Original Research Article

Multilateralism in Crisis: Challenges and Prospects for Africa in a Fractured World Order

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Abstract: The ongoing crisis in multilateralism represents a significant transformation in the international order. Escalating tensions between China and the United States, the resurgence of nationalism, increased disputes over international institutions, and the proliferation of global crises have collectively rendered the multilateral system increasingly fragile (Acharya, 2014; Ikenberry, 2011). Africa relies on these systems for security and development, and as external powers intensify their engagement with the continent, Africa assumes a pivotal role in these global dynamics (Adebajo, 2016; Zartman, 2018). This article analyzes the challenges confronting Africa and the opportunities emerging from the erosion of multilateralism. It argues that Africa can enhance its autonomy and global influence through regional cooperation and the diversification of partnerships. Consequently, a revitalized African multilateralism is positioned as an essential instrument for advancing the continent's interests within a multipolar world.

Keywords: Africa, multilateralism, world order, governance, geopolitics

1. Introduction

Multilateralism, long regarded as the cornerstone of global governance, is today confronted with a series of crises that call into question its effectiveness and legitimacy. Geopolitical reconfigurations, the rise of sovereignties, competition among major powers, and global crises (health, climate, and security-related) have weakened traditional multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and international financial institutions (Ikenberry, 2011; Acharya, 2017; Williams, 2021). In this context, Africa is both vulnerable and strategic: vulnerable due to its limited institutional capacities and strategic because of its economic, demographic, and geopolitical potential.

Examining the crisis of multilateralism is essential for understanding how African states can safeguard their interests within a fragmented and multipolar world. Such analysis also facilitates the identification of strategies to enhance the continent's strategic autonomy, particularly through collective diplomacy, the reinforcement of regional institutions, and the diversification of international partnerships (Acharya, 2016; Murithi, 2019; Taylor, 2019). Given intensifying global competition and the slow response of multilateral institutions to crises, it is imperative for Africa to develop robust internal and regional mechanisms to protect its interests and bolster resilience.

2. Research Problem

The central research problem of this study is as follows: How can Africa maintain its influence and protect its interests in a fragmented and crisis-prone international system, when traditional multilateral institutions are struggling to respond effectively to global challenges?

The main key issue for raising these problems:

1. The fragility of multilateral institutions in the face of health, climate, and security crises.

2. Geopolitical rivalries, particularly between the United States and China, are transforming Africa into a strategic arena of influence.

3. The limited capacity of African institutions (African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, ECCAS) to coordinate effective responses.

4. The need to identify autonomous African strategies—such as collective diplomacy and diversification of partnerships—to strengthen the continent's voice within the global system.

3. Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for Africa's position, agency, and strategic autonomy within a fragmented and multipolar international system. In pursuing this overarching aim, the study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To analyze the causes of the crisis of multilateralism and its impacts on Africa.

2. Assess the effects of geopolitical rivalries and global crises on African states.

3. Identify strategies likely to strengthen strategic autonomy and regional governance.

4. Propose recommendations to improve the effectiveness of multilateralism and the continent's collective bargaining capacity.

4. Hypotheses

1. **H1:** The fragmentation of the international system reduces Africa's ability to effectively defend its interests.

2. **H2:** Geopolitical rivalries reshape both opportunities and risks for the African continent.

3. **H3:** The strengthening of African institutions and collective diplomacy increases Africa's strategic autonomy.

4. **H4:** The diversification of South–South partnerships constitutes an effective lever for reducing dependence and expanding Africa's room for maneuver.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** grounded in interpretive and analytical approaches commonly employed in political science and international relations. The qualitative framework is particularly suitable because it allows for a nuanced exploration of complex, normative, and institutional dimensions of multilateralism and Africa's strategic positioning within a fragmented global order. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on measurable data, the qualitative approach provides depth and insight into the motivations, processes, and underlying factors influencing Africa's engagement with multilateral systems. This focus aligns closely with the research questions, which seek to understand the intricate dynamics rather than purely numerical trends.

