

Governance Transition from G7 to G20 and to Asia and the Global South: Coping with US-China Relations in a Changing Global Summitry Context

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An overview of the recent history of G20 summits reveals that the presence of a small group of experienced international leaders makes a difference in generating ambitious outcomes, but also that domestic political constraints increased by social divides raise the stakes while increasing the resistance to transformational change leadership. The emergence of toxic confrontational narratives in the bilateral US-China relationship poses a grave threat: geopolitical tensions could result in a bifurcated global order that most countries want to avoid. As a result, there is a need for shifts in the political dynamics to pluralize bipolar relations and refocus attention on generating effective governance rather than debating regime types – democracy versus autocracy. As the Asia-Pacific becomes more important in global affairs, the Biden presidency needs to shift its focus from groupings like the G7, the Quad, and the Summit for Democracy in 2021 to the Indonesia-led multilateral G20 in 2022 and the India-led G20 in 2023. These settings provide opportunities to engage in global public discourses which mirror the diversity embodied in the G20. The G20 is the appropriate global forum in which to transition to more pluralistic forms of global governance that are inclusive and effective and can meet the growing challenges to global governance.

Strengthening global governance by ‘Strengthening the G20’

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This Special Issue of the e-Journal Global Summitry, edited by the China-West Dialogue (CWD) co-chair, Alan Alexandroff, began with a focus on “strengthening global governance by strengthening the G20”. This topic was drawn from several CWD virtual meetings in early 2021. From these virtual gatherings it appeared that the G20 is indeed a unique forum in which the increasing tensions between the United States and China could potentially be worked out in the G20 settings. That conclusion led me to write a Brookings paper which appeared in the “Order from Chaos” series (2021), “Strengthening the G20 in an era of great power geopolitical competition”. That article contained multiple recommendations for strengthening the G20 as a means of strengthening global governance and easing, hopefully, geopolitical tensions between the United States and China.

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A lot of global gatherings have come and gone. The G7 Summit in Cornwall in

early June 2021 hosted by the UK’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson was followed immediately by President Biden’s meetings with EU and NATO leaders in Brussels which in turn was followed by a Biden-Putin summit in Geneva on June 16th. A pause on global summitry over the summer ended with President Biden’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 21, 2021. The Italian G20 Leaders’ Summit then followed that, held in Rome from October 30-31st. That Summit was followed immediately by the Glasgow COP26 UN climate change summit that ran from November 1st to the 12th. The year in summitry ended with the Summit for Democracy, December 9th and 10th, convened by President Biden (2021b) to, as he expressed it, in his opening remarks: 45

This gathering has been on my mind for a long time for a simple reason: In the face of sustained and alarming challenges to democracy, universal human rights, and — all around the world, democracy needs champions. And I wanted to host this summit because here is the — here in the United States, we know as well as anyone that renewing our democracy and strengthening our democratic institutions requires constant effort. 55

There are a number of lingering questions that ‘hang over’ these summits and are quite likely to influence global summitry and global governance going forward. The first question is: are the domestic political dynamics, primarily national elections, likely to produce national leaders in G20 countries who are capable of “strengthening global governance” by virtue of their backgrounds, experience, and domestic political support? Additionally, can we imagine ways in which the highly competitive geopolitical dynamics could be shifted in the next while, in part by using the G20 as a forum for facilitating US-China relations? If that is possible, can we see significantly enhanced collaboration, cooperation, and coordination? Can such greater collaboration result in enhanced outcomes in such vital global governance areas as global health, climate change, digital governance, and critically, also possibly advance domestic social inclusion? More on that below. 60 65

Domestic Political Dynamics and Global Leadership 70

Ambitious global leadership, at the G20 and elsewhere, vitally depends on the capacities and proclivities of the leaders of major countries, which in turn depend on the political dynamics in those countries. It is hardly possible to expect ambitious results from global governance fora unless there are leaders with global leadership skills. It is very much the case that the early successes of the G20 summits in these early years, 2008 through 2011, were a product in part of a large cluster of influential leaders within the G20. These G20 leaders possessed strong domestic political support and they themselves possessed leadership skills that reinforced their global governance policies. 75

In those early years, Barack Obama was in his first term as president of the United States; Angela Merkel was in the early years of her 16 year run as Chancellor of Germany; Nicolas Sarkozy, ambitious and feisty, was president of France; Kevin Rudd, a true multilateralist, was prime minister of Australia after being foreign minister; Manmohan Singh was prime minister of India after having been both foreign and finance minister; Lee Myung-bak was president of the Republic of Korea (Korea) for the Seoul G20 summit aided by Sakong Il, former finance minister who led as a super-minister for the Korea G20 year in 2010; Felipe Calderon was president of Mexico who played a significant role in 85

