



# **Old Forums, New Strategies: Rethinking Strategic Diplomacy in a Multipolar World**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper examines the reconfiguration of strategic diplomacy in an era defined by the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. The diffusion of power which is marked by the rise of India, China, Russia and the expanded role of the European Union has challenged the institutional architecture built during the post World War II and the post Cold War eras. While traditional multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization remain pillars of international legitimacy in world politics, their operational capacity is increasingly constrained by geo-political contestation and institutional challenges. This study is an investigation of two interrelated dimensions: first, the ability of established multilateral organisations, including BRICS, to facilitate cooperation among competing powers, and second, the emergence of adaptive strategies such as digital diplomacy, climate diplomacy and minilateralism—that seek to circumvent or complement institutional inertia. The paper explores recent scholarship and content analysis of

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various secondary data available. It argues that diplomacy in a multipolar world is not defined by the decline of old forums but by their coexistence with innovative, flexible mechanisms tailored to specific issues and coalitions. By conceptualising strategic diplomacy as hybrid and adaptive, this study highlights the need to rethink global governance as a process of institutional layering rather than wholesale replacement in a fragmented international order.

**Key words:** Multipolarity, unipolarity, strategic diplomacy, digital diplomacy, geopolitics

**Methodology:** This study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data and employs content analysis as the primary methodological approach. Since the subject of strategic diplomacy in a multipolar world involves the interpretation of evolving state behaviours, global power relations, and institutional practices, secondary materials provide a rich and reliable foundation for scholarly analysis. The secondary data includes a wide range of published materials such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and edited volumes in the field of International Relations and Diplomacy Studies. Policy reports and white papers published by think tank, research institutes, and intergovernmental organizations, government documents, official speeches, and statement from foreign ministers and international forums ( eg- UN, BRICS, G20). Credible news media and archival materials that capture contemporary diplomatic engagements. The study applies qualitative content analysis to systematically review and interpret collected data, which involves Thematic coding where recurring themes such as balance of power, strategic partnerships, multilateralism and emerging diplomatic practices are considered.

## **Literature Review:**

### **From Unipolar Stability to Multipolar Complexity**

Foundational accounts of the post–Cold War order emphasize how U.S. primacy shaped institutional architectures and agenda-setting ([Ikenberry, 2001](#)). As relative power diffused, scholars charted an emerging “multiplex” or multipolar order that pluralizes authority and norms ([Acharya, 2014](#); [Stuenkel, 2015](#)). This literature converges on two observations: first, legacy institutions retain symbolic legitimacy; second, their decision rules and representation lag behind power shifts ([Ruggie, 1993](#); [Weiss, 2016](#)).

### **Legitimacy vs. Effectiveness in Legacy Multilateralism**

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Work on the UN and WTO highlights a widening gap between legitimacy and performance. Weiss (2016) diagnoses political infeasibility of wholesale reform, while Hurd (2019) shows legitimacy's importance even amid contestation. For trade, the Appellate Body crisis symbolizes a system under stress ([Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021](#)). Empirically oriented policy studies echo these concerns, documenting Security Council veto paralysis and dispute-settlement dysfunction, yet also noting the persistence of these bodies as focal points for global norms.

### **Minilateralism and Forum-Shopping**

As universal bodies slow, states increasingly rely on small-N, purpose-built coalitions—“minilaterals”—to achieve tractable goals. Comparative analyses of the Quad, AUKUS, and I2U2 present minilateralism as an agility-enhancing supplement rather than a substitute for universal forums ([Council of Councils, 2023](#); [Wilson Center, 2023](#); [FPRI, 2023](#)). The BRICS literature sits at an intersection: it contests hierarchies of the liberal order, builds partial alternatives (e.g., the NDB), but faces internal heterogeneity that constrains delivery ([Stuenkel, 2015](#); [Carnegie Endowment, 2023](#)).

### **Digital and Climate Diplomacy as Cross-Cutting Arenas**

The scholarship on digital diplomacy frames online platforms as tools for narrative competition, crisis messaging, and networked engagement that partly bypass traditional gatekeepers ([Bjola & Holmes, 2015](#)). Regulatory scholarship further shows how the EU's digital rule-making (e.g., AI Act/DSA) exports standards through market power—creating de facto global benchmarks while fragmenting regimes ([European Parliament, 2024](#); [Mattoo & Meltzer, 2023](#)).

