



G7 countries' flags as jigsaw puzzle pieces. Image: Shutterstock

Reimagining Cooperation in a Multipolar Age:
G7-Emerging Power Engagement and the Politics of Shared Governance
Marianna Albuquerque

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Abstract: The contemporary international system is increasingly described as multipolar, yet this characterization remains analytically contested and politically ambiguous. The paper argues that the future relevance of the G7 depends not on expanding its membership, but on developing structured forms of engagement that preserve its core attributes while extending its reach. The paradox between inclusivity and functionality is especially visible in the case of the G7. As emerging powers are central to this process, the paper examines Brazil as a potential bridge actor, whose capacity to facilitate engagement depends on issue-specific dynamics and external perceptions. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for the French G7 presidency.

Keywords: Multipolarity; G7; Brazil.

INTRODUCTION: THE G7 IN A CHANGING SCENARIO OF COOPERATION

Few developments have reshaped the context of global governance as profoundly as the gradual diffusion of economic and political power beyond the traditional core of advanced Western economies. While often described under the broad label of “multipolarity,” this transformation is best understood not simply as a structural shift, but as a source of growing tension between existing institutional arrangements and the evolving distribution of capabilities, expectations, and influence in the international system.

At the center of this tension lies a widening void between effectiveness and legitimacy. Institutions such as the Group of Seven (G7) retain significant capacity for coordination, agenda-setting, and rapid political alignment among like-minded actors. At the same time, their limited and historically fixed membership increasingly diverges from the broader distribution of global power, raising questions about their representativeness and their ability to sustain meaningful cooperation beyond their core constituencies (Brandt 2019; Dijkstra & Greco 2024).

This divide is not merely a matter of institutional design. It reflects a deeper transformation in how States, particularly emerging powers, engage with global governance. Countries such as China, India, and Brazil are no longer peripheral actors operating within a system designed by others; they are central participants whose cooperation is indispensable for addressing transnational challenges, yet whose preferences and strategic orientations do not always align with those of established powers (Hurrell 2006; Stuenkel 2016). As a result, traditional

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models of engagement based on informal outreach or selective inclusion have proven increasingly insufficient to sustain cooperation at the necessary scale and depth.

In this context, multipolarity functions less as an organizing principle of international order and more as a driver of institutional strain. The diffusion of power generates what may be described as a legitimacy gap: a growing misalignment between who holds influence in the system and who is formally embedded in its core decision-making structures. This gap, in turn, creates pressure for new forms of engagement capable of reconciling the continued need for small-group coordination with the political necessity of broader participation.

The G7 is particularly exposed to this dynamic. Its comparative advantage lies in its cohesion, informality, and capacity for rapid coordination—attributes that are closely tied to its exclusivity. Yet, these same attributes limit its ability to engage meaningfully with actors whose participation is essential for addressing global challenges. This creates a structural paradox: the features that make the G7 effective also constrain its legitimacy, while efforts to enhance legitimacy risk undermining its effectiveness.

The challenge, therefore, is not to resolve this tension by abandoning one side of the equation, but to reconfigure the relationship between exclusivity and engagement. Rather than diluting its core membership, the G7 must develop more structured and durable mechanisms for interacting with emerging powers. Those mechanisms, however, should extend beyond symbolic inclusion while preserving the group's capacity for coordination.

Against this backdrop, this paper argues that the future relevance of the G7 depends on its ability to evolve from an exclusive decision-making club into a more flexible platform for structured engagement. This does not require formal expansion, nor the creation of entirely new institutions. Instead, it involves “bending” existing arrangements to accommodate a wider range of actors through issue-based coalitions, co-convening mechanisms, and layered forms of participation (Hamre et al. 2024).

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Within this broader transformation, emerging powers play a critical but differentiated role. Their engagement is shaped by varying combinations of strategic autonomy, institutional preferences, and geopolitical positioning. Among them, Brazil offers a particularly instructive case, not as a neutral intermediary, but as a potential bridge actor whose capacity to facilitate dialogue depends on how its positions are perceived by both advanced and emerging partners.

