

Brazil Hosting of the 2024 G20: Promise and Impediments in a High-Stakes, High-Drama Summit

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Abstract: This article offers an appraisal of both the promise and impediments regarding Brazil's hosting of the 2024 G20, a high-stakes, high-drama event. President Lula da Silva—with capable bureaucratic support—possesses both strong elements of charisma and experience that play well to the space of performance and policy. Nevertheless, at both the state and societal level, complications obtrude. Building popular support for the G20 faces the constraints of political and societal divisions. Furthermore, notwithstanding hopes that Brazil (and Lula) will be able to promote an expansive policy agenda, expectations persist that a turn back to geopolitical considerations will dominate the summit.

Keywords: G20; summitry; Brazil; Lula da Silva; geopolitics; BRICS.

Brazil's hosting of the 2024 G20 in Rio de Janeiro on November 18-19 promises to be a high-stakes, high-drama event. After a burst of activity as a crisis committee amid the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC), the commonplace opinion was that the G20 Summit process had faded in intensity (Cooper 2019a). Nevertheless, although the image of the G20 as the promoter of a collective agenda related to global management has become far less prominent, if anything, the role of the host for the G20 has become more accentuated (Cooper & Alexandroff 2019). Whereas in the early stages of the G20 scrutiny emphasized the delivery of collective benefits, the focus now has turned to the role of specific countries (and leaders) taking on the Presidency role concerning the Summit process. To a considerable extent, diminishing instrumental expectations around this informal institution explains this paradox. However, it is also a function of the evolving character of the G20, with an appreciation of the space in terms of agency regarding diversified hosts to put their stamp on the shape of the Summit.

The shift from a small, tight, concert-like forum comprising traditional great powers to a larger, in comparative terms at least, democratized leaders' gatherings is quite evident. To be sure, the established powers, the United States (U.S.), Great Britain, France, and Russia are there with their leaders. However, in contrast to the earlier G7 (that also includes Japan, Italy, and Canada), there is a far wider set of large economic market powers—China, India, and Brazil, and from the emerging developing powers—the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, and others. These annual gatherings of G20 leaders have opened the range of members and put the international focus on leaders in ways not seen in international governance before. If in some ways similar to past

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concerts, they differ from those earlier meetings in fundamental ways. Unlike the Big 3 gatherings of 1943/1945, most notably, they are not meetings of the great wartime leaders, privileging Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, and Winston Churchill.

The nature and impact of this shift in participation is reinforced by the contrast between the fluidity of the G20 and the fixed organizational attributes of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. Unlike in the formal international organizations (IOs), there is no fixed hierarchy: a construction underscored by the shift in the hosting role attached to the Presidency of the G20 away from the traditional elite encompassing western-oriented countries in and beyond the G7 countries to countries firmly embedded in the Global South—Indonesia in 2022, India in 2023, and now Brazil in 2024.

Such dynamics deserve attention given the unique—and unanticipated—nature and meaning of the process around the G20. Even acknowledging the level of contestation maintained around the creation and operation of the G20 (especially by smaller countries) (Cooper & Momani 2014), the move to elevate the G20 to the leaders' level can be viewed as a dramatic phenomenon in world politics (Cooper 2010). In generic terms, it must be reiterated that this response is not a fundamental institutional departure in that some elements of the G20 are consistent with past eras in which a cluster of traditionally powerful countries come together to act as a crisis committee/steering committee for the world. As well rehearsed, such concerts came to the fore in the aftermath of consequential moments of turbulence in 1814/1815, 1919, and 1945 (Ikenberry 2001).

When looked at more closely, though, the differences, not the similarities, between the present moment and earlier eras jump out. Not only did the nature of participation serve as a major break, but the catalyst for the new order was also a massive financial crisis rather than the turbulence of war. Unlike concert-like forums of earlier eras, the G20 possesses neither the image of allies/victors in war nor a sense of ideological uniformity or anti-revolutionary ethos. In terms of participation, most members of the G20 had no experience with the earlier institutional formats.