In climate diplomacy, analyses of the Paris regime stress pledge-and-review logics and coalition entrepreneurship ([Falkner, 2016](#)). Outcome-oriented minilaterals (e.g., High Ambition Coalition; Just Energy Transition Partnerships) illustrate pragmatic pathways for finance and implementation outside universal bargains, while raising equity and inclusion concerns ([IISD, 2024](#); [UNFCCC, 2023](#); [Carbon Brief, 2023](#)).

### **Accountability, Inclusivity, and the Political Economy of Reform**

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Institutional design debates foreground transparency and accountability as pillars of legitimacy in partially globalized governance (Keohane, 2002). Yet reform trade-offs are real: broad inclusion can slow decisions; tight clubs can deliver but risk exclusion and contestation (CiteseerX, 2003; OECD, 2020). Studies of sustainability transitions and technology governance similarly warn of “governance gaps,” knowledge asymmetries, and meta-organizational fixes that are innovative but uneven (SAGE, 2019; Springer, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2023; OECD, 2025).

### **Theoretical Anchors: Complex Interdependence, English School, Institutional Realism**

Three lines of theory jointly illuminate practice. Complex Interdependence explains why—even amid rivalry—dense transnational linkages keep states invested in rules and cooperation (Keohane & Nye, 1977/2012). The English School stresses how institutions endure as sites of recognition, voice, and order maintenance, even when materially weak (Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2004). Institutional Realism underscores how great powers instrumentalize institutions, driving forum-shopping and veto politics (Mearsheimer, 1994). Read together, these traditions predict a hybrid order in which universal bodies confer legitimacy, while minilaterals and functional regimes deliver outcomes.

### **Gaps This Paper Addresses**

First, while existing work documents either institutional stasis or minilateral proliferation, fewer studies model how states operationalize complementarity across forums (UN–G20–BRICS+ linkages). Second, the literatures on digital and climate diplomacy often run in parallel to institutions research; we integrate them to show how issue-specific capabilities (narratives, measurement, finance) travel between universal and minilateral arenas. Third, we advance the concept of institutional layering—incremental adjustments within legacy forums combined with externally built, task-oriented coalitions—as a realistic pathway that reconciles legitimacy with delivery.

### **Discussion**

#### **Why Traditional Forums Are Limited in Multipolarity**

The diffusion of power in today’s multipolar order exposes the structural limitations of traditional forums such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These institutions, designed during a period of concentrated authority after World War II, now operate in an environment where power is widely dispersed across established and emerging poles. This shift complicates consensus-building, generating a persistent gap between legitimacy and

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effectiveness. While these institutions continue to command symbolic authority, their operational capacities are increasingly compromised (East Asia Forum, 2023; The India Forum, 2023).

The UN Security Council illustrates this challenge most clearly. Its composition reflects the power balance of 1945 rather than the realities of 21st-century multipolarity. The veto power held by the five permanent members (P5) entrenches geopolitical rivalry, often preventing effective responses to major crises. For instance, Council action on Ukraine and Gaza has been repeatedly blocked by competing vetoes from Russia, China, and the United States, leaving the institution normatively central but operationally paralyzed (ORF, 2024; [International Peace & Security in Multipolar World Order, 2025](#)). Reform proposals, including expansion of permanent membership and curbs on veto use, have been discussed for decades, yet structural resistance from the P5 prevents meaningful change (ISDP, 2023). This rigidity demonstrates how multipolarity magnifies the misalignment between institutional design and global power distribution.

The WTO reflects a parallel crisis in economic governance. Once considered the crown jewel of the rules-based trade regime, its dispute settlement system has been effectively paralyzed since 2019 when the United States blocked appointments to the Appellate Body. The result is a system where states can appeal rulings “into the void,” undermining enforcement and eroding credibility ([Financial Times, 2025](#); [WTO, 2024](#)). In response, states have turned increasingly to plurilateral initiatives, regional trade agreements, and unilateral measures, bypassing the WTO in areas like digital trade and climate-linked tariffs ([Business Standard, 2025](#); [Hindustan Times, 2023](#)). Although the WTO retains normative authority as the custodian of global trade law, its practical relevance is diminishing in a competitive multipolar landscape.