By focusing on the relationship between institutional design and patterns of engagement, this paper seeks to move beyond abstract debates about the nature of multipolarity and toward a more concrete question: how can cooperation be structured in a context where both interdependence and geopolitical divergence are increasing?

To address this question, the paper proceeds in four steps. First, it examines how the diffusion of power translates into institutional pressure on existing governance frameworks. Second, it analyzes the G7's evolving role and the tension between its exclusivity and its need for broader engagement. Third, it explores how emerging powers, particularly Brazil, interact with these dynamics. Finally, it outlines practical models of cooperation and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of G7 engagement in a more complex global environment.

Rather than treating multipolarity as an end state, the paper approaches it as a condition that must be managed through institutional adaptation. The central claim is that cooperation in the current international system will not be sustained by expanding existing structures alone, but by developing new forms of interaction capable of operating under conditions of both rivalry and interdependence.

MULTIPOLARITY AS INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURE: FROM POWER DIFFUSION TO LEGITIMACY GAPS

The notion of multipolarity has become a central reference point in contemporary debates on global governance. However, its analytical utility depends less on how precisely it describes the distribution of power and more on how it helps explain the pressures facing existing institutional arrangements. Rather than treating multipolarity as a defining feature of a new international order, this paper approaches it as a condition that generates specific governance challenges.

At its most basic level, multipolarity refers to the diffusion of economic, political, and technological capabilities across a broader set of actors. The relative decline of Western dominance, combined with the rise of countries such as China, India, and Brazil, has altered the distribution of influence within the international system (Hurrell

2006; Stuenkel 2016). This transformation is reflected not only in aggregate indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or trade flows, but also in the growing capacity of these actors to shape global agendas and institutional outcomes.

However, the implications of this shift are not limited to changes in material power. More importantly, the diffusion of capabilities has been accompanied by a transformation in expectations regarding participation, recognition, and influence within global governance structures. Emerging powers are no longer passive stakeholders operating within a system designed by others; they are active participants whose cooperation is essential for addressing transnational challenges, and whose preferences increasingly shape the terms of engagement.

This dynamic generates a form of institutional pressure that can be understood as a legitimacy gap. Existing governance arrangements, particularly those structured around fixed and historically determined memberships, do not fully reflect the current distribution of power or the evolving expectations of key actors (Brandi 2019). As a result, institutions that remain effective in terms of coordination may nonetheless face challenges in sustaining broader political acceptance and engagement.

The legitimacy gap does not imply that smaller or more exclusive institutions are inherently ineffective. On the contrary, forums such as the G7 retain significant advantages in terms of cohesion, informality, and rapid decision-making capacity (Dijkstra & Greco 2024). However, their ability to generate outcomes that extend beyond their membership increasingly depends on their capacity to engage with actors that are not formally part of their core structures.

In this sense, multipolarity operates less as a stable configuration of power and more as a driver of misalignment between institutional design and systemic realities. The key issue is not whether the system is unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar in a strict analytical sense, but whether existing institutions are able to accommodate the participation of actors whose influence has expanded beyond the boundaries of those institutions.

This perspective also helps clarify the limitations of more traditional approaches to multilateral reform. Expanding membership in existing institutions may enhance

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representativeness, but it can also reduce cohesion and complicate decision-making processes. Conversely, maintaining smaller and more cohesive groups preserves effectiveness, but may exacerbate perceptions of exclusion. This trade-off—between inclusivity and efficiency—has become one of the defining features of contemporary global governance (Rode & Haas 2016; Brandi 2019).

As a result, the challenge is not to resolve this trade-off through a single institutional adjustment, but to develop mechanisms that can operate across it. This requires moving beyond binary choices between exclusivity and inclusivity, and toward more flexible forms of engagement that allow institutions to retain their core advantages while expanding their capacity for interaction.

