The Global Meaning of ‘We’ and the Global Common Good Agenda: A Critical Reflection

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Abstract

The pronoun ‘We’ has become one of the most symbolically charged yet conceptually unstable terms in 21st-century global discourse. While international institutions, political leaders, and transnational movements routinely invoke ‘We’ to signal unity, shared responsibility, and collective purpose, its practical application reveals deep fractures shaped by power asymmetries, geopolitical rivalries, and uneven capacities for action. This article critically examines the widening gap between the theoretical universality of ‘We’ and its practical fragmentation, arguing that this disjunction poses a significant challenge to the pursuit of the global common good. Drawing on examples from climate governance, global health, regional politics, and digital activism, the article demonstrates how competing interpretations of ‘We’ influence the legitimacy, inclusivity, and effectiveness of global initiatives. Yet rather than concluding that the absence of consensus renders the global common good agenda unattainable, the article proposes that alternative forms of cooperation such as coalitions of the willing, capacity-building programmes, inclusive policy frameworks, and narrative strategies and I dare say the Common Good Consortium (CGC) can sustain collective action even in a fragmented world. The analysis ultimately calls for a more honest, plural, and adaptive understanding of ‘We’ as a necessary foundation for advancing the global common good in an era of profound geopolitical complexity.

Introduction

Few words in contemporary global politics carry as much rhetorical weight, or as much conceptual ambiguity as the pronoun ‘We.’ It appears in the preambles of international treaties, in the speeches of world leaders, in the manifestos of social movements, and in the slogans of global campaigns. Whether addressing climate change, pandemics, digital governance, or economic inequality, the world repeatedly turns to ‘We’ as a linguistic shorthand for collective identity and shared responsibility. Yet beneath this seemingly

inclusive vocabulary lies a far more complicated reality. The 21st century has exposed a widening gap between the theoretical universality of 'We', referring to the idea that humanity can act as a coherent moral community, and its practical fragmentation across political, economic, and cultural lines. This tension is not merely semantic. It shapes how global problems are framed, how responsibilities are distributed, and how solutions are pursued. When the United Nations proclaims, 'We the peoples,' it gestures toward a universal human community. But when countries negotiate climate commitments, compete for vaccines, or assert regional interests, the boundaries of 'We' shift, contract, and fracture. The result is a global landscape in which the same pronoun is used to express radically different and often incompatible visions of collective identity. The theoretical 'We' imagines a world united by shared challenges; the practical 'We' reveals a world divided by power, interest, and historical memory.

This article argues that understanding this disjunction is essential for assessing the prospects of the global common good agenda. The global common good presupposes a shared moral horizon: a belief that humanity can recognise its interdependence and act accordingly. Yet the fragmentation of 'We' complicates this aspiration, raising critical questions about who is included in global decision-making, whose interests are prioritised, and whose vulnerabilities are acknowledged or ignored. At the same time, the absence of a unified 'We' does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of collective action. Instead, it invites a more nuanced and pragmatic approach to global cooperation that recognises plurality while still cultivating shared purpose. In what follows, the article critically examines how the global meaning of 'We' is constructed, contested, and deployed in contemporary geopolitics. It explores how this contested pronoun shapes the legitimacy and effectiveness of global initiatives, and it identifies strategic pathways through which the global common good can still be advanced despite the lack of consensus. By reflecting on both the limitations and possibilities inherent in the fractured 'We,' the article seeks to contribute to a more grounded and realistic understanding of what global solidarity can mean in the 21st century and how it might be strengthened in the years ahead.

The 21st century has placed unprecedented pressure on the meaning of collective identity, and few concepts reveal this tension more clearly than the pronoun 'We.' In global discourse, "We" appears deceptively simple, yet it functions as a dense political signifier

whose meaning shifts depending on who speaks, who is included, and who is excluded. The contemporary world invokes ‘We’ with increasing frequency; whether in climate negotiations, pandemic responses, or geopolitical alliances. However, the coherence of this collective identity remains deeply contested. This article argues that the world’s understanding of “We” in the 21st century is characterised by a widening gap between its theoretical universality and its practical fragmentation, a gap that exposes the structural inequalities and power asymmetries embedded in global governance. This huge lack of consensus around the global understanding of ‘We’ has profound implications for the global common good agenda.

