council behavior.

This article advances our understanding of global agenda-setting by showing that, even among mass atrocity events that meet the severity threshold for UN action, political calculations tied to institutional position determine whether a crisis receives sustained Council attention. The argument and analysis in this article make important contributions to our understanding of UNSC agenda-setting and response to threats to international peace and security. Through a more nuanced understanding of UNSC response to MA events and how members navigate the competing preferences of both external and internal audiences, this work aims to inform strategies that increase the likelihood of meaningful response by the

UNSC to mass atrocities.

2 Background and Literature Review

2.1 UNSC Structure

Firstly, I will provide a brief discussion of the structure of the UNSC as foundational information for the following discussion of the political considerations members must make within the constraints of their unique positions on the Council. The body is composed of five permanent members and ten elected members. The permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and can be referred to as a group as the P5. These members have been on the Council since its founding and hold veto power, meaning that if any of the P5 vote no on a resolution, it will fail no matter the votes of the other members of the Council. This allows each P5 member to unilaterally prevent resolutions on issues they do not want the UNSC to act on.

The remaining ten spots on the Council are distributed regionally and are filled through elections held in the General Assembly for two-year terms. The African region holds three seats, while the Asia-Pacific, Latin American and Caribbean, and Western Europe and Other groups hold two seats each, and the Eastern European group holds only one seat, though Russia is considered a permanent representative of the region. Arab countries alternate between the African and Asia-Pacific seats. While each group has its own internal norms for nominations which can lead to some states frequently being elected to the Council, for example, Brazil has served a total of 22 years on the UNSC so far, no elected member can serve two consecutive terms. While on the Council, each member will have the opportunity to act as Council President (CP) at least once, and the position rotates alphabetically. I will discuss the role of the CP in depth in the following section as the CP sets the monthly agenda for the Council.

2.2 Setting the Agenda

Understanding the agenda-setting process is essential to understanding under what conditions the UNSC responses to mass atrocities. While holding a meeting on an MA event may appear to have little impact regarding the on the ground realities of a crisis on its face, holding a UNSC meeting is the first step in the only pathway to UNSC action, such as sanctions, peacekeeping, or calling for international criminal prosecutions. As the UNSC acts as a gatekeeper to many forms of intervention as well as a normative compass to the international community, understanding which cases overcome this initial hurdle is essential to understanding the downstream actions and outcomes related to MA events. Even a UNSC meeting on an MA event constitutes naming and shaming, a strategy multiple actor types can engage in (Krain 2012), to meaningful ameliorative effects such as increasing the aid states give to NGOs and civil society organizations in the affected state and leading states to punish the abusive state through decreased direct aid and economic sanctions (Murdie & Peksen 2013, Dietrich & Murdie 2017). UNSC meetings also open the gate to stronger UNSC action, such as peacekeeping. UN Peacekeeping missions have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to protect civilians from both rebel and government violence (Hultman 2013, Phayal & Prins 2020). However, these positive outcomes can only be achieved if there is a meeting first.

The CP decides if there is a meeting to begin with. The CP selects which issues the Council will meet on in a given month, outside of mandated meetings. The members of the Council use this position strategically to set agendas that highlight issues of importance to them during the month they hold the CP position, or avoid sensitive issues. For example, Russia was CP in February of 2022 when its invasion of Ukraine began. Russia used its agenda-setting power to block any UNSC meeting on the invasion that month. Outside of agenda items related to a state's own action, literature has established certain contextual and relational conditions that influence the likelihood of an issue receiving a UNSC meeting and response, discussed below.

Contextual conditions refer to the aspects of the crisis, defined as a threat to international peace and security, that generate more attention for the crisis, specifically death and displacement. Higher death counts and larger displacements have been found to increase the likelihood that a conflict reaches the UNSC agenda. However, these findings are independent of each other. Displacements are a strong predictor of presence on the UNSC agenda among conflicts that have reached at least 1,000 battle-related deaths (Frederking & Patane 2017). In broader samples, deaths, either battle-related deaths (Lundgren & Klamberg 2023)or civilian deaths (Binder & Golub 2020), emerge as the significant predictor of agenda presence for the UNSC, while displacements remain insignificant in these models.

A more general measure of physical integrity rights abuse has also been shown to lead to greater inclusion on the UNSC agenda as well as the number of resolutions (Allen & Yuen 2020). It is unclear if these resolutions cite the state's human rights abuses as the justification for the resolution. Despite the differing measures, it is clear that the severity of the conflict has a meaningful impact on the likelihood that a crisis will reach the UNSC agenda. The role of crisis conditions also follows through to the implementation of interventions. Works focused on intervention found that the UN intervened in the most challenging and deadly conflicts where civilians were at high risk of victimization (Fortna 2008, Hultman 2013, Melander 2009). Conflict escalation, duration, and likelihood of contagion to surrounding states have also been shown to increase the likelihood of UNSC intervention (Beardsley & Schmidt 2012). However, in the cases of MA, these factors appear less influential. All MA events involve levels of violence, displacements, and potential regional instability that would typically warrant UNSC action. Yet, the Council's varied response across MA events suggests these factors of intervention are insufficient to explain Council action in these cases.

While the study of relational conditions impact on UNSC agenda-setting is still developing, research on IOs outside of the UNSC sheds some insight on the dynamics of relational conditions that impact response to human rights issues. In the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the review process undertaken by the United Nations Human Rights Council to

assess all member states human rights records, states go easy on their allies as measured by the severity of their recommendations, especially those they send aid to (Terman & Voeten 2018). States can also vary their UPR assessments based on the types of rights they discuss, which can also illustrate the relational dynamics between the two states. When assessing their allies, states tend to focus on "safe" rights, such as socioeconomic rights, but critique "sensitive" rights, like physical integrity rights, when evaluating their adversaries (Terman & Byun 2022). This article aims to evaluate if these dynamics are present in the UNSC as well. Understanding the conditions under which the UNSC chooses to intervene is also important for explaining which issues make it onto the UNSC agenda in the first place. As bringing an issue to the Council involves political and logistical costs, especially if the meeting does not result in concrete action being taken, Council members are likely to weigh the political feasibility of intervention early in the agenda-setting process. For example, research shows that third-party peacekeeping is less likely when the target state is a P5 member or has an alliance with one (Mullenbach 2005) , suggesting that political constraints shape not only final decisions on intervention, but also earlier stages of issue selection.

Finally, the type of membership Council members hold influences the agendas they set when they are the CP. Currently, there is debate on the influence of the P5 on setting the agenda. As P5 affinity, the alignment among the P5 on an issue increases, the likelihood of an issue being added to the agenda decreases (Allen & Yuen 2020). However when disaggregating the P5 into individual member states gives different results, as the US prefers to keep its interests off the agenda. In contrast, Russia and China prefer to keep their interests on the agenda (Lundgren & Klamberg 2023). Alternatively, when members are disaggregated into their positions on the Council, P5 interests are found to be less likely to be on the agenda and elected member (E10) interests more likely to be on the agenda (Binder & Golub 2020).