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Moreover, unlike the stalled process of UNSC reform or other IOs, bringing the Global South was done without protracted debate. When the call came for the G20, notwithstanding some considerable ambivalence about the format, all the Emerging Powers not only took part but engaged in the preparation, especially in the case of Brazil, from its position as chair of the G20 Finance in 2008. As Guido Mantega, the then Brazilian Finance Minister (IMF 2008) indicated, these countries called for a new form of institutional improvisation:

There is no agile structure prepared to deal with emergency economic problems. That is what we have seen at this time... We have to turn this G-20 into a forum or a tool of some kind that can provide answers to immediate problems and coordinate its actions better amongst many countries. We are facing the most serious financial crisis, perhaps since the crisis of 1929, and as this crisis is getting more serious, it demands quick answers, immediate answers. It must be monitored day by day, hour by hour, so that the necessary measures can be taken to handle the problems that arise. So, there must be very agile instruments available for that to happen.

Certainly, this buy-in by Brazil and other countries from the Global South was facilitated by the way that the G20 Finance had evolved as a problem-solving forum since its establishment in the late 1990s. As John Kirton argues, “Brazil was initially a reluctant participant. It feared the new G20 might undermine the traditional United Nations-based multilateralism of the ‘G192’” (Kirton 2011). Nonetheless, with the experience of the G20 Finance as a guide, Brazil was placed in a front-and-center position when the GFC hit. Not only could Brazil use its voice, but it could also act. Minister Mantega hosted the first emergency G20 ministerial meeting on October 11, 2008, in Washington, DC.

Furthermore, President Lula da Silva not only accepted President George W. Bush’s invitation to the November 2008 G20, but sat at the side of Bush for the “family” photo-op. Indeed, notwithstanding a wide number of reservations about the G20, Lula was pleased to take credit as one of the prime creators of the G20. As Lula articulated this sense of shared ownership in 2023, before Brazil took on the presidential function in terms of the 2024 summit: “I am one of the founder members of G20.” In so doing, a signal was also made concerning the import of the G20 in demonstrating and promoting the importance of the multipolar world (NDTV 2023).

The accommodation attached to this approach, albeit still contingent on performance, represented a major departure not only from the older concert models going back to and beyond 1945 but also from the culture of the G7/8. From this

perspective, comparing Brazil's relationship to the G20 and the G7/8 is significant. After all, President Lula da Silva had castigated his unequal role at the French-hosted Evian Summit in 2003: "What is the use of being invited for the dessert at the banquet of the powerful?" he asked, targeting the merely symbolic participation of emerging powers at the yearly gathering of the (then) G8. "We do not want to participate only to eat the dessert; we want to eat the main course, dessert, and then have coffee," he added, emphasizing emerging powers' claim to have a role in global decision-making processes (Wines 2007).

And for sure, the expansionary persona of the G20 as an inclusive body became reinforced by the opening of other institutions to specific countries in the Global South, the prime example being the reform of the Financial Stability Forum into the Financial Stability Board. Such a broadening out included opening membership to key non-Western states already brought into the G20, including Brazil. However, the innovative quality of the G20—as marked by the emphasis on organizational equality between members—went well beyond the functional. As David Held noted with effect, the G20 featured "an unprecedented successful attempt by developing countries to extend their participation in key institutions of global governance" (Held 2010, 204).

THE FOUNDATIONAL MODELS FOR LEADERSHIP BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL ELITE

It is misleading to suggest, notwithstanding the culture of organizational equality that, in de facto terms, all members of the G20 held equal standing. As one former official put it: "The chairs of the G20 need to show a certain deference to the concerns of the most influential G20 members, the United States, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and China" (Bradlow 2016, 143). That said, it became recognized that the host country taking on the Presidency (together with, to some extent, the other members of the Troika, encompassing the past host, the present host, and the future immediate host) must have the latitude to shape the agenda of Summits per national priorities.

