



**DEMOCRACY
COALITION
PROJECT**

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DEMOCRACIES SECURE UN CENSURE OF WORST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS

Four Key Country Resolutions Pass Despite Efforts to End Practice of Naming and Shaming

A concerted push by “spoiler” states to halt the practice of condemning the worst human rights violators through country specific resolutions suffered a set-back at the United Nations in November, a new survey by the Democracy Coalition Project shows. Four resolutions that took Belarus, Iran, North Korea and Myanmar to task for their human rights records were passed by the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee, with key support from democratic countries.

Efforts to censure Uzbekistan for its human rights violations, however, failed when a resolution to halt debate on that country passed by a narrow margin. A separate resolution, sponsored by Belarus and Uzbekistan and aimed at criticizing the practice of country-specific human rights resolutions, was approved, but in a watered-down form.

The Democracy Coalition Project, a public policy research and advocacy organization, released the survey to mark the 58th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The study, available at www.demcoalition.org, charts the votes of all 192 members of the Third Committee of the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly on six key human rights resolutions that illustrate UN member states’ approaches to some of the worst human rights crises in the world today.

The study consists of two scorecards, both of which rank UN member states by the number of votes cast that were considered positive or negative steps toward holding the worst human rights violators accountable. The results range from a score of 6 (positive votes on all six resolutions) to -6 (negative on all six resolutions). A government’s absence from the vote or a vote to abstain was given a value of zero. The first scorecard ranks the members of the United Nations Democracy Caucus, a group of governments established in 2003 by the Community of Democracies to coordinate common positions on issues regarding democracy and human rights. The second scorecard analyzes the votes of all other countries not in the UN Democracy Caucus.

“The results of the latest round of votes on the worst cases of human rights abuses demonstrate that a cross-regional group of democratic states are prepared to demand some measure of accountability from their fellow UN members,” remarked Ted Piccone, Executive Director of the Democracy Coalition Project. “If you include votes to abstain

in the tally, it becomes even clearer that the effort to silence criticism of a state's human rights record has been defeated resoundingly. It's time, therefore, for spoiler states to end their campaign against country resolutions at the General Assembly as well as at the Human Rights Council."

The study looked at six key resolutions:

- “**Promotion of equitable and mutually respectful dialogue on human rights,**” [Resolution L.31/Rev.1](#), introduced by Belarus and Uzbekistan, included language stressing the need to avoid “politically motivated and biased country-specific resolutions and confrontational approaches” on human rights; it also contained wording that undermined the universality of fundamental human rights principles. While negotiations to amend the language did result in a weaker resolution, a “No” vote was considered the best course of action in the face of such deliberate attempts to eliminate one of the UN’s tools to put pressure on the worst human rights abusers. Although the resolution passed by 14 votes, all 63 votes against it came from members of the UN Democracy Caucus.
- “**Situation of Human Rights in Belarus,**” [Resolution L.40](#), introduced by the United States, Canada and the European Union, criticized the government’s failure to hold free and fair elections and its ongoing politically-motivated prosecution of opposition figures and human rights defenders. A “Yes” vote on this resolution was seen as positive. Sixty-nine of the 70 votes for the resolution, or 98%, came from members of the UN Democracy Caucus.
- “**Situation of Human Rights in Iran,**” [Resolution L.41](#), introduced by Canada, set forth a catalogue of ongoing human rights abuses in Iran, including torture, serious harassment of civil society and systematic discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities. A “Yes” vote on this resolution was considered positive. Sixty-seven of the 70 votes for the resolution, or 95%, came from members of the UN Democracy Caucus.
- “**Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,**” [Resolution L.37](#), introduced by the European Union, was designed to call attention to “systemic, widespread and grave” human rights violations in North Korea. A “Yes” vote on this resolution was viewed as positive. Eighty-one of the 91 votes for the resolution, or 89%, came from members of the UN Democracy Caucus.
- “**Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar (Burma),**” [Resolution L.38/Rev.1](#), introduced by the European Union and the United States, expressed grave concern about the systematic violations of fundamental freedoms, attacks against ethnic minorities and ongoing detention of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. A “Yes” vote on this resolution was seen as positive. Seventy-five of 79 votes for the resolution, or 95%, came from members of the UN Democracy Caucus.
- The No Action Motion on the “**Situation of Human Rights in Uzbekistan,**” introduced by Uzbekistan, was designed to halt debate on [Resolution L.39](#), which mainly criticized the government’s failure to address ongoing problems

* CORRECTED VERSION *

surrounding the Andijan massacre in 2005. A “No” vote on this motion was a vote to keep debate open on Uzbekistan’s troubling human rights record, and therefore considered positive. All 69 “No” votes, or 100%, came from the UN Democracy Caucus.