In theoretical terms, ‘We’ is often imagined as a universal moral community. This idealised conception is rooted in cosmopolitan political thought, which assumes that humanity shares a set of common interests and responsibilities. The language of global institutions reinforces this vision. The United Nations Charter famously begins with ‘We the peoples,’ a phrase that symbolically elevates humanity above the nation-state and gestures toward a shared global destiny. Similarly, international agreements on climate change, such as the Paris Agreement, repeatedly invoke the idea that ‘We must act together’ to safeguard the planet. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization and national governments alike insisted that ‘We are all in this together,’ framing the crisis as a collective human experience that transcended borders, cultures, and political systems. This theoretical ‘We’ is aspirational. It imagines a world in which global challenges, ranging from ecological collapse to digital governance, can be addressed through shared commitment and coordinated action. It presumes that humanity possesses a common moral vocabulary and that global solidarity is both possible and necessary. In this sense, the theoretical ‘We’ functions as a normative horizon: it articulates what the world ought to be, even if it is not yet what the world is.

However, in practice, the meaning of ‘We’ becomes far more selective, strategic, and exclusionary. The geopolitical realities of the 21st century reveal that ‘We’ is frequently mobilised by powerful actors to legitimise their own interests while claiming to speak on behalf of the global community. The 2003 invasion of Iraq offers a clear illustration. Political leaders repeatedly invoked the authority of ‘the international community,’ even though large parts of the world opposed the intervention. Here, ‘We’ served as a rhetorical device that masked profound geopolitical divisions and elevated the preferences of a

small coalition of states to the status of universal will. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of the practical 'We.' While global rhetoric emphasised shared vulnerability, vaccine distribution revealed a starkly different reality. Wealthy nations secured vast supplies of vaccines long before lower-income countries had access to even minimal doses. The theoretical 'We' of global solidarity quickly dissolved into the practical 'We' of national self-interest. The pandemic demonstrated that although biological threats may be universal, political responses are not. The world discovered that the invocation of 'We' does not guarantee equitable action; instead, it often conceals the structural inequalities that shape global health governance. Regional politics also complicate the practical meaning of 'We.' The European Union frequently presents itself as a unified political community, yet moments of crisis reveal the limits of this collective identity. The 2015 refugee influx fractured the EU's sense of solidarity, as member states diverged sharply on questions of responsibility, cultural identity, and border control. Some governments embraced a humanitarian 'We,' while others insisted on a more exclusive, nationally bounded version. The resulting tensions demonstrated that even within highly integrated political blocs, the meaning of 'We' remains contested and contingent.

In the Global South, 'We' carries a different historical resonance. Postcolonial states often deploy the term to articulate a shared identity in resisting Western dominance. The emergence of BRICS as a geopolitical bloc illustrates this dynamic. Leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa frequently frame their cooperation as representing 'the developing world' or 'the majority of humanity,' positioning themselves as an alternative to Western-led institutions. Yet even within BRICS, national interests diverge sharply, and the unity implied by 'We' remains more rhetorical than substantive. The bloc's internal contradictions reveal that the practical 'We' is often a strategic construction rather than a stable collective identity. Climate politics offer perhaps the most vivid example of the tension between theory and practice. Global declarations routinely assert that 'We must reduce emissions,' but the responsibilities implied by this 'We' are far from equal. Small island nations interpret the term as a plea for survival, while major industrial powers interpret it as a call for gradual transition. Emerging economies such as India and China argue that 'We' cannot ignore historical emissions or the right to development. The result is a global conversation in which the same pronoun carries radically different meanings depending on the speaker's position within the global economic hierarchy.

The digital age introduces yet another layer of complexity. Transnational social movements, such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and Fridays for Future, have created new forms of global 'We,' built not on geography but on shared experiences, values, and grievances. These movements demonstrate that 'We' can emerge from below, challenging the top-down versions promoted by states and international institutions. Yet even these grassroots 'We's' are shaped by inequalities of voice, visibility, and technological access. The global reach of a movement does not guarantee global representation. Taken together, these examples reveal that the world's understanding of 'We' in the 21st century is characterised by a persistent and consequential disjunction. The theoretical 'We' gestures toward universalism, solidarity, and shared responsibility, while the practical 'We' reflects the enduring realities of power, inequality, and geopolitical competition. This gap is not merely rhetorical; it shapes the distribution of resources, the legitimacy of political actions, and the capacity of the international system to respond to global crises. Yet the continued invocation of 'We' suggests that the aspiration for collective identity has not disappeared. Rather, it remains a powerful symbolic resource that can inspire cooperation even as it exposes division. The challenge for the 21st century is not to abandon the concept of 'We,' but to interrogate its uses, expand its inclusivity, and align its practical implications more closely with its theoretical promise. Only then can the world begin to bridge the gap between the unity it proclaims and the fragmentation it enacts.