While existing scholarship provides valuable insights into the conditions that increase the likelihood of UNSC intervention, including levels of violence, displacement, and relations to Council members, these works have largely been based on broad samples of civil conflicts or

cases of civilian targeting more generally. These studies show how UNSC intervention can reduce violence against civilians, but they offer limited guidance for understanding variation in Council behavior within the specific context of mass atrocities. This is a critical gap. MA events, by definition, meet the severity threshold that existing literature associates with increased likelihood of UNSC response, yet even among these extreme cases, the Council's reaction varies significantly. This project addresses that puzzle. I argue that once a threshold of severity is passed, as it is in all MA events, the political interests of Council members, particularly the P5, play a central role in shaping whether the UNSC responds. By isolating a set of cases where humanitarian need is unambiguously high, this study offers a clearer lens on the political dynamics that drive collective action on the Security Council.

3 Theory

To examine whether an ongoing mass atrocity appears on the UNSC agenda, I focus on the factors influencing the decision of the CP. The CP has the authority to set the agenda and schedule meetings related to mass atrocities. I argue that the CP's decision whether to include the mass atrocity on the agenda is driven by considerations of the target state, the international community, and their fellow members of the Council. Each audience imposes costs and benefits on the CP's decision to hold a formal meeting, especially when that meeting could spark controversy or diplomatic fallout.

I assume the target state, the state perpetrating the mass atrocity, would prefer its transgressive behavior not be discussed at a UNSC meeting, as this naming and shaming by the body would be damaging to the target state's reputation. CP agenda-setting is inherently public; thus, a target state understands who is placing the issue on the agenda. The CP also understands that by holding a meeting on a given MA event, they are shining a spotlight on a state's transgressive behavior and damaging that state's reputation in the international community. Target states put in the spotlight may then pull back in their

bilateral relationships with the CP that put them there.

As such, CPs must weigh the cost of harming this relationship against the reputational or normative benefits of responding. When bilateral ties are strong, evidenced by similar UNGA voting patterns, alliance treaties, arms transfers, or economic interdependence, CPs may be reluctant to jeopardize the relationship. When ties are weak, the cost of public condemnation is lower. CPs, thus, have two courses of action relative to their relationship with the target state. The CP can either keep an MA event off the agenda to preserve its relationship with the target state or hold a meeting on the MA event, knowing it could damage its relationship with the target state. CPs will avoid putting an MA event on the agenda when their relationship with the target state is strong to preserve their bilateral relationship. Alternatively, when the relationship between the CP and the target state is weak, the CP can put the MA event on the agenda, imposing little cost on the already weak bilateral relationship.

These dynamics are clearly present in the UNSC's response to the Darfur Genocide. The US, which had a strained relationship with Sudan, put the crisis in Darfur on the UNSC agenda at its first opportunity , five months into the crisis, after 574 reported civilian deaths. When the US held the CP position again, fourteen months later, they held three meetings on the crisis following 6,084 reported civilian deaths. In contrast, Russia and China each had two opportunities to put the crisis in Darfur on the agenda and chose to take no action. Russia held the CP position in the initial month of the crisis and did not put it on the agenda. Over a year later, with 5,622 civilian deaths and four prior UNSC meetings, Russia again took no action on the crisis. Similarly, China could have responded in the ninth month of the crisis, following 3,874 reported civilian deaths and one UNSC meeting, or in the twenty-third month of the crisis, following 6,424 reported civilian deaths and nineteen prior UNSC meetings. In both opportunities, China took no action. Table 1 represents these events in relation to one another temporally, demonstrating how the relationships Sudan had with China and Russia kept Darfur off the agenda in those months, despite mounting civilian

deaths and previous UNSC action. The timeline of response to this crisis is further visualized in Appendix Figure A1.

Table 1: China, Russia, and US Response to Darfur

Council President	Month	Relationship	Prior Meetings	Civilian Deaths	Action
Russia	1	Strong	0	2	No Action
US	5	Weak	0	574	One Meeting
China	9	Strong	1	3,874	No Action
Russia	15	Strong	4	5,622	No Action
US	18	Weak	7	6,084	Three Meetings
China	23	Strong	19	6,424	No Action

Based on my argument above, I propose my first hypothesis:

H1: MA events in states with strong relationships with the Council President are less likely to receive a formal meeting.

The next consideration is the type of member that holds the CP position in a given month, specifically, if the CP is an E10 or P5 member. This distinction shapes both the time horizon and risk tolerance of the CP. The asymmetry between the P5 and E10 generates divergent incentives for CPs deciding to place an MA event on the agenda. For P5 members, recurring presidencies and entrenched influence on the Council create a long shadow of future interactions within the Council. P5 members therefore avoid placing issues on the agenda that are sensitive to fellow permanent members, particularly when outcomes are unlikely.

By contrast, E10 members face a different institutional logic; their two-year term on the Council creates a fleeting window to assert influence. E10 presidencies are viewed by member states as a venue for legacy building and reputational signaling. Through discussions with current and former E10 missions representatives, E10 members shared how they seek to "leave a legacy" through their presidency and term on the Council, whether by facilitating consensus on difficult issues, highlighting neglected crises, or initiating thematic debates. Because the presidency enables them to direct their attention outside of their regional periphery, E10 members are able to use their presidency to expand their diplomatic visibility and signal commitment to international norms. Furthermore, E10 members can be perceived as

more neutral actors within Council deliberations. As one former E10 representative shared, E10 presidencies seek to act as neutral arbitrators that aim to achieve a sustainable solution. Unburdened by the entrenched interests that can constrain P5 behavior, the E10 can place sensitive MA situations on the agenda through a frame of principled commitment to international peace and security. The unique structural position of the E10 members both constrains and empowers them, shaping how and when the CP can be used to elevate MA events.

