MULTIPOLARITY AND DIVERGENT PATTERNS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Çok Kutupluluk ve Küresel Yönetişimin Farklılaşan Biçimleri

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Abstract

This article examines how the transition toward multipolarity reshapes global governance across material, institutional, and normative domains. It asks why uneven power diffusion produces reform within some established institutions but encourages parallel institutions, selective cooperation, and stronger normative contestation in others. The analysis treats multipolarity as a domain-sensitive redistribution of capabilities rather than a uniform transfer of primacy and distinguishes it from hegemony, the liberal international order, and global governance. This article brings together the main arguments and questions in the growing scholarship on multipolarity and global governance. The study then places debates on power diffusion alongside recent evidence of economic, military, technological, diplomatic, financial, and normative change. The evidence is organized across six domains of power and three institutional responses. Normative contestation treated as a cross-cutting dimension. The findings show that the United States remains the central global power, while China and other rising and regional powers have gained influence unevenly across economic, military, technological, diplomatic, financial, and normative fields. This redistribution does not generate a single institutional path. Established institutions adapt where their authority is difficult to replace and internal adjustment remains possible. Parallel arrangements expand where representation deficits persist and dissatisfied actors possess the resources to sustain alternative pathways. Selective cooperation grows where broad consensus is costly but narrower coordination remains pragmatic. Liberal principles remain embedded in global institutions, while coexist with claims sovereignty, development, non-interference, and political diversity. The article's contribution is a conditional-pathways framework that explains variation among these coexisting responses at the level of issue areas. It does not treat multipolarity as a direct cause of either institutional decline or hegemonic replacement.

Keywords: Multipolarity, global governance, power diffusion, institutional adaptation, normative contestation

Öz

Bu makale, çok kutupluluğa geçişin küresel yönetişimi maddi, kurumsal ve normatif alanlarda nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma, gücün eşitsiz yayılımının neden bazı yerleşik kurumlarda reforma yol açarken başka alanlarda paralel kurumları, seçici iş birliğini ve daha güçlü normatif çekişmeyi teşvik ettiğini sormaktadır. Analiz, çok kutupluluğu üstünlüğün tek biçimli aktarımı olarak değil, yeteneklerin alanlara göre farklılaşan yeniden dağılımı olarak ele almaktadır. Araştırma, bu kavramı hegemonya, liberal uluslararası düzen ve küresel yönetişimden ayırmaktadır. Çalışma, çok kutupluluk ve küresel yönetişim üzerine gelişen literatürdeki temel argümanları ve soruları bir araya getirirken, gücün yayılımına ilişkin tartışmaları ekonomik, askerî, teknolojik, diplomatik, finansal ve normatif değişimlere dair güncel kanıtlar ışığında değerlendirmektedir. Kanıtlar altı güç alanı ve üç kurumsal tepki üzerinden düzenlenmekte, normatif çekişme ise bu tepkileri kesen bir boyut olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bulgular, ABD'nin küresel sistemdeki merkezî konumunu sürdürdüğünü; buna karşılık Çin'in ve diğer yükselen ve bölgesel aktörlerin ekonomik, askerî, teknolojik, diplomatik, finansal ve normatif alanlarda eşitsiz biçimde nüfuz kazandığını göstermektedir. Bu yeniden dağılım tek bir kurumsal yörünge yaratmamaktadır. Otoritesi kolayca ikame edilemeyen ve iç uyuma açık kurumlar reformdan geçerken, temsil açıklarının sürdüğü ve memnuniyetsiz aktörlerin alternatifleri destekleyecek kaynaklara sahip olduğu alanlarda paralel düzenlemeler gelişmektedir. Geniş uzlaşmanın maliyetli fakat dar kapsamlı eşgüdümün yararlı olduğu durumlarda ise seçici iş birliği öne çıkmaktadır. Liberal ilkeler küresel kurumlardaki yerleşik konumlarını korumakla birlikte, egemenlik, kalkınma, iç işlerine karışmama ve siyasal çeşitliliği vurgulayan taleplerle birlikte var olmaktadır. Makalenin özgün katkısı, çok kutupluluğu kurumsal gerilemenin veya hegemonik yer değiştirmenin doğrudan nedeni olarak ele almak yerine, bu eşzamanlı tepkilerin konu alanlarına göre neden farklılaştığını açıklayan koşullu bir çerçeve geliştirmesidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çok kutupluluk, küresel yönetişim, gücün yayılımı, kurumsal uyum, normatif çekişme

Introduction

The end of the Cold War left the United States in a dominant global position, supported by its economic strength and military capabilities. This status gave rise to the international order structure as a unipolar American hegemony in which characterized by U.S.-centered alliances, institutions, and liberal norms. Ikenberry (2018, pp. 7–8) describes this institutionalized leadership as a liberal hegemonic order, where American power was

legitimized through institutions that allowed Washington to shape global rules, provide public goods, and integrate other states into a U.S.-led system.

These developments raise the central question of this article: how does the transition toward multipolarity reshape global governance across material, institutional, and normative domains? The second correlated question is why this transition produces reform within some established institutions while encouraging parallel arrangements, selective cooperation, and stronger normative contestation? The decline of the unipolarity and the diffusion of global power are established in the literature. Acharya (2017, pp. 271–279; 2018) conceptualizes the emerging global order as multiplex, by emphasizing multiple actors, institutions, and ideas that cannot be reduced to polarity alone. This article instead uses multipolarity to examine how capabilities and influence are shifting among major and regional powers. Stephen (2025, pp. 145–151), meanwhile, links global power diffusion to declining governance capacity. This research does not assume a single process of governance decline. It examines variation in the institutional and normative responses associated with multipolarization. The article distinguishes among reform within established institutions, parallel institutional development, selective cooperation, and normative contestation. The study starts with changes in economic, military, technological, diplomatic, financial, and normative influence, then examines how these shifts appear in different patterns of global governance.

