

BRICS POLICIES TOWARDS THE UNITED NATIONS, WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION AND EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

The BRICS bloc, initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, expanded in 2023 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, forming what is now informally called BRICS+. With 13 additional partner countries, such as Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, BRICS represents a population of 3.27 billion, around 41.13% of the world's total and contributes 32% of global GDP. Leveraging this demographic and economic power, BRICS seeks to influence global governance, particularly within the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and in its relations with the European Union (EU). This study is anchored on realist theory, while secondary data were used for the study and content analysis was used to evaluate the effectiveness of BRICS policies toward these institutions. It is argued that BRICS collectively challenges Western dominance by advocating for reforms that enhance the voice of emerging economies. At the UN, BRICS supports reforming the Security Council to reflect today's geopolitical realities. Within the WTO, it promotes a transparent, rules-based, and inclusive trading system. While BRICS does not engage the EU as a unified bloc, individual member states interact with the EU independently. Nevertheless, the bloc has jointly criticised the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), viewing it as a veiled protectionist policy that harms BRICS exporters. The study concludes by recommending that BRICS strengthen its advocacy for UN reform, maintain a united front for equitable WTO rules, and deepen diplomatic engagement with the EU based on mutual respect and fair economic practices.

Keywords

BRICS Plus, United Nations, WTO, EU, G7, Policies, Power, Economy.

Resumo

O bloco BRICS, inicialmente composto por Brasil, Rússia, Índia, China e África do Sul, expandiu-se em 2023 para incluir Egito, Etiópia, Irão e Emirados Árabes Unidos, formando o que hoje é informalmente chamado de BRICS+. Com 13 países parceiros adicionais, como Argélia, Bielorrússia, Bolívia, Cuba, Indonésia, Cazaquistão, Malásia, Nigéria, Tailândia, Turquia, Uganda, Uzbequistão e Vietname, o BRICS representa uma população de 3,27 mil milhões, cerca de 41,13% do total mundial, e contribui com 32% do PIB global. Aproveitando esse poder demográfico e económico, o BRICS busca influenciar a governança global, particularmente dentro das Nações Unidas (ONU), da Organização Mundial do Comércio (OMC)



e nas suas relações com a União Europeia (UE). Este estudo está ancorado na teoria realista, enquanto dados secundários foram usados para o estudo e a análise de conteúdo foi usada para avaliar a eficácia das políticas do BRICS em relação a essas instituições. Argumenta-se que o BRICS desafia coletivamente o domínio ocidental, defendendo reformas que aumentem a voz das economias emergentes. Na ONU, o BRICS apoia a reforma do Conselho de Segurança para refletir as realidades geopolíticas atuais. Na OMC, promove um sistema comercial transparente, baseado em regras e inclusivo. Embora o BRICS não se envolva com a UE como um bloco unificado, os Estados-membros individuais interagem com a UE de forma independente. No entanto, o bloco criticou conjuntamente o Mecanismo de Ajustamento Carbónico nas Fronteiras (CBAM) da UE, considerando-o uma política protecionista velada que prejudica os exportadores do BRICS. O estudo conclui recomendando que o BRICS reforce a sua defesa da reforma da ONU, mantenha uma frente unida para regras equitativas da OMC e aprofunde o envolvimento diplomático com a UE com base no respeito mútuo e em práticas económicas justas.

Palavras-chave

BRICS Plus, Nações Unidas, OMC, UE, G7, Políticas, Poder, Economia.

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Introduction

The word *BRIC* was an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, and China, which was first coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill in his research paper titled *Building Better Global Economic BRICs*, in 2001. He argued that the growth of Brazil, Russia, India, and China was poised to challenge the G7 nations, describing the growth as significant in reshaping the international economy (O'Neill, 2001).