Accordingly, space opportunities within the context of the G20 were located over time by countries outside the traditional elite on several foundational models. One approach is associated with South Korea's leveraging the hosting of the G20 in November 2010 to shape some of its agenda (Cooper 2011). The Seoul Summit was not the only first non-Western summit. It revealed a move away from the core agenda in the aftermath of the GFC, with the shift toward the development dimension of the G20 and global economic governance, as

illustrated by the Seoul Consensus on Development. The Seoul Summit process also thickened the G20 process, including the notable adjustment concerning a formula for non-member participation, enabling the Summit host to invite up to five guests. At the same time, South Korea pushed some boundaries of non-state participation (Cooper 2013).

As epitomized by China's approach, the other model was far more nuanced. Internally, China made a significant distinction between civil society and the business community: downplaying the former and cultivating select strata of the latter. In this vein, building on the model pioneered by South Korea, the B (Business) 20 meeting held just before the Chinese 2016 Hangzhou Summit was unprecedented in scale. Externally, whereas South Korea prioritized the G20, China remained ambivalent about adopting a similar approach. China gave the G20 some considerable attention in recognition of the culture of equality. To illustrate this type of institutional buy-in, the original G20 Chinese Sherpa was the experienced Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, He Yafei (He 2015).

Even so, this focus did not come at the expense of other priorities. In comparative institutional terms, as reflected by China's 2016 hosting at the Hangzhou Summit, the onus was on a dualistic approach: engaging with the G20 in a manner that also directed at fuller engagement in UN priorities. To give a prime illustration, initiatives such as the G20 Blueprint on Innovative Growth highlight the consolidation between organizations, with the G20 in a delegating role. Notably, the blueprint aimed to be enriched by a "G20 taskforce supported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the FSB." A core strength of this alternative model is that it allows the G20, indirectly or directly, to inform and actively engage its governance by cutting across several global governance architectures simultaneously. One example that stands out is the U.S.-China joint ratification of the Paris Climate Change Agreement—immediately before the 2014 Brisbane Summit—and the endorsement of the Hangzhou G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (G20 Leaders' 2016).

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BUILDING A TEMPLATE FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Indonesia and India faced high-stakes, high-drama tests beyond what South Korea and China had to deal with. No less than South Korea and China, the consistent theme was a desire to send a signal about their global standing. However, Indonesia and India had potential limitations of a very different and more onerous type. This is not to suggest that Indonesia or India lacked experience in hosting major events, whether a Summit of peers as in the case of the Non-Aligned Movement (or the G77) or, for that matter, major UN events. Still, hosting a Summit of the magnitude—and media scrutiny—around the G20 was of a very different magnitude.

As two experienced G20 watchers have commented, it is misleading to suggest that the tests for hosting only relate to “substance” as opposed to “logistics and location features” (Chin & Dobson 2015, 164). Confirming this point, India has long been sensitive to its performance as a host to global Summits. Writing in 2019, Akshay Mathur, at the Indian think tank Gateway House, made a compelling case why the G20 should be viewed positively by a “rising” India in line with a more inclusionary global system: “The G20 is unique. Here, developing countries can display their political, economic, and intellectual leadership on a par with the most powerful countries. The G20’s rotating Presidency ensures that no one country dominates the agenda” (Mathur 2019).

Even among the enthusiasts, though, there was an ingrained strong concern regarding procedural dynamics that India must step up in operational capacity to deliver as an effective host. Accordingly, considerable attention was paid to the need for infrastructure that meets G20 criteria: “Unlike the Olympics and more like Davos, this effort is focused on a small but powerful group which expects good airports, accommodation, conference facilities, and communications infrastructure all year round” (Mathur 2019).

Furthermore, beyond the physical tests, concerns came to the fore about a gap in human capital. At least by comparative standards, India continued to make do with a bureaucratic culture comparatively deficient in the context of the G20 process. For one thing, there has been a lack of coordination among the relevant (and understaffed) ministries. For another thing, the appointment of Sherpas has retained an ad hoc image. In combination, these weaknesses were said to put India at a protracted disadvantage to the performance of the West, and increasingly by China, and, it might be added, to middle powers such as South Korea (Cooper 2014).