Existing research has explained institutional resilience, fragmentation, and normative contestation. These responses are often examined separately by focusing particular actors and institutions. This article's original contribution is to place them within one comparative framework and explain their coexistence at the level of issue areas. The form of change depends on institutional limitations and the alternative choices available for dissatisfied actors. These conditions explain why reform, parallel institution-building, and selective cooperation coexist. The framework extends work on contested multilateralism by identifying when actors are more likely to reform an institution, build an alternative, or coordinate through a narrower group (Morse & Keohane, 2014, pp. 392–393).

1. Conceptual Distinctions and Analytical Scope

Polarity objects the distribution of material capabilities among the strongest states, while unipolarity describes a system in which one state holds a sufficient advantage that no peer competitor can counterbalance it (Wohlforth, 1999, pp. 9–10). Monteiro (2012, pp. 13–14) explains unipolarity as an anarchic interstate setting that one great power predominates but other states retain meaningful freedom of action. A decline

in the American superiority may weaken unipolarity without immediately ending U.S. primacy.

Multipolarity indicates that several major powers possess sufficient capabilities for their choices and alignments to affect broader balance. Deutsch and Singer (1964, pp. 390–392) interpret the movement from bipolarity toward multipolarity by an increase in the number of major actors whose interactions shape systemic outcomes. Mearsheimer (1990, pp. 13–19) argues that a multipolar system creates more room for miscalculation and conflict than does a bipolar structure. Yet the contemporary order does not simulate a settled balance among equal poles. Acharya (2017, pp. 277–279) describes a 'multiplex' order in which power, institutions, and ideas are dispersed among different actors. Multipolarity is used here in a directional and domain-sensitive sense term. It denotes an uneven movement away from concentrated U.S. predominance, not a completed or uniform balance among equal powers.

Hegemony refers that political relationship rather than to the number of major powers in the system. Lake (1993, pp. 460–463), leadership involves providing international public goods, while hegemonic explanations link openness and compliance to the distribution of power.

Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990, pp. 284–285) argue that a leading state's influence becomes more robust when foreign elites regard its ideas as legitimate. Hegemony is understood here is a superior capability into durable rule-making authority that rests on consent. A state may remain the strongest pole while becoming less able to define legitimate rules, or coordinate collective action.

The liberal international order is a specific institutional and normative arrangement rather than the international system as a whole. Deudney and Ikenberry (1999, p. 179) attribute its post-war durability to the way security arrangements, economic openness, and restrained American power. Mearsheimer (2019, p. 22) argues that the post-Cold War liberal order centered on international institutions, an open world economy, and the spread of liberal democracy. Ikenberry (2018, pp. 7–9) describes the resulting arrangement as a liberal hegemonic order built under U.S. leadership. Liberal rules and institutions may survive a relative decline in American authority. This weakening of U.S. hegemony does not mean disappearance of every liberal element of international order.

Global governance has the widest scope of the concepts used in this article. Finkelstein (1995, p. 369) reserves global governance for efforts to manage cross-border relations in a system that lacks an overarching sovereign. Dingwerth and Pattberg (2006, pp. 191–196) further treat global governance as an analytical perspective that includes formal and informal arrangements involving public and private actors. These distinctions define the space examined in the following sections. A redistribution of capabilities does not by itself demonstrate the collapse of hegemony, the end of the

liberal order, or the failure of global governance. The article instead asks why the same movement of power is followed by reform in some fields, parallel arrangements or selective cooperation in others, and stronger normative contestation across several of them.

2. Method and Analytical Approach

This article develops its argument through a focused, interpretive review of scholarship in international relations and international political economy. It brings into conversation debates that are often considered separately: changes in the distribution of power, the adaptation and fragmentation of international institutions, the growing use of selective cooperation, and contestation over the norms that underpin global governance. In this vein, these bodies of work make it possible to trace how a change in capabilities enters institutional politics and why its effects diverge. The review is used to identify the conditions under which changes in power are associated with different forms of governance change.

The literature was selected in relation to the article's research question. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies and established scholarly works that offer either a clear theoretical argument and well-documented institutional case. The review concentrates on the post-Cold War order, on the period in which U.S. predominance has become increasingly contested. Earlier works are retained where they establish the meaning of the central concepts. Official and institutional sources serve a narrower purpose. They provide recent evidence on changes in economic weight, military expenditure, trade, technology, and stated government positions. This distinction allows current indicators to be read through established debates without presenting a change in capabilities as proof of institutional transformation.

The article compares patterns of governance change across fields of cooperation because a state or institution does not necessarily follow one strategy in every domain. A state may press for reform within one organization, support an alternative arrangement in another area, and cooperate through a smaller group elsewhere. The analysis therefore follows the relationship between a change in capabilities, the institutional setting, and the response that follows. Across the cases, attention is given to four recurring conditions: whether an existing institution is difficult to replace, whether representation can be adjusted internally, whether dissatisfied actors can sustain an alternative, and whether broad agreement remains possible. The cases clarify these pathways and Table 1 presents the comparative logic in a condensed form.