The positional dynamics I discussed can be seen in the UNSC's agenda-setting related to the crisis in Gaza, while illustrating the role of position on the Council when the CP makes these decisions. Brazil was the first to bring the issue to a formal meeting and draft the initial resolution calling for a ceasefire. The international community lauded Brazil for these actions. When China held the next presidency, no resolution calling for a ceasefire was brought to a meeting despite the worsening conditions in the crisis. This pattern continued for the next two months, with Guyana and France serving as the E10 and P5 CP, respectively. This divergence reflects the structural position of P5 members, who must weigh the long-term impact of their decisions on relationships with other permanent members. E10 states face fewer constraints and can take greater risks in placing sensitive issues on the agenda. So while P5 members prioritized their dyadic relations with a co-permanent member, the US, E10 members could reap the benefits of international goodwill. Expanding on these dynamics can aid our understanding of agenda-setting divergence by P5 and E10 members when they are Council Presidents. From my theory, I propose my second hypothesis:

H2: E10 members are more likely to bring mass atrocities to the agenda compared to their P5 counterparts

Next, I examine how the international community influences and potentially complicates the considerations of the CP. I define the international community as international human rights organizations (IHROs) (e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch). I focus on IHROs as these organizations act as norms entrepreneurs and information providers in

the global response to MA events (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, Ron, Ramos & Rodgers 2005). Compared to state counterparts, these organizations are less constrained by strategic interests, reporting early and consistently on atrocity events. These organizations also call upon IOs for recognition and action as a major driver of normative pressure in the international system (Krain 2012). IHROs favor public shaming, such as through UNSC meetings, which strengthens the normative framework designed to prevent mass atrocities.

IHROs exert pressure through naming and shaming, and CPs risk reputational damage if they ignore widely reported and discussed atrocities. As IHROs produce more public documentation on an MA event, the cost of inaction grows. As the international community is discussing a crisis more frequently, they will call on the UNSC to respond more forcefully. CPs that do no respond to these calls for action risk condemnation from the international community, damaging their reputation. To avoid this condemnation, CPs are incentivized to put MAs on the agenda in response to the international community's calls for action.

Returning to the Darfur example, while the crisis began in June 2003 and the US initially responded in October of the same year, Darfur then dropped off the agenda for seven months. In early 2004, journalist Nicholas Kristof began reporting on the mass killings in Darfur and Amnesty International released its first full-length report on Darfur in February of 2004. This building attention put Darfur back on the UNSC agenda after seven months of inaction, even with Pakistan, a friend to Sudan, as the CP. The discussion and attention from the international community picked up even further in July 2004 with the founding of the Save Darfur Coalition, an advocacy group representing 190 religious, political, and human rights organizations, as well as US Congress, condemning the atrocity in Darfur as genocide. As the international community's attention mounted, the UNSC also became more responsive, holding up to six meetings in a single month on the crisis. Although few resolutions resulted from the 20 UNSC meetings held on the crisis in Darfur, and those that did were critiqued for their weakness, this must be considered in the context of Sudan's allies on the Council, China and Russia, who were condemned by the international community

for blocking stronger action (Human Rights Watch 2005). Despite these states' position on the Council, they could not keep the issue off the agenda entirely due to the international community's call for action. This pattern illustrates how sustained international pressure, through reports, media advocacy, and transnational coalitions, can constrain even veto players. While Russia and China blocked strong resolutions, the rising discursive costs of total inaction made it difficult to keep Darfur entirely off the Council's agenda. This discussion leads to my third hypothesis:

H3: As international community discussion increases about an MA event, it is more likely to receive a formal meeting.

Finally, the history of the issue on the council must be considered. CP decisions are influenced by whether an MA event has previously appeared on the Council's agenda. Once an MA event has been placed on the agenda, future meetings become easier to justify procedurally and politically. Prior meetings establish a precedent that the MA event qualifies as a legitimate threat to international peace and security, warranting discussion in the UNSC. This precedent reduces procedural barriers and generates a form of institutional momentum, making continued engagement more likely. This dynamic is particularly important in politically sensitive cases, where concrete outcomes may be blocked but sustained visibility remains valuable. Additionally, previous meetings signal tacit consent among Council members, reducing uncertainty about whether the issue is too sensitive to revisit. I argue that UNSC meetings on MA events follow a path dependency, with prior meetings making future meetings more likely. From this, I propose my final hypothesis: H4: MA events that have received a UNSC meeting previously are more likely to receive additional meetings

4 Methods

To investigate the agenda-setting behavior of the UNSC in relation to mass atrocity events, I analyze a sample of 24 mass atrocity events that began between 1989 and 2022, covering 754 event-months. First, I discuss the scope of cases and operationalization of UNSC meetings, the dyadic relationship strength between the CP and target state, international community knowledge, and position on the Council, as well as control variables and estimation strategy. Secondly, I present the findings of my statistical analysis.

4.1 Scope

I utilized the Targeted Mass Killings dataset (Butcher, Goldsmith, Nanlohy, Sowmya & Muchlinski 2020) as a foundation to scope my cases of mass atrocity. The TMK data defines a mass killing event as "the direct killing of noncombatant members of a group by an organized armed force or collective with the intent of destroying the group, or intimidating the group by creating a perception of imminent threat to its survival. A targeted group is defined in terms of political and/or ethnic and/or religious identity". I narrow the TMK definition to include only events perpetrated by state actors and resulting in at least 1,000 civilian deaths in a year. This resulted in 88 cases of mass atrocities that began between 1948 and 2022. Preliminary research revealed limited UNSC engagement during the Cold War. I restrict the sample to post-1989 cases, resulting in 24 mass atrocity events. I use this restricted sample of mass atrocity events, beginning in 1989 or later, to exclude the Cold War period, during which UNSC behavior was shaped by a distinct set of geopolitical dynamics. During the Cold War, ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union frequently resulted in deadlock, limiting the Council's ability and willingness to act on humanitarian crises. As a result, agenda-setting patterns from that period are not reflective of the institutional dynamics that structure Council behavior today. The post-1989 period, marked by the end of bipolar rivalry and the rise of a more assertive human

Table 2: List of Mass Atrocity Events

Event Name	Start Date	End Date
Salvadoran Civil War	11/11/1989	5/31/1990
Fall of Ceaucescu regime	12/17/1989	12/24/1989
Rwandan Civil War	1/1/1991	4/6/1994
Kurdish/Shia Uprisings	3/31/1991	4/30/1991
All Saints Massacre	10/31/1992	11/1/1992
Rwandan Genocide	4/7/1994	7/15/1994
Burundian Civil War	1/1/1995	5/15/2005
First Chechen War	4/7/1995	7/31/1996
First Congo War	1/2/1996	5/16/1997
Rwandan Rebel Conflict	1/1/1997	12/31/1997
Republic of Congo Civil War	6/5/1997	12/31/1997
Afghan Civil War	9/12/1997	12/5/2001
Kosovo War	3/31/1998	6/10/1999
East Timor Crisis	9/4/1999	10/20/1999
Second Chechen War	9/6/1999	12/31/2001
Darfur Genocide	6/1/2003	1/31/2005
Andijan Massacre	5/13/2005	5/14/2005
End of Sri Lankan Civil War	1/1/2009	5/19/2009
Syrian Civil War	3/18/2011	3/6/2020
Rab'a Massacre	7/5/2013	8/17/2013
CAR Civil War	12/5/2013	12/6/2013
Rohingya Crisis	8/25/2017	12/31/2024
Tigray Civil War	3/11/2020	12/31/2024
Russian invasion of Ukraine	2/27/2022	12/31/2024

rights discourse, provides a more coherent and comparable context for analyzing variation in Council responsiveness to mass atrocity events. The list of cases is presented in Table 2 below, listed by the commonly used names of the MA events as designated in the TMK data, and the start and end date of the MA event (Butcher et al. 2020). If the event was still ongoing as of December 31st, 2024, I recorded 12/31/2024 as the end date and stopped data collection at that date.

