

## THE ROLE OF BRICS IN SUPPORTING EMERGING POWERS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL: DEEPER INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

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### Abstract

With the passage of time, BRICS has become not only a recognised cooperation of emerging states but also a focus for states of the so-called Global South to join. One may argue that those states are in search of additional support to enhance their international recognition and to ensure that their interests are taken into consideration at the global level. The question arises as to what extent BRICS, as a cooperation, can deliver on this expectation. Doing so would require BRICS to develop a strong institutional setting, to strengthen internal coherence, so that it can take on an influential role within the international system. However, this is where BRICS, like any other emerging organisation, faces a critical challenge. Stronger institutional development implies addressing and integrating the different interests of its members, while agreeing on a unified strategy as an organisation. The political, economic, and social heterogeneity of its members and the stated goal of supporting each member's national interest equally do not fit well with such strategic requirements. Failing to formulate a unified strategy, to deepen institutional cooperation, BRICS may not be able to deliver on what its members are expecting: to become a strong voice for their interests at the global level.

### Keywords

BRICS; emerging power; institutional development; international organisation; international system.

### Resumo

Com o passar do tempo, os BRICS tornaram-se não apenas uma cooperação reconhecida entre países emergentes, mas também um foco para os países do chamado Sul Global se unirem. Pode-se argumentar que esses países estão em busca de apoio adicional para aumentar o seu reconhecimento internacional e garantir que os seus interesses sejam levados em consideração a nível global. Surge a questão de até que ponto os BRICS, como cooperação, podem corresponder a essa expectativa. Para isso, seria necessário que os BRICS desenvolvessem um quadro institucional forte, reforçassem a coesão interna, para que pudesse assumir um papel influente no sistema internacional. No entanto, é aqui que os BRICS, como qualquer outra organização emergente, enfrentam um desafio crítico. Um desenvolvimento institucional mais forte implica abordar e integrar os diferentes interesses dos seus membros, ao mesmo tempo que se chega a um acordo sobre uma estratégia unificada como organização. A heterogeneidade política, económica e social dos seus membros e o objetivo declarado de apoiar igualmente os interesses nacionais de cada membro



não se coadunam bem com tais requisitos estratégicos. Se não conseguirem formular uma estratégia unificada e aprofundar a cooperação institucional, os BRICS poderão não ser capazes de corresponder às expectativas dos seus membros: tornar-se uma voz forte para os seus interesses a nível global.

#### Palavras-chave

BRICS; potência emergente; desenvolvimento institucional; organização internacional; sistema internacional.

#### How to cite this article

Ploberger, Christian (2025). The Role of BRICS in Supporting Emerging Powers at the Global Level: Deeper Institutional Cooperation and Associated Challenges. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. Thematic Dossier - Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations, VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1, December 2025, pp. 48-62. <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.DT0525.3>

**Article submitted on 17th January 2025 and accepted for publication on 10th September 2025.**





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### **Introduction**

While its origins are based on financial market imaginations, BRICS has undergone a considerable transformation to become a recognisable cooperation aiming to facilitate the international status and interests of its members in global politics. In doing so, it may also contribute to a change within the existing international system, as the voices of emerging powers and countries of the Global South gain more recognition. After all, the existing international system is still based on the interests of the dominant powers in the aftermath of the Second World War and especially on the geopolitical interests of the United States, which was the most influential actor in creating the existing global institutional setting. However, the current distribution of economic power has changed from that in the years following the Second World War, and emerging powers demand to have a strong impact on global political-economic decision-making in accordance with their economic influence. The critical question is this: Can BRICS as an organisation deliver what its members are expecting from it, like a recognition of their interests and to enhance their decision-making power within global political-economic decision-making? As such, BRICS is facing the same challenges as other international cooperations and organisations: the struggle to align the various interests of its members so it can speak with one voice and consequently increase its impact. We should remember a key factor in global affairs: the internal strength of an organisation generates international recognition. Once again, will BRICS be able to deliver? This represents a vital question, not least when considering its origin, starting in the imagination of a finance investment manager with no political support in the beginning. However, BRICS has already undergone some impressive structural changes. After all, it has now become a forum where the political leaders of emerging powers regularly meet. Taking the advantage of hindsight, one can argue that, with the expansion from BRIC to BRICS, the inclusion of South Africa represented the first indication of internal structural change, as it no longer followed a single financial logic in selecting new members, as was the original argument. This signified a change towards the inclusion of political considerations when considering membership extension and set the foundation for what it has become today, a voice of emerging powers and of countries of the Global South. In doing so, it also raised its profile as a potential challenger to the existing international order, questioning the political influence of the existing global institutional setting, arguing that the current