2009 in the Copenhagen climate change summit and followed that up at the Los Cabos Mexico G20 Leaders' Summit; and, finally, Gordon Brown was prime minister of the UK (until May of 2010) after being finance minister which enabled him to steer the perhaps most important economic summit ever at the London G20 in April 2009. Eight of the 19 G20 leaders were experienced global leaders who played significant roles in the early G20 years, complemented by three other leaders, namely Hu Jintao of China toward the end of his ten-year term, Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the EU Commission, the 20th leader, and former prime minister of Portugal and Luiz Inacio Lula, popular president of Brazil, and former labor union leader.

Today, there seems, regrettably, a rather leaner pool of G20 leaders to draw on for global leadership. Joe Biden, Xi Jinping, Angela Merkel, who remained Chancellor while the leader of the SPD Olaf Scholz negotiated a new coalition, Emmanuel Macron (France), Mario Draghi (Italy), Justin Trudeau (Canada) and Boris Johnson (UK), all currently qualify. Six of these seven are from the G7 which leaves the rest of the world on a 'weaker footing', but China must be included not only because of the weight of China but because Xi Jinping, at least on the global summitry front, has consistently been a strong supporter of the United Nations. Japan was absent from the G20 gathering with a legislative election underway. Previously, Shinzo Abe who had been prime minister of Japan from 2012 to 2020, the interval between the halcyon years and the current period, had stepped down and his successor, Yoshihide Suga, had left office after a very short stint as prime minister to be replaced by Fumio Kishida.

The leadership prospects, therefore, going forward seem rather more uncertain than the recent past. Bundestag elections in Germany in September 2021 brought to an end Angela Merkel's extraordinary Chancellorship of Germany; LDP leadership elections in Japan on September 29th were followed by national elections and Fumio Kishida claimed the prime ministership for the long-reigning LDP. Presidential elections in Korea are to take place on March 9, 2022; and national elections are planned in France for April 10, 2022. Congressional elections occur in the United States this coming November, and national presidential elections will follow in November 2024. The UK will hold national elections by May 2024; and Italy will have elections no later than June 1, 2023.

The domestic political dynamics today are worrisome in many of these G20 countries. These dynamics include untested leaders and leaders facing election contests many of which include nationalist, or populist contenders for national office. In this moment of conjuncture of systemic crises, many countries are suffering from what could be called a 'crisis of governance'. This crisis has arisen, in part I believe, due to political fragmentation, polarization, and paralysis which has created a loss of public confidence, a loss of trust in institutions, leaders, and in markets.

But the difficulty in current national politics extends further. An "us versus them" narrative has engulfed public discourse. Politicians, political parties, governments, and politics more generally are increasingly viewed as not being able to deliver outcomes that meet public expectations. And the politics of discontent are feeding off the conflicting narratives over who is to blame. In the politics of many countries, this has promoted false choices between oversimplified opposing alternatives: markets versus the state, individualism versus solidarity, freedom versus order, and competition versus cooperation. In this fraught political context dominating politics in many countries, it is difficult for aspiring leaders to emerge and capture clear majorities in national elections. And political

fragmentation has meant that it is often the case that weak coalition governments are the product of this fraught political environment.

The resulting governing coalitions in many instances make it difficult to forge bold ambitious actions commensurate with the deep systemic challenges facing most nations. Germany may be an exception. Helmut Anheier of the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin (2021) writes pointedly of the toxic politics in advanced economies: 135

The current German Bundestag election campaign offers further evidence of how Germany has long been spared from the dysfunctional political party system found in other Western democracies. While the United States buckles under an increasingly scorched-earth two-party war of attrition, the United Kingdom is routinely subjected to the Tory party's deeply deceitful political strategies and Labour's disingenuous fence-sitting. And France and Italy have both witnessed rapid swings that suggest disintegrating party systems. 140 145

The Social Order-Global Order Dynamics

Examining the fraught politics in many of these key G20 countries, we realize that for global governance to be strong, there needs to be a significant group of national leaders who can act as strong global leaders. The domestic political dynamics in many of these critical global governance countries do not seem to favor bold leadership because of the polarized politics in some cases, fragmented politics in others, and the general temptation by many contemporary politicians to resort to nationalism as an easy means to vault to prominence. Unfortunately, this political approach is not helpful in easing geopolitical tensions or in governing. There is some hope, however, that a focus on social inclusion by a number of leaders and candidates might inject a fresh public discourse into policy making in key global governance countries. A determination to focus on social inclusion can reveal mediating processes between extreme formulations and generate 'sweet spots' where these social outcomes are politically sustainable. These possibilities suggest the prospect for improvements in the social order first. Additionally, it is hoped that such fresh political discourse could positively impact the global order by creating a politics and a basis for greater multilateral cooperation instead of nationalism exacerbating geopolitics. The social order-global order dynamics and their interaction suggest a far more positive direction for both domestic and international affairs. 150 155 160 165

