Divided, Not Silent: Preference Variance and UNSC Response to Mass Atrocities

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November 7th, 2026 *

Abstract

Why does the UN Security Council convene on some mass atrocities while leaving others off its agenda entirely? Since October 2023, Gaza has occupied a near-constant place on the Council's formal agenda despite deep division among its members; fifteen years earlier, a comparably severe endgame to Sri Lanka's civil war never reached it. A long-standing expectation holds that division should suppress Council engagement, as members anticipate that divisive issues will not yield a resolution. Recent evidence suggests instead that the Council is more likely to take up armed conflicts over which its permanent members disagree. This paper develops and tests an account of why, through whom, and under what conditions division brings crises before the Council. Drawing on the Council's function as a collective legitimizer, I argue that a formal meeting is a consequential act independent of its legislative output, and that for mass atrocities, which clear a plausible severity threshold by construction, the payoff to being seen to raise a crisis is especially high. Division increases both the number of members with reason to claim that payoff and its value, since debate on a divided Council publicly separates members pressing for a response from those resisting one. International attention, in turn, concentrates the cost of silence on the member presiding over the Council. Using an original monthly panel of Council engagement with 24 mass atrocity events with onset between 1989 and 2022, I find that Council-wide division increases the probability that the Council convenes on an event in a given month regardless of which member presides, while international attention increases engagement under elected-member presidents but not under permanent-member presidents.

1 Introduction

"Over the past five years, those of us who work around the UN have seen the Security Council and the wider UN system respond to fast-breaking crises in a depressingly consistent fashion. When violence breaks out, the Security Council usually meets quickly. There are statements of concern. But soon enough, cracks emerge among the Council's members, making a robust response unlikely."

*Word Count: 13550

-Richard Gowan, Program Director, Global Issues and Institutions at the International Crisis Group

Richard Gowan's observation (Richard Gowan, 2026), drawn from years spent watching the Council up close, captures a pattern that sits uneasily with how much of the literature on UNSC agenda-setting has explained Council behavior. A prominent line of work expects division among Council members to suppress engagement (Allen and A. Yuen, 2022; Binder and Golub, 2020). Where preferences diverge, resolutions are unlikely, and issues that cannot produce a resolution are not worth the Council's limited time. Gowan describes something closer to the opposite. The Council meets, and meets again, even as the same divisions that make a resolution unlikely persist meeting after meeting. Frequent engagement and persistent division are not, on this account, in tension with one another. Rather, they travel together.

Gowan's observation is not only anecdotal, the literature is itself divided on the question. Recent evidence from the Council's attention to armed conflicts finds that conflicts over which the permanent members' interests diverge are more likely, not less, to reach the agenda (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023). Nowhere is this pattern more visible, or its absence more consequential than in the Council's response to mass atrocities. Since October 2023, the situation in Gaza has occupied a recurring place on the Council's agenda, entering formal discussion within two weeks of the October 7th attacks. Yet substantive Council attention lagged far behind its attention with a resolution calling for a ceasefire taking six months to pass the contentious forum and four comparable drafts being vetoed in the interim[1]. The Council was present, vocal, and internally divided throughout, exactly the pattern Gowan describes.

Fifteen years earlier, a comparably severe crisis received no such comparable attention. As the Sri Lankan civil war reached its final months in early 2009, an estimated 40,000 to 70,000 civilians were killed in a matter of weeks, trapped in a shrinking pocket of government-besieged territory. Human Rights Watch documented that nearly every hospital in the Vanni region, formal or makeshift, had been struck with artillery, and that women and children had been killed by shelling while waiting in line for milk powder distribution (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Jan Egeland, the former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, pressed the point directly: "The Security Council can no longer deny the facts on the ground. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians are trapped in a small pocket of land, held as hostages, shelled by government forces, and living in abysmal conditions. Why are these civilians less important than those in Darfur, DRC, or Gaza?"(Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2009). The Council never placed Sri Lanka on its formal agenda, relegating the crisis to informal discussions held in the basement (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2009).

I do not draw out this comparison to equate the two conflicts, which differ in political context, in the

[1](United Nations Security Council, 2023a; United Nations Security Council, 2023b; United Nations Security Council, 2024a; United Nations Security Council, 2023c; United Nations Security Council, 2024b)

actors involved, and in almost every particular beyond the raw scale of civilian harm. But the parallel in kind is difficult to ignore. Both cases involve a besieged population, a healthcare system degraded by strikes on hospitals, and aid distribution sites that became sites of civilian death, rather than relief (Human Rights Watch, 2009; United Nations Experts, 2024; Volker Turk, 2023). If the severity and character of this kind were what determined the Council's attention, both crises should have received it. Only one did. This divergence, between crises comparatively severe by any humanitarian measure, but starkly different in the Council's response, is the puzzle this paper addresses.

I argue that the answer depends on what convening is worth. Accounts assuming resolution passage as the only valuable outcome of the Council naturally focus on the veto, and so expect members to avoid raising issues on which they cannot agree. Drawing on the Council's function as a collective legitimizer, I relax this assumption. A formal meeting is itself a consequential act of collective judgment, signaling the Council's priorities whether or not consensus follows. For mass atrocity (MA) events, which clear plausible severity thresholds by construction, non-response registers as the failure of an accepted function, and members distant from the target state have reasons to bring the crisis before the Council, such as naming and shaming, diffusing critique, and signaling normative alignment. Division increases the number of members with such reasons, and it increases what a meeting is worth to them. Debate on a divided Council publicly separates the members pressing for a response from those resisting one, allowing the former to place responsibility for inaction on identifiable obstructors rather than share in diffuse critique of the Council as a whole, as well as name and shame the obstructor and target state, while signaling their own alignment with norms such as civilian protection.

This paper contributes to the study of Council agenda-setting in three ways. First, it contributes to the developing debate on the impact of division on Council behavior. Both sides of this debate draw on pooled samples of armed conflicts or of the Council's full docket, in which items differ widely in severity and in the reputational cost of leaving them off the agenda. Mass atrocities, where the value of convening and the cost of silence are greatest, provide a hard test for the veto-anticipation and suppression logic: if division suppresses engagement even here, the brake is likely a general feature of agenda-setting. The results suggest otherwise, and that whether division acts as a brake or an accelerant may depend on the salience of the issue at stake. Second, it extends the analysis of Council preferences beyond the permanent members. Existing studies measure division primarily among the P5, a focus that follows from treating resolution passage as the object of engagement. At the agenda-setting stage, however, the veto is unavailable, any member can request a meeting, and the presidency rotates monthly and is held by elected members for roughly two-thirds of the year. I therefore measure division across the full Council, and I use the Council President's position relative to its co-members to distinguish the presidential prerogative over the provisional agenda from the

near-automatic, unattributed requests through which any member can bring a crisis before the Council. Third, it examines conditions external to the conflict associated with an increased likelihood of agenda inclusion. Recent work suggests that increasingly mediatized politics has raised the value of being seen to put an issue on the table (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023), but the audience this argument invokes is absent from existing analyses. International human rights organizations direct their advocacy at the agenda-setting stage, and their attention increases the likelihood of resolution passage (Allen and A. T. Yuen, 2020), yet its relationship to agenda entry has not been examined directly. I treat this attention as a pathway that activates members' existing reasons to raise a crisis, differentiating between the reputational exposure of permanent and elected members, and I test it using Amnesty International reports as a proxy for crisis salience among international human rights organizations. To test these arguments, I constructed an original dataset of UNSC responses to 24 mass atrocity events with violence onset between 1989 and 2022, covering 753 MA event-months. I define mass atrocity events as state-perpetrated mass killings resulting in at least 1,000 civilian deaths in a given year, a threshold intended to focus the analysis on cases of sufficient humanitarian severity to plausibly generate an expectation of Council engagement in the first place[2]. Of the 24 events in the sample, 7 received no UNSC formal meeting, leaving 17 mass atrocity cases on which the Council took some form of action. I test these expectations with three complementary models. To assess whether Council division is associated with engagement, I estimate a probit model of whether the Council convenes a formal meeting on an event in a given month. This model compares across events, retaining the seven events that never reach the Council's agenda, which are central to the puzzle this paper addresses. Additionally, to test whether the elected -member presidency's greater reputational exposure depends on internal division or on external attention, I estimate a fully interacted probit model in which every covariate is allowed to operate differently under P5 and E10 presidencies. I compare the effects of division and attention across presidency types. Because the presidency rotates monthly, in alphabetical order, which type of member presides over the Council during a given crisis-month is determined by the calendar rather than by the crisis itself, providing exogenous variation.