5.1 Research Approach

The study is exploratory and analytical in nature. It seeks to understand patterns, processes, and meanings associated with the crisis of multilateralism rather than to test causal relationships through quantitative measurement. A qualitative approach allows for in-depth examination of geopolitical dynamics, institutional practices, and regional governance structures affecting Africa.

5.2 Data Sources

The research relies primarily on **secondary data**, drawn from a wide range of credible and authoritative sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic journal articles and scholarly books on multilateralism, global governance, and African international relations

- Policy reports and official documents issued by international and regional institutions such as the African Union and regional economic communities

- Publications from international organizations, think tanks, and research institutes.

- Conference papers and policy briefs relevant to global governance and African geopolitics

These sources provide both theoretical insights and empirical context necessary for a comprehensive analysis.

5.3 Methods of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through **systematic documentary analysis**. Relevant literature was identified using thematic keywords such as multilateralism, global order, geopolitical rivalry, African regionalism, strategic autonomy, and South–South cooperation. Sources were selected based on academic credibility, relevance to the research objectives, and contribution to ongoing scholarly debates.

5.4 Analytical Techniques

The study employs multiple qualitative analytical techniques:

1. **Thematic Analysis**
2. Key themes were identified across the literature, including fragmentation of the international system, geopolitical rivalries, institutional constraints, global crises, and African adaptation strategies. These themes were analyzed to identify patterns, convergences, and divergences in scholarly interpretations.

3. **Comparative Analysis**
4. A comparative perspective was used to examine how different African states and regional institutions respond to the crisis of multilateralism. This approach helps highlight variations in strategies, capacities, and outcomes across the continent.

5. **Contextual Analysis**
6. The research situates Africa's experiences within broader global transformations, allowing for an understanding of how international structural changes shape regional and national policy choices.

6. Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by the perspectives of **critical multilateralism**, **regional governance theory**, and **South–South cooperation frameworks**. These theoretical lenses enable critical evaluation of traditional multilateral institutions while emphasizing the agency of African actors and the potential of regional and alternative cooperation mechanisms.

7. Scope and Limitations

The research focuses on Africa at the continental and regional levels rather than on detailed country-specific case studies. While this broad scope allows for generalization and synthesis, it may limit in-depth analysis of individual national experiences. Nevertheless, the approach is appropriate for identifying structural trends and strategic patterns relevant to Africa as a whole.

8. Ethical Considerations

As the study is based entirely on secondary sources, no direct human participation was involved. Academic integrity was maintained through proper citation, acknowledgment of sources, and avoidance of plagiarism.

9. Literature Review

The literature on multilateralism, global governance, and Africa's role in the international system is extensive and interdisciplinary, spanning international relations theory, political economy, and regional studies. This review critically

examines key scholarly debates relevant to the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for Africa, organized around five major thematic areas.

1. Conceptualizing Multilateralism and Global Governance

Multilateralism has traditionally been understood as a system of cooperation among states based on shared norms, rules, and institutionalized arrangements. Keohane (1990) defines multilateralism as coordinated relations among three or more states guided by generalized principles of conduct. Classical multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank emerged after the Second World War to promote collective security, economic stability, and development.

However, several scholars argue that this model of multilateralism was historically shaped by Western dominance and asymmetrical power relations. Ikenberry (2011) suggests that the liberal international order rested on US hegemony and institutional legitimacy, but its sustainability depended on cooperation and trust among major powers. As these conditions erode, multilateralism faces both functional and normative crises.

Critical scholars contend that traditional multilateralism often marginalizes the interests of developing regions, including Africa, by prioritizing the agendas of powerful states. This critique provides the foundation for contemporary debates on the need for reform or alternative forms of multilateral engagement.

2. Crisis and Fragmentation of the International System

A growing body of literature highlights the fragmentation of the international system as a defining feature of contemporary global politics. Acharya (2014, 2017) argues that the world is transitioning from a unipolar or liberal hegemonic order to a "multiplex" world characterized by multiple centers of power, competing norms, and overlapping governance structures.

This fragmentation is driven by several factors: the rise of nationalism and sovereignist politics, declining trust in international institutions, and increasing geopolitical competition. According to Ikenberry (2011), multilateral institutions now struggle to generate consensus, enforce rules, or respond effectively to global crises.

