

The Role of India's G20 Presidency in the New Global Order: Achievements and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

India's G20 presidency marked a significant milestone in its journey towards greater global influence and leadership. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies and a key player in international affairs, India's G20 presidency presented both challenges and opportunities in shaping the new global order. This research paper aims to analyze the role of India's G20 presidency in navigating the complexities of the contemporary international landscape. It examines India's key challenges, including geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainties, and global health crises, while also exploring the opportunities India leveraged to advance its strategic interests and contribute to global governance. This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of India's G20 presidency in shaping the new global order, offering valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners interested in international relations, global governance and Indian foreign policy.

Keywords: India, G20 presidency, global governance, multilateralism, New Global Order.

INTRODUCTION

The world is going through a 'cooperation paradox' in an era marked by complex geopolitical dynamics and rapid economic shifts. It is popularly believed that cooperation is something in which individual and collective actors pursuing common goals engage, while actors who have differing world views and pursue conflicting objectives are disinclined to cooperate (Leggewie, n.d.) but because of the phenomena of 'complex interdependence' (Keohane & Nye, 1989) actors are compelled to cooperate. There is an inextricable attachment between states and their interests as the interests of the states are attached to each other. Owing to the complex interdependence, there has been more dependence on one another. Thus, the role of global institutions and alliances in shaping the trajectory of international relations becomes very critical.

Global institutions and alliances provide frameworks for cooperation, promoting stability, and addressing common challenges. International institutions serve as essential mechanisms for fostering cooperation, managing conflicts, and advancing common interests in the interconnected world of international relations. Among these institutions, the Group of Twenty (G20) stands out as a prominent forum for global economic cooperation and policy coordination. The Group of Twenty (G20) is a collection of twenty of the world's largest economies formed in 1999 in the wake of the Asian financial crisis. It was conceived as a bloc that brought together the most important industrialized and developing economies to discuss international economic and financial stability. In 2008, it began its annual summit, and G20 has evolved into a major forum for discussing economics as well as other pressing global issues (McBride et al., 2023).

It became an anti-crisis mechanism in the 2008 financial crisis and soon the G20 transformed into a global governance hub (Kirton, 2013, p.46-47).

In today's scenario, the role of multilateral organisations like the G20 is also crucial for addressing global challenges that no nation can tackle alone. G20, as a forum for the world's largest economies, provides a platform for cooperation and collaboration to create a more sustainable, prosperous, and equitable future for all. Against this backdrop, the ascension of India to the presidency of the G20 presented a significant opportunity to examine the evolving dynamics of global governance and the role of emerging powers in shaping the new global order. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies and a key player in international affairs, India's leadership of the G20 carried implications not only for its domestic priorities but also for the broader agenda of global economic governance.

INDIA'S RISE AS A GLOBAL POWER AND G20 PRESIDENCY

India's ascension as a global power is a multifaceted phenomenon with roots in its burgeoning economy, growing geopolitical influence and technological advancements. Being a non-Western, developing, post-colonial country, it is a successful democracy in a multi-religious, multi-linguist and multi-ethnic state, with the world's largest population and aspirations to great power status. India has become an important world's emerging power (Chivvis & Breiner, 2023). It is a potentially attractive partner for a variety of countries, ranging from the United States to Iran. This allows India to pursue a policy of multi-alignment (Wojczewski, 2019). Today India is in an enviable position. It appears to have sealed its status among the major powers and important groupings as a friend to all and an enemy to none. All camps seem to need India on their side (Hu, 2023). In the face of rising geopolitical tensions and protectionist tendencies in some quarters, India has proudly noted that it is in its camp. For example, India's perspective on U.S.-China strategic competition was well articulated by Jaishankar, who said, "What I would not like to be defined as is standing against something or somebody, because that diminishes me. That makes it out as though some other people are the center of the world and I'm only there to be for them or against them." (The Print, 2023).

As one of the largest and fastest-growing economies in the world, India has always supported the increasing prominence of emerging economies within global governance structures. It has championed initiatives aimed at strengthening global financial systems, enhancing trade and investment flows, and fostering inclusive economic growth. It has reinforced the importance of multilateralism and cooperation. India's approach to multilateralism focuses heavily on emerging economies, using multiple informal, mutually beneficial and purpose-driven partnerships, built on agreements between sovereign governments that are based both on principles and on centring their peoples' needs (Saran, 2023). India has taken on greater roles in global issues like climate change, it has tried to craft productive ties with all the major powers and has increased its investment in its economic, military, and diplomatic capabilities.

Not only this, the civilisational and cultural influence and its role as a "Third World" democracy have also played a vital role in making the country's imprint on world affairs (Baru, 2020, p.123-124). The former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once remarked about India's plural and composite culture, that it is the "living proof of the possibility of a confluence of civilizations" (PMO Archives, 2007). As a democracy with a rich culture and a modicum of principle in its international engagement, it has often better projected its culture and values to international audiences (Jaishankar, 2018). The G20 presidency gave India an excellent opportunity to promote these ideas and conceptual understanding of equality and sustainable development, which is deeply embedded in its culture and historical experience.

