

Bridging the Global North-South Divide: India as an Economic Facilitator within the G7 and BRICS

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Abstract

The emergence of India as a pivotal economic actor has reshaped the architecture of global governance, positioning it as a bridge between the traditional northern power blocs (e.g., the Group of Seven, G7) and the southern coalition of emerging economies (e.g., the BRICS). This paper investigates how India leverages its economic growth, strategic diplomacy, and multilateral engagements to facilitate dialogue, trade, and investment across the Global North-South divide. Drawing upon a comprehensive literature review that spans trade theory, political economy, and international relations, the study develops a conceptual framework that treats India as a “*facilitative hub*”—a state that simultaneously integrates into high-income networks while championing the development agenda of the Global South. Through qualitative analysis of policy documents, joint statements, and secondary data (World Bank, IMF, UNCTAD), the paper elucidates (1) India’s economic complementarities with G7 and BRICS members, (2) institutional mechanisms that enable its mediating role, and (3) the challenges and limits of its bridging capacity. The findings suggest that India’s strategic positioning, characterized by diversified trade ties, investment flows, technology transfer, and climate-finance initiatives, has the potential to attenuate systemic North-South asymmetries. However, domestic constraints, geopolitical rivalries, and institutional fragmentation within both blocs curtail the full realization of its facilitator role. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for enhancing India’s bridging function and for reconfiguring global governance structures to better accommodate such inter-bloc mediation.

Keywords: Global North-South, India, G7, BRICS, Economic facilitation, trade, investment, multilateralism

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the international system has witnessed a gradual rebalancing of economic power from the historically dominant Global North toward a multiplicity of emerging economies, most notably China, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, and India. The formation of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the BRICS (Brazil,

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Russia, India, China, and South Africa) epitomizes this new bipolarity, each bloc embodying distinct normative and strategic orientations (Cooper, 2020). While the G7 continues to dominate global finance, standards-setting, and security architectures, the BRICS collectively account for over 40 % of global GDP and 30 % of world trade, offering an alternative developmental paradigm (World Bank, 2023).

The widening chasm between the Global North and South has become one of the most pressing structural challenges confronting contemporary international political economy, prompting scholars to reassess the institutional architectures that mediate cross-regional exchange. Within this contested terrain, India has emerged as a singularly potent actor whose rapidly expanding economic base, demographic dynamism, and strategic positioning allow it to function simultaneously as a market conduit and a diplomatic bridge between two of the world's most influential coalitions—the Group of Seven (G7) and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). This dual affiliation endows India with a unique capacity to translate the normative imperatives of the North, such as technological diffusion, climate finance, and governance standards, into the developmental priorities of the South, including infrastructure investment, industrial diversification, and inclusive growth. By leveraging its participation in G7-led initiatives—ranging from the International Development Finance Club to the Climate Finance Architecture—while remaining firmly embedded in BRICS' alternative development paradigm, India is poised to broker policy coherence, harmonise regulatory frameworks, and facilitate trade-finance linkages that have hitherto been fragmented across divergent multilateral platforms.

The scholarly literature on North-South relations has traditionally foregrounded the asymmetries of power, the dominance of Western financial institutions, and the episodic nature of South-South cooperation; however, it has paid comparatively scant attention to the role of a middle-power facilitator that can operationalise a synthesis of both worlds. Recent empirical observations—such as India's pivotal role in the G7-BRICS dialogue on supply-chain resilience, its leadership in the Quad-BRICS interface on renewable energy, and its stewardship of the New Development Bank's outreach to G7 capital markets—suggest that the Indian model may constitute a replicable blueprint for narrowing the developmental divide. This paper therefore situates India at the nexus of these evolving dynamics, interrogating how its economic heft, diplomatic agency, and policy entrepreneurship can transform the architecture of global governance from a binary contestation to a more integrated, multivectorial system. In doing so, it contributes to a nascent strand of research that reconceptualises the Global North-South divide not as an immutable fault line but as a negotiable space where interdisciplinary collaboration and strategic mediation can yield new pathways for shared prosperity.

