The Group of 77 and Global Dialogue in the United Nations General Assembly

Max-Otto Baumann

Anna Novoselova

Javier Surasky

Philipp Schönrock

The Group of 77 and Global Dialogue in the United Nations General Assembly

Max-Otto Baumann, Anna Novoselova, Javier Surasky & Philipp Schönrock

Bonn 2024

Dr Max-Otto Baumann is a Senior Researcher in the research programme "Inter- and Transnational Cooperation" at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in Bonn, Germany.

Email: max-otto.baumann@idos-research.de

Dr Anna Novoselova is a Researcher in the research programme "Inter- and Transnational Cooperation" at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in Bonn.

Email: anna.novoselova@idos-research.de

Javier Surasky, PhD, is an Associate Fellow at CEPEI and Professor of Public International Law at the La Plata National University in La Plata, Argentina.

Email: javier.surasky@gmail.com

Philipp Schönrock is the Director of the Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (CEPEI), an independent think tank in Bogotá, Colombia.

Email: psm@cepei.org

Acknowledgements

Contents

Boxes

Figures

Tables

Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CANZ	Canada, Australia, New Zealand
CSO	civil society organisation
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (of the United Nations)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
G77	Group of 77
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
IFI	international financial institution
LDC	least developed country
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCA	Our Common Agenda
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Trade and Development
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

This study examines the Group of 77's internal structure, decision-making, and power distribution and how these are factors for the North-South dialogue at the United Nations (UN), the world's foremost multilateral organisation. The G77 compromises 134 developing countries and serves as a platform for the global South at the UN. It plays an important role in UN multilateralism by aggregating and representing the interests of its members vis-à-vis its long-standing counterpart, the global North. In theory, an inclusive consensus-approach can lead to strong G77 positions that are internally representative of and well-grounded in the interests of the group, and externally conducive to striking deals for global solutions. But any form of group politics is also prone to shortcomings, such as the dominance of specific minority interests, drift towards the least common denominator, inflexibility in negotiations, and heightened confrontation. It is against this conceptual background that the study analyses the G77 and how it operates, seeking to identify challenges and potentials regarding the representation of global South interests in the UN and, by extension, a more effective UN multilateralism in general.

The study starts by providing a snapshot of North-South relations at the UN General Assembly (see Section 2). Across several areas, a picture of increasing antagonism and mutual frustrations emerges. G77 countries articulate direct and assertive criticism of the global North and perceived injustices in the global system, in ways not heard of a decade ago. Global North countries register increasingly confrontational diplomatic practices by the global South that challenge their predominant roles. Reaching a consensus seems to become more challenging. The tax resolution provides a powerful example of the global South taking the initiative and dealing a visible defeat to the global North. Other processes, such as the Summit of the Future, were marked by stalemate over conflicting interests. All this might be symptoms of global economic power shifts in the recent decade and a changing global discourse about North-South relations.

The following sections of this study analyse decision-making in the G77 from different angles to gauge the group's role in UN multilateralism. Section 3 provides a descriptive analysis of the group's structure and its traditional consensus-approach, focusing in particular on its inclusivity. Decision-making in the G77 is essentially a matter of in-person consultations that lead to group positions, with little transparency and accountability towards the group in its entirety. This approach, which differs from how the European Union (EU) operates, ensures basic representation, but bears the risk of deficiencies such as the concentration of decision-making in the hands of a few members, the production of friable and rigid positions, and sometimes erratic behaviour by some members. The lack of diplomatic capacity in many G77 member state missions has a major impact on the group's decision-making, as it prevents smaller members from effective participation.

Section 4 zooms in on the tension between unity and diversity in the group. More than ever before, the G77 is marked by centrifugal forces, as it now comprises member states from almost all conventional state categories in use today. With recourse to the literature, we identify three mechanisms of solidarity that can explain both the group's continued unity, and limits to it: i) Their common interest in creating an international environment conducive to their national development; ii) confrontation with the global North as the main counterpart; and iii) practices of reciprocal support. Turning, then, to four case studies of recent policy processes (Summit of the Future; gender; civil society; tax resolution) we find that the group is not always able to reach a position because of internal disagreements. When it does, the decision-making path towards a common position is often an imperfect one in which factions of the group override or veto relevant positions, or even bypass group processes altogether only to rely on the group's support when proposals get tabled in the General Assembly.

Section 5 turns to the issue of power for a better understanding of G77 dynamics and outcomes. Five members, or groups of members, are analysed in more detail as to the power they exercise within or over the group: i) A category of members often referred to as "radicals" that are much more engaged and influential in the G77 than in the wider international system; ii) China, which has emerged as an important player, going from silent observer to something like a "big brother" of the G77 in the last decade; iii) BRICS, on which our study does not find evidence that they are transforming the political configuration of the G77 in a meaningful way; and iv) the African group, which has emerged not only as a key swing-group in the global geopolitical context but also as an actor in its own right; and v) the global North members that can engage in divide-and-rule practices, but appear to have seen their influence over the G77 become weaker in recent years.

Overcoming the North-South antagonism in the UN, which is an obstacle to more effective multilateralism, is the responsibility of both sides, North *and* South. Imperfections to the G77's decision-making mean that the group operates below its potential for contributing well-aggregated positions that represent common global South interests to negotiations at the UN General Assembly. Global North members, not shy to pursue their own interests in control over global economic and normative issues, also drive the North-South antagonism. As such, they invite G77 solidarity, and contribute, although indirectly, to the G77's shortcomings such as the tendency of the group to rally behind "radicals" who take confrontational positions.

The study suggests four broad reforms that could serve to strengthen the G77 – and UN multilateralism for that matter – on the assumption that a well-functioning G77 not only serves the interests of its members better, but is also a more capable stakeholder and counterpart in UN processes. To that end, the group is well-advised to i) ensure inclusive decision-making processes that safeguard against idiosyncratic influences; ii) focus on strategic priorities and ensure accountability in their implementation; iii) engage in networking to expand its ambitions beyond UN resolutions, towards real-world change; and iv) invest in staff and diplomatic capacity while also reducing the burden from ever-expanding UN processes.

Our coming together in the Group of 77 has the purpose of enabling us to deal on terms of greater equality with an existing Center of Power. Ours is basically a unity of opposition. [...] The object is to complete the liberation of the Third World countries from external domination. [...] And unity is our instrument – our only instrument – of liberation."

Julius K. Nyerere (1979, pp. 4-9)

1 Introduction

A defining aspect of multilateralism at the United Nations (UN), particularly in the area of development, is the division of member states into two major groups: the global North countries on the one side, and the global South, organised in the Group of 77 and China (henceforth, G77), on the other. The former group constitutes a minority of member states but has, since the inception of the UN and in particular after the end of the Cold War, enjoyed a position of dominance at the UN. The latter has its roots in the post-colonial era and constitutes what sympathetic observers call the "majority world" (Cheryl, 2019) with its currently 134 members. The G77 operates on the premise of strength through unity. Nearly every intergovernmental process at the UN related to development and financial issues, and the outcomes these processes generate, are shaped by the dynamics of group politics – often to the frustration of those involved on both sides. While asked by the UN Charter to pursue "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (UN Charter, preamble), delegates often find themselves locked into unproductive diplomatic battles that divide them and take the focus away from shared global responsibilities.

The North-South relationship at the UN General Assembly has become more strained compared to a decade ago. Developing countries have started to voice their demands for a greater say in global affairs more assertively (Passarelli & Justino, 2024). Their criticism towards the global North of "broken promises" around development and climate funding, double standards in the application of international norms, and stonewalling to defend privileges has become more audible in recent years (Gowan, 2024a, 2024b; Schalatek, 2021; Suzman, 2023). Global North states, in turn, are increasingly frustrated by a G77 they perceive as inflexible and defensive, better in saying "no" than in engaging constructively in collective problem-solving, as the protracted process around the Summit of the Future in 2024 seemed to demonstrate (Beisheim, 2024). This growing antagonism, and the loss of trust it brings, carries the potential of gridlock. But it also contains the possibility of a political shake-up of the UN from which new opportunities for global dialogue may emerge (Baumann & Haug, 2024).

This study explores the current state of affairs in UN multilateralism by focusing on the G77, which coordinates mostly on matters handled in the General Assembly's Second Committee (that deals with economic and financial matters) and Fifth Committee (administrative and budgetary issues). Groups like the G77 are an important factor for UN multilateralism that can shed light both on the latter's strengths and on its shortcomings. Like political parties in domestic contexts, groups in multilateral settings aggregate interests, thereby facilitating "consensus-formation [...] by reducing the number of interests that, in the end, have to be reconciled with each other" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 18; see also Laatikainen, 2017, p. 133). They help with processing information for their members and represent them in negotiations, thus reducing the load on diplomatic capacity. As groups bundle the voices of their members, they give practical meaning to the aspiration of the UN as an egalitarian intergovernmental space, in which might does not equal right, and where the smaller members have a fair chance to influence global matters that have effects on them.

Yet, group politics are also prone to certain shortcomings that can cause gridlock and fuel antagonism (Laatikainen, 2017). The difficulties in finding and protecting intra-group consensus can translate into an outward rigidity that threatens the pragmatic negotiation of solutions with

global partners. While group unity is a factor for external influence – and thus in the interest of all members of the group – the high premium put on unity can come at the cost of inclusive decision-making. Dominant actors can use groups for their own purposes. In addition, rather than acting on the basis of a set of shared interests, groups may draw their energy from confrontation with a shared opponent, which can turn them into predominantly defensive coalitions. With all that in mind, one can conclude that groups will typically represent a certain balance of benefits and shortcomings, and the question then becomes how the benefits can be maximised, and the shortcomings minimised, so that groups function well in the overall multilateral system.

Where, then, does the G77 fall between these two poles of benefits and shortcomings? Trying to find answers, our study contributes an update to a relatively small body of literature on the G77.[1] It aims to accomplish two things: First, it aims to provide an assessment of the current North-South relations at the UN General Assembly. It tests the hypothesis that, under the usual "noise" of diplomatic tussle, of expressions of mistrust, and mutual frustrations, we can detect an increasing North-South antagonism that begins to affect established diplomatic practices and political roles at the UN. This then provides the grounds for the second, more explanatory question that pertains to the G77's role in shaping UN multilateralism. We look at the G77's internal decision-making processes to parse out how the group shapes the conditions for a constructive North-South dialogue at the UN. To do so, we identify three aspects of group-level decision-making that have implications for negotiations at the General Assembly. Each aspect adds another layer of understanding: i) We provide a descriptive account of how the group makes decisions, focusing in particular on the inclusiveness of its processes; ii) we focus on the tension between diversity in the group and mechanisms of solidarity that pull the group together; and iii) we adopt a power lens to analyse the (shifting) role of key actors, or subgroups, in the G77.

The study contributes a mostly qualitative account to the scholarship on multilateralism in the UN General Assembly, a topic which has so far been dominated by statistical analyses on voting and the different factors influencing it (Adhikari, 2019; Dreher et al., 2008; Lektzian & Biglaiser, 2023; Smith, 2016). The study also contributes to larger discussions about the changing North-South relationship in a context of global geopolitical change. The emergence of the term "new South", which denotes a "new sense of agency" among some developing countries (Ishmael, 2024, p. 3; see also Haibin, 2023; Heine, 2024), the "poly-crisis" (another new term) of the pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as the emergence of a new discourse about persisting neo-colonialism (Chan & Patten, 2023; Langan, 2018), and geopolitical transformations that include China's ascendance to the position of a global superpower (Haug et al., 2024) – all these indicate that a fundamental rebalancing of global political relations is currently happening, and that a stronger role of the global South is a key part of this (Gopaladas, 2024; Hogan & Patrick, 2024; Ikenberry, 2024).

Among the states of the global North, this has triggered some soul-searching about their role in the world and the need to re-calibrate relations with the "new South", bringing forward two almost contradictory imperatives: climbing down from their roles of paternalistic global leaders, while maintaining or even building global influence. For the global South, the newfound agency brings its own challenges: On the one hand, it means that there are new opportunities to advance its global aspirations in politically meaningful ways with real prospects of affecting change. On the other hand, uneven economic development and an increasing diversity of interests threaten the unity of the global South in ways not experienced before.

Much of that global dynamic can have profound implications for the UN. The UN and its multilateralism may succumb to the forces of global antagonism (the dysfunctionality of the Security Council in the Cold War era provides a warning) or serve as the central platform where global change is managed and negotiated in constructive ways (the adoption of the 2030

---

1   Iida (1988); Lees (2021, 2023); Sauvant (1981); Swart & Lund (2011); Toye (2014); Vihma et al. (2011).

Agenda in 2015 comes to mind as an example). Both sides, the global North and South, have a responsibility towards, and an interest in, the latter. If in this study we focus on the G77, that is because the group represents the majority of member states in the UN and, on top of that, might also be the one that is politically on the ascendance. Nevertheless, we are aware that this study provides a partial account of UN multilateralism, which would make a complementary study on the global North desirable.

The study is based on interviews at UN headquarters in New York and, to a lesser degree, in Rome, another UN location where the G77 operates a regional chapter. We conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with delegates from the G77, global North states and independent observers.[2] For triangulation, we systematically analysed voting data based on a new data set we compiled from publicly available UN data and diplomatic statements made at the UN General Assembly. With interviews conducted in the period between November 2023 and May 2024, the study essentially provides a snapshot of current affairs at the General Assembly. However, the desk study elements (and the long-term professional careers in the UN of some of our interviewees) allowed us to look back a bit further and trace developments since 2015, a year often regarded as the high-water mark of global cooperation in the post-Cold War era because of the multilateral feat of adopting the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement as ambitious and actionable common endeavours.

2 Growing antagonism at the United Nations

We begin with a review of the current state of North-South relations at the UN General Assembly. Our hypothesis is that, over the past decade, the North-South antagonism has grown, resulting in a new level of mutual frustrations and missed opportunities for joint action. To gauge the extent of the current antagonism, and how it may have increased in recent years, we take a tour d'horizon of different areas of UN politics: We look at sentiments expressed in diplomatic statements, negotiation practices and attitudes, specific policy processes, and voting patterns. Across these different areas, the contours of a profound change in the UN's political landscape seem to be emerging. This is not to say that there ever was a time of amiable relations or that a certain degree of confrontation is bad per se. The G77 was founded with the purpose of introducing a counterweight to the global North. Its demand for "creating a new and just world economic order" (G77, 1964, para 1) signalled the ambition to shape UN policies against the resistance of global North counterparts, and the diplomatic battles that followed from that left delegates from both sides somewhat accustomed to the frustrations of group politics in the UN (Swart & Lund, 2011). Yet, it appears that something novel is currently occurring, as not only attitudes shift, but also underlying power structures. It seems as if the North-South relationship in the UN is currently entering a new phase, one that can be described as a "crisis" in the Greek sense of the word: A critical juncture in which established practices, beliefs, and roles are broken up, or at least become contested, and where a process of readjustment of social structures is taking place, with uncertain outcomes as of yet.

---

2   Interview statistics: We spoke with 42 people in 36 interviews. Of these, 16 interviews were with dele-gates from global North countries; 10 with G77 delegates; 9 with independent experts; 1 with UN staff. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, we conducted interviews on the assurance of complete confidentiality, relying on notes-taking during the interview rather than recording. We reference inter-views by numbers that do not reflect the order in which interviews were conducted or any other logic.

2.1   Airing dissatisfaction: G77 chairs in the General Assembly

The UN General Assembly and in particular its centrepiece, the annual General Debate during its opening in September, is the most prominent global platform on which member states articulate their views about the world and their place in it. Although detached from any specific policy process, speeches by political leaders at the General Assembly are like a thermometer that can indicate the mood of current international affairs. Our analysis of speeches[3] given in the General Debate suggests that the global South has become more critical towards the global North in recent years, moving from utterances of general dissatisfaction to direct, assertive and at times less-diplomatic blaming. There is no being mistaken that the heat has increased in the UN (see also Gowan, 2024b).

Recent G77 chairs have criticised the global North and the current international system in a more assertive manner in past years than they did before. Articulating long-felt G77 concerns about the lack of democratic inclusivity in international fora, Egypt (a G77 chair in 2018) criticised the "monopoly by major Powers of the ability to make international decisions and their disregard for the aspirations of hundreds of millions of peoples and communities"; it also questioned "how is one system of values morally superior to others?" (UN [United Nations], 2023a, pp. 50-52). Pakistan (a G77 chair in 2022) expressed concern about an international system that is "being eschewed due to the unilateral policies and strategic rivalry and tensions between global powers" (UN, 2023b, p. 21). In a similar vein, Guinea (the G77 chair in 2021) stated that Africa "suffers from a model of governance that has been imposed on it", and asserted that this model "has contributed above all to maintaining a system of exploitation, the plunder of our resources by others" (UN, 2023c, p. 18). Even stronger criticism came from Cuba (a G77 chair in 2023). It claimed to represent "the voice of the South, the exploited and scorned" and labelled the global North as "voracious predators of resources and the environment", and the international system as "unjust, irrational, and abusive, […] replicating a pattern of modern colonialism", thus turning the South into "laboratories of renewed forms of domination" (UN, 2023d, pp. 24-25). We did not find similarly strong rhetoric from G77 chairs in the earlier half of the past decade.[4] In the context of the General Assembly's High-level Week, where heads of state and government usually strike an aspirational and lofty tone founded in the "we, together" of the UN Charter, this rhetoric is remarkable for its assertive and direct condemnation of a specific group of UN members. It certainly has contributed to making global governance reform an unavoidable item on the international agenda.

It must be said that not all G77 members use such strong rhetoric. Rather, a more "diplomatic" tone dominates in the speeches of other G77 members. In terms of content, however, they often articulate similar criticism that is in accord with the assertive language recent G77 chairs have used. Burundi, for example, noted that "trust and solidarity [have] lost their primary meaning under the effects of neocolonialism, characterized by multifaceted interference in the internal affairs of developing States, by unfair remuneration for raw materials and by the strong demands imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions" (UN, 2023c, p. 20). In our interviews, delegates from

---

3   We systematically analysed the General Debate speeches of G77 chairs over the period 2015-2023. As a first step, adopting a process of qualitative content analysis, a coding scheme was developed, and segments in each speech were identified and categorised according to codes including, but not limited to, the global North, the global South, the international order, the international financial system, the United Nations, etc. Subsequently, the coded data was sorted and analysed to identify repeated occurrences of specific language or the emergence of new expressions related to the criticism, blaming or accusations of the global North by the G77.

4   Indicative for the change in rhetoric is, for example, how Guyana (a G77 chair in 2020), speaking on climate policies, went from referring to "humankind" as the cause of climate change in 2017 (UN, 2017a, p. 10) to identifying the "the worst emitters" and "large polluters [that] have simply nor kept their word", blaming them for "deception" in 2021 (UN, 2021a, p. 3).

G77 member states confirmed a growing sentiment of "broken promises" in the group that in their perception casts a dark shadow on the relationship with the global North (interviews 8, 26).

The agreed positions of the G77 also provide evidence of dissatisfaction with the global North. While the demand for "creating *a new* and just world economic order" (emphasis added) in the G77's declaration of 1964 has been toned down to the "determination to strive for economic and social development" within the existing order, the urgency behind these positions has not. The outcome document of the last South Summit, held in Uganda in 2024, presents the group's current set of positions (see Box 1). This document, too, criticises the "unfair international economic order" presided over by the global North and demands reforms of the international financial architecture, tax cooperation, and multilateral trade system (G77, 2024a). Particularly note-worthy is that the document starts with political issues that sit at the heart of the most notorious North-South tensions and are unrelated to the economic challenges of an average developing country: Quite early in the document, the G77 articulates its "principled and longstanding" support for an independent State of Palestine, coupled with a criticism of Israel's actions towards its neighbouring states (paragraphs 6 to 13). The rejection of "unilateral coercive measures" – sanctions that, according to some G77 members including China, violate the non-interference principle (Ungar, 2024) – also assumes relatively much space in the document. One might see these two issues as symbols that summon both the solidarity of the G77 with those members suffering the most, and the predominant role of the global North as the cause of it. Compared to these political positions that denote confrontation, the more economic and ecologic positions where global interests are more likely to overlap appear further down in the document.

Box 1: Summary of G77 positions, presented in the same order as in the Third South Summit outcome document

1. Fulfilment of the right to development.
2. Support for an independent State of Palestine, coupled with a comprehensive condemnation of Israel's "systematic, grave breaches of international law".
3. Rejection of "unilateral coercive measures" and solidarity with Cuba.
4. Critique of an "unfair international economic order" that is linked to a number of current challenges.
5. "Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions" as an "indispensable requirement for sustainable development".
6. Demands for transfer of technology, capacity building and financing for sustainable development in line with ODA-targets.
7. Reform of the international financial architecture, including its governance structures, and to that end reform of the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC as well as the issue of debt.
8. Demand for "inclusive and effective international tax cooperation".
9. An inclusive and equitable multilateral trade system based on a reformed WTO.
10. Greater global connectivity through infrastructure and at the policy level.
11. Gender equality and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women.
12. Expansion of South-South cooperation initiatives as a "complement" to North-South cooperation.
13. Investments in science, technology, innovation and digital public infrastructure, and the adoption of an international technology framework.
14. Dealing with the impact of climate change, while affirming the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities".
15. Dealing with the degradation of natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, the extinction of threatened species, and plastic pollution.
16. A preventive approach to disaster risk that is "broader, systemic and a more people-centred".

Source: G77 (2024a)

2.2 Frustrations and dysfunctionalities: a global North perspective

The frustration is mutual. Delegates from global North member states have their own story to tell about interactions with the G77 and "the tyranny of negotiating in blocs" at the General Assembly (interview 9). There appears to be a broadly shared feeling that negotiation tactics have become harsher and more politicised in recent years. "We stopped listening to each other", as one delegate noted (interview 2). Mirroring the G77's growing distrust towards the global North, sources from the latter camp expressed their doubts about the possibility of approaching "the other side" with constructive proposals, be it for lack of friendly reception or simply because the group is preoccupied with itself (interview 14). Either way, trust seems to have hit a low point, and confrontational practices appear to have become more pervasive. A telling example of the lack of trust are the controversies around the war in Ukraine. Global North states put food security on the agenda in the Rome-based UN organisations and demanded from the global South support for the condemnation of Russia's violation of the UN Charter, assuming that this would be in the interest of developing countries; yet, in the end, the latter rejected this outreach which they saw as a geopolitical move and unnecessary politicisation of the UN's development work, speaking more of Western double standards than of a sincere interest in the UN's norms and mission (interviews 21, 23).