Theoretical insights illuminate these dynamics. Realist perspectives argue that institutions reflect power asymmetries, with great powers instrumentalizing forums to advance their interests. The paralysis of the Security Council and the U.S. blockade of the WTO Appellate Body exemplify this logic ([Bava, 2013](#); [Slantchev, 2005](#)). By contrast, institutionalist perspectives emphasize that governance structures must adapt to shifts in power distribution to remain effective. Without reform, institutions designed for bipolar or unipolar contexts struggle in a multipolar world ([E-IR, 2013](#)). The evidence suggests that while the UN and WTO remain normatively relevant, their inability to deliver timely outcomes risks widening the legitimacy–effectiveness gap and fueling the search for more agile alternatives.

### **How Emerging Strategies Fill Governance Gaps or Create New Ones**

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The shortcomings of universal forums have spurred the emergence of alternative strategies aimed at filling governance gaps. These include innovations in financing, technology governance, and sustainability transitions. Such mechanisms are designed to compensate for institutional inertia, but they also risk generating new challenges when fragmented or exclusive.

In development finance, traditional institutions have fallen short in mobilizing resources to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments. This has encouraged experimentation with decentralized and blended finance models, which aim to combine public and private resources while strengthening local accountability ([Decentralization Net, 2025](#)). While these approaches expand available funding and enhance flexibility, they remain fragmented, with limited ability to provide systemic solutions at scale ([ResearchGate, 2016](#)).

Technological governance presents even sharper gaps. Innovations in artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, and clean energy advance more rapidly than regulatory frameworks, creating risks of regulatory capture and uneven rule-making. Emerging strategies, such as foresight tools and international networks of regulators, attempt to anticipate technological disruptions and coordinate standards across jurisdictions ([OECD, 2025](#); [Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2023](#)). However, these same mechanisms often privilege the interests of resource-rich states and corporations, marginalizing smaller players and deepening asymmetries ([Springer, 2022](#)).

The widening knowledge gap between regulators and innovators compounds the challenge. Policymakers often lack the technical expertise to govern frontier technologies effectively, leading to dependence on private actors for guidance ([SSRN, 2022](#)). Regulatory sandboxes and public-private foresight platforms have been introduced to enhance adaptive capacity ([AEI, 2024](#); [WEF, 2024](#)). Yet reliance on private expertise risks reducing public autonomy and accountability, generating new governance gaps even as others are filled.

Environmental governance demonstrates both the promise and pitfalls of emerging strategies. Multi-stakeholder platforms and circular economy initiatives have enabled diffusion of best practices across borders, supporting sustainability transitions ([ScienceDirect, 2022a](#); [ScienceDirect, 2024b](#)). However, reliance on voluntary commitments and weak enforcement mechanisms limits their systemic impact and raises accountability concerns ([SAGE, 2019](#)). This duality underscores how emerging governance tools may both compensate for institutional inertia and fragment the global order.

### **Tensions: Fragmentation vs. Flexibility, Inclusivity vs. Efficiency**

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These innovations highlight two core tensions in global governance under multipolarity: fragmentation versus flexibility, and inclusivity versus efficiency.

The proliferation of minilateral forums, sectoral regimes, and issue-specific coalitions provides flexibility by allowing states to respond quickly to evolving challenges. Yet this same proliferation risks fragmentation, producing overlapping mandates and inconsistent rules. For example, environmental governance illustrates both experimentation and incoherence, with the European Union, India, and international negotiations pursuing divergent approaches to emissions reduction ([EJIL: Talk!](#), 2020; [UNFCCC](#), 2021). Similarly, the global financial system faces competing regulatory standards, raising coordination costs and complicating systemic resilience ([World Economic Forum](#), 2024; [BIS](#), 2025). The energy sector also demonstrates this duality: while diversification of supply chains enhances adaptability, it generates parallel transition pathways that weaken coherence ([IEA](#), 2023).