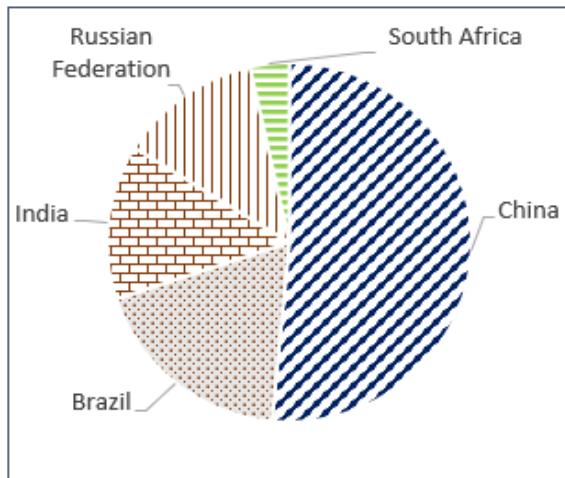
distribution of political-economic power represents a historical and outdated political-economic power distribution, which no longer corresponds with the current distribution of political-economic power. As recent membership expansion strongly indicates, its attractiveness as a cooperation for emerging powers is still rising. Not only has the membership increased considerably, but the number of associated members has also increased. However, with increasing membership, the internal complexity increases as well, since, after all, a principal stance within the BRICS cooperation is to support the interests of its members. When considering the impact of BRICS on the contemporary character of the international system, we also have to take into consideration how we interpret the international system from a structural perspective, what power constellation we can identify (uni-/ bi-/ or multipolarity), and what kind of dynamic drives changes within the international system.

### **An alternative forum for cooperation between emerging countries**

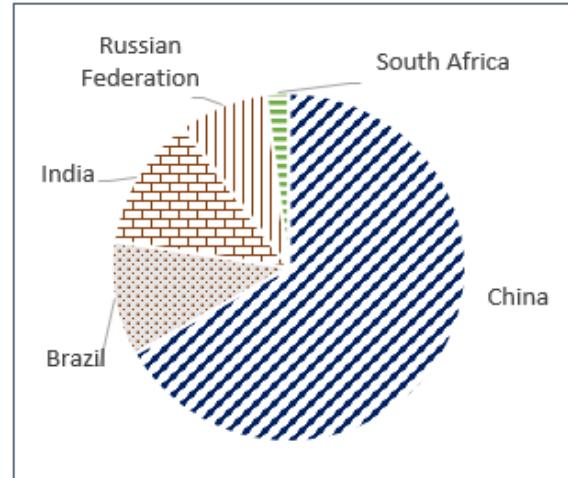
Own into the fact that BRICS members represent emerging powers, their influence as individual nations on the global level is rather limited and country-specific. While some members may generate an appreciable impact within their respective regions, to assert meaningful influence in global politics, they need to work together, and even then, the extent of their impact is not guaranteed. Indeed, asymmetric global economic and political influence and impact, different political systems have been a major characteristic of BRICS members from the very beginning, generating a practical challenge for cooperation. Comparing the size of the GDP of the original BRICS countries, this diversity becomes quite recognisable, with China clearly dominating. The four graphics below, covering a 14-year period in five-year intervals, indicate the dominant economic status of China among the group, as well as the increasing relevance of India over time. While there is no suggestion that China will manipulate the BRICS as an instrument for its own strategic rise, the GDP distribution among the original BRICS members also indicates a different level of global influence. While the recent increase in membership will extend the GDP size of the BRICS countries as a whole, it will have a smaller impact on the ranking among the BRICS countries. A long-running GDP growth rate comparison of the original BRICS countries shows a bit of a different picture, as between 2010 and 2019, China and India formed a closer group compared to the other members. Yet from 2021 to 2024, the data indicate a change with India taking the lead, with China, Brazil, and later Russia forming another group. While South Africa performs below this group. The growth data also indicate that the BRICS countries are less able to isolate themselves from overall global impacts. Thus, BRICS countries are not only confronted with a challenge of representation in the decision-making within the international institutional setting of the liberal international order, dominated by the United States, but also with an individual challenge, as most would not be able to exercise a meaningful impact on the global level as individual countries. Yet, one could argue that this provides additional incentives for cooperation and, in extension, for organisational development. Yet, as the original BRICS member are located in different regional settings, they also face different political-economic challenges within their respective regions, which in turn could generate an impact on their readiness to cooperate. Another, but related topic is that, for example,