For Africa, this fragmentation creates both vulnerability and uncertainty. Weak enforcement of global norms limits protection for smaller states, while inconsistent multilateral responses to crises reduce the predictability of international cooperation. Scholars increasingly agree that classical multilateralism is no longer sufficient to address complex transnational challenges, particularly for regions with limited bargaining power.

3. Geopolitical Rivalries and Africa's Strategic Environment

The intensification of geopolitical rivalries—especially between major global powers—has significantly reshaped Africa's external relations. Zartman (2018) and Taylor (2019) emphasize that Africa has become a strategic arena where external actors compete for influence through investment, security cooperation, and diplomatic engagement.

China's expanding economic presence and the renewed strategic interest of Western powers have generated new opportunities for African states, including access to infrastructure financing and diversified partnerships. However, scholars also warn of associated risks, such as debt dependency, political pressure, and the erosion of policy autonomy.

The literature highlights a central dilemma for Africa: while geopolitical competition can be leveraged for development gains, it can also deepen external dependency if not managed strategically. This debate underscores the importance of African agency and

coordinated diplomacy in navigating global rivalries.

4. Global Crises and the Limits of Multilateral Responses

Recent global crises—health pandemics, climate change, and security conflicts—have exposed the limitations of contemporary multilateralism. Williams (2021) argues that international responses to these crises have been slow, uneven, and shaped by power asymmetries rather than collective solidarity.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, revealed stark inequalities in access to vaccines, medical supplies, and financial support. Climate change literature similarly points to inadequate fulfillment of international commitments toward vulnerable regions, including Africa. These shortcomings have reinforced perceptions of selective and interest-driven multilateralism.

Scholars increasingly argue that Africa cannot rely solely on global mechanisms to address such crises and must instead strengthen regional and continental capacities. This shift in emphasis from global to regional solutions is a recurring theme in recent literature.

5. African Regional Institutions and Strategic Autonomy

African regionalism occupies a central place in the literature on Africa's response to the crisis of multilateralism. Murithi (2019) and Tieku (2015) analyze the role of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities in promoting peace, governance, and integration.

While these institutions are recognized as essential platforms for collective action, scholars note persistent constraints, including limited financial autonomy, weak enforcement mechanisms, and political fragmentation among member states. Dependence on external funding further undermines institutional independence and agenda-setting capacity.

Despite these limitations, the literature emphasizes the potential of collective diplomacy, institutional reform, and regional integration—particularly initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area—to enhance Africa's strategic autonomy. Acharya (2016, 2017) highlights South–South cooperation as a critical avenue for building more balanced and less hierarchical international partnerships.

6. Gaps in the Existing Literature

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into multilateralism, geopolitical competition, and African regionalism, several gaps remain. First, much of the literature treats these issues in isolation rather than examining their combined effects on Africa's strategic positioning. Second, limited attention is given to Africa's proactive strategies and agency in reshaping multilateral engagement. Finally, there is insufficient synthesis linking global systemic fragmentation with regional governance and strategic autonomy.

This study seeks to address these gaps by offering an integrated analysis of the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for Africa, while highlighting pathways toward a renewed African multilateralism.

6. Expected Results / Main Findings

Based on documentary and comparative analysis, the findings indicate that:

1. The fragmentation of the international system reduces the effectiveness of classical multilateral mechanisms in addressing African challenges.

2. Geopolitical rivalries create both opportunities (investment, bilateral cooperation) and risks (competition for resources, political pressures).

3. African institutions, although essential, remain constrained by financial and structural limitations, reducing their influence in global negotiations.

4. The diversification of partnerships and collective diplomacy emerges as the

most effective lever for strengthening Africa's strategic autonomy.

5. The study concludes that Africa must consolidate its regional mechanisms, coordinate its diplomacy, and leverage South–South partnerships to increase its influence in a fragmented multipolar world.