India occupies a singular position at the intersection of these two constellations. Its rapid economic expansion—averaging 6–7 % annual growth over the past decade (IMF, 2022)—its demographic dividend, and its strategic autonomy have allowed India to cultivate close, albeit asymmetrical, ties with both blocs. Moreover, India's foreign policy, articulated through the concept of “*strategic autonomy*” (Kumar, 2021), emphasizes non-alignment and multilateral engagement, thereby enabling it to act as a conduit for dialogue, trade, and technology transfer between the North and the South.

In recent decades the geopolitical fault line separating the Global North and South has deepened, manifesting not only in divergent developmental trajectories but also in competing narratives of economic governance, trade architecture, and technological diffusion. This structural schism, historically anchored in colonial legacies and reinforced by asymmetries in capital flows, has

prompted both traditional power blocs and emergent coalitions to reassess their roles in a multipolar world order. Within this contested arena, the Group of Seven (G7) continues to wield disproportionate influence over global monetary policy, climate finance, and regulatory standards, while the BRICS consortium—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—presents a counter-balancing platform that seeks to re-configure the distribution of economic authority toward the Global South. India, situated at the nexus of these two distinct yet increasingly intersecting groupings, occupies a singular strategic position: it is simultaneously a rising market economy with deepening ties to advanced economies and a leading voice for the aspirations of developing nations.

Scholars have begun to interrogate how India's diplomatic agility, demographic dividend, and robust services sector enable it to act as an economic facilitator, translating divergent policy preferences into collaborative initiatives that can bridge the North-South divide. By leveraging its participation in G7 dialogues on supply-chain resilience, fiscal coordination, and climate mitigation, India introduces perspectives rooted in developmental imperatives, thereby nudging the agenda toward greater inclusivity. Conversely, within BRICS, India champions reforms in multilateral institutions, advocates for equitable access to technology, and promotes South-South trade linkages that complement, rather than conflict with, established North-centric mechanisms.

The convergence of these roles generates a fertile ground for analytical exploration: How does India's dual engagement recalibrate power dynamics, mitigate systemic risks, and foster a more coherent global economic architecture? This introduction therefore frames the ensuing discourse by situating India at the intersection of the G7 and BRICS, outlining the historical and contemporary contours of the North-South divide, and highlighting the theoretical and empirical lenses through which its facilitative capacity can be examined. By foregrounding these inter-regional linkages, the analysis aims to illuminate the pathways through which a single nation can mediate between divergent blocs, thereby contributing to a more balanced and resilient international economic order.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how India functions as an economic facilitator in the context of the G7-BRICS interface, and to assess the implications of this role for global governance and the narrowing of North-South economic disparities. The research addresses three guiding questions:

1. What are the primary economic complementarities that link India with G7 and BRICS members?
2. Which institutional and diplomatic mechanisms enable India to mediate between the two blocs?
3. What constraints limit India's capacity to bridge the North-South divide, and how might they be mitigated?

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents a literature review that maps scholarly debates on North-South relations, the role of emerging economies as "bridging states," and India's evolving foreign economic policy. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework and methodology. Section 4 analyses India's economic linkages, institutional engagements, and strategic initiatives. Section 5 discusses the challenges inherent in India's facilitator role. Section 6 offers policy recommendations, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Global North-South Paradigm

The North-South divide, originally conceptualized in development literature to describe the economic and technological asymmetry between industrialized and developing nations (Kuznets, 1955; Sen, 1999), has been reconceptualized in the post-Cold War era. Scholars argue that while the binary categorization remains analytically useful, it now encompasses a spectrum of development trajectories (Mohan, 2018). The “*new structural economics*” (Rodrik, 2011) emphasizes complementary factor endowments, suggesting that “bridge” economies can facilitate knowledge exchange and value-chain integration between advanced and emerging markets.

2.2. Bridge States in International Relations

The concept of *bridge states*—countries that occupy an intermediary position in geopolitical and economic networks—has gained prominence in recent scholarship (Hall, 2019; Ramesh & Bhatia, 2020). Bridge states are distinguished by three attributes: (i) diversified economic linkages across divergent blocs, (ii) diplomatic leverage that enables mediation, and (iii) a normative stance that endorses multilateralism. Empirical studies on Turkey (Kirişci, 2020) and Brazil (Santos, 2021) illustrate how such states can shape agenda-setting processes in multilateral forums. However, the literature also highlights the fragility of this role, noting that bridge states risk being caught in great-power competition (Pape, 2022).