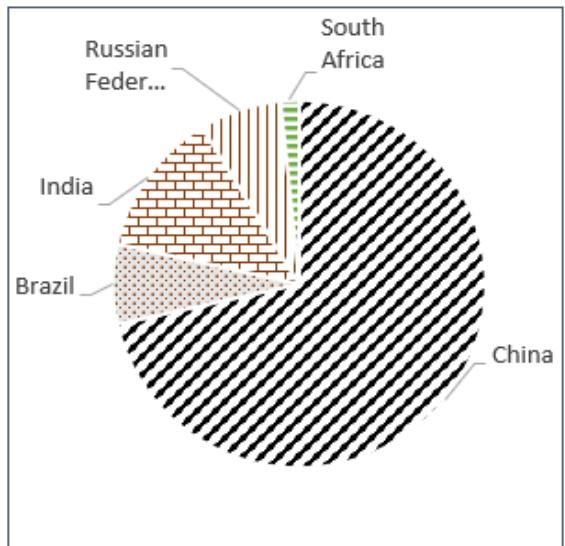
two BRICS members are in direct competition at the regional level, as is the case between India and China, which could also impact their readiness to cooperate. While Noort (2019, 462) describes BRICS as an informal diplomatic group, Nuruzzaman (2020, 59-60) identifies some of the critical internal weaknesses of BRICS, as it was not able to converge the foreign policy aims of its members into one shared foreign policy goal. This can be interpreted as a practical implication of the group's political and economic heterogeneity.



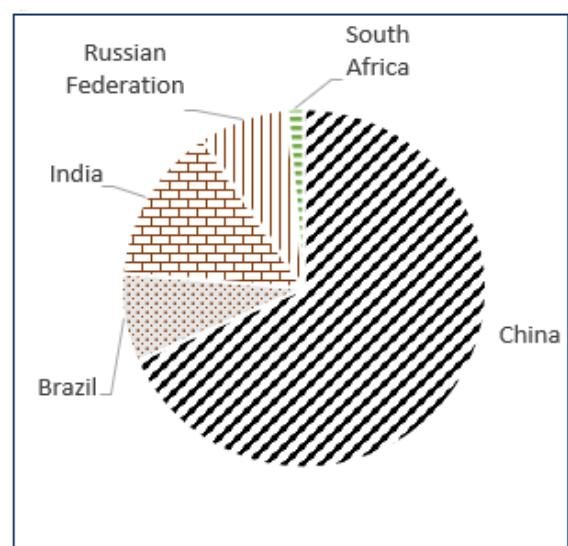
Derived-from-World-Bank-Data-GDP-current-US\$-distribution-2010



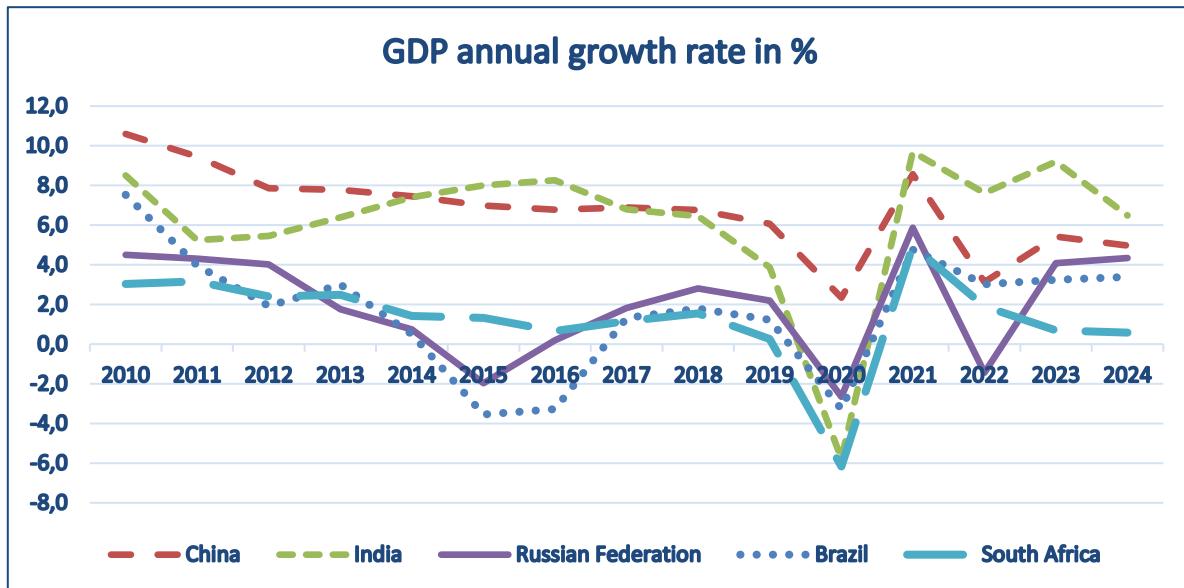
Derived-From-World-Bank-Data-GDP-current-US\$-distribution-2015