Country Resolutions on Worst Violators Win Handily...

As evidenced by the vote tallies, the UN’s Third Committee did not abandon the practice of country-specific resolutions, despite a full-court press by such countries as Belarus, China, Uzbekistan, Cuba and Iran to block such resolutions. The resolutions on Belarus, Iran, North Korea and Myanmar were all approved with clear double-digit majorities of those UN member states voting. Members of the Community of Democracies were vital in this endeavor, providing between 89% and 100% of the “yes” votes needed to approve these four resolutions. The strongest performers from the 16 members of the Community of Democracies Convening Group were Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Portugal, the United States, Republic of Korea, El Salvador, Chile and Mexico.

One other country resolution, condemning Israeli military operations in Lebanon, passed by a vote of 109-7, with 59 abstentions. The seven states voting against the resolution, including Australia, Canada and the United States, argued that it was imbalanced because it failed to cite Hezbollah violations against civilians in Israel.

... But Uzbekistan Is Spared Scrutiny

“Spoiler” countries, however, gained a small victory with the razor-thin approval of a “motion of no action” on the resolution on Uzbekistan, a procedural motion which effectively removes the resolution from debate. The motion was passed by only five votes and could easily have been defeated had more members of the UN Democracy Caucus not voted *for* the motion (such as South Africa, India, Indonesia, Botswana, Barbados and the Philippines) or had not been absent or abstained (e.g, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ghana and Mali).

The Third Committee notably rejected by wide margins two resolutions, sponsored by Belarus and Iran respectively, criticizing the United States for its record on voting rights, the death penalty and a range of measures taken in its approach to terrorism, and Canada for its treatment of indigenous peoples and immigrants. The final votes were 6 Yes, 114 No and 45 abstentions on the US resolution, and 6 Yes, 107 No and 49 abstentions on the Canada motion.

Some Disappointing Behavior by Key Democracies

The scorecard shows that a number of democracies which have made commitments through the Community of Democracies and other bodies to promote democracy and human rights in international fora voted in ways that weakened the UN’s capacity to hold blatant human rights abusers to account.¹

¹ The scorecard’s analysis neutralizes the importance of abstentions by giving them a value of 0 in the index of votes. Abstentions can cut both ways. Some countries sometimes choose to abstain as a way to avoid voting against a resolution, which can help a resolution pass. Abstention in other cases, however, often results in losing an important vote, as in the case of the Uzbekistan no-action motion.

Some **leading members of the Community of Democracies** scored very poorly. For example, five members of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies voted in negative or unhelpful ways (as demonstrated by a vote total of zero or worse):

- **Mali**, the current chair of the Community of Democracies, abstained on most of the resolutions surveyed, missing an opportunity to hold human rights abusers accountable, earning a score of -1.
- **India**, the world's largest democracy, voted across the board in ways that undermined stronger accountability for human rights abusers, earning a score of -5.
- **South Africa**, with a score of -4, continued its poor track record by failing to use its influence in international bodies to defend human rights victims. It voted against resolutions critical of Belarus, Iran and Uzbekistan.
- **The Philippines**, with a score of -1, voted for only one of the country resolutions studied (North Korea), and voted against the resolution to hold Uzbekistan to account.
- **Morocco** voted against stronger accountability for human rights abusers on three resolutions (Iran, Belarus and Uzbekistan), and twice for accountability (North Korea and Burma), earning a score of -2.

Other members of the UN Democracy Caucus acted as important allies of those governments seeking to weaken or eliminate UN resolutions holding specific countries to account for human rights abuses:

- **Indonesia, Russia, and Venezuela** all received the lowest possible score.
- **Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Senegal, Namibia and Niger** also voted poorly.
- **Costa Rica**, which traditionally votes with other leading democracies for country resolutions, abstained on all but one of the resolutions surveyed this year. They argued that such resolutions should be taken up by the new Human Rights Council.

As noted in last year's DCP survey of votes on similar resolutions, voting dynamics continue to fall along a pattern in which democracies from Europe (West, Central and Eastern), Latin America and the Caribbean, along with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States, Japan, South Korea, and several small island states, usually vote for UN censure of serious human rights violators. Members of the Africa and Asia bloc, including states from the Middle East, most of which do not participate in the UN Democracy Caucus, tend to vote against such resolutions or abstain. Several countries that reliably voted this way in the past are increasingly voting with the first group, e.g., **Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, and Afghanistan**.