Moreover, Brazil, Russia, India, and China began formal diplomatic engagement with each other in 2006 on how to strengthen their economic tie. The first BRIC summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009. In 2010, South Africa was invited by the BRIC nations to join their economic platform, thereby expanding the BRIC platform into *BRICS* (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) (BRICS, 2010). Since then, BRICS nations have transformed into a significant multilateral political and economic platform within the global economy, advocating for critical reforms in international governance and promoting a more multipolar world order as opposed to the present unipolar world order dominated by the United States.

In recent years, a number of reasons have been advanced in the literature of International Political Economy for the growing influence of BRICS countries, particularly China and India. One of the reasons has been attributed to the growing population of China and India, as both nations possess massive populations that serve as both sources of consumer market and labour sources. Besides, many BRICS nations have undergone accelerated industrialisation and urban development, such as China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa, leading to increased productivity, infrastructure expansion, and manufacturing output (Stuenkel, 2020).

Similarly, BRICS nations are continuously diversifying their economy beyond primary commodities into manufacturing and services. For instance, Brazil is expanding its agribusiness sector, India is developing its services and tech sectors, while China has become a global leader in manufacturing and green technology. It is also important to note that high levels of public investment in infrastructure, education, and research and development have enabled BRICS countries, especially China and India, to enhance their competitiveness and productivity at the international level (World Bank, 2023). Also, BRICS states tend to promote economic cooperation among developing countries,



thereby facilitating trade, investment, and political solidarity. This effort helps to strengthen their bargaining power in global institutions like the UN and WTO (Gasper et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) by BRICS states provides alternative sources of finance and monetary support to member states and helps in reducing dependency on Western-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Cooper, 2021). Consequently, BRICS states such as Russia, Brazil, and South Africa are endowed with abundant energy, minerals, and agricultural resources, making them critical players in global commodity markets, especially amid rising global demand for rare earth.

In contemporary times, BRICS states are beginning to forge bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, thereby expanding their influence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, through the promotion of de-dollarisation in trade settlements, which has continued to enhance BRICS states' monetary autonomy (Thakur, 2020). Although, despite global slowdowns, BRICS nations such as India and China have continued to record robust GDP growth, contributing significantly to global economic expansion and lifting millions out of poverty.

Since the formation of BRICS, the international political and economic order has undergone significant changes, with the BRICS nations increasingly challenging Western dominance within the international system. Over the years, BRICS nations have evolved from a theoretical economic construct into a significant geopolitical bloc that now actively shapes global governance debates. One of the requirements for the selection of the BRICS nations was based on their population size, natural resource endowments, economic growth trajectories, and potential for global influence.

Furthermore, the BRICS and G7 are two influential global blocs representing the emerging political and economic power centres within the international system. While the G7 as of today consists of advanced industrialised nations with high per capita income, such as the U.S., Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Germany and Japan. BRICS includes major emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Other newly admitted members of the BRICS include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE, with partners such as Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan. The strategic goals of the G7 are to lead global policy on security, climate change, pandemic response and global finance, while BRICS seeks to pursue multipolarity, financial alternatives to Western-led institutions, promote trade in local currencies and reform the United Nations, especially the United Nations Security Council and World Bank structures. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the efficacy of the BRICS policies towards the United Nations, the WTO and the European Union.

Literature Review

There are growing empirical studies that indicate BRICS collective action in seeking UN Security Council reform to better reflect contemporary global realities. For instance,



Mearsheimer (2001) argues that power transitions usually influence institutional redesign, which supports BRICS' demands for a new world order that is multipolar in nature. In a content analysis of BRICS summit declarations (2009–2022), Stuenkel (2015) found repeated calls by BRICS for equitable representation and greater roles for developing countries in global governance. This has been demonstrated by China and Russia at the UN Security Council to check Western hegemony, while BRICS nations such as India, Brazil, and South Africa have continued to lobby for permanent seats at the UN Security Council.

Bond (2016), using qualitative interviews with diplomats, documented how India and Brazil use multilateral forums to push for UN reform. However, Bond (2016) argued that the internal contradictions within BRICS have continued to impede this effort. Similarly, Acharya (2017) empirically traced the shift from Western liberal hegemony to a multipolar world order, emphasising how BRICS' coordinated positions at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have continued to reflect a broader move towards norm diffusion rather than outright rejection of liberal institutionalism.