At its core, the global common good presupposes a shared moral horizon: the belief that humanity can recognise collective challenges and mobilise collective solutions. Yet the disjunction between the idealised 'We' and the fractured realities of global politics undermines the very conditions necessary for such an agenda to flourish. In theory, the global common good relies on a universal 'We' capable of transcending national, cultural, and economic boundaries. This universalism is embedded in the rhetoric of global governance, from the Sustainable Development Goals to climate agreements and pandemic preparedness frameworks. These initiatives assume that humanity can act as a coherent moral community, one that recognises interdependence and accepts shared responsibility for planetary well-being. The theoretical 'We' thus functions as the ethical foundation upon which the global common good is imagined: inclusive, solidaristic, and oriented toward long-term collective flourishing. However, the practical fragmentation of 'We' exposes the fragility of this foundation. When states, regions, and political blocs

invoke ‘We’ selectively, often to advance their own interests while claiming to represent universal values, the legitimacy of the global common good agenda becomes compromised. The 21st century has repeatedly demonstrated that the invocation of ‘We’ does not guarantee collective action. Instead, it often reveals the asymmetries of power that shape whose interests are prioritised and whose voices are marginalised.

This fragmentation manifests most clearly in global crises. Climate politics offer a vivid illustration. While international agreements proclaim that ‘We must reduce emissions,’ the distribution of responsibility remains deeply contested. Wealthy nations emphasise future commitments, emerging economies highlight historical injustices, and vulnerable states demand urgent action for survival. The result is a fractured ‘We’ that lacks the cohesion necessary to pursue the common good. The universal language of climate solidarity masks a practical landscape defined by divergent interests, unequal capacities, and unresolved historical grievances. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed this tension. The global rhetoric of shared vulnerability. ‘We’ are all in this together, was quickly undermined by vaccine nationalism, border closures, and competition for medical supplies. The theoretical ‘We’ of global health solidarity dissolved into a practical ‘We’ defined by national self-preservation. This divergence not only weakened the global response but also eroded trust in the very idea of a shared global good. When the world’s most powerful actors fail to embody the universal ‘We’ they proclaim, the credibility of global cooperation suffers. The gap between theoretical universality and practical fragmentation also affects the governance structures meant to advance the common good. International institutions often rely on the language of inclusivity, yet their decision-making processes frequently reflect the interests of dominant states. This creates a paradox: the global common good is articulated in universal terms but pursued through mechanisms that reproduce inequality. As a result, many countries, particularly those in the Global South view the global common good agenda with scepticism, perceiving it as a vehicle for the priorities of others rather than a genuinely shared project. Moreover, the fragmentation of ‘We’ complicates the emergence of global solidarity from below. Transnational social movements have demonstrated the potential for grassroots forms of collective identity, yet these movements also face structural barriers. Digital divides, geopolitical tensions, and cultural differences limit the extent to which a truly global ‘We’ can be constructed outside formal institutions. The result is a patchwork of partial solidarities that are powerful in their own contexts but insufficient to anchor a

comprehensive global common good agenda.