A second tension lies between inclusivity and efficiency. Inclusive governance ensures legitimacy by incorporating diverse actors, particularly from the Global South ([OECD](#), 2020). However, inclusive structures often slow decision-making and dilute policy precision ([CiteseerX](#), 2003). By contrast, smaller and more exclusive coalitions can act decisively, but their legitimacy may be questioned when they exclude key stakeholders ([ResearchGate](#), 2020). This trade-off is visible in both trade and climate negotiations, where universal forums stall, prompting states to form narrower, faster-moving coalitions.

Ultimately, these tensions cannot be eliminated but must be managed. Fragmentation enables experimentation, while inclusivity underpins legitimacy. Efficiency produces timely outcomes, but without inclusivity it risks alienating marginalized actors. The challenge for global governance is to design hybrid arrangements that balance pluralism with coherence and representation with functionality ([World Economic Forum](#), 2024; [ScienceDirect](#), 2022).

### **Theoretical Link: Complex Interdependence, English School, and Institutional Realism**

Bridging theory and practice offers a richer understanding of these dynamics. Three traditions—Complex Interdependence, the English School, and Institutional Realism—provide complementary insights into global governance in a multipolar order.

Complex Interdependence, articulated by Keohane and Nye (1977/2012), highlights how states are embedded in dense networks of economic, technological, and social ties where military power alone cannot dictate outcomes. This perspective explains why forums like the WTO retain normative importance even in paralysis: interdependence constrains unilateralism, compelling states to preserve some degree of institutional order ([ResearchGate](#), 2016). Climate diplomacy

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similarly reflects interdependence, as transboundary environmental risks necessitate cooperation even in fragmented contexts ([JSTOR, 2000](#)).

The English School emphasizes the persistence of an international society bound by norms, rules, and institutions ([Buzan, 2018](#); [Lawson, 2018](#)). From this vantage point, institutions like the UN matter less for their efficiency and more for their symbolic role in sustaining dialogue and reaffirming sovereign equality. The UN General Assembly, for instance, remains a vital platform for weaker states to voice concerns, reinforcing legitimacy despite limited enforcement capacity ([Tripura University, n.d.](#); [E-IR, 2018](#)). Similarly, newer coalitions like BRICS+ reflect the pluralism of international society, providing a forum for emerging powers to articulate alternative visions of order.

Institutional Realism, by contrast, underscores the enduring influence of power politics. It views institutions as arenas where asymmetries are entrenched rather than neutralized. The Security Council's paralysis and U.S. obstruction of the WTO dispute settlement system reflect realist logic: powerful states use institutional rules to defend their interests ([Pearson Higher Ed, 2012](#); [Slantchev, 2005](#)). The proliferation of minilaterals such as the Quad and AUKUS exemplifies states bypassing universal bodies to pursue narrower strategic objectives consistent with realist assumptions.

Together, these theories explain why global governance in multipolarity is both persistent and adaptive. Complex Interdependence highlights the constraints on unilateralism, the English School explains the durability of legitimacy, and Institutional Realism reveals the structural barriers imposed by power rivalries. The interplay of these perspectives suggests that the evolving order is hybrid: fragmented yet resilient, contested yet cooperative, shaped by ongoing negotiations between legitimacy, power, and interdependence.

### **Concluding Reflection**

The evidence demonstrates that multipolarity has strained the effectiveness of old forums while simultaneously stimulating the rise of new strategies. The UN and WTO remain symbols of legitimacy, yet their structural rigidity prevents them from addressing crises with agility. In contrast, minilaterals, digital diplomacy, and climate coalitions illustrate the adaptive strategies states employ to fill governance gaps. These arrangements deliver flexibility and targeted outcomes, but at the cost of coherence and inclusivity. Theoretical perspectives converge on one insight: global governance in a multipolar world is no longer defined by a single model but by the negotiation between legitimacy and effectiveness, universality and agility. This tension lies at the heart of contemporary strategic diplomacy and underscores why the shift “from multilateralism to

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minilateralism” represents not a replacement but an evolving balance between old forums and new strategies.

## **Findings**

### **Old Forums: Legitimacy Without Effectiveness**

#### **United Nations (UN)**

The United Nations continues to serve as the primary symbol of collective security, but its capacity to act decisively has diminished under multipolar conditions. The Security Council’s paralysis during recent crises, particularly Ukraine and Gaza exposes the structural fragility of the institution. The veto power of the five permanent members (P5) frequently prevents consensus on urgent matters. For example, in 2023, competing draft resolutions on Gaza, one spearheaded by the United States and the other by Russia, both failed, reinforcing the perception of deadlock ([UN Geneva, 2023](#); [Reuters, 2024](#)).

