# Prospects for the G20's 2025 Johannesburg Summit

John Kirton, G20 Research Group
November 15, 2025

## Introduction

### Significance

The G20's 20th regular summit, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 22–23 November 2025, is highly significant. It is the first time an African country has hosted the G20 summit, doing so a year after the admission of the African Union as a full member of the group. South Africa, Africa's biggest economy and democracy, will host the G20 summit for the first time. It will highlight Africa's growing global economic and political importance, as the continent with some of the world's fastest-growing economies, a young, rapidly expanding population embracing technology and innovation, many of the critical minerals the democratic world badly needs, and the abundant nature needed to counter climate change and biodiversity loss.

Yet Africa also suffers from widespread poverty, high levels of debt, unemployment, humanitarian crises, emigration, crime and corruption, requiring African voices to be heard on the key issues of sustainable growth, the digital economy, green industrialization and much else. The Johannesburg Summit takes place during the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, and at the start of the third trimester to reach the now struggling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) five years from now in 2030. As the 20th G20 summit since their start in November 2008, with every country having hosted a summit, it marks a significant milestone in G20 history, and G20 leaders will receive the G20@20 Review that assesses their achievements and working methods and charts the way ahead for the next 20 years.

The G20's future is highly uncertain. US president Donald Trump has said he and his officials will not attend the Johannesburg Summit, even as he is eagerly planning to host the next summit in Miami in December 2026 to launch the second cycle of G20 summitry. Also skipping the summit are the leaders of Russia, China, Mexico and Argentina – more absentees than ever before.

South Africa continues the trend of democratic, emerging powers hosting the G20, as South Africa succeeds Indonesia in 2022, India in 2023 and Brazil in 2025. Johannesburg will be the fifth G20 summit hosted by a member of the BRICS of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. It comes ten years after the launch of the UN's 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its SDGs. It takes place immediately after the UN Climate Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, designed to counter the existential threat of climate change.

The Johannesburg Summit confronts many key interconnected challenges: wars and conflicts, climate change, pandemics, poverty, rising debt levels in poor countries, terrorism, inequality, unemployment (especially youth unemployment), violence against women, migration, artificial intelligence, amid growing geopolitical tensions, unilateralism, nationalism, protectionism and isolationism.

With South African president Cyril Ramaphosa as chair, G20 leaders will seek to lead global governance, under the summit's key themes of "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability." Its four specific priorities are 1) strengthening disaster resilience and response, 2) ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries, 3) mobilising finance for a just energy transition, and 4) harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

## The Debate

The prospects for and propellors of the Johannesburg Summit's performance have inspired a debate among several schools of thought.

The first, most optimistic school saw Africa's opportunity to convert its G20-driven growing global visibility into influence in a multipolar world (Timothewos 2025). The accession of the AU as a G20 member and Africa's abundant critical minerals and youthful population would support this transition, despite almost 40% of global conflicts being on the African continent – more than 50 armed conflicts, a 45% increase since 2020, with 35 million people displaced.

The second school saw the Johannesburg Summit as South Africa's credibility test for global investment. Bastian Teichgreeber (2025) argued that following the country's removal from the grey list published by the Financial Action Task Force, its G20 summit "was a rare opportunity to reset its relationship with global investors," by showing policy coherence, institutional resilience, a pragmatic growth strategy and fiscal responsibility.

The third, similar school saw the G20 seeking to advance continental value addition, job creation, export revenues and development priorities, and showcasing South Africa's latest technological innovations in key security, crime and environmental fields (Sokutu 2025).

The fourth, now pessimistic school saw South Africa's ambitious agenda unrealized in summit agreement and action. Elizabth Sidiropoulos and Krissmonne Olwagen (2025, 40–41) argued that "this G20 has provided a unique opportunity for South Africa and Africa to articulate and advance African priorities on the global stage." However, "the Johannesburg Summit will probably produce a declaration, but the presidency's ambition, reflected in its agenda, is unlikely to be realised in practice." This is due to "some members disputing climate change or the validity of the Sustainable Development Goals." Brenda Madumise (2025) added that it would be a substantively unserious spectacle on gender equality, due to deeply entrenched patriarchal norms among G20 members.

The fifth school saw Africa's precarious progress, due to the now endangered and overwhelmed 2015 SDGs and Paris Agreement on climate change. Adam Tooze (2025) wrote: "Aid budgets did rachet up. African governments gained greater voice in the G20. Progress came not in great leaps but in iterative efforts." But if there is now a "new African scramble," it would lead to disaster: "Africa's youth quake is upon us. The climate crisis is here."

The sixth school saw a shrinking summit, due to Trump (Tooze 2025). He announced on September 5 that he would not attend the summit, sending his Vice President J.D. Vance in his place (Woodhouse and Wingrove 2025). This would be the first time in 20 summits that the US president did not attend. This follows the decision of US treasury secretary Scott Bessent to skip the G20 finance ministers' meeting in late February, following Secretary of State Marco Rubio skipping the G20 foreign ministers meeting in South Africa the week before (Flatley and Dendrinou 2025). And in early November, Trump declared that no US official would attend at all (Wardwell 2025).