ARE THE TESTS FOR BRAZIL DIFFERENT?

On several counts, at first glance, Brazil is in an advantageous position over the relevant Global South peers in managing a high-stakes, high-drama Summit. The annual event places a high degree of value, particularly on the hosting leaders and various government officials. It is vital because those leaders and their governments host the organization and are responsible for delivering policy initiatives. Status can be enhanced or lost by the effectiveness, or not, of the leader's actions and policy determinations. The leaders' focus is salient for several reasons.

For one thing, the G20 at the leaders' level lacks some of the socialization process witnessed in the past. The G7 culture of political like-mindedness and meetings in smaller, often remote sites, allowed leader outlooks to converge on issues. The G20 is highly diverse geographically and in terms of their political backgrounds. Both of these trends highlight the role of leaders as the G20 goes forward (Cooper & Alexandroff 2019), even if many of the leaders around the table lack the experience or the expertise in dealing with collective problem-solving at the core of the G20's mandate.

President Lula da Silva possesses strong elements of charisma and experience that reinforce the image of the potential animation of a high-stakes, high-drama Summit. Facing massive domestic political and economic challenges at home, Lula has a great incentive (and capacity) to leverage the hosting function symbolically and instrumentally. The G20 serves as a primary means to enhance his personal status positioning (Brazil 2023a; 2023b). Equally, animated by a compelling sense of ambition, Lula has the opportunity to address key policy issues: exercising leadership and working to convince his counterparts of the value of the proposals over a Summit process that, by stretching out for a year, is both exceedingly long and visible by international standards.

Although at its core a leaders' forum, the Finance ministers and Central bankers have played a central role. Other mainline ministers have also become involved in advancing decisions, with meetings of ministers concerned to advance employment, security, and environment ministers, and, on occasion, foreign ministers have gathered as well. Two tracks define the central ministers—the Finance Track including ministers and deputy ministers, and then the leaders' personal representatives, the so-called Sherpa Track, responsible in particular for agenda setting for the leaders' gatherings (Cooper 2019b).

India appointed a corporate (NITI Aayog) CEO, Amitabh Kant, as India's Sherpa for the G20. In comparison, Brazil is well-resourced with both a high quality and high quantity stock of personnel. Notably, Ambassador Mauricio Lyrio, Secre-

tary of Economic and Financial Affairs at Itamaraty (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), whose extensive experience includes being Chief of Staff of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2016-2017), and Secretary of Diplomatic Planning (2013-2016), has taken the role of G20 Sherpa.

If Brazil enjoys some considerable strengths at the State level, any edge at the societal level is more complicated. Brazil—with the chosen site of Rio de Janeiro—could also build on the grounding (although contested) experience with recent mega-events, as witnessed by the Olympic Games in 2016 and the World Cup FIFA final in 2014. At a basic level, therefore, there is no need to tie the hosting function into the equivalent of the Narendra Modi government’s longer-term objective of projecting the image of a “New India” via the Central Vista redevelopment project in New Delhi.

That said, this strength could be transformed into weaknesses. A primary potential domestic test in terms of logistics and site will, in all likelihood, come in terms of demonstrations vis-à-vis the holding of the G20 in Brazil. Neither the Indonesian nor the Indian G20 is associated with significant demonstrations. However, Brazil is unlikely to be so positioned that it can disregard this component of the hosting function. After all, Brazil is long associated with massive demonstrations at mega-events, as witnessed by the street protests around the 2016 Olympics. What is more, a scenario along these lines is accented by the climate of polarization in Brazil, as punctuated by the protests around the election victory by Lula and, for that matter, by protests around police operations.