I find that Council division is associated with a higher probability that the Council convenes on a mass atrocity event: a one-standard-deviation increase in division raises the monthly probability of a meeting by roughly five percentage points. Presidency type matters as well, but not through division. The effect of Council division is statistically indistinguishable under elected and permanent presidents. The effect of international attention is not. Rising attention from human rights organizations substantially increases the likelihood of a meeting under elected-member presidents, but has little discernible effect under permanent-member presidents. At high levels of attention, a meeting is 6.05 percentage points less likely when a

[2](Ulfelder and Valentino, 2008; Rost, 2013; Cronin-Furman, 2022)

permanent member holds the presidency. These findings suggest that the reputational costs of silence on mass atrocities are borne unevenly, and that external audiences shape Council engagement most where they can attach those costs to an identifiable and reputationally exposed member.

2 Literature Review

A large literature examines what predicts Security Council action, with particular attention to the authorization and support of peacekeeping operations(Mullenbach, 2005; Beardsley and Schmidt, 2012; Binder, 2015; Lugg, Lansdale, and Carcelli, 2024; Scherzinger, 2023). A developing line of work has turned to the antecedent process of agenda setting (Allen and A. Yuen, 2022; Binder and Golub, 2020; Frederking and Patane, 2017; Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023). This stage deserves attention in its own right as placement on the agenda is a necessary condition for any Council response, and what the Council takes up and leaves out shapes how its legitimacy is judged.

The dominant expectation is that division acts as a brake. Its logic runs through the veto. Since Permanent members can block any substantive outcomes, and use the veto alongside outside options to secure favorable outcomes (Voeten, 2001; M. Bailey, Strezhenev, and Voeten, 2017), members deciding whether to raise an issue anticipate whether it can produce a resolution. Where preferences diverge, a resolution is unlikely, and an issue that cannot yield a resolution is not worth the Council's limited time. Consistent with this logic, heterogeneity among the Permanent members reduces both the likelihood that an issue reaches the agenda and the likelihood that a resolution passes (Allen and A. Yuen, 2022), and divergence among permanent and elected member coalitions delays the Council's first meeting on civil conflicts (Binder and Golub, 2020).

Recent evidence, however, points to division as a gas pedal for agenda inclusion. Lundgren and Klamberg (2023) study of all UCDP armed conflicts between 1989 and 2019 finds that the greater the dispersion of permanent member positions toward a conflict country, the more likely the Council is to take up the conflict in a given year. They attribute this to agenda entrepreneurship, arguing that agenda adoption, as a procedural matter not subject to the veto, is a low-cost action, and the more diverse members' interests, the more likely it is that at least one member values an issue enough to put it on the agenda.

These works also find that more severe crises, whether measured in battle deaths, civilian deaths, or displacement, are more likely to reach the agenda (Beardsley and Schmidt, 2012; Mullenbach, 2005; Binder, 2015; Fortna, 2008; Hultman, 2013) [3], and that worsening physical integrity abuses and international attention increase the likelihood that a resolution passes once they do (Allen and A. T. Yuen, 2020). Though

[3]Frederking and Patane (2017) measure displacements in war, Lundgren and Klamberg (2023) measure battle-related deaths directly, Binder and Golub (2020) measure civilian deaths

this sits in tension with response to salient cases, such as Gaza and Sri Lanka as discussed above, as well as practitioner observations as evidenced by Richard Gowan (2026) and Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2009). Taken together, two puzzles remain apparent. Division is said to both suppress and promote agenda inclusion, and severity, though it predicts which crises reach the agenda, does not explain why the Council stays silent on some of the most salient ones. The next section argues that both puzzles may hinge on what silence costs the members who decide whether to raise a crisis.

3 Theory

3.1 Scope and Eligibility of Mass Atrocity Events

Mass atrocity events constitute a paradigmatic case for UNSC response: by character and scale, they meet both a normative threshold for agenda inclusion, as evidenced by advocacy groups' calls for agenda inclusion, as well as crisis conditions that empirical studies find are associated with increased agenda inclusion, as discussed above. These are events broadly recognized as threats to international peace and security, and are therefore eligible for Council engagement in a way that lower-severity conflicts are not. If all MA events clear a normatively sufficient severity threshold, yet variation in Council response persists, then severity itself cannot be the factor differentiating between MA events that receive formal Council attention and those that do not. Holding severity effectively constant by scoping cases to MA events allows remaining variation in outcomes to be attributed to political and relational conditions of Council membership, rather than to differences in the underlying humanitarian need.

This eligibility across examined cases carries a corollary. Across much of the Council's docket, an item's absence in a given month carries little consequence. Even a persistently active item such as "the situation in the Middle East" registers a meeting or consultation in only 62 percent of months over a two-decade period (Allen and A. Yuen, 2022), and the small arms item has received a single formal meeting roughly every other year over the past decade. Months without meeting on these issues pass as ordinary prioritization of limited plenary time and carry no distinct reputational cost.

Mass atrocity events differ because of what the Council is understood to do. As a collective legitimizer, the Council confers politically consequential approval or disapproval on the conduct of states through debate and deliberation, independent of any binding output (Claude Jr, 1966). That function creates an audience with standing to evaluate its performance. Members routinely describe the Council as speaking for the "international community," language that states and advocacy organizations take seriously enough to shape their own policy in response (Barnett, 1997). Because MA events are the paradigmatic case of what

the Council's custodianship of international peace and security is understood to address, that audience is activated by the Council's silence on them in a way it is not by a quiet year on small arms trafficking. Non-response registers not as dormancy but as the failure of an accepted function, and the costs of that failure are imposed by third parties, principally international human rights organizations, whose purpose is to call out both the perpetrating state and the bodies positioned to respond. Variation in Council response to MA events therefore cannot be attributed to simple prioritization. It is more plausibly attributable to political factors that vary across the Council in observable ways, including some members' preference to keep an event out of view.

3.2 Agenda Setting Process

To first set the institutional landscape, reaching a formal Council meeting on an MA event requires that some member of the Council exercise the political will to place it there, and the procedural bar for doing so is low. Under the Council's Provisional Rules of Procedure, the President shall call a meeting at the request of any member (United Nations Security Council, 1946, Rule 2). Adoption of the agenda is a procedural matter, decided by nine affirmative votes and not subject to the veto (S. D. Bailey and Daws, 1995).[4] No single member can keep an item off the agenda. This low threshold is central to the argument that follows: if placing an MA event before the Council requires the will of only one member, then what governs agenda entry is not whether the Council agrees, but whether at least one member has the will to put it there. Three pathways convert that will into a meeting. This paper is agnostic about which of the three pathways described below accomplishes this, as each rests on the same underlying mechanism: willingness, rather than formal authority, as the binding constraint on action.

First, the Council President (CP) may exercise the prerogative attached to the presidency itself. The CP sets the provisional agenda for the month and can use that authority to place an MA event, or any other issue, before the Council (Mingst, Karns, and Lyon, 2022). Second, a member who does not hold the presidency may request that the CP place an MA event on the agenda. I conducted interviews with UNSC representatives discussing the agenda-setting process, and representatives consistently indicated that such requests function as a near-automatic norm rather than a contested bid for inclusion. Once made, a request is rarely refused outright. The CP does retain latitude to shape the terms of the resulting debate, such as expanding the roster of invited briefers or participants to balance the subsequent discussion, but outright denial is not the norm. While it is still possible that states self-censor their requests by waiting until an amenable CP, this possibility did not emerge from my discussions with representatives. Finally, an event

[4]The "double veto," through which a permanent member could first determine that a question was substantive and then veto it, has not been used to block an agenda item since 1959 (S. D. Bailey and Daws, 1995). Contested adoptions of the agenda are rare and, when they occur, require a majority rather than unanimity to proceed.

that has already reached the agenda by one of the previously described pathways may recur there by prior agreement, typically to receive updated briefings from the Secretariat or other relevant actors on a crisis already under Council consideration.

Each pathway reflects a strategic choice. A member deciding whether to request a meeting weighs what it expects to gain from the meeting against what raising the crisis to the agenda will cost it: the effort of mobilizing a meeting, friction with members aligned with the target state, and a public record that exposes the Council's division through the subsequent debate. Two features of the request pathway shape this calculation. First, because requests are rarely refused, a member considering one need not anticipate that its request will fail. The relevant question is not whether the Council will meet but whether a meeting serves the member making the request. Second, requests are not attributed to the requesting member in the Council's formal record[5], which lowers the bilateral cost of making one. A member can bring a crisis before the Council without being formally identified as having done so, while remaining free to publicize its role to the audiences it wishes to reach.

Given that the cost of a request is low and partly within the requesting member's control, agenda entry depends less on the position of the median member than on that of the member most motivated to act. This is the logic of agenda entrepreneurship (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023): the more varied members' positions toward the target state, the more likely it is that at least one member is distant enough from the target, and exposed enough to external audiences, for the benefits of a meeting to outweigh its costs. It follows that the relevant distribution of preferences is that of the Council as a whole rather than of the permanent members alone. Any of the fifteen members can request a meeting on a mass atrocity event, and the members with the most to gain from visible responsiveness are elected members. A measure of division restricted to the P5 omits much of the pool from which entrepreneurs are drawn.