Table 1. Conditions and expected governance responses

Governance response	Conditions favoring it	Illustrative cases
Reform within established institutions	The institution is difficult to replace because of its membership, expertise, resources, or legal authority, and its rules still permit adjustments in representation or decision-making	G20 elevation; IMF quota revisions; World Bank voting reforms
Parallel institution-building	Representation deficits persist, internal reform is blocked, and dissatisfied actors hold the material and diplomatic resources to sustain an alternative	AIIB; NDB; BRICS+; SCO; RCEP
Selective and minilateral cooperation	Broad consensus carries high transaction costs while a smaller group retains a strong functional interest in coordination	P5+1 negotiations with Iran; Quad; AUKUS; issue-specific coalitions
Normative contestation	Rules bear directly on sovereignty, political legitimacy, intervention, rights, or competing development models	UN Human Rights Council debates; R2P after Libya; WTO disputes over trade models

Source: Author's synthesis, informed by Morse and Keohane (2014, pp. 392–393) and Deitelhoff and Zimmermann (2020, pp. 51–54).

3. Multiple Dimensions of Power in the Emerging Multipolar Order

In the economic sphere, the U.S. unipolarity has been diminishing where is evident across multiple domains of international relations. One of biggest indicator is the clear economic shift from the United States to emerging powers. Between 2000 and 2025, China's GDP (nominal) has increased dramatically from 1.22 trillion USD to 19.63 trillion USD**,** at the same time United States also showed significant economic growth, with its GDP increasing from 10.25 trillion USD to 30.77 trillion USD over the same period (Textor 2026). According to International Monetary Fund (2026) in purchasing power parity terms, China has already become leader. On the other side, the U.S. has remained the biggest economy, reflecting a historic change in the global economic hierarchy. Trade patterns likewise show China's expanding influence. Between 2000 and 2025, China's total trade has increased from 474 billion USD to 6.36 trillion USD, (Shang & Zhou, 2026). According to Osorio Rodarte (2023) these developments have been transforming it from the leading trading partner of limited and small number of economies into the dominant partner across most of Asia, Africa, and South America, while the United States remained strongest mainly in North America and selected South American markets and the European Union retained its leading position primarily in Europe and North Africa. This

strong change in trade links has been enhancing China's leverage in international economic relations. As parallel to that development, the Chinese renminbi is slowly expanding its role in global finance at the expense of the U.S. dollar (Kapron, 2026). The dollar still remains dominant as the world's reserve currency, but its portion of global foreign-exchange reserves has been decreasing from about 71% in 2000 to 56.77% at the end of 2025, (Nephew et al., 2026). During this period, Central banks have gradually diversified reserves, and alternative financial arrangements have been developed exclude U.S. control (Kapron, 2026). China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2016 as a new multilateral financial institution with 110 member states to parallel the U.S.-led World Bank. Moreover, China launched its own cross-border interbank payment system to reduce reliance on the SWIFT network. This Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) was introduced to strengthen China's RMB payment infrastructure projects and support the broader development of renminbi and cross-border financial services (Xinhua, 2025). Together, these initiatives diversify the financial infrastructure available to China and its partners without yet displacing the dollar-centered system (H. Wang, 2019, pp. 221–224).

On the diplomatic and political front, U.S. primacy has been diminished through decision making. American influence in multilateral forums such as UN has declined as rising powers assert themselves and sometimes disrupt U.S. initiatives. The United Nations Security Council has also challenged by rising powers. Russia and China have applied their veto power more than they did in the early post-Cold War period. This has been visible during debates over Syria, Gaza, Iran and other major geopolitical crises, where both states haven't agreed with Western resolutions (United Nations Security Council, n.d.). The growing use of the veto suggests that the uncontested U.S.-led multilateral order of the 1990s has weakened. This environment giving way to a more divided and adversarial Security Council environment. This reflects a more contested UN multilateral arena where U.S. ability to set the agenda has diminished. More broadly, U.S. diplomacy struggles to rally the broad coalitions anymore. In recent years, American efforts to isolate adversaries have met complicated responses beyond its alliance network. Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, rising Global South powers like India, Brazil, and South Africa have remained neutral rather than joining a U.S.-led sanctions regime towards Russia. Rather than be part of Western pressure against Moscow, BRICS countries have maintained engagement with Russia, thereby reducing the effectiveness of efforts to isolate Putin and avoiding participation in sanctions (Hopewell, 2026). Türkiye further demonstrates that selective alignment is not confined to states outside Western institutions. As a NATO member, it condemned

Russia's invasion, supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and defense capacity, and facilitated negotiations. Türkiye declined to join the broad Western sanctions regime and maintaining substantial economic and diplomatic relations with Moscow (Öniş & Uluyol, 2025, pp. 5–6, 19–21). Its position reflects strategic autonomy within alliance constraints rather than withdrawal from the Western order. Similarly, some of the Global South states also have not followed the U.S. led technology regime towards Huawei. A focal point relates to 5G infrastructure, Chinese digital infrastructure notably affordable and remained high demand even though the U.S. security concerns and the pressures for an emerging digital Cold War (Heeks et al., 2024). These results underscore that U.S. global leadership is no longer taken for granted rather, states are more willing to take independent stances when their interests differ from the U.S.

Besides, China's expanding diplomatic reach enhances a relational dimension to this movement toward multipolarity. A state's diplomatic influence also comes from the bilateral and multilateral relationships it can draw on to gather information, negotiate, and build coalitions (Henke, 2017, pp. 412–413). China's overseas diplomatic network has become comparable in global scale by wide spreading across Africa, East Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific (Neelam & Sato, 2024, pp. 2–5). The 2025 Asia Power Index which combines diplomatic networks, multilateral power, and foreign-policy capacity where China ahead of the United States in diplomatic influence within Asia (Patton & Sato, 2025, p.24). These developments demonstrate a significant diplomatic primacy for China.