UN Secretary-General António Guterres cautioned that persistent inaction could leave the Council “fatally undermined” as a credible mechanism for peace and security ([Reuters, 2024](#)). While the General Assembly has stepped in to express global sentiment by convening emergency special sessions, its resolutions remain non-binding, limiting their practical impact. Reform proposals including expansion of permanent membership and voluntary veto restraint have been discussed but remain elusive because any Charter amendment requires P5 approval ([Carnegie Endowment, 2024](#)). As a result, the UN retains symbolic legitimacy but is increasingly ineffective in resolving high profile crises.

#### **Comparative reflection**

The UN’s paralysis contrasts with the agility of Mini laterals like the Quad and AUKUS ([FPRI, 2023](#)). Mini laterals deliver targeted outcomes but lack the UN’s universal legitimacy, reflecting the fragmentation, legitimacy trade-off.

#### **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

The WTO, once hailed as the cornerstone of global economic governance, now illustrates the erosion of multilateral authority in the trade domain. Since December 2019, the U.S. blockade of Appellate Body appointments has left the WTO’s dispute settlement system dysfunctional, allowing losing parties to appeal “into the void” and thereby suspend rulings indefinitely ([WTO, 2024](#)). This enforcement gap undermines the credibility of the institution.

The EU-led Multiparty Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) provides a partial fix, ensuring continuity among participating members. However, its limited scope creates a two-track system: members bound by MPIA and others operating outside its framework ([WTI, 2023](#); [EPRS, 2024](#)). Negotiations to restore the dispute settlement system by 2024 faltered, largely due to U.S.

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objections concerning judicial overreach and constraints on addressing Chinese trade practices (CSIS, 2023; IISD, 2023). Beyond disputes, WTO negotiations on new trade rules have stalled, with only incremental progress on issues like fisheries subsidies. Many states now prefer regional trade agreements (RTAs) and plurilateral initiatives for digital trade, climate-linked trade, and supply chain resilience. Thus, the WTO retains formal authority but has lost its centrality in trade diplomacy.

### **Comparative reflection**

Compared to regional agreements like IPEF and RCEP, the WTO retains legitimacy but lacks effectiveness (European Parliament, 2024).

### **BRICS Expansion**

BRICS represents a different trajectory, originating as a coalition of emerging economies seeking greater voice in global governance. Its recent expansion to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE has increased its demographic and economic reach, now encompassing nearly half the world's population and about 35% of global GDP (Carnegie Endowment, 2025; CFR, 2024). The bloc promotes Global South solidarity and financial autonomy through institutions such as the New Development Bank and mechanisms like BRICS Pay, designed to reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar (IBA, 2025).

Nevertheless, BRICS faces internal divergences that complicate its effectiveness. India remains wary of China's influence, Russia's international isolation poses reputational challenges, and economic models differ widely among members (Stimson Center, 2023). Expansion without clear membership criteria or a robust secretariat risks incoherence. Scholars argue that while BRICS is symbolically valuable as a reformist platform, its institutional weaknesses prevent it from rivaling Bretton Woods institutions (ResearchGate, 2025). BRICS, therefore, embodies aspirational multipolarity rather than functional governance.

### **Comparative reflection**

BRICS+ has symbolic weight but lacks cohesion. By contrast, smaller coalitions like I2U2 produce concrete projects (FPRI, 2023)

New Strategies: Adaptive Diplomacy in a Fragmented Order

### **Minilateralism**

The growing inefficacy of universal forums has encouraged states to pursue Mini lateral arrangements, smaller, agile coalitions targeting specific challenges. The Quad (United States, India, Japan, Australia) has expanded its remit from maritime security to vaccine distribution, critical technologies, and infrastructure. AUKUS (Australia, UK, U.S.) demonstrates a defense-

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oriented approach, focusing on nuclear submarine technology and cybersecurity. Meanwhile, I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, U.S.) highlights cooperation on food security and renewable energy ([Wilson Center, 2023](#); [FPRI, 2023](#); [ICWA, 2024](#)).