6. Multilateralism, defined as a system of cooperation based on common rules and institutions (Keohane, 1990), has long structured the international order. However, this model is now weakened by the rise of nationalisms, Sino–American competition, and the contestation of international institutions (Acharya, 2014). In this context, Africa occupies a paradoxical position: while it is dependent on multilateral mechanisms for security and development (Adebajo, 2016), it is simultaneously exposed to rivalries among external powers (Zartman, 2018). The challenge, therefore, is to identify how the crisis of multilateralism is reshaping Africa's place and which strategies can be mobilized to strengthen its autonomy and role within the international system.

7. **I – Transformations of Contemporary Multilateralism**

In light of the upheavals of the global system, it becomes essential to examine the main factors driving the transformation of multilateralism. The fragmentation of the international system thus appears as a central element influencing interstate interactions and global cooperation mechanisms.

1. **1.1 Fragmentation of the International System**

The multilateral order faces several challenges: sovereignist retrenchment by states, the contestation of the United Nations and international financial institutions, and the emergence of a multipolar world (Ikenberry,

2011; Acharya, 2017). This fragmentation limits the effectiveness of traditional cooperation mechanisms and generates strategic uncertainty for African states.

More broadly, the contemporary international system is characterized by growing fragmentation, marked by tensions between the principles of multilateralism and the dynamics of national sovereignty. This fragmentation is reflected in the multiplication of actors and centers of power, which challenge the effectiveness of multilateral institutions established after the Second World War, such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Ikenberry, 2011). The concept of fragmentation reflects both geopolitical rivalries, the diversification of international partnerships, and the emergence of bilateral or regional cooperation logics that fall outside the traditional multilateral framework.

One of the main drivers of this fragmentation is the sovereignist retrenchment observed in many states, motivated by the protection of national interests and distrust toward international institutions. According to Acharya (2017), this phenomenon reflects states' desire to reduce their dependence on multilateral mechanisms and to assert their autonomy in strategic decision-making. For African countries, this retrenchment can create foreign policy dilemmas, as it limits their ability to benefit from international cooperation arrangements while exposing their economies to increased competition in global markets.

At the same time, the effectiveness of multilateral institutions is being questioned. The UN, the IMF, and the World Bank—once perceived as guarantors of stability and development—face growing challenges regarding their legitimacy and representativeness. Many states, particularly in Africa, believe that their specific interests are insufficiently considered in global decision-making (Ikenberry, 2011). This perception fuels a sense of marginalization and encourages some countries to seek

alternative alliances, often outside traditional multilateral frameworks.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the international system is accompanied by the emergence of a multipolar order in which several regional and global powers simultaneously exert significant influence. The rise of China, India, and certain Global South countries broadens the range of strategic partnerships available to Africa, but also complicates the coordination of foreign policies (Acharya, 2017). This multipolar context offers opportunities—such as access to new sources of financing and cooperation—but also generates intensified competition that may increase African states' vulnerability to external pressures.

In the face of this fragmentation, traditional multilateral cooperation mechanisms reveal their limitations. International agreements, financing programs, and collective security initiatives struggle to deliver the expected outcomes due to divergent interests and priorities among member states. For Africa, this means that classical cooperation instruments, such as development policies financed by the IMF or the World Bank, must be reassessed and adapted to better respond to local needs (Ikenberry, 2011). A more flexible approach, combining multilateralism with regional partnerships, therefore appears necessary.

Finally, this fragmentation creates major strategic uncertainty for African states. The absence of a stable and predictable multilateral framework complicates economic planning, regional security, and political coordination on transnational issues such as climate change and migration flows. Consequently, African states must navigate a complex international environment by balancing relations with major powers while strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms—such as the African Union—to compensate for the shortcomings of global multilateralism (Acharya, 2017).

Geopolitical Rivalries

Competition between the United States and China is reshaping the map of alliances and partnerships. Africa is becoming a strategic arena of influence where traditional and emerging powers compete (Zartman, 2018; Taylor, 2019). The rivalry between the United States and China constitutes one of the main drivers of global geopolitical reconfiguration. This competition is no longer confined to economic or military spheres; it extends to diplomatic alliances, infrastructure projects, and international investment flows (Zartman, 2018). Both powers seek to expand their influence by promoting alternative cooperation models, often in direct competition, thereby profoundly altering the dynamics of global governance and testing the principles of traditional multilateralism.