Derived-from-World-Bank-Data-GDP-current-US\$-distribution-2020



Derived-from-World-Bank-Data-GDP-current-US\$-distribution-2024



Source: Chart derived from online World Bank Data.

Indeed, BRICS's ability to influence global politics and the existing global order is linked with its ability to manage internal contradictions and to facilitate consensus among its members. Indeed, as asserted by van Noort, generating a comprehensive organisation-based narrative in support of it would be a preferable strategy (van Noort 2016). A more diverse membership will increase the challenge of generating such a narrative.

BRICS's international standing may be enhanced through the actions of some of its members. China's Belt and Road Initiative is the most prominent case. Certainly, India also has a strong development engagement with the countries in South Asia and Russia, with Central Asian countries, even though its position may be weakened because of the Ukraine war. That the BRICS countries are aiming to improve their international recognition by enhancing their relations with countries of the Global South is also recognised by Petrone (2019). Interestingly enough, Nayyar (2016) asks for caution because, while stronger engagement with the countries of the Global South offers a potential avenue for stronger South-South cooperation and international recognition of BRICS, it could also lead to a perception of what he describes as subimperialism, generating a new form of dependency associated with earlier forms of imperialism. India's engagement with the smaller states of South Asia, in combination with its self-perception of being the dominant leader of the region, may offer a good example. Even though South-South engagement could contribute to a BRICS narrative of the 'Voice of the South', so far, the BRICS members are only partly successful in doing so. Within this context, Nuruzzaman (2020, 61) assesses that BRICS's weak internal cohesion undermines its ability to formulate an alternative world vision. This, in turn, weakens its ability to challenge the existing international order, dominated by the United States. In this regard, we need to address a fundamental question: Does BRICS aim for a fundamental change of the existing international system, or does it aim for changes



within the existing international system? Or, as asked by Petrone (2019), are the BRICS members aiming to create a parallel or alternative system, or to create a new space for acting within the existing international liberal order? The first option aims to undermine and even completely change the existing global institutional setting, while the second option indicates a willingness to accept the existing global institutional setting, but demands that their interests are taken into consideration, resisting United States dominance and hegemonic policy behaviour within that global institutional setting. With regard to the potential systemic challenges that BRICS poses to the established liberal order, Stuenkel (2016) states that emerging countries are less interested in challenging the underlying norms of the existing liberal system but rather in institutionalising their enhanced power position. Similarly, Roberts (2015) argues that, while the BRICS countries contest the West's pretensions to permanent stewardship of the global institutional organisations, they do not demand a systemic change to the existing international system itself. Indeed, in their official statements, regular support for establishing global institutions can be identified, such as the World Bank, IMF, or the UN, but with a strong demand for structural power adjustment to give emerging powers a stronger role in decision-making.

Considering that every existing international system is based on the political, economic, and strategic interests of the dominant country, we should not be too surprised that the United States continues to explore and exploit its strong position to its advantage, even though it is quite successful in generating the image of a benevolent hegemon. With reference to the current existing international order, Ikenberry describes the existing contradictions within the rule-based liberal order as a 'hierarchical order with liberal characteristics' (Ikenberry 2012). Therefore, enhancing the influence of BRICS could offer some more impactful engagement of the countries of the Global South within the existing United States-dominated international system. Stuenkel (2016) points out that the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB) will strengthen the Global South's position within the existing global institutional setting. He adds that, while they will not challenge the existing global setting, they aim at decreasing the United States' institutional dominance within that setting. At the same time, we can observe what Ikenberry describes as the diffusion outward, the loss of the overwhelming power the United States once possessed (Ikenberry 2014). This, in turn, favours the position of emerging powers of the Global South. However, one still has to recognise the institutional weakness of BRICS as assessed by van Noort, who stated that their internal diversity undermines the generation and communication of a strategic narrative in supporting the BRICS position and its role in global politics (van Noort 2019, 465).