Within this framework, multipolarity can be understood as generating a three-step causal dynamic: diffusion of power → legitimacy gap → pressure for new forms of engagement. This mechanism provides a more concrete analytical link between systemic change and institutional adaptation. It shifts the focus from describing the international system to explaining why existing governance arrangements are under strain, and what types of responses are required.

Importantly, this perspective also avoids treating multipolarity as a self-sustaining equilibrium. The diffusion of power does not automatically lead to a more stable or cooperative order. Without appropriate mechanisms of engagement, it may instead result in fragmentation, competition, or the emergence of parallel institutional structures that further complicate coordination (Ikenberry 2018).

The implication is that the sustainability of cooperation in a multipolar context depends not on the distribution of power *per se*, but on the ability of institutions to adapt to that distribution. This shifts the analytical focus from systemic structure to institutional design, and from abstract debates about polarity to concrete questions about how engagement is organized. In this sense, multipolarity serves as a contextual driver rather than the central object of analysis. Its relevance lies in the pressures it generates on existing governance frameworks, particularly those like the G7 that combine high levels of effectiveness with limited representativeness. Understanding how these pressures can be managed is therefore essential to assess the future of international cooperation.

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THE G7 PARADOX: PRESERVING EXCLUSIVITY WHILE EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT

The G7 occupies a distinct position within the architecture of global governance. Unlike formal multilateral institutions, it operates as an informal coordination forum among a small number of advanced democracies, relying on cohesion, shared political orientations, and the absence of rigid procedural constraints to enable rapid and strategic decision-making (Hajnal 2007; Dijkstra & Greco 2024). These characteristics have historically allowed the G7 to function as an agenda-setting body, shaping priorities that are later taken up by broader institutions and forums.

However, these same attributes also define the limits of the G7's contemporary relevance. As the distribution of global power has shifted, the gap between the group's membership and the broader set of actors whose cooperation is required to address global challenges has become increasingly pronounced. This tension reflects not simply a question of representation, but a more fundamental misalignment between institutional design and systemic realities. The group thus embodies a structural paradox: its effectiveness is closely tied to its exclusivity, yet this exclusivity constrains its ability to engage with actors that are essential for the implementation of its agenda. In other words, the very features that enable coordination within the group limit its capacity to generate outcomes beyond it.

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A common response to this challenge has been to emphasize the need for greater inclusivity. However, framing the issue in terms of expanding or diluting membership risks misidentifying the core problem. The G7's comparative advantage lies precisely in its small size, informality, and capacity for alignment. Transforming it into a more inclusive body in the mold of larger forums such as the G20 would likely undermine these attributes without necessarily resolving the underlying challenges of coordination.

The challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate exclusivity, but to decouple exclusivity from isolation. This requires distinguishing between the G7's internal structure—where exclusivity underpins effectiveness—and its external interface with the broader international system, where more structured forms of engagement are necessary.

This distinction shifts the focus from membership reform to institutional design. Rather than asking whether the G7 should become more inclusive in its composition, the more relevant question is how it can develop mechanisms that allow it to engage more effectively with non-members while preserving its core characteristics. In this sense, the issue is not whether to move beyond exclusivity, but how to build additional layers of interaction around an exclusive core.

Existing outreach practices provide only a partial solution. Invitations to non-member countries to participate in selected summit sessions or thematic discussions have become a recurring feature of G7 diplomacy. While these practices signal openness, they remain limited in scope and often lack continuity, reducing their effectiveness as tools of sustained engagement. Moreover, when not accompanied by meaningful participation in agenda-setting or follow-up processes, such forms of inclusion may reinforce perceptions of hierarchy rather than mitigate them.