In this context, Africa emerges as a privileged arena of this competition. The continent, rich in natural resources and development opportunities, attracts both traditional and emerging powers. China, through the "Belt and Road Initiative," and the United States, via bilateral and regional partnerships, seek to consolidate their economic, political, and security influence (Taylor, 2019). This dynamic transforms Africa into a strategic space where local decisions are often shaped by global stakes.

Moreover, Sino–American rivalry is also reshaping regional alliances and partnerships. African states face a delicate strategic choice: align with one of the major powers or attempt to maintain neutrality in order to maximize economic and political benefits. This situation may generate internal tensions, but also offers the possibility of negotiating diversified and flexible partnerships, provided that African countries are able to master their diplomatic strategies (Zartman, 2018).

While this competition opens opportunities for financing, infrastructure development, and technology transfer, it also entails risks. External pressures may accentuate economic vulnerabilities, reinforce dependency, and provoke conflicts of interest between local and international actors (Taylor, 2019). For

African states, the challenge therefore lies in leveraging the benefits offered by these rivalries while preserving strategic autonomy, strengthening regional cooperation, and adapting governance mechanisms to this new geopolitical landscape.

Global Crises and the Limits of Multilateralism

Health, climate, and security crises highlight the limits of contemporary multilateralism (Williams, 2021). Global responses appear slow and unevenly distributed, reinforcing the need for Africa to develop its own regional mechanisms.

Recent global crises—particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, climate-related disasters, and international security instability—have revealed the structural limitations of contemporary multilateralism. Williams (2021) emphasizes that international coordination remains slow, fragmented, and often ineffective in the face of challenges that nevertheless require a concerted response. The ability of multilateral institutions to anticipate, prevent, or manage systemic crises is increasingly questioned, exposing the flaws of a system struggling to adapt to the growing interdependence of societies.

These crises also highlight the persistent inequality in the distribution of resources, aid, and response capacities between the Global North and the Global South. The global management of the pandemic, especially unequal access to vaccines, illustrated a deep asymmetry between the most influential countries and the most vulnerable regions, including Africa (Williams, 2021). Similarly, international financial commitments for climate action remain insufficient in relation to the continent's actual needs, reinforcing the perception of a selective multilateralism driven by the interests of major powers.

In response to these limitations, Africa is compelled to strengthen its own regional cooperation mechanisms to effectively address health, climate, and security crises. Institutions such as the African Union,

regional economic communities, and continental initiatives become essential to fill the gaps left by global multilateralism (Williams, 2021). The development of autonomous regional capacities thus emerges as a strategic necessity, enabling the continent to enhance its resilience, assert its decision-making autonomy, and better defend its priorities in the international arena.

Impacts on Regional Governance

The African Union and regional organizations (ECOWAS, SADC, ECCAS) play a central but limited role due to institutional and financial constraints (Murithi, 2019; Tieku, 2015). Continental coordination remains insufficient for Africa to exert collective influence within the global system.

The dynamics of geopolitical reconfiguration reinforce the importance of African regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, SADC, and ECCAS. These institutions constitute essential platforms for the collective management of the continent's security, political, and economic challenges. However, Murithi (2019) emphasizes that their capacity for action remains constrained by persistent institutional limitations, notably weak legal mandates, insufficient enforcement mechanisms, and divergent interests among member states. These fragilities diminish the impact of their decisions and hinder their effectiveness.

Another major obstacle lies in the financial constraints faced by African regional organizations. The dependence of the African Union and regional communities on external funding considerably limits their strategic and operational autonomy. Tieku (2015) indicates that this dependence tends to shape the priorities of these institutions, which are often driven by donors rather than by the internal needs of African populations. This situation not only weakens regional policy coherence but also reduces the continent's ability to act sovereignly within the international system.

Consequently, continental coordination remains insufficient to enable Africa to exert

collective influence in global decision-making. Despite initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), cooperation mechanisms remain fragmented, and synergies among regional organizations are weak (Murithi, 2019). This situation limits Africa's capacity to articulate common positions vis-à-vis major powers and to respond effectively to global challenges. Institutional, budgetary, and strategic strengthening is therefore required to transform these organizations into effective levers of continental governance.