Group confrontation also plays out in seating arrangements. In the General Assembly's Fifth Committee which deals with budgetary matters – an area where the global North's "power of the purse" is pitted against the global South's majority in votes – delegates from the same bloc sit together, opposite their global counterparts. According to one source, efforts to change seating arrangements in recent years had failed due to the objection of the G77 that puts a high premium on unity in the Fifth Committee (interviews 3, 12). The Second Committee presents a more relaxed picture not only from a sociological point of view, but also with regard to group unity in negotiations. Yet, even there, delegates feel the "tyranny of negotiation in blocs" and the lack of trust in the face of diplomatic practices they consider counterproductive to the UN Charter mandate of "promoting international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and health fields" (UN Charter, Art. 13, 1).

A particularly frustrating – and in the eyes of global North delegates aggressive – tactic is what one source described as "blunt deletions" of agreed language in zero drafts for annual resolutions by the G77[5] (interview 2). For example, the draft of the annual ECOSOC resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR)[6] was cut down to approximately 25 per cent in terms of the word count compared to the predecessor in 2023; the number of decisions were reduced from 23 to 4.[7] Such "blunt deletions" may happen for various reasons. The G77 may do it to remove contentious positions that complicate the internal search for consensus, to remove points on which they disagree, or simply to counter the paragraph inflation in UN resolutions that has become increasingly unwieldy. Either way, this practice of stripping down drafts then triggers a time-consuming negotiation process of reinstating previously agreed content, restoring the resolution to the previous year's shape and

---

5   By contrast, see subsection 5.5, "Global North: external influence" for more information on tactics used by global North countries when interacting with the G77.

6   This is the recurrent policy process through which the General Assembly reviews and mandates the work of the UN development pillar.

7   Resolution: "Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system".

content. In the end, both sides can claim the victory of having successfully defended the status quo, while none of them have made substantial progress. Some delegates of the global North see a trend that zero drafts increasingly fall back behind the versions from previous years because of a more belligerent G77 (interviews 2, 14).

Another frustration felt by global North delegates is that the G77 does not listen to them – that it does not have to, given that it has the majority of votes required to pass decisions[8] of the General Assembly, and so "they push whatever they want" (interview 2). They feel that the G77 can afford to ignore their submissions in negotiating processes, thus undermining the inclusive-ness of General Assembly negotiations and introducing an element of power politics into what should be, at least to some extent, policy-oriented deliberations (interview 2). While dominating the funding of the UN (Baumann & Haug, 2024) – a form of influence that reaches far into the UN's policies – global North delegates feel they are on the defensive in the General Assembly (interview 1). (However, it is worth mentioning that this sense of being powerless is also shared by G77 members who understand that a majority might be good to pass a resolution, but not to get it implemented – and global North member states can always discourage majority votes by threatening to ignore resolutions adopted that way).

Global North delegates are also frustrated about the perceived G77's narrow focus on financial gains. "The G77 applies the same solution to all problems: 'more ODA'" (interview 28; also in 2, 14). Drawing a parallel to psychological partner therapy, one can see attributions like "you always do this and that" as sign of a dysfunctional relationship. Yet, the allegation is not entirely baseless. It matches with the analysis of the G77's official positions (see Figure 1). If we distinguish four types of positions related to i) the group's own policy commitments; ii) demands for better representation in global governance; iii) proposals for new/reformed international regulation; and iv) demands for North-South resource transfers, then the latter accounted for 42 per cent of the word count in the South Summit outcome document of 2024. (This analysis raises further questions, however: whether global North delegates "see" that there are other G77 demands that invite collaborative international approaches; and whether the G77 adequately articulates these other priorities in the General Assembly – the outcome document, for example, has a clear position on gender, but in the General Assembly, the G77 has been unable to agree on a position on gender, as Section 4 explains).

---

8   This applies to decisions on important issues such as recommendations on peace and security, the election of the non-permanent members of the Security Council and of the members of ECOSOC, the admission of new members to the UN, the suspension of the rights and privileges of member states, and budgetary questions require a two-thirds majority.

Figure 1: G77 positions in the 2024 South Summit outcome document
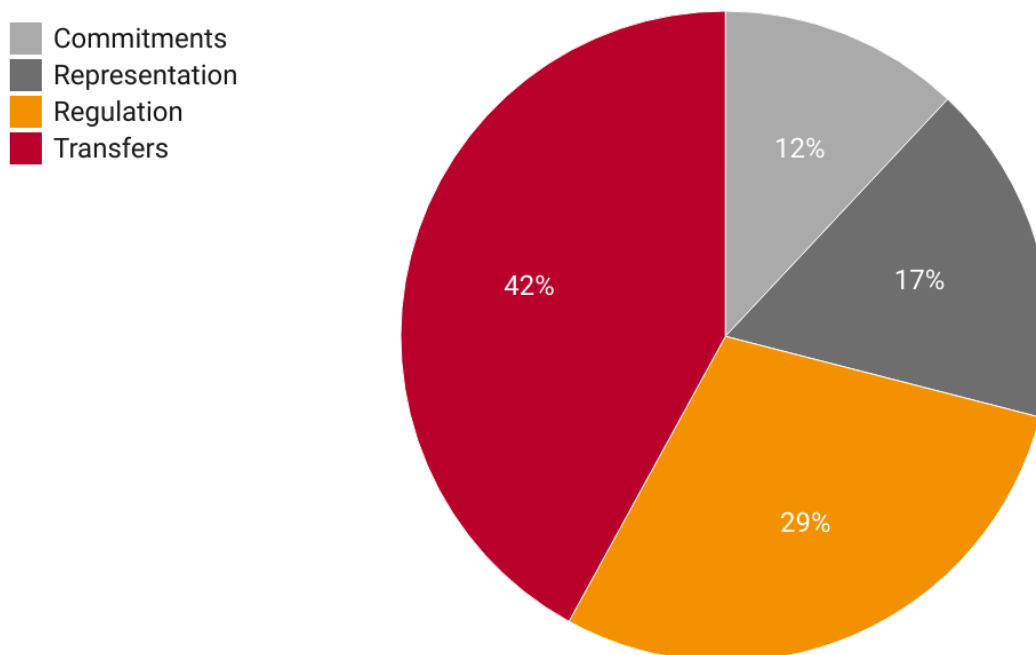
Source: Authors, based on the South Summit outcome document (G77, 2024a). Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: The graph displays the relative weight of four types of G77 positions in the 2024 South Summit outcome document as measured by a word count. Demands for North South-transfers figure prominently on the G77's official agenda, while less space is given to proposals for new/reformed international regulation, demands for better representation in global governance and commitments of the group itself.

2.3   The "tax resolution": voting interests through

As we turn to specific cases, the "tax resolution" (UN, 2023i) adopted in 2023 provides probably the most powerful illustration of the points discussed above and the new North-South reality at the UN. As far as we can tell, there has been no resolution from the Second Committee in recent years that made the expert community sit up and take notice in the way the tax resolution did. The tax resolution mandated the start of an intergovernmental process towards a binding international tax convention, which global North states did not want (interviews 2, 7, 27). The global South and civil society, however, celebrated it as "a historic victory delivered by countries of the global South" (Bou Mansour, 2023). For countries of the global North, it signified a dramatic loss of control at the UN; a failure to hold their "red lines"; and a departure from the consensus principle (interviews 14, 15). (While the UN Charter provides for General Assembly decisions to be adopted by voting, it has become customary practice to adopt decisions without a vote; votes are then only taken when no consensus can be achieved). This resolution would probably not have been possible in previous years, and the fact that it passed in 2023 indicates an escalation in the global South's willingness to assert its interests.

The background of the resolution is a decades-long struggle towards giving the UN a greater role in international tax cooperation. Suffering huge losses through illicit flows, in particular the African countries had for years advocated for upgrading the UN's Tax Committee to an intergovernmental body. Tax cooperation has also been an ongoing issue in the Financing for Development process. In these processes, global North states had resisted the call for an effective role of the UN, arguing that the issue be better dealt with in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) because of its expertise on tax issues.

Although developing countries were involved in the OECD process, they felt that they did not have a meaningful say in this global North-dominated group (UN, 2023b). The tax agreement previously adopted at the OECD in 2021 was criticised as "insufficiently inclusive and fair, especially concerning non-OECD member countries" (Amnesty International, 2023; also in Alonso, 2018). The tax issue can be seen as part of a longer tradition in efforts by global North states to keep economic and trade issues out of UN forums, a battle they have largely won after marginalising UNCTAD (United Nations Trade and Development) in the 1970s (Boutros-Ghali, 2006, pp. 5-8; Hogan & Patrick, 2024; Toye, 2014).

It is thus historically significant that, through the tax resolution, global South countries relying on their majority of votes challenged the marginalisation of economic issues and forced them back into the UN. The resolution was sponsored by Nigeria on behalf of the group of African states. It was adopted by 125 votes in favour with four G77 countries abstaining (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru, United Arab Emirates) and 10 not voting (eight small island states and two countries that had lost their voting rights, Afghanistan and Venezuela), and was rejected by virtually all global North states, with abstentions from Norway and Iceland only. Although an African project, the entire G77 membership supported the resolution through votes and words, with both Asian and Latin American member states making statements in support of it (UN, 2024b). Global North delegates expressed surprise and shock at their loss of control (interviews 1, 6). Their efforts before the vote to have the reference to a binding convention replaced by language on a non-binding "framework" were brushed off by the global South (Bou Mansour, 2023). One delegate said the entire process left them "blindsided and frustrated" (interview 1).

In the past, global North states have relied on the consensus approach to stop or water down important initiatives (interview 6). Global South states pushing ahead and tabling the resolution for adoption against global North resistance signalled not only a disruption of consensus-based decision-making (although technically speaking the vote was requested by the United States (US) which said it "could not join a consensus on the draft" (UN, 2023g, p. 20)).[9] It also testified to a new willingness to put the global North on the spot. It remains open how global North states will engage with the policy process triggered by the resolution; typically, majority votes are pyrrhic victories, which the sponsors likely knew and the US and global North partners probably deliberately wanted in this case as the lesser evil. But nothing is sure in a crisis and, under a new global power balance, majority votes might not just serve to shame the opponent or undermine a policy; they might have to be taken more seriously than before, because the majority can also be a factor in the implementation process. In the case of the tax resolution, its proponents may also prove to be a significant force in the intergovernmental process mandated by the resolution.

The defeat was particularly painful for global North states on the level of public discourse as shaped mainly by Western media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The public discourse was largely on the side of the global South (interviews 2, 7). Global North states were perceived as having a weak intellectual case for their defensive position (interview 13), and their negotiating approaches – reported attempts to obstruct the process, to "kill" proposals, the alleged lack of will to negotiate in good faith – became a matter to be discussed in newspapers (Financial Times, 2023). Perhaps worse than losing a vote, global North states thus felt that they no longer controlled the public discourse and the narratives, which post-colonial thinkers see as the deeper sources of power and domination. Commenting on the resolution, one African state explained that Africa was tired of the "narratives of local governance and corruption to explain the problems they faced" (UN, 2024b, p. 17).

---

9   However, this request came after Nigeria had requested a vote on the United Kingdom (UK) amendment, thus essentially forcing a vote on the resolution itself.

2.4   Summit of the Future: stalemate and disputes

The Summit of the Future process, arguably the UN's dominant topic in the period 2022-2024, provides another example of the existing discontent of the global South towards the global North, although with an opposite effect: Had the tax resolution put something in motion on an issue the global South wanted, then the Summit of the Future demonstrated the current limitations of global cooperation on an issue significant parts of the G77 did not want. It sprung from the Our Common Agenda process in which the UN Secretary-General presented his vision for improved, more efficient and inclusive multilateralism and measures to increase the participation and representation of the global South in the UN's global governance platforms (interview 9). However, faced with political and procedural differences, preparations for and negotiations around the Summit, originally bound to take place in September 2023, became a venue where the global South's demands were met with the unwillingness of the global North to commit to meaningful changes (interviews 8, 9, 12, 13). The G77, and specifically its more "radical" members together with Russia, also contributed to the stalemate (see Sections 4 and 5), hanging on to rigid positions and insisting on certain practices (for example, negotiating paragraph by paragraph behind closed doors) which slowed down the already complex and loaded process (Beisheim, 2024).

The result was a protracted process that fell far behind the initial plans. The summit ultimately had to be postponed by one year until September 2024 at the request of the G77 (Beisheim & Weinlich, 2023; Lynch, 2023a). Additionally, in the first half of 2023, all preparations for the event were halted at the insistence of the G77, urging the UN and its member states to focus on development issues and the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) Summit, instead of working on another parallel process. G77 countries were also rather pessimistic about the summit. They doubted that it could lead to substantive and meaningful reforms to the existing system and deliver on their key interests (interviews 8, 9, 12). The summit was seen as an initiative driven solely by the Secretary-General and influenced by global North-thinking. The global North for its part took a defensive position, not willing to give away control and offering more "cosmetic" changes (interview 10; also in 11).

In terms of policy, the summit process revealed profound global differences. During consulta-tions on the Summit and its main outcome document[10], the Pact for the Future, the reform of the international financial architecture became a major contentious issue. There was a broad consensus among countries of the global South that they required increased participation in the international financial institutions and more available funding to address their climate and debt burdens. With greater self-confidence in recent years (Thakur, 2020, p. 307), but also with pressing struggles linked to increasing levels of debt, the G77 put respective demands on the table (see Passarelli & Justino, 2024; Gowan, 2024b) which were either not fully taken into consideration by the global North or not in a meaningful way. While the general sentiment of the global South is that reforms will not matter if the entire multilateral system is not reformed (interview 26), states of the global North did not seem to be prepared to make meaningful concessions on Southern representation, specifically in global economic governance. Although maintaining the official narrative about a need for more representation and a voice for the global South (interview 30; also, for instance, UN, 2022a, p. 25), global North states acknowledged that they did not want to relinquish power (interviews 15, 25) and sought to keep the status quo: "We have to show that the current system is able to meet the needs – that is our moment of truth" (interview 11).

---

10 The Global Digital Compact and the Declaration for Future Generations were adopted as annexes.

At the moment of writing, the second revision of the Pact for the Future draft was not very promising. Despite calls for "bolder actions" (South Africa[11]), "more operational and binding language" (Egypt), and "a pact of actions" rather than "a pact of good intentions" (Cameroon), the second revision has only increased in size and has fallen short of providing more concrete and actionable commitments (Surasky, 2024). The feeling in New York among delegates and observers was that, compared to 2015 when the 2030 Agenda was agreed, no similar diplomatic achievement would be feasible in the face of increased tensions that have to do with the broader political situation (which includes the war in Gaza), accusations of double-standards, and unfulfilled promises (interviews 8, 12, 13; Beisheim, 2024). One global North source noted the spirit of universality of the 2030 Agenda – an achievement that embodies the UN Charter's "we together", gives meaning to the High-Level Political Forum (a forum where all UN member states account for their national sustainable development efforts) and serves as the basis for searching for common solutions – seemed to have disappeared, whereas patterns of North-South confrontation are being revived (interview 14).

2.5 Voting behaviour: a high degree of unity maintained

After the qualitative insights presented above, we now turn to a statistical analysis of voting behaviour at the General Assembly. Voting is important to study because it provides a relatively objective measure of North-South antagonism at the UN, even though it can only capture a specific dimension of a larger phenomenon. An important starting point is the observation – briefly noted above – that, as per customary practice, most General Assembly resolutions are adopted by consensus, that is, without a vote. It is only in cases where member states do not achieve consensus on a draft resolution that a vote may be requested (as was the case with the tax resolution). Resolutions are then adopted by a simple majority of members "present and voting" (UN Charter, Art. 18, 3).[12] From this, we can derive a proxy for the degree of North-South antagonism: The more divided member states are, the more votes we can expect. We analysed voting since 2015, considering resolutions from all five General Assembly committees.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the number of votes climbed to a maximum of 110 in 2018/2019 (the 73rd regular session of the UN General Assembly), before falling back to approximately where it was in 2015. The increase of 35 resolutions decided by voting compared to 2015/2016 appears moderately significant. It represents an increase of approximately 10 per cent given an average of 321 resolutions adopted every year.[13] It also coincides with the emergence of more assertive language around this time, as noted above. A partial explanation, pointing in the same direction, might come from increased G77 activity. If we focus on the subset of resolutions sponsored by the G77 itself (depicted in orange), we also see an increase from 5 in 2015/2016 to 15 in 2018/2019, again followed by decline. This can only be a partial explanation, though, as the 10 additional G77-sponsored resolutions cannot fully account for the increase in the 35 resolutions adopted by voting. Whatever we can say about the increase, there also seems to have been a normalisation in recent years. At the time of writing, it is not clear where the longer-term trend is headed.

---

11 This, along with the following references to Egypt and Cameroon, are from the informal consultations on the Summit of the Future, 15 May 2024, available at https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1noa92u89

12 Except for some categories of "important issues" such elections of members to the Security Council where a two-third's majority is required (UN Charter, Art. 18, 2).

13 The total number of resolutions adopted by consensus or by voting each year remains relatively constant around the average of 321 resolutions per General Assembly session; the maximum (347) was reached in 2018/2019, the minimum (305) in 2015/2016.

Figure 2: Resolutions adopted by vote
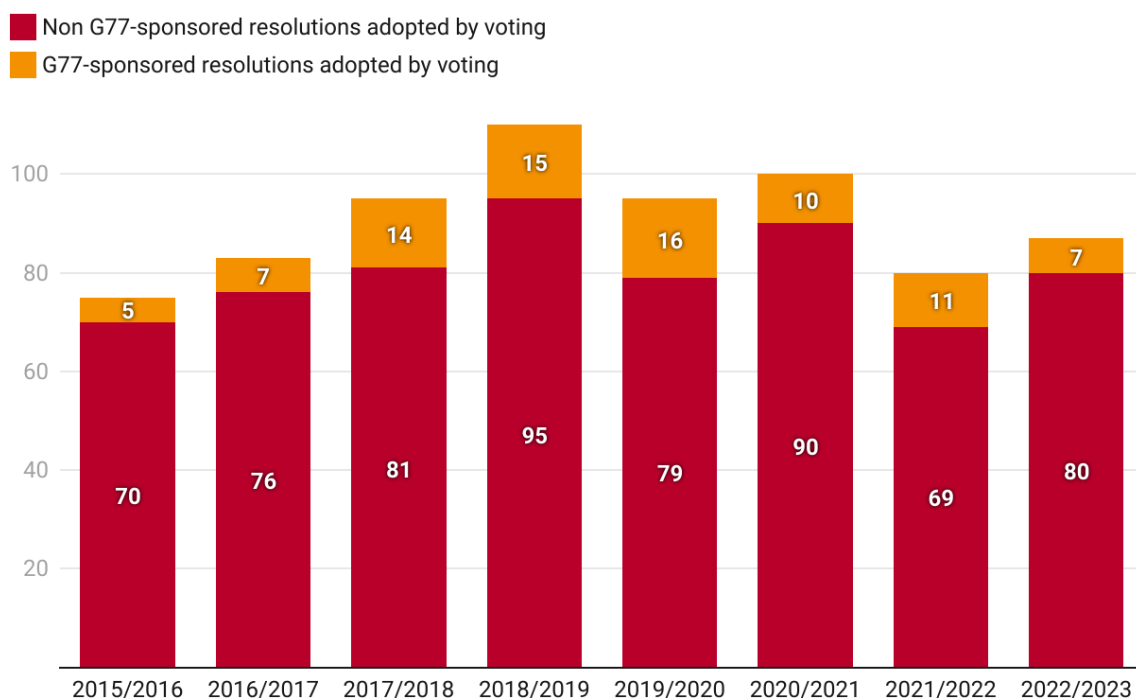
Source: Authors' calculations, based on UN Digital Library information. Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: The columns show the number of UN General Assembly resolutions adopted by voting based on regular sessions of the General Assembly. The orange segments show the number of resolutions that have been sponsored by the G77 and adopted by voting (the overall number of G77-sponsored resolutions is bigger). The data suggests a moderately significant, but temporary, rise in North-South antagonism, as far as voting is concerned.

Our analysis comprises resolutions from all five Committees, as noted above. When we disaggregate G77-sponsored resolutions by the committee of origin,[14] we find that most of them come from the Second Committee, which represents the G77's main area of influence in the General Assembly (see Figure 3). This indicates that the North-South antagonism does indeed play out in mainly the economic and financial field and is not driven by human rights or security issues.

---

14 The committees are organised thematically: the First Committee discusses disarmament and international security affairs; the Second, economic and financial affairs; the Third, social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs; the Fourth, special political and decolonisation affairs; and the Fifth, administrative and budgetary affairs.

Figure 3: G77-sponsored and adopted resolutions by committee of origin

Source: Authors' calculations, based on UN Digital Library information. Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: G77-sponsored resolutions according to the General Assembly committee from where they originate. A small number of resolutions was directly presented to the General Assembly plenary (represented in grey). This analysis confirms that the North-South antagonism centres on economic and financial issues, the realm of both the G77 and the second committee.

Voting data also allow us to analyse the unity of the G77, which is another proxy for North-South antagonism. A more united G77 will generally mean a higher degree of polarisation. To measure the group's unity, we look at the "defection ratio", a concept suggested by Iida (1988). Both against-votes and abstentions[15] are counted as defections from the group position. The calculation of the defection ratio is simple: Following Iida (1988, p. 377), the total number of defections in the General Assembly is counted for a given session and then divided by the number of resolutions adopted by voting and the number of G77 members present in the General Assembly. Multiplying by 100 gives the percentage. We only consider adopted resolutions, but not votes on amendments and resolutions that did not receive a majority. An objection might be that, in this model, defections are measured not against the G77 position (which strictly speaking cannot be known from voting data) but against the resolution itself. However, the two scenarios are typically the same, except for the rare circumstance where a minority of the group votes with global North states against a G77 position (see subsection 4.2.2 for such a case). In general, the G77 wins votes (the question is only: with what margin?), and if a resolution has no prospect of getting passed, a vote would generally not be requested in the first place by either the G77 or global North members.