The ideational power of U.S. hegemony has also weakened. Liberal democracy and free-market economics have enjoyed broad ideological support and bolstered U.S. soft power during 1990's. Today, global opinion surveys have shown a relative decline attractiveness towards the American values. Confidence in U.S. leadership has lost its support broadly and generally trended downward (Gallup, 2026). This shift toward volatility has diminished the perceived reliability of U.S. global leadership. Moreover, democratic governance around world has become defensive. Freedom House has been recording this phenomenon, based on their reports. 2025, marked the twentieth consecutive year of decline in relatively global freedom, as 54 countries saw setbacks in political rights and civil liberties, while only 35 experienced progresses, with more countries experiencing democratic backsliding than gains (Gorokhovskaia et al., 2026). Rising powers have also advanced competing accounts of political legitimacy and development.

The U.S. set of liberal democratic ideas has been challenged by rising powers. Competing governance models championed by rising powers have gained importance in developing world. The decline in liberal appeal is not a uniform rejection of democracy across the Global South. Criticism in non-Western societies often targets the presentation of one Western

institutional model as universally applicable, the use of democracy and human-rights conditionality, and perceived double standards in intervention and accountability (Acharya, 2017, pp. 281-283).

On the other hand, China has defined its model of "democracy with Chinese characteristics" as an alternative to liberal democracy. China frames its of democracy as a "whole-process people's democracy," meaning that it is a system in which public participation goes beyond elections and extends into lawmaking, policy formation, governance, and supervision through its institutions such as the National People's Congress and the "two sessions," with this the stated purpose of representing the broader interests of the people, at the same time supporting national development (Xinhua, 2022). These narratives and results have intensified normative contestation that fundamental principles like human rights, sovereignty, and intervention are debated in international forums and institutions. China focuses on interpretations privileging state sovereignty and economic/social rights that challenging the Western emphasis on individual political rights and humanitarian intervention. This overall ideological influence of the U.S. rooted in the of liberal democracy has been losing its attractiveness to undermining one of important pillar of U.S. hegemony.

Military capabilities are main power of a superpower's dominance, and the U.S. remains the world's strongest military power. Still, this domain also has narrowed American supremacy. SIPRI's military expenditure data between 2000 and 2025 shows not only the overall expansion of global defense spending, but also the changing structure of great-power competition (Sköns et al., 2001; Liang et al., 2026). In 2000, the United States occupied an overwhelmingly dominant military position, spending roughly 37 percent of total global military expenditure alone, at a time when world military spending stood at about $798 billion. This reflected the height of the post-Cold War unipolar order and the United States' position as the only superpower (Sköns et al., 2001). The United States has remained the world's largest military spender today. Its military expenditure of $954 billion, accounting for around 33 percent of the global total, while China's rise to second place in military spendings with $336 billion which is signaled as a major shift in the global balance of military and technological power (Liang et al., 2026). This change has reflected the broader and structural transformation of international politics, in which military competition is no longer limited to conventional force size, but also increasingly focuses on advanced military technologies, naval power, cyber capabilities, space systems, artificial intelligence, missiles etc. North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], 2022). In this context, rising military expenditure by China, and middle and rising powers can see that the international system has moved away from the mainly based on U.S.-led security order of the

1990s toward relatively competitive and technologically shaped and driven era of great-power rivalry.

These key dimensions of power indicate that China can no longer be understood merely as a great power, but increasingly as a superpower (Lind, 2024). China has also constructed its capabilities in military through designed to offset U.S. superiority in key regions. The development of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems by China has improved its position and made it riskier and more costly for U.S. forces to operate near their shores (Yevtodyeva, 2022). China's technical and military strategies on deployment of long-range anti-ship missiles, advanced air defenses, and anti-satellite weapons in the Western Pacific have complicates U.S. military intervention in any conflicts (Burdette, 2025). In this sense, the global diffusion of advanced technology directly refers to the U.S. is not a monopoly on certain military tools anymore (Yevtodyeva, 2022). These developed technologies such as guided missiles, drones, and cyber warfare capabilities used to be largely U.S. domains are now available to middle powers such as Türkiye (Rossiter & Cannon, 2022). This changing environment for military technology has reduce American military dominance.

Technological leadership, a strong front of U.S. power, is also becoming more contested. The distribution of technological capabilities has become a central focal point of the rising U.S.–China rivalry. While the United States remains a top innovation power, carried by its well-developed private-sector research ecosystem as well as its strong performance in frontier scientific fields, China has significantly narrowed the technological gap through sustained investment in research capacity, industrial upgrading, and innovation strategies. Those policies made China become the world's largest performer of R&D expenditure and also produces the highest number of scientific publications in the world, although U.S. continue to maintain its higher presence in influential research by measuring through highly cited publications (National Science Board, 2026). These contrasting strengths has given a more detailed transformation of technological power rather than the U.S.-China digital competition. China's R&D expenditure has gradually expanded over the past two decades, increasing from approximately 33 billion USD in 2000 to more than 1 trillion USD by 2024, while U.S. R&D expenditure has increased from 269 billion USD to nearly USD 1 trillion. This result has made China became as the world's largest performer of R&D expenditure, slightly surpassing the United States in total R&D investment (National Science Board, 2026B). In recent years, China has become a peer competitor to the U.S. in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology. The rivalry to set standards in 5G, renewable energy tech, and other emerging sectors has become a geopolitical contest (Chari, 2025). China's technology power has changed in international standard-setting bodies are increasingly influential, reflecting a shift from U.S.-EU to a more multipolar tech governance environment which

has named as *digital orientalism* (Mahoney, 2023). In AI governance, China's participation in international standard-setting illustrates how technological competition now extends to the rules governing innovation (Cheng & Zeng, 2023, pp. 794–797). Technological diffusion consequently influences a distribution of power, diminishing U.S. influence in determining the parameters of globalization.