Ultimately, the widening gap between the theoretical and practical meanings of 'We' does not simply challenge the global common good agenda; it shapes its possibilities and limits. The global common good cannot be realised through rhetoric alone. It requires a transformation in how the world understands and enacts collective identity. Until the practical 'We' becomes more aligned with its theoretical counterpart, that is, becoming more inclusive, more equitable, and more reflective of shared vulnerability, the global common good will remain an aspirational ideal rather than an operational reality. Yet the persistence of the universal 'We' in global discourse suggests that the aspiration itself remains powerful. The challenge for the 21st century is to close the gap: to build institutions, norms, and practices capable of turning the imagined universality of 'We' into a lived political reality. Only then can the global common good move from moral vision to collective achievement.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The question of who constitutes the global *"We"* has long occupied scholars of international relations, political theory, and global ethics. Yet the 21st century has intensified this debate, as globalisation, geopolitical fragmentation, and transnational crises have exposed the instability of collective identity in world politics (Held 2010; Acharya 2017). Existing literature reveals three broad strands of thought that shape contemporary understandings of *"We"*: cosmopolitan universalism, communitarian and realist critiques, and emerging perspectives on plural globalism. Cosmopolitan theorists argue for a universal *"We"* grounded in shared humanity and moral equality, suggesting that global interdependence necessitates expanding our circle of concern beyond national borders (Nussbaum 1996; Pogge 2002). In contrast, communitarian and realist scholars challenge the feasibility and desirability of such universalism, emphasising the enduring primacy of particular communities, national identities, and power politics in shaping collective belonging (Walzer 1994; Morgenthau 1948). More recent work on plural globalism seeks to move beyond this binary by recognising the coexistence of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes competing global "We's," shaped by diverse cultural, regional, and normative frameworks (Acharya 2014; Appadurai 2006). Together, these strands illuminate the contested and evolving nature of collective identity in an increasingly interconnected yet fractured world.

Cosmopolitan theorists such as Martha Nussbaum, David Held, and Kwame Anthony Appiah argue that humanity possesses a shared moral identity that transcends national borders (Nussbaum 1996; Held 2010; Appiah 2006). Their work positions *"We"* as a universal category grounded in human rights, global justice, and interdependence. This tradition underpins much of the normative language of global governance, from the United Nations Charter to the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 1945; UN 2015). In this view, the global common good is both possible and necessary because humanity is bound together by shared vulnerabilities and obligations. The cosmopolitan *"We"* is therefore expansive, inclusive, and aspirational. However, communitarian and realist scholars challenge this universalism. Thinkers such as Michael Walzer, Hedley Bull, and more recently John Mearsheimer argue that political communities remain fundamentally particularistic (Walzer 1994; Bull 1977; Mearsheimer 2018). States act according to national interests, not global moral commitments, and any invocation of a universal *"We"* risks masking the power dynamics that shape international order. From this perspective, the global common good is constrained by the realities of sovereignty, competition, and unequal capabilities. The realist critique is especially relevant in the 21st century, where geopolitical rivalries—between the United States and China, within the European Union, and across the Global South—have intensified, revealing the limits of collective identity (Mearsheimer 2019; Acharya 2017).

A third strand of literature, emerging from postcolonial theory, global South scholarship, and critical international relations, interrogates the politics of representation embedded in the term *"We."* Scholars such as Achille Mbembe, Arjun Appadurai, and Siba Grovogui argue that global discourse often universalises the experiences and priorities of powerful states while marginalising others (Mbembe 2001; Appadurai 2006; Grovogui 2011). They highlight how the *"We"* of global governance frequently excludes those most affected by global crises; small island nations facing climate collapse, low-income countries confronting health inequities, and communities displaced by conflict or extractive development (Nixon 2011; Dauvergne 2016). This literature reframes the global *"We"* as a contested terrain shaped by historical injustice, epistemic inequality, and competing visions of global order (Grovogui 2006; Mbembe 2020). Together, these strands reveal that the global meaning of *"We"* is neither fixed nor consensual. Instead, it is a dynamic construct shaped by normative aspirations, geopolitical realities, and struggles over representation (Acharya 2017). This article builds on this insight by proposing a

conceptual framework that distinguishes between the theoretical 'We' and the practical 'We.' The theoretical *'We'* refers to the universalist ideal invoked in global declarations, treaties, and moral appeals. It imagines humanity as a coherent collective capable of pursuing shared goals (Held 2010). The practical *'We,'* by contrast, refers to the fragmented, interest-driven, and often exclusionary forms of collective identity that emerge in real-world politics (Mearsheimer 2018; Acharya 2014). This distinction provides a lens through which to analyse the tensions that shape the global common good agenda.