The sheer weight of its collective membership, the absence of a functioning 21st-century multilateral grouping that adequately represents the shift eastward and southward in the global economy through its membership, as well as its robust response to the 2008 global financial crisis have traditionally lent the G20 a degree of legitimacy as the economic steering committee of the world. Coupled with the extent of specialised government-level and civil-society engagement under the G20 Sherpa and Finance tracks, as well as the knowledge and resource backing by multilateral organisations—such as WTO, UNCTAD, OECD, WB, and IMF—the G20 can command significant political momentum. In particular, the G20 can be a lynchpin multilateral platform for—at the very least—propelling political direction and support on key priorities as well as promoting peer learning and sharing that can together contribute towards shared understanding and coordinated actions (Passi, 2022). Thus, assuming G20 Presidency and availing this platform to showcase itself as a major global player has been the core focus of India in 2023.

India's G20 presidency was a celebration of a Bharat that has reclaimed its 5,000-year-old “civilisational state” heritage in all its cultural, intellectual and spiritual depth, diversity and grandeur (Puri, 2023). Whether it was the Konark Temple, the Nalanda University backdrop, or the towering Nataraja at the Bharat Mandapam, 300 cultural events involving 18,000 artists, classical and folk dances, ancient Rudraveena music, interactive art exhibits, and gourmet cuisine including Shree Anna—India's enormous soft power, in all its efflorescence, made its presence felt (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). During this presidency, India advocated for the interests of developing nations and emphasized the importance of inclusivity in global decision-making processes. India took the opportunity through its presidency to strongly advocate for a rules-based international order, promote dialogue, consensus-building, and diplomatic engagement among G20 members.

India also continued its diplomatic overdrive to expand ties with major global players like the US, the UK, Japan, France and the European Union in sync with a broad goal of increasing its geo-political heft and positioning itself as a credible force for peace and stability in contrast to China's bullying behaviour (The Indian Express, 2022). India's expertise in digital technology and innovation was also leveraged to advance discussions on enhancing global connectivity and digitalization. India's Digital India initiative and its prowess in areas such as IT services and digital entrepreneurship also contributed to shaping policies related to digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and digital inclusion on the global stage.

Overall, India's G20 presidency offered a platform for the country to assert its role as a responsible global stakeholder, advocated for the interests of emerging economies, and contributed to shaping a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient global order.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

India's assumption of the G20 presidency marked a significant milestone in its trajectory towards global leadership. As the world's largest democracy, a major emerging economy, and a key player in the global economy India played a vital role. In this New World Order, Indian interests demand a more proactive engagement with global institutions not merely as a dissident but as a positive contributor. The role India has played in global governance in the last quarter of a century – whether in global trade, climate change or nuclear non-proliferation – attests to both its rise and its importance in global governance (Pant, 2017, p,7). India is keen to promote open, rules-based trade and investment regimes that facilitate economic integration and prosperity. Thus, India's strategic interests and priorities in the G20 reflected its aspirations for global leadership, domestic development agenda, and desire to shape the international economic and political order (Finnegan, 2023).

With a large and growing population and ambitious development goals, India leveraged its presidency to foster inclusive growth, promote job creation, foster innovation, attract investment and enhance trade relations with key partners. By advocating for policies that prioritize economic resilience and social equity, India aimed to strengthen its position as a driver of global economic growth (Bhasin & Wasnik, 2023). With its motto of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, India successfully highlighted the ESG concerns faced by the global community today (Kumar, 2023, p.60). ESG includes environment, social and governance. These principles have emerged as the essential focus of global policy attention. This covers universal concerns like environmental degradation, women empowerment, increasing income divergence across countries and the unsavoury prospect of a worsening fragmentation of the rule-based multilateral trading order and global governance.

India pressed for sustainable development goals such as climate change, renewable energy, green growth initiatives and health crises while addressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and rural-urban disparities. As one of the world’s largest emitters of greenhouse gases and a country vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, India has a vested interest in advancing global efforts to combat climate change. It ensured that global climate agreements accommodate the needs and concerns of developing countries while advocating for technology transfer and financial support for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. India championed initiatives that promote clean energy, climate resilience, and green growth while advocating for the needs of developing countries (Bhowmick, 2023).

G20 efforts to promote economic growth and job creation indirectly impacted rural India by creating demand for products manufactured in rural areas. G20 also emphasised reducing inequalities in economic growth by addressing urban-rural disparities. There were also discussions on policies and initiatives that promote equitable growth that improve the standard of living and opportunities in rural regions (Sehgal Foundation, 2023). India played a crucial role in fostering international cooperation and driving collective action on these fronts. Through its presidency, India also advocated for measures to address protectionism, enhance market access, and promote a level playing field for all countries, thereby fostering greater trade and investment flows among G20 members (Tradelmex, 2023). It provided an exceptional opportunity for the country to spearhead a collective approach to tackle multiple, complex, and interconnected challenges while placing, front and centre, the aspirations and needs of the developing world (Asian Development Bank, 2023).