The seventh, most pessimistic school saw a dormant summit due to Trump. Rob Rose, Monica Mark and Henry Foy (2025) reported a senior official preparing the summit said "G20 had become a bit dormant … It's a time for it to be in hibernation" after Argentina's President Javier Milei and China's Xi Jinping also said they would also not attend the Johannesburg Summit, in addition to Russian president Vladimir Putin. There were also reports that Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum would not attend (Ecofin Agency 2025). Delegations "assume there will be no joint statement" but were planning instead for bilateral talks and "to coordinate positions on issues including trade and climate change."

However, an eighth school saw Trump's absence as a blessing in disguise. Keith Gottschalk (2025) predicted that "in his absence, the delegations will reach consensus on significantly more issues than if he were present … The G20 will go through a nadir during his year, 2026, bur will recover in subsequent years."

Unlike the debates before previous G20 summits, no schools saw this summit producing a very strong, strong or even significant performance.

### The Argument

The Johannesburg Summit is likely to produce a small performance. It could even be the G20's first failed summit since the first in 2008. The absence of the leaders of the US and China – the two largest economies in the world – along with Russia, Mexico and Argentina, mean few big bargains between the North and the South can and will be struck on the spot. Moreover, G20 members' compliance with the commitments made at Johannesburg will be historically low, as the leaders of five of the 21 members (including the European Union and African Union) will not be personally attached to the promises made there. Also suffering will be the summit's domestic political management, as it will receive far less attention back home in the key countries without their leaders there. And without them, Johannesburg will do less to deliberate on a broad range of subjects, where each leader ensures that his or her particular priorities are addressed. It will similarly do less to shape or create global governance institutions inside or outside the G20. Producing even a small performance will depend critically on the contributions of all the G7 leaders other than Trump, of the key leaders from the Global South's leading democratic members of India, Brazil and Indonesia, and of South Africa as the chair.

Johannesburg's prospective small performance will be propelled by the unprecedented shock of the US president's absence from the summit, despite the offsetting small shocks from the economy, social, ecological and security fields. While mounting multilateral organizational failure due to Trump's assault on them would otherwise propel G20 performance, it is overwhelmed by the much reduced globally predominant and internally equalizing capabilities controlled by the G20 leaders participating at Johannesburg's summit table, by the new divergence in members' principles due Trump and Milei, by the poor domestic political control of the leaders, and, above all, by the low value placed by the missing leaders on the G20 as the club at the hub of a summit-level global governance for an increasingly endangered world.

## South Africa's Priorities and Plans

From the start, Ramaphosa, as he announced at the end of the G20's Rio de Janeiro Summit in November 2024, said the Johannesburg Summit would focus on the three themes of solidarity, equality and sustainability. These would be backed by the four specific priorities of strengthening disaster resilience and response, ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries, mobilising finance for a just energy transition, and harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development. These remained the constant foundation through to the eve of the summit itself (Kirton and Koch 2025; Ramaphosa 2025).

On December 3, 2024, Ramaphosa (2024) elaborated, saying that South Africa had created three dedicated task forces to deal with cross-cutting issues. The first was on inclusive economic growth, industrialization, employment and reduced inequality; the second was on food security; and the third was on artificial intelligence, data governance and innovation for sustainable development.

### Ministerial Meetings

To build a broad foundation for leaders to produce these and other priorities, in a basic bottom-up approach, South Africa planned 25 ministerial meetings, often alongside the relevant working groups. They covered 18 different ministerial portfolios. They were led by finance and central bank governors with four meetings, followed by foreign affairs with two, and then, with one each, in chronological order, development, employment, tourism, agriculture and food security, research and innovation, digital, artificial intelligence, trade and investment, energy transitions, disaster risk reduction, climate and environmental sustainability, education, empowerment of women, culture, and anti-corruption. At the end, in the first week of November, health ministers met in person and were scheduled to meet with their finance counterparts in virtual form.

Only six ministerial meetings (on foreign affairs, finance, development and employment) were held from February through July. The remaining were scheduled and mounted from September 18 to November 7.

To start the sequence, on February 20–21 foreign ministers met in Gauteng. Opened by Ramaphosa, the meeting was designed to discuss the geopolitical environment and its impact of the G20's work, and to reflect on South Africa's priorities and deliverables. At the end, South Africa's foreign minister, Ronald Lamola, issued a chair's summary of 970 words. It contained 12 commitments: regional security with four, G20 governance and development with two each, and UN reform, international financial institution (IFI) reform, trade and climate change with one each.