However, Sinha and Mishra (2020) in their study observed that China and India increasingly file and defend cases, challenging EU and U.S. agricultural and intellectual property policies at the WTO. They further argued that BRICS have adopted both defensive and proactive stances in their engagement against the EU and the U.S in many fora. Furthermore, Sinha and Mishra (2020) employed data from WTO dispute settlement proceedings in their study to back up their argument. Consequently, Hopewell (2018) in his study argues that BRICS Trade Ministers' Meetings have continued to emphasise the preservation of the multilateral trading system. Hopewell (2018) further shows how India and Brazil act as "norm entrepreneurs" in resisting trade liberalisation by Western nations that undermines domestic industries in the Global South. In a related study, Hopewell (2016) argued that China's support for Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) has been documented in WTO archives and debates, underscoring BRICS' solidarity with the developing countries around the world. In the same vein, Bond (2016) has argued that empirical data have revealed growing divergences, especially in China's economic clout, which often sidelines other BRICS members, and South Africa's weaker bargaining power has limited its strategic influence at the international level.

Empirical evidence from Stuenkel (2015) and Bond (2016) shows that while the EU seeks to engage BRICS as a body, BRICS countries prefer bilateral engagement with the EU due to divergent interests. Evidence from the WTO indicates that between 2009 and 2022, the EU filed 34 complaints against BRICS+ countries, while BRICS+ countries, on the other hand, filed 16 complaints against the EU (WTO Dispute Settlement Database, 2023). Therefore, BRICS-EU relations are complex and marked by both dialogue and dispute.

Furthermore, Acharya (2017) argues that despite overlapping economic interests, BRICS members are sceptical of EU normative agendas, especially on climate change and human rights, as EU-BRICS dialogue forums have shown limited coherence. For instance, empirical studies from the European Council on Foreign Relations revealed BRICS resistance to EU conditionalities in trade and aid negotiations. Nevertheless, empirical studies have also shown that the BRICS collective influence has continued to challenge Western dominance and remains critical in reshaping global institutional norms.



On the whole, from the review of empirical literature, BRICS adopts strategic interest-based policies toward the UN, WTO, and EU, while unified in statement, internal asymmetries and conflicting national interests have continued to undermine BRICS cohesion. Therefore, from the review of literature, there is a gap in the literature, such as Mearsheimer (2001), Stuenkel (2015), Bond (2016), Hopewell (2018), Acharya (2017), and Sinha and Mishra (2020) on a comparative study of BRICS policies towards the UN, WTO, and EU in a single study. It is against this background that this study seeks to interrogate the efficacy of the BRICS policies towards the trio of multilateral platforms (United Nations, WTO and the European Union).

Theoretical Framework

Scholars in International relations have developed a number of theories for the study of multilateralism, such as constructivism, dependency theory and realism. Constructivism focuses on identity, norms, and shared ideas among states at the international level. BRICS presents itself as a platform for developing countries at the international level or the voice of the Global South in promoting sovereignty among nations, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations, and a promoter of development-oriented norms at the international level. At the UN, BRICS have continued to advocate for multipolarity as a normative value by insisting on a world order that represents the diversity of global cultures. In the WTO, BRICS usually promotes equity and justice in trade rules. With the EU, BRICS has continued to challenge the Eurocentric narratives or posture of the EU, while still engaging in norm diffusion on issues of trade and climate change. For instance, most BRICS communiqués have continuously sought to promote “inclusive global governance” and the significance of cultural diversity in the developmental processes (Acharya, 2017).

However, Dependency theory argues that international capitalism benefits core (developed) states while underdeveloping the periphery (developing). BRICS policies often seek to reverse this imbalance in the International Political Economy. At the UN, BRICS demand more equitable representation for the Global South. At the WTO, BRICS also challenge contemporary neocolonial trade structures and demand technology transfer to the Global South. BRICS engagement with the EU involves resisting trade conditionalities and pushing back against exploitative investment practices. For instance, BRICS countries continued to criticise the EU’s carbon border tax as a strategy of green protectionism that has continued to undermine the industrial growth of developing nations (Bond, 2016).

