

FROM WEST TO THE REST: ANALYSING TURKEY'S BRICS MEMBERSHIP BID THROUGH THE PRISM OF WESTERNISM

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy through the lens of its bid for BRICS membership, contextualised within the country's shifting approach to Westernism. The study thus contributes to ongoing discussions about the shifting alignments of emerging powers in a multipolar world. Drawing on historical process tracing, the study argues that Turkey's frustrations with Western institutions have prompted a strategic recalibration toward alternative multilateral frameworks. However, the analysis reveals that Turkey's overtures to BRICS represent not a wholesale rejection of the West, but an attempt to balance East-West allegiances in a multipolar world. The findings suggest that while BRICS appeals to Ankara's rhetoric of autonomy and multipolarity, its suitability as a strategic alternative remains limited.

Keywords

Turkey, Westernism, BRICS, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey-West Relations.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a evolução da política externa da Turquia através da lente da sua candidatura à adesão aos BRICS, contextualizada dentro da mudança de abordagem do país em relação ao ocidentalismo. O estudo contribui, assim, para as discussões em curso sobre as mudanças nas alianças das potências emergentes num mundo multipolar. Com base no rastreamento do processo histórico, o estudo argumenta que as frustrações da Turquia com as instituições ocidentais levaram a uma recalibração estratégica em direção a estruturas multilaterais alternativas. No entanto, a análise revela que as aproximações da Turquia aos BRICS não representam uma rejeição total do Ocidente, mas uma tentativa de equilibrar as alianças entre o Oriente e o Ocidente num mundo multipolar. As conclusões sugerem que, embora os BRICS apele à retórica de autonomia e multipolaridade de Ancara, a sua adequação como alternativa estratégica continua a ser limitada.



Palavras-chave

Turquia, ocidentalismo, BRICS, política externa turca, relações Turquia-Ocidente.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the rise of emerging economies has reshaped the global political landscape, particularly through the emergence of new international actors, such as the BRICS (Christensen & Xing, 2016; Lissovlik & Vinokurov, 2019). This shift has even been interpreted as the beginning of a post-Western world order that has expanded the space for regional and middle powers to act autonomously (Kutlay & Önış, 2021). In parallel with these global dynamics, Turkey has exhibited traits that align with this shift and has become more open to new and alternative foreign policy visions, bringing about new partnerships and ad hoc alliances with non-Western actors. By adopting an almost identical line to the BRICS countries with its weakening Westernism in foreign policy, Turkey has promoted the idea of a multipolar international order and defended the rights of the least developed countries. Turkey's interest in joining BRICS gained prominence as its emerging political orientation began to align with the rising global profile and normative stance of the BRICS countries. The convergence between Turkey's shifting foreign policy priorities and the growing influence of this like-minded coalition brought renewed attention to the prospect of deeper engagement with BRICS as an alternative platform for international cooperation.

This study examines Turkey's pursuit of BRICS membership within the broader context of its evolving orientation toward the West in foreign policy. Over the past two decades, Turkey's traditional Westernist stance, characterised by an almost unquestioned alignment with the West, has visibly shifted, giving way to growing scepticism toward Western institutions and a search for alternative alignments, driven by a more selective, pragmatic, and autonomy-oriented approach. By situating the BRICS bid within this shift, the study seeks to uncover how changing perceptions of the West have influenced Turkey's strategic interest in engaging with non-Western platforms. The study addresses the issue through two main research questions: first, how Turkey's evolving approach to Westernism has influenced its pivot toward non-Western platforms such as BRICS; and second, to what extent Turkey's interest in BRICS represents a rational strategy for balancing its diminishing alignment with the West through alternative global partnerships. By examining these questions, the article aims to contribute to broader debates on multipolarity, middle power diplomacy, and the strategic recalibration of



foreign policy in a shifting international order. The primary methodology of this research is historical process tracing, aimed at uncovering two interconnected processes occurring concurrently.

The paper is organised as follows: The first section offers a historical overview of Westernism in Turkish foreign policy. The second section explores the evolving dynamics of Turkey's relationship with the West over the past two decades, with particular emphasis on the crises that have shaped this trajectory. The final section examines Turkey's pursuit of BRICS membership in the context of its shifting stance on Westernism.