4.2 Dependent Variable

I investigate the effect of the strength of the relationship between the CP and the target state, international community knowledge, and the position of the CP on UNSC response to

MA events. In the first step of the UNSC action process, I measure UNSC responsiveness as the number of meetings held on an MA event in a given month. A formal UNSC meeting is a matter of public record, unlike their informal meetings. In formal meetings, member states discuss issues of international peace and security, with each state giving a statement on the issue at hand. A briefing from UN officials or other relevant experts sometimes supplements this.

For the UNSC to take any action, they must first hold a formal meeting on the issue. The more meetings held on a given event, the more opportunities for the UNSC to take action through passing resolutions. So, the number of formal meetings serves as a meaningful indicator of Council responsiveness. Resolutions, along with their binding declarations and the actions they authorize, such as peacekeeping operations, can only be voted on in formal meetings. Thus, I measure the number of formal meetings held on a given MA event. Using the UNSC's publicly available agenda, I manually recorded the number of UNSC meetings each MA event received at the monthly level for each month the event was active and the twelve subsequent months, to capture any delayed responses. I then read the transcripts of each meeting for mentions of the MA event to ensure that each recorded meeting substantively addressed the relevant mass atrocity event, rather than unrelated developments within the same state. I did this for a total of 753 event months and 392 meetings. While the potential number of meetings the UNSC could hold on a topic in a given month does not have a strict upper bound, the number of meetings in these cases ranged from 0 to 6, demonstrating the range of responsiveness and number of opportunities the UNSC had in a month to take further action on a given MA event.

4.3 Independent Variables

The independent variables of interest relate to three audiences of the CP: dyadic relationship strength, international community knowledge, and Council membership type. These variables capture factors shaping Council President decision-making that are distinct from

the on-the-ground severity of the atrocity, which has been the focus of prior literature. To measure the strength of the political dyadic relationship between the CP and the target state, I calculated the ideal point distance between the CP and target states using the ideal point estimates derived from countries' voting records in the UN General Assembly (Bailey, Strezhenev & Voeten 2017). This measure indicates the similarity of preferences between the CP and the target state, with smaller numbers indicating more similar preferences. I use this measure as a proxy for the strength of the political relationship between the CP and the target state, as similar voting behavior in the UNGA indicates similar preferences for UN action.

To a similar end, I also include a binary indicator for whether the CP and the target state are formal military allies in a given year to measure the strength of the military relationship between the CP and the target state. I utilize ATOP data (Leeds, Ritter, Mitchell & Long 2002) and include all treaty types in the measure. As ATOP only includes positive cases of alliances, I assign a value of zero where no alliance exists between the CP and the target state. Both of these variables are utilized to test my first hypothesis as measures of the strength of the relationship between the target state and the CP. I further measure military relationships through SIPRI's Arms Transfers database. I utilize data on arms transfers from the CP to the target state in the year prior as another measure of the military relationship between the states. Finally, I measure the economic ties between the CP and target states. I utilize IMF trade data to measure the goods import and export between the target state and CP measured annually in millions, USD. This measure is also one year lagged.

My next independent variables of interest relate to the composition of the Council and the position the CP occupies on the Council to test my third hypothesis. First, I include a measure of the membership type of the CP. This is a binary indicator of whether the CP in the given month was a member of the P5 (the US, UK, France, China, or Russia) or an E10 member. This serves as a proxy for the CP's time horizon and reputational sensitivity within the Council. For this variable, 0 indicates elected members and 1 indicates members

of the P5. I include another binary indicator on whether the target state is also on the Council in a given month, as the presence of the target state on the Council likely increases the diplomatic costs of initiating public discussion. While this is a relatively rare occurrence, Russia is a target state in three cases while also being a permanent member, and Rwanda was a member of the Council from 1994 to 1995 while the Rwandan Genocide was occurring.

To measure international community attention, I focus on IHROs, which serve as early-warning actors and norm entrepreneurs. I operationalize their pressure through the frequency of their public documentation. I treat Amnesty International document counts as a proxy for the visibility and salience of a mass atrocity within IHRO networks, recognizing that this measure reflects visibility rather than advocacy strength or mobilization capacity. To test my third hypothesis, I collected count data on all Amnesty International (AI) public documents at the monthly level that address the state where the MA event occurred, lagged by one month, resulting in 3089 documents. AI documents have frequently been used as a measure of IHRO naming and shaming (Hendrix & Wong 2013, Ron et al. 2005). As I have previously established, my assumption that the International Community would always prefer UNSC condemnation of MA events, AI documents serve as a proxy for the international community's discussion on MA events. While imperfect, document frequency indicates the salience of a case within human rights advocacy networks, which can shape CP perceptions of reputational costs associated with inaction. I lag the variable by one month to address issues of endogeneity.

My final independent variable of interest relates to the influence of prior meetings on future meetings. To measure the influence of meetings on a MA event in prior month on future meetings, I created a measure with a decay function. The decay function models the declining influence a prior meeting has on the likelihood of a future meeting as that meeting becomes older and older relative to the future meeting. Prior research on UNSC agenda-setting has found that the longer an issue remains on the UNSC provisional agenda without a meeting, the less likely it is to have a meeting held on it (Allen & Yuen 2022).

Hence, a decay function seems appropriate to model these dynamics. I use a stepped decay function, the formula of which can be seen below [1].

$$I_t = \sum_{m \epsilon M_t} w(s_m) \cdot C_m$$

Using UCDP's Geolocated Events Data (GED) (Sundberg & Melander 2013), I measure the number of civilians killed in a state in a given month. This is an appropriate measure as the death counts included in the TMK (Butcher et al. 2020) dataset also utilized UCDP GED data for the majority of their death estimates. Thus, I'm simply disaggregating to the month level rather than the event level as in the original TMK data. I lag this variable to reflect the information available to the CP at the start of the month, when they begin their term. As indicated in Table 3, the civilian deaths variable is skewed; to address this, I use the logged values.