The pattern reflects an uneven shift toward multipolarity, with no single state directly replacing the United States. Economic and technological capabilities have become broadly distributed. Also, diplomatic autonomy has expanded among rising and middle powers. China has significantly narrowed selected capability gaps, while U.S. remains top power on military, economy and alliances. This distinction provides the basis for examining why global governance displays different patterns of institutional adaptation, parallel development, selective cooperation, and normative contestation rather than a single process of decline (Acharya, 2018; Nye, 2022; Stephen, 2025).

4. Reform within Established Institutions

During the unipolar era, many multilateral institutions and decision-making forums have been shaped by the U.S. and its close allies, reflecting a global hegemonic arrangement. The U.S. leadership mostly translated to Western preferences set the rules within institutions (Ikenberry, 2018). Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), NATO, and others, have been managed by institutional rules. In multipolar era, as power diffuses, and pluralistic in structure (Stephen, 2025).

One response to the changing distribution of power has been adaptation within established institutions rather than their displacement. Decision-making process, formerly run through advanced Western states has been expanding to include emerging powers (Stephen, 2025). A noticeable change is the elevation of the G20 which became the premier forum for global economic coordination after the 2008 financial crisis. The formation of major developing economies in the G20 acknowledged that effective global economic governance should requires broader representation beyond the traditional trans-Atlantic states (Blom, 2022). Similarly, within Bretton Woods institutions, important reforms have given greater weight to rising states. The IMF implemented quota and voting share adjustments that increased China's standing as well as boosted the influence of other emerging market economies (Wang, 2018). The World Bank also introduced new set of governance reforms tied to capital increases, expanding the voting power of developing countries (Lee & Woo, 2022). Even though Western powers still hold significant influence, these steps reflect movement toward more multipolar global governance structure through institutions. Moreover,

China has supported alternative institutions such as the AIIB, this trend accompanying a new governance structure defined as *"multilateralism à la carte"* (Heldt et al., 2025). These reforms show that multipolarization can be accommodated through changes in representation and voting power even when established institutions remain intact.

China's engagement with multilateral economic institutions can be interpreted as selective and pragmatic, rather than fully supportive of the existing order or openly revisionist (Liu & Yang, 2023). In contrast to a single multilateral order dominated by one superpower, the emerging structure is a combination of overlapping and competing cooperative frameworks (Tang, 2018). In this post-unipolar era, states are increasingly adopting selective multilateralism, participating in institutions or coalitions that align with their specific interests on related subjects, rather than depending on a singular universal system for all governance requirements. This new "multi-multilateral" system is more adaptable, as states can make their arrangements, but it also leads to divided global governance landscape broadly.

5. Parallel Institutions and Competing Forums

In the era of multipolarity, as global power becomes more widespread, dissatisfied and rising states have increasingly demanded more institutional innovation through shifting activity toward alternative forums (Liu & Yang, 2023). They have created new multilateral parallel institutions, such as the AIIB, the New Development Bank, and BRICS+, in order to gain their agenda-setting capacity and institutional arrangements closely aligned with their strategic and developmental interests (Daßler, 2024; Heldt et al., 2025; Wang, 2019). This has led to institutional multiplication and overlapping mandates among rival institutions. China and other emerging powers have established parallel structures as alternatives to Western-dominated ones. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS-founded New Development Bank (NDB) are most important examples of these new parallel institutions, they provide alternatives to the World Bank and IMF for development finance without demanding governance arrangements explicitly aiming to offer financing without the policy changes associated with Western lenders (Wang, 2019). Moreover, in the security sphere, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), formed by China, Russia and Central Asian states, it brings a new forum for regional security cooperation that purposely excludes the U.S. (Dadabaev, 2014; Yuan, 2023). In trade, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) led by ASEAN within China came into force in 2022, providing the world's largest trading bloc after the U.S. had withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. The existence of multiple institutions addressing similar issues enables what scholars call "forum shopping" that states can join that best serve their strategic preferences (Heldt et al., 2025). In this environment, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is an

institution than a network of bilateral and multilateral projects globally. It exemplifies a new multilateral platform through which China advances infrastructure development and economic integration by its own terms rather than through the Bretton Woods framework.

Institutional pluralism cannot be reduced to a Chinese model of global governance. India, Brazil, and South Africa combine support for multilateral rules with demands for greater representation, sovereign equality, policy space, and development autonomy rather than advancing a single alternative pattern (Stephen, 2014, pp. 912–916). India's participation in the Quad, the SCO, and BRICS preserves room for independent choice. BRICS and the NDB should not be treated solely as instruments of Chinese leadership. They provide members with additional voice and financing while leaving strategic preferences partly unresolved (H. Wang, 2019, pp. 221–224). The common claim is that global governance should be more representative and should permit nationally defined development choices.

The growth of alternative frameworks has produced a more fragmented institutional landscape of overlapping regimes led by Western states, China and other rising powers (Foot & Zhang, 2026). Global governance has become defined by overlapping regimes, some led by Western states, some by China or other rising powers, especially in some specific regions. In this context most notable one in Asia-Pacific trade governance, where there is significant overlap between the Japan-led Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for TPP that evolved after the U.S. exit, besides, the ASEAN-led RCEP with China, and various bilateral free trade agreements through all coexisting within the multilateral WTO system. This institutional pluralism has shown various effects in global governance. On the one hand, the expansion of these parallel institutions has duplicated existing functions and created inconsistencies in development finance. The World Bank and the NDB follow different approaches to governance in finance, their lending, transparency, and environmental and social safeguards, these different policies expose borrowers to competing loan criteria and institutional standards (Hongying Wang, 2019). This can also be seen in infrastructure governance, where the BRI and Western funded initiatives operate by different financing practices, and regulatory policies (Heng Wang, 2021).