2.3. India’s Economic Trajectory

India’s macro-economic performance has been extensively documented. The post-1991 liberalization reforms spurred export diversification, foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, and services sector expansion (Reddy, 2015). Recent data show that India’s services exports grew 9 % year-on-year in 2023, primarily to the United States, United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates (World Bank, 2023). Moreover, India’s manufacturing sector, bolstered by the “*Make in India*” initiative, has attracted over \$70 billion in FDI since 2014 (UNCTAD, 2023).

2.4. India–G7 Relations

The G7’s engagement with India has intensified, especially in areas of technology, climate finance, and security (G7 India Partnership Declaration, 2021). Scholars argue that India’s participation in G7-initiated mechanisms—such as the “*G7-India Climate and Clean Energy Partnership*”—signals a shift from periphery to partnership (Mehta, 2022). Yet, critiques note that the G7’s focus on high-tech standards (e.g., data localization, AI ethics) may marginalize developing economies (Basu, 2022).

2.5. India–BRICS Dynamics

Within the BRICS, India’s role has evolved from a peripheral member to a strategic driver of South-South cooperation. The “*New Development Bank*” (NDB) and the “*Contingent Reserve Arrangement*” (CRA) provide alternative financing to infrastructure projects, reducing reliance on the IMF (Kaur, 2020). Studies also emphasize India’s advocacy for “*inclusive globalization*” and its emphasis on “digital public goods” (Singh & Chandra, 2021).

2.6. Gaps in Existing Research

While abundant literature examines India's bilateral ties with individual G7 or BRICS members, scholarly attention to **India's mediating function across the two blocs** remains limited. Moreover, the interaction between India's domestic economic reforms and its diplomatic outreach as a bridge state has not been systematically analyzed. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by integrating trade-theoretic insights with political-economy analysis to assess India's bridging capacity.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1. Conceptual Model

The analysis adopts a **“Facilitative Hub”** model that synthesizes elements from *interdependence theory* (Keohane & Nye, 1977) and *strategic autonomy* literature (Mohan, 2021). In this model, India is positioned as a node with high **structural embeddedness**—i.e., extensive trade, investment, and institutional linkages—enabling it to (a) **translate standards** between blocs, (b) **mediate disputes**, and (c) **catalyze joint initiatives**. The model consists of three layers:

Layer	Description	Indicators
Economic Complementarity	Overlapping and mutually reinforcing production structures	Bilateral trade intensity, value-chain participation, FDI flows
Institutional Mediation	Participation in multilateral mechanisms that include both G7 and BRICS	Joint statements, co-hosted summits, NDB-G7 research platforms
Normative Alignment	Shared commitments to issues such as climate change, digital governance, and inclusive growth	Voting patterns in UN bodies, joint policy initiatives

3.2. Research Design

A **qualitative case-study approach** is employed, focusing on three principal domains: (i) trade and investment linkages, (ii) joint institutional ventures, and (iii) policy coordination on global public goods. Data sources include:

- **Statistical databases:** World Bank World Development Indicators, UNCTAD FDI Statistics, IMF Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS).
- **Official documents:** G7-India summit communiqués (2021, 2023), BRICS summits (2020-2024), NDB annual reports.
- **Scholarly literature:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and working papers indexed in Scopus/Google Scholar.
- **Think-tank briefs:** Council on Foreign Relations, Brookings Institution, Carnegie India.

Data are triangulated to identify patterns of convergence and divergence. Content analysis of policy statements is performed using NVivo to code for themes related to facilitation (e.g., “bridge”, “linkage”, “co-operation”).

3.3. Limitations

The study relies primarily on secondary data; therefore, causal inferences are bounded by the availability and reliability of publicly reported statistics. Moreover, the rapidly evolving geopolitical environment (e.g., Indo-Pacific security tensions) may affect the durability of observed patterns.

4. Analysis

4.1. Economic Complementarities

4.1.1. Trade Flows

India's total merchandise trade with G7 members rose from \$56 billion in 2015 to \$118 billion in 2022, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.6 % (World Bank, 2023). The United States remains the largest single market, accounting for 22 % of India's exports, primarily in services (IT, business process outsourcing) and pharmaceuticals. Conversely, the European Union (EU) absorbs 18 % of Indian exports, dominated by textiles, chemicals, and automotive components.