The request pathway also bears on the role of the presidency. Because a non-presiding member can obtain a meeting through a request the CP is expected to honor, the presidency is not a gatekeeper for members who already want the Council to meet. The presidency should matter most where no other member has yet acted. In setting the provisional agenda and presenting the Council's programme of work for the month, the President is the member to whom outside actors can most readily attach responsibility for the Council's silence. The theoretical object of interest is therefore not eligibility, which all MA events satisfy by construction, but selection: whether, and how often, at least one member converts eligibility into agenda placement, and the conditions under which none does.

[5]The Penholder system was implemented in 2004 to help make drafting resolutions a more equitable endeavor among Council members. However, MA events are minimally impacted by this system, even at the resolution proposal stage, as only the Myanmar case has an official penholder, the UK. The other 23 MA events in this sample have no official penholder assigned, given the sensitivity of these issues

3.3 Variance and the Value of Debate

Much of the existing work on agenda-setting finds that greater variance in member preferences slows and suppresses discussion (Allen and A. Yuen, 2022; Binder and Golub, 2020), though recent evidence from armed conflicts points the other way (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023). This pattern is consistent with P5 veto anticipation and thus the assumption that resolution passage is the outcome members' decision whether or not to convene hinges on. This paper relaxes that assumption in relation to MA event response due to the costly nature of inaction. Council meetings carry independent strategic signaling value apart from any resolution the meeting may or may not produce. Convening itself allows the Council to demonstrate engagement with a salient crisis. Given that, in the case of MA events, silence carries reputational costs for all Council members, despite the underlying variety of unexpressed preferences, I argue Council members, on average, prefer meeting to silence in all cases, as meetings dispel some, if not all, potential critiques against the body.

The value of a meeting to the member that brings it about does not depend only on what the Council decides. A meeting produces a public record. Members state their positions in a forum that is formally on the record, broadcast, and closely followed by governments, advocacy organizations, and the press, and the member that raised the crisis can point to that record as evidence that it acted, that it named the conduct at issue, and that responsibility for going no further lies with others. Lundgren and Klamberg (2023) suggest that the worth of such a record has grown as international politics has become more mediatized and more symbolic, so that being able to say one put an issue on the table can justify the cost of putting it there, even when defeat is expected. I build on this observation in two ways.

First, the payoff to being seen to raise a crisis depends on whether an audience expects the Council to act and is watching for whether it does. That audience is thin for most of the Council's docket but not for mass atrocities, where engagement is a minimum expectation and silence a failure. The audience payoff should therefore be at its strongest in the cases examined here.

Second, division does more than raise the chance that some member values a meeting enough to request it; it also changes what a meeting is worth. On a Council broadly united in its stance toward the target state, a meeting allows the body to signal engagement but does little to distinguish any one member from the rest, so credit for convening, and blame for a weak outcome, is shared. On a divided Council, a meeting does something silence cannot: it publicly sorts members into those pressing for a response and those resisting it. For members with weak ties to the target, that sorting is much of the point. It lets them state their position openly and locate responsibility for inaction with identifiable obstructors, rather than share in a diffuse critique of the Council as a whole. Division thus increases both the number of members with reason

to want a meeting and the value of a meeting to each of them.

A successful resolution may still signal a deeper level of engagement than debate alone, and the Council continues to face criticism when meetings fail to produce one. But, reaching the debate stage gives members a venue to state their positions clearly and engage in blame-shifting for subsequent inaction to specific obstructing members of the Council, rather than bear the dispersed, unattributable reputational cost Council-level inaction would incur. Thus, a formal meeting is preferable to no meeting at all with respect to the risk of inaction critique[6].

A state with strong bilateral ties to a perpetrating state may prefer to keep a crisis off the agenda entirely and bear part of a dispersed critique of the Council as an institution rather than state its position vis-a-vis the MA event in open debate, which would open the state to more direct critique; a state with weak ties to the target state, however, has no such incentive and would rather place the crisis on the agenda for the chance to state its position openly and avoid critique from the international community entirely. Under these conditions, resolution passage is unlikely to be the primary object of the meeting. Debate itself, as a vector for clarifying and publicizing the positions of individual members, even without resolving those differences, allows the Council to signal engagement with a salient crisis while making visible, rather than concealing, internal divisions. A failure to convert debate into a resolution is itself informative to outside observers, but it is a distinct signal from silence and is considerably less costly to the Council's legitimacy than non-engagement altogether.

From this logic, it follows that divergence in Council members' positions toward the target state should increase, rather than decrease, Council engagement with mass atrocity events. On a divided Council, some members have weak or no ties to the target state. For these members, requesting a formal meeting is an opportunity to state their position openly and to place responsibility for inaction on the members who obstruct a stronger response, with little reason to defer to colleagues who would prefer that the Council remain silent. Thus, a more divided Council should be more likely to convene on an MA event at all in a given month.

H1: Council-wide preference variation is positively associated with Council engagement on a mass atrocity event, increasing the likelihood that the Council convenes on the event in a given month.

3.4 The Council President's Position

While no single member's identity is publicly attached to *requests* for a meeting, the identity of the Council President under which the meeting happens is clearly visible. Unlike a request, which is publicly

[6]The dynamics that unfold once a meeting has been convened, how debate and resolution proposals are strategically used by Council members, are treated more fully in a companion paper

unattributed and near-automatically honored, the presidential decision to place an item on the agenda directly is a unilateral act, and it is here that institutional position should matter most. The reputational cost mechanism discussed above rests on an assumption of reputational exposure that I expect to fall unevenly across Council membership. Permanent members occupy a structurally entrenched position, as their presence on the Council and ability to wield the veto are not contingent on performance or reelection[7]. This insulates P5 members from dispersed reputational costs levied against the Council during any given crisis. No matter the outcome, the P5 will still remain present and powerful within the body. Elected members, by contrast, serve fixed, limited terms and depend on the General Assembly's vote for any potential return to the Council. These members aim to leave a positive legacy during their tenure on the Council, hoping to bolster their reputation beyond the forum. Failure to address a salient crisis during an Elected member's tenure may disrupt these reputational benefits in ways elected members cannot recover before they must rotate off the body. If the mechanism described above operates through reputational exposure specifically, rather than institutional position alone, this asymmetry generates a directional expectation about the exercise of the presidential prerogative, or strategic request making. Council Presidents drawn from the E10, whose standing depends on demonstrating responsiveness within a limited tenure, should be more willing to place a divisive or reputationally sensitive mass atrocity event before the Council than Council Presidents drawn from the P5, whose position is comparatively insulated from that same pressure.

The size of this reputational gap between elected and permanent presidents should not be consistent across crises. A presiding member's reputational exposure depends on the conditions under which its handling of the crisis is observed and evaluated, and those conditions vary from one event-month to the next. I consider two such conditions that could widen the gap between E10 and P5 presidents: one internal to the Council, the degree of division among its members over the target state, and one external to it, the level of international attention to the crisis.

3.4.1 Internal Division

The first condition is the degree of division among Council members over the target state. Division makes an MA event more sensitive. Convening on it invites potential confrontation with the members most closely aligned with the target, and signals the presiding member's willingness to bear that confrontation. There are reasons to expect permanent-member presidents to be especially reluctant to do so. The P5 interact across

[7]Though there have been attempts to make P5 members more accountable for the vetoes they wield ((Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Montenegro, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Turkey, Ukraine, United States of America and Vanuatu, 2022), especially in relation to mass atrocities((Mexico, 2023)

every file on the Council's docket, bargain with one another over mandates, sanctions, resolution language, and vetoes before including the E10, and are frequently the patrons of target states themselves. Confrontation on one issue can carry costs on others that permanent members will continue to bear long after the month ends. Alternatively, an elected president, whose standing depends on demonstrating responsiveness within a short tenure, has comparatively less to lose from confrontation and more to gain from being seen to act. On this logic, the gap between E10 and P5 presidencies should be largest when the Council is most divided. **H2a:** The positive association between Council preference divergence and Council engagement is stronger under E10 Council Presidents than under P5 Council Presidents.

However, there is a competing expectation that follows from the agenda-setting process described above. Division does not only raise the stakes for the presiding member; it also raises the stakes for other Council members who are motivated to place the event on the agenda by request. Because requests from any member are near-automatically honored, and not publicly attributed to the requesting state, a divided Council does not depend on a president's discretion alone to meet. If division primarily operates through Council member request, rather than presidential discretion, division should increase engagement regardless of which member holds the presidency, and presidency type should not condition its effect.

