

Although members of a group often vote together on important issues, they also frequently differ. Some of the groups exist mainly for the purpose of choosing candidates for membership in various United Nations organs. Others concert their policies on a wide variety of subjects. Geographically, the informal groups fall under the headings "Western and Others" (a number of developed countries that includes the United States of America, Western Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with Japan sharing many interests), "Eastern" (the Soviet Union and other socialist countries – but not including the People's Republic of China and Albania), "African and Asian", and "Latin American". Third World countries (sometimes called the non-aligned group) tend to seek a political position between the first two groups and are usually set apart from them by their stage of economic and social development.

Even though the preamble to the Charter purports to be a declaration made in the name of "We the peoples of the United Nations...", the organization was not intended by the drafters to become a world government, nor was the General Assembly to become a world parliament. It remains an organization of sovereign states, "a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations". Nevertheless, not unlike parliamentary democracy, the United Nations system, in its philosophy, atmosphere and operation, has always been dominated by the interplay of majority and minority and by a high degree of regulated confrontation between them. This confrontation has, over the years, taken a number of successive forms – between the Communist and Western states, between colonial and anti-colonial states, between developing and industrialized countries, between poor and rich.

Confrontation of the first kind was already developing when the United Nations came into being, and compromises stemming from it are reflected in the Charter itself. It inhibited the application of the Charter, making a dead letter, for instance, of the provision for the use, under the control of the Security Council, of armed forces to maintain or restore international peace and security. On the other hand, it led to the development of peacekeeping and to some forms of arms