The second ministerial meeting was on February 26–27 in Cape Town, and was the first for finance ministers and central bank governors. Absent from the meeting was US treasury secretary Scott Bessent. It produced a chair's summary that contained 38 commitments.

On April 23–24, in Washington DC the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors met again, on the margins of the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Only a media statement was issued describing the discussions.

On July 17–18, in Durban, G20 finance ministers and central bank governors met for their last stand-alone meeting in the host country before the Johannesburg Summit itself. Bessent was again absent. The ministers and governors did, however, produce a formal communiqué, from all members, including the US. Its five pages contained 33 commitments. They were led by financial sector issues and financial inclusion with 12, followed by international financial architecture with 10, international taxation four, the Joint Finance Health Task Force three, the global economy two, and infrastructure and general one each.

The communiqué contained a section of four paragraphs on sustainable finance. It used the word "climate" four times and "carbon" twice. The section on the global economy noted "frequent extreme weather events and natural disasters" once, that on financial sector issues "climate-related financial risks" once, and "COP30" twice. Yet despite these nine references to climate change or its cognates, there were no commitments on climate change anywhere. The same was true for the accompanying media statement describing what issues were discussed on each day.

On July 20-25 the Development Working Group and ministers met in Kruger National Park and issued the Skukuza Development Ministerial Declaration. A chair's report was also published.

On July 30-31 the employment working group ministerial meeting was held in George and produced the Fancourt Declaration.

After an absence of meetings in August, in September the pace quickened, with seven ministerial meetings.

On September 12, the tourism ministers met in Skukuza and agreed on the Mpumalanga Declaration.

On September 18, the Agriculture Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place in West Somerset, followed by the Food Security Task Force ministerial meeting on September 19.

On September 23 the Research and Innovation Working Group Ministerial Meeting released a chair's summary and recommendations for science engagement.

On September 25, foreign ministers met at the UN General Assembly. A chair's summary was published.

On September 29 the Digital Economy Working Group Meeting met in Cape Town, and issued a chair's statement. The following afternoon, on September 30, the Task Force Ministerial Meeting on Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance and Innovation for Sustainable Development issued its own chair's statement.

In October, the pace quickened further, as another nine ministerial meetings were mounted.

On October 9, there was a G20 Nuclear Energy Ministerial conference in KwaZulu Natal. It was followed by the Energy Transitions Working Group Ministerial Meeting on October 10, which produced a chair's summary and also an action plan on "Closing the Clean Cooking Gap."

On October 10–11, the Trade and Investment Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape. No outcome document was released.

On October 13, the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place in Somerset West, Western Cape. It produced a ministerial declaration.

On October 15–16, the fourth finance and central bank ministerial meeting was held in Washington DC, on the margins of the fall meetings of the IMF and World Bank. There was a chair's summary and a ministerial declaration on debt sustainability.

On October 16–17, the Climate and Environmental Sustainability Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place in Cape Town. It produced three outcome documents, the first two were ministerial declarations, from the ministers, on air quality and on environmental crime. The third was a chair's summary, from only the official-level Working Group.

The Cape Town Ministerial Declaration on Air Quality, published on October 22, contained five paragraphs with 11 commitments. The Cape Town Ministerial Declaration on Crimes that Affect the Environment had three paragraphs and four commitments.

The Chair's Summary of the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group covered biodiversity and conservation (including the components of invasive alien species, deforestation and forest degradation and the biodiversity economy), land degradation, desertification, drought and water sustainability, chemicals, circular economy and waste management, and climate change (including the components of adaptation and climate resilient development, loss and damage, mitigation-integrating climate and development approaches towards enhanced implementation and realizing sustainable, inclusive and just transition), and oceans and coasts (including marine planning and ocean governance, the blue economy and addressing marine plastic pollution).

On October 22, the Education Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place at the Skukuza Safari Lodge, Mpumalanga. No outcome document was released.

On October 29 the Culture Working Group Ministerial Meeting was held in KwaZulu-Natal. Ministers produced the KwaDukuza Declaration.

On October 30 the Anti-Corruption Working Group Ministerial took place in Kruger National Park. No outcome document was published.

On October 31 the Empowerment of Women Working Group Ministerial Meeting took place in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng. No outcome document was released.

In November, only two ministerial meetings were held.

On November 6, in Limpopo, came the Health Working Group Ministerial.

On November 7, by a video teleconference, the Joint Finance and Health Ministerial Meeting took place.

By September 25, South Africa had added a new African Panel of Experts to address the impediments to growth and development in Africa, including the cost of capital.

It also created a G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts in Global Wealth Inequality, chaired by Joseph Stigliz, to deliver the G20's first official paper on global inequality.

## Compliance Momentum

As the summit approached, the momentum from the members' compliance with the 13 priority commitments they made at the 2024 Rio Summit was usually small, averaging only 67% as of August 20, 2025.