Tracing Traditional Westernism in Turkish Foreign Policy

With its deeply embedded roots in the early Ottoman reform era of the 19th century, aiming to modernise political, economic, and social structures by initially taking the rapidly advancing West, solely Europe, as a role model, Westernism has consistently served as a foundational element of Turkish foreign policy. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the ideal of Westernisation was further consolidated in the hands of new ruling cadres who envisioned a modern and secular state that would achieve Western levels of political and economic development by eradicating all traces of the Ottoman legacy. After warring against some members of the West during the First World War and waging a war of salvation against them, taking the West as a model, they renamed it the attainment of a higher level of civilisation (Monceau, 2023). Over time, this orientation evolved into a clear and consistent foreign policy stance, with Turkey pursuing strong ties with the Western powers. However, the official approach to foreign policy during the interwar period was characterised by neutrality, aiming to develop friendly relations with both Western powers and the Soviet Union (SU) (Criss, 2017).

After the Second World War, Turkey, faced with the growing Soviet threat, sought security guarantees from the West, especially from the US (Oğuzlu, 2003). This motivated Turkey's membership in all post-war Western constructs, and Westernism emerged as a stable tenet of Turkish foreign policy despite the changing ideological orientation of the ruling parties (Ovalı & Özdişmenli, 2020). The signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 and Turkey's subsequent membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1952 marked a clear political commitment to the Western bloc, as the country strengthened its position in the face of the growing ideological and military Cold War rivalry between the US and the SU. Turkey's acquisition of a place within the Western security architecture became a fundamental shift from Turkey's earlier policy of neutrality to a more overtly Western-oriented foreign policy approach (Oğuzlu, 2019). This change, mainly due to Turkey's geopolitical position as a buffer between the Western powers and the SU was very much welcomed by the West (Müftüler-Baç, 1996). In return for its loyalty, Turkey received economic and military aid from the West during this period, which eventually led to a high degree of integration of the Turkish military into NATO structures (Lippe, 2000). With a few exceptions, such as the Cyprus crisis (from the early 1960s) or the opium crisis (late 1960s), Turkish foreign policy remained very compatible with the West throughout the Cold War (Aydın, 2000). However, the memory



of the past problems with the West has persisted because of the "Serves Syndrome"¹, which has been passed on to new generations (Şahin, 2025). Beyond the security perspective, the westernisation of Turkish foreign policy intensified when the country decided to develop closer ties with the European Economic Community by the late 1950s, the predecessor of the European Union (EU), primarily to achieve its economic modernisation (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2012).

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the SU created a new geopolitical context in which Turkey's relationship with the West faced significant challenges. Turkey continued to value its relationship with the West. However, its place within the Western alliance began to be questioned due to the changing geopolitical dynamics, lessening the country's strategic value. The rise of identity politics, which makes Turkey different and less democratic, is a significant problem for the West (Şahin, 2020). During the 1990s, the relative importance of Europe in Turkey's Western foreign policy line increased with the country's formal application for EU membership in 1987, in fulfilment of its aspirations for European integration (Erdoğan, 2019). This new positioning of Turkey also received the support of the US (Tocci, 2012). Following the declaration of Turkey as a candidate for membership in 1999, the EU accession process became the main rationale for Turkey's continued commitment to Western political and economic norms in the post-Cold War era (Müftüler-Baç, 2005).

This foreign policy line, primarily designed by the secular state elite, continued uninterrupted after the rise of political Islam to power in 2003, when the country's new ruling cadres opted for a foreign policy based on pragmatism and economic liberalisation (Dinçşahin, 2012). These were the golden years in Turkey-EU relations. Turkey's Western credentials were further strengthened as the country materialised an extensive list of reforms to be eligible for the next round of EU enlargement (Kaliber, 2014). During this period, as a Muslim country that embraced liberal democratic values, Turkey was portrayed by the West as a role model (Çınar, 2018). However, this positive atmosphere became short-lived when the EU formally decided not to conclude accession talks with Turkey until the Cyprus problem had been resolved in 2006, following Turkey's refusal to apply the customs union to the Greek side of Cyprus (Heinz, 2007).