The conceptual framework adopted here views the global common good not as a fixed endpoint but as a process of negotiated solidarity. It recognises that the absence of a unified "We" does not preclude collective action; rather, it necessitates alternative pathways for cooperation. These pathways include coalitions of the willing, regional leadership, transnational social movements, and policy innovations that align national interests with global responsibilities. By situating the global common good within this plural and contested landscape, the framework acknowledges both the limitations and the possibilities inherent in contemporary global politics. This approach departs from traditional cosmopolitanism by refusing to assume a pre-existing global community. It also challenges realist pessimism by demonstrating that meaningful cooperation can emerge even in the absence of consensus. Instead, it aligns with emerging scholarship on 'plural globalism,' which argues that global governance must be built on overlapping, flexible, and context-specific forms of solidarity rather than on a singular universal identity. In doing so, the article positions the global common good as a project that must be continually constructed, contested, and reimagined.

The Many Faces of 'We' and the Global Common Good

In everyday conversation, the word *we* seems almost weightless — a tiny grammatical convenience that slips into sentences without effort. Yet linguists have long shown that *we* is anything but neutral. It is a strategic device that encodes social relationships, power, and belonging (Brown & Levinson 1987). Every time someone uses *we*, they draw a boundary around who is included, who is excluded, and who is imagined as part of a shared world. This becomes especially significant when we turn to the idea of the global common good, a project that depends on expanding our sense of collective identity beyond local, national, or ideological lines (Nussbaum 1996; Pogge 2002). The pronoun *we* becomes a linguistic hinge on which global cooperation turns. The inclusive *we* brings

the listener into the speaker's circle. It signals partnership and shared responsibility. When someone says, 'We need to leave now,' they are not issuing a command but inviting joint action. In global discourse, this inclusive *we* is the rhetorical backbone of appeals to solidarity: 'We must act on climate change.' And 'We can eradicate extreme poverty.' Such statements attempt to construct a moral community that crosses borders (Held 2010). The inclusive *we* imagines humanity as a collective agent capable of coordinated action, that is a necessary fiction for any global common good agenda. Yet this *we* is aspirational. It presumes a unity that does not yet fully exist. Still, its power lies precisely in its ability to invite the listener into a shared future.

The exclusive *we* includes the speaker and their group but excludes the listener. When policymakers say, 'We have decided to change the policy,' they speak from a position of authority. In global governance, this exclusive *we* is double-edged. It is essential for institutions that must act on behalf of others; for example, 'We, the scientific community, recommend immediate action' (IPCC 2023). But it can also reinforce hierarchies, especially when powerful actors speak for those with less influence (Chakrabarty 2009). In the context of the global common good, the exclusive *we* risks reproducing the very inequalities the agenda seeks to overcome. It can unintentionally echo colonial patterns of decision-making, where some speak and others are spoken for. The generic *we* refers to people in general, a universalising gesture. Statements like 'We never know what the future holds' or 'We depend on a stable climate' appeal to shared human experience. This form of *we* is central to global ethics. It highlights common vulnerabilities and interdependence (Beck 1992). Pandemics, climate change, and ecological collapse do not respect borders; the generic *we* captures this shared exposure. However, critics warn that the generic *we* can obscure inequalities. Saying "We are all responsible for climate change" glosses over the vastly uneven contributions of different nations and industries (Roberts & Parks 2007). The generic *we* unites, but it can also flatten.

The institutional *we* allows organisations to speak with a unified voice: 'We at the United Nations call for cooperation.' In global governance, this *we* is ubiquitous. It gives coherence to complex institutions and allows them to act as if they were singular agents (Barnett & Finnemore 2004). But it also raises questions: Who is included in this institutional identity? Whose interests does it represent? When institutions claim to speak for the global common good, the institutional *we* must be transparent and accountable.

The editorial *we* is used by writers and scholars to create a sense of shared intellectual perspective: 'We observe that the data supports the hypothesis.' In global discourse, this *we* appears in reports, academic writing, and policy analysis. It constructs a community of interpretation, a shared vantage point from which global problems can be understood (Fairclough 2001). Yet it can also carry an implicit hierarchy, assuming that the writer's perspective is universal. In global ethics, this must be handled with care to avoid reproducing epistemic dominance. Across its many forms, *we* is not merely a pronoun but a political and ethical tool. The global common good depends on expanding the boundaries of *we*; from local communities to humanity as a whole, and from the present generation to future ones. In sum, the inclusive we invites cooperation; the exclusive we organises action but risks exclusion; the generic we highlights shared humanity but may obscure inequality; the institutional we coordinates collective structures and the editorial we builds shared understanding. The challenge of the global common good is to use these forms wisely to widen the circle without erasing difference, and to speak collectively without speaking over others. In this sense, the future of global cooperation may depend as much on our grammar as on our policies.