The positive interaction of social order-global order politics can be seen in current politics. One example is the current politics in Germany. With an election victory, the SPD took the lead in forming a coalition government led by Olaf Scholz, the then current German finance minister. Earlier, Scholz was labor minister and he brought balance to German politics with his gaining leadership. Anheier (2021) points to Scholz's acknowledgement of the impact of globalization on the politics and economics of Germany and its consequent social impacts on the German people. Anheier writes: 170

Scholz contends that Germany, with its globalized economy, cannot isolate itself. Instead, it must try to manage globalization by modernizing its social market economy, so that it can mitigate the negative impact of open 175

markets on vulnerable cohorts while ensuring future competitiveness through proactive innovation policies.

Anheier proposes seven principled actions for securing Germany's place in a globalized future including: a significant increase in the minimum wage; ensuring high quality universal childcare and free education; investing in vocational training; expanding social housing; modernizing and expanding public infrastructure; and creating a fair taxation system. These are critical features to address social cohesion in Germany and possibly in Europe. 180

In fact, it turns out that as of the recent Norwegian elections, for the first time in 25 years, all five Nordic governments now are led by social democratic parties – Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. The Nordic model is often referred to as a way forward to greater social inclusion. The economic policies improve the prospects for effective governance. A recent study by Martela et al. (2021) on “the Nordic exceptionalism” concludes: 185

The Nordic countries are characterized by a virtuous cycle in which various key institutional and cultural indicators of good society feed into each other including well-functioning democracy, generous and effective social welfare benefits, low levels of crime and corruption, and satisfied citizens who feel free and trust each other and governmental institutions. ... There seems to be no secret sauce specific to Nordic happiness that is unavailable to others. There is rather a more general recipe for creating highly satisfied citizens: Ensure that state institutions are of high quality, non-corrupt, able to deliver what they promise, and generous in taking care of citizens in various adversities.” 190 195 200

The new German government led by the SPD in coalition with the Green Party and the Free Democrats along with the extant social democratic governments in the five Nordic countries, at the very least, injects into the global public discourse examples of countries that are showing credible effective governance pathways and policies to greater social inclusion at just the moment when accelerating those efforts across the globe would seem to be one of the crucial transitions toward better futures that people are turning towards. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 (2015) provide, as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres pointed out, an urgent “common agenda” for the 2020s. Given the need for developed countries to also adopt stronger social agendas, one wonders whether the SDGs would not better be called ‘systemic transformation goals’, to make clear these goals are not just for developing countries alone (as were the earlier IDGs (International Development Goals) and MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) before them). These goals are not for normal times but rather for turning point moments and inflection points. It is, in fact, a ready roadmap for all countries whether advanced, emerging or developing countries for effective governance. 205 210 215

To meet the conjuncture of systemic political crises and systemic transformation requires governments to be able to function effectively to deliver politically sustainable outcomes which reinforce the legitimacy of governments and markets in the public mind. To do that, a focus on effective governance is far more important than focusing on forms of governance and regime type. Effective governance, I surmise, will aid in developing the skills, strategies and support for programs that can provide systemic sustainability 220

internally in countries and support multilateral cooperation externally among countries. The CWD Project, where I am co-chair, urged that G20 leaders at the G20 Summit in Rome support the establishment of a G20 working group on “effective governance” as a means of advancing the “common agenda” for the 2020s. Though the proposal was not taken up, the CWD urged more broadly that the G20 leaders target inclusive economic policies rather than focus on whether democratic or authoritarian governments provided better governance. 225

Transitioning from the G7 to the G20 – ‘Shifting Coalitions of Consensus’ 230

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in his remarks to the UN General Assembly (September 2021) called upon leaders “to avoid our world creeping towards two different sets of...rules, two divergent approaches... and ultimately two different military and geopolitical strategies”. President Biden (2021a) made clear his commitment to democracy over autocracy in a clear message to China at the UN: “authoritarianism – the authoritarians of the world may seek to proclaim the end of the age of democracy, but they are wrong”. 235