This institutional plurality can weaken universal norms when borrowing countries abandon broader forums for other institutions which conditionalities are lesser. On the other hand, a multiplicity of institutions has brought new energy and advantages to their members, this competing global governance efforts can bring innovation into governance. Competition among institutions has already given rise to trends of reforms, and specialized institutions can work efficiently to give solutions to specific

regions or issues. Amitav Acharya (2017) characterizes that the emerging order as a "multiplex world" in such a world, no single power or institution dictates all rules; thus, diverse governance arrangements coexisted, and states rationally navigate among them, which might provide resilience through diversity.

Within the context of increasing division, regional organizations have taken on a more prominent role. ASEAN in Southeast Asia has constructed its own consensus-based approach to regional issues, by asserting "ASEAN Centrality" on Asian security and trade arrangements (Yoshimatsu, 2023). These changing regional efforts reflect more local autonomy and governance by those directly affected, rather than by great powers and their competition. Increasing regionalism contributes to a more decentralized governance architecture in which regional orders operate alongside global institutions rather than simply beneath a single hierarchy (Acharya, 2018; Yoshimatsu, 2023). This creates a layering of global, inter-regional, and regional institutions at the same time, and these layered institutions sometimes cooperate, other times run in parallel (Rabitz, 2016). Meanwhile, established order in global institutions has been face significant adaptation challenges in this new environment. Most legacy institutions were designed in an era of U.S./Western dominance and they are struggling to reform their governance to reflect current realities (Stephen, 2025). Reforming the UN Security Council to add new permanent members such as India, Japan, or Brazil, has been debated for decades, yet it remains blocked by the interests of current powers (Binder & Heupel, 2020). The policy has reduced the Council's legitimacy and effectiveness. The WTO has found it increasingly difficult to complete broad multilateral trade negotiations. One reason is its consensus-based decision-making system, which allows disagreements among members with different economic interests and policy priorities to delay or block agreement (Zampetti et al., 2022). The U.S.–China rivalry has ended up a trade war and it has diminished the WTO's capacity to serve as the primary platform for trade rule formulation and dispute resolution. This is not just a technical difficulty of change, but a wider crisis of institutional adaptation, as global trade governance is more and more driven by great-power competition, legal fragmentation and alternative arrangements are outside of full WTO consensus. (Shaffer & Gao, 2018). Great-power rivalries cause to delay of reforms especially when global adaptation is needed. As emerging powers create alternatives, this might outcome to traditional institutions risk falling into irrelevance if they cannot adjust (Stephen, 2025).

The other major difficulty for global institutions is the correlation between effectiveness and representation. If institutions expand their participants, that directly affects decision-making and mostly becomes either slower or harder to coordinate, otherwise, if they fail to broaden representation, they are become unrepresentative (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019).

Decades long debate over IMF quota reforms clearly illustrates this issue, since these attempts to give sufficient weight to place to emerging and developing economies have been repeatedly constrained by the voting power and also their institutional privileges of existing major shareholders (Wang, 2018). This dilemma is reinforced by a wider significant problem. When power becomes more dispersed, states are more willing to engage selectively with multilateral rules based on their needs and interests, they support institutions when they serve national interests but bypassing, criticizing, or withdrawing from them when they impose constraints (Cooper et al., 2025). The U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and its changing policies towards institutions such as the WTO and WHO, can interpreted as how major powers can weaken multilateral authority when they treat related rules as tool and optional. In this sense, the authority of global governance depends not only on formal rules, but also on whether powerful states are willing to accept and uphold them. Parallel institution-building becomes most consequential when representation deficits persist, internal reform is blocked, and dissatisfied actors can sustain an alternative body as well as bargain for established one.

6. Selective Cooperation and Minilateralism

Multipolarity has also encouraged more flexible kinds of cooperation better suited to a more plural and contested international order (Panda & Park, 2024). States have relied on informal and issue-specific coalitions to address specific problems when achieving universal consensus through major treaty-based organizations is difficult. Mini-lateral arrangements, and hybrid institutional environment can reduce negotiation costs and provide faster coordination among interested actors, even though their weakly institutionalized nature also raises questions for accountability, legitimacy, and long-term effectiveness (Abbott & Faude, 2022). Forums such as BRICS proved how informal platforms can become more important in global governance. The expansion of BRICS reflects the growing demand for emerging powers to reach alternative platforms of influence (de Carvalho et al., 2025).

When global institutions are not capable to produce a result for consensus, states increasingly shift cooperation toward regional, mini-lateral, or these specific frameworks (Panda & Park, 2024). In security and non-proliferation related, the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement was a smaller negotiation format that involving Iran, the P5+1, and the European Union, while not only relying to make wider UN-based processes (Sauer, 2019). In the Indo-Pacific, the Quad and AUKUS alliances has illustrated the growing use of flexible security arrangements in mini-lateral structure, (Bisley, 2025) allowing key actors to coordinate on their regional order, maritime security,

technology, and strategic resilience without creating complexity of formal alliance structures.

Cooperation has not disappeared in these geopolitical rivalries; rather, it has become more selective and issue-based. Although states compete in strategic and technological domains while still maintaining their limited cooperation in some of functional areas. Increasingly, global governance evolved based on overlapping layers of cooperation, where universal institutions co-exist with regional platforms, mini-lateral alliances and technical bodies. Selective cooperation also occurs within established alliances, as the case of Türkiye demonstrates. The case shows that states may separate core collective commitments from issue areas in which they preserve policy autonomy (Öniş & Uluyol, 2025, pp. 19–21).