4.4 Controls

I include a number of additional variables to control for institutional dynamics and event-level context that may shape Council responsiveness. These include the number of civilian deaths in the previous month, whether the event was part of a civil war, and if the MA event is ongoing in a given month. I utilize binary indicators of if the MA event was still active in a given month as I measure twelve months following the end of an MA event, and a binary indicator of if the event was part of a civil war, though this variable is time-invariant for my cases and the event-level fixed effects absorb its effect, seventeen cases are associated with a civil war while seven are not. These variables represent an events connection to broader

[1] I_t is the influence of previous meetings on a given MA event at time t. $w(s_m)$ indicates the decay weights assigned based on the stepped month cutoffs at 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year with the corresponding weights of 0.75, 0.5, 0.25, and 0. This is then multiplied by the count of meetings in a given month, C_m. Finally, these values are summed across the set of previous months with a meeting, m, within a given MA event, M_t. So, for example if two meetings are held in the same month, that would result in an influence score of 1.5 and in 3 months both would decay and result in a score of 1.00. If another meeting is held following the prior meetings the new influence score would be 1.75 with each of the contributing meetings decaying at their own rate.

peace and security concerns. Crises that are ongoing or embedded in broader civil conflicts may be more likely to prompt Council engagement due to their heightened implications for peace and security. I include a measure of general news coverage of the target state to capture its baseline international visibility. States that are more frequently in the news may be subject to greater international scrutiny, which can indirectly increase the salience of a mass atrocity and the pressure on the CP to respond. While clustering standard errors at the MA event level would also be appropriate, I have an insufficient number of unique cases to utilize it. I do use MA event-level fixed effects to control for unobservable heterogeneous factors not captured by my other controls.

The descriptive statistics of all variables used in the models can be seen in Table 3. These demonstrate that overall, the average political distance between CPs and target states is low; the mean ideal point distance is small, indicating a similar UNGA voting pattern in the CP-target state dyads on average. Despite this political closeness, alliances, the other measure of relationship strength between CPs and target states, are rare, occurring in 10% of the event months. The AI response varies widely between months, with a median of two reports per month, but a maximum of thirty-eight reports. A substantial majority, 80%, of event months occur while the corresponding MA event is ongoing, highlighting the Council's opportunity to respond in real-time.

As shown in Table 3, UNSC meetings are infrequent on a month-to-month basis, with only 240 of the 753 months (31%) recording any meetings at all. Within those months, a total of 392 individual meetings were held. The distribution of meetings across cases falls into four distinct categories: seven cases (29%) had no meetings, six cases (25%) had 1–10 meetings each, seven cases (29%) had 11–20 meetings each, and three cases had more than 20 meetings each. Notably, the crisis in Syria received the highest number of meetings, with a total of 157. The maximum number of meetings in a month, six, has been held for Syria, Ukraine, and Darfur.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
UNSC Meeting Count	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.0	6.0
Ideal Point Distance	1.4	1.1	0.0	1.2	4.7
Arms Exports by CP (lag)	5.0	39.5	0.0	0.0	538.0
Trade with CP (lag)	1162.7	8754.4	0.0	8.7	180012.3
Allies	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.0
AI reports (lag)	4.1	5.2	0.0	2.0	38.0
Total News (lag)	17005.4	52173.7	4.0	4549.0	727743.0
P5 CP	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.0
Influence	11.0	22.3	0.0	3.0	117.8
Target on Council	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.0
Civil War	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.0	1.0
Active	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.0	1.0
Civilan Deaths (lag)	1110.2	23151.2	0.0	2.0	629278.0
Civilian Deaths (lag,log)	2.1	2.4	0.0	1.1	13.4

5 Analysis

The OLS regression estimates with fixed-effects at the event level are reported in Table 4 and further visualized in Figure 1. Models 1 and 2 test hypothesis 1 on the relational strength between the CP and the target state. As political proximity is measured both broadly, through the Ideal Point Distance of UN General Assembly voting, and concretely through alliances, arms exports, and trade, I test Hypothesis 1 in two stages. Models 3 and 4 test hypothesis 2 on the institutional positions and constraints on the council. Model 3 examines whether agenda-setting varies when the CP is a permanent member (P5), while Model 4 examines whether the target state itself holds a Council seat in that month. Model 5 provides a joint, parsimonious specification including both IPD and P5 presidency. This model is a theory-driven comparison of the two core mechanisms of interest: political affinity and institutional structure. Model 6 tests Hypothesis 3 on international community discussion, as measured by both AI reports and total news, for a target state in a given month.

Finally, Hypothesis 4, on path dependence, is incorporated across all models. Because the influence of prior meetings is plausibly foundational to understanding agenda-setting, I treat it as a baseline factor that conditions all subsequent tests. Finally, Model 7 adds the full set of independent variables and controls.

The results reveal a consistent pattern. Hypothesis 4 receives strong support across all models, with prior meetings exerting a statistically significant and positive influence on the likelihood of future meetings. Hypothesis 2 also receives support: the P5 presidency variable is significant at the 0.05 level in Model 5 and at the 0.1 level in all other specifications, consistent with expectations about permanent members' greater caution as agenda setters. By contrast, neither Hypothesis 1 nor Hypothesis 3 finds support in the full sample. These results are stable across all specifications.

Relational proximity between the CP and the target state, measured by Ideal Point Distance and alliance status, fails to reach statistical significance across the full-sample models. This suggests that CPs are not generally deterred from placing an issue on the agenda based on their relationship with the target state. Similarly, whether the target state is currently a member of the UNSC, another potential source of political cost, does not exert a statistically significant effect. These patterns suggest that placing an issue on the Council's agenda may be perceived as a low-risk action, especially compared to stronger forms of UNSC response such as resolutions.

Amnesty International reports, as my proxy for international discussion and pressure, also lack statistical significance across models. This suggests that international community discussion of an MA event may not be a primary factor influencing CP agenda-setting decisions, at least not through this formalized document-based measure. While IHRO discourse may shape broader international pressure, it does not appear to exert direct influence on whether an event reaches the UNSC agenda.

By contrast, Hypothesis 2 receives support across models, indicating support for the hy-

Table 4: UNSC Meetings on MA events

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Ideal Point Distance	0.024	0.022			0.059.		0.042
	(0.030)	(0.030)			(0.034)		(0.034)
Allies		−0.030					−0.004
		(0.106)					(0.107)
Arms Exports by CP (lag)		−0.001.					−0.001
		(0.001)					(0.001)
Trade with CP (lag)		0.000					0.000
		(0.000)					(0.000)
P5 CP			−0.100.	−0.102.	−0.155*		−0.125.
			(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.070)		(0.073)
Target on Council				0.476			0.472
				(0.397)			(0.398)
AI reports (lag)						−0.004	−0.005
						(0.008)	(0.008)
Total news (lag)						0.000**	0.000***
						(0.000)	(0.000)
Influence of prior meetings	0.014***	0.014***	0.015***	0.015***	0.014***	0.014***	0.014***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Active	0.469***	0.480***	0.501***	0.510***	0.469***	0.491***	0.481***
	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.121)	(0.113)	(0.121)
Civilan deaths (lag, log)	−0.012	−0.013	−0.012	−0.012	−0.014	−0.012	−0.015
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.015)
Num.Obs.	709	709	751	751	709	753	709
AIC	1620.7	1621.1	1699.4	1699.9	1617.5	1697.6	1610.0
BIC	1643.5	1657.6	1722.5	1727.7	1644.9	1725.4	1664.7
RMSE	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.74	0.75	0.74	0.74