However, most countries do not want to choose between siding with China and its authoritarian model, or with the United States and its democratic model (Yeo 2021). “The current Moon Jae-in government [Korea], for example, has worked hard to avoid being pulled into the ‘anti-China’ coalition”. And, the apparent revitalization of the Quad, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, with the first in-person leaders’ gathering of the US, India, Australia, and Japan on September 24, 2021, appeared to raise concerns and disquiet for many countries in Southeast Asia including Indonesia and Malaysia, key members of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN). As Jonathan Stromseth suggested in a Brookings post (2021): 240

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ discourse is viewed skeptically as a thinly-veiled containment strategy against China, with potentially destabilizing implications for the region. Although many Southeast Asians are deeply worried about China’s growing influence and aggressive actions in the South China Sea, they largely prefer to manage China’s rise by engaging and “enmeshing” Beijing in ASEAN institutions and mechanisms, rather than relying on a counter-coalition of major powers. 250

Latin American states want an economic-business relationship with China but are not interested in political arrangements. Some members of the EU, France notably, have urged a stance of “strategic autonomy”, vis-a-vis the US-China relationship, not wanting to line up with the US but rather deal with China on its own. Merkel’s Germany pressed for the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) which was agreed to at the end of 2020, though the EU failed to ratify the agreement after China imposed sanctions on, among others, Members of the European Parliament. 260

As Kerry Brown puts it in his article for this Special Issue:

In essence, European views on China are more complex, often more nuanced, and sometimes deeply ambiguous. That mindset frustrates the US 265

clearly, but it may well be the more appropriate approach to a power that does not present the same stark security threat that the USSR did decades ago, but which is clearly deeply problematic in terms of its lack of alignment of values with the West. Ironically, for once Europe’s complexity might be an asset rather than an impediment.

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The United States has every right to express its support for democratic values, processes, and practices. The Summit for Democracy that the Biden Administration held in December could turn out to be a positive moment if it succeeds in strengthening the capacities of democracies to deliver results. Democratic protection, that is strengthening democracy at home, are appropriate concerns for G7 leaders. It is evident that the G7 can be a caucus for democracy. The G20, however, provides the critical setting for global governance. As I suggested in the earlier Brookings article (2021): "The G-20 could become a vehicle for more ambitious concerted global actions and a platform for addressing and managing geopolitical tensions." As I suggested with my CWD colleague Alan Alexandroff in Foreign Affairs (2021), "The G-20 is informal and flexible enough to accommodate the ideological diversity that the authors believe is necessary to manage contemporary great-power competition. The right players are at the table. Plurilateral leadership within the larger G20—including China as a vital member—would bring multiple interests, perspectives, and pressures to bear on the issues at hand." The G20 is where "effective multilateralism" is required.

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In this context, the United States needs to lead with others in sober, serious, focused, results-oriented negotiation modalities which enable progress rather than scoring points for domestic political purposes back home. China needs to be treated as a peer, key player, and potential partner and rule-maker in these fora to encourage professionalism necessary for progress. Treating China as a serious competitor is different than treating China as an adversary. And engaging in efforts to use negotiations on state behaviors as opportunities to press for systemic internal change in the economic system or political processes of China is reverting to the mistakes of the past. Until recently, it was assumed by many in the West that the liberalization of China’s economy would lead to liberalization of the political system, which turns out now to be a fallacious line of reasoning. Furthermore, it is lecturing to a ‘learning civilization’. Whether in fact it was true that policymakers believed that such a result would occur, and there is room to question that (Johnston 2019), we should know better by now.

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Moreover, given the dramatic structural transformations underway, collaboration between China and the US is a must. As Michael Spence (2021) points out, there are at least four transformations underway: the multi-dimensional digital revolution; the push for clean energy and environmental sustainability; major breakthroughs in biomedical science and biology; and the rise of Asia. While these structural transformations can bolster global welfare, they likely involve disruptive transitions that require “major adaptations to existing global institutions and frameworks.” Collaboration is thus a must. As Spence urges:

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Under these circumstances, we don’t really have the luxury of focusing exclusively on competition or picking fights for domestic political gain. The risks to global health and prosperity are too high. Escaping the dangerous path of competition without cooperation will require sustained

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leadership on both sides and from all sectors of society. There is no guarantee of success, but there is no alternative to trying.

And it seems that such an altered course of action is highly necessary.

The challenge for the US is to move itself from excessive reliance on individualist values—liberty, property rights, freedom, and sovereignty—which were foundational for the market economy, a competitive society, democracy, and the nation-state, to include social values of respect, fairness, trust, and responsibility which can facilitate actions to achieve social cohesion, public access, economic security, and sustainability. An inclusive America by all, for all, which invests in people, communities, and the planet can shape a common future for America at home and abroad. And it can shape a rebalanced approach to geopolitical relations, especially approaches to China, which can be more nuanced, complex, and inclusive. Such an approach would enhance its effectiveness not only vis-à-vis China but with the rest of the world as well.