Per se, it is indicative of the high stakes that the theme of at least attempting to insulate the Rio G20 is already front and center. Here, the experience of India is valuable in that the Modi government went to great lengths to decentralize the G20’s activities. Akin to India, then, Lula has already said that Brazil will take G20 meetings to “many Brazilian cities” in an effort to “democratize” the G20 and make it popular amongst civil society. Nor will this approach be all about style, with

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a deep appreciation that there needs to be a link between the G20 and everyday lives. As Lula commented, when asked by *The Hindu* about how much Brazil had budgeted for the G20 Summit and how it compared to India, it did not matter how much money was “spent” but whether it was “invested” for the betterment of the country (Haidar 2023).

SHIFTING TO THE PRIMARY IDENTITY TEST

Beyond logistical and site concerns, it needs emphasis; the primary tests that jump out relate to Brazil’s identity in the world. The domestic tests, while significant in shaping the global attitudes concerning Brazil, will not impact the instrumental outcome of the Summit process. Reference to Brazil’s identity signifies a return to the question about the meaning of the G20 for Brazil. Hosting a Summit process of this type—that is to say, an institution constructed without the cushion of legitimacy attached to formal IOs—conveys a message of Brazil’s equality of peer status vis-à-vis the other structurally important members in the G20. However, in playing up this (insider) side of Brazil’s identity (Cooper & Stolte 2019), the other side of Brazil’s (outsider) identity that privileges solidarity with the Global South and the privileging of aspirational multilateralism through the UN is potentially compromised.

Despite the pattern of engagement, sentiments of ambivalence toward the G20 lingered. Expressing this feeling of distrust and grievance towards the established powers, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim stated in a *New York Times* article in 2010: “[...] the traditional centers of power will not share gladly their privileged status” (Amorim 2010). Against this background, a push towards forming an alternative exclusive club granted Brazil—and the rest of the BRICS countries—the opportunity to balance insider status and the retention of grievances outsiders to the established powers, which had excluded and disregarded them for so long.

On the face of it, the decision of Brazil to push hosting the BRICS to 2025 demonstrates the higher standing accorded to the G20. In terms of policy, this approach allowed a preference to put global equality on the G20 agenda. As Lula put it: “It’s a lot of responsibility for Brazil to host the G20 Summit next year. Everybody knows that we’ll chair the G20, and we will put the inequality issue as the core issue for the next G20 process for discussion” (NDTV 2023). However, this preferential treatment also allows Brazil (and Lula) to hold a backup plan if the G20 fails to present an ambitious delivery on inequality. The same duality holds in terms of Lula’s ambition for bio-fuels. Notably, the partners given the most attention to this initiative were cross-cutting, with Brazil working with India and the U.S. via the Global Biofuel Alliance.

Set in this fashion, the G20 has a privileged status more equivalent to the South Korean position than that adopted by China. As Lula's chief foreign policy advisor suggests, although there is a need for some adaptation: "I think the G20 is the closest thing to a representative body in the international community" (Xie & Bai 2023). This choice of organizational privileging also reflects Lula's ambivalence about the projection of the BRICS. While Lula moved to become the public face of the BRICS in the early stages of creation, signs appeared that he was pessimistic about the forum's progress. As he articulated in one 2018 interview: "BRICS was not created to be an instrument of defense, but to be an instrument of attack. So we could create our own currency to become independent from the U.S. dollar in our trade relations; to create a development bank, which we did—but it is still too timid—to create something strong capable of helping the development of the poorest parts of the world" (Escobar 2019).

Brazil's wary response regarding the enthusiasm of China to widen, not deepen, BRICS accentuated such thinking. As media stories before the South African hosted Summit in August 2023 recounted, Brazil remained cautious on this type of initiative, albeit this sentiment was expressed anonymously: "Brazil's position has been concerned with the cohesion of the group and preservation of our space in a group of important countries" (Paraguassu 2023. See also Stuenkel 2023). Such sensitivity to the implications of the expansion of BRICS was reinforced, it must be added, by the case of Argentina's entry to BRICS. While Lula was highly supportive of Argentina's specific claims of membership with the government of Alberto Fernández in power, as well as the candidacy of Sergio Massa in the 2023 presidential election, the unanticipated victory of the far-right or radical libertarian, Javier Milei, upended this calculation.