According to realism, states act mainly in pursuit of power and national interest at the international level. Therefore, BRICS nations seek to challenge the dominance of Western powers in notable international institutions. For instance, at the United Nations, BRICS have been advocating for the reform of the United Nations Security Council in order to allow for the expansion of a permanent member seat that will ensure the representation of developing nations and balance Western hegemony. In the WTO, BRICS often defends the “trade interests” of the developing nations by opposing the European Union and the United States’ agricultural subsidies. It is important to note that BRICS engagement with the European Union is a clear reflection of its strategic hedging cooperation, where



interests align particularly in the area of trade and climate, but at variance with the issue of a multipolar world order. Today, Russia and China have continued to veto many United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at promoting Western hegemony, which has further demonstrated that states pursue their strategic interests under realist persuasion (Mearsheimer, 2001).

From the foregoing analysis of constructivism, dependency theory and realism to the study of BRICS policies towards the UN, WTO and EU. This study recognises the relevance of constructivism and dependency theory as a useful framework for analysis of BRICS policies towards the UN, WTO and EU, but considers realism as the most effective theoretical framework to explain BRICS policies towards the UN, WTO, and EU due to the BRICS strategic pursuit of influence and security in the international arena. For instance, at the UN, BRICS' continuous advocacy for the reform of the UN Security Council is not merely for inclusivity, but to gain hard institutional power (Stuenkel, 2015). Again, at the WTO, BRICS have continued to pursue national economic interests, protecting domestic industries and forming coalitions to counterbalance Western trade dominance. In BRICS relations with the EU, the bloc has continued to act pragmatically by engaging in partnerships that are beneficial but outrightly rejects Western overreach, perceived issues such as human rights or sanctions. On the whole, realism as a framework of analysis in this study captures the geopolitical calculations, strategic alignments, and power-maximising behaviour that underpin BRICS's multilateral engagements at the international level.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected from secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journal articles and BRICS statements, resolutions, communiqués, and policy documents. Content analysis was used to examine statements, resolutions, communiqués, and policy documents from BRICS. This includes the BRICS joint statement on South Africa's admission on December 24, 2010; the Sixth BRICS Summit – Fortaleza Declaration from July 15, 2014; the 15th BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration from August 24, 2023; the Third BRICS Summit Declaration from April 14, 2011; the Joint Declaration of the 15th BRICS Trade Ministers Meeting from May 21, 2025, World Bank, World Trade Organization, *Bali Ministerial Declaration* of December 7, 2013 and WTO Dispute Settlement Database (2023). These documents relate to the UN, WTO, and EU. They express support for multilateralism, call for reform, trade liberalisation, and protectionism, along with criticism of Western dominance and cooperation with the EU. The reason for using content analysis is that these primary official documents show how BRICS collectively states its positions. This approach ensures reliability instead of relying on secondary interpretations. Additionally, these documents come directly from official BRICS platforms, providing authentic insights into BRICS' stance. They also reveal how BRICS balances cooperative and confrontational attitudes toward global institutions.



BRICS Contribution to World Economic Growth in relation to G7

The BRICS is the acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and the G7 consist of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which represent two significant blocs shaping global economic dynamics. While the G7 symbolises the world's most advanced economies, the BRICS reflects a coalition of emerging powers from the Global South with increasing influence in global economic governance (Stuenkel, 2020).

Available statistics from the IMF show that in 2024, BRICS accounts for approximately 32% of global GDP on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, surpassing the G7's share of about 30% (IMF, 2024). The key drivers of BRICS' growth are China and India, which have continued to post higher economic growth rates relative to G7 nations, benefiting from large populations, expanding markets, and a relatively youthful population (World Bank, 2023). In contrast, G7 economies face structural constraints such as ageing populations and slower productivity growth, though they remain dominant in innovation, capital markets, and institutional governance (OECD, 2022).