Compliance was led, as usual, by the European Union, then – again as usual – by the United Kingdom at 92%, but newly by Brazil, the 2024 host, and Japan at 88% each. Then came Canada, Australia and Korea at 77%, Germany, France and Italy at 73%. Below the all-time, overall average of 71%, came South Africa and Indonesia at 69%, India and Turkey at 62%, Saudi Arabia 50%, and the African Union, the newest member, at 54%

The countries with the leaders who will be missing at Johannesburg were led by China 73%, Mexico 58% Russia and Argentina 42%, and, at the very bottom, the United States at 27%. These five absentees averaged 48%, far below the overall Rio average of 67%.

Compliance, and thus the momentum from Rio, was highest for the commitments on the energy transition at 93%, Climate change and disaster risk reduction 86%, environment (biodiversity) and inclusive health systems at 83%, and macroeconomic and fiscal policy at 81%. After a large drop came digital platform transparency at 69%, greenhouse gas reduction at 67%, development in terms of support for low- and middle-income countries at 63%, gender equality and labour markets 60%, AU integration 57%, and institutional reform 52%. In the negative range were humanitarian efforts in Gaza and Lebanon at 48%, and fertilizer shortages at 36%. The US had full compliance with two commitments, those on the energy transition and on fertilizer shortages.

This compliance should help propel a stronger performance on the Johannesburg priorities of, in turn, mobilising finance for a just energy transition (where the US had complete compliance), strengthening disaster resilience and response, and even harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development, but a weaker performance on ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries. The high compliance on macroeconomic and fiscal policy corresponded with Trump's priorities for his back-to-basics Miami Summit focused on macroeconomic policy and energy security.

## Deliverables

On the eve of the summit, Trump and other leaders in the Global North were already reducing their financial support for some of South Africa's key priorities, while the wide gulf between them and Russia and China remained, joined by some divisions among G7 members themselves.

Still, the Johannesburg Summit was on track to produce a small, workerlike performance, and could do more to confront new shared shocks that could arise (see Appendix B).

On the economy and finance, G20 leaders will receive and likely welcome the report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Wealth Inequality. They will also endorse the

Financial Stability Board's Implementation Monitoring Review to reinforce their work on financial stability and its G20 Cross-Border Payments Roadmap, recommendations on non-bank financial institutions and new work on related data challenges.

On development and employment, Johannesburg is due to endorse the fourth Financing for Development Conference and its Seville Commitment's blueprint to close the sustainable development financing gap with a call to expand social protection coverage by at least 2% each year and reshape the global financial system. G20 leaders will endorse the report of the African Panel of Experts to address the impediments to growth and development in Africa, including the cost of capital and IFI reform, and the Nelson Mandela Bay Target to reduce the share of youth not in employment, education or training by a further 5% by 2030.

On digital technologies, they will likely advance the G20's "AI for Africa" Initiative to accelerate implementation of the AU's Continental AI Strategy and endorse the results of the G20 Digital Economy Working Group and the work of the AI Task Force, the ITU's AI Skills Coalition and AI Standards Exchange.

On energy and the environment, they will launch the G20 Critical Minerals Framework on responsible business conduct, contract negotiations and illicit trade, and endorse the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan, the work of the African Risk Capacity Group and probably the results of the UN Ocean Conference in Nice and the work of the International Ocean Panel.

And above all, leaders will look forward to receiving the G20@20 Review that reflects on the G20's achievements and working methods and recommends how to ensure that the G20 remains a key global forum for international economic cooperation, as its second 20-summit hosting cycle starts.

In November, Ramaphosa said the summit would receive the first ever G20 report on global inequality, delivered on November 4. He said Johannesburg was expected to "take concrete measures to reform the global financial system and address the widening global wealth gap and income inequality," and would conclude "an agreement to strengthen multilateral development banks such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the African Development Bank" (Xinhua 2025).

## Dimensions of Performance

The Johannesburg Summit's prospective performance can be systematically and comparatively judged according to the six dimensions of performance by which all previous similar summits have been assessed. The current and likely state of these dimensions suggest at best a small performance, and possibly even a very small or even failed one – the worst performance of the G20's first 20 summits (see Appendix A).

### Domestic Political Management

The first dimension, domestic political management, recognizes that members' leader go to such high-profile international summits to advance their policies, political standing and popularity back home. Its first measure is thus the attendance of the leader at the summit. Johannesburg could well be the G20 summit with the lowest attendance. It will be the first without the US president, as Donald Trump said he would not attend, and later said neither his vice president nor any US official would go. Russia's Vladimir Putin will again be absent, as he has been since 2022, but now for the first time will not send his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, but a lower ranking official in the presidential administration. On November 11, Argentinian president Javier Milei said he would stay away, due to the absence of Trump, but would send his foreign minister, Pablo Quirno. Then China's President Xi Jinping, who skipped the 2023 New Delhi Summit, said he would stay away, and send Premier Li Qiang instead. And there were reports that Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum, who attended the 2024 summit in Rio de Janeiro, would send her foreign minister, as had her mentor Andrés Manuel López Obrador when he was president from 2018 to 2023.