TURNING (FINALLY) TO THE INTENSIFYING GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION

Looking back at the response to the intensifying geopolitical situation, what stands out about both the Indonesian and Indian Presidencies is a risk-averse (deflection) mode of hosting that threatened to disrupt the image of a successful Summit. The impact of the relationship between the G20 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine—and, for that matter, the relationship of China to the U.S. and its allies in the G7—opened possibilities of fracturing and immobilization of a very different magnitude.

With some impressive diplomatic ability, Indonesia, as host of the 2022 Bali Summit, was able to manage the relationship of the G20 to the Russian invasion by

carefully crafting its outcome documentation. The G20, in its Leaders' Declaration, depicted the "aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine" in comprehensive terms not just as "causing immense human suffering" but "exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy." Nonetheless, regarding projected visibility through the Summit proceedings, the war was downplayed. Instead, Indonesia was given ample space to play up the themes of its Presidency—"Recover Together, Recover Stronger"—with a push to accelerate achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a general goal and the establishment of a new Financial Intermediary Fund for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (FIF-PPR) in particular (G20 Indonesia 2022). Indonesia did not want the war to define the Bali Summit and largely succeeded in that goal.

India had a much harder time replicating Indonesia's approach. Akin to Indonesia, India's desire was designed to keep attention away from Russia-Ukraine by focusing on India's agenda, with a reliance on support from the Global South for the success of this strategy. As such, the Indian Sherpa emphasized throughout the process that the conflict is external to the G20 and its mandate.

Complicating the situation further, a reference to geopolitical tensions is not complete without returning to the second strand: the relationship of China to the India-hosted G20. In Bali, there was some distance between Russia and China. A good deal of the engagement of Chinese leader President Xi Jinping with the G20 concentrated on supporting global governance initiatives. Crucially, the highlight of Xi's meeting with North American President Biden was the announcement of the resumption of their bilateral cooperation on global climate change mitigation efforts. While in a much stronger diplomatic position, China could only build on these advantages by distancing itself from Russia and the war. Not only did Xi join Biden in condemning any consideration of the use of nuclear weapons in the Russia/Ukraine conflict, but he confirmed the message in his meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Forging consensus on the geopolitical tensions in New Delhi took on a far more onerous orientation, in part at least because of the polarization of attitudes about the war not only between the West and Russia but with a spillover effect to China. At the March 2023 foreign ministers meeting, China joined Russia in refusing to sign the joint statement that criticized Moscow's invasion, leaving India to issue a "chair's summary and outcome document" summarizing the two-day meeting and acknowledging disagreements (Mogul & Sud 2023).

What allowed India's deflection approach to work was the absence of not only Putin but Xi in an unanticipated (and last-minute) fashion. Ultimately, after

protracted negotiations, the G20 members, in effect, issued a leaders' declaration that masked disagreements behind a statement that played down the G20's role as a "platform to resolve geopolitical and security issues" while playing up concerns about "the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any State [and the inadmissible] use or threat of use of nuclear weapons" (G20 India 2023).

Initially, it appeared that Brazil wanted to make an explicit break with the risk-averse deflection approach. This turn was most dramatically connoted in early September 2023 around the New Delhi G20, when Lula—who had already, during a European trip, tried to insert himself as a peacemaker between Russia and Ukraine—said the Russian President would be welcome to attend the November 2024 event: "What I can tell you is that, if I'm Brazil's President, and if he comes to Brazil, there's no reason he'll be arrested" (Phillips 2023).

Since then, this stance has been toned down, if not completely reversed. Nuancing the bold comments Lula made earlier about Putin being able to visit Brazil, despite Brazil being a signatory to the Rome Statute that empowers the International Criminal Court, Lula offloaded responsibility "to the Brazilian Judiciary" to decide whether to execute the ICC warrant against Putin for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. That said, Lula opened up the issue in the broadest possible fashion by pointing to the fact that as Russia, China, and India are all not signatories to the Rome Statute and as the U.S. rescinded its accession to the ICC, Brazil must review its decision to accede as well (Verma 2023. See also Brazil 2023b).