Methodology

This article adopts a conceptual and interpretive methodology, drawing on traditions in critical international relations, global ethics, and political theory. Rather than generating new empirical data, it synthesises existing scholarship, policy documents, and illustrative global events to interrogate how the pronoun *'We'* functions as both a normative ideal and a political instrument. The analysis proceeds through two complementary strategies. First, it employs discursive analysis to examine how 'We' is invoked in global governance texts, diplomatic rhetoric, and transnational social movements. This approach highlights the symbolic power of collective identity claims and reveals the tensions between inclusive language and exclusionary practices. By analysing the discursive construction of 'We,' the article uncovers the implicit assumptions, power relations, and moral aspirations embedded in global political communication. Second, the article uses illustrative case analysis to explore how the theoretical and practical meanings of 'We' diverge in real-world contexts. Examples from climate negotiations, pandemic responses, regional politics, and digital activism serve as empirical touchpoints that illuminate broader conceptual dynamics. These cases are not treated as exhaustive but as

strategically selected illustrations that reveal patterns of fragmentation, contestation, and selective solidarity. This methodological approach is appropriate for a reflective, theory-building article. It allows for a nuanced interrogation of the global common good agenda without reducing the analysis to either abstract moral philosophy or narrow empirical description. Instead, it positions the article within a growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand global cooperation as a dynamic, contested, and evolving process.

Analysis and Discussion

At the heart of this article is the argument that the global meaning of *'We'* is characterised by a widening gap between its theoretical universality and its practical fragmentation, and that this gap profoundly shapes the prospects of the global common good agenda. The analysis unfolds in three interrelated movements. The first movement examines the theoretical 'We' as a normative construct. In global governance discourse, 'We' is deployed as a symbol of shared humanity and collective responsibility. It appears in the language of the United Nations, in climate agreements, and in global health campaigns. This universalist 'We' is aspirational: it imagines a world capable of acting together in pursuit of common goals. It functions as a moral horizon that guides global agendas and legitimises calls for cooperation. The second movement exposes the practical fragmentation of 'We.' In real-world politics, the boundaries of 'We' are fluid, contested, and often strategically manipulated. States invoke 'We' to legitimise their actions, but the referent frequently excludes those whose interests diverge. The 2003 Iraq War, the uneven distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, and the divergent responses to climate responsibilities all reveal how 'We' fractures along lines of power, wealth, and geopolitical alignment. Even within regional blocs such as the European Union, the meaning of 'We' shifts under pressure, revealing the fragility of collective identity.

The first and second movements presented above are exemplified with a critical analysis of Canadian Prime Minister - Mark Carney's 2025 Davos speech through the lens of the fragmented global 'We'. Prime Minister Mark Carney's 2025 address at the World Economic Forum in Davos was framed around the urgent need for renewed global cooperation in the face of climate instability, economic inequality, and technological disruption. His repeated invocation of 'We' as in *'We must rebuild trust,' 'We must accelerate the green transition,'* and *'We must ensure that growth is inclusive'.* Thus, he

positioned his speech firmly within the tradition of globalist rhetoric that imagines humanity as a unified moral community. Yet when examined through the critical lens of the widening gap between the theoretical universality of 'We' and its practical fragmentation, the speech reveals the deep tensions that continue to undermine the global common good agenda. Carney's use of 'We' operates at the level of theoretical universality. He speaks as though the world shares a common purpose, a common responsibility, and a common capacity to act. This rhetorical strategy is not unusual for Davos, where leaders often appeal to a shared global identity in order to legitimise ambitious agendas. In this sense, Carney's speech aligns with the cosmopolitan ideal that humanity can act collectively to address systemic risks. His emphasis on climate action, financial reform, and equitable growth reflects a belief that global challenges require global solutions, and that 'We,' as a unified community, can deliver them.