---

15 Abstentions can have different causes: They can be a way of avoiding a politically inconvenient against-vote, but they can also result from a lack of guidance from capital or capacity (and the inability to adopt an informed position). Following Iida, we did not include absences in the calculation of the defection ratio. Member states may stay absent for the same reasons they abstain, but generally the inability to participate will play a bigger role than political considerations.
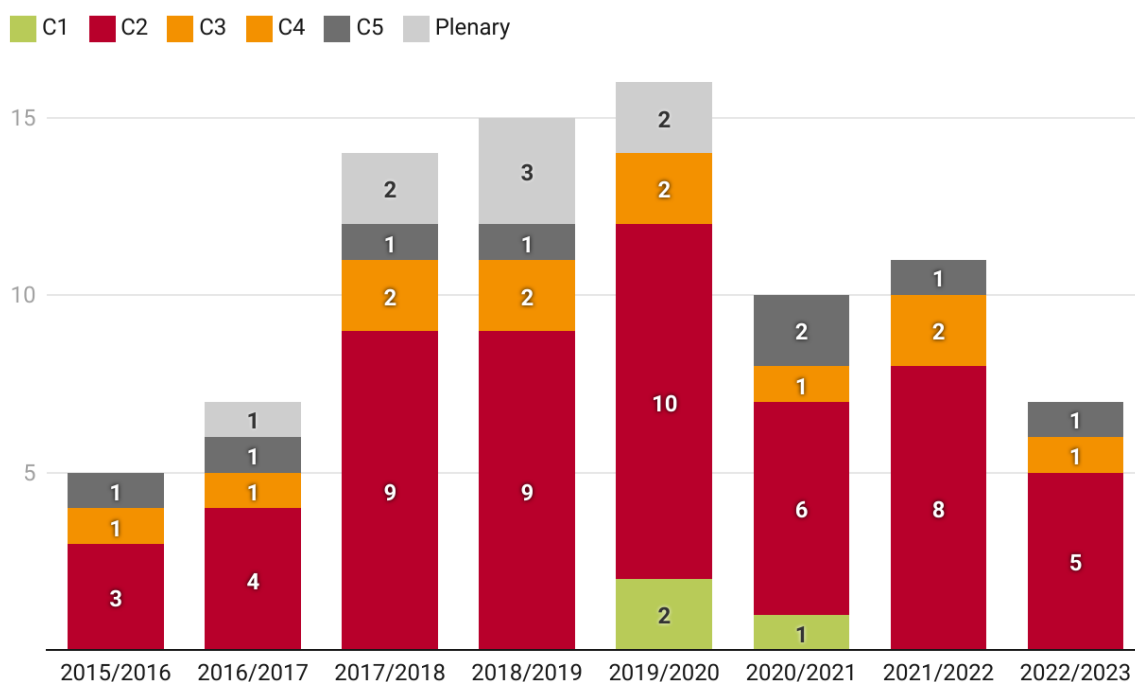
Figure 4: G77 members' defection ratio
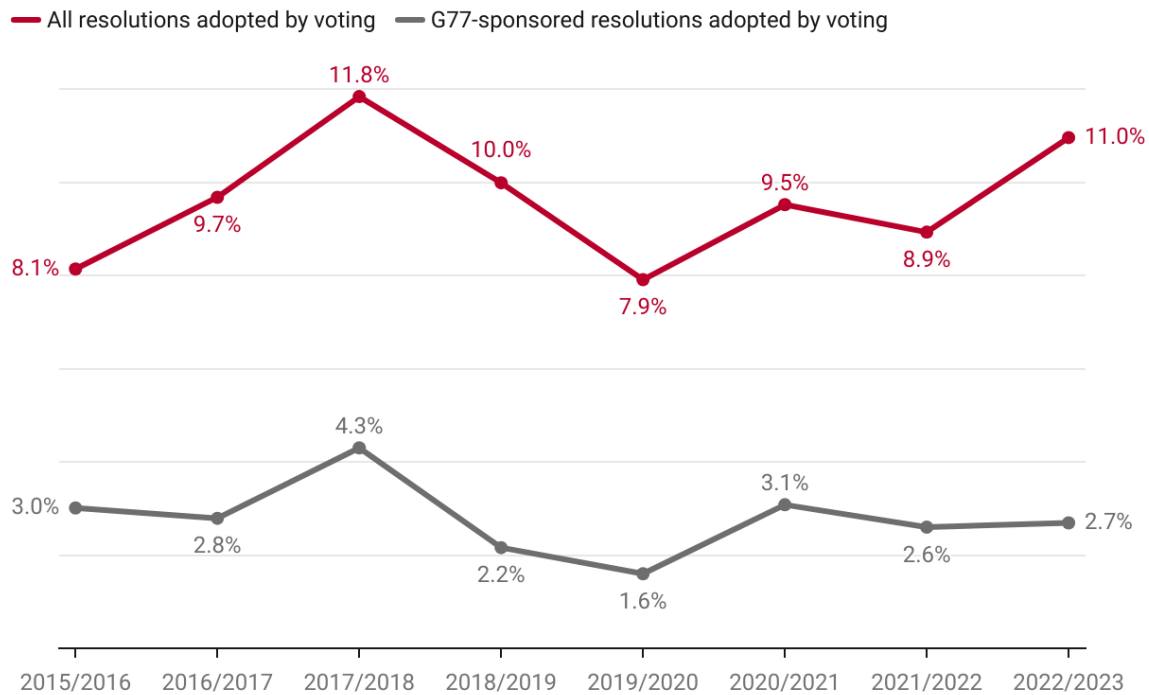
Source: Authors' calculations, based on UN Digital Library information. Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: Defection ratio of the G77 in General Assembly resolutions, based on the methodology of Iida (1988). The lower the defection ratio, the higher the group unity. On average, only 10 per cent of the G77 defect from the presumed group position (red line). The defection ratio drops to approximately 3 per cent when only G77-sponsored resolutions are considered (grey line).

As we can see from Figure 4, there has been a fairly consistent degree of group unity over the last decade. The average defection ratio is approximately 10 per cent when we consider all the resolutions voted on, and 3 per cent when referring only to G77-sponsored resolutions voted on in the General Assembly. It is not surprising that, when the group sponsors a resolution, it is more united in terms of its voting behaviour. There is no significant trend in the defection ratio, meaning that states of the global North faced a fairly united G77 when it came to voting. It would be difficult to explain this unity if not through the effect of group politics. While the ups and downs are small compared to the overall level of unity, it is noteworthy that the year with the lowest defection ratio (2019/2020, or the 74th session) was also the one in which the group sponsored the most resolutions (see Figure 3). That particular year coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the discussions on global access to vaccines and medical treatments. This points to an observation made by a G77 delegate that global crisis tends to strengthen the G77's unity (interview 8).

Figure 5: Variation in G77 members' defection ratio

— High-unity resolutions   — Average-unity resolutions   — Low-unity resolutions
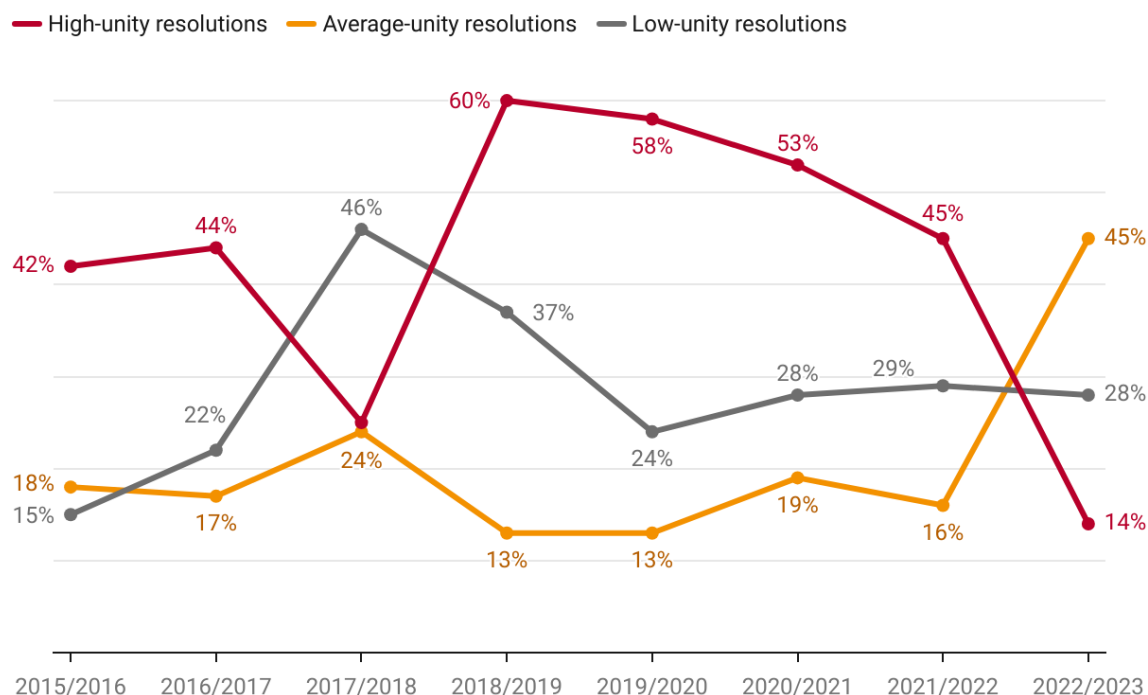
Source: Authors' calculations, based on the UN Digital Library information. Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: The graph shows the number of resolutions per session that were adopted with high, medium and low G77 unity (defined through defection ratios below 5 per cent, between 5 and 10 per cent, and above 10 per cent). The scourge of high-unity resolutions in 2018/2019 is notable, as is the reversal in 2022/2023.

We can add further nuance to this analysis by zooming in on the defection ratio. We distinguish three categories of resolutions based on defection ratios below 5 per cent, from 5 to 10 per cent, and above 10 per cent. This corresponds to resolutions on which the G77 can be said, based on the 10 per cent average defection ratio, to display comparatively high, average and low unity. As Figure 5 shows, there is a significant increase in high-unity resolutions that went up in 2018/2019 but have been on the decline since, and in particular during 2022/2023, the last General Assembly session covered by our analysis. Complementary to that, low-unity resolutions have been relatively few over the last decade but rose sharply in 2022/2023 – however, it is too early to see if this indicates a permanent trend. Overall, the trend so far confirms the "rise and fall" pattern of North-South antagonism noted in the statistical analysis above. A full explanation of this voting pattern is beyond the capacity of this study. The swelling and ebbing of global crises might play a role, as noted above, but also intra-group dynamics related to the leadership of G77 chairs (see Section 3). The main take-away from the entire voting analysis is that the G77 continues to show a consistently high degree of unity when it comes to voting. This speaks to the North-South antagonism in the UN General Assembly.

Interim conclusion

The analysis in this section shows that North-South relations have become more fraught in recent years, and to a concerning degree. Trust is at a low point and frustration at a high point, on both sides. Global North delegates feel the G77 does not listen and is not available as a partner for constructive problem-solving. G77 member states advance identical claims about the global North. While one could dismiss these issues as unavoidable features in the search for consensus among the UN's 193 sovereign member states, the analysis we provided indicates that the global dialogue has worsened in recent years to a point of significant

dysfunction. If we distinguish process and policy, there appears to be an element of unnecessary confrontation, caused by group politics, whereas the interests of both sides are perhaps not as irreconcilable as they seem, or at least only on a small set of issues. Indeed, there are also notable successes in the global dialogue, such as the ground-breaking resolution on artificial intelligence (AI) in 2024, which was co-sponsored by the US and China, adopted by consensus and which established the UN's global governance role in this area (Lederer, 2024). Yet, as much as this example provides a positive perspective, for the moment it seems to be the exemption that proves the rule.

The growing North-South antagonism, and the frustrations it brings, may be symptoms of global power shifts, and they might also not be entirely separate from growing East-West geopolitical tensions. As the convergence in global economic power has been a major underlying factor in shaping global political relations in recent years (see Figure 6), it would not be a surprise to see it percolate into the UN setting. We might then interpret practices like "blunt deletions", dismissals of the consensus principle, rhetorical blaming, attacks on opponents' red lines, and so on as power games that test the opponent's strength and willingness to hold his ground and through which, step by step, the power balance shifts. If that assessment is correct, then the UN has indeed become a battleground on which global power shifts make themselves felt (Haug et al., 2024; Heine, 2023; Hogan & Patrick, 2024; Ikenberry, 2024; Thakur, 2020).

Figure 6: Change in the share of global GDP
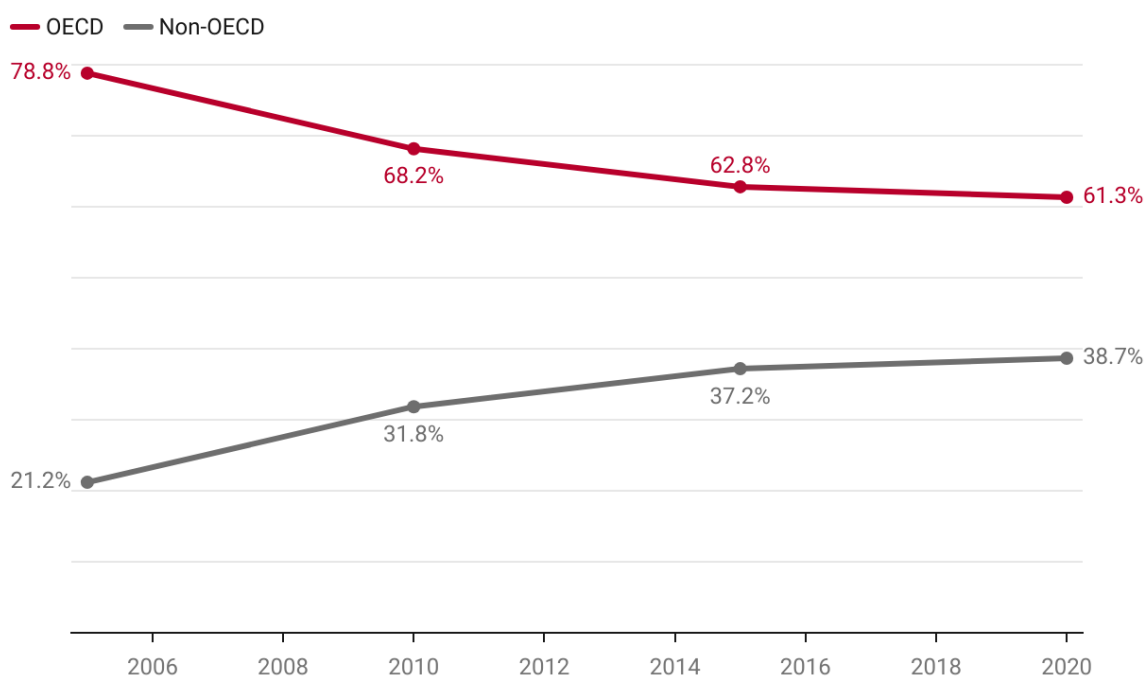
Source: Authors' representation, based on UN Statistical Yearbook (UN, 2023a)

Notes: The graph shows the economic convergence of the OECD (a proxy for the global North) and the "rest" (Non-OECD), a proxy for the G77. This convergence is both significant, compared over the last 15 years, and incomplete given the gap that still exists.

Yet, confrontation is not without alternatives. One can disagree about everything, but still maintain the mechanisms of cooperation needed to bridge differences and manage more complicated relationships. It requires self-restraint from both sides to check the self-reinforcing tendencies of antagonism. As one source (from the G77) reflected, conflict also creates a "comfort zone", as the common opponent unites the group (interview 20). But giving in to the temptation of conflict will not help solve problems, and any unity that comes out of it will be

shallow and difficult to put towards constructive purposes. The need for cooperation continues under a new balance of power. With that, we turn to the internal decision-making of the G77 to analyse how it is prepared to contribute to an "effective multilateralism", to cite an expression from the Our Common Agenda process (UN, 2021b, pp. 4, 67; HLAB [(High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism], 2023).

3 The G77's internal decision-making

This section explores the procedural aspects of decision-making in the G77. In principle, this could be a simple affair: According to a G77 delegate we interviewed, there is "no defined procedure" (interview 8). Delegates come together and decide by consensus. Yet, the absence of formal rules does not make the process any simpler. To the contrary, decision-making in a 134-member group is inherently complex, as the consensus-approach invites the emergence of informal practices. Inconspicuous details of the process, such as how information flows, or who is in charge of facilitating processes, can then have a significant influence on the outcome. The question that guides this section is to what extent the G77's largely informal processes conform to the ideal of inclusive decision-making through consensus. Inscribed in the consensus-approach is the assumption that the inclusiveness of the group's decision-making is a factor for its unity and strength. Decisions that emerge from an inclusive deliberative process will carry more weight and legitimacy compared to a process in which a faction of the group takes things into their own hand. The latter can still result in a forceful external representation of the group, but one that fails to meet the group's own aspirations and falls short of its role in aggregating interests for negotiations in the General Assembly.

3.1 Structure of the group

Before we delve into decision-making processes, we begin by reviewing the basic structure of the G77 as it presents itself today. The "supreme decision-making body" of the G77 is the South Summit, a relatively late innovation in the group's history.[16] Such summits happen irregularly, with the first one taking place in 2000 (in Cuba), and two subsequent ones in 2005 (Qatar) and 2024 (Uganda). Other summits during the last decade took place in 2014 on the occasion of the group's fiftieth anniversary (Bolivia) and 2023 on the topic of science, technology and innovation (Cuba) and climate change (United Arab Emirates). An immediate insight becomes apparent from the – until recently – relative rarity of summit meetings: As the top leadership of government is only involved in a limited way, the group does not operate at the same political level as the African Union, the G20, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South America) or other clubs that hold annual summits. Ministerial Meetings are more frequent. In 1977, the tradition of the annual meeting of ministers for foreign affairs before the UN General Assembly High-level Week was introduced (Sauvant, 1981, p. 80). In addition, special Ministerial Meetings may take place but appear to be even rarer than summits judging from the G77's official website and the list of "major meetings" presented there.

The group has regional "chapters" at various UN locations, specifically in New York, Geneva, Vienna, Rome, Washington (the Group of 24), Nairobi, and Paris (the latter two appear inactive). The regional G77 chapters operate independently of the New York chapter. They elect their own "chairpersons",[17] have their own secretariats, and there appears to be minimal coordination among them. Their relevance varies. The chapters in Geneva, where historically the G77

---

16 See the website of the G77 https://www.g77.org/doc/

17 In the G77's Rome chapter, not member states, but individuals are listed as "chairpersons" (G77, 2024c).

originated within the context of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (Sauvant, 1981), and Vienna are political forces in their own right, whereas the one in Rome (which we covered through field research) provides the example of a rather thin G77 presence. In Rome, the G77 holds one meeting a month where it seeks to build "common understanding" on agenda items discussed in intergovernmental bodies (interviews 20; also in 23), but it rarely goes so far as to produce a joint statement. In fact, one G77 source from Rome recounted that they had only seen two G77 statements in the past four years (interviews 24). That contrasts with the New York chapter where, by default, the G77 assumes a leading role particularly in General Assembly negotiations related to economic and development issues (Second Committee) and regarding the UN's regular budget (Fifth Committee).

The Chair of the G77 in New York is held by the diplomatic mission of the respective member state. The G77 chair rotates on a regional basis. The region whose turn it is to chair the G77 for the upcoming year is responsible for nominating a country from within their region. This nomination process typically occurs through informal consultations "on the basis of a country's identification with the work of the Group of 77" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 78). The chair is then formally designated "by acclamation" (G77, 2023c) in the annual Ministerial Meeting and assumes office in mid-January of the following year. The period of office is one year, which speaks to the group's aspiration of being inclusive as no country can develop a permanent hold on the chairmanship. A small secretariat located in the UN headquarters building supports the group, mostly through administrative support functions (interviews 12, 26). The political coordination is the responsibility of the chair. It might be assumed that, with its size of 134 members from all world regions, the group would have sub-divisions with their own coordination processes, but this is not the case. There are neither formal nor indeed informal regional groupings in the G77, and those loose alliances that do exist, such as the least developed countries or small island states groups, are not recognised as subgroups. The G77 in New York is just one big group.

The list of past G77 chairs in New York deserves some attention (see Table 1). It has been noted in interviews with sources from the global North that most of the G77 chairs do not exactly fit the description of a typical developing country (interviews 7, 11). Chairs seem to fall into two groups that stand out either by their relatively high degree of geopolitical entanglement such as Egypt, Pakistan, Cuba, Palestine, Sudan, Yemen or (and sometimes overlapping) as rather smaller countries such as Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Guyana – countries that because of their smallness may be trusted for their neutrality, but have little diplomatic capacity and may be susceptible to external pressure. Global North states do not always fully understand what one delegate referred to as "curious choices" of the chair (interview 11). They assume that the group's raison d'être is founded in the desire for economic development and a fairer international system (see Swart & Lund 2011, p. 20). Yet, none of the countries that positioned themselves as supporters of the Summit of the Future process[18] – if that is an indicator for an interest in multilateral solutions – were appointed as chair during the last two decades. The sentiment we gathered from global North sources is that the choice of chairs has not always helped to inspire trust in the group. This might to a certain extent be intentional, in the sense that the G77 may deliberately appoint chairs known for their willingness to take a hard-line stance against the global North.[19] Internal mistrust and regional rivalries might explain why the group, or regions in the group, rarely select more powerful members.

---

18 For example, Viet Nam, Namibia, Costa Rica or Colombia according to one source (interview 9).

19 This is perhaps an explanation why, according to one perplexed interview partner, the G77 put forward Saudi Arabia as the negotiator on gender: because Saudi Arabia has stronger positions than most G77 countries on the topic (interview 1).

Table 1: Past chairs of the G77 (New York chapter)

1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
1990 - **Bolivia** 1991 - **Ghana** 1992 - **Pakistan** 1993 - **Colombia** 1994 - **Algeria** 1995 - **Philippines** 1996 - **Costa Rica** 1997 - **Tanzania** 1998 - **Indonesia** 1999 - **Guyana**	2000 - **Nigeria** 2001 - **Iran** 2002 - **Venezuela** 2003 - **Morocco** 2004 - **Qatar** 2005 - **Jamaica** 2006 - **South Africa** 2007 - **Pakistan** 2008 - **Antigua and Barbuda** 2009 - **Sudan**	2010 - **Yemen** 2011 - **Argentina** 2012 - **Algeria** 2013 - **Fiji** 2014 - **Bolivia** 2015 - **South Africa** 2016 - **Thailand** 2017 - **Ecuador** 2018 - **Egypt** 2019 - **Palestine**	2020 - **Guyana** 2021 - **Guinea** 2022 - **Pakistan** 2023 - **Cuba** 2024 - **Uganda**

Source: G77 (2024d)

3.2   Consensus-based decision-making

The defining feature of the G77 and one of its proud traditions is its commitment to making decisions by consensus without exception, a principle officially stipulated in 1979 during the fourth Ministerial Meeting (Iida, 1988). As noted above, even the chair is appointed by a consensus decision. The consensus method is well-established in social and political decision-making, and we will start this discussion with some conceptual remarks. Consensus comes with egalitarian and inclusive aspirations and is often adopted as an integrative mechanism in otherwise loosely connected groups. In an ideal scenario, consensus "develops when all views have been heard, understood and considered, and a decision emerges that each party can accept or can live with" (Rietig et al., 2023, p. 222). The consensus-approach should therefore be inclusive, leaving no one behind. Consensus also means that there are formally no winners and losers, which lends legitimacy to a decision reached in this way.