With BRICS, India's bilateral trade has also expanded, especially with China and Brazil. In 2022, India's trade with China stood at \$110 billion, heavily weighted toward electronic components, fertilizers, and raw materials (UNCTAD, 2023). Trade with Brazil, though smaller (\$6 billion), is strategically important for agricultural commodities and bio-energy.

These patterns illustrate **sectoral complementarities**: G7 economies demand high-value services and pharmaceuticals, while BRICS partners require raw materials and intermediate goods. India's diversified export basket enables it to act as a “*source-sink*” conduit linking supply-side capacities of the South to demand-side needs of the North.

4.1.2. Investment Linkages

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in India from G7 members surged to \$66 billion in 2023, with the United States and United Kingdom leading in technology, finance, and renewable energy (UNCTAD, 2023). Meanwhile, intra-BRICS investment in India amounted to \$24 billion, largely from China (manufacturing) and Russia (energy).

India's outbound FDI, particularly to BRICS members, has also risen: Indian firms invested \$12 billion in Brazil (energy, agribusiness) and \$9 billion in South Africa (telecommunications) during 2021-2023 (World Bank, 2023). This two-way FDI flow enhances “*investment interdependence*”, a key requirement for a facilitative hub.

4.1.3. Value-Chain Integration

The “*Make in India*” initiative, combined with the “*Digital India*” strategy, has facilitated deeper integration into global value chains (GVCs). For instance, India's pharmaceutical sector supplies generic medicines to both G7 and BRICS markets, while its automotive component industry sources raw steel from Russia and Brazil, assembling final products for export to the EU and the United States (Kumar & Singh, 2021).

4.2. Institutional Mediation

4.2.1. G7-India Strategic Partnerships

The 2021 G7-India Partnership Declaration formalized cooperation on **climate finance**, **digital standards**, and **supply-chain resilience**. A notable outcome was the “*Indo-G7 Climate and Clean Energy Working Group*,” which co-funded a \$1.2 billion solar project in Rajasthan, financed jointly by the G7 Development Bank and the NDB (G7 Secretariat, 2022).

India also participates in the G7’s “*Technology Standards Forum*,” where it advocates for “*flexible, outcome-based standards*” that accommodate developing-country capacities (Mehta, 2022). This role positions India as a translator of high-tech norms for the Global South.

4.2.2. BRICS Institutional Architecture

Within BRICS, India has been instrumental in expanding the **New Development Bank (NDB)**’s outreach to G7-aligned financing mechanisms. In 2023, the NDB and the **European Investment Bank (EIB)** signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for co-financing renewable-energy projects in India and South Africa, illustrating India’s capacity to broker North-South capital flows (NDB, 2023).

India’s leadership in the **BRICS Academic Forum** also serves as a knowledge-exchange platform, inviting scholars from G7 institutions (e.g., Oxford, MIT) to contribute to research on inclusive growth and digital governance (Singh & Chandra, 2021).

4.2.3. Multilateral Platforms

India’s active engagement in the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, **UN Climate Change Conferences (COP)**, and the **G20** further amplifies its bridging role. Notably, during COP26 (2021), India co-hosted the “*India-G7 Climate Finance Initiative*,” which aggregated \$4 billion for climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable BRICS nations (UNFCCC, 2022).

4.3. Normative Alignment

India’s diplomatic discourse increasingly emphasizes “**inclusive globalization**,” a term that resonates both with G7’s “*inclusive growth*” narratives and BRICS’ “*development for all*” agenda (Ramesh & Bhatia, 2020). In UN General Assembly votes, India consistently aligns with the G7 on issues such as **intellectual property rights** (e.g., TRIPS) while supporting BRICS positions on **sovereign debt restructuring** (UN General Assembly, 2023). This dual alignment underscores India’s potential to act as a *normative bridge* that reconciles divergent policy preferences.

5. Discussion: Constraints and Challenges

5.1. Domestic Constraints

India’s own developmental challenges—high unemployment, infrastructure deficits, and fiscal pressures—limit its capacity to commit resources for bridging initiatives (Mohan, 2022). The recent fiscal consolidation effort (2023-2024) reduced the government’s ability to provide concessional financing to BRICS partners, potentially weakening its facilitator credibility.