3.4.2 International Attention

The second condition is external visibility. Sustained attention from international human rights organizations and the media raises the visibility of the Council's response to a crisis and the risk of condemnation for non-response. Division raises the stakes for any member with weak ties to the target state and a distinct position to communicate, and these states can act through the unattributed request to put an issue on the agenda. Alternatively, attention from external audiences raises the cost of inaction for the Council as a whole, concentrating on the members positioned to act visibly. The Council President sets the provisional agenda, presides over the month's deliberations, and publicly presents the Council's programme of work, making the presidency the natural focal point for external pressure.

Advocacy organizations direct their efforts at this stage deliberately. Organizations such as the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect maintain standing advisory access to Council members, using bilateral meetings, briefings, side events, and open letters to press for atrocity situations to be placed on the agenda, and they frame formal meetings, rather than resolution passage or informal discussion, as the primary ask and the baseline expectation of Council conduct (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and other NGOs, 2021). These appeals routinely invoke members' endorsement of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, the institutional source of the Responsibility to Protect, to cast continued inaction as a breach of an already-accepted commitment (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and other

NGOs, 2024). A clear example of this targeted advocacy was in October 2023, when Human Rights Watch called on Brazil, during its term as Council President, to convene the Council on the crisis in Gaza, which Brazil did five days later ((Shakir and Charbonneau, 2023)). International attention thus converts a diffuse, Council-level reputational cost into an attributional one borne by the presiding member.

Given that elected members are more exposed to such costs than permanent members, whose position is insulated from them given their institutional position, the effect of international attention on Council engagement should depend on who holds the presidency. Rising attention should increase the likelihood of a meeting more sharply under an E10 president, whose reputational standing and potential return to the Council that attention directly implicates, than under a P5 president.

H2b: The positive association between international attention and Council engagement is stronger under E10 Council Presidents than under P5 Council Presidents.

Taken together, H2a and H2b distinguish two route through which reputational exposure might shape the exercise of the presidential prerogative. Internal division raises the stakes for members across the Council, who can act through unattributed requests that bypass the presidency. External attention also raises the cost of inaction and directs that cost at the presiding member. Examining both allows me to assess not only whether institutional position matters for MA response, but through which channel.

4 Methods

4.1 Sample and Scope

This paper analyzes 24 mass atrocity (MA) events with violence onset between 1989 and 2022 with UNSC response recorded through 2024,covering 753 MA event-months. Seven of these 24 events never received a formal UNSC response at all. I draw these 24 cases from the Targeted Mass Killings (TMK) dataset (Butcher et al., 2020), which defines targeted mass killings 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 it through a perceived threat to its survival. Where the TMK data includes cases with as few as 25 civilian deaths per year, I raise this threshold to 1,000 or more civilian deaths per year, and scope to deaths perpetrated by state actors, aligning my case selection with common practices in the mass atrocity literature (Ulfelder and Valentino, 2008; Rost, 2013) and with the normative expectation that international attention plausibly follows once violence reaches a scale widely understood as catastrophic (Cronin-Furman, 2022).

I further restrict the sample to events with violence onset in 1989 or later, excluding the Cold-War period. Cold War-era Council behavior was structured by a distinct set of geopolitical dynamics with the ideological

rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union routinely producing deadlock. This does not reflect the institutional dynamics governing Council behavior in the period this paper examines; the sharp increase in Council subsidiary-body creation in the immediate post-Cold War period (Lugg, Lansdale, and Carcelli, 2024) as well as the increased use of the veto during the forum's response to the Syrian Civil War illustrate how the Council's dynamics have meaningfully shifted in the post Cold-War era this paper analyzes.

The analysis adopts an event-month panel: each MA event is observed in every month of its duration, whether or not the Council met that month. This structure follows directly from the theoretical argument, which is concerned with whether the Council engages with a crisis at all. The analysis sample consists of 705 event-months across 23 events[8]. What happens once a meeting is convened, including resolution proposal and passage, is the focus of a separate paper.

4.2 Variables

4.2.1 Outcomes

I measure Council engagement as a binary indicator equal to 1 if the Council held at least one formal meeting on the event in a given month, and 0 otherwise. This captures whether the Council engages with an event at all and is the outcome for both the H1 and H2 hypotheses. This information was collected from publicly available UNSC transcripts. The meeting must have been held under a related agenda item, such as "Rwanda" or "Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine", and key terms such as human rights, protection of civilians, or humanitarian aid/crisis must have been invoked during the meeting as evidenced by the meeting transcript.

4.2.2 Council Division

The first key independent variable is Council-wide preference divergence toward the target state, operationalized as the variance in ideal point distance (IPD) to the target state among sitting Council members in a given event-year. I measure political distance using ideal point estimates derived from UN General Assembly voting records (M. Bailey, Strezhenev, and Voeten, 2017), with higher values indicating greater political distance between a Council member and the target state[9]. This measure is calculated for each sitting member of the Council in a given crisis-year. I then take the variance of these positions to use as a measure of overall Council division in positions relative to the target state. The average ideal point distance

[8]The Kosovo War drops from all models because the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not participate in General Assembly voting during this period, leaving no ideal point estimate for the target state, and a small number of additional event-months lack ideal point data for one or more sitting Council members, when they are both the Council President and the target state.

[9]Ideal point distance is treated as a proxy for bilateral political alignment toward the target. It may miss issue-specific ties, bilateral pressure, or crisis-specific diplomatic commitments.

among Council members is also used as an alternative measure. The underlying ideal point distances and the measures constructed upon them vary both across events and within events from year to year as elected members rotate on and off the Council.

4.2.3 International Attention

I also include a measure of international attention as a lagged monthly count of Amnesty International's public documents referencing the state experiencing the mass atrocity. As in related work using this same measure (Hendrix and Wong, 2013; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers, 2005), I interpret higher counts as a proxy for the salience of a given crisis within human rights advocacy networks, not as a direct measure of advocacy capacity or mobilization strength. This variable operationalizes the international-attention channel that reinforces the institutional mechanism described above.

4.2.4 Council President's Position

To test H2a and H2b, I include a binary indicator equal to 1 when the Council President in a given month is a permanent member. The presidency rotates monthly in alphabetical order of member states' names (United Nations Security Council, 1946, Rule 18), so which type of member presides in a given month is determined by the calendar and the Council's composition rather than by any particular crisis. This gives presidency type a plausibly as-if random assignment with respect to the events in the sample. Consistent with this, P5- and E10-presided event-months are statistically indistinguishable on Council division, international attention, prior Council engagement, and conflict status (Appendix Table A1). The one substantial difference is in the president's own relative distance from the target state: permanent-member presidents rank considerably farther from targets than their co-members (mean percentile rank of 0.72 versus 0.45), which motivates the control for Council President rank described below.

To separate the reputational exposure attached to institutional position from the president's bilateral alignment with the target, I control for the Council President's relative distance to the target state in all models. Because absolute ideal point distance partially reflects event-level characteristics, as some crises involve Councils that are uniformly close to or distant from the target, I transform this measure into a within-Council percentile rank. The measure records the president's rank in ideal point distance to the target relative to the other members sitting on the Council in the same year, divided by the number of sitting members, so that higher values indicate a president more distant from the target than its co-members[10]. This standardization isolates the president's relative position from cross-event differences in the Council's overall

[10]The measure ranges from $1/15 \approx 0.067$ (the member closest to the target) to 1 (the most distant).

distance from the target. Raw rank and absolute ideal point distance are used as alternative measures, with results reported in Appendix Table A2.

4.2.5 Controls

All models include a binary indicator for whether the underlying conflict was ongoing at the time of observation, and the logged, one-month-lagged count of civilian deaths drawn from UCDP's Georeferenced Event Dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013), aggregated to the monthly level. The log transformation reduces the influence of a small number of extremely high-fatality event-months. I also account for the Council's previous engagement with an event using a stepped decay function of prior meetings, since an event that has drawn sustained engagement over recent months carries a different institutional history than one returning to the agenda after a long lull[11]. Descriptive statistics for all variables are reported in Table 1 below, with P5 and E10 subsample descriptive statistics reported in Table 2.