A more effective approach requires moving from episodic outreach to structured engagement frameworks. These frameworks would not alter the composition of the G7 itself, but would create institutionalized channels through which emerging powers can participate in specific areas of cooperation. Such arrangements could take the form of regularized dialogues, joint working groups, or co-led initiatives focused on clearly defined policy domains. This layered model allows the G7 to preserve its internal cohesion while expanding its external reach. By maintaining a clear distinction between its role as a coordination forum and its role as a platform for broader engagement, the group can leverage its strengths without overstretching its institutional design.

At the same time, this approach also requires a recalibration of expectations. Engagement does not imply convergence, and cooperation does not eliminate competition. In a multipolar context, interactions between the G7 and emerging powers are likely to remain selective and issue-specific, reflecting both shared

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interests and persistent divergences. Recognizing this reality is essential to avoid overly ambitious or unrealistic institutional designs.

The evolution of the G7 must therefore be understood not as a process of transformation into a universal forum, but as an adaptation of its functions within a more complex governance scenario. Its continued relevance will depend on its ability to operate simultaneously at two levels: internally, as a cohesive group capable of rapid coordination; and externally, as a platform capable of engaging a broader set of actors in structured and meaningful ways.

This dual role also has implications for how legitimacy is constructed. Rather than deriving legitimacy solely from inclusivity, the G7's standing will increasingly depend on its ability to generate outcomes that are recognized and accepted by actors beyond their membership. This shifts the focus from formal representation to a combination of performance and recognition, reinforcing the importance of designing engagement mechanisms that are both effective and credible (Brandi 2019).

Ultimately, the future of the G7 lies not in resolving the tension between exclusivity and engagement, but in managing it. By preserving its core attributes while developing more robust forms of interaction with emerging powers, the G7 can remain a relevant actor in a governance scenario defined by both interdependence and fragmentation. Following up, the next section examines how emerging powers, particularly Brazil, approach this evolving configuration, and what their engagement reveals about the possibilities and limits of such a layered model of cooperation.

EMERGING POWERS AND THE POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT: BRAZIL AS A CONDITIONAL BRIDGE

The role of emerging powers in global governance cannot be understood through a uniform analytical lens. Countries such as China, India, and Brazil differ significantly in terms of material capabilities, strategic objectives, and patterns of institutional engagement. While all three have benefited from and contributed to existing international frameworks, their approaches to reform, autonomy, and cooperation vary in important ways (Hurrell 2006; Stuenkel 2016).

China, as the most consequential emerging power, has combined deep integration into the global economy with the development of parallel institutional initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. These efforts reflect both a desire to shape global governance and a degree of strategic competition with existing Western-led arrangements. India, in turn, has pursued a strategy of multi-alignment,

engaging across multiple institutional settings while preserving a high degree of strategic flexibility.

Brazil occupies a different position. As a middle power, it does not possess the material capabilities to shape systemic outcomes independently, but has historically sought to exert influence through diplomatic engagement, coalition-building, and a strong normative commitment to multilateralism. Its foreign policy tradition emphasizes principles such as sovereignty, non-intervention, and the peaceful resolution of disputes, while advocating for greater inclusivity in global governance structures.

This positioning has often led Brazil to be described (both in diplomatic discourse and academic analysis) as a “bridge actor,” capable of facilitating dialogue across geopolitical and institutional divides. In principle, this characterization reflects Brazil’s engagement across a wide range of forums, including the G20, BRICS, and various UN-led processes, as well as its longstanding preference for negotiated solutions over alignment-based strategies.

However, the extent to which Brazil effectively performs this bridging role in practice is more contingent than such descriptions sometimes suggest. From the perspective of several G7 actors, Brazil is not always perceived as a neutral intermediary or a reliable facilitator of consensus. Its positions on key geopolitical issues, such as the war in Ukraine, its engagement within BRICS, and its approach to relations with China, have, at times, raised questions about alignment, consistency, and strategic intent.

In addition, there are recurring concerns regarding Brazil’s delivery capacity in global initiatives. Past experiences in areas such as peacekeeping, climate commitments, and international cooperation have contributed to perceptions of uneven implementation or gaps between stated ambitions and operational outcomes. While these concerns do not negate Brazil’s relevance as a partner, they do shape how its role is evaluated by other actors.