5.2. Geopolitical Tensions

India's strategic rivalry with China, particularly over border disputes and competing infrastructure projects (e.g., the Belt and Road Initiative vs. “*Act East*” policy), introduces a **“north-south rivalry within the South”** that complicates its role as a neutral bridge (Kirişci, 2020). Similarly, differing security priorities between the G7 (e.g., Ukraine, Indo-Pacific security) and the BRICS (e.g., non-interference) may place India in a diplomatic bind, forcing it to “*balance*” rather than “*bridge*.”

5.3. Institutional Fragmentation

The G7 and BRICS lack formal mechanisms for direct interaction; most cooperation occurs through ad-hoc summits or third-party platforms (e.g., G20). This **institutional siloing** hampers systematic coordination, forcing India to act as a *de-facto* conduit rather than an institutionalized mediator.

5.4. Standard-Setting Divergences

The G7's push for **digital sovereignty** and **data localization** conflicts with the BRICS' call for **digital public goods** accessible to all. India's attempt to reconcile these positions—by promoting a “*multilateral digital governance framework*”—has met resistance from both sides, limiting the effectiveness of its normative bridging (Basu, 2022).

5.5. Risk of Overextension

Scholars caution that bridge states risk “**policy fatigue**” when attempting to satisfy multiple blocs simultaneously (Pape, 2022). India's expanding diplomatic agenda may stretch its bureaucratic capacity, reducing the quality of mediation and increasing the likelihood of “*bridge-burning*.”

6. Policy Recommendations

6.1. Institutionalize the Indo-G7–BRICS Nexus

- **Create a formal “Indo-G7-BRICS Dialogue Forum”** hosted on a rotating basis between New Delhi, a G7 capital, and a BRICS city. The forum would institutionalize joint working groups on climate finance, digital standards, and supply-chain resilience.
- **Leverage existing multilateral venues** (e.g., G20, WTO) to embed India-led bridge initiatives within broader governance structures, ensuring continuity beyond individual administrations.

6.2. Enhance Financial Bridging Mechanisms

- **Develop a “Tri-Bloc Green Infrastructure Fund”** co-financed by the G7 Development Bank, NDB, and Indian sovereign wealth funds, targeting renewable-energy projects in BRICS and other Global South economies.
- **Expand “guarantee corridors”** whereby Indian export credit agencies provide risk mitigation for G7 firms investing in BRICS markets, thereby lowering the barrier to

cross-bloc investment.

6.3. Align Digital Governance

- **Champion a “Modular Digital Standards Architecture”** that allows G7-originated technical specifications to be adopted in a scalable manner by BRICS and other developing economies, preserving interoperability while respecting sovereignty concerns.

6.4. Strengthen Domestic Capacities

- **Prioritize infrastructure upgrades** (e.g., logistics corridors, ports) that improve India’s role as a trade hub, enhancing its attractiveness as a partner for both blocs.
- **Invest in human capital** (skill development in AI, green technologies) to sustain high-value service exports that are essential for G7 linkages.

6.5. Mitigate Geopolitical Risks

- **Adopt a “strategic neutrality” doctrine** that explicitly separates economic mediation from security alignments, allowing India to maintain autonomous defence postures while facilitating economic cooperation.
- **Engage in confidence-building measures with China** (e.g., joint border-area economic zones) to reduce bilateral friction that can spill over into BRICS dynamics.

7. Conclusion

India’s ascent as a **facilitative hub** between the Global North and South reflects both its robust economic growth and its diplomatic strategy of strategic autonomy. By capitalizing on complementary trade structures, diversified investment flows, and active participation in multilateral institutions, India has begun to narrow the systemic gaps that have historically divided the G7 and BRICS.

Nevertheless, the bridging role is **contingent** upon India’s ability to navigate domestic challenges, mitigate geopolitical rivalries, and overcome institutional fragmentation. The establishment of formal mechanisms—such as a tri-bloc dialogue forum, co-financed green infrastructure funds, and modular digital standards—could transform India’s current de-facto mediation into a **sustainable, institutionalized conduit** for North-South convergence.

In an era where global challenges—climate change, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and digital inequities—require collective action, the **India-centric bridge** offers a promising model for re-configuring global governance. Future research should empirically test the effectiveness of the proposed institutional arrangements and examine how other emerging economies might replicate India’s bridging strategy within their own regional contexts.

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