Institutional development could contribute to a stronger recognition of BRICS in global politics. Yet institutional development faces a number of challenges, which will be the focus of the next section.

## **Institutional development: Characterising international organisations**

Taking into consideration that BRICS so far only represents a loose form of cooperation, a deeper institutional development could offer a strategy to enhance its global standing.



Transforming BRICS into a bona fide international organisation (IO) faces several serious challenges, even though one could argue that a degree of institutionalisation has already occurred since its first official meeting in Yekaterinburg in 2009. To apprehend the challenges involved, we should begin with a short assessment of IOs in general.

### **International organisations: Some general characterisations**

When considering that BRICS aims to support the interests of its members and to address unequal decision-making power in global politics, a primary issue arises: how to strengthen BRICS's role in global politics and within the existing global institutional setting? Stronger cooperation between its members represents a critical step forward. Transforming the BRICS cooperation into an international organisation could offer a strategic response that would enhance its global role. However, there are various issues related to establishing an IO. To begin with, Keohane (1989, 166) reminds us that the promise of mutual benefits is the *sine qua non* for international institutions; otherwise, there is no reason for forming international institutions. Lugg (2024), meanwhile, points towards a general acknowledgement that international organisations are usually created by a great power to lock in a particular structural power distribution or to support the creation of one. The formation of an IO requires addressing another fundamental issue in international politics: trust. Based on the anarchic character of the international system and the associated security dilemma, countries can hardly trust each other. Yet forming an IO must be founded upon a process of generating trust among independent political units (Higgott, 2006). Indeed, transforming a loose cooperation into an IO requires a willingness for deeper cooperation. For Keohane (1984), cooperation requires that the actions of separate actors, who are not acting in pre-existent harmony, be brought into conformity. To facilitate such a process, IOs are based on certain rules and norms, which are institutionalised by treaties which members have to agree to and are expected to follow. March and Olsen (2006, 3-4) describe an IO as an enduring collection of rules and organised practices, which in turn facilitates a process described as institutional logic, generating predictability of members' behaviour. However, Keohane (1989, 3) reminds us that while an IO generates predictability and trust among its members, it also limits the choices available for its members.

This short overview highlights the challenges associated with creating an IO, as well as the potential trade-offs, between each country of 'going on its own' or aligning with other countries to speak 'with one voice' in global politics to increase the potential impact. A closer assessment of BRICS's internal development is required to assess the challenges BRICS is facing in transforming itself into a genuine IO.

### **BRICS as an international organisation: Assessing the challenges**

So far, BRICS can be described as a loose cooperation of states, and transforming it into an IO to increase its impact on global politics would require considerable effort. Even so, the present state of facilitating cooperation among BRICS members should not be underestimated. Considering the above-mentioned characteristics of an IO, we may start



assessing the most fundamental one: What potential mutual benefits can be identified? While it seems at first quite simple to answer this question, it becomes more challenging when undertaking a closer evaluation of the annual statements produced. Certainly, from the very beginning, in all official statements, the mutual benefits of cooperation to support the demands of emerging countries have been emphasised. Specific issues to be addressed are the reform of existing international financial institutions and the formation of a multi-polar world order. As specified in the Yekaterinburg Statement (2009), recent changes in the global economy need to be recognised, consequently offering emerging economies a stronger voice and better representation within the existing global institutional setting. On a general level, it is stated that cooperation should serve the common interests of emerging powers. Equality, mutual support, and inclusiveness in support of its members and emerging powers are also stressed in the Goa Declaration (2016). Alike reads the Johannesburg II Declaration (2023, 1-2), declaring that the benefits of cooperation are based on three pillars: political and security; economic and financial; and cultural and people-to-people cooperation. It adds that enhancing and improving global governance, as well as increasing the representation of emerging powers in international organisations, represents another ongoing and primary task. The Kazan Declaration (2024) reiterates a commitment to the three-pillar cooperation, a more inclusive international financial architecture, and a multi-polar world order, so as to enhance the benefits and roles of emerging and developing states. Thus, one can argue that enhancing the members' global standing and participation in decision-making within the established global institutional setting can be identified as a primary mutual benefit target, which in turn could offer a basis for a deeper institutional development.