THE CHOICE OF HIGH/LOW-RISK APPROACH

Regarding the hosting function, Brazil holds some components of superiority over its peer equivalents in the Global South, especially in terms of personal leadership. President Lula da Silva enjoys being in the spotlight that comes with global summitry. Concomitantly, Lula, his advisors, and the bureaucracy all deeply appreciate the benefits of the Summit process in terms of an amplified profile in world politics and specific agenda items.

To signal these advantages is not at the same time to suggest that Brazil does not have imposed limitations. One relates to the duality of Brazil's embrace of both an insider and outsider role. As viewed by Lula's high-profile role at BRICS Summits (Stuenkel 2015; Cooper 2016), it is as the champion of the Global South where Lula is most comfortable. There will have to be care, therefore, that hosting the G20 does not reveal confusion or even distraction between these different forms of leadership.

High risks attached to Brazil's hosting will be accentuated if the ambition goes too far. The opportunity for Brazil is to accent the G20's role as a focal point (Cooper 2019a). In other words, to make sure that the countries of the G20 (and their leaders) privilege the institution. The breadth of (good) relations that Brazil and Lula enjoy across membership facilitates this goal, especially in the case of China and Xi, in contradistinction with the New Delhi Summit, where the souring of the China-India relationship compromised the focal point orientation. What will jeopardize the focal point role will be pushing too hard on controversial or simply too difficult issues. One of these relates to the (physical) presence of Putin. Despite all the controversy around this issue, Lula adopted a sanguine air: "I'm hoping that, when we open the G20 in Brazil, the war will have ended and everything will have gone back to normal... That's what I want. So there's still a year to go. Not a year: there are a year and two months to go, because Brazil will only truly assume the Presidency from November onwards" (Brazil 2023b).

Internally, the image of the Rio G20 as a high or low-risk event will be reflected by the response of the domestic public. Tying the Presidency with claims to a deserved elevated status in the global hierarchical pecking order is one thing. It is another thing to link the G20 to achievements on the ground.

Another risk relates to the conflation between the role of the G20 and IO aspirational status, especially concerning the UNSC reform. The move to include the African Union as a full member of the G20 was given considerable emphasis by Lula. However, to conflate G20 reform with IO reform puts hope over experience, notwithstanding Lula's enthusiasm (Brazil 2023b):

The World Bank needs, you know, a change—that is, developing countries must be able to run the bank. We have tried to propose changes to the IMF since our first meeting, but changes have been extremely small and do not advance. We will also want to discuss our permanent membership in the UN Security Council—that it is necessary to change the geography that is established there, dating back to 1945, and replace it with a geography of 2024, which is the year the discussion will take place in Brazil.

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to a deserved elevated status in the global hierarchical pecking order is one thing. It is another thing to link the G20 to achievements on the ground. Or, as Lula put it at his press conference around Brazil's Presidency, "[t]o try to make the G20 popular" (Brazil 2023b). There are no signs of ambivalence in engaging with the hosting function. On the contrary, Brazil has gone big: playing up the role of host in advocacy of domestic priorities via the G20. Even if holding the Summit in Rio holds some comparative risks, these logistical issues are unlikely to be severe enough to cause significant reputational damage.

Externally, as with Indonesia and India, the shadow over the Rio G20 Summit will be the complicated background of geopolitical tensions. With the lessons of both of these Summits in mind, adopting a risk-averse style offers some promise of safety. As Lula opined at the end of the New Delhi Summit: "We cannot allow geopolitical issues to hijack G20 bodies' discussion agendas. A divided G20 does not interest us. We can only tackle present-day challenges through joint action" (Brazil 2023a).

The question, however, is whether, under the immense expectations and pressure of the G20 Presidency, Brazil and Lula will have the will, autonomous skill, and ability to maintain this approach. The only certainty is that the choice will be made under conditions that justify the interpretation of the G20 Summit as a high-stakes, high-drama event, with Brazil and Lula center stage. 🇧🇷

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