In practice, however, the consensus-method opens the door to certain shortcomings. By its definition, consensus should not be confused with unanimity (everybody holding the same position or voting the same way) – this would render the concept impractical as it would make it impossible to go beyond the smallest common denominator. In the UN context, consensus is therefore "understood as the absence of objection rather than a particular majority" (UN, s. a.; UN, 2005, p. 457). In UN climate framework negotiations, there typically comes a point where negotiation leaders determine whether all parties are on board or, if not, are willing to "stand aside" (Rietig et al., 2023, p. 222). Consensus thus means the absence of formal objections. However, without a formal process – or even the inclusive deliberation leading to that point – the consensus approach can fall short of the ideal of a "sincere process of adjustment" (NAM [Non-Aligned Movement], quoted in Sauvant, 1981, p. 17) and lead to decisions that are significantly unrepresentative of the collective stance of the group.

Without a quorum, for example, "absence of objection" can mean that a minority – or hypothetically even just one party – determines the decision. An unregulated process of consensus-based decision-making also opens the doors to social pressure, benefiting the more influential and conflict-prone members of the group. Weak members might be afraid to speak freely and challenge the more powerful interests in the group. Consensus can mean the "steamrolling of smaller powers by the dominant interests" (Narlikar, 2002, p. 175). It is therefore not to be confused with democratic processes of guaranteed voice and representation. Rather, it can become a vehicle for the more powerful members to capture and speak on behalf of the group. A striking example took place at the General Assembly itself, where, in the 1980s, the US pressed for the application of the consensus method in negotiations on the UN's regular budget,

thereby ensuring that it could not be outvoted by a majority from the global South (Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 16; Laurenti, 2008, p. 689).

These pathological elements seem to be at play in the G77 as well, where the challenge of merging the interests of 134 member states under almost anarchic conditions is immense. In terms of organisational set-up, the only rule that seems to apply is that delegates need to be in the room and participate in the exchange if they want to influence decisions. This works in favour of countries with larger capacities. The group does not have a mechanism that would allow members to submit comments or proposals by digital means. There are generally no virtual meetings. There are also no protocols taken and shared, which may encourage frank exchanges in the room, while disadvantaging those outside (Sauvant, 1981, p. 17). All this results in limited participation. The factual number of those actively engaged in decision-making appears to be much smaller than the group's total membership. Some of our sources said that, in New York, only a core group of 10 members are really engaged in G77 decision-making (interview 13); others estimated 15 (interview 14) or "less than 30" (interview 2). The specific countries that were named at least seem to ensure some basic regional representation.[20] A similarly small circle exists in Rome, where only 20 members were said to participate in meetings (interview 20). This suggests that there is an in-group within the G77 acting as an informal executive board and a larger out-group that is only sporadically involved and may be insufficiently informed to understand the political dynamic behind each decision-making process (interview 29). While in the 1970s the G77 had a 27-member working group ("Group of 27") that prepared decisions for the plenary based on the latter's mandates (Sauvant, 1981, p. 76), we heard nothing in the interviews to the effect that today's small circle operates on the basis of an agreed delegation of tasks and within a defined accountability structure.

G77 coordination appears to be a time-intensive process. Consultation meetings take place almost daily, according to the UN's meeting schedule displayed in the General Assembly building, and in relation to ongoing negotiations. "We can talk for hours about one para", a source from the G77 said (interview 12). Meetings often run late into the early morning and the weekend (interview 26). Even global North delegates have noted that for the G77, it "can take days and weeks to agree" on something and return to negotiation (interview 11; also in 15, 16). Such lengthy deliberations speak to the difficulties of bringing diverging interests together. They also seem to suggest that, despite the limited number of members involved in active decision-making, the group's diversity plays out in these processes (see Section 4). In situations where the G77 struggles to reach a common position, the chair can be asked to offer a ruling, but this was said to happen rarely as the chair is expected to play a facilitating role only – the chair position does not have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the group (interview 12). Discussions typically take place at the level of experts but can also be raised to the level of ambassadors to resolve points of contention (interview 26). Either way, an immediate implication of lengthy deliberations is that "the resulting positions are not likely to be very flexible" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 17).

The process of bringing the group together also depends on the leadership credentials of the chair. According to our sources, there is considerable variance in how G77 chairs have conducted their functions in recent history (interviews 5, 27). It was noted in interviews that, during the last part of the SDGs negotiations, the G77 leader at the time – the permanent representative of South Africa – was a widely respected man of great skill, thematic competence and a natural authority who managed to steer the group well while also acting as a trusted bridge to global North member states (interview 27). The same was said about the Namibian co-facilitator in the 2030 Agenda process (interview 7). The more recent chairs – Egypt, Pakistan, and Cuba – had a reputation for a more vigorous, less inclusive leadership style that was said to have caused some unusual discontent in the group (interview 28).

---

20 The "active ones" were said to include Cuba, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China, Pakistan, Colombia, Brazil, Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago (interview 2).

It can be helpful for heuristic purposes to contrast the decision-making processes in the G77 with those of other groups in the UN (see Box 2). One is the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), created in 1961 by (mostly) global South states as a forum that would help them keep away from Cold War bloc politics and advance their common economic interests. Compared to the G77, and based on official sources, the NAM has stronger vertical and horizontal differentiations that should be factors for inclusion and accountability: it has Ministerial Meetings that review the implementation of summit decisions; a coordinating bureau that holds the threads together; and working groups that report back to the coordinating bureau. It was suggested by a source from a NAM/G77 member state that the three-year tenures in NAM allow the chair and coordinators to understand topics better and to be more effective in their second and third years (interview 26). Greater expertise may translate into more pragmatic decision-making, a factor against politicisation. Another group is the EU. In the context of the General Assembly, the EU runs a rather lean structure without much differentiation (in that aspect it is similar to the G77), but with three notable differences to the G77 (interviews 11, 16, 31): First, the chair role does not rotate but rests with the EU delegation, which is embedded in an organisation that holds considerable expertise on issues from which burden-sharers also benefit. Second, the coordination does not require in-person presence; this means that members can submit positions efficiently in writing. Third, there is an information system that ensures that all parties, present or not in New York, are constantly well-informed about negotiation processes.

Box 2: Decision-making arrangements in other UN groups

Decision-making in the NAM

The NAM is in many respects similar to the G77. Founded only three years earlier, with no formal structures as well, it is just slightly larger with a membership of 144; most of these overlap with the G77. It is the other important global South alliance in the UN with a focus on security issues but overlapping on economic issues – the latter is represented by a Standing Ministerial Committee on Economic Cooperation (NAM, s.a.). Yet, despite the similarities, NAM's decision-making is very different. The NAM has a summit every three years, and two ministerial ones every year – one just before the UN General Assembly High-level Week, the other in the course of the year. "The Ministerial Conference is held for the purpose of reviewing the development and implementation of decisions of the preceding Summit, to prepare for the following one, and to discuss matters of urgency." (NAM, 2006, p. 3) The chair, appointed on the basis of regional rotation, serves for three years. NAM has a small Coordinating Bureau composed of Permanent Representatives in New York. There are 8 working groups, each chaired by one member state for a period of at least three years (NAM, 2006, p. 12). These groups serve as coordination structures and are mandated to provide regular reports on their activities to the Coordinating Bureau. NAM has in the past set up an ad hoc panel of economists for advice on key challenges. There are also contact groups and task forces. The Coordinating Bureau is stronger than the G77 secretariat and has in the past been mandated to conduct studies for the group (NAM 2006, p. 9).

Decision-making in the EU

The European group with its 27 members is much smaller than the G77 and comprises a relatively homogeneous set of countries that are also bound together by the EU's supranational structures. Coordination is provided by the permanent delegation of the European Union; the relevant staff do not rotate on an annual basis and have the support of a reasonably well-staffed mission, with additional expertise being supplied by the EU's headquarters in Brussels. The process of coordinating common positions for negotiations is based on written inputs by member states to the EU coordinator, who then integrates these inputs into a common position. In-person meetings are not part of the routine. Member states may run EU "lines to take" through state capitals (interview 15). Where the EU coordinator cannot resolve differences among member states, the issue will be raised to the level of ambassadors. There is systematic reporting back from negotiations in various formats (specific to negotiations, but also through weekly briefs) to member states in New York and to capitals, including the EU headquarters in Brussels where EU member states also deliberate on UN policies.

3.3   The issue of diplomatic capacity

Another factor restricting equal representation in the G77 is the limited diplomatic capacity of Permanent Missions in New York. "The issue of bandwidth is real", as one close observer noted (interview 13; also in 27). Although it affects all Permanent Missions, including global North countries, the problem of insufficient staff numbers is particularly acute for many developing countries. For them, it can mean losing their ability to participate in the G77's decision-making. The demand for diplomatic capacity appears staggering. A delegate from a small developing country explained that it would take 50 per cent of her weekly worktime simply to sit in all regular G77 coordination meetings (interview 12), and then there are meetings around negotiations that can run late into the night and into weekends. With so much time being absorbed by meetings, delegates have little capacity left to immerse themselves in substantial issues. Their capital will also often not provide support to them. The Summit of the Future process, with its series of lengthy reports issued by the Secretariat, presented a particular challenge (not only) for smaller missions – there simply was no time to digest all this information.

This has implications. Lack of capacity translates into exclusion and reform-averseness in all UN-related matters. Some delegates may feel that a certain matter has relevancy for their country, and yet they cannot engage. "I can't argue with G77 colleagues on artificial intelligence," one G77 delegate allegedly complained, because he had neither received a set position from his capital nor had a sound analysis on this topic (interview 27). Yet, artificial intelligence is a prime example of a policy issue that affects all countries and where in particular smaller ones should have an interest in rules that are not dictated exclusively by the leading economies (interview 27). Observers of UN processes see a larger pattern in how a simple lack of capacity ends up having an outsized impact on group positions, and that dynamic was on display during the Summit of the Future preparations in 2023 and 2024: unable to fully analyse an issue, developing countries allegedly "automatically" defaulted towards established concepts, opposing reform even when, in the opinion of pundits, a proposed reform should have been in their interest (interview 3). Or they effectively gave up engaging with the G77 (interview 2), leaving decision-making to those member states that had more capacity to engage. For sure, some G77 members will simply trust the G77 to represent their interests, but for others, their absence from the process is not voluntary and they do feel their inability to have their interests represented against opposing views and/or more influential members (interview 9, 12). During the Summit of the Future process, it appeared that a relatively small in-group defined the G77's hesitant position in the early formative stage while, behind the scenes, several countries told people in the Secretariat and global North delegates that they had a much more open attitude towards the Summit of the Future process (interview 9).[21]

There have been attempts to support smaller countries. On specific issues, coalitions of small developing countries, think tanks or NGOs and global North member states have closely worked together. Through such forms of cooperation, developing countries benefit from the expertise of (global North) think tanks and diplomatic support from global North member states. Even small forms of support, such as dispatching interns from New York-based universities to small missions, can give these missions the capacity to monitor negotiations and stay informed (interview 27). These unconventional forms of North-South cooperation may not be practical for all thematic areas – on some issues, the interests of small countries may not sufficiently overlap with global North interests to have a productive collaboration at the level of states (but there will always be think tanks and NGOs arguing for the global South's interests). Nevertheless, these examples speak to the potential benefit of working across group-divisions and together with non-state actors.

---

21 Global North member states also struggle with capacity issues but seem to have greater trust that the Secretary-General, whom by default they generally support, steers the process in the right direction policy-wise (with the exception of international financial institutional reform).

3.4   General Assembly negotiations

The production of positions cannot be viewed entirely separately from negotiations at the level of the General Assembly. There are usually several rounds of negotiations, during and in between which the groups have to adjust their positions. The interplay of two consensus-based systems – the G77 and the General Assembly – seems to lead to a potentiation of difficulties, and it can also produce its own shortcomings. With several dozens of resolutions to be negotiated every year, the chair cannot always represent the group itself. Often, it needs to rely on burden-sharers from the group. The set-up for negotiations is thus that the G77, facilitated by the chair, selects a delegate from its ranks to be the (internal) coordinator and negotiator for a specific process. According to one source from the G77, there is no mechanism for appointing negotiators; "whoever volunteers" because of an interest in the topic will get the job (interview 5). Other members of the G77, and in particular a delegate from the mission that holds the chair, might be present in negotiations but will typically not engage (interview 14). Apart from the G77 negotiators, there are negotiators from the EU, Canada, Australia, New Zealand (referred to as "CANZ"), the UK, and the US taking part in General Assembly negotiations.

Two issues came up in our interviews regarding the G77's role in General Assembly negotiations: the rigidity of the G77 positions, and concerns about the imperfect representation of group interests. The first is almost a logical implication of difficult internal decision-making processes: once positions are agreed through a long and tortuous process, there is a high premium placed on defending them in negotiations. From what we heard, G77 negotiators do not have authorised fall-back positions, or margins for compromise (interview 11). The inflexibility of G77 negotiators appears to be one of the major factors in rendering General Assembly negotiations protracted and frustrating processes. It irks global North partners that the G77 is quite "rigid", placing a high emphasis on retaining agreed language (interview 1). According to our sources, negotiations then frequently reach a point where the G77 negotiator needs to go back to the group to get compromises approved, triggering another round of (often lengthy) internal coordination. During the negotiations on the political declaration of the SDG Summit in 2023, the group apparently negotiated until four in the morning (interview 7). Both global North and G77 delegates pointed out that G77 negotiators often find themselves in a very tight spot, where they have "a harsh time asking for changes" in the group which – because of the diversity of interests – comes with a strong status-quo orientation (interview 2; also in 1). In contrast to the G77, EU negotiators have positions that always include a margin for compromise, giving them more flexibility (interview 11).

However, the issue is probably not unique to the G77, and some context is in order. According to Swart and Lund (2011, p. 126), G77 delegates have in the past also complained that global North states dispatch relatively young and unexperienced delegates to UN negotiations who do not have the gravitas required to strike a compromise and sell it to their group and/or capital. The rigidity of G77 positions, and their impact on decision-making in the General Assembly, is thus just one piece in a larger puzzle that also includes the constant expansion of policies discussed in the General Assembly, the capacity this growing diplomatic agenda requires, and the consequent inability of any member states to participate in all of these processes at adequate seniority.

The other concern goes back to the representational deficits of the group and the space this opens up for national interests. This is a matter that is not entirely clear-cut, and we start the discussion by citing global North perspectives. A frequent allegation made by the global North is that G77 negotiators infuse group positions with national interests, often with the result of unduly prioritising controversial geopolitical issues over more genuine, development-related interests (interviews 15, 23). Cuba, in particular, was accused of mixing national interests (specifically: the issue of "coercive multilateral measures", UN parlance for sanctions) with group interests (interviews 1, 2, 7, 9, 11, 12, 23). With such alleged representational deficits, it was not

lost on global North delegates that the group's positions were often "more fragile than it might seem" (interview 15), something that also seems to be reflected in the G77's defection ratios when it comes to voting (see Section 2). In one instance from the formative phase of the preparatory process for the Summit of the Future, the chair (Cuba) requested a stop to the consultations by sending a letter to the co-facilitators – allegedly, not even the Namibian co-facilitator, a member of the G77, had been informed, while behind the scenes other G77 delegates criticised that behaviour to people in the Secretariat and global North colleagues (interviews 9, 10, 16). Another case comes from Rome: In an election matter, which was about the chair position of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)'s Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters, the chair of the G77 chapter in Rome advanced a candidacy from Venezuela but, when a global North country requested a vote, it turned out that the G77 did not support the G77's official candidate (interviews 16, 22, 30). Another source shared an anecdote where she found a position advanced by the G77 negotiator so far off from what she assumed to be the group's position that she called other G77 members into the room to provide some balance (interview 2).

If such imperfections result in weak G77 positions that global North members may attempt to break, they can also result in missed opportunities for finding common ground. Another variation of the concern about the faithful representation of interests pertains to how delegates represent, or do not represent, their national interests. Global North delegates and observers shared experiences of how a G77 member state diverged drastically from what they thought they knew about national policies of the G77 members (interview 2, 14, 25; see also Swart & Lund 2011, p. 123). That allegation is difficult to prove (statements take place in informal settings). Yet, our sources said they were "absolutely sure" about incidents in which G77 delegates diverged from what they (our sources) heard a minister or government document express at their capital (interviews 25, 27). One source also noted that she sometimes could not make sense of why certain positions had been adopted, noting that policies of a member state could change rapidly as the respective representatives assumed or left their positions in New York (while the government itself remained the same) (interview 27). The assumption behind these observations is that the real interests between global North and developing countries are often perceived to be much closer than they appear under the influence of group politics, where members of the group can hide behind group positions. For global North members, all that speaks to the notion of a diplomatic bubble in New York that operates with insufficient accountability and generates erratic behaviour.

For context, there are different degrees in how delegates are connected to capitals.[22] Some permanent missions receive instructions on all relevant matters from their capitals. With others, it is a matter of personalities and their expertise where the centre of gravity in decision-making settles. Finally, there are the permanent missions of small countries which do not have the capacity to support their missions in New York in the same way that global North member states do. Our sources also pointed to specific explanations that illustrate the difficult positions a G77 delegate might occupy at the UN. In Rome, it was suggested that FAO management held a considerable sway over delegates from the global South. The FAO leadership was apparently not shy to "report" an inconvenient delegate to the capital, leading to that person's demission and return to the capital, or to reward delegates, and their countries for that matter, with an FAO development project (interview 35). Delegates may also censor themselves as they seek jobs with the UN, thus putting their personal interest over the interest of their country. Third, the entire process of give and take, on which group unity depends, might lead to shifts in positions. It is part and parcel of group politics that members defend their collective interests even in cases where it diverges from the national interest. It would make the coordination of the group much more difficult if all G77 delegates only acted on specific instructions from their capitals (Swart & Lund 2011, p. 16).

---

22 This section is partly based on previous field research (Baumann, 2018).

In the past, states from the global North have reached out to developing country capitals in order to bypass "loose" delegates in New York or to try to influence these capitals as a way of shaking up rigid G77 positions. Swart and Lund report an incident in 2009 in which the EU reached out to capitals over negotiations on the methodology for the regular budget because it thought the G77 was "particularly inflexible on this issue". However, this initiative apparently "caused a great deal of anger among those Missions concerned" (Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 13). Another remedy can be to request voting, on the assumption that delegates – then subject to scrutiny by the public and their capital – have to align with national interests or, where processes in other regional G77 chapters are concerned, with positions taken in New York (interview 16).

Interim conclusion

The challenge of adopting common positions in a group of 134 sovereign member states should not be underestimated. The way the G77's consensus approach operates – informal, ad hoc coordination with limited participation from group members – ensures a somewhat practical approach to this challenge. Not every G77 member has to engage fully on every topic, and that already is a big asset. The friction involved in the decision-making process suggests that basic representation works. Yet, one cannot simply dismiss the imperfections of the group's decision-making process as unavoidable or even desirable. For many G77 members, their lack of direct involvement in the group's decision-making process reflects not so much a trust that things work out in their way, as an inability to participate in a more substantial manner. The imperfections are also not just the result of the complexities of decision-making in a large group, but to some extent they result from organisational arrangements that one of our sources from within the group characterised as "medieval" (interview 12), because they put too many demands on member states' diplomatic capacities. The system might have worked well when the group was much smaller but appears dated now. The implications are far-reaching. The group's representational imperfections can undermine its credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the G77's counterparts, and they also make the group prone to a kind of rigidity that at best strengthens its negotiation position but may also be detrimental to the ability of the General Assembly to find common solutions to common problems. It thus undermines those assets of group politics needed to manage the rising tensions described in the previous section.

4 The struggle for unity in the face of diversity

Early documents of the G77 celebrate the group's unity and the sense of hope and solidarity it conveyed. In fact, the G77 emerged out of the experience of unity during the first UNCTAD conference in the 1960s, a unity forged by the "common interest in a new policy for international trade and development" (G77, 1964, para 5). In recent decades, the promise of strength through unity has become more difficult. The group has grown to 134 members, and this expansion in membership along with uneven economic and global developments has exposed the group to new centrifugal forces. Some observers have pointed to the possibility of disintegration of the G77 in the face of unmanageable diversity (Puchala et al., 2007, p. 103). Yet, the group still exists, and not only on paper. It has held its membership (only five countries have left the G77 since the 1990s[23]) and shapes UN discourses and policy processes, as Section 2 has made clear. Hence, we turn our attention to the factors that hold the group together and examine how the group reconciles diverging interests – or fails to do so. We provide a conceptual account of

---

23 Mexico (1994) and South Korea (1997) when they joined the OECD; Malta, Cyprus (2004) and Romania (2007) when they joined the EU. Palau was briefly a G77 member from 2002 to 2004. OECD membership does not automatically terminate G77 membership. Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica are both G77 and OECD members.

group unity and its limitations, before identifying four practical avenues of how the G77 reaches decisions. Four empirical cases then demonstrate how these avenues may play out in practice.

4.1 Unity in theory: centrifugal forces and solidarity mechanisms

To illustrate the diversity of the G77 in the 21st century, it may be useful to compare it to the EU. The EU comprises 27 member states and, despite stark differences in size, these countries are all high-income countries, market economies, and democracies (some with deficits). Most importantly, they are united in an international organisation that has supranational elements and strong normative foundations and that defines their position in the world. Compared to that, unity is a daunting affair for the G77. Its 134 members differ on every state category and metrics in use today: country income (low, medium, high); geographic position (landlocked or not); geopolitical inclination (West versus East); government system (autocracy versus democracy); political stability (peaceful versus conflict-ridden); debt situation; climate-affectedness, and so on. On many of the issues, the divergence has increased in recent years. In terms of poverty, for example, persistent poverty in the least developed countries co-exists with emerging economies with solid middle classes (Kharas, 2023; UN, 2023h). An autocratic backlash in recent years has accentuated the fault line with democracies (Carothers & Press, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). The BRICS expansion in 2023 revealed tensions between a group around China and Russia that embrace anti-Western stances, whereas others, like South Africa, India, and Brazil, are keen to simply strengthen their independence (Ashby et al., 2023; Garcia-Herrero, 2024; Grimm, 2023).

From previous analysis on the G77, we know that attempts to analyse the G77's overall course in terms of any of these fault lines are futile (Lees, 2021; Swart & Lund, 2011). The group is not anti-democratic per se and, given the economic diversity it contains, one would today no longer describe the G77 as "a kind of trade union of the poor" as global South leader Julius Nyerere did in the 1970s (Sauvant, 1981, p. 9), even though demands for North-South-transfers remain a priority (Vihma et al., 2011, p. 317; see Section 2). On each topic that comes on the agenda in the UN, a different combination of intra-group fault lines will emerge. Some of these fault lines are reflected in the emergence of informal subgroups in the General Assembly, giving rise to the phenomenon of "group politics" (Farrell, 2017; Laatikainen, 2017). These subgroups include, for example, the longstanding Small Island Developing States Group; the more recently founded Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the UN;[24] or the African Group (as an example of a regional group). These groups represent forms of coalition-building and perform certain functions that are similar to those of the G77, which is the largest among them: they are spaces for information-sharing, for brokering positions, and act as platforms to advance common interests and visibility at the UN (Laatikainen, 2017, p. 133). Having a smaller membership can make these functions easier to realise, and the subgroups more effective.