[11]The measure follows a stepped decay function,

$$I_t = \sum_{m<t} w(t-m)\, C_m, \qquad w(s) = \begin{cases} 0.75 & \text{if } 1 \le s \le 3, \\ 0.50 & \text{if } 4 \le s \le 6, \\ 0.25 & \text{if } 7 \le s \le 12, \\ 0 & \text{if } s > 12, \end{cases}$$

where the sum runs over all months m prior to t in the event's history, C_m is the number of meetings held on the event in month m, and $w(s)$ weights those meetings by the number of months $s = t - m$ that have elapsed since they were held. For example, two meetings held in the same month contribute $2 \times 0.75 = 1.5$ to the score in each of the following three months, decay to $2 \times 0.5 = 1.0$ in the fourth month, and fall out of the measure entirely after twelve months. A single additional meeting held in that fourth month would raise the score in the following month to 1.75 ($2 \times 0.5 + 1 \times 0.75$), with each meeting decaying along its own schedule.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	P25	Median	P75	Max
Formal Meeting (binary)	0.32	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Number of Formal Meetings	0.54	0.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	6.00
Council IPD Variance	1.01	0.33	0.10	0.79	1.06	1.19	2.05
P5 Council President	0.34	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
CP IPD Rank (percentile)	0.54	0.29	0.05	0.27	0.53	0.80	1.00
AI Reports (lag)	4.31	5.29	0.00	1.00	2.00	6.00	38.00
Influence of Prior Meetings	2.42	3.60	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.75	16.75
Active Conflict	0.82	0.38	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Civilian Deaths (lag)	1181.15	23 925.66	0.00	0.00	2.00	47.00	629 278.00
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	2.07	2.37	0.00	0.00	1.10	3.87	13.35

N = 705 event-months across 23 mass atrocity events.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics by Council President Type

	E10 CP				P5 CP			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Formal Meeting (binary)	0.34	0.48	0.00	1.00	0.29	0.45	0.00	1.00
Number of Formal Meetings	0.57	1.02	0.00	6.00	0.47	0.94	0.00	6.00
Council IPD Variance	1.00	0.33	0.10	2.05	1.02	0.33	0.10	2.05
CP IPD Rank (percentile)	0.45	0.24	0.05	1.00	0.72	0.28	0.07	1.00
AI Reports (lag)	4.29	5.05	0.00	31.00	4.35	5.74	0.00	38.00
Influence of Prior Meetings	2.47	3.71	0.00	16.75	2.32	3.37	0.00	14.25
Active Conflict	0.83	0.38	0.00	1.00	0.82	0.39	0.00	1.00
Civilian Deaths (lag)	1695.95	29 383.23	0.00	629 278.00	171.02	1119.12	0.00	16 205.00
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	2.14	2.40	0.00	13.35	1.94	2.31	0.00	9.69

E10 CP: N = 467 event-months; P5 CP: N = 238 event-months.

5 Empirical Strategy

5.1 Council Division and Engagement

I test my expectations on Council division and the likelihood of engagement with a probit model of whether the Council convenes a formal meeting on an event in a given month, with standard errors clustered on the event, reported in Table 3 and discussed fully below. I deliberately do not include event fixed effects in this model. A central motivation for the design is that seven of the twenty-four events never reach the formal agenda; event fixed effects would absorb this variation entirely, since each such event's fixed effect would perfectly predict its null outcome. Thus, event-level fixed effects, or any specification that structurally cannot use the non-entering events, cannot speak to the cross-event question this paper is designed to answer.

5.2 Presidency Type, Division, and Attention

I expect that the effects of Council division and of international attention on convening a meeting differ depending on whether an elected or permanent member holds the presidency, as formalized in H2a and H2b. I first estimate a probit specification including a P5 President indicator (Table 4, Model 1), which captures a difference in baseline meeting propensity between the two types of presidency. To test whether the two types of presidency respond differently to division and attention, I then conduct a joint Wald test of the null hypothesis that the P5 President indicator and all of its interactions are zero, reported in Appendix Table A3. This test asks whether meetings are generated by the same process under both types of presidency, before examining which effects differ.[12] The test rejects the null that the P5 indicator and all six of its interactions equal zero at conventional levels. The test of the six interaction terms alone, which asks whether the covariates have the same effects under both presidency types, also rejects the null. Because the number of event clusters is small ($G = 23$), both statistics are evaluated against an F distribution with $G - 1 = 22$ denominator degrees of freedom rather than a chi-squared distribution. The data therefore reject a single process in favor of presidency-specific models, which supports the interacted specification. I then estimate a fully interacted probit model in which the P5 President indicator is interacted with every covariate, see Table 4 Model 3. This model reproduces the estimates that would be obtained by fitting separate models to P5- and E10-president months, reported in Appendix Table A4, but it estimates the differences between them as parameters. Estimating the models on the full data with standard errors clustered on the event also accounts for the covariance between P5-month and E10-month estimates, which arises because

[12] This is the logic of the Chow test for structural differences between groups (Chow, 1960), implemented as a Wald test so that it accommodates the probit model and event-clustered standard errors.

each event contributes months under both types of presidency[13]. I report average marginal effects (AMEs) across all models. For Council division and international attention, I estimate the AMEs separately under P5 and E10 presidencies and test whether the two differ. I also estimate the difference in predicted meeting probability between P5 and E10 presidencies at low (25th percentile) and high (75th percentile) values of each moderator, and the second difference between them, which directly measures whether the gap between presidency types widens as division or attention rises, reported in Appendix Table 5.

6 Results

6.1 Council Division and Engagement

Table 3 reports the tests of H1. Consistent with the expectation that division acts as a gas pedal rather than a brake, Council-wide preference variance is positively associated with the probability that the Council convenes a formal meeting on a mass atrocity event in a given month, as shown in Model 1. The average marginal effect reported in column 2 indicates that a one-unit increase in Council IPD variance increases the monthly probability of a meeting by 15.3 percentage points[14]. Variance has a standard deviation of 0.33 in the sample, so a more intuitive benchmark would be that a one-standard-deviation increase in Council division is associated with a roughly five-percentage-point increase in the probability of a meeting. Against a baseline in which the Council meets in 32 percent of event-months, this represents a one-sixth increase of the baseline probability. This finding supports my argument that mass atrocity events facing a more divided Council are more likely, not less, to reach the formal agenda, consistent with that of Lundgren and Klamberg (2023).

[13] Comparing coefficients across separately estimated probit models would potentially conflate differences in effects with differences in residual variance (Allison, 1999; Williams, 2009), and a coefficient that is significant in one sample but not another is not itself evidence that the two differ (Gelman and Stern, 2006), though the subsample models are reported for completeness.

[14] $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Council Division and Engagement with Mass Atrocity Events

	(1) Probit	(2) Probit AME
Council IPD Variance	0.623*	0.153*
	(0.311)	(0.077)
AI Reports (lag)	0.029*	0.007*
	(0.012)	(0.003)
P5 Council President	−0.172	−0.041
	(0.105)	(0.026)
CP IPD Rank relative to Target	−0.230	−0.056
	(0.261)	(0.062)
Influence of Prior Meetings	0.257***	0.063***
	(0.050)	(0.009)
Active	0.152	0.036
	(0.286)	(0.066)
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	−0.021	−0.005
	(0.029)	(0.007)
(Intercept)	−1.762***	
	(0.506)	
Num.Obs.	705	705

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
Standard errors clustered on the mass atrocity event

The control variables in Model 1 are also informative about the scope conditions of the argument. Civilian deaths are unrelated to the probability of a meeting in this sample, consistent with the premise that severity cannot explain variation in Council response among events that are all, by construction, severe enough to warrant it[15]. Alternatively, prior Council engagement is strongly associated with continued engagement. A one-standard-deviation increase in the prior-meetings measure is associated with a roughly 23 percentage point increase in the probability of a meeting, reflecting the institutional persistence of items once they are before the Council. International attention is also positively associated with meeting likelihood, with a 0.7 percentage point increase per Amnesty International document, $p < 0.05$. I examine this relationship in more detail below, where its effect proves to depend on who holds the presidency.

6.2 Presidency Type, Division, and Attention

The results for H1 treat the Council as a single body. H2a and H2b turn to the member presiding over it, asking whether elected- and permanent-member presidencies, who differ in their exposure to the reputational costs of inaction, respond differently to the same conditions. A descriptive look at the data suggests that presidency type matters, with the Council meeting in 34 percent of event-months presided over by an elected member, compared with 29 percent of those presided over by a permanent member, as seen in Table 2. Table 4 examines whether this difference persists once Council division, international attention, and other covariates are held constant. In the full specification, without the Council President's relative position (Model 1), a P5 presidency is associated with a 5.6 percentage-point lower probability of a meeting,$p < 0.001$. Once the president's relative distance from the target is accounted for, the estimation gap narrows to 4.1 percentage points and is no longer statistically distinguishable from zero at conventional levels. Given that permanent-member presidents rank considerably farther from target states than their co-members, as reported in Appendix Table A1, part of the unadjusted difference between presidency types reflects this difference in relative position rather than institutional position alone, although the president's rank itself is not significantly associated with meeting likelihood. The level difference between presidency types is therefore consistent in direction with my argument, but imprecisely estimated.

