

# What P5 Members of the UNSC Have to Say About Rebel Groups

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## Introduction and Background

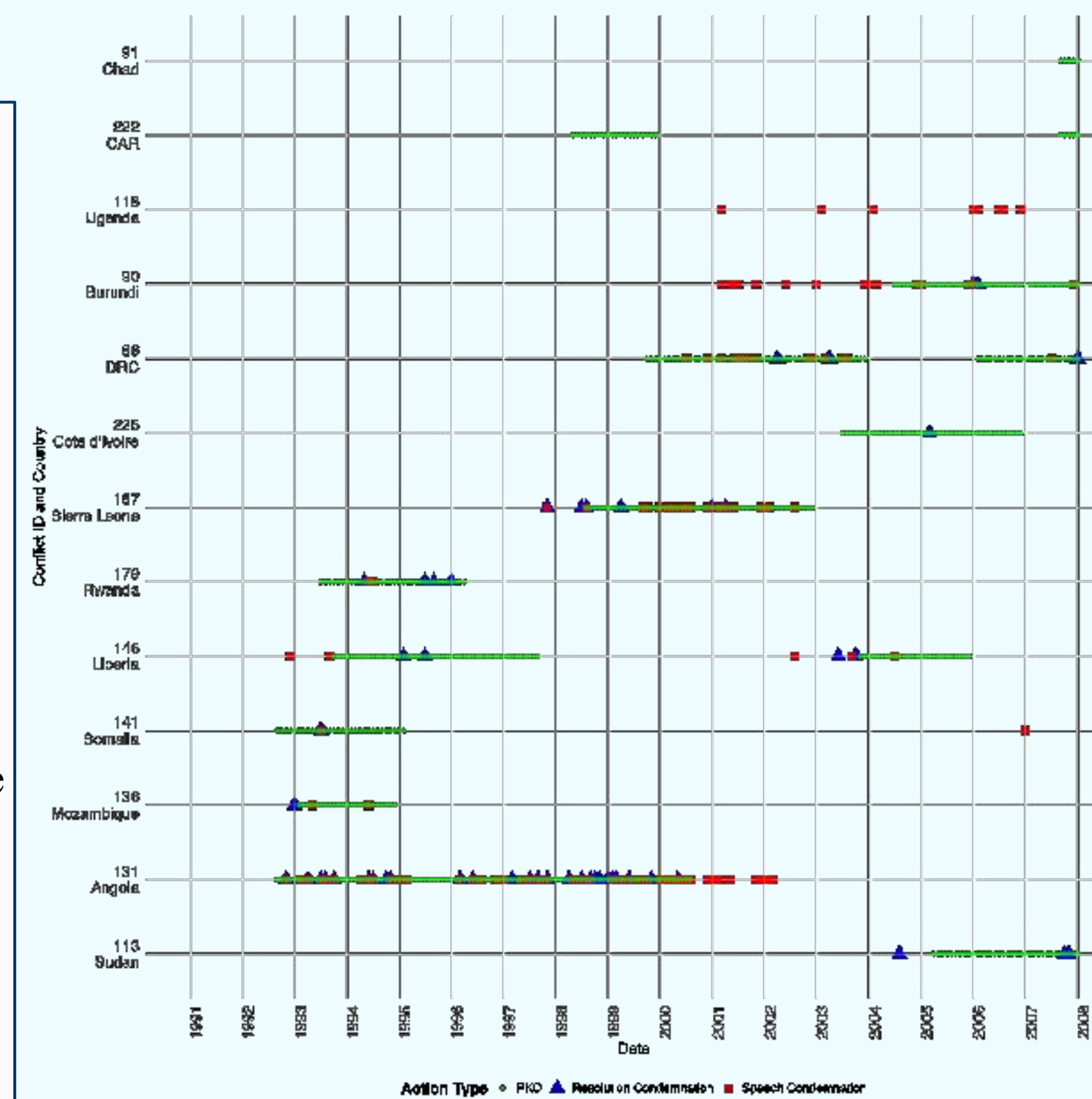
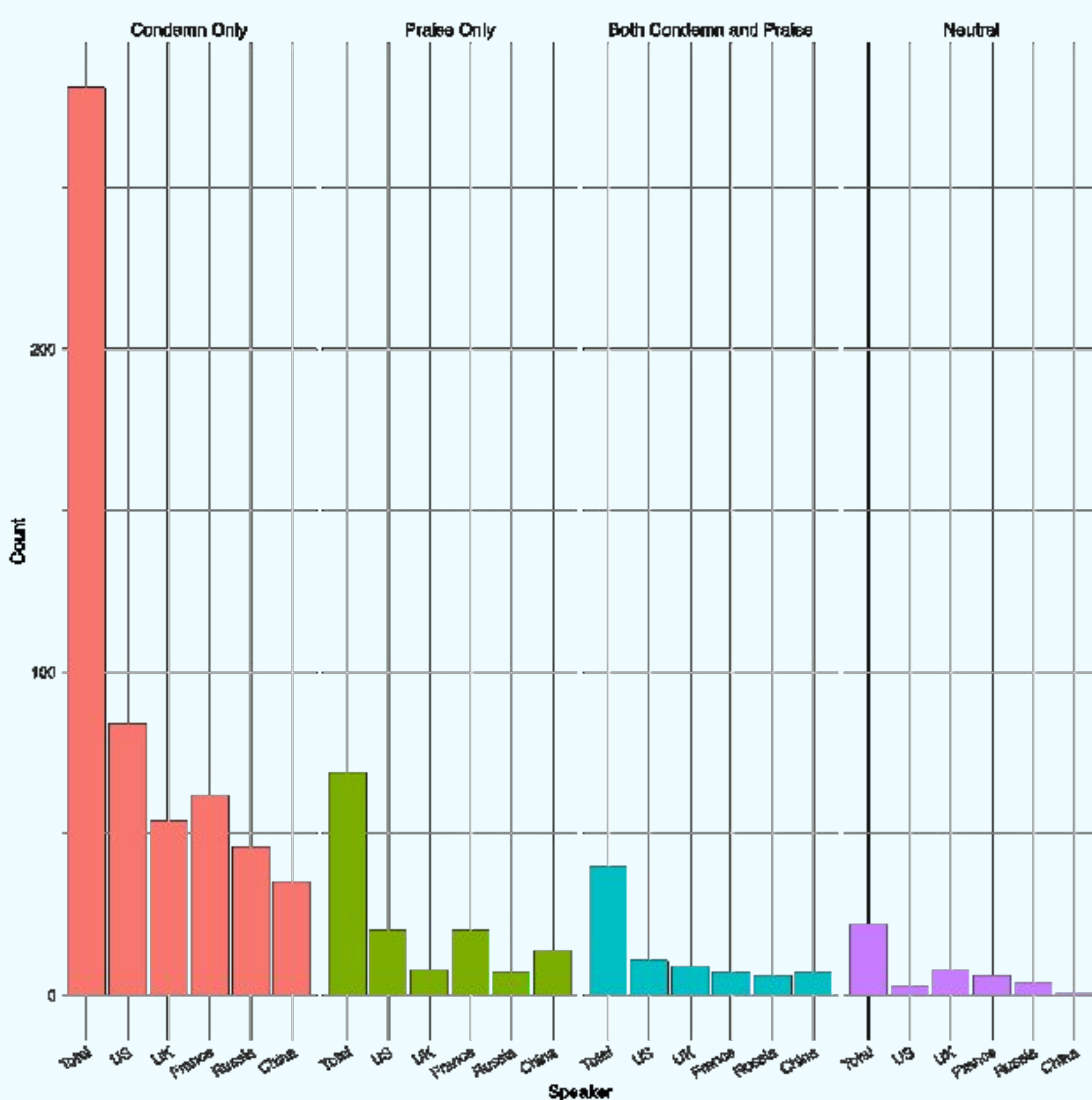
At the epicenter of international relations, which is and has always been a whirlwind of debates, tension, and negotiations, lies the United Nations. In 1945, the UN founded the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**. As the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions such as sanctions and peacekeeping missions, the UNSC is a rather weighty institution in the international community. The UNSC consists of 15 members, 10 of which are elected for 2-year terms by the General Assembly and 5 of which are permanent and called the “**P5,**” including the **United States, France, China, the United Kingdom, and Russia**. Because of their permanent place in such a vastly important body and the power of the P5 as countries independently, when they speak, the world hears it. In this research project, we wanted to examine their speech within the UNSC, where speeches are used to motivate other members to take or refrain from action, change their stances towards a group or policy, create strategies, and more. Focusing on the P5’s rhetoric surrounding rebel groups in sub-Saharan Africa, this project asks, “**What is the distribution of sentiments expressed towards rebel groups at the UN?**” This gives insight into the diplomatic strategies of P5 nations and lays the groundwork for analyzing the effects of their speeches, an area in which there lies a gap in existing research.