A central pillar of India’s strategic imperatives in the G20 presidency has been the reform of global governance institutions to better reflect the realities of the 21st century. India has long been a vocal proponent of reforming institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to increase the representation of emerging economies. As G20 president, India enhanced the legitimacy and effectiveness of the global governance architecture. This reflected India’s aspiration for a more equitable and inclusive global order (Jaldi et.al, 2023).

India fostered greater cooperation among G20 members in addressing the security challenges as well as the issue of terrorism which is not a core topic for the G20 forum but in the July 2023 G20 conference organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the impact of new-age technologies on security, the issue of terrorism was raised (Tiwary, 2023). The obvious reason for emphasizing this issue has been the fact that security concerns, both regionally and globally are a grave matter of concern. India faces persistent challenges such as terrorism, regional conflicts, and maritime security threats. Thus, with the help of dialogue, cooperation, and confidence-building measures India engaged with G20 members on counter-

terrorism efforts, maritime security, and conflict resolution in its neighbourhood to enhance peace and stability in the region and beyond.

India committed itself to promoting open, rules-based trade and investment regimes that facilitate economic integration and prosperity. It advocated for measures to reduce protectionism and trade barriers that create trade imbalances. It also addressed intellectual property rights while promoting trade diversification and economic resilience. India pressed to enhance market access and promote a level playing field for all countries. India brings to the table a convening ability, and voice to represent concerns of emerging markets and developing countries, its interests and evolving domestic trade landscape. These three factors lend India the power to promote consensus on the operating conditions of international trade, advance concrete trade commitments for collective consideration, and offer lessons from its own domestic experience (Passi, 2022).

With its burgeoning technology sector and aspirations for digital transformation, India prioritized issues related to the digital economy and technology within the G20. It promoted digital inclusion, innovation, and cybersecurity on the G20 agenda. It advocated for policies that harness the potential of technology for economic growth, social development, and governance while addressing concerns such as data privacy, the digital divide, and cyber threats. The promotion of an open, secure, stable, accessible, peaceful and accountable ICT environment was emphasized, as was the need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to Information Communication Technology (ICT) development and security, including technical advancement, business development, safeguarding the security of States, public interest and respecting the privacy of individuals (The Hindu, 2023).

The summit also showcased India's strategic pivot towards enhancing regional influence and cooperation. This included inviting nine neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and the United Arab Emirates thereby strengthening regional ties and extending its influence within South Asia and beyond. India provided an opportunity for these countries to come and be equal partners in the G20 process (Bhattacharjee, 2023). The African Union became a full member of the G-20 which will strengthen the G-20 and also strengthen the voice of the Global South. The inclusion of the African Union will surely enhance the representation, and voice of developing countries, in the deliberations and decisions of the Group. India advanced its national interests while contributing to the collective efforts to address global challenges and promote sustainable development.

Despite so much of opportunities that G20 as a platform provided to India this presidency was not free from challenges. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar once mentioned that the G20 summit is being held in the context of a "very turbulent" global environment. The world is difficult in terms of the COVID impact, conflict impact, climate impact, in terms of debt, sharp north-south divide and east-west polarization (ANI News Agency, 2023). There is a revival of the great-power rivalry triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There is reshaping the regional power balance in the face of China's increasingly aggressive behaviour (The Indian Express, 2022). Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin notably skipped the summit, sending lower-level representatives instead. Although External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in an interview with News Agency ANI said, "It has nothing to do with India, whatever decision they make, they know best." (ANI News Agency, 2023) but the writing was clear on the walls. Other challenges include Covid-19 pandemic threatening the global economy, which is experiencing disrupted supply chains, cost of living crisis, soaring energy prices and challenges to climate action (Hussain, 2023). India also faced lots of negative publicity by the international media.

In the face of such odds, India's efforts to ensure the vitality of the G-20 process have been valiant. In this respect, India's G20 presidency has been a milestone event for a major emerging global power amid the difficulties that it experienced in developing and maintaining strategic autonomy in a polarized world (Bajpae, 2023). Overall, the G20 Summit in India was a complex interplay of showcasing India's leadership on the global stage, managing regional rivalries, and addressing the pressing concerns of the Global South amidst a backdrop of significant geopolitical tensions.

CONCLUSION

The G20 summit brought an exemplary New India to the centre stage of global attention. The outcomes of the Summit were transformational and would contribute to the reshaping of the global order in the decades ahead. In particular, the focus on realizing Sustainable Development Goals, reforming international financial institutions, expansion of tourism, establishing digital public infrastructure and encouraging women-led development were noteworthy. It is a great achievement of India that it has navigated today's highly complex and tense global environment. The country could present this as a model for other G20 members to emulate in future. Given India's growing systemic importance across so many dimensions, current and future generations alike would benefit from the steps taken at the G20 platform to minimise the risks and maximise the opportunities presented by a larger global footprint.

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