Unsurprisingly, the emergence of subgroups was cited as a tangible threat to G77 unity by our sources (interviews 7, 20, 25, 27, 29). A former G77 chair noted their "tendency to break away" from the group, complicating the search for consensus (interview 8). Subgroups can be a platform to build alliances with global North states on specific topics (interview 3). Some groups are known to represent opposing interests – for example the Small States Group, which has an interest in effective multilateralism, and the group Friends of the Charter with its focus on sovereignty and non-intervention (interview 18). As subgroups grow along with diversity in the G77, they can lead to a more fragmented and less relevant group similar to the G77 chapter in Rome, where regional groups are much stronger, and where, according to several sources,

---

24 This group emerged in 2021 and has its own website https://www.gof-uncharter.org/

"nobody from the global South wants to be represented by another G77 country" (interview 22; also in 20, 21). Yet, the emergence of subgroups also holds a potential for a more vibrant and inclusive G77, in which subgroups strengthen the voice and representation of minorities while not necessarily undermining the group's unity. In fact, the voting analysis does not show a decline in unity over the last decade. Rather, it remains consistently high (see Section 2).

This requires attention to what unites the group. Generally, the principle of any alliance is that, together, member states can be more effective in the pursuit of their common interest against external actors than if members act alone. Yet, the growing diversity in the group and the emergence of relatively strong actors (such as China and other regional leaders) suggests the need for a more differentiated account of solidarity. Based on the literature, we present three theoretical models that help to create a more nuanced understanding of what keeps the group together – and where the limits of this unity are. The first two models are adopted from Iida (1988), the third from social psychology literature. While these three models may not exhaust explanatory approaches,[25] they provide three diverse accounts of group unity.

i) **Community of shared interests**: Scholars have argued that developing countries are marked by two challenges, external economic vulnerability and internal political weakness, from which arise shared interests (Iida, 1988, p. 382):

> Highly dependent on the world economy, the developing countries are subject to outside economic disturbances. In addition, they are not strong enough internally to make adequate domestic adjustments. Since internal solutions are very difficult, Third World states seek external remedies and try to turn international regimes from liberal to authoritative ones that can provide more stable and predictable transaction flows.

We find an expression of that shared interest in the G77's first declaration that invoked the "common interest in a new policy for international trade and development" (G77, 1964, para 7). And it was given a powerful expression by Nyerere (1979, p. 5): "What we have in common is that we are all, in relation to the developed world, dependent – not interdependent – nations. Each of our economies has developed as a by-product […] of development in the industrialized North". However, at the time this analysis was made ("Third World" was the accepted term in the 1970s), the economic diversity of the group was already seen as constituting explanatory weakness, and with the growing diversity in the group, the common interest explanation is becoming even more difficult. But it also holds a prediction: strong unity is to be obtained only in matters that are, by and large, priorities for the entire group. In recent history, climate seemed to be one such area (interviews 23, 26; see also Urpelainen, 2012; Vihma et al., 2011). Another area is global governance reform that also includes the issue of North-South transfers, as noted in Section 2.

ii) **Institutionalised reciprocity**: The second model stresses reciprocity as a way of fostering solidarity in anarchical contexts (Iida, 1988, p. 386). Reciprocity describes quid pro quo practices in which parties exchange support for their respective priorities. This creates solidarity as long as the give and take delivers better results than what parties can achieve acting outside the group. As Iida points out, this kind of unity only works on the basis of diffuse reciprocity. If actors conceive of group membership in purely transactional terms and eagerly tally the costs of supporting others in order not to be disadvantaged, reciprocity would spiral down as actors lose trust in each other. Reciprocity as a factor of solidarity therefore only works over longer periods and when it is guided by a generous attitude through which parties build a reputation of being supportive to the group. When we asked a delegate about her country's support for resolutions that struck us as being fairly unrelated to the country's national interests, the delegate said, "we

---

25 While the role of leadership from individual group members could be a fourth model (Iida, 1988), we discuss it in the next section where we focus on the role of power.

do it to show solidarity to other countries" and because she assumed that at some point in future, her country might need support from the group (interview 12). Other sources also confirmed that "no G77 member wants to let go of the reciprocity and mutual support; often, they are willing to tolerate a lot [of] what the group advances as they in other instances depend on the support of the group" (interview 27; also in 14). Analytically, reciprocity can explain the continuity of unity when common interests and common ideological sources start to wear off. It can also explain the length of official G77 documents, where some positions reflect more the individual interests of member states rather than common interests. With more active subgroups, quid for pro practices might become more prevalent. Yet, reciprocity as an instrument to safeguard a self-interest reaches a dead end when the interests are mutually exclusive (Sauvant, 1981, p. 17).

iii) **Intergroup dynamics**: This model is based on social psychological theory and explains intragroup solidarity as a function of external conflict (Böhm et al., 2020; Iida, 1988, p. 395). Despite the enormous diversity of the G77, all its members share similar historical experiences of colonialism, poverty and marginalisation in the international system out of which evolved the unity of the global South as an "indispensable instrument" to achieve a better international position against the global North (G77, 1964). The focus on the global North as "the other" permeates G77 documents (Alden et al., 2010, pp. 3-4; Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 149). From the start, the group understood its main purpose and the root of its solidarity as stemming from "a unity of opposition" against an "existing Center of Power", rather than of any normative ideal (Nyerere, 1979, p. 4). Unity is then a generalised purpose, as it "protects them from being played off against each other" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 18). This model can explain an equally generalised norm of unity that makes defection costly, no matter what the policy at hand is about. Our sources indicate that G77 members can indeed come under intense pressure when they break away from group positions.[26] This model can also explain why the group is more united in times of global upheaval and confrontation – "the group thrives on crisis", as a G77 delegate noted (interview 8) – despite rising levels of diversity.

4.2   Unity in practice: ways to reach a decision

While these three concepts provide explanations of unity, and how unity can be maintained in the longer arch of history, they tell us little about how the process towards a group position looks like. Hence, the question arises: How does the struggle between diversity and unity play out in practice? Where does the G77 currently fall between these two poles? Conceptually, we start where we left off in Section 3. As the consensus-method is prone to shortcomings, it makes sense to zoom in a bit more and differentiate avenues towards decision-making outcomes. Based on our field research and informed by the existing literature on the G77's decision-making, we identify four possible avenues towards decision-making outcomes. One or a combination of them can help understand how the group reaches – or fails to reach – positions.

i) **Failure to agree**: Not all differences can be reconciled, and the result of a decision-making process can be the decision that the group simply has no common position. The failure to bring internal negotiations to a successful end might even be more common than the G77's reputation for unity suggests. The members of the group are then free to speak in their national capacities in General Assembly negotiations (interviews 8, 26). Failure to agree is most likely when one or a combination of all three solidarity mechanisms do not work: lack of a genuine common interest;

---

26 Some said that "bullying and pressuring plays a great role" and that those who go against the group "face the risk of being iced out" (interview 25); smaller countries were said to have exercised particular restraint under Cuba's assertive leadership of the group (interview 28); on gender, the Latin American states had, according to one source, faced massive backlash and "saw their role in the G77 diminished after they had spoken out on gender" (interview 2). All this plays out more at the personal level, where delegates may face the ire of colleagues (interview 9).

a low level of intergroup antagonism; and unwillingness to reciprocate in the face of a strong national interest. Sometimes, the existence of these factors is clear, either from history or political factors, and the group will not even try to reach a position to avoid a highly divisive experience (interview 8).

ii) **Overriding opposition**: Conflicts of interest can also be resolved by overriding the positions of group members. This seems to require leadership, or at least power politics, in the sense of having a dominant actor or subgroup that uses various forms of power to muscle through a particular solution (Iida, 1988, p. 383-386; also see Section 5). Such leadership might come from the "radicals" in the group or individually powerful countries. It can also result in "maximalist" positions, when moderate voices are excluded. Although power play is present in this avenue, the benefits of maintaining group unity and, with it, the prospect of being on the other side the next time – that is, expecting reciprocity – will generally soften the blow for those being overridden.

iii) **Veto playing**: Another route to consensus observed in the G77 stems from exercising vetoes. If the above-mentioned avenue of overriding suffers from taking too few interests into account, this avenue suffers from the inclusion of *too many* interests, in particular the vetoes of specific members. It manifests itself in (failed) efforts by members to use the G77 for advancing their interests, but at the cost of having them watered-down to a point where the effort defeats the purpose. One source from a small state complained that its more progressive proposals related to debt got "killed" by other members (interview 12), and another, larger country, similarly had to backtrack on a proposal deemed constructive, at least in the eyes of global North sources (interview 28). One influential actor in the group that "opposes everything" on a specific topic, such as climate, can be enough to condemn the group to generality (interview 22).

iv) **Bypassing the group**: Limited prospects of going through the group can prompt states to bypass it, while counting on the group's solidarity once a draft resolution has been submitted to the General Assembly. Our sources suggested that the more important a matter is for a country, the less likely they are to go through the group (interviews 1, 12). The sponsors of a resolution then essentially create a fait accompli: they retain full control over the content, but then put the group's solidarity to the test by demanding a vote in the General Assembly. This avenue comes with the dangers of alienating other G77 members. However, in a process of give and take, a more expensive "take" today can also result in a stronger "give" tomorrow, thus still serving to bring the group together. Additionally, the intergroup dynamics can encourage the rest of the group to show solidarity.

We now (re)turn to four recent cases in which the G77's unity was tested. Two of them have been mentioned in Section 2 (Summit of the Future and tax resolution), where – based on the assumption of the G77 as a unitary actor – they served as examples of growing North-South tensions. Here, we focus on internal divisions within the G77 and how they were (not, or imperfectly) resolved. The other two (gender and civil society engagement), while related to the Summit of the Future, touch on longstanding neuralgic points in the North-South relationship in the UN.

4.2.1   Summit of the Future: opposing subgroups and a case-by-case unity

The Summit of the Future not only pitted the G77 against the global North, as noted in Section 2, it also tested the G77's unity. Member states signalled diverging priorities, and soon major fault lines began to emerge, leading to the formation of competing subgroups and highlighting the fragmentation of the G77.

Two major groups, hosting different G77 members and other states, emerged early in the process (Beisheim, 2024; Gambale, 2024; interviews 14, 18). On the one hand, the Like-Minded Group, led by Pakistan, emerged as a strong and active voice. As of January 2024, it comprised

17 members,[27] among them Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Egypt (and Russia, as a non-G77 member). China sometimes joined the group's statements. The Like-Minded Group held conservative and to a certain extent revisionist positions on issues such as human rights, gender equality, sanctions, and stakeholder engagement in the UN (Beisheim, 2024). It put national sovereignty at the forefront of its concerns, which helped understand their positions on various aspects of the Pact for the Future. As evident from the analysis of informal consultations on the Summit,[28] one of the group's key positions was that the attention directed to human rights, gender equality, and multilateralism in the Pact for the Future overshadowed topics that it saw as more important for the global South, in particular poverty eradication, infrastructure, and combating hunger. Behind this is the group's treatment of the UN as a purely intergovernmental organisation of sovereign states: the Like-Minded Group was pushing back against the involvement of other stakeholders across UN processes and strengthening of the Secretariat (Beisheim, 2024; interviews 13, 18), fearing it would reduce the role and power of member states in the organisation (interview 15). Fitting with its conservative domestic agenda and the importance it puts on sovereignty, the group also expressed a strong opposition to the inclusion of more progressive human rights and gender language, advocating instead for the maintenance of a clear separation between the development and human rights pillars of the UN (see informal consultations on the Summit of the Future; also Pakistan, 2024).

On the other side, the Small States Group, consisting of 55 members from both the global North and South (Gambale, 2024), emerged as an important voice in reaction to the Like-Minded Group. The Small States Group is spearheaded by Singapore, a vocal supporter of the Summit of the Future process. The Group saw the Summit as an effort to strengthen multilateralism, and as small states, they perceived multilateralism to be in their interest (interview 18) and themselves as its "defenders" (Gafoor, as cited in Gambale, 2024). Although not a negotiating bloc, it did take positions on the Pact for the Future (Gambale, 2024). Specifically, it focused on issues like strengthening human rights and promoting gender equality, as well as on pushing for stakeholder engagement in UN debates and increased transparency, seeing these as tools for making multilateralism more democratic, effective, and aligned with today's global policy-making needs. The main cleavage between the Like-Minded Group and the Small States Group was the way they view the UN: as a mere platform for sovereign states or as an independent actor respectively (interview 18).

While the Small States Group was a big proponent of the Summit of the Future, the Like-Minded Group was rather sceptical (interview 9). When the co-facilitators of the Summit, Germany and Namibia, planned the adoption of the resolution on the scope of the Summit for August 2023, the Like-Minded Group requested the extension of negotiations of the resolution text until September 2023. Some of its members broke the "silence procedure" of a co-facilitators' first draft of that resolution, forcing negotiations to continue. Prior to that, Cuba, a member of the Like-Minded Group and Chair of the G77 at that time, requested on behalf of the G77 that preparations for the Summit be halted, arguing that many different processes were happening at the same time, including the SDG Summit, and that the UN must focus on how to better advance the implementation of the SDGs. Allegedly, Cuba had not properly consulted with G77 members on this (interview 16; see also Section 3). Behind the scenes, various different members of the G77 expressed their support for the summit along with their frustrations about how Cuba had handled it (interview 9). However, there was also a general agreement in the G77 that the SDG Summit deserved due attention (Lynch, 2023a).

---

27 Based on the statement delivered by Pakistan on behalf Algeria, Bolivia, China, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Nicaragua, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, see https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k131jwybc8

28 More information is available at http://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k131jwybc8

Given the existence of such diverse preferences regarding the Summit of the Future and its content, it is no surprise that the G77 failed to present a common position on some critical topics (interview 36). Specifically, the group failed to agree and did not negotiate as a group on international peace and security and youth and future generations (interviews 9, 14, 26, 28). On security, this can be explained by the fact that divisions were too great to be reconciled (interview 18). As described by an expert, the Like-Minded Group was particularly difficult in this regard (interview 9). The group criticised quite extensively the second revision of the Pact for the Future, stating that the section on international peace and security should address the "real challenges" of peace and security, such as "violations of the UN Charter and international law, great power rivalry and geopolitical tensions and their disproportionate impact on developing countries". It also listed "receding trust, eroding multilateralism, foreign occupation, the use of force, unilateral coercive measures and injustice against nations" as the main causes of these challenges (Pakistan, 2024, p. 3). The G77 also appeared to be genuinely unable to find consensus on the youth and future generations part of the Pact. Youth participation is considered by the Like-Minded Group to be at risk of becoming an instrument of the global North to promote its agenda on gender and environmental issues (Beisheim, 2024). On the transformation of global governance, the G77 only had a partial common position.

However, on issues around the collective desire among the group to focus on the SDGs (G77, 2023a) – and in particular on issues of poverty and development – the group achieved a certain unity. The group found a common position on the parts of the Pact concerning sustainable development and financing for development, demanding fairer representation (see G77, 2023b, 2024b). Additionally, the G77 negotiated as a group on science, technology and innovation, and digital cooperation, which was the topic of the G77 summit in 2023 (interview 18). The group demanded that the Summit of the Future should not introduce any modifications to the SDGs, either directly or indirectly, by creating new goals. Instead, it demanded a focus on combating poverty and hunger, a position that was made clear by the representative of Brazil during the discussion on the Summit of the Future modalities resolution: "We already have a multilaterally agreed framework to tackle our development challenges – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development […]. Our current crises, such as the rise in food insecurity and the deterioration of living conditions, among others, illustrate that this is a time to highlight the centrality of the Agenda and to accelerate its implementation, not to overshadow it by creating new agendas" (UN, 2022b, p. 17). However, even on the issue of the IFI (international financial institution) reform – key to the G77's strategic priorities – the group had diverging positions regarding how to negotiate on this, with the poorest states and the Small States Group calling for pragmatic bargaining and members of the Like-Minded Group such as Pakistan, Venezuela, and Nicaragua seeking in coordination with China and Russia to "expand the discussion to highlight the damage done by unilateral US and EU sanctions to the global economy" (Gowan, 2024b).

To sum up, the Summit of the Future process proved fairly divisive for the G77: not only was it marked by the strong presence of opposing subgroups, but the group as a whole also did not negotiate together on all parts of the Summit's outcome document. When it *did* negotiate as a group, united by a common interest and a rather high intergroup antagonism (reform of IFIs, and the lack of commitment to meaningful transformations from the global North, respectively), it resorted to a kind of least common denominator, demanding reform but still disagreeing on how to negotiate the desired result.

4.2.2   Gender: stalled progress amid opposing factions

Another major division in the G77 relates to women's rights and gender equality, a field where the UN has developed global norms over the last decades and set ambitious goals in the 2030 Agenda (SDG 5). Several of our sources pointed out that the G77 does not have a common position on gender because of the starkly diverging positions of its member states. This is not entirely correct. In principle, the G77 *does* have a position on gender: the Third South Summit

outcome document, for example, includes an item on "gender equality and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women" (G77, 2024a). In the General Assembly, the G77 sponsors the biennial resolution "Women in Development". Yet, the topic has proven highly divisive for the G77 in recent years, pitting the Latin American faction of the G77, which on women rights and gender equality is mostly aligned with global North states, against the rest of the G77, and in particular, the more conservative African and Arab members.

The latest such dispute erupted around the most recent iteration of the "Women in Development" resolution (UN, 2022c). The G77 introduced a draft resolution in which a paragraph from the previous resolution (UN, 2019) had been removed. This paragraph centred on "multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination", a concept that has roots in the UN World Conference for Women (Beijing 1995) and essentially says that women are often subject to several forms of discrimination simultaneously (Nedera, 2023; UN, 2017b). In reaction to this "blunt deletion" (see also Section 2), an amendment was introduced that sought to return the language on "multiple and intersection forms of discrimination" to the resolution (UN, 2023g). Referencing national experiences, a Colombian delegate argued that the concept of multiple discrimination provided a "truly transformative lens that responded to the needs of those who faced multiple obstacles, including as a result of their origin" (UN, 2023g, p. 24). In opposition to that, other G77 states, mostly from Africa and the Middle East (Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, but also Indonesia), rejected the amendment as a digression away from the resolution's focus on economic issues and "towards a non-consensual human rights agenda" (UN, 2023g, p. 26). Some also pointed out that the amendment would go against their national legislation, an aspect which can present additional complications for any normative issue discussed at the UN.

The amendment was adopted by 90 votes (mostly Latin American G77 members and global North states) to 62 votes (the remainder of the G77, including China) (UN, 2023g, p. 24). It was one of the rare examples where, in General Assembly decisions, parts of the G77 voted together with the global North, defeating the internal majority of the G77 (37 G77 members had voted in favour, 60 against). The amended resolution itself was nevertheless adopted by consensus (member states that had voted against the resolution disassociated themselves from the passed amendments). Another, quite similar dispute unfolded a year later when Mexico – at that time still planning to re-join the G77 – introduced a resolution on women rights, criticised by some G77 members as an unnecessary "duplication" of the "Women in Development" resolution (UN, 2024a, pp. 8-18).[29] In this resolution, which also contained references to multiple discrimination (without using this language), a faction of the G77 successfully introduced an amendment that – in a highly unusual move – transferred the issue to the Third Committee that deals with social and human rights issues (UN, 2024a, pp. 8-18).

The gender case study example demonstrates how a formal, though generic, G77 position can break up when it is put to the test. One faction of the group wanted to go further than the agreed position, and another used the opportunity to go back a step. According to our sources, those on the conservative side put pressure on the Latin American countries behind the scenes. One source likened the internal disputes to "epic showdowns" (interview 25). The advocates for women rights and gender equality, in particular Colombia and Costa Rica, were said to have found themselves sidelined and their role in the group diminished (interviews 2, 7, 13, 15). This suggests that there was an attempt to override a significant faction of the group, though in the end, as neither side could persuade the other, the group failed to reach a common position. The G77 neither supported the amendments nor the resolutions themselves, leaving it to member states how they would position themselves. The overall result from these two episodes leaves a picture of the G77 battling against itself, one faction overriding the others: in the first instance

---

29 Resolution "Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls for realizing all Sustainable Development Goals".

(the "Women in Development" resolution), the Latin American states had carried the day, though in terms of policy, the resolution finally adopted just confirmed the status quo of its predecessor. In the second instance (the resolution sponsored by Mexico), the rest of the G77 had successfully deflected a normative issue away from the Second Committee, winning a vote against their Latin American fellow G77 members. One interview source suggested that the conservative forces had taken "revenge" for their previous defeat (interview 2).

4.2.3 Civil society engagement: unbridgeable diversity

Tensions also exist regarding civil society's participation in UN processes. The UN Secretary-General had flouted some specific proposals "to increase opportunities for engagement by civil society and other stakeholders across all the intergovernmental organs" for a more "effective multilateralism" (UN, 2021b, pp. 79, 77). And while these proposals were not advanced in the Secretary-General's policy briefs that expanded on key reform issues identified in the Our Common Agenda report, a reference to the engagement of civil society appeared in the zero draft for the Pact of the Future.[30] This triggered a dispute in the General Assembly where member states held opposing views on the question, and the default line also ran right through the G77. A number of members that were wary of expanded civil society roles published a statement in which they explained their concerns. In that letter, which was also supported by Russia, they argued that NGOs were an inherently "Western" phenomenon, because only rich countries had the "excess resources" to sustain them, and that they were "proxies for trans-national corporations and foreign governments [...] used to promote politicisation, selective and punitive approaches, in benefit of national agendas from a few developed countries" (Belarus et al., 2024, p. 2). Civil society organisations (CSOs) are thus viewed by this group as potential threats to state sovereignty and as vehicles for global North influence.

This prompted a joint response, delivered in the form of a statement from the Dominican Republic on behalf of 58 countries from Europe and the G77 (the latter including the G77 members Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Cabo Verde). The statement refuted the critical view of civil society and instead argued that civil society organisations "serve as essential partners in advancing shared goals and promoting accountability. They represent the voices of the people and communities for which the UN gathers to reaffirm human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person" (Dominican Republic, 2024, p. 2). The letter then points to recent experiences where civil society supported smaller countries, "in particular LDCs [least developed countries]", in defending their interests, thus bringing a balancing element to the discussions. The tax resolution is a case in point, where Nigeria highlighted the "indis-pensable" role of civil society for creating "more robust and effective approaches" (UN, 2024b, p. 6). In the G77, Costa Rica has built itself a reputation as an advocate for promoting civil society participation at the UN, arguing that civil society organisations provide valuable expertise, represent marginalised voices, and enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of UN decision-making. Another representative from a small G77 country observed in our interview the importance of the "informed citizen" as a "new player in international relations":

> Citizens are informed and engaged in a way that they never were 40 years ago […] when there was no understanding in the foothills of Namibia of what was happening in Indiana, in the US. Now we know immediately […] what another country is doing and how that affects them where they are. And so, exerting that influence so that their governments are then required to reflect their values is I think the force that is yet to be unleashed and that will help to bring us back into balance to make sure that our values are the preeminent consideration when decisions and policies are being made (interview 29).