Not only relations with the EU, but also with the US became more strained during this period, especially after the US decision to intervene in Iraq for the second time in 2003. At a time when the Turkish government was divided between being a reliable ally and avoiding the security implications of an imminent war, the Turkish National Assembly voted against the use of Turkish territory by American forces to reach Iraq from the north (Yeşiltas, 2009). In this case, Turkey's position clashed with the American one. However, it was not totally anti-Western, because Europe was also divided on this issue. The leading countries of Europe, also known as old Europe, led by Germany and France, also adopted a position against this intervention (Crowe, 2003). However, Turkey's decision was a big disappointment for the US. In the shadow of these frustrations in relations with

¹ A traumatic syndrome based on the sense of failure and loss caused by the 1920 Treaty of Serves, which was imposed on the Ottoman Empire by the victorious allies after its defeat in the First World War and which aimed to divide the Ottoman territory between the major Western powers and the local groups supporting them. The Sèvres Treaty was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, following the Turkish War of Independence victory.



the West, dissatisfaction with the dominance of Westernism in Turkish foreign policy began to grow, culminating in a process of distancing Turkey from the West in foreign policy.

A New Era of Westernism in Turkish Foreign Policy in the Wake of Recent Crises

In the past, temporary crises, such as the opium crisis in the 1960s, have been observed in the relations between Turkey and the West. These past crises made Turkey see the limits of its alliance with the West, but they never led it to rethink its relations with the West radically. In the last two decades, however, a combination of shifting internal (i.e., the rise of conservative ruling elites or Turkey's strong economic performance when the West was suffering from the 2008 crisis) and external (i.e., developments in the neighbourhood or increasing multipolarity of the international system) dynamics has led to a new set of crises that have allowed a profound questioning of the traditional Western orientation of Turkish foreign policy by challenging the long-accepted idea of seeking Western approval or guidance for every significant foreign policy action (Akkoyunlu, 2021). This new foreign policy line has been identified in the literature under various banners, such as neo-Ottomanism (Trifković, 2011), Islamic realism (Yalvaç, 2016) and Euro-Asianism (Erşen, 2019), zero problems with neighbours (Cornell, 2012), and has resulted in discussions about the country's strategic autonomy (Oğuzlu, 2020), shifting axis (Başer, 2015), paradigm shift (Sözen, 2010), twists and turns (Cop & Zihnioglu, 2017), precious loneliness (Coşkun, 2015), de-Europeanization (Yılmaz, 2016) and independence (Taşpınar, 2011) in foreign policy.

Anti-Westernism in Turkey has become prominent as the government follows more nationalist and security-oriented policies, after consolidating its power by the 2010s (Karaömeroğlu, 2022). In such a context, ruling cadres relied more on populist discourses, including anti-Western elements, such as the West's siding with Turkey's enemies or its double standards towards Turkey (Hazır, 2022). "One Minute Crisis" during the 2009 World Economic Forum meeting, which ended Turkey's balanced policy on the Israeli-Palestine conflict and opened the way for its active engagement on the side of the Palestinians (Cornell, 2012), was a historic moment that gave the first signals of the reconfiguration of the West in Turkish foreign policy, as it also included a rejection of the West's unconditional support for Israel. In addition, Turkey, which is heavily dependent on Iran for energy, showed its dissatisfaction with the sanctions against Iran by voting against the fourth round of sanctions against Iran on 9 June 2010 during its temporary membership of the United Nations Security Council, and this new policy line was viewed as very alarming by the US (Ari, 2022).

Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy gained significant momentum since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (Öniş & Uluyol, 2025), and it became so evident with the Arab Spring, especially during the Syrian crisis, that the gap between Turkish and Western foreign policies widened due to the differing approaches to regional stability (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay & Keyman, 2025). While Turkey generally sided with the opposition forces, the West stood for stability and did not favour the processes bringing actors associated



with political Islam to power (Aliboni, 2011). The diverging positioning of Turkey and the West gained a new dimension, when the West, notably the US, decided to provide political and military support to the Kurds in Syria, who are seen by Turkey as a Syrian branch of the internationally recognized terrorist organisation of PKK targeting Turkish state since the 1980s, as a ground force in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) by 2014 (Outzen, 2025). This new US positioning was totally clashing with the previous one, including active or passive support of Turkish actions against the PKK, by sharing the country's security concerns. These changing security concerns of the parties resulted in the opposition of the West to Turkey's military operations in northern Syria, aiming to create safe zones in areas near the border (Atmaca & Torun, 2022). Turkey's operations in northern Syria have been heavily condemned by the West and framed as a process hampering the fight against ISIS (Orton, 2016). When Turkey chooses to act independently at the regional level, it undermines the effectiveness of Western collective efforts aimed at promoting regional stability. Besides, this new positioning also raised doubts about Turkey's long-standing commitments as a NATO member and EU membership candidate, especially when coupled with its growing de-alignment from EU norms, particularly in the areas of democratic governance, the rule of law, and foreign policy. (Aydın-Düzgit & Keyman, 2014).

The Gezi Park Protests in 2013 and the failed coup attempt in 2016, culminated on top of each other, resulting in a still ongoing trauma on the ruling cadres of Turkey. These two events led to an increase in their tendency to use a securitisation perspective in the making of foreign policy (Karakoç & Ersoy, 2024). From Turkey's point of view, the West's exclusive expression of its concern about the erosion of democracy and rule of law was a failure to understand the country's renewed sense of security (Özpek & Tanrıverdi-Yaşar, 2017). The country's disappointment with the West grew when the Russian government, despite the ongoing influence of the crisis stemming from the downing of a Russian jet by Turkey, sided strongly with the Turkish government (Oğuzlu, 2020). When the coup plotters, who were clearly terrorists from the point of view of the Turkish government, went to Western countries as safe havens, it is worth noting that the US was hosting the leading cadres of the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organisation (FETO); the matter was further complicated. This was seen as an unfriendly interference in the internal affairs of the country and listed as support for terrorist organisations targeting Turkey (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019). The tension with the US reached a peak when Turkey imprisoned US Pastor Brunson due to his so-called ties with the groups targeting the government of Turkey. During this crisis, President Trump even sent a very unfriendly letter to his counterpart and threatened Turkey with severe political and economic sanctions. To show its sincerity about the economic pressure, in August 2018, the US took some steps to show its ability to destabilise Turkey's capital markets, and finally, the pastor was freed after two years of detention (Strachota & Wilk, 2019).

Turkey's changing perception of the West shapes not only its relations with the West but also with the non-Western actors. When Turkey has had problems in its relations with the West, it has tended to develop its economic and political ties, especially with the West's competitors, such as Russia and Iran (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020). Turkey has long suffered from being unable to meet its military equipment needs from its leading suppliers in the West, especially the US. The US refusal to sell the Patriot missile defence



system led the country to buy the Russian S-400 defence system. Turkey's decision, an explicit demonstration of its strategic autonomy, led to a further deterioration in relations with the West by generating friction with key allies. As a reaction to the S-400 purchase, the West adopted a punitive attitude, and Turkey's membership in the F-35 programme, which aims to develop a new-generation fighter jet, was cancelled, and sanctions were imposed on Turkey's Defence Procurement Agency under the CAATSA mechanism (Martin, 2025). The country has even negotiated the sale of new F-16 fighter jets and the modernisation of existing ones, linking them to its approval of Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership (Neset, 2023). Not only has the country been meeting its needs from non-Western actors, but it has also been improving its self-sufficiency in this area through heavy investment in its national defence industry because of being denied access to Western weapons (Bağcı & Kurç, 2017). This process overall paved the way for a new wave of anti-Western discourse in Turkish foreign policy (Hazır, 2022). As an offshoot of this new dynamic, Turkey did not join the Western sanctions imposed on Russia after the Ukraine crisis, but only the UN sanctions and maintained its economic, trade and energy relations with Russia (Yanık, 2023).