However, the practical fragmentation of 'We' becomes evident the moment Carney's claims are situated within the geopolitical realities of 2025. While he speaks of shared responsibility, the world remains deeply divided along economic, political, and ideological lines. The global financial system continues to privilege wealthy nations; climate negotiations remain stalled by disputes over historical responsibility; and technological governance is fractured between competing regulatory models. Carney's universal 'We' therefore obscures the fact that not all countries possess equal capacity to act, nor do they share the same priorities or vulnerabilities. This disjunction is particularly visible in his call for accelerated climate transition. While Carney frames climate action as a collective imperative, the practical 'We' is fractured by divergent national interests. High-income countries can invest in green technologies and transition their economies, while many low-income nations struggle with debt burdens, adaptation costs, and limited access to climate finance. Carney's speech gestures toward solidarity, but it does not fully confront the structural inequalities that make a universal 'We' difficult to operationalise.

Similarly, his appeal for inclusive economic growth assumes a shared commitment to fairness, yet global economic governance remains shaped by asymmetrical power relations. The institutions that define global economic rules, namely, financial markets, credit rating agencies, and multilateral lenders are not governed by a genuinely global 'We,' but by a small group of influential actors. Carney's rhetoric of shared responsibility therefore risks masking the fact that the global economic order continues to reproduce

inequality rather than resolve it. The speech also reveals the political fragility of the global 'We.' Carney's call for trust, cooperation, and multilateralism comes at a time when many countries are turning inward, prioritising national resilience over global integration. The rise of protectionism, geopolitical rivalry, and populist nationalism challenges the very idea that a unified global 'We' exists. Carney's speech attempts to revive this ideal, but it does so without fully acknowledging the depth of the fragmentation that has taken hold. Yet the speech is not without value. By invoking 'We,' Carney seeks to re-energise the moral imagination of global governance. His rhetoric reflects an aspiration for a more cohesive world, even if the practical conditions for such unity remain elusive. In this sense, the speech illustrates both the promise and the limitations of the global common good agenda. It demonstrates that while leaders continue to rely on the universal 'We' to articulate global challenges, the practical fragmentation of global politics demands more than rhetorical unity. It requires structural reforms, differentiated responsibilities, and new forms of cooperation that acknowledge inequality rather than gloss over it. Ultimately, Carney's Davos speech exemplifies the central tension captured in the introduction of this reflection. The theoretical universality of 'We' remains a powerful moral resource, but its practical fragmentation continues to impede meaningful progress toward the global common good. The challenge for global leadership is not simply to invoke 'We,' but to transform it into a lived political reality - one that recognises diversity, addresses structural injustice, and builds solidarity through action rather than aspiration.

The third movement argues that despite this fragmentation, the global common good agenda remains viable, but only if it is reconceptualised. Instead of relying on a singular, universal 'We,' global cooperation must be built through plural, overlapping, and context-specific solidarities. Coalitions of the willing, transnational social movements, regional leadership, and inclusive policy frameworks demonstrate that collective action can emerge even in the absence of consensus. The global common good, therefore, is not a product of a unified global identity but of strategic, negotiated, and adaptive forms of cooperation. This analysis reframes the global common good as a practical project rather than a moral abstraction. It suggests that the world does not need to agree on the meaning of 'We' to act collectively; it needs mechanisms that allow diverse actors to pursue shared goals despite their differences.

Strategic Pathways to Sustain the Global Common Good amid a Fragmented

Global ‘We’

If the 21st century has taught us anything, it is that the global common good cannot wait for perfect consensus. The widening gap between the theoretical universality of ‘We’ and its practical fragmentation does not merely complicate collective action; it forces the world to rethink how solidarity is built, enacted, and sustained. Yet this gap does not render the global common good agenda impossible. Instead, it invites a more pragmatic, layered, and adaptive approach; one that recognises the fractured nature of global identity while still cultivating shared purpose through strategic interventions. One promising pathway lies in building coalitions of the willing, rather than insisting on universal agreement as a precondition for action. In climate governance, for example, smaller alliances such as the High Ambition Coalition have demonstrated that meaningful progress can emerge from groups of states that share a commitment to ambitious targets, even when global negotiations stall. These coalitions do not claim to represent all of humanity; instead, they model what a functional ‘We’ can look like in practice. Their success suggests that the global common good can be advanced through concentric circles of cooperation; starting with those ready to act and expanding outward as trust and momentum grow.