With the exception of the 2021 Rome Summit, a hybrid summit held while much of the world was still experiencing travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic so six leaders participated virtually with their foreign ministers present, never before have the leaders of so few G20 members chosen to come to the summit. Only 14 of the 19 G20 countries – or 74% – have chosen to attend the Johannesburg Summit, and the leaders of both the largest economies in the world will stay home. These figures could change as the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has replaced his aging, ailing father at the summit for many years, may choose to send his foreign minister as he did in 2024.

### Deliberation

The leaders' private deliberation is thus likely to be substantial, but its public deliberation, recorded in its agreed communiqués, will likely be small or even non-existent, if no joint statement is produced.

Without Trump at the table to dominate the private discussions with his personal views on unpredictable, particular subjects, the private discussions could be more focused, detailed and consensus creating than they would otherwise be.

But far more importantly, with so many key leaders absent and thus unable to add their personal perspectives or national subjects to the deliberations and any outcome documents, the deliberations are likely to be smaller and less comprehensive than those in the past several years.

### Decisions

The leaders' decision-making, through collective, public, precise, future-oriented, politically binding commitments, recorded in the summit's outcome documents is, for similar reasons, likely to be small. There is a reduced need for leaders at the table to approve or add agreements on the subject preferred by Trump, or the other missing leaders, on a consensus-oriented, horse-trading or diffuse-reciprocity dynamic. Moreover, Quirno, Milei's recently appointed foreign minister visiting Washington DC just before the summit, and knowing Argentina depended on Washington for $20 billion to stave off another financial collapse, could well veto any agreements at the summit table he thought Trump might not like.

### Delivery

The delivery of Johannesburg's decisions, through members' compliance with its commitments before the next summit is held in Miami 13 months later, will likely be very small, possibly the worst ever by a wide margin.

The Trump administration was highly unlikely to comply with any Johannesburg commitments that it had no part in making at the summit, nor will it implement them. The same is true, if to a lesser extent, with the other four members whose leaders are absent.

However with Trump's previous sherpa, Nels Nordquist, having participated constructively in the Johannesburg preparatory process, replaced by Kevin Hassett before the fourth and final sherpa meeting on the summit's eve, and with the US part of the G20's governing troika for 2025, before it assumes the presidency on December 1, 2025, it could comply with the Johannesburg commitments, in ways the US wants, on the subjects Trump has already identified for his Miami Summit on December 13–14, 2026. These are "unleashing economic prosperity by eliminations the burdensome regulations unlocking affordability energy and pioneering new technologies" (White House 2025). Other issues added to the agenda include the energy grid, oil production, construction, blue collar wages, tariffs, incoming foreign direct investment into the US, peace deals, tax deals, trade deals, the US as the best place to so business, have tax certainty, energy security and regulatory security. This suggests a so-called "back to basics" approach for Miami, with a focus on macroeconomic (fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policy), financial regulation and supervision, but also trade, tariffs and investment, artificial intelligence (which Trumps considers a growth engine), and energy including electricity, the grid and oil.

Some Johannesburg leaders might wish to add commitments on such issues, to please Trump now, or to save the G20 summit institution itself. Such subjects reflected an American-defined back-to-basics streamlined approach, focused on core economic subjects and energy and critical minerals.

### Development of Global Governance

Johannesburg's development of institutionalized global governance is likely to be very small.

Creating or guiding institutions within the G20 itself will likely be impeded by the missing leaders' desire to reduce such consensus-oriented democracy that contain US unilateralism, save for those jointly shared with the G7, where Trump and his ministers have participated fully throughout 2025.

Outside the G20, there are even fewer institutions that Trump and Milei would want the G20 to create or guide. There are many that they would like to see removed, led by the World Heath Organization, UN Climate and the UN High Commission for Refugees, will likely be saved by the attending leaders.

### Money Mobilized

Another measure of summit performance is the new money mobilized by, at or because of the summit for global public goods. Johannesburg could raise a solid amount, and more than the very small sum mobilized at the Rio Summit in 2024. It is most likely to come from the Global Fund's eighth replenishment summit, held in Johannesburg on November 21 just before the summit, and co-hosted by South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Also relevant is the G20 Africa Energy Investment Forum, mounted by the Africa Energy Chamber in Johannesburg on November 21, to attract foreign investment in African oil production, natural gas, clean cooking, nuclear and affordable energy, hydropower and geothermal.

Such money would come not from the missing US, but from attendees such as Saudi Arabia, and rich guests such as Norway and the United Arab Emirates.