It is pertinent to note that BRICS has made notable strides in creating alternative financial mechanisms, such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), aimed at reducing dependency on Western-led institutions like the IMF and World Bank (Cooper, 2021). This reflects BRICS' strategic ambition to shape a multipolar global financial system. Meanwhile, G7 countries maintain control over major global financial and trade institutions and dominate international aid, investment, and technology flows (Kirtan, 2018).

Moreover, while the G7 emphasises preserving the liberal international order, promoting democracy, and addressing transnational threats such as climate change and pandemics, BRICS emphasises reforming the global governance architecture to reflect the voices of developing nations. The bloc has consistently called for restructuring the UN Security Council and the WTO to make them more representative and equitable (Thakur, 2020).

Despite divergent approaches, both blocs are indispensable to global economic growth. BRICS contributes by fueling development-led growth, especially across Asia and Africa, while the G7 contributes through advanced industrial capacity, financial innovation, and global regulatory standards. Therefore, rather than competition alone, enhanced cooperation between BRICS and G7 is crucial for addressing shared global challenges, including climate change, digital transformation, and geopolitical instability (Gasper et al., 2023). Table 1 below shows the share of BRICS contribution to World Economic Growth (2024-2029).

Table 1 shows that the BRICS contribution to World Economic Growth between 2024 and 2029 is estimated at 44.3 per cent. Brazil is expected to contribute 1.8 per cent, Russia 1.8 per cent, India 14.2percent, China 21.2 per cent, South Africa 0.3 per cent, Egypt 1.5 per cent, Iran 0.9 per cent, Saudi Arabia 1.5 per cent, United Arab Emirates 0.7 per cent and Ethiopia 0.4 per cent. From the above data, India and China will jointly contribute 35.4 per cent to global economic growth between 2024 and 2029, making both countries the largest BRICS countries that will contribute the largest share to Global Economic Growth. The implication is that India and China's contributions to Global Economic Growth will surpass that of other BRICS countries combined. This shows that



India and China's economies remain critical in the development of Global Economic Growth.

Table 1. Showing BRICS Contribution to World Economic Growth (2024-2029)

| Country | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Brazil | 1.8% |
| Russia | 1.8% |
| India | 14.2% |
| China | 21.2% |
| South Africa | 0.3% |
| Egypt | 1.5% |
| Iran | 0.9% |
| Saudi Arabia | 1.5% |
| United Arab Emirates | 0.7% |
| Ethiopia | 0.4% |
| Total | 44.3% |

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook (April 2024)

Table 2 shows that the G7 nations' Contribution to Global Economic Growth between 2024 and 2029 is estimated at 20.1 per cent of Global Economic Growth. Japan is expected to contribute 1.8 per cent, France 1.4 per cent, the United Kingdom 1.5 per cent, Germany 1.7 per cent, Canada 1.0 per cent, Italy 0.8 per cent and the United States 11.9 per cent. This further shows that the United States will be the largest contributor among the G7 nations to Global Economic Growth. The implication is that the United States will contribute 50percent of the entire Global Economic Growth of the G7 nations.

Table 2. Showing G7 Contribution to World Economic Growth (2024-2029)

| Country | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| Japan | 1.8% |
| France | 1.4% |
| United Kingdom | 1.5% |
| Germany | 1.7% |
| Canada | 1.0% |
| Italy | 0.8% |
| United States | 11.9% |
| Total | 20.1% |

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook (April 2024)

However, comparative analysis of data from Table 1 and Table 2 shows that the BRICS contributions to Global Economic Growth are estimated at 44.3 per cent, while the G7 is estimated at 20.1percent. Other nations that are neither BRICS nor G7 are expected to contribute 35.6percent of Global Economic Growth. A critical analysis of the above data shows that the percentage of BRICS to Global Economic Growth will surpass that of the G7 in the years under review. The implication of the above findings shows that BRICS,



especially India and China, remain key drivers of future Global Economic Growth based on the present assessment of their economic performance.