These factors suggest that Brazil’s function as a bridge is not an intrinsic or universally recognized attribute, but rather a conditional role, dependent on both domestic and external factors. Domestically, it requires a degree of policy coherence and continuity that enables Brazil to act as a credible interlocutor across different issue areas. Externally, it depends on the willingness of other actors to recognize and engage with Brazil in such a capacity. Reframing Brazil as a potential or conditional bridge actor allows for a more nuanced and analytically robust understanding of its role. Under certain conditions, particularly in issue areas where its positions are perceived as pragmatic, consistent, and aligned with broader cooperative objectives,

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This is particularly relevant in policy domains that are less directly tied to geopolitical competition and more centered on shared interests, such as climate governance, development financing, and aspects of digital regulation. In these areas, Brazil's combination of technical capacity, institutional experience, and diplomatic tradition may enable it to play a constructive intermediary role.

At the same time, recognizing the conditional nature of this role helps to avoid overstating Brazil's capacity to bridge more contentious divides. In domains where strategic competition is more pronounced, or where perceptions of alignment are more salient, Brazil's ability to function as an intermediary may be significantly constrained. This perspective also aligns more closely with the broader argument of the paper. In a multipolar context characterized by both interdependence and rivalry, roles such as "bridge actors" are not fixed, but emerge from specific configurations of interests, perceptions, and institutional opportunities. They are contingent, issue-specific, and subject to change over time.

For the G7, this implies that engagement with Brazil should not be based on assumptions about its role, but on a careful assessment of where such engagement is most likely to be effective. Rather than treating Brazil as a generalized intermediary, it may be more productive to identify specific areas in which its participation can add value—either by enhancing legitimacy, facilitating coordination, or contributing to implementation. Ultimately, the significance of Brazil's role lies less in its ability to bridge all divides, and more in its potential to contribute to selective forms of engagement within a broader and more differentiated framework of cooperation. Recognizing both the opportunities and the limits of this role is essential for designing engagement strategies that are both realistic and effective.

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REIMAGINING COOPERATION: FROM CLUBS TO PLATFORMS

The preceding sections have highlighted a central tension in contemporary global governance: the mismatch between multipolar power structures and institutional arrangements that remain largely anchored in a more hierarchical and Western-centric order. Addressing this tension requires more than incremental adjustments; it calls for a rethinking of the modalities through which cooperation is organized and sustained.

One promising avenue is the development of issue-based coalitions. Rather than relying on fixed membership, these coalitions bring together actors with shared interests in specific policy domains. This approach allows for greater flexibility, as participation can vary depending on the issue at hand. It also reduces the risk of deadlock associated with more comprehensive and universal frameworks. In areas such as climate change, digital governance, and global health, issue-based coalitions have already demonstrated their potential to mobilize resources and coordinate action across diverse groups of actors.

Closely related to this is the concept of co-convening. In this model, advanced economies and emerging powers jointly lead cooperative initiatives, sharing both responsibility and visibility. Co-convening arrangements can enhance legitimacy by signaling that cooperation is not being imposed by a limited group of actors, but is instead the result of joint leadership. They also create opportunities for knowledge exchange and capacity-building, contributing to more balanced and sustainable forms of engagement.

Another important dimension of this transformation concerns the reconfiguration of development and infrastructure cooperation. While they differ in their underlying models and strategic objectives, initiatives such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), promoted by the G7, have been explicitly framed as alternatives or complements to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, framing such initiatives purely in terms of competition risks undermining their effectiveness. For many countries, particularly in the Global South, the primary concern is not the origin of financing, but the terms under which it is provided and the benefits it generates. This underscores the importance of designing cooperation frameworks that prioritize mutual benefit, move beyond donor-recipient dynamics, and promote local ownership, rather than imposing externally defined priorities.