III – Toward a Renewed African Multilateralism

To build a renewed African multilateralism, it is essential to strengthen the continent's strategic autonomy so that African states can collectively influence international decision-making.

Strengthening Strategic Autonomy

A unified African voice is necessary in international forums. Collective diplomacy and coordinated negotiation capacity are essential to protect the continent's interests (Acharya, 2016).

Strengthening Africa's strategic autonomy first and foremost requires the construction of a unified diplomatic voice capable of influencing the major orientations of the international system. In a context marked by the rise of multipolarity and the fragmentation of multilateralism, the ability of African states to speak with one voice becomes a determining factor in effectively defending their collective priorities. Acharya (2016) emphasizes that regions of the Global South only manage to influence international rules when they adopt joint and coherent positions grounded in shared interests. For Africa, this strategic unity must translate into the harmonization of foreign policies, the strengthening of continental consultation platforms, and deeper coordination among regional economic communities. Without such cohesion, African states risk remaining marginalized in major multilateral negotiations, whether on trade, climate change, security, or development finance.

Collective diplomacy thus constitutes a central tool for enhancing the effectiveness of Africa's representation in international forums. A coordinated approach not only improves the continent's bargaining power but also helps to counter bilateral influence strategies employed by major powers, which often tend to fragment African positions. Acharya (2016) explains that regions adopting a collective posture possess negotiating power disproportionate to their individual capacities, particularly when they defend common priorities such as reform of the United Nations Security Council, climate finance mechanisms, and equity in trade relations. For this continental diplomacy to gain effectiveness, it is indispensable to strengthen the institutional mechanisms of the African Union, consolidate technical expertise within African delegations to international organizations, and develop strategic coalitions with other Global South regional blocs. By consolidating this collective approach, Africa will be better equipped to protect its interests and assert its place in global governance.

Institutional Reforms

Strengthening the African Union and regional mechanisms would make it possible to anticipate crises, optimize security, and develop common economic strategies (Murithi, 2019).

Strengthening the African Union (AU) emerges as an essential lever for improving continental governance, anticipating crises, and increasing the continent's strategic action capacity. Murithi (2019) emphasizes that the AU still suffers from institutional shortcomings, particularly in terms of autonomous financing, early warning mechanisms, and operational crisis management capacities. Structural reform involving increased contributions from member states, greater professionalization of technical bodies, and improved coordination among continental institutions would enable

faster and more effective interventions. Moreover, the systematic integration of regional economic communities into the AU's deliberative and operational architecture would strengthen the coherence of collective responses, particularly in the areas of security, political mediation, and migration management.

Institutional reforms must also aim to optimize collective security and promote harmonized economic strategies among African states. Murithi (2019) stresses the need to modernize security cooperation mechanisms by strengthening, for example, the African Standby Force, the Continental Early Warning System, and regional initiatives to combat terrorism and organized crime. At the same time, improved economic integration—particularly through the AfCFTA—requires the synchronization of industrial, trade, and fiscal policies in order to build a resilient and competitive continental market. Enhancing these institutional mechanisms would increase Africa's strategic autonomy, reduce structural vulnerabilities, and foster the emergence of a more organized African voice within the international system.

Diversification of Partnerships

Balanced negotiation with external powers and the consolidation of South–South partnerships are crucial for reducing dependence and increasing strategic room for maneuver (Acharya, 2017; Taylor, 2019).

The diversification of partnerships constitutes a key strategy for strengthening the strategic autonomy of African states in an international context marked by competition among major powers. Acharya (2017) emphasizes that regions of the Global South can reduce their structural vulnerability by multiplying sources of cooperation rather than relying exclusively on a small number of dominant actors. For Africa, this approach helps to mitigate traditional asymmetries inherited from the postcolonial international system and to access alternatives in financing, infrastructure, and technology. Diversification thus opens

crucial room for maneuver to negotiate more favorable agreements better aligned with national and regional priorities.