These groupings allow states to bypass institutional inertia and focus on deliverables. Analysts argue they represent “speed lanes” in diplomacy: not replacements for multilateral institutions but functional supplements that provide agility where consensus among 190+ states is unfeasible ([Carnegie–Tsinghua, 2024](#)). However, they are criticized for exclusivity and for potentially sidelining smaller states.

### **Comparative reflection**

They achieve effectiveness by operating outside institutions such as the WTO or the UN, but this comes at the expense of legitimacy.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

Digital governance exemplifies the tension between universal ambition and fragmented practice. The UN’s Global Digital Compact, endorsed in 2024, seeks to promote an inclusive digital order, advocating principles for a secure, open, and rights-based digital space ([UN, 2024](#)). Yet the most impactful initiatives are regional. The EU’s AI Act and Digital Services Act demonstrate how regulatory powers can project influence globally by setting de facto standards ([EU Parliament, 2024](#)). Similarly, Mini lateral initiatives on cybersecurity and data governance are multiplying across Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

This proliferation reflects both adaptation and fragmentation. On one hand, states are innovating diplomatically to manage emerging technologies too complex for universal processes ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)). On the other hand, the lack of harmonization risks creating a splintered digital ecosystem, echoing the WTO’s fragmentation in trade governance.

### **Comparative reflection**

Compared to WTO digital deadlocks, digital diplomacy produces adaptive but fragmented regimes ([Mattoo & Meltzer, 2023](#)).

### **Climate Diplomacy**

Climate diplomacy offers a critical test of global cooperation. COP28 in Dubai delivered progress with the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund, a historic achievement for vulnerable states ([UNFCCC, 2023](#); [Brookings, 2023](#)). Yet disputes over financing and accountability persist. Universal frameworks like the UNFCCC remain central for legitimacy, but real breakthroughs increasingly occur in smaller coalitions.

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The High Ambition Coalition has pressed for stricter emission targets, while Just Energy Transition Partnerships have mobilized finance for energy transitions in countries like South Africa and Indonesia ([IISD, 2024](#)). These arrangements reflect the Mini lateral turn: focused, pragmatic, and often resource driven. However, they risk excluding less powerful states, raising questions of fairness and equity. Climate diplomacy thus demonstrates how new strategies can advance incremental progress while deepening divides between those with capacity to participate and those without.

### **Comparative reflection**

Compared to UN or WTO paralysis, COP summits have produced incremental progress ([Carbon Brief, 2023](#)).

### **Synthesis**

The findings illustrate a hybrid diplomatic order shaped by the interaction of old forums and new strategies. Traditional institutions such as the UN, WTO, and BRICS continue to provide global legitimacy but falter in effectiveness due to structural rigidities and geopolitical rivalries. In response, states are developing adaptive strategies, mini lateralism, digital diplomacy, and climate coalitions, that provide agility and focus but often lack inclusivity and coherence.

Strategic diplomacy in a multipolar world is therefore best understood as a negotiation between legitimacy and effectiveness, universality and functionality. Old forums anchor global norms, but new strategies increasingly deliver operational outcomes. The resulting order is fragmented yet resilient, demonstrating both the persistence of multilateralism and the growing indispensability of alternative forms of cooperation.

### **Suggestions**

The analysis of both traditional multilateral forums and emerging diplomatic strategies suggests that effective global governance in a multipolar world requires a balanced and adaptive approach. Established institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization remain central to legitimacy, yet their limited effectiveness highlights the need for incremental innovation. While wholesale reform of these bodies has often proven politically unrealistic ([Weiss, 2016](#)), carefully targeted adjustments—such as streamlining decision-making, empowering issue-specific working groups, and strengthening the role of regional caucuses within global forums—can help reduce paralysis while preserving their universal authority ([Hurd, 2019](#)).

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Equally significant is the relationship between established forums and new mechanisms that have emerged in response to their shortcomings. Rather than treating multilateralism and mini lateralism as mutually exclusive, diplomatic practice should aim for complementarity. Coordinated dialogues, joint task forces, and structured channels for information-sharing between the UN, BRICS+, and the G20 can reduce fragmentation and enhance policy coherence ([Acharya, 2017](#); [Stuenkel, 2020](#)). This approach ensures that flexible coalitions remain anchored in the legitimacy of wider multilateral institutions.