This shift also has implications for the sectors that should be prioritized in cooperative efforts. While traditional development cooperation focused heavily on physical infrastructure, contemporary challenges increasingly require

attention to intangible and systemic domains. Digital governance, artificial intelligence, supply chain resilience, and climate transition are areas where the need for cooperation is particularly acute. In digital governance, for example, the absence of agreed-upon standards risks leading to fragmentation, with competing regulatory regimes and technological ecosystems. Cooperation in this area must balance concerns related to security, innovation, and inclusivity, requiring input from a wide range of actors. Similarly, in climate policy, the effectiveness of mitigation and adaptation efforts depends on the ability to coordinate across different levels of development and capacity.

The concept of flexible geometry provides a useful framework for understanding how such cooperation might be structured. Rather than assuming that all actors will participate in all initiatives, flexible geometry allows for variable configurations of participation, depending on the issue and the willingness of actors to engage. This approach acknowledges the diversity of interests and capacities within the international system, while still enabling progress in areas where consensus exists.

Within this broader transformation, the role of the G7 must also evolve. Rather than functioning primarily as an exclusive decision-making body, it can serve as a platform for initiating and coordinating cooperative efforts that extend beyond its membership. This implies a shift from a logic of control to one of facilitation. The G7's comparative advantage lies not in its representativeness, but in its capacity to mobilize resources, generate political momentum, and provide strategic direction. To fully realize this potential, however, the G7 must move beyond symbolic forms of engagement with emerging powers. Structured and sustained mechanisms of interaction are needed to ensure that cooperation is not limited to episodic consultations. This could include regularized dialogue formats, joint task forces, and shared leadership of specific initiatives. Such mechanisms would help to institutionalize cooperation without requiring formal changes in membership.

At the same time, emerging powers must also adapt their approaches, as the success of new cooperation models will depend on mutual adjustments by both established and emerging actors. Engagement with platforms such as the G7 offers opportunities to influence global agendas and access resources, but it also requires a willingness to engage constructively and to assume responsibilities commensurate with their growing influence. Ultimately, reimagining cooperation in a multipolar world is not a purely technical exercise. It is a political process that involves negotiating new balances between inclusion and efficiency, autonomy and interdependence, competition and collaboration. It requires moving beyond zero-sum perspectives and recognizing that, in many areas, the costs of non-cooperation are simply too high.

LIMITS, TRADE-OFFS, AND STRATEGIC RISKS

While the transition from club-based governance to more flexible and platform-oriented forms of cooperation offers promising pathways, it is neither frictionless nor guaranteed to succeed. On the contrary, it unfolds within a context marked by structural constraints, geopolitical tensions, and competing normative visions of international order. Recognizing these limits is essential to avoid overestimating the capacity of institutional innovation to overcome deeper political divergences.

One of the most significant constraints arises from intensifying great-power competition, particularly between the United States and China. As rivalry deepens across economic, technological, and security domains, the scope for cooperation narrows, especially in areas perceived as strategically sensitive. In such an environment, even flexible and issue-based coalitions may struggle to maintain a clear distinction between cooperation and strategic alignment. This dynamic poses a particular challenge for the G7. While its cohesion is partly derived from shared political values and strategic interests, this same cohesion may limit its ability to engage with actors that do not fully share those perspectives. Efforts to expand cooperation risk creating internal tensions within the group, especially if members differ in their approaches to major external actors, such as China. As a result, the G7 must navigate a delicate balance between maintaining internal alignment and expanding external engagement.

A second set of constraints relates to asymmetries among emerging powers themselves. While often grouped together under broad categories such as the “Global South,” countries such as China, India, and Brazil differ significantly in terms of economic scale, political systems, and strategic priorities. Treating them as a homogeneous bloc risks oversimplifying the complexities of their engagement with global governance structures. Engagement strategies that are effective for one actor may not be appropriate for others, and attempts to create uniform frameworks may lead to suboptimal outcomes.