## Propellors of Performance

The performance of the Johannesburg Summit will be propelled by the current state of the six proven propellors of G7 summit performance: shock-activated vulnerability, multilateral organizational failure, members' globally predominant and internally equalizing capabilities, their common and converging principles, domestic political support, and their perceived value of the G20 as the club at the hub of an expanding network of global governance.

Specifically, Johannesburg's prospective small performance will be driven by the unprecedented shock caused by the US president's absence, despite the offsetting small shocks from the economy, social, ecological and security fields. Although mounting multilateral organizational failure due to Trump would otherwise propel G20 performance, it is overwhelmed by the much reduced globally predominant and internally equalizing capabilities controlled by the G20 leaders at the summit table itself, by the new divergence in members' principles due Trump and Milei, by the poor domestic political control of the leaders, and, above all, by the low value placed by the missing leaders as the club at the hub of a summit-level global governance for an increasingly endangered world.

## Shock-Activated Vulnerability

Trump's absence at Johannesburg and his decision not to send any officials to represent the US will reduce the summit's performance. Milei, Xi and reportedly Sheinbaum have subsequently decided not to attend, and even Putin is sending low-level officials instead of his veteran foreign minister.

This American shock will overwhelm the performance-propelling strength of Russian military advances in Ukraine and its attacks on the energy system there, China's military support for Russia and advances in the South China Sea, intensified deadly extreme weather events throughout the world, and financial fragilities from Trump's tariff assaults on his G20 partners, from G20 members' soaring deficits and debts, and from private credit finance.

## Multilateral Organizational Failure

Mounting multilateral organizational failure due to Trump would otherwise propel G20 performance (see Appendix C). But this is so strong that it overwhelms the capacity and willingness of G20 members to fill the gap. The most directly relevant failures of multilateral organizations are the inability of the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council to stop Russian advances in Ukraine, China's expansion in the South China Sea and against Taiwan, and North Korea's and Iran's nuclear programs. The International Atomic Energy Agency, still receiving US funding, has limited power to stop Russian attacks on Ukraine's reactor infrastructure and Iran's nuclear program. The International Energy Agency (IEA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization also have limited capacity. There is no multilateral body dedicated to ensuring a secure supply of critical minerals, not even a plurilateral one such as the IEA to do so for oil.

The UN's COP30 summit on climate change in Belém in early November attracted only 30 leaders from its almost 200 members, with those of the US, Canada, China and Russia staying home. Moreover, very few members submitted their updated nationally determined contributions on time, and those that did mostly provided rather weak ones.

## Predominant, Equalizing Capability

The absent G20 leaders at the Johannesburg will eliminate the G20's globally predominant capability, as the US, China, Russia, Argentina and probably Mexico will no longer be there to add to the total. This is even with the decline in 2025 of the value of the US dollar by about 9% against the basket of key currencies, slowing growth in Russia, and Argentina being bailed out by the IMF and now the US, and strong growth in India. It is true for overall capability, as measured by gross domestic product in current exchange rates, but also in most specialized capabilities most relevant to South Africa's priorities and agenda.

Here much will depend on Canada, with the world's tenth largest economy. It is – as Prime Minister Mark Carney claims – a genuine "energy superpower" – as one of the world's largest exporters of liquefied natural gas and holders of oil and gas reserves. It is in the top five countries with the most important critical minerals, and ranks third in the uranium it possesses. Of the world's listed mining companies, 40% are in Canada, and 85% of its energy comes from clean sources. It has many of the critical minerals that the US needs but lacks at home, and enough to help replace China over the medium term. It is also an ecological superpower, with the world's longest coastlines, second largest territory, freshwater and boreal forests, and third largest peatlands. It is the largest per capita donor of financial support to Ukraine.

Ranking similarly high in such relevant capabilities are India, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia and – in finance and technology – Japan, Germany and Korea.

## Common, Converging Principles

The G20's common, converging principles is low. It fell sharply in 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and then with China's support for Russia and military expansion in the South China Sea. But it increased sharply with the arrival of Trump and Milei, with their assault on the post-1945 rules-based order and multilateral organizations. It surged again with their decision to skip the Johannesburg Summit itself.

### Domestic Political Control

G20 leaders have poor political control of their domestic politics. To be sure, none of the G7 ones is likely to face an election that would replace them during the following year. But their parties' control of their legislatures is uncertain in France and Japan and depends on fragile coalition governments in Germany.

G7 leaders are very unpopular in Germany, the UK, US and, especially, France. Trump's approval rating has plunged to historic lows, and the US state and local election results on November 4 saw surging support for the Democratic Party. G7 leaders are popular only in Japan, Canada and Italy.

Beyond the G7, there are coalition governments in South Africa. The leaders' domestic political approval is highest in Russia, China and Mexico, whose leaders will skip the summit. Among the attending leaders, it is substantial in Australia. So much will depend on what a highly popular, political secure leader of a powerful India does, and Brazil's Lula too.