Despite these challenges in the relations with the West, Turkey has continued to prioritise its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) membership, highlighting the importance of its security ties to the West (Ciddi, 2022). Turkey's role in regional security, its strategic location between Europe and the Middle East, and its position as a key member of NATO ensure that it remains an important factor in Western foreign policy discussions (Oğuzlu, 2020). As well as its membership of NATO, the country has also valued its customs union with the EU, which has been in force since 1996. Putting aside the dynamics of mutual resentment stemming from the problems of the accession aspect of the relationship, Turkey and the EU, as two sides sharing the same neighbourhood and facing similar challenges, have chosen to create a new balance in the relationship through a kind of issue-based functional cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as migration, energy or climate change (Erdoğan, 2024). Despite Turkey's willingness to cooperate, a widely held perception persists in Europe that Turkey has deprioritised its EU accession in favour of pursuing strategic pluralism, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. As a result, Turkey's reliability as a partner has been increasingly questioned, and the tendency to view Turkey as a third country rather than a candidate country has grown stronger (Turhan, 2025).

Turkey's Claims for BRICS Membership

Turkey's interest in joining BRICS can be traced back to 2018, when the country was invited to the 10th annual summit of the initiative in Johannesburg, as the head of the rotating presidency of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. President Erdoğan attended the meeting and interpreted the invitation as a significant opportunity for Turkey's potential inclusion in the group. In his address during this meeting, Erdoğan emphasised the prospective trajectory of cooperation between Turkey and BRICS members and even referred to Turkey's membership by using the term BRICST (Daily Sabah, 2018). Consequently, following this initial high-level engagement, discussions surrounding Turkey's aspiration to join BRICS gained greater momentum.



Beyond its general desire to develop relations with key countries of the Global South, Turkey's interest in BRICS, one of the key players in the non-Western camp, is driven by a combination of economic, strategic, and ideological considerations. Among these, economic motivations, particularly the vast market potential of BRICS member states, play a pivotal role in informing Turkey's engagement with the group, especially in the context of ongoing economic challenges such as high inflation and the depreciation of the Turkish lira (OECD, 2023). Illustrating this perspective, on November 14, 2024, Reuters reported statements by President Erdoğan, noting that "Ankara sees the BRICS group as an opportunity to further economic cooperation with member states, rather than as an alternative to its Western ties and NATO membership" (Reuters, 2024a). However, the weakness of BRICS as a well-developed financial framework and trade network (Helleiner & Wang, 2018) makes Turkey's economic expectations somewhat speculative compared to its resilient economic ties with the West. From a strategic and political perspective, as previously noted in this study, Turkey has become increasingly disillusioned with its Western partners. The prolonged stagnation of its EU accession process and persistent tensions with NATO allies have contributed to Ankara's growing aspiration to operate as an independent global actor engaging with others. Ideologically, the BRICS' emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolarity resonates with Turkey's own rhetorical stance in international affairs, which calls for a more just world order and its broader ambition to advocate for comprehensive system reform. Turkey is no longer content with an ideological commitment that equates Westernisation with modernisation and democratisation. This does not mean, however, that it rejects the liberal international order entirely; instead, Turkey aims to engage with it on its own terms, especially with a foreign policy vision that prioritises flexibility, diversification, and regional actorness.

President Erdoğan and other Turkish officials have made several public statements indicating Turkey's interest in BRICS, including their expectation of an invitation. On numerous occasions, this interest has been articulated in parallel with frustrations over the stagnation of the country's EU accession process. As such, discussions surrounding BRICS membership within the Turkish context have often served as a vehicle for expressing disillusionment with the trajectory of EU-Turkey relations (DW, 2024). This suggests that within the mindset of Turkey's ruling elites, there is a prevailing tendency to view BRICS and the EU as alternative, and at times competing frameworks for international engagement. In terms of population and economic capacity, BRICS holds significant potential. However, from a political point of view, its record on democracy and human rights remains unpromising (Bacık, 2013). Turkey's still enduring dream of modernisation in the form of democratisation, which is very much in line with the ideal of EU membership, does not fit comfortably into the BRICS framework. Moreover, the growing geopolitical tensions between key actors of the West and the BRICS bloc risk complicating Turkey's efforts to maintain a calibrated balance in its foreign policy. As Ankara seeks to diversify its strategic and economic partnerships beyond traditional Western alliances, these rivalries may limit its room for manoeuvre, forcing difficult choices between competing power centres and potentially undermining its pursuit of strategic autonomy. Hence, Ankara needs to find an innovative way to leverage new alliances without jeopardising the benefits of its existing partnerships.