In sum, the institutional face of global governance is in transition, while the decline of unipolarity has led to a more multilayered institutional ecosystem. Power shifts have resulted in the creation of new institutions and forums that produced overlapping arrangements at global and regional levels, and created informal and flexible modes of cooperation. The emerging system is mostly seen as decentralized and contested, where institutions created by states to pursue their aims.

7. Normative Contestation in a Multipolar Order

Multipolarity also has a normative dimension, but normative change should not be treated as an automatic consequence of material redistribution. The post-1990 global order was constructed through the U.S. material and normative power. Namely democracy, free markets, human rights, and rule of law are main caterpillar of the system (Ikenberry, 2018). As American dominance lost its momentum, these liberal principles no longer go unchallenged and we witnessed a normative power shift is underway together with the material shift (Bettiza & Lewis, 2020). During the unipolar era, Western liberal norms were widely seen as universal objectives. In recent years, rising powers like China and Russia have explicitly promote different norms in international discourse (Bettiza & Lewis, 2020). They emphasize Westphalian codes, specifically state sovereignty as well as non-interference, and prioritize the economy and over political liberties (Dukalskis, 2023). China's one of main discourse "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" presents an alternative approach to normative world, where norms based on sovereign equality, non-interference, development, and national development paths (Nathan & Zhang, 2022). Although this vision is framed as inclusive multilateralism, the concept also challenges the Western liberal tendency to correlated international cooperation was linked to democracy promotion, civil-political rights, or externally defined governance standards (Dukalskis, 2023). This new discourse has particular appeal among many developing states because it emphasizes state autonomy, infrastructure, development, and their regime choice instead of focusing political conditionality.

This phenomenon has been debated in bodies like the UN Human Rights Council, underscoring this crucial tendency (Dukalskis, 2023). Western states often press concerns like humanitarian intervention, while BRICS and others non-Western blocs frequently counter with strict interpretations by focusing of state sovereignty and critiques of Western double standards. The net effect is a normative pluralization and *multiplex* order, where no single set of values is universally dominant anymore in global diplomacy (Acharya, 2017). Another main factor is the democratic recession more evident around the world, which weakens the appeal of the liberal model. In recent decade, the deterioration of democratic institutions in many countries has diminished the number of states associated with liberal order on a global scale. Even within traditional democracies, internal challenges have caused to polarization, populism, and worsened of liberal democracy (Davis et al., 2025). Such developments give ideological place to challengers of the liberal order. When Freedom House and other observers record democracy in decline globally (Gorokhovskaia et al., 2026), it follows to diminishing soft power for the U.S. and Europe to shape global norms. The resulting pattern is better understood as greater contestation over the interpretation and application of established norms than as simply replacement of liberal principles.

This new trend of hybridization of norms is taking place in response to contestation, rather than the liberal order simply being replaced by a rising ideological order. Still, new norms on issues like internet governance or AI ethics has been constructed by East and West together, resulting in a balance between openness and sovereignty principles (Cheng & Zeng, 2023). This approach has reflected that pragmatic adaptation to reach agreement in a more ideologically diverse world where global order needs to include non-Western perspectives. Still normative divisions are strongly visible in other institutions to making decisions more difficult. In the WTO case, consensus for deepening trade liberalization has reflected not only economic disagreement, but also a broader shift away from the existing free-market orthodoxy. Recent debates over “fair trade,” industrial policy, subsidies, national security, and strategic competition show that trade governance has been shaped by ideological and geopolitical divisions rather than by a shared commitment to liberalization (Shaffer & Gao, 2018). A similar pattern is also visible in the UN Security Council. Although Resolution 1973 authorized action in Libya in 2011, China and Russia have viewed NATO’s implementation of the mandate as an example of Western overreach, which contributed to their stronger resistance to R2P-based action in Syria (Snetkov & Lanteigne, 2015). As a result, normative intervention became much harder to authorize through the Security Council. These examples show that global governance now operates in a more ideologically

heterogeneous environment when compared to post-Cold War period, when Western liberal ideas easily reached stronger support and position. However, the liberal order is not entirely contradicted by rising powers, many of its norms and institutions continue and are defended by coalitions of West and Western alliances. Middle powers like the European Union, Japan, and others continue to promote democracy, human rights, and multilateralism rather than a total normative withdrawal (Bargués et al., 2023). The U.S. itself, despite moments of putting "America first" era, remains engaged in advocating its values but it faces a coordinated counter-narrative from powerful states. Thus, the decline of unipolarity includes a qualitative shift where global governance is not just becoming more multipolar in power terms. This shift becomes more ideologically challenging and pluralistic. This landscape makes finding common ground on global governance more challenging. On the other hand, a pluralistic discourse could optimistically create more legitimate norms.

Conclusion

The evaluation shows that the movement toward multipolarity is not producing single global governance transformation. Power has become more widely distributed, yet its pattern differs among domains. China and other rising powers have significantly increased their economic, technological, diplomatic, and institutional influence. The United States continues to hold its advantages in military, finance, alliances, and advanced technological capacity. The emerging system is not a transfer of superiority from one state to another. In global governance is broader actors holds influence over rules, institutions, coalitions, and political agendas.

The study organized the governance consequences of multipolarity into three institutional pathways and pattern of normative contestation. First, established institutions have responded through reform and adaptation. It is shown by changes in the G20, IMF, and World Bank. Second, rising powers have expanded parallel institutions and new forums such as the AIIB, NDB, BRICS+, SCO, and regional trade arrangements like RCEP. These institutions coexist at the same time, rather than replace older ones. Third, where broad multilateral agreement is difficult, states increasingly rely on selective, regional, and minilateral cooperation, or issue-specific coalitions and security arrangements. Normative authority has become more contested in the recent decade. Liberal principles remain embedded in global institutions, while their interpretation increasingly competes with approaches emphasizing sovereignty, development, non-interference, and political diversity. These patterns show that multipolarity is changing how global governance operates, but its institutional effects vary across cases.