### Club at the Hub

The members and their leaders value the G7 as the club at the hub of an expanding network of global governance is low. The unprecedented absence of five leaders, including the United States and Mexico's for the first time, comes on top of Xi Jinping's absence for the second time and Vladimir Putin's for the fifth summit in a row.

Yet as they as well as Modi are also skipping other such plurilateral summits, there is no replacement for the G20 in sight, leaving leaders with no place else to go. And Trump's unusually early decision to host the G20 summit in 2026, at a specific time and location, and with a specific, in streamlined back-to-basics agenda focused on the economy and energy, shows that he too still values the G20 summit, and its ability to work for the United States.

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# Appendix A: G20 Summit Performance, 2008–2024

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Development of global governance | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Domestic political management | | | Deliberation | | | Direction setting | | | | Decisions | Delivery | | | Internal | | External | | Engagement groups | |
| Summit | Grade | Attendance | # compliments | % members complimented | # days | # documents | # words | Stability | Inclusion | Democracy | Liberty | # commitments | Compliance | Compliance | # Assessed | # references | Spread | # references | Spread | # references | Spread |
| 2008 | A– | 100% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 2 | 3,567 | 16 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 95 | +0.53 | 77% | 10 | 0 | 4 | 39 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| 2009a | A | 100% | 1 | 5% | 2 | 3 | 6,155 | 29 | 6 | 9 | 0 | 129 | +0,20 | 60% | 10 | 12 | 4 | 120 | 27 | 0 | 0 |
| 2009b | A– | 100% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 2 | 9,257 | 11 | 21 | 28 | 1 | 128 | +0.37 | 69% | 17 | 47 | 4 | 115 | 26 | 0 | 0 |
| 2010c | A– | 90% | 8 | 15% | 2 | 5 | 11,078 | 47 | 32 | 11 | 1 | 61 | +0.40 | 70% | 16 | 71 | 4 | 164 | 27 | 0 | 0 |
| 2010d | B | 95% | 5 | 15% | 2 | 5 | 15,776 | 66 | 36 | 18 | 4 | 153 | +0.34 | 67% | 42 | 99 | 4 | 237 | 31 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 | B | 95% | 11 | 35% | 2 | 3 | 14,107 | 42 | 8 | 22 | 0 | 282 | +0.41 | 71% | 26 | 59 | 4 | 247 | 27 | 4 | 2 |
| 2012 | A– | 95% | 6 | 15% | 2 | 2 | 12,682 | 43 | 23 | 31 | 3 | 180 | +0.54 | 77% | 21 | 65 | 4 | 138 | 20 | 7 | 2 |
| 2013 | A | 90% | 15 | 55% | 2 | 11 | 28,766 | 73 | 108 | 15 | 3 | 281 | +0.34 | 67% | 27 | 190 | 4 | 237 | 27 | 9 | 5 |
| 2014 | B | 90% | 10 | 40% | 2 | 5 | 9,111 | 10 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 205 | +0.42 | 71% | 29 | 39 | 4 | 42 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| 2015 | B | 90% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 6 | 5,983 | 13 | 22 | 0 | 2 | 198 | +0.42 | 71% | 24 | 42 | 4 | 54 | 11 | 8 | 6 |
| 2016 | B+ | 95% | 7 | 25% | 2 | 4 | 16,004 | 11 | 29 | 34 | 5 | 213 | +0.40 | 70% | 34 | 179 | 4 | 223 | 19 | 14 | 6 |
| 2017 | B+ | 95% | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 34,746 | 42 | 61 | 2 | 11 | 529 | +0.29 | 65% | 43 | 54 | 6 | 307 | 19 | | |
| 2018 | B– | 90% | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 13,515 | 23 | 53 | 7 | 2 | 128 | +0.56 | 78% | 25 | 20 | 5 | 24 | 15 | | |
| 2019 | B | 95% | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 6,623 | 13 | 16 | 7 | 6 | 143 | +0.56 | 74% | 25 | 56 | 5 | 54 | 17 | | |
| 2020 | B– | 95% | 3 | 10% | 2 | 1 | 5,697 | 13 | 20 | 6 | 6 | 107 | +0.55 | 78% | 27 | 30 | 6 | 58 | 16 | | |
| 2021 | B+ | 95% | 4 | 10% | 3 | 1 | 10,060 | 5 | 27 | 2 | 0 | 225 | +0.41 | 71% | 25 | 31 | 8 | 70 | 25 | | |
| 2022 | B | 85% | 4 | 10% | 2 | 1 | 10,402 | 27 | 43 | 3 | 1 | 223 | +0.58 | 79% | 15 | 40 | 5 | 91 | 28 | | |
| 2023 | B+ | 85% | 4 | 10% | 2 | 1 | 14,290 | 18 | 33 | 12 | 4 | 242 | +0.90 | 85% | 09 | 34 | 13 | 115 | 31 | | |
| 2024 | B– | 95% | 7 | 24% | 2 | 1 | 9,095 | 14 | 41 | | | 174 | +0.35 | 67% | 13 | 20 | 14 | 99 | 39 | | |
| Total | | N/A | 66 | | 32 | 64 | 193,067 | 452 | 449 | 188 | 34 | 3,248 | - | - | 425 | 933.0 | 60. | 2001 | 289 | 42.0 | 21.0 |
| Av 23 | N/A | 90% | 4.4 | 0.1 | 2.0 | 4.2 | 12,871 | 30.1 | 29.9 | 14.5 | 2.6 | 171 | +0.41 | 71% | 22 | 66.6 | 4.3 | 142.9 | 20.6 | 3.8 | 1.9 |
| 2025 | C | 81% | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Notes: a) London Summit, b) Pittsburgh Summit, c) Toronto Summit, d) Seoul Summit. N/A = not applicable or available.
The 2020 and 2021 summits include virtual attendance, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
The 2023 summit lacked the leaders of Russia, China and Mexico (whose leader has not attended since 2019).
Compliance average is by the 18 years, not by the individual commitments, and excluded the score for 2024.
The 2025 scores are projected as of November 15, 2025.