Within this dynamic, the ability of African states to conduct balanced negotiations with external powers—whether the United States, China, the European Union, or new actors such as Russia, India, and Gulf countries—becomes central. Taylor (2019) stresses the need to improve diplomatic and technical expertise to enable accurate assessment of the economic and geopolitical implications of international agreements. A more strategic negotiation approach would help avoid the traps of financial dependence, particularly in the context of large-scale infrastructure loans, and ensure that partnerships genuinely contribute to the sustainable development of African economies.

At the same time, strengthening South–South partnerships represents a major opportunity to build alliances based on shared experiences, constraints, and interests. Acharya (2017) notes that intra-South cooperation fosters less asymmetric relationships and provides access to solutions better adapted to the socio-economic realities of the countries concerned. Africa can thus develop collaborations across diverse sectors—agriculture, industry, digital technologies, security, and renewable energy—in partnership with other emerging states. This approach not only promotes the exchange of best practices but also facilitates the establishment of joint initiatives capable of strengthening the Global South's position in international governance.

However, diversification can only be effective if it is embedded in a coherent and coordinated continental strategy. Taylor (2019) points out that the lack of coordination among African foreign policies paves the way for intra-African competition, weakening the continent's collective bargaining capacity vis-à-vis major powers. The development of a common economic diplomacy, supported by the African Union and regional communities, is therefore indispensable to harmonize international commitments, avoid cross-

dependencies, and maximize the benefits of partnerships. By structuring diversification around shared objectives, Africa can not only strengthen its resilience but also assert a more influential position within the evolving world order.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for Africa within a fragmented and increasingly multipolar international system. The analysis demonstrates that contemporary multilateralism is undergoing a profound structural transformation, driven by the erosion of institutional legitimacy, the resurgence of nationalism, intensifying geopolitical rivalries, and the inability of traditional global institutions to respond effectively to transnational crises. These dynamics collectively weaken the capacity of multilateral frameworks to deliver inclusive and equitable outcomes, particularly for regions such as Africa that historically rely on collective mechanisms for security, development, and representation.

The findings indicate that Africa occupies a paradoxical position in the current international order. On the one hand, the continent remains structurally dependent on multilateral institutions for development finance, peacekeeping, and normative protection. On the other hand, it is increasingly exposed to external power rivalries that reshape its strategic environment and constrain policy autonomy. The uneven responses to global crises—such as pandemics, climate change, and security threats—have further revealed the selective and interest-driven nature of contemporary multilateralism, reinforcing Africa's marginalization within global decision-making processes.

At the regional level, the study highlights the central but limited role of African institutions, particularly the African Union and Regional Economic Communities. While these bodies represent important platforms for collective action, their effectiveness continues to be undermined by financial dependence, institutional fragility, and insufficient political coordination among member states. As a result, Africa's capacity to articulate unified positions and influence global governance outcomes remains constrained.

Nevertheless, the study also underscores the existence of significant opportunities for Africa in the evolving global order. The fragmentation of multilateralism and the rise of multipolarity create strategic openings for African states to diversify partnerships, strengthen South–South cooperation, and leverage collective diplomacy. By consolidating regional integration initiatives, reforming continental institutions, and enhancing negotiation capacity, Africa can move beyond passive participation toward a more assertive and autonomous role in international affairs.

In this context, the concept of a renewed African multilateralism emerges as a critical strategic pathway. Such an approach emphasizes coordinated diplomacy, institutional reform, and balanced engagement with external powers, enabling Africa to better defend its interests while contributing constructively to global governance. Rather than rejecting multilateralism, Africa must adapt it—reshaping existing frameworks and complementing them with regional and alternative mechanisms that reflect the continent's priorities and realities.

In conclusion, the crisis of multilateralism should not be viewed solely as a constraint but also as a transformative moment for Africa. By strengthening regional governance, promoting strategic unity, and engaging selectively and strategically within the global system, Africa can enhance its resilience and influence in a fractured world order. Future research may build on this study by examining country-specific strategies, empirical case studies of regional initiatives, and the long-term impact of South–South cooperation on Africa's global positioning.

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