However, when we consider one of the alternative explanations for creating an IO, based on the interests of a dominant great power, BRICS seems unlikely to be a medium for any great power. While we can identify some potential regional great powers among the BRICS members, only China would qualify as a potential global great power. Yet neither has China signalled any willingness to take on, nor would the other members accept, a special role for China in usurping BRICS as an instrument of national power enhancement to dominate global politics. Nor is there any other member state that could do so. Thus, indicating that there needs to be existing great power interests in facilitating the development of an IO does not fit well with the cooperation dynamic observed within BRICS so far. Does this mean that BRICS will be the exception to the rule? Future developments will show.

Another, earlier mentioned, topic is building trust among independent political units. Has the current stage of its development already generated enough trust among its members to be a basis for further institutional development? A preliminary assessment would indicate that it has. An associated question is whether we can identify rules and norms as another source of enhanced cooperation and a basis for transforming BRICS from a loose cooperation of states into an IO. Equality, respect for national sovereignty, recognition of the role of emerging powers in global affairs, and support for the countries of the Global South could serve as indications of shared norms and rules. A resilient commitment to multilateralism - accompanied by a call for reforms to the existing global institutional setting and a focus on a multi-polar world order - can be added as another example of emerging norm-setting. The Yekaterinburg Statement (2009) delivers a



strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy, with the United Nations at its core, though efforts for creating a multi-polar world order are also mentioned. The Goa Declaration (2016, 2-3) restates those focuses by pointing out that BRICS envisages a transition to a multi-polar world order based on the central role of the United Nations but includes the comprehensive call for United Nations reforms, especially of the Security Council, to become more representative of the current distribution of economic power and to include more countries from the Global South in global decision-making. The Goa Declaration also re-emphasises solidarity, equality, and mutual understanding. The Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) reaffirms that sovereign equality, solidarity, consensus, and multilateralism are the guiding principles of the BRICS cooperation. It also confirms that the United Nations is the cornerstone of the international system, but upholds the earlier call for comprehensive reforms. The Kazan Summit Declaration (2024) reiterates the BRICS commitment to cooperation based on mutual respect, sovereign equality, solidarity, and consensus. It also restates its support for multilateralism and a multi-polar world order, as well as the continued recognition of the United Nations as the cornerstone of the international system, while the call for reform is also upheld.

Assessing the performance of IOs in general, Lall (2017, 276) identifies narrow national interests and opportunistic behaviour of its members as a primary obstacle, even when at first a demand for collective action exists, but this may change once an IO has been created, as countries may decide that a strategy of pushing national interests may be a more suitable approach. Considering BRICS' commitment to support the national interests of its members, aligning the national interests of its members becomes a critical challenge for deeper integration, which will increase with rising membership. However, creating a new institution to support the global standing of its members raises additional issues. For instance, if any of them are already members of other global or regional international organisations, how will this impact their behaviour with regard to specific goals as members of another organisation? In this regard, Papa (2015) points towards the impact of institutional density. For example, if country A is a member in organisations X, Y, and Z, the specific response it decides on with regard to one membership may also generate a knock-on effect as other members in one of the organisations start to question the extent of country A's commitment to that organisation and its goals, consequently undermining a critical aspect for every organisation: trust and, with it, predictability. BRICS has so far shown a commitment to cooperation with different regional organisations, outlined in the various annual statements assessed for this paper, permitting them to address regional issues by themselves, with a special emphasis on the African Union and its Agenda 2063. Nor is the African Union the only regional organisation BRICS focuses on; it has had some engagement with BIMSTEC leaders, as well. In addition, BRICS highly values the role of the G20 as a primary global forum for multilateral cooperation. As to whether this strong support for various regional organisations and global forums, such as the G20, and membership overlay will develop into a potential serious internal challenge for BRICS, only the future will show.