## Methodology

For this project, we looked at all **speeches delivered by the P5 at the UNSC from 1991 to 2008 regarding African rebel groups** including UNITA, the Revolutionary United Front, the Lord’s Resistance Army, and more. Our raw data are from Sakamoto (2023) and Schönfeld et al. (2019)’s UNSC public speech data. We used a dictionary-based approach to filter all speeches that mentioned any of the African rebel groups that are in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute, Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Melander, Pettersson, and Themnér, 2016), which is one of the most used datasets in conflict studies. This returns us a comprehensive list. Among all the **4,423 speeches delivered by the P5 during the period, 374 mentioned at least one African rebel group**. To capture the sentiment toward each rebel group, we separate the data into **412 rebel-speech unique pairs**. These speeches averaged 843 words with a median of 674. The longest speech includes 4,291 words, and the shortest speech includes 204. On average, **each speech mentions 1.11 rebel groups**. In total, **22 rebels and 10 corresponding conflicts are mentioned in these speeches**. To determine the sentiment a given country was expressing towards a rebel group, we **performed a rhetorical analysis of each speech**. A speech was determined to be neutral if it only named a rebel group but gave no indication of feelings towards them. It was negative if the speech exclusively condemned the rebel group, as was normally seen following an increase in violence or a refusal to cooperate with the UNSC. The speech would usually label these actions as abhorrent and call for further action from the council. A positive speech exclusively praised a rebel group, which often followed compliance with the UNSC. A speech was deemed mixed if there both praise and condemnation in a speech. Each sentiment was assigned a number—0 for neutral, 1 for negative, 2 for positive, and 3 for mixed—which was then coded into an excel sheet. This sheet was subsequently used to **visualize the distribution of sentiments amongst UNSC speeches**. Our coding standard of speeches follows a similar study that codes resolutions (Benson and Tucker 2022). We coded the same speeches independently. Our **F1-score** (a measure of inter-coder agreement, the higher the score is, the more robust and reliable the data are) is **89.73%**, which means our coding results are **highly accurate**.

## Results and Conclusions

The first figure represents the number of speech-rebel pairs, categorized by sentiment and by speaker. **280 (68%) speech-rebel pairs condemn the rebel, exclusively. 40 (10%) speech-rebel pairs both condemn and praise the rebel**—this often occurred when the rebel made some progress toward peace but still did not fully comply with the UNSC. These ratios suggest that if the P5 explicitly names a rebel in their public speeches, **they are very likely expressing negative sentiment** toward that rebel. Most condemnation speeches were delivered by the US, and the fewest by China. The gap is around 50 cases. Overall, the **condemnation speeches were made relatively evenly among the P5 members**. There are some amount of positive speeches, which suggest that the rebels sometimes complied with the UNSC and made progress toward peace, and the UNSC acknowledged their efforts.



The second figure plots the co-occurrence of Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs), resolution condemnation, and speech condemnation per conflict-month in conflicts discussed in the analyzed speeches. These **ten conflicts received at least one of the three actions** from the UNSC. There are 36 conflicts in Africa in total during the period. The 26 conflicts not shown in this figure did not receive any action from the UNSC, suggesting a **selectivity in UNSC’s response to conflicts**. There is **sufficient variation between these three actions**—we see that speech condemnation is sometimes made in a context that has had PKOs and/or resolution condemnation, and sometimes in a context that has neither. For example, Uganda only received speech condemnation, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) only received PKOs, and Sudan and Cote d’Ivoire received resolution condemnation and PKOs. This variation **suggests that the UNSC’s actions are context dependent**. In other words, these actions may be given due to systematic reason rather than randomly. Having obtained variation in our data allows us to further investigate other questions, such as what are the effects of the speech condemnation on rebel groups.

## Future Considerations

The future of this research entails using news reports documenting **rebel group action in the wake of P5 speech and action** as data to demonstrate what **rebel groups’ reactions are to the rhetoric of the P5**. This will lay the groundwork for an examination of the effects that the P5’s speeches have not only on the rebel groups which they speak about, but also the conflicts they are a part of, and the international community as a whole.

## References

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