Another strategic option involves embedding the global common good into national and regional policy frameworks, thereby aligning self-interest with shared interest. When governments integrate global goals into domestic agendas; whether through climate legislation, public health preparedness, or digital rights protections. With this approach, they create a practical ‘We’ grounded in policy rather than rhetoric. The European Union’s Green Deal, for instance, demonstrates how regional initiatives can serve as laboratories for global norms. Even if the world lacks a unified understanding of 'We,’ such policy innovations generate models that others can adapt, thereby diffusing the common good through practice rather than proclamation. At the programme level, transnational capacity-building initiatives offer another avenue for bridging fragmentation. Programmes that support climate adaptation in vulnerable regions, strengthen public health systems, or expand digital literacy do more than address immediate needs; they cultivate a sense of shared fate by demonstrating that global challenges require mutual investment. When a small island nation receives support to build resilient infrastructure, or when a low-income country gains access to open-source medical technologies, the practical meaning of ‘We’ becomes more tangible. These programmes do not erase geopolitical

inequalities, but they soften their impact by creating networks of reciprocity that transcend borders.

Equally important are dialogue-based activities that foster mutual understanding across cultural, political, and ideological divides. Global citizens' assemblies, intercultural forums, and youth diplomacy initiatives create spaces where diverse voices can articulate their visions of the common good. These activities do not aim to produce a single, unified 'We'; rather, they cultivate an awareness of plurality and interdependence. In a world where fragmentation is the norm, such spaces help re-humanise global politics by reminding participants that the common good is not an abstract ideal but a lived, negotiated reality. Policy innovation also plays a crucial role. The global common good agenda can be strengthened through policies that institutionalise fairness, such as equitable financing mechanisms, transparent governance standards, and inclusive decision-making processes. The principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities,' long debated in climate negotiations, exemplifies how policy can acknowledge inequality while still promoting collective action. Similarly, global taxation proposals such as minimum corporate tax rates illustrate how structural reforms can align national interests with global justice. These policies do not require a perfect consensus on the meaning of 'We'; they simply require a shared recognition that fairness is indispensable to cooperation.

Finally, the global common good can be advanced through narrative strategies that reshape how societies imagine their place in the world. Storytelling, public education, and cultural diplomacy can help cultivate a more expansive sense of belonging – a type that acknowledges national identities while situating them within a broader human community. The success of global movements like Fridays for Future demonstrates the power of narrative to mobilise action even in the absence of institutional consensus. When young people across continents march under the banner of climate justice, they enact a form of 'We' that is emergent, dynamic, and deeply moral. Taken together, these strategic options covering coalition-building, policy alignment, capacity-building programmes, intercultural dialogue, structural reforms, and narrative transformation, illustrate that the global common good does not depend on a singular, uncontested meaning of 'We.' Instead, it thrives through a mosaic of practices that make cooperation possible despite fragmentation. The task for the 21st century is not to wait for a perfect global 'We' to

emerge, but to cultivate multiple, overlapping forms of solidarity that can carry the common good forward. In this sense, the absence of consensus is not a barrier but a condition that demands creativity, humility, and sustained commitment to the shared future we cannot escape.

Conclusion

The fragmentation of the global 'We' is often interpreted as a sign of crisis that is characterised by a symptom of geopolitical rivalry, cultural divergence, and institutional fatigue. Yet this article argues that fragmentation, while challenging, does not foreclose the possibility of advancing the global common good. Instead, it demands a more realistic and pluralistic understanding of how solidarity is formed in the 21st century. The global common good agenda cannot depend on a singular, uncontested 'We.' Such a universal identity has never existed in practice, and its absence should not be treated as a failure. Rather, the task is to cultivate multiple pathways of cooperation that reflect the world's diversity while still enabling collective action. Coalitions of the willing can drive ambitious climate action; regional frameworks can pioneer innovative policies; transnational movements can reshape public consciousness; and inclusive governance reforms can institutionalise fairness. What emerges is a vision of the global common good that is incremental rather than uniform, negotiated rather than assumed, and plural rather than monolithic. This vision acknowledges the realities of power and difference while refusing to abandon the aspiration for shared global flourishing. It recognises that solidarity is not a precondition for action but a product of it; that is built through relationships, practices, and policies that gradually expand the boundaries of 'We.' In this sense, the global common good becomes not a destination but a continuous process of constructing and reconstructing collective purpose. The challenge for the 21st century is not to eliminate fragmentation but to work within it, transforming the fractured 'We' into a mosaic of solidarities capable of sustaining global cooperation. By embracing this more nuanced and adaptive approach, the world can move closer to realising the common good even in an era marked by profound complexity.

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