Adaptation also requires widening the scope of diplomacy to address contemporary challenges. Digital diplomacy has become an indispensable tool for shaping narratives, countering disinformation, and engaging publics ([Bjola & Holmes, 2015](#)), while climate diplomacy increasingly defines institutional credibility in addressing transnational risks ([Falkner, 2016](#)). Investment in these domains through specialized training and cross-border cooperation platforms would not only strengthen state capacity but also create opportunities for collaboration with non-state actors.

Legitimacy further depends on stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms. Independent monitoring, open-access policy reporting, and meaningful consultations with stakeholders can reinforce trust in both established and emerging forums ([Keohane, 2002](#)). In parallel, diplomacy should engage more systematically with NGOs, businesses, academic networks, and local communities, whose expertise and resources enrich institutional capacity. Comparative regional case studies, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America, can offer context-sensitive insights to guide broader governance reform ([Hurrell, 2006](#)).

Taken together, these recommendations underscore the need for a hybrid diplomatic model—one that preserves the authority of multilateral institutions while embedding the flexibility, inclusivity, and innovation of emerging strategies—ensuring resilience in the face of a rapidly shifting international order.

## Conclusion

This study argues that strategic diplomacy in a multipolar world is best understood as hybrid and adaptive. Legacy institutions—the UN and WTO foremost—continue to anchor legitimacy and provide common reference points, yet their capacity to resolve high-stakes disputes is constrained by veto politics, representation lags, and design inertias. Wholesale reform remains politically

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unlikely. The practical route, therefore, is institutional layering: targeted adjustments within universal forums (streamlined procedures, empowered working groups, strengthened regional caucuses) coupled with externally organized, small-N coalitions that tackle discrete problems at speed.

Minilateral arrangements—exemplified by the Quad, AUKUS, I2U2, and climate finance partnerships—are not replacements for universalism; they are speed lanes that deliver implementation while remaining normatively tethered to broader regimes. Parallel evolutions in digital diplomacy and climate diplomacy demonstrate how states are building new capacities—narrative shaping, standards setting, measurement, and blended finance—that circulate between forums and, when coordinated, can mitigate fragmentation.

The core policy challenge is to balance legitimacy and effectiveness. Designing interfaces—joint task forces, data-sharing protocols, and agenda alignment—between universal bodies (UN, WTO) and flexible coalitions (G20 working tracks, BRICS+ initiatives, climate clubs) can reduce duplication and forum rivalry. Equally, legitimacy requires accountability and inclusion: transparent reporting, independent monitoring, and meaningful engagement with NGOs, firms, and local communities guard against exclusivity and mission drift.

In short, resilience in the international order will come neither from abandoning old forums nor from fetishizing new ones. It will come from purposeful complementarity: preserving the authority of multilateral institutions while harnessing the agility and innovation of emerging strategies. This hybrid model offers a realistic blueprint for cooperation amid rivalry—capable of producing timely outcomes without severing the normative foundations on which global governance ultimately rests.

## Author Contributions (Credit Statement)

- **Hafsha Rahman (First Author):** Conceptualization of the research topic; development of research questions; collection and synthesis of secondary data; drafting of the **Discussion** and **Findings** sections; overall manuscript coordination.
  - **Faisal Mahmood:** Drafting of the **Introduction**; contextual framing of the study within broader debates on multipolarity and strategic diplomacy.
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- **Manashi Parashar:** Development of the **Research Purpose**; design and articulation of the **Methodology**; guidance on alignment with academic standards.
- **Thal Blankson:** Lead work on the **Literature Review**; data coding support; integration of theoretical frameworks into the manuscript.
- **Ceren Kale:** Drafting of the **Suggestions** section; integration of case study evidence with practical recommendations; cross-reference of discussion to policy implications.
- **Sandeep Singh:** Drafting of the **Conclusion** and compilation of **References**; synthesis of arguments across sections; ensuring consistency in citation and formatting.
- **[Supervisor/Advisor]:** Guidance, review, and methodological feedback.

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