POLICY SOLUTION

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CONNECTIVITY OVER COMPETITION. A G20 INITIATIVE TO SAFEGUARD GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY AS A GLOBAL PUBLIC GOOD

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Connectivity Over Competition. A G20 Initiative to Safeguard Global Connectivity as a Global Public Good

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Diagnosis of a Global Policy Challenge, Threat, and Opportunity

The world's greatest infrastructure challenge is no longer financing roads, ports, railways, or digital networks. It is preventing the fragmentation of the global connectivity system upon which markets, trade, investment, energy, technology, and innovation depend.

Geopolitical competition is reshaping the global economy. Governments are diversifying supply chains, investing in competing transport corridors and digital ecosystems, and strengthening economic resilience. While these are rational national responses, collectively they are creating fragmented infrastructure systems, incompatible standards, regulatory divergence, and higher transaction costs.

Markets cannot function efficiently if connectivity fragments. Economic growth increasingly depends on the interoperability of transport networks, digital infrastructure, energy systems, financial architecture, and regulatory frameworks. Fragmentation raises costs, discourages investment, constrains innovation, and weakens resilience. This is fundamentally a governance challenge, not an infrastructure financing challenge. Implementing the United Nations Pact for the Future requires a stronger partnership between the United Nations and the G20. The United Nations provides the global vision while the G20 provides the political leadership, economic coordination, and financial influence to help deliver it.

The G20 should therefore recognize connectivity as a strategic global public good, alongside climate stability, financial resilience, digital cooperation, and sustainable development, and make preserving interoperability a central objective of international economic cooperation.

Assessment of Current Institutional Responses

The international community has responded to growing infrastructure needs with unprecedented investment. China's Belt and Road Initiative, the European Union's Global Gateway, the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Digital Public Infrastructure initiatives, and numerous regional corridors are reshaping global trade, logistics, energy, and digital connectivity. These initiatives demonstrate that the world is not short of infrastructure strategies or financing capacity. Indeed, competition among connectivity initiatives has expanded investment opportunities and given countries greater flexibility in pursuing economic development. The problem lies elsewhere.

The issue is not that there are too many connectivity initiatives. The issue is that no institution is responsible for ensuring that they remain interoperable.

This is now one of the most important governance gaps confronting the international economy.

This lack of interoperability is already visible in practice. Corridors may connect the same regions on a map, but operate through different customs systems, digital platforms, financing rules, technical standards, and political alignments. The result is that countries can find themselves connected to several corridors at once, but without those corridors necessarily working together as one coherent system.

Existing institutions address only part of the challenge. The World Trade Organization governs trade rules but not connectivity systems. Multilateral development banks finance infrastructure but do not coordinate interoperability. Regional organizations promote regional integration but lack a global mandate. The United Nations provides normative leadership through the Pact for the Future but does not coordinate global infrastructure governance.

Rather than viewing the United Nations and the G20 as competing centers of global governance, policymakers should recognize them as complementary institutions with distinct comparative advantages. The United Nations establishes global norms and long-term strategic vision. The G20 mobilizes political leadership, economic coordination, and investment at scale. Together they are uniquely positioned to safeguard connectivity as a global public good.

Institutional, Policy, and Governance Changes

The G20 should launch a Global Connectivity Initiative as a flagship contribution to implementing the United Nations Pact for the Future. The Initiative would not finance new infrastructure, replace existing corridor programs, or choose between competing geopolitical initiatives. Instead, it would provide the missing governance framework needed to ensure that increasingly diverse connectivity systems continue to work with one another in a way that supports open markets, economic resilience, and sustainable growth. This would involve the following:

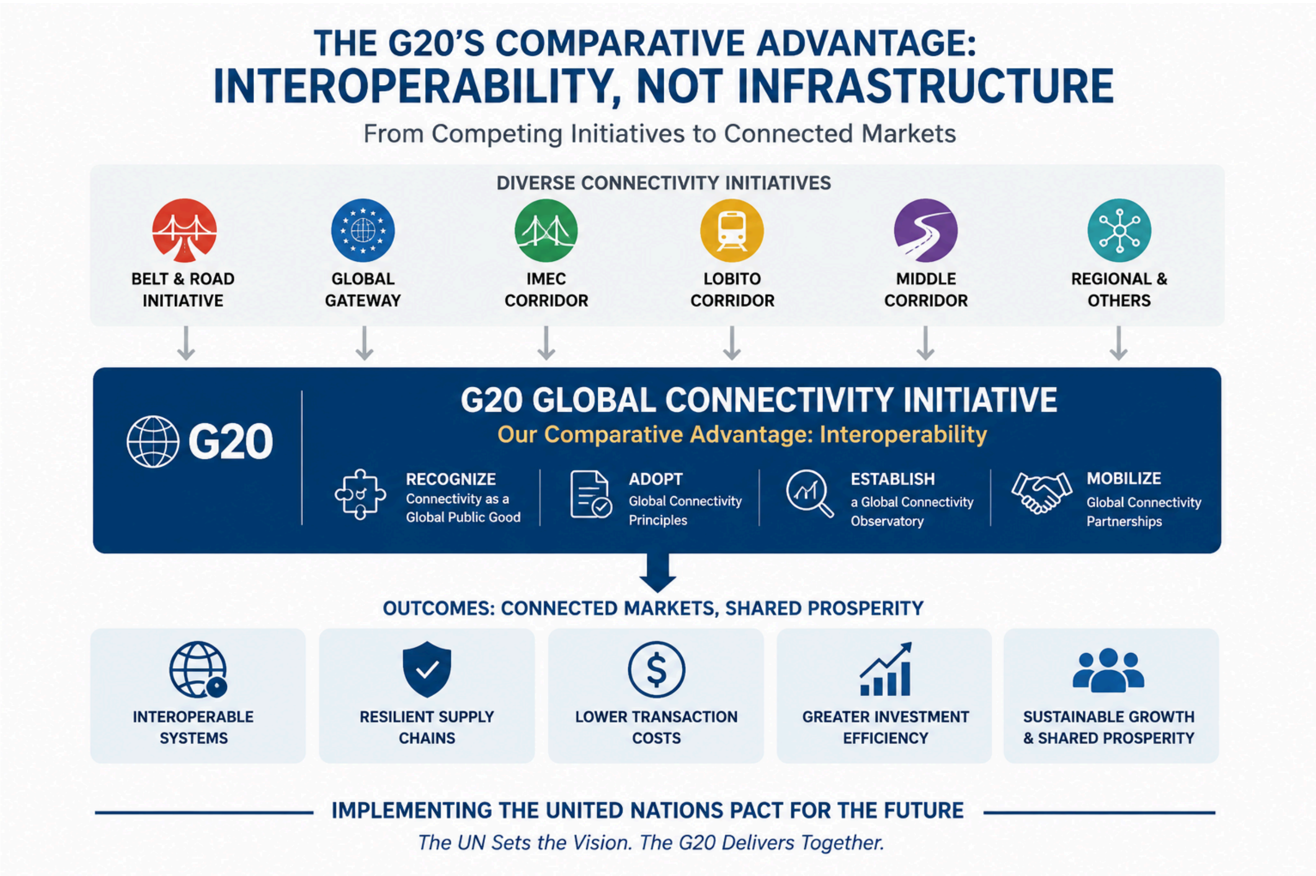
- ***First — Recognize Global Connectivity as a Twenty-First Century Global Public Good*:** The G20 should formally recognize global connectivity as a strategic global public good essential to economic growth, resilience, and sustainable development. Just as the international community recognizes the importance of financial stability, climate resilience, and global health, it should also recognize that efficient movement of goods, services, capital, energy, technology, and data across borders benefits all economies. Formal recognition would establish connectivity as a permanent pillar of international economic cooperation and reinforce implementation of the United Nations Pact for the Future.

- ***Second — Adopt Global Connectivity Principles*:** The G20 should endorse a voluntary set of Global Connectivity Principles centered on interoperability, transparency, resilience, open markets, compatible standards, and investment complementarity. Like the OECD AI Principles, a G20 set of Global Connectivity Principles need not replace national or regional approaches, but would encourage practical alignment across transport, digital, energy, financial, and regulatory systems while respecting national sovereignty and different development models.

- ***Third — Establish a Global Connectivity Observatory*****:** Working through existing international institutions, the G20 should establish a light-touch Global Connectivity Observatory. The Observatory would identify emerging interoperability challenges, monitor fragmentation risks, promote evidence-based policy dialogue, and strengthen transparency across competing connectivity initiatives. Its purpose would be to improve market efficiency, not create another international bureaucracy.

- ***Fourth — Mobilize Global Connectivity Partnerships*****:** The G20 should strengthen coordination among multilateral development banks, development finance institutions, sovereign wealth funds, institutional investors, and the private sector to promote complementary (not competing) connectivity investments. Mobilizing capital should increasingly focus on strengthening market integration, resilient supply chains, compatible infrastructure systems, and long-term productivity rather than reinforcing fragmentation.

Collectively, these four measures would reduce transaction costs, improve investment efficiency, strengthen supply chain resilience, support sustainable growth, and enhance the functioning of global markets. More importantly, they would demonstrate how the United Nations and the G20 can work together in practice: the United Nations providing the normative framework through the Pact for the Future, and the G20 providing the political leadership, economic coordination, and investment necessary to implement it.



Conclusion

The G20's comparative advantage is not infrastructure. It is interoperability. Competition between nations is inevitable. Fragmentation of markets is not.

The future of multilateralism will depend less on creating new institutions than on strengthening connections among existing ones. The United Nations and the G20 possess complementary strengths that, together, can help safeguard some of the world's most important global public goods. The United Nations provides the global vision through the Pact for the Future. The G20 provides the political leadership, economic coordination, and financial influence needed to translate that vision into practical action.

The G20 cannot eliminate geopolitical competition. Nor should it attempt to do so. Its comparative advantage lies in ensuring that strategic competition does not come at the expense of connectivity itself. In an increasingly fragmented world, preserving connectivity is essential to sustaining open markets, resilient supply chains, innovation, economic growth, and shared prosperity. Connectivity over competition should become a defining principle of twenty-first century multilateralism, and a practical expression of a stronger partnership between the United Nations and the G20.

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