A third challenge concerns the risk of institutional fragmentation. As new forms of cooperation proliferate, as issue-based coalitions, minilateral groupings, and hybrid platforms, the overall governance panorama may become increasingly complex and difficult to navigate. While such diversity can enhance adaptability, it may also lead to duplication of efforts, inconsistencies in standards, and reduced accountability. This fragmentation is further exacerbated by the weakening of formal multilateral institutions. As confidence in organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and international financial institutions declines, States may increasingly rely on informal or *ad hoc* arrangements. While these

arrangements can be more agile, they often lack the legitimacy and enforcement mechanisms associated with formal institutions (Dijkstra & Greco 2024).

A fourth and closely related issue is the tension between values and pragmatism. Cooperation among States is often shaped by both normative commitments and strategic considerations. In the context of the G7, this tension is particularly relevant. On the one hand, the group defines itself in terms of shared democratic values and a commitment to a rules-based international order. On the other hand, effective cooperation in a multipolar world requires engagement with actors that may not fully adhere to these norms. Balancing these considerations is inherently difficult. Prioritizing values may limit the scope of cooperation, while prioritizing pragmatism may raise concerns about compromising core principles. This tension is unlikely to be resolved, but must instead be managed through context-specific judgments about when and how to engage.

Finally, there is a broader risk that efforts to reimagine cooperation may be perceived as attempts to preserve existing hierarchies under new forms. If initiatives led by the G7 are seen as instruments of influence rather than genuine partnerships, they may face resistance from emerging powers and countries of the Global South. This perception risk underscores the importance of designing cooperation frameworks that are not only effective but also perceived as legitimate and inclusive (Brandt 2019).

Taken together, these constraints suggest that the transition toward more flexible and inclusive forms of cooperation will be uneven and contested. Progress is likely to be incremental, shaped by both opportunities for collaboration and persistent sources of tension. Recognizing these limits does not negate the need for institutional innovation; rather, it highlights the importance of grounding such efforts in a realistic assessment of the political environment in which they operate.

POLICY AGENDA FOR THE FRENCH G7 PRESIDENCY

The French presidency of the G7 presents a strategic opportunity to advance a more adaptive and inclusive approach to global governance. France has explicitly emphasized the need to strengthen dialogue with emerging powers and to reframe international cooperation in terms of mutual benefit and shared responsibility (France Diplomacy 2026). Translating these principles into concrete policy actions requires moving beyond declaratory commitments toward the institutionalization of new practices.

A first priority should be the establishment of structured engagement mechanisms with key emerging powers. Rather than relying on *ad hoc* invitations, the G7 could develop regularized formats for dialogue, such as annual ministerial-

level meetings or thematic working groups that include both members and non-members. These mechanisms would provide continuity and predictability, enabling more substantive and sustained interactions.

A second priority concerns the adoption of co-convening arrangements in selected policy domains. By jointly leading initiatives with emerging powers, the G7 can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of its actions. For example, cooperation on climate finance or digital governance could be co-led by G7 members and countries such as Brazil or India, reflecting both the shared nature of these challenges and the need for broader participation.

Third, the G7 should prioritize cooperation in areas where mutual benefits are most evident and where progress is both necessary and feasible. Digital governance, climate transition, global health, and supply chain resilience stand out as domains in which interdependence is high and unilateral action is insufficient. Focusing on such areas can help build trust and demonstrate the value of cooperation, creating positive spillovers for other domains.

Fourth, the G7 should deepen its engagement with development and infrastructure financing in ways that emphasize partnership rather than competition. While initiatives such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) have been framed in part as alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative, their long-term effectiveness will depend on their ability to respond to the needs and priorities of partner countries. This requires flexible financing models, transparency, and a focus on tangible outcomes.