[15](Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023) likewise find civilian fatalities unrelated to agenda entry across their full sample, with the association between severity and attention carried by battle deaths

Table 4: Probit Models of Council Meetings on Mass Atrocity Events

	(1) Pooled	(2) AME	(3) Pooled + CP IPD	(4) AME	(5) Fully Interacted	(6) AME
Council IPD Variance	0.618*	0.151*	0.623*	0.153*	0.632.	0.146.
	(0.310)	(0.076)	(0.311)	(0.077)	(0.374)	(0.078)
AI Reports (lag)	0.028*	0.007*	0.029*	0.007*	0.042**	0.008**
	(0.012)	(0.003)	(0.012)	(0.003)	(0.014)	(0.003)
P5 Council President	−0.233**	−0.056***	−0.172	−0.041	0.065	−0.048.
	(0.071)	(0.017)	(0.105)	(0.026)	(0.567)	(0.027)
CP IPD Rank to Target			−0.230	−0.056	−0.445.	−0.065
			(0.261)	(0.062)	(0.249)	(0.058)
Influence of Prior Meetings	0.258***	0.063***	0.257***	0.063***	0.283***	0.065***
	(0.049)	(0.009)	(0.050)	(0.009)	(0.059)	(0.009)
Active	0.152	0.036	0.152	0.036	0.324	0.042
	(0.285)	(0.066)	(0.286)	(0.066)	(0.404)	(0.065)
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	−0.021	−0.005	−0.021	−0.005	−0.041	−0.006
	(0.029)	(0.007)	(0.029)	(0.007)	(0.037)	(0.007)
P5 CP × Council IPD Variance					−0.089	
					(0.239)	
P5 CP × AI Reports					−0.033**	
					(0.012)	
P5 CP × CP IPD Rank					0.533	
					(0.579)	
P5 CP × Prior Meetings					−0.048	
					(0.038)	
P5 CP × Active					−0.409	
					(0.428)	
P5 CP × Civilian Deaths					0.054	
					(0.049)	
(Intercept)	−1.859***		−1.762***		−1.880**	
	(0.447)		(0.506)		(0.578)	
Num.Obs.	705	705	705	705	705	705

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
Interaction coefficients are on the latent (probit index) scale and are not probability-scale effects; see Figure 2 and Table 4.

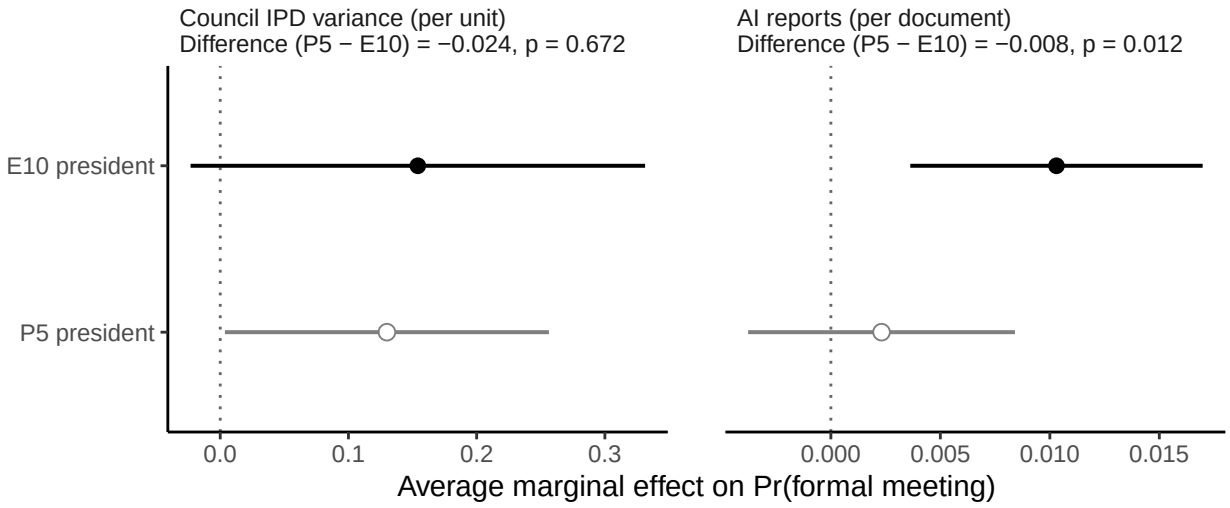
Table 5: Presidency Differences (H2a and H2b)

	Estimate	SE	95% CI	p
A. Marginal effect of Council IPD variance (H2a)				
E10 president	15.41.	(9.04)	[-2.31, 33.13]	0.088
P5 president	13.00*	(6.45)	[0.36, 25.63]	0.044
Difference (P5 − E10)	-2.41	(5.70)	[-13.59, 8.76]	0.672
B. Marginal effect of AI reports (H2b)				
E10 president	1.03**	(0.34)	[0.36, 1.70]	0.002
P5 president	0.23	(0.31)	[-0.38, 0.84]	0.457
Difference (P5 − E10)	-0.80*	(0.32)	[-1.42, -0.18]	0.012
C. P5 − E10 gap across Council division (H2a)				
Gap at 25th percentile (variance = 0.79)	-4.34	(3.42)	[-11.04, 2.36]	0.204
Gap at 75th percentile (variance = 1.19)	-5.43.	(2.89)	[-11.10, 0.25]	0.061
Second difference (75th − 25th)	-1.09	(2.38)	[-5.76, 3.58]	0.648
D. P5 − E10 gap across international attention (H2b)				
Gap at 25th percentile (1 report)	-2.07	(2.66)	[-7.28, 3.14]	0.436
Gap at 75th percentile (6 reports)	-6.05*	(2.83)	[-11.58, -0.51]	0.032
Second difference (75th − 25th)	-3.98*	(1.58)	[-7.07, -0.88]	0.012

Note: All quantities in percentage points, computed from the fully interacted probit model (Table 4, Model 5). Panels A–B: average marginal effect of a one-unit increase in the variable on Pr(meeting). Panels C–D: difference in predicted Pr(meeting) between P5 and E10 presidencies with the moderator set to its 25th or 75th percentile for all observations. Standard errors clustered on the mass atrocity event. Cluster-bootstrap intervals are reported in Appendix Table A5. . $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

However, the fully interacted model does indicate that the two types of presidency differ in more than their baseline propensity to convene. A joint Wald test rejects the null hypothesis that the P5 President indicator and all of its interactions are zero[16], and the rejection holds for the interaction terms alone[17]. Meetings are not generated by the same process under elected and permanent presidents. Figure 1 and Table 5 decompose this difference further.

Figure 1: Variance and Attention Average Marginal Effects Plot



6.2.1 Internal Division

Hypothesis 2a is not supported. The average marginal effect of Council Variance is positive under both types of presidency and nearly identical in magnitude, as seen in the left panel of Figure 1. The difference between P5 and E10 presidencies is -2.41 percentage points with a p-value of 0.67. This gap between presidency types does not widen as the Council becomes more divided. The difference in meeting probability between P5 and E10 presidencies is 4.34 percentage points at the 25th percentile of Council variance and 5.43 points at the 75th percentile, with the second difference small and not statistically significant[18]. I find no evidence that the association between division and engagement depends on who presides. This pattern is consistent with the competing expectation I outlined above. Because members with weak ties to the target state can place a crisis on the agenda through unattributed requests, the effect of division does not depend on the discretion of the presiding member and I find no evidence that it reflects strategic request-making based on the presidency holder. If division matters because it increases the likelihood that some member is

[16] $F(7, 22) = 4.75$, $p = 0.00224$; See Appendix Table A3
[17] $F(6, 22) = 4.26$, $p = 0.00540$
[18] -1.8 points, $p = 0.51$