Nevertheless, when we consider where BRICS started, as the imagination of a financial investment manager with no political support, it already had some remarkable success in institutionalisation, based on its ability to organise regular annual heads of government summits, with individual statements generated and an ever-increasing field of



cooperation among its members. Those fields are quite varied: supporting agricultural development to enhance food security; establishment of a Digital Economy Working Group; a Centre for Industrial Competence to increase human resource development; support for infrastructure development; improving collective capacity for global pandemic prevention; a Young Scientist Forum and Youth Council; disaster management cooperation; people-to-people exchanges; and sporting events, just to name some of the additional cooperation mechanisms. While each of them addresses a specific theme, together they contribute to a rising visibility of BRICS among its members' decision-makers and people at the grassroots level, consequently increasing its profile and contributing to a process of deeper cooperation.

In considering that BRICS may decide on a deeper cooperation, to form an IO, to increase their recognition and influence in global politics and with the existing institutional global setting, a critical question is how to assess their demand for change. In analysing the various annual BRICS meeting statements, we can see that they also offer more clarity on the extent to which BRICS members are revisionist, i.e., aim to 'overthrow' the existing international order. The short answer is that they are not revisionists in the original meaning of the term, as they aim for adjustments within the existing global institutional setting, instead of overthrowing it. Indeed, there is a strong commitment to existing institutions, like the United Nations, the WB, the IMF, the WTO, and the WHO. While there is a strong appeal to adjust the inner workings of the existing global institutional setting to allow more participation of emerging powers and developing states in policy-making, there is no call for developing an alternative or parallel global institutional setting, nor for abolishing the existing global institutional setting. Instead, there are specific demands like for a strong global financial safety net founded on a quota-based and adequately resourced IMF; for a multilateral, rule-based, non-discriminatory trading system with the WTO at its centre; and an emphasis on the indispensable cornerstone of the United Nations in the international system, even while there are equally strong calls for United Nations reforms to enhance the presence and role of emerging powers and developing states. Therefore, based on these commitments to the established global institutional framework, describing BRICS as a source of revisionism, as a source of change *of* the international system, as opposed to change *within*, is grossly misleading, if not outright wrong. Indeed, in the context of recent developments, such as the United States' withdrawal from the WHO (whereas the BRICS members reiterate their full support for the WHO as the central IO in addressing global public health issues, including pandemic prevention), or in undermining the work and rule-based process of the WTO, it seems that it is the United States that has become the revisionist actor. Indeed, the unilateral trade policy the U.S. is obstinately pursuing only adds to this impression.

## What future International System?

In considering whether BRICS can be an influential actor in global politics, the character of the international system is as relevant as its internal coherence. After all, we can observe an ongoing discussion that we are in the midst of another critical change of the international system, aligning the argument with the structural changes we witnessed in



the aftermath of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War, by referring to the increasing pressure the liberal international order and its global institutional setting has been facing to adapt to changing global developments, like the rise of emerging powers. This pressure increases with the readiness of the current United States government to undermine the global institutional setting through its policy strategies and related decisions it takes. The general assessment is that the existing global liberal order was created in the aftermath of the Second World War by the United States to support and enhance its new great-power position. However, Acharya (2017) and Ney (2017) remind us that its reach was never global, as during the Cold War period, the countries within the Soviet Bloc, as well as China, India, and Indonesia, were never part of it. Nonetheless, one could argue that the reach of the liberal international order expanded with the end of the Cold War as the underlying system conflicts (political/economic/social) decreased, giving the United States its hegemonic 'moment'. However, recent challenges based on emerging powers and a rising demand from the countries of the Global South to get stronger recognition of their interests within the existing global institutional setting have increased the challenge to the liberal international order and its basis. While it is accepted, especially for China and its Reform and Opening Process, that some rising powers did greatly profit from the established liberal international order, Acharya (2017, 276) points out that assuming that emerging powers would have the same stake in the liberal order as Western countries have would be a misperception. Ward (2017, 10-11), too, offers some insight into the complex relationship of rising powers with the existing liberal international order, stating that they should not be perceived as revisionists per se, but only to the extent that they become dissatisfied with the distribution of resources or the norms and rules governing the existing institutional setting supporting the international liberal order. In addition, and in an astonishing break with established policy, the policy of the current Trump presidency contributes to the undermining of the existing liberal international order. Indeed, it seems the United States has become the revisionist, even though the United States was once the primary sponsor of the existing global institutional setting.