BRICS has issued several declarations referring to its expansion into various world regions, such as Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, making its intention to include countries from these areas as members (BRICS, 2024). However, despite strengthened bilateral relations with individual BRICS members, Turkey was not explicitly mentioned as a potential member in any of these declarations. In 2024, Turkey's membership in the BRICS turned into a heated debate after Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates were accepted as BRICS members. Even the earlier membership of South Africa, which is comparable to Turkey in terms of economic size and relative proximity to the West, was a strong signal for Turkey (Lissovolik & Vinokurov, 2019). During his official visit to China in June 2024, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan was asked whether Turkey would be interested in joining BRICS. In response, he briefly stated, "We would like to, of course, why wouldn't we?", thereby refraining from providing a detailed explanation of the country's official stance (Reuters, 2024b). Minister Fidan gave another briefing the same month and made Turkey's position on BRICS more precise: "When we look at the BRICS issue, we have to follow very closely how alternative economic platforms are being formed in the world and how markets are being formed... All these alternative platforms, in fact, we should see them as complementary rather than alternative to each other, and we are making serious efforts to evaluate these platforms in favour of our country" (Demir, 2024).

In the absence of a formal statement, media reports in September 2024 suggested that Turkey had been invited to join the BRICS, a reflection of its efforts to increase its global influence and forge new partnerships beyond traditional Western allies (Hacaoğlu & Kozok, 2024). The media also reported that Turkey made an official application for membership at the annual BRICS summit in Russia on 22-24 October 2024 (Waldman, 2024). This act is very much in line with President Erdoğan's official statement in early September that "Turkey can become a strong, prosperous, respected and effective country if it improves its relations with the East and the West at the same time" (Hacaoğlu & Kozok, 2024). Turkey thus became the first NATO country to apply for BRICS membership.

The absence of well-defined membership criteria compels the BRICS to evaluate each membership application on a case-by-case basis (Lissovolik & Vinokurov, 2019). The reaction of the existing BRICS members to Turkey's membership has been cautiously receptive. However, there is clearly a lack of unanimity. Turkey's geographic position as a Eurasian bridge and its NATO membership could lend BRICS additional geopolitical weight, particularly regarding Euro-Atlantic institutions. China and Russia, key proponents of BRICS enlargement, may view Turkey's accession as a strategic gain. President Putin also expressed his satisfaction with Turkey's aspiration to align more closely with BRICS, emphasising its desire for cooperation in addressing common challenges and reaffirmed his support for Turkey's bid for membership (PBS News, 2024). In contrast to Russia, China maintained a somewhat ambiguous stance on this issue, mainly due to the persistent tensions arising from the divergent sensitivities of both countries regarding the Uyghur issue (Akin, 2024). In addition, reports have suggested that India holds a negative stance toward Turkey's potential BRICS membership, primarily due to Turkey's close ties with Pakistan and its support for Pakistan in the Kashmir conflict (Bellut, 2024). India has not issued any formal statements or produced



any official discourse regarding Turkey's potential membership in BRICS. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has offered insights into India's general position on the admission of new members, stating: "India is ready to welcome new countries as BRICS partner countries. All decisions in this regard should be made unanimously, and the views of the founding members of BRICS should be respected" (Times of India, 2024). Meanwhile, South Africa and Brazil are likely to evaluate Turkey's bid based on its contributions to global South agendas and development cooperation, wary of diluting BRICS' cohesion through overly rapid expansion (Stuenkel, 2015).