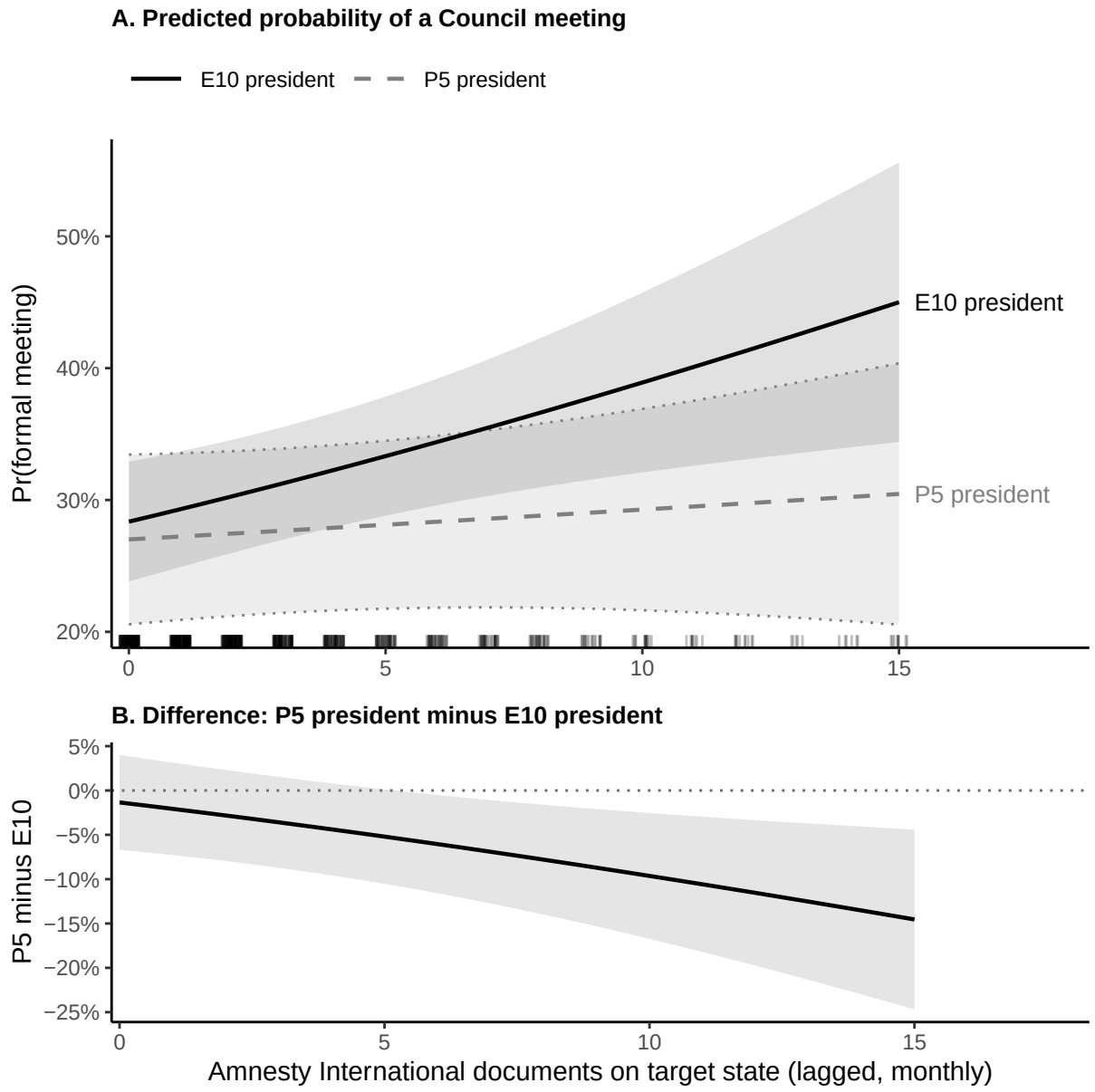
motivated to act, and any member can act through a request the President is expected to honor, the effect of division should not depend on the presidency, which is consistent with what I find here.

6.2.2 International Attention

Hypothesis H2b is supported. International attention is strongly associated with Council engagement under elected-member presidents, and has little to no discernible association under permanent member presidents, as illustrated in the right panel of Figure 1. Each additional Amnesty International document is associated with a 1.0 percentage point increase in the probability of meeting under an E10 president, compared with 0.2 points under a P5 president; this 0.8 percentage-point difference per document is statistically significant[19]. Figure 2 shows what this difference implies across the observed range of attention. Under an elected-member president, the predicted probability of a meeting rises from roughly 28 percent when a crisis receives no Amnesty International attention to 45 percent at 15 documents, the 95th percentile of the attention distribution. Under a permanent-member president, it rises from 27 to only 30 percent. As a result, the gap between presidency types is negligible when attention is low and grows as attention increases, illustrated in panel B of Figure 2. At the 25th percentile of attention, equivalent to a single document, meeting probability is statistically indistinguishable under the two types of presidency, while at the 75th percentile, equivalent to 6 documents, a P5 presidency is associated with a 6.05 percentage point lower probability of a meeting. The second difference between these levels, -3.98 points, is statistically significant at p = 0.012. At the highest levels of attention, 95th percentile, in the data, the gap reaches roughly 15 percentage points.

[19] $p = 0.012$

Figure 2: International Attention Interaction Plot



The contrast between H2a and H2b is the central finding of this section. Division and attention both raise the stakes of response to a mass atrocity event, but only international attention differentiates between the two types of presidency. This is consistent with the argument that external attention, unlike internal division, concentrates reputational costs on the member positioned to act. Elected-member presidents, whose standing depends on being seen to respond within a short window of opportunity, convene more readily as the crisis becomes more visible, while permanent members with their long tenure on the Council are insulated from these costs and do not convene as readily. The results also give empirical content to the claim that

mediatized politics has raised the value of placing issues on the agenda (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023). External attention is associated with Council engagement, but its effect depends on who is positioned to bear the cost of silence.

6.2.3 Robustness Checks

The variance-based second difference lacks statistical significance under every approach. The results are also robust to measuring the Council President's position using raw rank or absolute ideal point distance to the target; see Appendix Table A2. Given the analysis relies on 23 event clusters, I re-estimate the H2 quantities with a cluster bootstrap that resamples whole events. These results are reported in Appendix Table A5. The results are consistent in direction, though less precise. The gap between presidency types at high attention remains statistically significant[20], while the difference in the marginal effect of attention and the attention second difference becomes marginally significant[21].

7 Conclusion

The Security Council convened on Gaza within weeks of October 2023 and returned to it repeatedly despite deep and persistent division among its members, while a comparably severe endgame in Sri Lanka in 2009 never reached its formal agenda. This divergence is difficult to explain with accounts built on the Council's ordinary docket. Those accounts treat resolution passage as the object of Council engagement and accordingly, expect division among members to suppress it. This paper has argued that mass atrocities call for a different logic. Because these events clear a plausible severity threshold by construction, non-response is a visible failure of an accepted function, rather than a neutral scheduling choice. Additionally, a formal meeting is itself a consequential act of collective judgment, whether or not it produces a resolution. Once passage is set aside as the necessary marker of engagement, division becomes more than a brake on Council outcomes.

The evidence is consistent with this argument, and with recent findings on the Council's attention to armed conflict more broadly (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023). Across 23 mass atrocity events between 1989 and 2022, greater preference divergence among Council members is associated with a higher probability that the Council convenes on an event in a given month. Division distinguishes the crises and months in which the Council engages from those in which it remains silent. The institutional position of the presiding member also matters, but not in ways that prior focuses on division or P5 preferences would suggest. The effect of Council division is nearly identical under elected and permanent presidents, suggesting a lack of strong

[20] 95% CI: -12.5 to -0.6; p=0.041

[21] $p = 0.078$ and $p = 0.081$, respectively

exercise of presidential prerogative or strategic request making by other members. However, the effect of international attention does vary across presidencies. As attention from international human rights organizations rises, elected-member presidencies become substantially more likely to convene the Council, while permanent-member presidencies are largely unresponsive. Division raises the stakes for members across the Council, who can act through unattributed requests, while international attention concentrates those stakes on the member publicly positioned to act, the Council President, and that member's response depends on how exposed it is to the reputational costs of inaction. Because elected members have a fleeting tenure on the Council and are motivated to leave a positive legacy in their 24 months, they face these costs more than entrenched permanent members, who can and have weathered reputational backlash through the Council.

These findings carry three implications for the study of the Security Council and international organizations more broadly. First, these findings suggest that the relationship between Council division and Council engagement is not fixed but depends on the purpose of engagement. Mass atrocities offered a hard test for the expectation that division suppresses engagement, and that expectation does not hold here. Together with evidence that division increases agenda entry across armed conflicts more broadly (Lundgren and Klamberg, 2023), this suggests that the effect of division depends on what convening is worth. Where resolution passage is the overriding goal and an item's absence carries little cost, the anticipated difficulty of agreement may be reason enough to stay away. Where external audiences expect the Council to act, the value of convening, as a signal to those audiences and a venue for assigning responsibility, can outweigh that difficulty. The divergent findings in the literature may therefore reflect, in part, differences in the salience of the issues studied. Treating Council agenda items as interchangeable units that differ only in the covariates predicting their uptake obscures this variation, and a promising direction for future work is to examine directly how salience conditions the effect of division across the Council's docket.

Second, the results shift attention away from the permanent members as the sole locus of politically consequential preferences on the Council. Much of the literature attends to the P5 because their veto determines whether resolutions pass. At the agenda-setting stage, however, the veto is unavailable, and the members who matter are those willing to place a crisis before the Council. The monthly rotation of the presidency hands that prerogative to elected members for roughly two-thirds of the year, and it is these members, not the permanent five, whose behavior responds to external scrutiny. While elected members' limited tenure is often treated as a source of weakness relative to the P5, here it is a source of responsiveness to extreme crises.