---

30 See, in this connection, the UN website on the Summit of the Future https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future (accessed 29 August 2024).

There are also the regional heavyweights Brazil (though not under the tenure of President Bolsonaro) and South Africa, that were not part of the statement but nevertheless are known for supporting a more open UN. A third group of G77 members holds a middle-ground position that can vary depending on the context. India, for example, sometimes supports greater civil society involvement in UN discussions on sustainable development issues, but it can be more cautious regarding security-related matters.

This conflict was not resolved by a consensus or in favour of either party to the conflict. The G77 has no official position on civil society. It is a clear case of the failure to agree on a common position. The latest G77 Summit Document does not mention civil society once (G77, 2024a). Rather, member states were de facto given space to follow their own preferences. Judging from the evolution of the draft of the Pact for the Future, the progressive camp seems to have gained the upper hand in the process. Whereas the zero draft of February 2024 had just one thin reference to civil society, the revision of July 2024 had four, more specific, references (UN, 2024c).

4.2.4 Tax resolution: bypass to a G77 position

As mentioned in Section 2, the 2023 tax resolution (UN, 2023i) represents a win for the global South in the General Assembly (though one with an uncertain outcome). It delivered a significant initial breakthrough on international tax cooperation. However, that win did not come as the result of coordinated action within the G77. Although the group had a position on tax cooperation – in 2015, the annual Ministerial Declaration for the first time "reiterated the need to fully upgrade the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters into an intergovernmental body" (G77, 2015, para 51) – this position did not cover the demand for a binding international convention. Strong tax cooperation was first and foremost an interest of African countries that are most affected by uncontrolled illicit flows (interview 7). It was not a priority for G77 members from other regions. The Ministerial Declaration of 2023, which set the G77's course for the 78th General Assembly (2023/2024), only "reiterated" the general demand "to strengthen international cooperation on tax matters" through an upgrade of the Tax Committee, but again did not go beyond that (G77, 2023c).

The breakthrough came when the African Group adopted a policy option offered by a report of the UN Secretary-General. This option was about a binding international "convention", which the report outlined next to the option for simply an international "framework" (UN, 2023f). Nigeria then sponsored a draft resolution on behalf of the African Group that mandated the start of an intergovernmental process towards an international convention (UN, 2024b). Formally, the entire process took place outside the G77 which did not make a group statement during the debate on the resolution. When the UK proposed an amendment that would have taken out the term "convention", Nigeria requested a vote which resulted in the defeat of the amendment with a G77 majority of 107 votes to 55, with 16 abstentions. On the draft resolution itself, the G77 majority was even larger with 125 votes to 48 and 9 abstentions. Not a single G77 member voted against it, and only four G77 members abstained (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru and the United Arab Emirates). A few G77 members were absent. G77 members from Latin America and Asia supported the resolution through statements made in the debate. Singapore offers a particularly striking case of G77 solidarity: The country had voted for the resolution despite laying out a range of concerns that closely reflected the criticism global North states advanced against the resolution.

In sum, the process around this resolution took place outside the G77 but ended with a massive show of G77 solidarity for the African initiative. Moreover, two months later, in early 2024, the outcome document of the G77's South Summit officially appropriated the African position, stating that "we look forward to the successful completion of the process initiated by the resolution 'Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United

Nations' and calls upon all countries to continue to participate and negotiate in good faith" (G77, 2024a, para 54).

Interim conclusion

Two insights relevant to debates – or rather, myths – about the G77 emerge from the analysis in this section. First, the group's unity, while constantly tested, is currently nowhere near total collapse. A mixture of shared rational interests, group dynamics in the face of global conflict, and a socially entrenched practice of reciprocity provide a sound basis for the group's solidarity. Depending on the topic at hand, one factor for solidarity might be more pronounced than the other, but at least one of them will typically be observable. Second, although the G77 manages to stay united, its unity is not guaranteed and is practically always a matter of degree, given the challenges of its decision-making processes and the fundamental differences within the group, particularly on normative issues. Sometimes the group does not reach a common position. In the previous section, we identified the lack of inclusiveness as a deficit, and how that can result in fragile group positions. This section added a new layer of understanding by focusing on causes and processes behind the G77's unity (or lack thereof). Even when the group votes together (as it frequently does), the earlier stages in the formation of a group position may involve practices like overriding and vetoing positions in the group or bypassing group processes altogether. These practices point to the presence of power in the group's decision-making, which we will address in the next section.

5   Power and influence within and over the group

We now take the analysis of G77's decision-making one step further and turn to the issue of power. By "power" we understand an actor's ability to exert direct influence over other actors, shaping their course of action.[31] The section analyses the main UN member states, or group of member states, both within and outside the group. Understanding the different ways and strategies that member states use to exert influence over the G77 provides some hints both about the general orientation of the group and the potential conflicts that limit its internal cohesion and opportunities for dialogue with external counterparts in the General Assembly. Studying power is also relevant in the context of ongoing global power shifts which might lead to a reconfiguration of established power relations within the G77.

## 5.1   The "radicals": small, but influential

We start the survey of power-holders in the G77 with a group of members that diplomatic sources readily and consistently identified as key actors: The so-called "radicals", a small set of members that are described as wielding disproportional influence given their limited international status outside the UN and the material resources they can muster to influence other members (interviews 2, 11, 13, 23; see also Puchala et al., 2007; Swart & Lund, 2011). The set of these states changes over time: A study from the early 1980s mentions Algeria, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, alongside Brazil, Argentina, Mexico as G77 members that "often play an important role in many issues" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 9). The more recent study by Swart and Lund (2011) mentions a similar set that includes Cuba and Egypt at the forefront, and additionally Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Venezuela (but not Sri Lanka and Jamaica). In our interviews, Cuba and Pakistan were said to be currently at the heart of this group. In a wider sense Egypt, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia have also been mentioned as belonging to this category

---

31 For a discussion of concepts of power, see Barnett & Duval (2005); Drezner (2021).

(interviews 2, 24). Figure 7 illustrates the relatively small international influence some of these states possess outside the UN.

Figure 7: Influence of G77's BRICS[32] members, Cuba, Egypt, and Pakistan
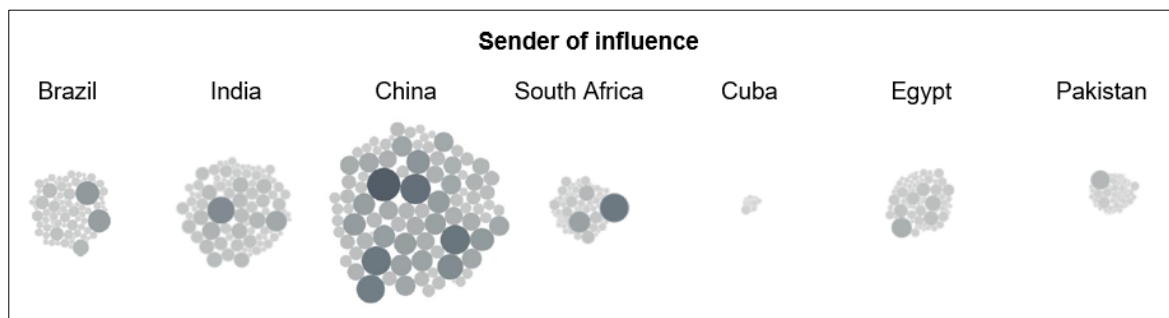
Source: FBIC Interactive Data Viz; Moyer et al., 2018

Notes: The graph shows the level of influence that the "radicals" exert on other countries outside the UN compared to G77 members of the BRICS group. The number of bubbles indicates the number of countries a "sender of influence" reaches, while the size of bubbles corresponds to the sending country's influence in a receiving country.[33]

These countries are referred to as "radicals" – sometimes also "maximalists", and "hardliners" – both by other G77 delegates and by experts and global North delegates (interviews 9, 15, 23, 27). However, the label of a "radical" needs to be taken with a grain of salt, because it seems to be an external attribution that may not reflect how these G77 members conceive of themselves. In our analysis, the meaning of "radical" appears to combine three elements: i) radical in the sense of "always in contradiction" with the global North (Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 22); ii) wielding disproportional influence in the group; and iii) displaying a tendency towards socially con-servative positions. In one sentence, they are perceived as "radicals" insofar as they organise principled resistance against the global North, in particular on contentious normative issues.

The power of the "radicals" has been evident in the Summit of the Future process, where Cuba in early 2023 apparently single-handedly stopped the preparation process (see previous sections). Although other G77 members shared a similar sentiment about the process (frustration about yet another time-consuming initiative from the UN Secretariat), the Cuban delegation did not seem to have consulted with the wider G77 membership before issuing its intervention. As noted above, the "radicals" are active in the Like-Minded Group, known for its strong conservative position in the negotiations leading up to the Summit of the Future (interview 14). The power of the "radicals" was also said to manifest itself in their ability to bring national interests – in particular, the opposition to sanctions – into the G77 and place them above other priorities of the group (interviews 1, 7, 9, 11, 23; Puchala et al., 2007, p. 103). There is no uniform attitude in the group about the issue of sanctions: Some sources hinted that sanctions affect not only a few heavily embargoed countries like Cuba and Iran but are a broader phenomenon which affects development and rightly activates global South solidarity (interview 26, 27; G77, 2024). Other sources, however, criticised the prominence of sanctions as a distraction for the group and as the national interest of a few affected countries that are in conflict with international norms and values (interviews 6, 23). A third example of the "radicals'" relatively outsized role is more about discursive power and can be found in the kind of "radical" rhetoric levelled against

---

32 We do not include Russia in the figure as it is not a G77 member.

33 The power index is based on two aspects, bandwidth and dependence. Bandwidth captures the intensity of interactions between countries, in particular the frequency of interactions and the number of dimensions in which member states interact. Dependence captures levels of trade.

the global North (see Section 2), which shapes the discourse in the UN and may marginalise moderate voices.

The power of the "radicals" in the G77 presents a puzzle. As noted above, their position in the group seems to be much stronger than in the broader international arena outside the UN, where they rank far below BRICS. What explains the power of the "radicals" in the G77, then? To some extent, smaller powers might be proxies of China (see below). However, this can only be part of the explanation, as the "radicals" predate the emergence of China as a global power. We can point to four other explanations based on interviews and our own analysis:

i) **Diplomatic skill**: Individual abilities of delegates vary. While some countries send fairly young and inexperienced staff to the UN, or staff who are primarily policy experts, others send highly trained diplomatic professionals. While large and geopolitically active countries like the US, Russia, China, and Brazil are said to operate on another level in terms of diplomatic professionalism, at least in Rome (interview 21), in New York the "radicals" also have a reputation for their expertise and effectiveness. They were described in interviews as skilled and experienced negotiators, tenacious and impactful in their approach, always well prepared, and with a combative attitude that values outcomes over process (interviews 4, 15). "They play the UN like it is a game of chess", as Swart and Lund quote a delegate (2011, p. 22).

ii) **Capacity**: Some of the "radicals" operate comparatively large diplomatic missions and therefore have the diplomatic capacity to engage more deeply and across multiple fronts (interviews 8, 13). Cuba stands out with a staff of 45, which compares to the five to ten staff of many other G77 member missions. Egypt (22) and Pakistan (17) also have more capacities than other G77 member states, but less than BRICS and maybe not enough to fully account for their outstanding position in the group. Yet, if a significant faction of the G77 is in "basic survival mode" in terms of following processes in the UN (interview 27), then even a moderate staff size can make a significant difference. The Summit of the Future process and the inability of many G77 states to participate meaningfully in it seems to demonstrate this point (see Section 2).

Figure 8: Size of selected UN member state missions in New York
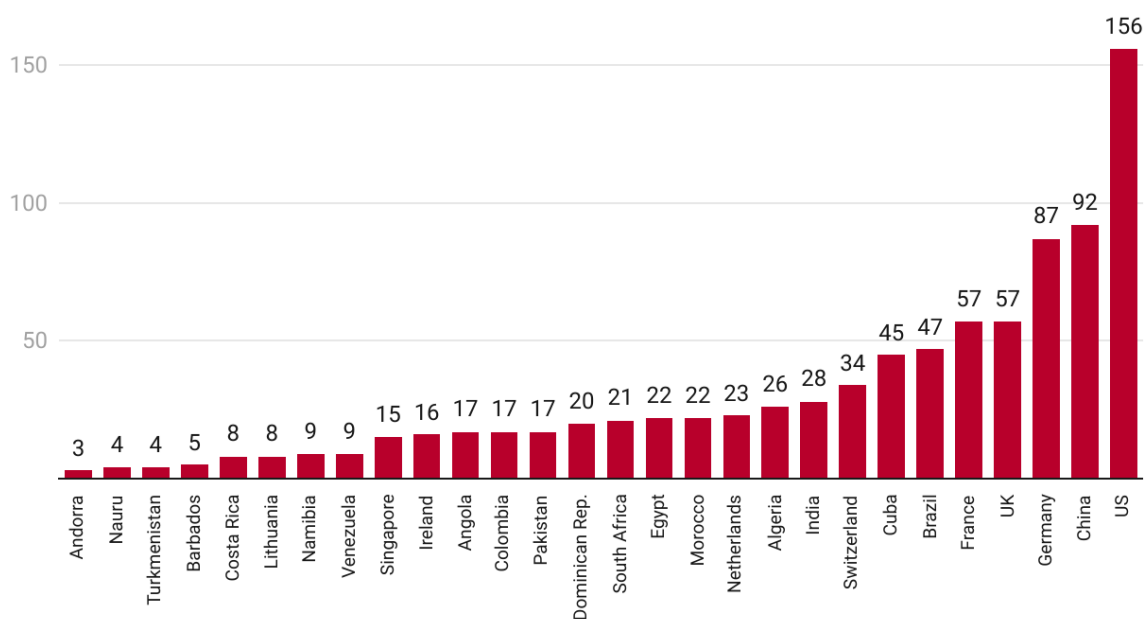
Source: Authors, based on the UN Blue Book information. Created with Datawrapper.

Notes: The graph shows the variance of member states at the UN in terms of diplomatic capacity as measured in terms of their staff size. While the "one country one vote" principle ensures formal equality, differences in diplomatic

capacity are likely to translate into differences of influence in the G77 and the General Assembly. The graph reflects a snapshot from September 2024; numbers fluctuate.

iii) **Leadership**: The leadership explanation puts a question mark behind the assumption that the "radicals" do not represent the group well. They may on certain issues have differences with the group, but in one aspect – leading the opposition vis-à-vis the global North – they might be more recognised by the group than external assessments suggest. As noted above, their uncompromising attitude towards the global North is a key, if not constitutive aspect of their role as "radicals" (interview 13; Puchala et al., 2007). Global times of upheaval and North-South confrontation might in particular create a demand for robust leadership – after all, who else dares to stand up in the General Assembly and condemn the global North in a way "radicals" have done in recent years (see Section 2)? Observers and delegates indeed pointed out that G77 members may silently applaud it when some of them adopt strong positions and "give the big powers a beating" (interview 13; also 24). Courageous behaviour might in that sense be a collective good for the group, and a source of influence within the group if prestige is indeed the "day-to-day currency of international power" (Gilpin, 1981).

iv) **Motivation**: The global governance system offers a fourth explanation, though not so much of the "radicals'" power itself, but rather the motif to cultivate the above-mentioned power factors. The "radicals" are not members of clubs like the G20. They only have the UN, and to some extent, they have it for themselves, given that BRICS and other emerging economies are part of the G20 (with the exception of Russia) (interview 25). India and Brazil, for example, were mentioned by our sources as two countries that seem to prioritise the G20 as a platform to build their roles as global South leaders – platforms, on which they can interact with global powers on an equal footing (interviews 9, 13). This leaves a power vacuum at the UN in which the "radicals" can flourish, develop idiosyncratic profiles, and set the agenda in the shadow of world politics. The countries of the global North may themselves have contributed to this situation by keeping macro-economic and trade issues out of the UN (see the case study on the tax resolution in Section 2).

5.2   China: developing country superpower

Over the last decade, China has significantly expanded its engagement with the UN's development work, and this engagement has unfolded mainly on the political level rather than through financial contributions (Baumann et al., 2022; Fung & Lam, 2022). As the largest global South alliance, the G77 is key to China's efforts to build a global leadership role for itself, and China is also the most powerful member of the G77, exerting significant influence on many developing countries, much more so than, for example, its regional rival India (Economist, 2024). So how does this influence play out in the UN context and what implications does it have for both sides, China and the G77?

The overall picture that emerges from our research is that China's role in the UN General Assembly has transformed from a mostly silent observer to an active and assertive player, if not a "big brother" of the G77, though one that prefers to act behind the scenes (interviews 7, 14). An observation from the Fifth Committee was that, in the past, China had never been the lead negotiator but could be relied on to help cut a deal behind the scenes. Since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2013, however, China appears to have started to speak up in meetings, becoming one of the hardliners itself (interview 6). In the Second Committee, China was said to maintain a low profile, visibly engaging only where key Chinese interests were directly involved (interview 16). Yet, when asked about China, almost every delegate we interviewed described China as omnipresent and engaged behind the scenes, preferring to go through proxies in great power style (for instance, interviews 7, 20, 24, 28).

Behind the "optics", the relations between China and the G77 is a case study in the complexities of alliance politics, which often cuts both ways for both sides. China needs the G77 but cannot totally avoid being constrained by it – something that finds its expression in China's strangely ambivalent official relationship with the G77. Despite being listed as a regular G77 member on the group's official website, China makes a point of not being a member of the G77 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2024). Thus, the common expression "G77 plus China". Technically, this allows China to influence G77 positions without being formally constrained by group positions and expectations of group solidarity. Politically, however, China is generally keen to emphasise its solidarity with fellow global South countries and to speak on behalf of the global South, which requires China to be receptive to the interests represented in the group (interviews 5, 29; Takahashi, 2021).

This appears to be a difficult balancing act. For the G77, China comes with benefits and downsides. One G77 delegate described China as a "formidable ally" that is "coming in handy" for developing countries (interview 5). China has something to offer: a development model seen as attractive to countries of the global South; the prospect of a system that offers developing countries political alternatives; and direct support in negotiations. For this, G77 members appear ready to give something in return. The mutual accommodation that follows from that indicates how China has evolved from a largely rhetorical to a political presence in the G77. For example, the resolution on rural development[34] is sponsored by China and contains Chinese "language" such as "shared future of mankind", phrases that are seen as key to China's aspirations to create a more China-centric world order (Baumann et al., 2022). The resolution has in all previous years been adopted with a large G77 majority against the "no"-votes from global North countries. In a similar vein, Chinese initiatives (such as the Belt and Roads Initiative and the Global Development Initiative) show how developing countries are willing to lend political recognition in the UN to China's hegemonic ambitions (interview 29; Haug, 2024).

The expectation of mutual accommodation can be painful, in particular for smaller countries given the power differences which tilt the cost-benefit calculus towards China. All G77 members will strive to make their own positions a group position, but when China as a superpower tries to do so, the effects become more visible and may pose a risk to the group's ideal of inclusive consensus. Interviewees noted that China is "always" present in discussions and negotiations (operating the largest UN mission in the group, it has unique capacities). Even in small settings where only the negotiators speak, China is normally in the room – a noteworthy "big brother" strategy, according to some sources, to exercise control over fellow G77 members (interviews 14, 15, 16). And when China then weighs in, it can be quite effective. An example was mentioned to us where a G77 member reversed its position completely after being told to do so by China (interview 27). In another case, a G77 delegate apparently got "crucified" after having gone against Chinese interests (interview 15). It seems to have become difficult for G77 members to speak up against China, at least in General Assembly settings (interviews 14, 23).

This is particularly concerning when China pursues interests that are not aligned with those of the average developing country. Delegates from both the G77 and global North countries noted that China often frames its statements as being in the interest of the group, when they are in quite obvious ways not (interviews 11, 12, 23). In general, financing for development and in particular debt, as well as peacekeeping are difficult topics for China as a major donor that does not want to commit further resources (interviews 11, 14, 17). On the issue of debt, for example, China has in G77 internal processes allegedly "killed" the proposals of smaller countries, making this "a very bad experience" for them (interview 12). In the Fifth Committee where the UN's regular budget is discussed, China, having become the second largest contributor behind the US, was said to have grown "hawkish" and keen to curb Secretariat expenditures on issues

---

34 UN General Assembly resolution "Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", first introduced in 2018.

where other developing countries would prefer the UN to spend more liberally (interview 13; Lynch, 2023b). Also, in the larger geopolitical contexts, China seems to be keen to use the G77 to accentuate or even create global differences, which can put developing countries that enjoy good relations with global North countries in a difficult position. One global North delegate observed that, as the North-South antagonism increased in recent years, China had pushed for this and "there were recriminations for countries that did not go along with it" (interview 15).

5.3   BRICS: not a coherent force

China is also a member of BRICS,[35] a group that has emerged as a counterweight to the global North in the international arena. BRICS are not known to be a group within the UN. Nevertheless, the question was raised more than a decade ago whether (or when) the ascendance of BRICS might also result in the political reconfiguration of the G77 (Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 151 ff.). On the one hand, BRICS could undermine the relevance and coherence of the G77 by cutting their own deals with the global North outside the UN. On the other hand, they could also infuse the G77 with new political energy, strengthening its position in the UN. The expansion of BRICS from 5 to 11 members in 2023 and the inclusion of states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that point to an "appetite for non-Western led multilateral arrangements" (Bhatt, 2023) only adds relevance to this question.

However, we found little evidence for such a political shake-up of the G77. Delegates and experts that we interviewed did not see BRICS acting as a cohesive force in the General Assembly or within the G77, either in New York or in Rome (interviews 6, 7, 15, 24). Individual BRICS members seem to engage more in their respective regional groups, aspiring to become "self-appointed leaders" (Stephen, 2012, p. 293; interviews 7, 25). Some of our sources think they have detected some kind of reciprocity among BRICS members in the sense that they support each other as long as national interests do not stand in the way (interviews 1, 12). This would be broadly in line with the research on how BRICS vote in the General Assembly. Some scholars do find a high level of voting cohesion among BRICS (Binder & Lockwood Payton, 2022; Ferdinand, 2014). Others, however, disagree (Hooijmaaijers & Keukeleire, 2016). As a bloc, BRICS are said to be more present and visible in peace and security-related issues, that is, in the Security Council (interview 7). But when it comes to Security Council reform, they are divided between the veto powers China and Russia and the aspiring members Brazil, India and South Africa regarding what the reform should look like.