# Appendix B: Possible G20 Johannesburg Summit Deliverables

October 5, 2025

The Johannesburg Summit is due to/likely to:

- Receive the G20@20 Review that reflects on the G20's achievements and working methods and recommend how to ensure that the G20 remains a key global forum for international economic cooperation
- Endorse the report of the African Panel of Experts to address the impediments to growth and development in Africa, including the cost of capital and reform of international financial institutions
- Endorse the first official paper on global in equality produced by the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts in Global Wealth Inequality
- Endorse the Seville Commitment's detailed blueprint to close the sustainable development financing gap, reshape the global financial system and expand social protection coverage by at least 2% each year
- Endorse the results of the UN Ocean Conference in Nice and the International Ocean Panel
- Advance the G20's "AI for Africa" Initiative to accelerate implementation of the African Union's Continental AI Strategy
- Advance the Nelson Mandela Bay Target to reduce the share of youth not in employment, education or training by a further 5% by 2030
- Launch the G20 Critical Minerals Framework on responsible business conduct, contract negotiations and illicit trade.
- Endorse the Financial Stability Board's (FSB) Implementation Monitoring Review commissioned by South Africa's G20 presidency to strengthen implementation monitoring and reporting to the G20 to reinforce its work on financial stability
- Endorse the FSB's G20 Cross-Border Payments Roadmap, recommendations on non-bank financial institutions and related data challenges
- Endorse results of the G20 Digital Economy Working Group and AI Task Force, the ITU's A Skills Coalition and AI Standards Exchange
- Endorse the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan, and the work of the African Risk Capacity Group.

## Appendix C: Multilateral Organizational Failure

- United Nations Budget: The UN's regular budget from assessed contributions per annum is $3.7 billion for the regular budget and $5.6 billion for the peacekeeping budget, for a total of $9.3 billion. Voluntary contributions account for most of its income.
  - The US share of the UN's regular budget is 22%.
  - China is second at 20% or $680 million in 2025 (having risen from 0.99% in 2000).
- Arrears: Only 53 of the UN's 193 members pay their annual regular budget contributions on time since 2019 (Leppert 2025).
  - 41 were in arrears at the end of 2024.
  - The US is regularly in arrears. As of April 30, 2025, it owed $1.5b billion in unpaid contributions to the regular budget and $1.5 billion to the peacekeeping budget, for a total of $3 billion. It defers its payments according to its fiscal calendar.
  - China is also regularly in arrears, owing as of April 30, 2025, $597 million to the regular budget and $587 million to peacekeeping for a total of $1,184 billion. China always pays late, without explanation. It makes relatively low voluntary contribution to UN humanitarian agencies. Its late payment of regular dues rose from two months in 2021 to 10 months in 2024. In 2024 the final installment of its $480 million contribution came only on December 27 (only North Korea was later its last dues on December 30).
- Impact on UN Performance
  - The UN had to cut its 2025 budget for regular operations by 17% or about $600 million. UN controller Chandramouli Ramanathan said "We cannot implement our budget fully or efficiently; we cannot plan our spending with confidence … if all member states do not pay in full or on time" (Leahy, Pedone and Ruehl 2025). This creates "a pretty huge liquidity crisis for the UN."

Sources: Joe Leahy, Hannah Pedone and Mercedes Ruehl (2025), "China's Delayed Payments Fuel UN Funding Crisis," *Financial Times*, September 17, https://www.ft.com/content/66a3c1e1-ddb5-473b-a3ef-8559b52d5a85; Rebecca Leppert (2025), "How The United Nations is Funded, and Who Pays the Most," Pew Research Center, July 31, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/31/how-the-united-nations-is-funded-and-who-pays-the-most.