Fifth, the Presidency should promote greater coordination between the G7 and other multilateral and minilateral forums, particularly the G20. Given the complementary strengths of these two groupings (cohesion in the G7 and representativeness in the G20), enhancing their interaction can help bridge the gap between legitimacy and effectiveness (Rode & Haas 2016). This could involve aligning agendas, coordinating initiatives, and facilitating information exchange.

Finally, the French Presidency should articulate a broader narrative about the future of international cooperation in a multipolar world. This narrative should emphasize that cooperation is not a zero-sum game, but a necessary condition for addressing shared challenges.

CONCLUSION: MULTIPOLARITY AS A POLITICAL PROJECT

The emergence of multipolarity is often described as an objective transformation of the international system, driven by shifts in the distribution

of power. While this structural dimension is undeniable, it is insufficient to determine the trajectory of global order. Multipolarity does not automatically produce stability, cooperation, or inclusivity. Rather, it creates a set of conditions within which different outcomes are possible. This paper has argued that multipolarity should be understood not only as a structural condition, but as a political project: one that requires active construction through institutional adaptation and strategic engagement.

Within this context, the G7 occupies a paradoxical but potentially significant role. Its limitations in terms of representativeness are evident, yet its capacity for coordination and agenda-setting remains valuable. The challenge is not to replace the G7, but to transform it from an exclusive club into a more flexible platform capable of engaging a wider range of actors.

Emerging powers, in turn, are not merely external to this process; they are central to it. Their participation is essential for addressing global challenges, but their engagement is shaped by their own strategic calculations and normative preferences. Among these actors, Brazil stands out as a bridge, illustrating how middle powers can contribute to the construction of more inclusive and adaptable forms of governance.

The transition toward new models of cooperation will be neither linear nor uncontested. It will involve trade-offs between inclusivity and efficiency, values and pragmatism, autonomy and interdependence. It will also require navigating a complex landscape of institutional fragmentation and geopolitical rivalry. Yet, the costs of inaction are likely to be higher. In a world characterized by deep interdependence, the failure to develop effective mechanisms of cooperation risks exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones. The question is not whether cooperation is necessary, but how it can be organized in a way that reflects the realities of a multipolar system.

Ultimately, the future of global governance will depend on whether States are able to move beyond inherited institutional frameworks and experiment with new forms of interaction. This requires not only institutional innovation, but also a shift in political imagination, recognizing that cooperation in a multipolar world must be built not on hierarchy, but on partnership.

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Executive Summary*

The contemporary international system is increasingly described as multipolar, yet this characterization remains analytically contested and politically ambiguous. The paper argues that the future relevance of the G7 depends not on expanding its membership, but on developing structured forms of engagement that preserve its core attributes while extending its reach. This requires moving beyond episodic outreach toward institutionalized mechanisms such as issue-based coalitions, co-convening arrangements, and layered participation frameworks.

This paper approaches multipolarity not as an end-state of international order, but as a condition that generates institutional pressure on existing governance arrangements. In particular, the diffusion of power across a broader set of actors produces a legitimacy gap between formal decision-making structures and the distribution of influence in the system.

This breach is especially visible in the case of the G7. While the group retains significant advantages in terms of coordination, cohesion, and agenda-setting capacity, its limited membership constrains its ability to engage with emerging powers whose participation is currently essential for addressing global challenges. This creates a structural tension between effectiveness and legitimacy.

Emerging powers are central to this process, but their roles are differentiated. The paper examines Brazil as a potential bridge actor, whose capacity to facilitate engagement depends on issue-specific dynamics and external perceptions. While Brazil's diplomatic tradition and institutional engagement provide opportunities for mediation, its effectiveness in this role is contingent rather than guaranteed.

The paper concludes with policy recommendations for the French G7 Presidency, emphasizing structured engagement, prioritization of high-return cooperation areas, and the reconfiguration of international cooperation around mutual benefit and delivery-oriented legitimacy. It argues that sustaining cooperation in a context of interdependence and geopolitical divergence requires not new institutions, but more adaptable forms of interaction within existing frameworks. 

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