The article's main theoretical contribution is a conditional-pathways framework that explains this coexistence at the level of issue areas. It does not treat whole states or institutions as belonging permanently to one pathway. The implications are more complex than either the collapse of

multilateralism or the construction of a new hegemonic order. Global governance is becoming more plural in its participants, more varied in its institutional forms, and more contested in its normative foundations. This can make collective action more difficult due to major powers and regional actors' interests or understandings of legitimate governance. On the other hand, a broader distribution of influence can create pressure for institutional reform, provide additional sources of finance and cooperation. This environment can give states greater choice among international forums. The future effectiveness of global governance will depend on whether established and rising powers can manage these divergent patterns. Institutional competition and normative disagreement may undermine cooperation on shared problems. In this sense, multipolarity is a changing political context that shapes how global governance is negotiated.

Ethical Aspects of the Research

In the study, all the rules specified in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed. None of the actions specified under the second section of the Directive, "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", have been carried out.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

Contribution Rate Declaration

All stages of the study were planned and carried out by the author.

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Multipolarity and Divergent Patterns of Global Governance

Genişletilmiş Özet

Araştırmanın amacı, çok kutupluluğa yönelişin küresel yönetişimi maddi, kurumsal ve normatif boyutlarda nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini açıklamaktır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, gücün eşitsiz yayılımının neden bazı alanlarda mevcut kurumların reformunu, başka alanlarda ise paralel yapıların gelişmesini ve seçici iş birliğini öne çıkardığını sorgulamaktadır. Çok kutupluluk, güç ve nüfuzun alanlara göre farklılaşan yeniden dağılımı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Hegemonya, liberal uluslararası düzen ve küresel yönetişim arasındaki kavramsal ayrımlar, bu değişimin kurumsal sonuçlarını değerlendirmek için kullanılmaktadır.

Yöntem olarak, uluslararası ilişkiler ve uluslararası politik ekonomi literatürünün araştırma sorusu doğrultusunda yorumlayıcı biçimde incelenmesi benimsenmiştir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası döneme odaklanan çalışma: ekonomik, askerî, teknolojik, diplomatik, finansal ve normatif değişimler değerlendirilirken güncel göstergeler ve devletlerin açıkladığı tutumlar için de resmî ve kurumsal kaynaklardan yararlanılmaktadır. Karşılaştırma, devletleri tek bir kurumsal tercihle tanımlamak yerine, farklı iş birliği alanlarında izledikleri yaklaşımlara odaklanmaktadır. Böylece güç dağılımındaki değişim, kurumların özellikleri ve aktörlerin seçenekleriyle birlikte ele alınmaktadır.

Elde edilen bulgular, ABD'nin küresel sistemdeki merkezî konumunu koruduğunu, Çin'in ve diğer yükselen ve bölgesel güçlerin ise farklı alanlarda etkilerini artırdığını göstermektedir. ABD'nin askerî kapasite, finans, ittifak ilişkileri ve ileri teknolojide süren avantajları, ekonomik ve diplomatik nüfuzun daha geniş bir aktörler grubuna yayılmasıyla birlikte değerlendirilmektedir. Bu tablo, küresel üstünlüğün tek bir devletten diğerine aktarılmasıyla açıklanamayacak, alanlara göre farklılaşan bir güç dağılımına işaret etmektedir.

Kurumsal karşılaştırmada üç tepki belirginleşmektedir. Yerleşik kurumların otoritesi, uzmanlığı ve kaynakları kolayca ikame edilemiyor ve temsil düzenlemeleri içeriden değiştirilebiliyorsa reform daha olası hâle gelmektedir. IMF ve Dünya Bankası'ndaki temsil değişiklikleri bu eğilimi örneklemektedir. Temsil açıklarının sürdüğü, reformun engellendiği ve memnuniyetsiz aktörlerin alternatifleri destekleyecek kaynaklara sahip olduğu alanlarda paralel yapılar gelişmektedir. Asya Altyapı Yatırım Bankası ve Yeni Kalkınma Bankası bu arayışın örnekleridir. Geniş uzlaşmanın maliyetli olduğu, dar kapsamlı eşgüdümün ise yarar sağladığı durumlarda seçici ve minilateral iş birliğine yönelinmektedir. Quad ve AUKUS gibi düzenlemeler bu çerçevede incelenmektedir.

Normatif boyutta, bu kurumsal tepkilere normların anlamı ve uygulanması üzerindeki çekişmeler eşlik etmektedir. Liberal ilkeler uluslararası kurumlardaki yerini korurken egemenlik, kalkınma, iç işlerine karışmama ve siyasal çeşitlilik talepleri daha görünür hâle gelmektedir. Normatif değişim, maddi gücün yeniden dağılımının kendiliğinden ortaya çıkan bir sonucu olarak değerlendirilmemektedir. Yükselen güçlerin talepleri de tek bir alternatif düzen tasarımında birleşmemektedir.

Sonuç olarak, küresel yönetişim katılımcıları bakımından daha çoğul, kurumsal düzenlemeleri bakımından daha çeşitli ve normatif temelleri bakımından

daha tartışmalı bir yapı kazanmaktadır. Çalışmanın temel katkısı, bu tepkilerin konu alanlarına göre neden farklılaştığını ve birlikte nasıl var olabildiğini kurumsal koşullar ve aktörlerin seçenekleri üzerinden açıklamasıdır. Bu çeşitlilik, temsil ve iş birliği imkânlarını artırırken ortak sorunlara yönelik eşgüdümü de zorlaştırabilmektedir.