Acknowledging that we are confronted with potential fundamental changes to the existing liberal international system does not offer much of an answer, but rather leads to more questions, in particular about the direction and nature of change. Indeed, when one tries to evaluate this topic, different positions can easily be identified, even though there is broad agreement that a change in the existing international liberal order will happen. Though the issue is, will it be a structural change *within* or even *of* an existing international system and to what extent the existing power constellation - unipolarity, bi-polarity, tri-polarity, or multipolarity - may undergo change. In one way or another, one of those constellations has been the foundation of every international system throughout history. Yet current propositions about the structural changes the existing international system will undergo argue that continuing to think about different forms of polarity may no longer be appropriate. Indeed, alternative conceptions of a future emerging international system, whether multiplex (Acharya 2017), polycentric (Cohen 2015), or multi-order (Flockhart 2016), support a perception of forthcoming structural change. Cohen (2015, 3) describes a polycentric international order as being built on three categories of states: first-order power, whose influence and capacities reach beyond



their own region; second-order power, major powers whose influence is limited to their region; and third-order powers, with either distinctive cultural or ideological capacities to influence their neighbours. However, he adds that geopolitical regions, a conglomerate of countries based on geographical proximity, political, cultural, and military interaction and shared historical experience, will be a crucial force in the shaping and radical restructuring of the international system. Regarding the prospect of a multi-order international system, Flockhart (2016) argues that there is compelling evidence that the international system is changing towards a multi-order system instead of multi-polar, as it will be composed of clusters of states with different cultural backgrounds and experience in their process of rising modernity, leading to a generation of different sets of norms underlying a multi-order international system. She also states that this represents a diffusion of power, which contrasts with the various characterisations of polarity we are familiar with. As for the conception of a multiplex international system, Acharya (2017, 277) claims that it will be based on the experience of multiple modernities, of interconnectedness and interdependence, representing a complex setting of crosscutting ideas, perceptions, and power constellations; as such, it will not be defined by a hegemon, a single country, or a single idea. In a more recent publication, Acharya, Estevadeordal, & Goodan (2023) identify four features of multiplexity: interaction capacity (the ability to influence the movement of ideas, goods, people, money, and military power across the system); deep interdependence beyond economic cooperation (such as environmental issues, governance, security, and connectivity); shared, multidimensional, and diverse world-order leadership; and clusters of layers of international cooperation based on or beyond geography-based interactions. Thus, a multiplex international system will be a plural, multi-centred, and multidimensional world where not a single power will dominate.

## Conclusion

BRICS's ability to influence global politics is linked with its ability to manage internal contradictions and its ability to speak with one voice. Thus, institutional development could contribute to a stronger recognition of BRICS in global politics. When considering its origins, as a financial market imagination, it has already undergone a remarkable institutionalisation process based on annual meetings of heads of state, annual strategy documents, and a wide variety of cooperation mechanisms at the ministerial and societal levels. However, BRICS is still, and rightly, described as a loose state cooperation, and the critical question is: Can BRICS as an organisation deliver what its members are expecting from it, recognition of their interests, to enhance their decision-making power within the existing global institutional setting? In this regard, it is worth remembering that asymmetry of global economic and political influence and impact has been a major characteristic of BRICS members from their very beginning. Thus, facilitating deeper cooperation would be instrumental in addressing this challenge. Transforming the BRICS into an IO could offer a strategic response to increase its weight in global decision-making and within the existing global institutional setting. Transformation into an IO would require addressing a number of fundamental topics, as an IO requires some basic requirements. The most fundamental are the promise of mutual benefits, to generate



trust among its members, the establishment of rules and norms that every member has to follow, and hence the establishment of an institutional logic. Thus, can we identify benefits, rules and norms within the BRICS cooperation which could support its transformation towards an IO and a strong voice of its members at the global level? While we can identify some specific aspects informing BRICS cooperation, like assured equality, respect for national sovereignty, recognition of the role of emerging powers in global affairs, strong support for emerging powers and the countries of the Global South and a fundamental demand for reforming the existing global institutional setting, the question remains if those aspects can be already be identified as rules and norms and a source for transformation towards an IO. Whether such a transformation will ever be successful or even attempted is an open question, but without the influence of BRICS on global politics, the influence on instigating change within the existing global institutional setting will be rather limited. Even if successful, the most likely outcome of an institutionalisation process may lead to another ASEAN-style cooperation process, since a stronger internal integration of the different members, towards a supranational organisation, is rather out of the question.

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