Consequently, a comparative analysis of BRICS and G7 contributions to Global Economic Growth in 2001, 2023 and 2060 projections is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Showing a Comparative Analysis of G7 and BRICS Contributions to Global GDP in PPP terms (2001, 2023 and 2060)

| YEAR | G7 | BRICS |
|-------------|------------|------------|
| 2001 | 43% | 19% |
| 2023 | 30% | 32% |
| 2060 | 19% | 45% |

Source: OECD (2022), IMF (2024)

Table 3 above shows that in 2001, the contributions of G7 to Global GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms were estimated at 43 per cent, while the BRICS was 19 per cent. In 2023, the contributions of the G7 to Global GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms were estimated at 30 per cent, while BRICS nations' contributions to Global GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms rose from an earlier 19 per cent to 32 per cent, with a 13 per cent increase. In 2060, it is projected that G7 contributions to Global GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms will decrease to 19 per cent, showing an 11 per cent decrease. The implication of the above findings shows that BRICS contributions to Global GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms by 2060 surpass that of the G7 by 26 per cent. This will, among other things, help the BRICS nations to influence global trade.

BRICS and G7: Contrasting Institutional Strategies at the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is a multilateral platform where global powers pursue their strategic interests through institutional engagement. Both the BRICS and the G7 use the UN to shape multilateral decision-making. However, their institutional strategies differ greatly because of their geopolitical positions, economic priorities, and governance views. The G7's approach at the UN is rooted in its commitment to liberal internationalism and multilateral cooperation. It aims to uphold the rules-based order established after World War II. The G7 countries, on the other hand, have consistently taken advantage of their economic and financial strength to support UN programmes by focusing on issues of democracy promotion, human rights protection, humanitarian aid, and ensuring sustainable development (Luckhurst, 2020). For example, G7 members often coordinate their voting patterns and diplomatic efforts in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. They often push for resolutions related to humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping, and sanctions, especially in situations like Syria and North Korea (Patrick, 2019). The BRICS strategy relies on working together, with the G7 acting as an informal group to unify their positions before formal negotiations at the UN.

BRICS focuses on challenging Western dominance and promoting a multipolar world within the UN system. BRICS countries coordinate their actions to push back against what they see as Western overreach, especially regarding issues like sovereignty, intervention,



and development financing. For instance, BRICS states often dispute the G7's view of the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P). They argue that more emphasis should be placed on state sovereignty and non-interference (Stuenkel, 2015). In the UN Security Council, Russia and China, both permanent members of the United Nations, have frequently used their veto power to overturn resolutions led by the West that are detrimental to the interests of the developing countries. Meanwhile, Brazil, India, and South Africa have continued to advocate for reforms in the Security Council to give more voice to emerging powers (Hodzi, 2019). This strategy reflects BRICS' long-term goal of reforming institutions to balance global governance.

Another significant difference lies in their approaches to development and economic governance. The G7 focuses on financing through established UN-related institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In contrast, BRICS promote alternatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB), which operates both alongside and outside traditional UN financing pathways. At the level of the UN, BRICS states have continued to highlight the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," especially in climate talks, to point out the differences between developed and developing countries (Bhandari, 2021). This approach contrasts with the G7's method of setting binding global standards and stressing accountability.

On the whole, the G7 uses the UN to strengthen and promote the liberal political and economic world order. Meanwhile, BRICS treat the UN as a platform to challenge Western dominance by calling for the reform of the UN Security Council and support for a multipolar world. These differing strategies reflect not only the tension between established and emerging powers but also the ongoing struggle over the legitimacy and future of global governance.

BRICS and G7: Divergent Policy Instruments at the WTO

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the main global forum for managing international trade among states. However, different economic groups around the world have shown significant differences in their strategies towards the WTO. Two of the most notable groups are the Group of Seven (G7), which consists of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Japan and Italy and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Both groups work with the WTO to influence outcomes that serve their interests, but they use different policy strategies that reflect their foundations, priorities, and political world views.