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

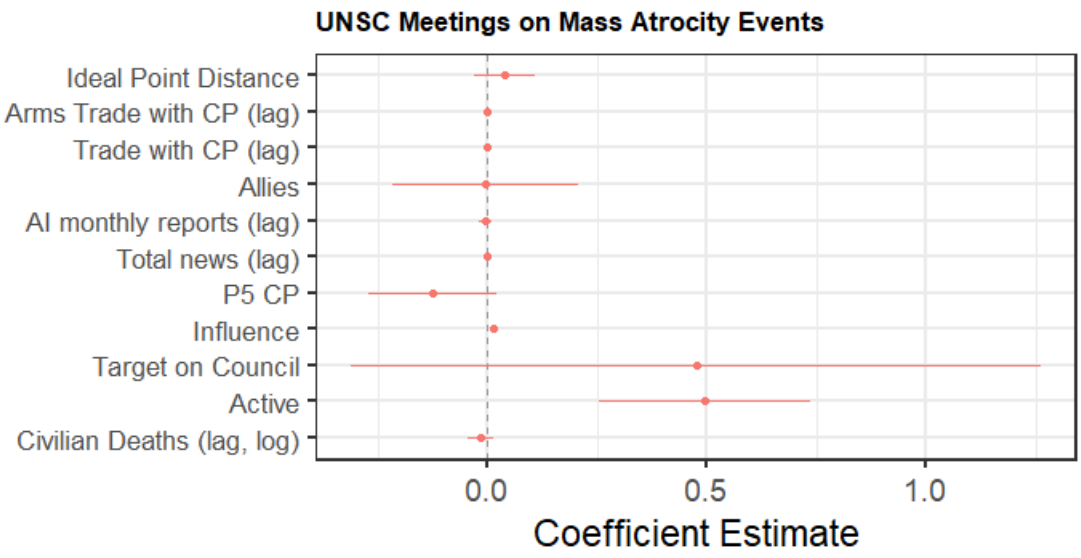

Figure 1: Coefficient Plot - Full Sample

pothesis. The binary indicator for whether the CP is a member of the P5 is statistically significant and negative. This indicates that when a P5 member is serving as CP, MA events receive fewer meetings. This supports my argument that permanent members are more cautious agenda setters, likely due to their enduring presence on the council and greater reputational cost within the institution. The effect size is comparable to, though in the opposite direction of, the influence of prior meetings, as visualized in Figure 1.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 receives strong support across all models, indicating clear support for the hypothesis. The influence of previous meetings is statistically significant and positive, with each additional prior meeting increasing the likelihood of future meetings by 0.014. While this coefficient is modest in isolation, it indicates a clear path dependency; once a crisis is placed on the agenda, it is more likely to remain there through repeated discussion.

Across all models I also find that active crises are statistically more likely to receive meetings. If the crisis is ongoing, the number of meetings increases by 0.481, a substantial impact given that the mean number of meetings for an MA event is 0.5. This indicates that active crises still drive UNSC attention at least among some CPs. Notably, civilian death count is not a significant predictor. This may reflect a threshold effect as all cases in the

dataset involve high-casualty events (at least 1,000 civilian deaths per year), so differences in monthly death counts above this level may matter less. I verify this findings robustness by excluding the Rwandan Genocide, an outlier in this variable, and the results still hold. These results can be seen in Table A1 in the Appendix.

6 Additional Analysis

As one of the main findings of the initial analysis is in the differing behaviors of P5 and E10 CPs, I rerun the analysis on data subset into these two groups to see if these groups are divergently affected by other variables in ways that might not be apparent in the main model, as I argue theoretically. Table 5 presents the results for the E10-only sample, which comprises two-thirds of the total months in the full sample. These results largely mirror the full sample. The influence of prior meetings and the active status of the MA events are both positive and statistically significant, with coefficients comparable to those in the full sample. While the Total News variable is statistically significant, its coefficient is 0, as visualized in Figure 2. This suggests that E10 members are responsive to whether a crisis is ongoing and prioritize maintaining visibility on active crises. The AI reporting, civilian deaths, and relational indicators remain statistically insignificant, consistent with the interpretation that E10 CPs are guided less by strategic concerns.

In contrast, Table 6 and Figure 3 present a distinctive pattern for P5 CPs. While the influence of prior meetings remains a positive and statistically significant predictor, the effect of the crisis being active loses significance. This indicates that the responsiveness of the full sample to active MA events is driven by E10 member responsiveness, not P5. Thus, P5 CPs appear less reactive to crisis conditions when setting the agenda. Notably, the Ideal Point Distance, a measure of the political relationship between the CP and target state, becomes statistically significant in model 1 of the P5 subsample. In this model, greater political

Table 5: UNSC Meetings on MA events - E10 CP

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ideal Point Distance	0.027	0.018			0.001
	(0.051)	(0.053)			(0.051)
Allies		−0.055			−0.060
		(0.149)			(0.144)
Arms exports by CP (lag)		0.028			0.028
		(0.036)			(0.034)
Trade with CP (lag)		0.000			0.000
		(0.000)			(0.000)
Target on Council			0.710		0.685
			(0.474)		(0.469)
AI reports (lag)				−0.002	−0.002
				(0.010)	(0.010)
Total news (lag)				0.000***	0.000***
				(0.000)	(0.000)
Influence of prior meetings	0.015***	0.015***	0.015***	0.017***	0.017***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Active	0.580***	0.576***	0.638***	0.563***	0.539***
	(0.156)	(0.156)	(0.144)	(0.138)	(0.151)
Civilian deaths (lag, log)	−0.020	−0.020	−0.016	−0.007	−0.010
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Num.Obs.	471	471	498	498	471
AIC	1099.4	1103.7	1141.4	1106.3	1070.3
BIC	1120.1	1137.0	1162.4	1131.6	1116.0
RMSE	0.77	0.77	0.75	0.73	0.74