Third, these findings speak to how external actors influence the Council. International human rights organizations are often studied as sources of pressure on the Council as a body. The results here demonstrate that their influence runs through identifiable members and positions rather than through the Council as a

whole. Attention matters when it can be attached to a presiding state that bears its costs. This is consistent with how advocacy organizations already behave, as in Human Rights Watch's appeal to Brazil during its October 2023 presidency, and it suggests a practical implication. Because the presidential rotation is known well in advance, advocates seeking Council engagement on an emerging atrocity may find their efforts most effective when timed to coincide with an elected member's presidency.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The sample of mass atrocity events is necessarily small, and inference based on 23 event clusters is imprecise. The differences between presidency types are consistent in direction under a cluster bootstrap but less precisely estimated. Ideal point distance derived from General Assembly voting proxies bilateral alignment and may miss issue-specific ties, bilateral pressure, or crisis-specific commitments. The count of Amnesty International documents captures a crisis's salience within advocacy networks rather than broader media coverage or salience within members' domestic publics. The analysis also focuses on formal meetings and therefore does not capture the informal consultations or Arria-formula meetings, which are how the Council sometimes engages with crises it declines to place on its formal agenda, as it did with Sri Lanka in 2009. Finally, although the rotation of the presidency is set by the calendar rather than by any particular crisis, presidency type is bundled with other attributes of the presiding state, and requests for meetings by non-presiding members, which the theory treats as a distinct pathway to the agenda, are not publicly attributed and cannot be observed directly.

These limitations point toward several avenues for future research. The same reputational logic that shapes whether the Council convenes should also shape how quickly it does so, and examining that timing of the Council's first response to mass atrocities would test whether division and exposure accelerate engagement as well as enable it. A companion paper examines what happens once a meeting is convened, including which members propose and how proposals fare. Qualitative work drawing on interviews with Council representatives could trace the request pathway that the quantitative evidence can only infer.

The Council's response to mass atrocity is often described as a story of paralysis, in which division among its members prevents meaningful action. The evidence here suggests a more complicated picture beneath the inaction. Division does not silence the Council but rather gives members a reason to speak, even when they cannot agree on what to say. Whether a crisis reaches the Council's agenda depends less on consensus than on whether someone is positioned, and sufficiently exposed, to put it there. Understanding when and why the Council chooses to speak, even without agreement, remains essential for the populations whose protection depends on it, and for the advocates and scholars who seek to hold the Council to that responsibility.

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8 Appendix

Table A1: Covariate Balance by Council President Type

	E10 CP (n = 467)	P5 CP (n = 238)	Difference	p-value
Pre-treatment covariates				
Council IPD Variance	1.002	1.017	0.015	0.353
CP IPD Rank (percentile)	0.450	0.718	0.268	0.000
AI Reports (lag)	4.293	4.349	0.055	0.853
Influence of Prior Meetings	2.467	2.320	-0.147	0.283
Active Conflict	0.827	0.819	-0.007	0.786
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	2.142	1.939	-0.203	0.063
Outcomes				
Formal Meeting (binary)	0.343	0.286	-0.057	0.005
Number of Formal Meetings	0.570	0.471	-0.099	0.057

Note: Difference = P5 minus E10, from a regression of each variable on the P5 President indicator; p-values use standard errors clustered on the mass atrocity event.

Table A2: Probit Models of Council Meetings on Mass Atrocity Events

	(1) Pooled + CP IPD Rank	(2) AME	(3) Fully Interacted	(4) AME	(5) Pooled + CP absolute IPD	(2) AME	(3) Fully Interacted	(4) AME
Council IPD Variance	0.618*	0.151*	0.628.	0.145.	0.639*	0.157*	0.686.	0.152*
	(0.314)	(0.077)	(0.371)	(0.078)	(0.296)	(0.073)	(0.359)	(0.074)
AI Reports (lag)	0.028*	0.007*	0.041**	0.007*	0.029*	0.007*	0.045**	0.008**
	(0.012)	(0.003)	(0.014)	(0.003)	(0.013)	(0.003)	(0.015)	(0.003)
P5 Council President	−0.254*	−0.061*	0.047	−0.067*	−0.199.	−0.048.	0.240	−0.052*
	(0.111)	(0.026)	(0.532)	(0.027)	(0.110)	(0.027)	(0.430)	(0.026)
CP IPD Rank to Target	0.005	0.001	−0.010	0.001				
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.018)	(0.004)				
CP IPD to Target					−0.034	−0.008	−0.117	−0.015
					(0.076)	(0.018)	(0.080)	(0.016)
Influence of Prior Meetings	0.257***	0.063***	0.285***	0.065***	0.259***	0.064***	0.289***	0.065***
	(0.050)	(0.009)	(0.061)	(0.010)	(0.051)	(0.010)	(0.059)	(0.010)
Active	0.147	0.035	0.339	0.041	0.151	0.036	0.324	0.041
	(0.278)	(0.064)	(0.398)	(0.063)	(0.287)	(0.066)	(0.403)	(0.065)
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	−0.021	−0.005	−0.039	−0.006	−0.021	−0.005	−0.038	−0.005
	(0.029)	(0.007)	(0.037)	(0.007)	(0.029)	(0.007)	(0.037)	(0.007)
P5 CP × Council IPD Variance			−0.087				−0.179	
			(0.247)				(0.229)	
P5 CP × AI Reports			−0.032*				−0.036**	
			(0.013)				(0.014)	
P5 CP × Prior Meetings			−0.053				−0.056	
			(0.040)				(0.041)	
P5 CP × Active			−0.462				−0.410	
			(0.429)				(0.426)	
P5 CP × Civilian Deaths			0.048				0.051	
			(0.048)				(0.048)	
(Intercept)	−1.885***		−2.026***		−1.852***		−2.038***	
	(0.497)		(0.562)		(0.461)		(0.565)	
Num.Obs.	705	705	705	705	705	705	705	705

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
Interaction coefficients are on the latent (probit index) scale and are not probability-scale effects; see Figure 2 and Table 4.

Table A3: Joint Wald Tests of Differences Between P5 and E10 Presidencies

Null hypothesis	Question	F	df	p
P5 President indicator and all interactions = 0	Same process under P5 and E10 presidents	4.75	(7, 22)	0.002
All P5 President interactions = 0	Same covariate effects under P5 and E10 presidents	4.26	(6, 22)	0.005

Note: Tests are based on the fully interacted probit model (Table **??**, Model 5) with standard errors clustered on the mass atrocity event. F statistics are evaluated against an F distribution with $G-1 = 22$ denominator degrees of freedom, where G is the number of event clusters.

Table A4: Split-Sample Probit Models by Council President Type

	(1) E10 Presidents	(2) AME	(3) P5 Presidents	(4) AME
Council IPD Variance	0.632.	0.154.	0.544*	0.130*
	(0.373)	(0.090)	(0.260)	(0.065)
AI Reports (lag)	0.042**	0.010**	0.010	0.002
	(0.014)	(0.003)	(0.013)	(0.003)
CP IPD Rank to Target	−0.445.	−0.108.	0.088	0.021
	(0.248)	(0.056)	(0.531)	(0.127)
Influence of Prior Meetings	0.283***	0.069***	0.235***	0.056***
	(0.059)	(0.011)	(0.044)	(0.007)
Active	0.324	0.073	−0.085	−0.021
	(0.403)	(0.085)	(0.268)	(0.067)
Civilian Deaths (lag, log)	−0.041	−0.010	0.013	0.003
	(0.037)	(0.009)	(0.035)	(0.008)
(Intercept)	−1.880**		−1.816**	
	(0.576)		(0.643)	
Num.Obs.	467	467	238	238

. p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
AME columns report average marginal effects on Pr(meeting).

Table A5: Cluster-Bootstrap Inference for Presidency Differences

	Estimate	Bootstrap SE	95% CI (percentile)	p
A. Difference in marginal effects (P5 − E10)				
Council IPD variance (H2a)	-2.41	(6.25)	[-14.33, 10.55]	0.759
AI reports (H2b)	-0.80.	(0.47)	[-1.65, 0.19]	0.081
B. P5 − E10 gap across Council division (H2a)				
Gap at 25th percentile	-4.34	(3.60)	[-11.77, 2.28]	0.187
Gap at 75th percentile	-5.43.	(3.03)	[-11.71, 0.08]	0.056
Second difference (75th − 25th)	-1.09	(2.58)	[-6.09, 4.11]	0.721
C. P5 − E10 gap across international attention (H2b)				
Gap at 25th percentile	-2.07	(2.41)	[-7.37, 1.97]	0.303
Gap at 75th percentile	-6.05*	(2.84)	[-11.42, -0.19]	0.046
Second difference (75th − 25th)	-3.98.	(2.36)	[-8.18, 1.16]	0.090

Note: Percentage points. 1999 bootstrap replications resampling whole mass atrocity events with replacement (1999 of 1999 converged); percentile intervals; p-values are twice the share of draws on the far side of zero. . $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.