This shows that BRICS face a similar challenge as the larger G77, namely finding unity in the face of diverging interests – which, for BRICS, are more defined and driven by capitals than is the case for many developing countries. Differences are particularly notable with regard to human rights and nuclear disarmament, though with greater convergence on development issues (Binder & Lockwood Payton, 2022; Ferdinand, 2014; Hooijmaaijers & Keukeleire, 2016; Kurşun & Parlar Dal, 2017). BRICS also differ in their attitude towards the global North, as debates about the recent expansion of BRICS have shown: Some (China, Russia, Iran) want to position BRICS as an anti-Western alliance and an incubator for a new, multipolar world order (Garcia-Herrero, 2024; Grimm, 2023; Murphy, 2022, pp. 41-42). Others (South Africa, Brazil) are more concerned with strengthening their international independence and reforming the global system for better representation of the global South (Grimm, 2023; Lehne, 2023). This divergence makes it unlikely for the group to emerge as a cohesive block in the UN any time soon. Strong commitments to the G77 and to "advancing the common interests of developing countries" (see, for example, joint statements in 2017, 2019 and 2023 by Brazil, South Africa,

---

35 While Russia is a BRICS member, it does not belong to the G77. Additionally, the majority of the interviews were conducted before the expansion of BRICS; therefore, we refer to BRICS rather than BRICS+.

India, and China on climate change (BASIC, 2017, 2019, 2023)) are mostly rhetoric and serve to increase their legitimacy as "the ones speaking on behalf of the global South" (interview 15) – as we have seen above in the case of China.

5.4 Africa: the core of the global South

The power analysis of the G77 also leads to Africa, a continent that has long been seen as the weakest region globally. But if Ikenberry (2024) is right about the evolution of a "three-world system" with the "West, East and South" as distinct "worlds", then Africa must be said to represent a significant part of the global South. In contrast to West and East, Africa is not led by any global superpower nor even a dominant regional power. Africa's power is essentially that of a "global audience" to which the superpowers speak and that can give or withhold support and legitimacy to them (Ikenberry, 2024, p. 132). Yet, Africa may not entirely be the kind of passive power that Ikenberry's analysis suggests. The continent may actually be on the verge of developing its own agency at the UN, actively advancing its demands. As one source observed in that regard, the African group seems to have "decided in recent years that it will no longer put up with how the UN (and global North member states for that matter) is dealing with them" (interview 13).

The African group has one feature that is a rare commodity in international alliances: it is relatively homogenous, and so the solidarity mechanisms that also apply for the G77 at large work relatively well in the African group (Paterson & Virk, 2013). Some of the fault lines mentioned above also run through Africa, but there are strong common interests, in particular, on taxes and finances, with substantial cohesion also around development and international cooperation in general (interviews 14, 32). The African Union, which maintains a diplomatic mission in New York, provides an institutional and ideological framework of African solidarity. In terms of process, the Group was said to regularly meet at the ambassadorial level (interview 4). Therefore, as one source opined, "if the African group is united, they are considerable force within the G77" (interview 7). This also extends beyond the G77. For example, during climate negotiations, the group proved to be one of the most united ones with a clear and articulate position (Makina, 2013).

This unity, along with a newfound appetite to assert its interests, were visible in the tax resolution, spearheaded by Nigeria on behalf of the African group (see subsection 4.2.4). The resolution touched on vital African interests in resources for SDG implementation and gaining "a critical voice in norm-creation and decision-making processes" (Nigeria, quoted in UN, 2024b, p. 7). As noted in Section 2, the significance of the process was that the Africans pushed ahead on the resolution against resistance, dealing global North states a highly visible defeat in the General Assembly, reinforced by statements such as that Africans were tired of "narratives of local governance and corruption to explain the problems they faced" (see Section 2). The African group appears to have calculated that, given its increasingly stronger position, it could afford to enter into a policy conflict without fear of notable retribution from either inside the G77 or global North states. This quality of being an actor – and a bold one for that matter – is very much what the term "new South" signifies.

In addition to the ability to promote its own interests, Africa is important to other global players because of its votes. Being the target of geopolitical attention confers influence. As one diplomatic source noted when reflecting about the current political climate in New York, "nobody wants to be against the Africans" (interview 14). China appears to have a keen interest in winning Africa's support, and Russia also courts Africa as it seeks to drive a wedge between African and European member states (interview 11). It is probably against that backdrop that Russia emerged as an unlikely co-sponsor of the draft resolution on tax cooperation, explaining this with the "concerns of the Group of African States" on the one hand and the "obstructive stance taken by most of the OECD members" on the other (UN, 2024b, p. 8). If African states

have votes to give, and statements to make that may affect the global public discourse, then it seems African states are conscious about the value of their support that may also be withheld. Regarding the Ukraine crisis, the states of the global North have been denied full support from Africa: In votes on the war in Ukraine, particularly those involving concrete measures to inflict punishment on Russia, most African countries chose to stay neutral, abstaining from votes rather than aligning with either side in this geopolitical conflict (Götz et al., 2023; Gowan et al., 2023). In Rome, where the Ukraine crisis also became a topic in the FAO, the African states adopted a position of explicit neutrality to protect their unity in the face of pressure from global North states to pull them over to their side (interviews 20, 23). The war against Ukraine seems to have awakened African states' appetite for independence, and a newfound bravery in challenging global North leadership.

5.5   Global North: external influence

Global North states still hold considerable influence at the UN as funders of the organisation and through their economic and political strength within the wider global governance system. Historically, global North states were the reason why the G77 came into existence in the first place (Sauvant, 1981). How do global North states deal with the G77? From our interviews, we are not aware of something resembling a grand strategy. The global North approach seems to involve a mixture of attempts to build trusted relationships on the one hand and power politics aimed at divide-and-rule tactics on the other.

To start with the more social aspects, it seems to be an unwritten norm that global North delegates immediately begin to reach out to build personal relationships with delegates from the global South when they arrive at their duty posts in New York (interviews 7, 15, 16). Good relationships with the more reclusive, influential, and "difficult" members of the G77 seem to carry particular prestige. In general, the value of personal relationships for building trust and maintaining communication channels is thus well understood. The EU has recently begun to host an annual reception for all G77 negotiators and facilitators – something that was well appreciated by G77 delegates (interviews 11, 12). On a personal level delegates talk to each other and conceive of themselves as being part of the same community of UN diplomats. Global North delegates often seem to have astonishingly detailed and direct (though anecdotal) insights into affairs of the G77 through their trusted G77 colleagues (interview 28). Building personal relationships can also be a part of an outreach strategy to advance policy goals through persuasion rather than power-politics. One observer noted that efforts by the US ambassador to engage with G77 members individually, one by one, to build support for the resolution on artificial intelligence (see Section 2) "almost surprised developing countries" and was essential in securing the broad majority that the resolution attracted (interview 27).

At the same time, global North states are no strangers to power tactics that serve to divide the group. When push comes to shove, global North states may engage in coordinated efforts to influence individual members of the G77. As one delegate narrated, they may agree on a division of labour where one minister (at the capital level) calls a counterpart in the global South, and a bilateral development project, financial support, export opportunities, and such like, may be offered to cajole the country into changing its stance in New York (interview 1). Swart and Lund (2011) have also described such practices – and how they are resented by the G77. A more recent example from our own research comes from Rome, where the EU employed "all instruments in the diplomatic toolbox", as one delegate said, to mobilise support for the condemnation of Russia's war against Ukraine, which prompted the African states to officially adopt a neutral position as noted above (interviews 20, 23; see also Baumann, 2022). In New York, a G77 delegate noted that the instruments of global North countries – in particular the "telephone call" between ministers to follow up on démarches – have become weaker (interview 8). A still powerful tool of dividing the group can be found in the area of normative issues. One G77 source suggested

that, by bringing normative issues to the negotiations (for example, gender), global North states deliberately divide and incapacitate the G77 (interview 12). Without a common G77 position, as on the gender issue, the aggregation of interests is disrupted, potentially increasing the global North's room for negotiating outcomes closer to its own priorities.

A third form of outreach – engagement with subgroups – falls between power politics and persuasion. The EU might support subgroups within the G77, for example the Least Developed Countries – to which Europe is the largest donor – to pursue common interests and bypass the G77 (interviews 16, 25, 27). Alliances may also be sought with other G77 subgroups, in particular the small states, island states, and the African and Latin American groups, each characterised by a relatively high commitment to multilateralism and particular links to the global North, either through aid streams or normative alignment. The collaboration with a subgroup can give momentum to a policy issue "which the G77 then can no longer ignore" (interview 27). This can be a strategy to mobilise politics for the sake of policy, to work through and foster pragmatic coalitions – all with the benefit (in the eyes of global North actors) of undermining G77's coherence along the way. However, such coalition-building is increasingly also being seen as a deliberate strategy to forestall attempts by Russia and China to gain influence in the G77 (interview 11).

Interim conclusion

The power analysis presented here concludes the arc of our analysis that started with the ideal of the consensus approach and wrestled with the competing forces of diversity and unity along the way. China, and to a lesser extent Africa, have become more important, reflecting a fledgling reconfiguration of the power landscape of the G77. Yet, no single power dominates the G77. And for every power faction in the group, there are notable counterforces: The "radicals" are a minority in the group and face opposition from a significant group of moderate global South democracies; China occupies a singular position as a global superpower, but with increasingly structural differences compared to all lesser powers in the global South; BRICS are not even united themselves and are checked by regional rivalries; Africa remains a minority whose challenges are not always shared by more developed G77 members; and global North countries can only make minor inroads into the G77 whose main purpose continues to be checking global North influence in the UN. Power might therefore tilt outcomes to one side but, ultimately, its role needs to be understood in tandem with the consensus approach (that opens the door to power practices) and mechanisms for solidarity (that can provide vehicles for influence, in particular through reciprocity). None of the case studies presented in the previous section can be explained by the dominant interest of one member or subgroup of the G77 alone.

6   Conclusions and recommendations

The G77's position at the UN General Assembly needs to be seen in the context of the current global upheaval, an important aspect of which is the reckoning with established North-South relations. For the first time in the post-war era, the power and aspirations of global South countries are starting to align to an extent that tangible changes become possible. The G77 may not be the global spearhead of the "new South", which makes itself felt across the global governance system and in bilateral relations as well: the heterogeneity of interests and level of influence of different group members can undermine its unity as a factor for the group's effectiveness. Nevertheless, the G77 represents an important piece in the overall global political shifts in which established roles of power and influence, and diplomatic practices that flow from them, are put in question and a new political reality seems to be in the making. Based on the analysis conducted in this study, we can draw five conclusions that speak to the G77's potential

to shape this new reality through the UN General Assembly and contribute to a more effective multilateral system.

The G77 currently enjoys a relatively strong position vis-à-vis its global counterparts. As one global North source noted with a sigh, "they are cruising" (interview 2). The G77 has been able to put global North powers on the spot regarding key issues that in the past were kept out of the UN. If global North states have long held the moral high ground at the UN, the global South now increasingly acts with an intellectual tailwind from global public discourse. The G77 has brought the discussion of representation in global governance to the UN's agenda where global North states have to fight an uphill battle against demands for greater representation by the global South. Discussions of the international financial architecture became an integral part of the Summit of the Future process, against the will of global North states. The tax resolution, supported (though not initiated) by the G77, marks not only a decisive diplomatic win for the global South, but also indicates that diplomatic consensus practices in the General Assembly are under pressure. Majority voting emerges as an option. It might under the new global power balance no longer result in pyrrhic victories only but may trigger processes that develop their own political dynamics. While the G77 has the reputation for being good at saying "no" only, global North delegates are increasingly recognising the G77 as a political force that shapes the conditions of the North-South dialogue at the UN. And if analysts have in recent decades raised doubts as to whether developing countries still benefit from G77 membership, then the group's current position of strength appears to provide a sound rationale for it.

Yet, the G77's internal decision-making system has room for improvement. The G77 operates on the basis of the consensus principle, which is an appropriate mechanism for a loosely integrated group. However, the G77 currently performs below its aspirations for an inclusive and productive system of decision-making. There are virtually no institutional guardrails that could guide group processes. By and large, Sauvant's observation from the early 1980s still holds true today: "No strong unifying institutional force exists: the Group of 77 has no long-term leadership, regular staff, headquarters, secretariat [one should add: of noteworthy size] or, for that matter, any other permanent institution" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 9). As a result, decision-making takes place in a rather ad hoc and unregulated way, which gives space to the emergence of certain shortcomings, or deviations from the ideals of inclusive consensus. The decision-making is effectively in the hands of a few member states – not only because the others trust them to represent their interests, but also because the system of in-person consultations requires diplomatic capacity which many G77 missions in New York do not have. In line with theoretical expectations, individual members can assert their own national interests over the presumptive common interest of the group. With growing diversity in the group, the G77 can often not reach a common position or only a weak one, even in those areas around development that are at the centre of the group's mission. With such difficulties, reaching common positions is often an imperfect process that involves power politics, the overriding of significant interests in the group, or simply a quid-pro-quo game, which can explain the burgeoning of G77 positions over the years that do not really reflect common priorities, despite being officially sanctioned as group positions.[36] Although the group maintains a high degree of unity in voting, it is notably less united in policy processes than the G77's image of a powerful global South negotiation bloc suggests, an image nursed both by itself and global North counterparts.

The imperfections of G77 decision-making have knock-on effects on the North-South dialogue at the UN. The G77, in principle, has functions not only for developing countries, but also towards multilateralism in the General Assembly. As the largest political group, its function is to aggregate interests, provide them with legitimacy, and thus create the conditions for

---

36 The first Ministerial Declaration from 1964 had just 10 paragraphs; the declaration from 1997 had 73; lately, the number rose to 343 in 2023. This corresponds to a large number of General Assembly resolutions, most of them initiated and "zealously protected" by the G77 (interview 15).

negotiations in the General Assembly. Deficits in the group's internal process can thus affect the processes at the General Assembly, and they can in particular contribute to heightening North-South tensions. Several aspects seem to be noteworthy based on our research. First, imperfections in internal decision-making can mean that those G77 positions that are divisive in the global context seem to get more attention than positions that affect common global interests. Group members entangled in geopolitical confrontation with the global North can take advantage of the weak decision-making processes and shape the agenda in ways that serve their interests. This constitutes not just a missed opportunity to deal with problems that are closer to the group's mission, it can also hurt the group's global reputation which is kind of the currency for influence. As Swart and Lund note, "The G-77 should be aware that its moral underpinning is at risk when it is seen as unwilling to compromise on issues that are not strictly at the heart of the G-77's original mission" (Swart & Lund, 2011, p. 161). Second, the imperfections in decision-making mean that the group often has no position, a general position only, and/or rigid positions. In particular, the latter can play into a dynamic of fruitless group-confrontation, marked by politicisation and stalemate, and fuelling mistrust on both sides. Third, internal decision-making deficits can lead to group policies built on the construction of a common global adversary. It is much easier to unite around demands for greater North-South transfers, which reinforces North-South divisions, than to work out common interests on policies (which could have a much bigger impact on resource flows). One could go one step further and argue that the G77 has an unresolved and inconsistent conception of its global position, where the dominant demand for transfers puts the group into the symbolically inferior position of a recipient over the group's more fundamental concern for equal rights and participation in global governance. This deprives the G77 of opportunities to affect change, and by implication, it weakens the G77 as an important voice in the global political discourse.

The global North, itself a driver of the North-South confrontation, is also a factor for the G77's imperfections. As noted in Section 4, group unity can, among other factors, be explained by inter-group conflict. In fact, the G77 was founded in response to the dominant role of the global North. This raises the question to what extent the unity and the behaviour of the G77 might be conditioned by the global North. Writing in the context of the late 1970s and its debates on a new international economic order, Sauvant observed that global North states may have invited and promoted G77 unity by resisting substantial and detailed discussions on economic and trade issues in the UN (Sauvant, 1981, p. 10). Policies in this field will touch on key national interests, which may create a more pragmatic approach to negotiations as experiences from trade negotiations suggest (Singh, 2002, p. 470). Focusing on largely normative and symbolic issues, however, makes it relatively easy for groups to unite vis-à-vis global counterparts (with the exception of divisive human rights issues). If marginalisation can explain confrontational tactics, then recent years have offered the global South a couple of experiences that may have reminded them of their subordinate international position: The war against Ukraine (and the global North states' muscular reaction to it); the war in Gaza, a territory of the G77 member Palestine (likened to a genocide); the Covid pandemic (and issues around access to vaccines); climate change (with tangible effects for the first time) – all these were, or still are, major global crises in which the global North has dominated the international responses. The allegation of double standards that were raised in the context of these crises speak to the point that power (of which the global South still has less) matters more than norms (which can have an equalising effect). When Arab leaders asked in the UN "how the UN could have a Summit of the Future if Palestinian children have no future at all" (Gowan, 2024b), they expressed the kind of fundamental distrust in the global North from which antagonistic attitudes arise. In such a situation of heightened antagonism, it can be understandable that the G77 rallies behind what global North delegates consider their "radical" members that demonstrate an appetite for confrontation, thus reducing the space for the moderate forces and for substantive policy work.

Still occupying a position of power in the international system, the global North therefore has a particular responsibility to create conditions that are conducive to dialogue. The key factors are

likely not the diplomatic behaviour (outreach and trust-building activities) but the foreign policy strategies made in global North capitals. Two seemingly contradictory goals need to be balanced for the global North countries: Retaining global influence as a geopolitical imperative in the emerging multipolar system (Ikenberry, 2024), and sharing power in international organisations, where global North countries still occupy privileged positions in terms of staff representation and influence over policies. Following the Chinese model of muscular influence might not be sustainable – in the longer term, global North countries might be well-advised to apply "smart power" based on the principles of consistency, reliability and partner-orientation in order to safeguard both national interests and multilateralism (Chen et al., 2023). This needs to be coupled with an adjustment of attitudes; it at least speaks for global North delegates that they themselves recognise behaviour in their own global camp that is "self-centred and ignorant about the changed reality" and attached to "anachronistic beliefs" (interview 25). As global power shifts occur, such attitudes come with the ever-increasing risk of alienating partners in the global South.

A less confrontational G77 could make for better global South outcomes. Just as the global North has a choice, so too does the G77. It can use its newfound power to turn up the pressure on the global North and approach UN politics as a power game where the goal is to maximise influence and win policy battles. With its majority of votes, it could do that. However, while majority votes are legitimate and can be used to send a strong signal – the vote on the tax resolution can be interpreted as a wake-up call to the global North – they are not a sustainable instrument for building conditions for a constructive dialogue, as they could alienate global North countries from the UN. A policy win in the UN would then not translate into any real-world benefit, to which the group should aspire. This prompts a consideration of how the G77 can identify and pursue its common interests in a somewhat more pragmatic way, where political power and moral persuasion join hands. Like global North countries, the group would be well-advised to also seek forms of "smart power" that, while principled in the pursuit of the legitimate interests of the group, reduce the risk of alienating counterparts. Such an approach might, in general, involve operating more through policy and discourse than through confrontational power tactics; it should be based on inclusive processes; and it should be conscious of the reputation of the group as a source of its influence in the UN.

Based on these conclusions and the vision of the G77 as an effective participant in UN multilateralism, we offer four suggestions about the general direction in which improvements to the G77's decision-making could be pursued:

6.1 Inclusive decision-making

The strength of the G77 is not just a matter of its unity in voting, and maybe not even primarily. Rather, there is a deeper and more compelling form of unity that comes from the potential inclusiveness of the G77's internal decision-making. An inclusive consensus will produce better positions that are more balanced and well-grounded in common global South interests and that for this reason carry greater weight in the General Assembly. It will also act as a safeguard against the politics of "who gets what" and other shortcomings that emerge when politics takes precedence over policy. It will make for greater trust in the G77 both internally, from G77 members itself, and externally, from counterparts in the General Assembly. The G77 is thus well-advised to adjust its arrangements for building consensus. Relatively modest changes could bring substantial improvements. For example, the group might create a mechanism for G77 members to provide written inputs to internal consultations, from which the chair or burden-sharer could then construct a common position. To facilitate the broadest possible involvement of G77 members, an information-sharing system could ensure that missions are routinely updated on consultations and negotiations. This would allow missions to follow processes without the need to be (personally) present in all meetings, and it could also give them an

opportunity to run issues through their capitals with relative ease. Such arrangements would bring greater transparency to the group's decision-making. A potential downside might be seen in the reduced space for frank exchanges behind closed doors. However, the benefits of a more authoritative, legitimate, and balanced group position based on inclusivity would seem to outweigh the benefits of secrecy. The G77 might also consider reviving practices of the 1970s, where a working group of 27 member states, consisting of nine members from each region, prepared proposals for the group that were then either adopted by consensus or referred back for further discussions (Sauvant, 1981, pp. 75-77).

6.2 Focus on strategic priorities

Impact requires focus. The current portfolio of G77 positions (as expressed in Ministerial Decla-rations, for example) is too expansive to allow for a meaningful focus and follow-up on progress. Not only global North partners but also G77 members appear to lack a clear concept of what the G77 wants, apart from its demands on greater North-South transfers and reform of the international financial institutions. Deficits in the aggregation of interest are not conducive to strategic bargaining in the General Assembly, in the sense that both sides can compare policies and negotiate compromises around their priorities. The group would therefore be well-advised to regularly review and define key priorities. The 2023 "Havana Declaration", with its focus on the role of science, technology and innovation, provides an example of such a process and the thematic focus it brings (G77, 2023d). In the past, the 27-member working group and later the annual G77's Ministerial Meeting, which takes place at the beginning of the regular session of the General Assembly, provided this function of "limit[ing] the topics to be dealt with by the Group to the main issues […] that are of concern to the Group as a whole" (Sauvant, 1981, p. 79). This function should be revived, producing a well-focused agenda and concrete goals around which the group's energy and outreach activities could be bundled. This could also help to build greater accountability: A few clearly stated goals could provide a framework against which the group can review policy progress in the General Assembly and, if necessary, draw lessons learned when progress is not satisfying. They could be the basis for delegating work towards working groups charged with elaborating positions. As positive side-effects, agreed policy priorities would be a factor for policy discipline, as deviations from these priorities would have to be justified. They could also set in motion a reflection of where the key interests of the group lie, and how they are best pursued. From interviews, and supported by our own analysis (Section 2), the G77 is perceived as being strongly focused on North-South transfers, which can overshadow its other policies – policies that could potentially result in much bigger financial flows. The exercise of defining annual (or multi-annual) policy priorities could strengthen the group's ability to make policy proposals.