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

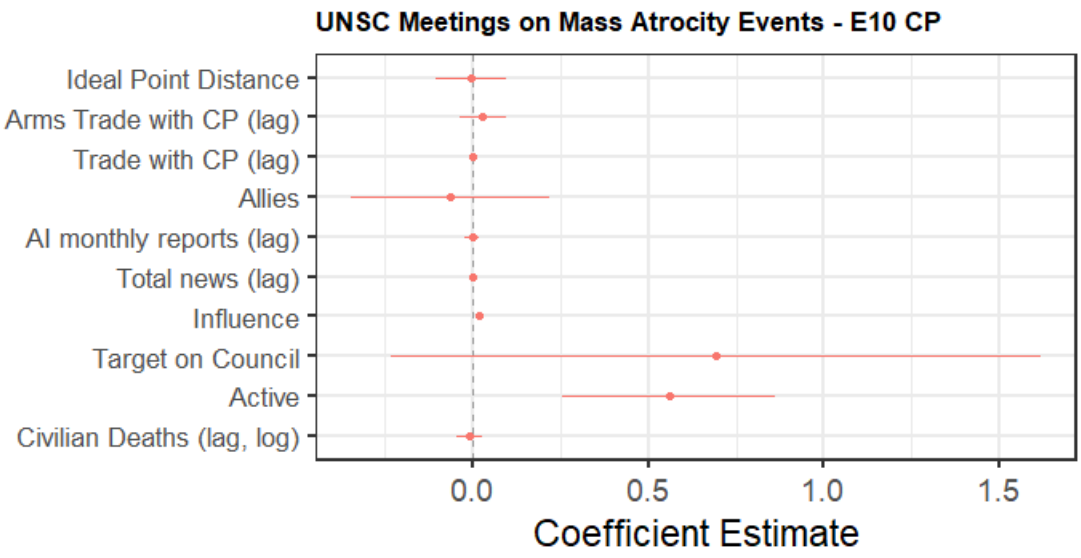

Figure 2: Coefficient Plot - E10 CP

distance between the P5 CP and the target state predicts more meetings on the related MA event. The size of this effect is notable, nearly ten times the impact of prior meetings. While this effect loses significance in the fully specified model, potentially due to the limited number of observations, its presence in a simpler specification suggests that geopolitical alignments shape P5 behavior. Trade with the CP also emerges as statistically significant, though, like the Total news variable in the E10 sample, this variable has a coefficient of 0. P5 members appear more willing to put MA events on the agenda when the target state is less politically aligned with them. This suggests the P5 utilize the UNSC agenda as a platform to exert diplomatic pressure on adversarial states. This pattern is absent in the E10 sample, suggesting that this political instrumentalization of the UNSC agenda is unique to P5 member as they are better institutionally positioned given their veto power and permanence on the Council.

These comparative findings offer evidence that P5 and E10 members have fundamentally different approaches to their role as the CP. E10 members are more likely to respond to event conditions, specifically when the MA event is currently active, whereas P5 members are more likely to consider political alignment. Together, they illustrate how the institutional positions

Table 6: UNSC Meetings on MA events - P5 CP

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Ideal Point Distance	0.092*	0.067			0.069
	(0.044)	(0.045)			(0.045)
Allies		0.117			0.128
		(0.201)			(0.202)
Arms Exports by CP (lag)		−0.001			−0.001.
		(0.001)			(0.001)
Trade with CP (lag)		0.000**			0.000**
		(0.000)			(0.000)
Target on Council			−0.148		−0.183
			(0.781)		(0.749)
AI reports (lag)				−0.015	−0.019
				(0.013)	(0.012)
Total news (lag)				0.000	0.000
				(0.000)	(0.000)
Influence of prior meetings	0.014***	0.014***	0.013***	0.012***	0.012***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Active	0.304	0.320	0.329	0.345	0.348
	(0.224)	(0.222)	(0.222)	(0.222)	(0.223)
Civilian deaths (lag, log)	−0.007	−0.005	−0.007	−0.003	0.005
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Num.Obs.	238	238	253	253	238
AIC	505.6	499.8	551.0	551.5	503.0
BIC	522.9	527.6	568.6	572.7	541.1
RMSE	0.69	0.67	0.70	0.70	0.66

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

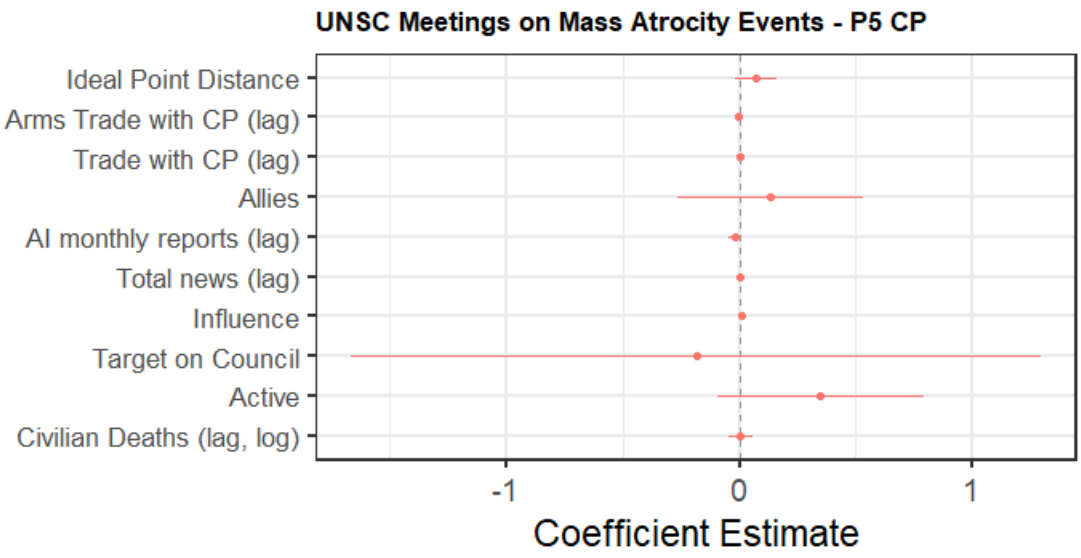

Figure 3: Coefficient Plot

of different CPs shape their incentives in agenda setting in ways that have meaningful impacts on which MA events receive UNSC attention and which fall to the wayside. The implications of these findings are discussed more fully below.

7 Discussion

The findings of this analysis shed light on the political dynamics that shape the UNSC's agenda-setting process, particularly the under examined role of the Council president in responding to mass atrocity events. Across models, P5 CPs are significantly less likely to place MA events on the agenda, even when controlling for crisis severity and ongoing violence. These results reaffirm the CP's position as a pivotal institutional gatekeeper and demonstrate how institutional position, whether permanent or elected, conditions agenda-setting behavior. Specifically, the findings support my argument that political considerations, not just crisis characteristics, shape when and how the UNSC recognizes mass atrocities.

This article contributes to existing work on UNSC behavior by demonstrating that the agenda-setting process by the relational and strategic context of the CP. Rather than re-

sponding uniformly to event-based indicators of severity or urgency, CPs appear to be attuned to the reputational and relational costs of attention. For permanent members, who operate under a long shadow of the future in their UNSC engagements, placing a politically sensitive issue, like an MA event, on the agenda can risk alienating fellow permanent members whose support may be necessary in future negotiations. By contrast, elected members, whose time on the council is limited, are structurally freer to take risks and pursue issues beyond their usual spheres of influence. Their relative insulation from long-term institutional retaliation enables them to be more assertive in highlighting ongoing crises, as the results indicate.