In response to reports suggesting that India is blocking Turkey's accession to BRICS, Turkish officials have come up with denials. The Turkish Minister of Trade Ömer Bolat emphasized that "there is no question of India vetoing our membership" (Associated Press, 2024), while former diplomat Sinan Ülgen noted that "there was 'no need to veto' Turkey's membership, as the issue was not voted upon at the recent BRICS meet in Kazan, Russia" (Varma, 2024).

Western governments have responded to Turkey's BRICS overtures with a mixture of concern and pragmatic recognition. Turkey's potential BRICS membership is particularly sensitive given its NATO status, raising fears of divided loyalties within the alliance (Kirişci, 2020). Turkish officials have repeatedly said potential membership of BRICS would not affect Turkey's responsibilities to the Western military alliance (Reuters, 2024a). At the same time, some Western analysts interpret Turkey's manoeuvre as a strategic play rather than a definitive shift in allegiance (Öniş & Uluyol, 2025). Ankara has a history of transactional diplomacy, leveraging its geostrategic location and political relevance to extract concessions from both East and West (Gökay, 2024). In this sense, Turkey's BRICS bid could be seen as a bargaining chip aimed at gaining greater recognition and autonomy within existing Western-led institutions. This is understandable, as Turkey is unlikely to leave its long-established position in Western institutions.

According to Channel News Asia's coverage, Turkey's partner country status was approved at the last BRICS meeting. The country listed among the 13 nations will be waiting to join (Norman, 2024). By taking such a decision, the BRICS gained some time to observe whether Turkey's rapprochement is a periodic change or not, as Turkey is still institutionally, politically, economically and militarily cooperating with the West (Ari, 2022). But the partnership status seems to be falling short of Turkey's expectation of attaining full membership in BRICS, an outcome that would offer the country an opportunity to maintain a more balanced relationship between the West and the East (Reuters, 2024a). If this is indeed the case, there is the potential for Turkey to experience a kind of disillusionment in its engagement with BRICS. Therefore, the issue has not received much media coverage in Turkey, unless the top leadership mentions it.

Conclusion

This study has examined the recent transformation of Turkish foreign policy amid shifting global and domestic dynamics, including the decline of unipolarity, the rise of new powers, the enduring impact of the failed July 15 coup attempt, and the rise of populism.



Within this framework, Turkey's evolving approach to Westernism has been critically analysed in relation to its bid for BRICS membership.

Historically anchored in a pro-Western orientation, Turkey's foreign policy over the past two decades has increasingly diverged due to growing frustration with the West and a sense of marginalisation within the Western bloc. This has led to oscillations between Westernism and anti-Westernism, culminating in a more pragmatic and self-reliant form of Westernism. This new orientation seeks to balance traditional Western alliances with alternative partnerships, such as those offered by BRICS, reflecting a strategic recalibration rather than outright rejection.

Turkey's pivot toward non-Western platforms like BRICS is thus closely tied to its evolving stance on Westernism. BRICS represents not only an economic opportunity but also a geopolitical counterbalance to the West, with its emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolarity resonating with Turkey's current foreign policy discourse. Turkey's renewed expressions of interest in BRICS, particularly during periods of heightened tension with Western powers, underscore a calculated effort to diversify its foreign policy options and enhance its autonomy.

In this light, Turkey's engagement with BRICS is best understood as a rational strategy aimed at balancing its diminishing alignment with Western institutions by cultivating alternative global partnerships. Rather than signalling a definitive break from the West, this strategy reflects Ankara's desire to maximise its leverage in an increasingly multipolar international order by pivoting between established and emerging power blocs, through a more flexible engagement allowing it to safeguard its national interest.

Moving forward, Turkey's evolving relationship with both Western institutions and emerging platforms like BRICS will be a key indicator of its broader international ambitions and strategic positioning. The interactions and reactions between BRICS members and Turkey's traditional Western allies highlight the complexities involved in navigating divergent institutional loyalties and geopolitical commitments. As BRICS broadens its influence and inclusiveness, Turkey's possible membership could signal a pivotal shift in global governance and a transformation of traditional alliances in the twenty-first century.

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