6.3 Greater networking

The G77 in New York appears to operate in its own bubble that centres on its frequent internal consultations and where G77 delegates in New York belong to the inside and everybody else to the outside. Links to the outside world appear to be minimal (apart from contacts to global North delegates who are themselves part of the larger UN cosmos in New York). However, if the G77 aspires to a greater role in global governance, it would be well-advised to open up towards the world beyond the narrow perimeters of its internal processes. In today's vibrant public sphere, the route to global influence goes at least partially through public discourse. To some extent, the vote on the tax resolution made sense, and international financial institutions reform became a topic in the Summit of the Future process because there was a strong public support for these issues, reducing the ability of global North states to effectively counter these G77 interests. To build a case and aim for change that is larger than some language in specific General Assembly resolutions, the G77 should therefore engage in global networking, actively

mobilise support for its goals, and thus create a discursive tailwind. This should start with stronger links among the G77's regional chapters. The G77 in New York, sitting at the highest level of global governance, should be in a mutually supportive relationship with its regional chapters. Greater networking should also involve encouraging the role of civil society from the global South in the G77, and in the UN in general. The G77 should embrace think tanks from the global South as natural allies that can provide analysis while also strengthening global South positions in the public discourse. Furthermore, the G77 should follow and even seek representation at other important intergovernmental venues where consequential decisions are being taken, for example in the G7, G20, and BRICS. At the minimum, the G77 should have an analysis of how matters discussed in these forums affect global South interests.

6.4   Capacity for impact

While membership in the G77 can help reduce the burden on diplomatic capacity, even the most efficient system requires some capacity. Currently, many G77 members cannot actively participate in group processes, while the chair almost entirely relies on its own (limited) diplomatic capacities. Greater capacity should start with the G77 secretariat, which should be strengthened so that it can perform functions related to internal information-sharing, managing networking activities, and perhaps even policy work. This is not a new proposal. As Nyerere noted in an address to the group in the 1970s: "It may be that the Group of 77 should be looking again at this question of whether it needs its own full-time economists and other professional people as a technical aid to the policy-makers and negotiations" (Nyerere, 1979, p. 12). Providing funding would not be easy. The most logical approach would be to collect contributions from group members based on a scale of assessment that spreads the financial burden broadly enough to prevent disproportional influence by any single member or group of members. Funding could also come from the UN regular budget, as long as other groups receive similar support in line with their numbers and relative financial capacities. G77 members should also review their individual diplomatic capacity in light of their interests in UN multilateralism. Some of that capacity might be built at the capital level at cheaper rates than in New York. However, while strengthening capacity is important, there should also be complementary efforts to reduce the burden on capacity. This is a challenge not only for the G77, where a focus on priority issues could help reduce the burden from having to coordinate on too many issues. For the same purpose, all UN members should review UN processes in general for opportunities to shed weight. The number of annual General Assembly resolutions can probably be reduced significantly, by either phasing resolutions out or changing them from annual to quadrennial resolutions. The UN Secretariat could reduce the length of its reports, and member states could simply mandate fewer reports in line with their limited capacities to digest them.

References

Adhikari, B. (2019). United Nations general assembly voting and foreign aid bypass. *International Politics, 56*, 514-535. doi: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0152-2

Alden, C., Morphet, S., & Vieira, M. (2010). *The south in world politics*. Springer.

Alonso, J. A. (2018). Two major gaps in global governance: International tax cooperation and sovereign debt crisis resolution. *Journal of Globalization and Development, 9*(2), 20180016.

Amnesty International. (2023). *Global: Vote in favour of international cooperation on tax helps advance human rights.* https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/global-vote-in-favour-of-international-cooperation-on-tax-helps-advance-human-rights/

Ashby, H., Markey, D., Randolph, K., Sharad, K., Tugendhat, H., & Verjee, A. (2023). *What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc's Founding Members.* United States Institute for Peace, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/what-brics-expansion-means-blocs-founding-members (accessed 19 August 2024).

Barnett, M., & Duval, R. (2005). Power in international politics. *International Organization, 59*(1), 39-75. doi: 10.1017/S0020818305050010

BASIC. (2017). *Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of the 25th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change.* UNFCCC, 13 November 2017. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/BASIC-25-Statement-as-adopted-13-Nov-2017.pdf

BASIC. (2019). *Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of the 28th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change*. Ministry of Ecology and Environment, The People's Republic of China, 16 August 2019. https://english.mee.gov.cn/News_service/news_release/201908/t20190829_730517.shtml

BASIC. (2023). *BASIC Ministerial Joint Statement on Climate Change.* Press Release 467, Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 16 October 2023. https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/basic-ministerial-joint-statement-on-climate-change

Baumann, M.-O. (2018). Forever North-South? The political challenges of reforming the UN development system. *Third World Quarterly, 39(4)*, 626-641. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1408405

Baumann, M.-O. (2022). Trouble at the UN: Western member states push back against Chinese-led FAO. *The Diplomat.* https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/trouble-at-the-un-western-member-states-push-back-against-chinese-led-fao/

Baumann, M.-O., & Haug, S. (2024). *Financing the United Nations: Status quo, challenges and reform options*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation/German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

Baumann, M.-O., Haug, S., & Weinlich, S. (2022). *China's expanding engagement with the United Nations development pillar: The selective long-term approach of a programme country superpower*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

Beisheim, M. (2024). *Auf dem Weg zum Zukunftspakt der Vereinten Nationen* (SWP-Aktuell 20, March 2024). https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2024A20_vereinte_nationen_zukunftspakt.pdf

Beisheim, M., & Weinlich, S. (2023). *Germany and Namibia as Co-leads for the United Nations. Chances and challenges on the road to the 2024 UN Summit of the Future* (SWP Comment 2023/C 03, 12.01.2023). doi:10.18449/2023C03

Belarus, Bolivia, China, North Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Syria, Venezuela. (2024). *Challenges to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations arising from initiatives promoting enhanced NGOs participation in the work of the United Nations* (Working Paper).

Bhatt, A. (2023). No One Knows What BRICS Expansion Means. *The Diplomat*, 4 Oct. https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/no-one-knows-what-brics-expansion-means/

Binder, M., & Lookwood Payton, A. (2022). With Frenemies Like These: Rising Power Voting Behaviour in the UN General Assembly. *British Journal of Political Science, 52*(1), 381-298. doi:10.1017/S0007123420000538

Böhm, R., Rusch, H., & Baron, J. (2020). The psychology of intergroup conflict: A review of theories and measures. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, 178*, 947-962.

Bou Mansour, M. (2023). *UN adopts plans for historic tax reform.* Tax Justice Network. https://taxjustice.net/press/un-adopts-plans-for-historic-tax-reform/ (accessed 8 July 2024).

Boutros-Ghali, B. (2006). *Reinventing UNCTAD* (Research Report 7). South Centre. https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/232125/1/south-centre-rp-007.pdf

Carothers, T., & Press, B. (2022). *Understanding and Responding to Global Democratic Backsliding* (Working Paper). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Carothers_Press_Democratic_Backsliding_v3_1.pdf

Chan, S. Y., & Patten, A. (2023). What's Wrong with Neocolonialism? The Case of Unequal Trade in Cultural Goods. *American Political Science Review*, (September), pp.1-15. doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000795

Chen, Y., Faure, R., & Gulrajani, N. (2023). *Crafting development power: Evolving European approaches in an age of polycrisis* (ODI Research Report). ODI.

Cheryl, M. (2019). *Postcolonialism, Decoloniality and Development*. Routledge.

Dominican Republic. (2024). *Statement on behalf of 58 Member States and the European Union*. https://x.com/Denmark_UN/status/1761114628065546490?s=20

Dreher, A., Nunnenkamp, P., & Thiele, R. (2008). Does US aid buy UN general assembly votes? A disaggregated analysis. *Public Choice, 136*(1), 139-164.

Drezner, D. (2021). Power and international relations: A temporal view. *European Journal of International Relations, 27*(1), 29-52.

Economist. (2024). *Who's the big boss of the global south?* https://www.economist.com/international/2024/04/08/whos-the-big-boss-of-the-global-south

Farrell, M. (2017). Group Politics in Global Development Policy: From the Millennium Development Goals to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 12*(2-3), 221-248.

FBIC. (s. a.). *Measuring influence in the international system*. Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures. https://korbel.du.edu/fbic

Ferdinand, P. (2014). Rising powers at the UN: An analysis of the voting behaviour of BRICS in the General Assembly. *Third World Quartely, 35*(3), 376-391. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.893483

Financial Times. (2023). *Developing countries and Europe in dispute over global tax role for UN.* https://www.ft.com/content/552052ab-8650-44b3-a4d2-6affca339132

Freedom House. (2022). *Freedom in the World 202. The Global Expansion of Authoritarian.* https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf

Fung, C. J. & Lam, S. H. (2022). *Mixed-report card: China's influence at the United Nations*. Lowy Institute Analysis, December 2022. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/FUNG%2C%20LAM%2C%20China%20at%20the%20UN%2C%20PDF%20v5.pdf

G77. (1964). *Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Developing Countries made at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.* Geneva, 15 June 1964. https://www.g77.org/doc/Joint%20Declaration.html

G77. (2015). *Ministerial Declaration*, UN-Doc. A/70/410. https://www.g77.org/doc/docs.html

G77. (2023a). *Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by Ambassador Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta, Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, at the informal consultation on the roadmap for the Summit of the Future.* New York, 14 February 2023. https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20230214100000000/dCTRjcSSrR3V/rur2k Q1IasBs_en.pdf

G77. (2023b). *Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by H. E. Mr. Bruno Rodriguez Padilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, at the preparatory Ministerial Meeting on the Summit of the Future.* https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=230921

G77. (2023c). *Ministerial Declaration,* UN-Doc. A/78/392. https://www.g77.org/doc/docs.html

G77. (2023d). *Havana Declaration on Current Development Challenges: The Role of Science, Technology and Innovation*, UN-Doc. A/78/393. https://www.g77.org/doc/docs.html

G77. (2024a). *Third South Summit of the Group of 77 and China, Outcome Document.* https://www.g77.org/doc/docs.html

G77. (2024b). *Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China delivered by Ambassador Adonia Ayebare, Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations, at the informal consultations on the Summit of the Future.* https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=240416

G77. (2024c). *Historical list of G77 & China Chairpersons (as of March 2024).* FAO. https://www.fao.org/g77/about-us/en/ (accessed 16 July 2024).

G77. (2024d). *Chairmanship of the Group of 77 in New York* (Website). https://www.g77.org/doc/presiding.html

Gambale, M. L. (2024). Small Countries Are Crucial for the UN's Long-Term Survival, and Singapore Leads the Way. *PassBlue.* https://www.passblue.com/2024/02/27/small-countries-are-crucial-for-the-uns-long-term-survival-and-singapore-leads-the-way/

Garcia-Herrero, A. (2024). China continues to dominate an expanded BRICS. *East Asia Forum, 12 April.* https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/04/12/china-continues-to-dominate-an-expanded-brics/

Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and Change in World Politics.* Cambridge University Press.

Gopaldas, R. (2024). Global south: Moving off the menu and to the table? *Institute for Security Studies.* https://issafrica.org/iss-today/global-south-moving-off-the-menu-and-to-the-table

Götz. E., Kaas, J. G., & Knudsen K. P. (2023). *How African states voted on Russia's war in Ukraine at the United Nations – and what it means for the West* (Policy Brief). Danish Institute for International Studies. https://www.diis.dk/en/research/how-african-states-voted-on-russias-war-in-ukraine-the-united-nations-and-what-it-means

Gowan, R. (2024a). *The Double Standards Debate at the UN.* International Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean-mena/israelpalestine/double-standards-debate-un

Gowan, R. (2024b). The UN, an organisation close to breaking point? *Le Monde Diplomatique.* https://mondediplo.com/2024/07/06un

Gowan, R., Gibson, T., & Alberto De La Fuente, R. (2023). *U.N. Votes Reveal a Lot About Global Opinion on the War in Ukraine.* International Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/un-votes-reveal-lot-about-global-opinion-war-ukraine

Grimm, S. (2023). *The BRICS bang! – Signals from BRICS enlargement to South, West and North.* https://blogs.idos-research.de/2023/08/25/the-brics-bang-signals-from-brics-enlargement-to-south-west-and-north/

Haibin, N. (2023). *The Global South Is an Important Driving Force in the Evolution of the International Order.* Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS). https://interpret.csis.org/translations/the-global-south-is-an-important-driving-force-in-the-evolution-of-the-international-order/

Haug, S. (2024). Mutual legitimation attempts: The United Nations and China's Belt and Road Initiative. *International Affairs, 100*(3), 1207-1230.

Haug, S., Foot, R., & Baumann, M. (2024). Power shifts in international organisations: China at the United Nations. *Global Policy, 15*(S2), 5-17. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13368

Heine, J. (2023). The Global South is on the rise – but what exactly is the Global South? *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/the-global-south-is-on-the-rise-but-what-exactly-is-the-global-south-207959

Heine, J. (2024). Active non-alignment and global governance: From Latin America to the Global South. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations, 30*(2), 214-224.

HLAB (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism). (2023). *A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future*. https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/new-blueprint-calls-for-reinvigorated-global-governance/

Hogan, E., & Patrick, S. (2024). *A Closer Look at the Global South*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/global-south-colonialism-imperialism?lang=en

Hooijmaaijers, B., & Keukeleire, S. (2016). Voting Cohesion of the BRICS Countries in the UN General Assembly, 2006-2014: A BRICS Too Far? *Global Governance, 22*(3), 389-407.

Iida, K. (1988). Third world solidarity: The Group of 77 in the UN General Assembly. *International Organization, 42*(2), 375-395.

Ikenberry, J. G. (2024). Three Worlds: The West, East and South and the competition to the shape global order. *International Affairs, 100*(1), 121-138.

Ishmael, L. (2024). *The New South: Breaking with the Past. West-South Engagement in a Changing world* (Discussion Paper 9/2024). IDOS. https://doi.org/10.23661/idp9.2024

Kharas, H. (2023). *The Rise of the Global Middle Class. How the Search for the Good Life Can Change the World*. Brookings Institution Press.

Kurşun, A. M., & Parlar Dal, E. (2017). An analysis of Turkey's and BRICS' voting cohesion in the UN General Assembly during 2002–2014. *Global Policy, 8*(2), 191-201. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12405

Laatikainen, K. V. (2017). Conceptualizing groups in UN multilateralism: The diplomatic practice of group politics. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 12*(2), 113-137.

Langan, M. (2018). *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa*. Springer.

Laurenti, J. (2008). Financing. In S. Daws, & T. G. Weiss (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations* (pp. 674-700). Oxford University Press.

Lederer, E. M. (2024). UN adopts Chinese resolution with US support on closing the gap in access to artificial intelligence. *The Associated Press News*. https://apnews.com/article/un-china-us-artificial-intelligence-access-resolution-56c559be7011693390233a7bafb562d1

Lees, N. (2021). The Brandt Line after forty years: The more North–South relations change, the more they stay the same? *Review of International Studies*, *47*(1), 85-106.

Lees, N. (2023). The endurance of the G77 in international relations: South–South ideology and voting at the United Nations 1970–2015. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, *24*(3), 1-21.

Lehne, S. (2023). *After Russia's War Against Ukraine: What Kind of World Order?* Carnegie Europe. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/after-russias-war-against-ukraine-what-kind-of-world-order?lang=en&center=europe

Lektzian, D. & Biglaiser, G. (2023). Sanctions, aid, and voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly. *International Interactions, 49*(1), 59-85. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2023.2155151

Lynch, C. (2023a). *Exclusive: Global south thwarts UN future summit plans*. Devex. https://www.devex.com/news/exclusive-global-south-thwarts-un-future-summit-plans-105573

Lynch, C. (2023b). *China 'absolutely obsessed' with cutting spending at UN*. Devex. https://www.devex.com/news/china-absolutely-obsessed-with-cutting-spending-at-un-105825

Makina, A. (2013). Managing climate change: The Africa Group in multilateral environmental negotiations. *Journal of International Organizations Studies, 4*(1), 36-48.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. (2024). *Group of 77, G77.* https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjb_673085/zzjg_673183/gjjjs_674249/gjzzyhygk_674253/qsqg_674549/gk_674551/

Moyer, J. D., Sweijs, T., Burrows, M. J., & Van Manen, H. (2018). *Power and influence in a globalized world. Atlantic Council.* https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Power_and_Influence_.pdf

Murphy, D. C. (2022). *China's Rise in the Global South. The Middle East, Africa, and Beijing's Alternative World Order*. Stanford University Press.

NAM (Non-Aligned Movement). (2006). *14th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement.* Document on the Methodology of the Non-Aligned Movement, NAM 2006/Doc.6/Rev.2/Corr.1, Cuba.

NAM (s. a.). *Non-Aligned Movement: Background Information*. https://web.archive.org/web/20160209210107/http:/www.nam.gov.za/background/background.htm

Narlikar, A. (2002). The politics of participation: Decision-making processes and developing countries in the World Trade Organization. *The Round Table, 91*(364), 171-185. doi: 10.1080/00358530220134851

Nedera, S. (2023). *What is intersectionality? And why is it important for gender equality?* UNDP. https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/blog/what-intersectionality-and-why-it-important-gender-equality

Nyerere, J. (1979). *Unity for a new order*. Arusha, 12 February 1979. https://www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/view/unity_for_a_new_order_1979_arusha_1979

Pakistan. (2024). *Initial comments on Rev. 2 of the Pact of the Future by Pakistan, on behalf of the Like-Minded group* (Ambassadorial level meeting, 29 July 2024). https://pakun.org/uploads/07292024_01_6759946ea8.pdf

Passarelli, D., & Justino, P. (2024). *The demand for a fair international financial architecture* (Working Paper). United Nations University Centre for Policy Research.

Paterson, M., & Virk. K. (2013). *The African Group at the United Nations* (Report). Centre for Conflict Resolution.

Puchala, D., Laatikainen, K., & Coate, R. (2007). *United Nations Politics: International Organization in a Divided World* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662299

Rietig, K., Peringer, C., Theys, S., & Censoro, J. (2023). Unanimity or standing aside? Reinterpreting consensus in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations. *International Environment Agreements, 23*, 221-234.

Sauvant, K. P. (1981). *The group of 77. Evolution, structure, organization*. Oceana Publications.

Schalatek, L. (2021). *Broken Promises – Developed countries fail to keep their 100 billion dollar climate pledge.* Heinrich Böll Stiftung. https://us.boell.org/en/2021/10/25/broken-promises-developed-countries-fail-keep-their-100-billion-dollar-climate-pledge

Singh, J. P. (2002). Weak Powers and Globalism: The Impact of Plurality on Weak-Strong Negotiations in the International Economy. *International Negotiation,* 5, 449-484.

Smith, A. (2016). Leader Turnover, Institutions, and Voting at the UN General Assembly. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 60*(1), 143-163. doi: 10.1177/0022002714532689

Stephen, M. D. (2012). Rising regional powers and international institutions: The foreign policy orientations of India, Brazil and South Africa. *Global society, 26*(3), 289-309.

Surasky, J. (2024). *Advance: A quick opinion on the Pact for the Future Rev-2.* Global Radar. https://globalradar-analysis.blogspot.com/2024/07/advance-opionon-on-pact-for-future-rev-2.html

Suzman, M. (2023). The Roots of the Global South's New Resentment. *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/africa/roots-global-souths-new-resentment

Swart, L., & Lund, P. (2011). *The Group of 77: Perspectives of its role in the UN General Assembly*. Center for UN Reform Education. https://old.centerforunreform.org/?q=node/510

Takahashi, T. (2021). *Rising and Leading: China with the G77 at the United Nations General Assembly.* https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3944408

Thakur, R. (2020). The United Nations and the North-South Partnership: Connecting the Past to the Future. *Ethics & International Affairs, 34*(2), 305-317.

Toye, J. (2014). Assessing the G77: 50 years after UNCTAD and 40 years after the NIEO. *Third World Quarterly, 35*(10), 1759-1774.

UN (United Nations). (2005). *Juridical Yearbook 2005*. https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789213633618

UN. (2017a). *General Assembly Seventy-second session. 7th Plenary Meeting* (20 September 2017), UN-Doc. A/72/PV.7.

UN. (2017b). *Impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence in the context of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls.* Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN-Doc. A/HRC/35/10.

UN. (2019). *General Assembly, Second Committee, State of Palestine: Revised draft resolution. Women in Development,* UN-Doc. A/C.2/74/L.28/Rev.1.

UN. (2021a). *General Assembly Seventy-sixth session. 10th Plenary Meeting* (23 September 2021), UN-Doc. A/76/PV.10.

UN. (2021b). *Our Common Agenda. Report of the Secretary-General.* https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

UN. (2022a). *General Assembly Seventy-seventh session. 14th Plenary Meeting* (26 September 2022), UN-Doc. A/77/PV.14.

UN. (2022b). *General Assembly Seventy-sixth session. 102nd Plenary Meeting* (8 September 2022), UN-Doc. A/76/PV.102.

UN. (2022c). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 2022. Women in Development,* UN-Doc. A/RES/77/181.

UN. (2023a). *General Assembly Seventy-eighth session. 12th Plenary Meeting* (23 September 2023), UN-Doc. A/78/PV.12.

UN. (2023b). *General Assembly Seventy-eighth session. 10th Plenary Meeting* (22 September 2023), UN-Doc. A/78/PV.10.

UN. (2023c). *General Assembly Seventy-eighth session. 8th Plenary Meeting* (21 September 2023), UN-Doc. A/78/PV.8.

UN. (2023d). *General Assembly Seventy-eighth session. 4th Plenary Meeting* (19 September 2023), UN-Doc. A/78/PV.4.

UN. (2023e). *Statistical Yearbook 2023*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

UN. (2023f). *Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations.* Report of the Secretary-General. Advance unedited version, 8 August 2023.

UN. (2023g). *General Assembly Second Committee. Summary record of the 25th meeting.* Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 23 November 2022, UN-Doc. A/C.2/77/SR.25.

UN. (2023h). *The Least Developed Countries Report 2023. Crisis-resilient Development finance*. https://www.un-ilibrary.org/docserver/fulltext/9789213585368/9789213585368_web.pdf?expires=1724660153&id=id&accname=ocid77015268&checksum=088DF99B2B20204C46F058F7D48D3F9A

UN. (2023i). *Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations*. Resolution 78/230, 22 December 2023.

UN. (2024a). *General Assembly, Second Committee, Summary record of the 24th meeting*. Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 21 November 2023, UN-Doc. A/C.2/78/SR.24.

UN. (2024b). *General Assembly, Second Committee, Summary record of the 25th meeting*. Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 22 November 2023, UN-Doc. A/C.2/78/SR.25*.

UN. (2024c). *Pact for the Future: Rev.2*. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/pact_for_the_future_-_rev.2_-_17_july.pdf

UN. (s. a.). *What does it mean when a decision is taken "by consensus"?* Dag Hammarskjöld Library. https://ask.un.org/faq/260981

Ungar, M. (2024). *Political divides drive a reassessment of UN sanctions*. International Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/political-divides-drive-reassessment-un-sanctions

Urpelainen, J. (2012). Strategic problems in North–South climate finance: Creating joint gains for donors and recipients. *Environmental Science & Policy, 21*, 14-23.

Vihma, A., Mulugetta, Y., & Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, S. (2011). Negotiating solidarity? The G77 through the prism of climate change negotiations. *Global Change, Peace & Security, 23*(3), 315-334. https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2011.601853