The CWD process was founded on the concept that pluralizing the toxic US-China bilateral relationship would create more complexity, maneuvering room and policy space by providing varieties of perspectives and potential outcomes. Plurilateral leadership would enlarge the negotiating and political processes, thereby easing geopolitical tensions. Rather than a US-China bilateral focus, a China-West framing would improve global governance relations and improve the prospects for collaborative actions. Additionally, the CWD concluded that in the G20 experience a handful of countries could provide essential ‘shifting coalitions of consensus’ to drive closure and global governance results, rather than a fully universal multilateral consensus driven process.

We see this plurilateral leadership dynamic that is embedded in the much larger G20 process to open opportunities for rotation in and out of the G20 leadership depending on the issues and the occasions. Plurilateral dynamics have already included China in G20 leadership roles in 2010 and 2016, if not also in other years, and reveals avenues for China’s more formative integration into global governance. And we have seen already in the G20, and we presume hopefully for the future, that such shifting coalitions of consensus, this plurilateral dynamic can arise and carry forward without initially the requirement of either leading power—that is without the US or China. CWD participants have proposed encouraging “plurilateral” leadership within the G20 by nurturing the role of powers beyond just China and the US within the G20. Plurilateral leadership manifests itself in G20 summit history where a few significant players beyond just the US and China play key roles in developing ambition and outcomes in the more successful G20 years. CWD has identified this dynamic as ‘effective multilateralism’. This does require an acceptance of G20 leaders that such policy coalitions can be formed without requiring China or the US leading. As we said earlier, it takes, dynamic G20 leadership.

Furthermore, we have concluded that one of the most powerful ways to strengthen global governance is to strengthen the G20. Strengthening the G20 can be undertaken by member governments in ways that are feasible and relatively uncomplicated. Johannes Linn in his article for this Special Issue makes clear that there are always obstacles and impediments and some reforms proposed may not pass muster. But the ‘asks’ are not great, and the pain is relatively small. The resource in short supply is ambition and forceful G20 leaders. If G20 leaders want Leaders’ Summit to work and have greater impact, that is the most crucial ingredient for strengthening global governance—strengthening the G20 itself. These dynamics suggest that the G20 provides a key multilateral forum in which to

try to shift the nature of global order politics from confrontation to professional exchange. The UN is too big, the World Bank and IMF are too technical, the G7 is too limited in its member representation, and APEC is too limited in its mandate. The G20 of all global summits is evidently the most nimble, flexible, porous, open-ended, informal, and multiple in its form and processes. And it is leader-led. What matters is what attitudes countries bring to it, and how urgent and inclusive their agendas are. 360

The issue is whether there is sufficient ambition, convergence, and leadership to put the world on sustainable trajectories for the rest of the decade of the 2020s. Values are not the issue. Scale, scope, depth, endurance of the commitments made at the G20 summits are the criteria by which G20 actions will be judged. The challenge is great. Leadership in the G20 has passed from Europe to Asia. The next host for 2022 is Indonesia and in turn in 2023 hosting of the G20 passes to India. This is a new era of leadership. 365

The Biden focus on the G7, the Quad, and the Summit for Democracy in 2021 has to be replaced by the G20 in 2022. Ten non-western countries are there, with different perspectives, cultures, and vantage points. What resonated at the G7 at Cornwall or EU gatherings will not fly at the G20 Leaders' Summit in Indonesia, or in India. The fact that there are a variety of views and viewpoints with the West is actually an asset, if only the United States officials would recognize it. A growing strategic competition and rivalry with China diverts US leadership from the global governance challenges that must be tackled. Use difference to enhance, enlarge and strengthen outcomes. There is plenty of literature on business and organizational behavior which makes clear that diversity of viewpoints, dissent, out-of-the-box thinking, curiosity, and innovation are drivers of better outcomes for business. The G20 is a large and varied space. Going into the G20 setting requires imagination, thoughtfulness, listening, and sensitivity to difference rather than single-mindedness. 370 375 380

In sum, these themes work together. Effective multilateralism in the G20 can be a significant means for generating effective governance in key countries by drawing on diverse country experiences and extracting practical policy ideas from others. In turn, collective global governance action and strengthening the G20 benefit from promoting effective governance domestically by reducing social pressures for populist nationalism. Effective multilateralism leads to effective governance; and so effective governance leads to effective multilateralism. 385

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