The supplemental analysis reinforces this divergence. When the data is disaggregated by CP type, E10 CPs behave similarly to the overall model, with slightly stronger responsiveness to whether a crisis is active in a given month. The P5 results diverge notably. In the P5 subset, whether a crisis is ongoing loses its effect. Instead, P5 CPs appear to be influenced by the political distance between themselves and the target state. MA events in states with greater political distance from the P5 CP receive more meetings. This relationship is also substantively large, out-sizing the effect of prior meetings almost ten times over. This finding lends conditional support to Hypothesis 1 and suggests that for P5 members their response is influenced by political considerations more than humanitarian concern. These results extend our understanding of the selective attention in the UNSC and show how the form and function of Council attention is conditional on who holds the gavel.

Some findings are consistently present. Most notably, prior meetings reliably increase the probability of future meetings. This dynamic highlights a clear form of institutional path dependency. Once an issue crosses the threshold to appear on the agenda, further discussion becomes easier to justify procedurally and politically. This inertia suggests that the most significant barrier to Council attention is getting on the agenda in the first place. This finding has real implications for advocacy and civil society groups. By contrast, civilian deaths do not significantly predict attention in my model, a surprising result given

the importance of this measure in earlier studies with broader crisis samples (Lundgren & Klamberg 2023, Binder & Golub 2020). As all cases in this dataset are high-severity cases by design, this suggests there is some threshold for UNSC response and over this threshold of severity, greater monthly death counts are insufficient to drive change in Council behavior and political considerations emerge as stronger predictors.

These findings raise several directions for future research. First, it would be valuable to extend this framework to later stages of the Council process, examining whether similar political logics shape the introduction of resolutions, the strength of resolution language, or final voting outcomes. Further qualitative research, like elite interviews, could help unpack the internal deliberations behind CP decisions to push forward MA events. This analysis makes clear that UNSC attention to mass atrocities is not merely a function of need, but of position and politics.

8 Conclusion

This article examined how the institutional role of the Council President and the preferences of countervailing audiences shape UNSC agenda-setting on mass atrocity events. Departing from explanations that focus solely on the severity of crises, I argue that CP behavior is conditioned by strategic political considerations of placing a sensitive issue such as MA events on the agenda. I identify three key audiences that could influence CP decision-making, the target state, the international community, and fellow Council members, and theorize how each creates different incentives for action or inaction. By focusing on MA events that meet a threshold of high severity (at least 1,000 civilian deaths by state forces per year), I isolate the political drivers of attention among cases where humanitarian need is evident.

The results show that Council response to mass atrocity events is not uniformly driven by crisis severity. While ongoing violence increases the likelihood of meetings, other indicators,

most notably civilian death count, consistently do not affect agenda-setting. Instead, the behavior of CPs diverges sharply by institutional status. Elected members, whose time on the council is short, are more likely to respond to crisis conditions. Permanent members, by contrast, appear to prioritize bilateral relations with the target state over event characteristics when determining to place an MA event on the agenda. These findings highlight the structural and reputational constraints facing P5 CP, for whom agenda-setting can carry diplomatic costs that color future Council interactions. As a result, permanent membership may weaken responsiveness to even the most urgent mass atrocities, demonstrating how institutional design can inhibit humanitarian action.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the bargaining environment and political logic of UNSC agenda-setting. They underscore the idea that Council attention is not merely a function of need, but of position and politics. This framework offers a more nuanced account of how and when the UNSC recognizes mass atrocities, providing empirical leverage for anticipating variations in its behavior. Practically, this research suggests that advocacy may be more effective when directed at E10 members as they are more responsive to crisis dynamics and less constrained by long-term institutional politics.

In sum, this article demonstrates that even in the face of mass atrocity, UNSC attention is governed by political logic over humanitarian urgency. Understanding this logic is essential for scholars, advocates, and policymakers seeking to increase the consistency and effectiveness of international response to mass atrocities.

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9 Appendix

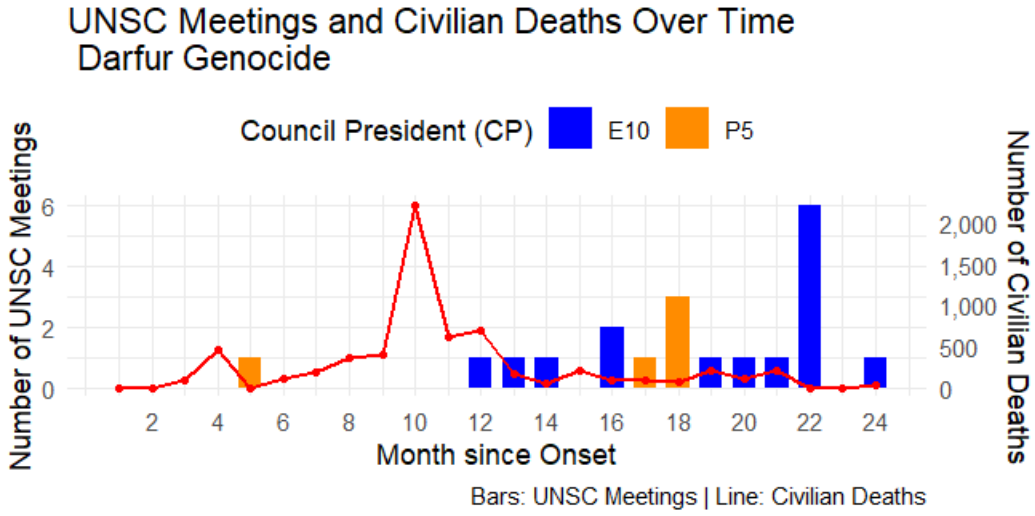

Figure A1: UNSC response to Darfur Genocide

Table A1: UNSC Meetings on MA events - Rwandan Genocide Excluded

	(1)
Ideal Point Distance	0.040
	(0.035)
Allies	−0.001
	(0.106)
Arms Export by CP (lag)	−0.001
	(0.001)
Trade with CP (lag)	0.000
	(0.000)
AI reports (lag)	−0.004
	(0.008)
Total news (lag)	0.000***
	(0.000)
P5 Council President	−0.119
	(0.073)
Influence of prior meetings	0.014***
	(0.002)
Target on council	0.452
	(0.396)
Active	0.398**
	(0.125)
Civilian Deaths (lag,log)	−0.014
	(0.015)
Num.Obs.	686
AIC	1549.5
BIC	1603.9
RMSE	0.74

* p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001