The first major difference in this strategy is in how they coordinate their activities and their institutional structures. For instance, BRICS is a loose group of emerging economies without a binding treaty or central institutions. This institutional setup of BRICS allows for more flexible but less unified policy tools at the WTO. Recently, BRICS members have increased their efforts to align their trade policies through initiatives such as the Contact Group on Economic and Trade Issues (CGETI), which facilitates trade-related discussions about WTO reforms and global trade challenges (CPPR, 2024). Although BRICS joint statements often highlight the need to restore the WTO's Appellate Body and strengthen the dispute resolution system, to reflect priorities that benefit developing countries (BRICS Research Institute, 2025). In contrast, the G7 consist of seven industrialised



nations that are committed to a strong level of policy and institutional unity. G7, during their annual summits, regularly release detailed statements that act as signals for political intentions and agreement before WTO meetings (CLAWS, 2024). Therefore, while BRICS relies on coordinated statements and flexible arrangements, the G7 uses formal declarations that are integrated into multilateral discussions.

Another difference is that BRICS and G7 focus on institutional reform versus political messaging. BRICS uses its policy tools to push for structural changes in the WTO that promote inclusiveness and uphold the special rights of developing countries. This is clear in BRICS' common position and calls for a fair, rules-based trading system and the reinforcement of developing countries' rights under WTO agreements (InfoBRICS, 2024; BRICS Research Institute, 2025). However, the G7 uses its strategies mainly to set agendas. Its statements often express shared values and indicate negotiation positions such as supporting flexibility in intellectual property for public health without making binding commitments (SDG Knowledge Hub, 2023). This contrast shows that BRICS focuses on the WTO's longevity and reform, while the G7 prioritises immediate political influence.

BRICS employs formal mechanisms such as summit resolutions, joint statements, and task groups to advocate for systemic reforms of the WTO, such as reviving the dispute resolution system (The BFT, 2024). In contrast, G7 strategies mainly come in the form of non-binding statements, serving as platforms for political expression rather than practical plans. For instance, during the WTO talks about trade-related aspects of intellectual property (TRIPS), the G7 utilised summit statements to support flexibility for vaccine licensing within the Doha Declaration, while steering clear of institutional commitments that could limit their freedom (SDG Knowledge Hub, 2023).

In conclusion, BRICS and the G7 approach the WTO in fundamentally different ways. BRICS focuses on institutional reform, inclusiveness, and priorities for developing countries, using coordinated statements and specific working groups. Meanwhile, the G7 relies on non-binding statements and expressions of intent to signal priorities and maintain negotiating strength without making structural changes to the multilateral system. These differences mirror their broader roles in the global economy: The goal of BRICS is to adjust the activities of the WTO to address the challenges developing nations face, while the goal of the G7 is to maintain influence and reinforce its leadership in the contemporary international system.

BRICS and G7 Strategies Compared to the EU

The European Union (EU) represents one of the unique models of governance that combines shared sovereignty with collective decision-making at the international level. In contrast, both BRICS and G7 pursue noticeably different strategies in terms of structure, policies, and approaches. While the G7 often supports EU initiatives, BRICS tends to oppose EU-led agendas, focusing instead on multipolarity, sovereignty, and development.

The G7 shares many similarities with the EU, as both are rooted in liberal democracy, international rules, and open market policies (Kirton, 2020). This common ground



enables both the G7 and the EU to coordinate their efforts at the United Nations (UN) and World Trade Organisation (WTO). The G7 and EU policies often confront issues such as human rights, climate change, and global economic stability (Smith, 2021). For instance, the EU's Green Deal and the G7's commitments to climate finance often support one another, highlighting their shared goals for sustainability (Youngs & Panchulidze, 2020).

Besides, both the G7 and EU most often engage in diplomatic efforts to impose sanctions against states that threaten international stability, as seen in their unified response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Keukeleire & Raube, 2022). Therefore, the G7 acts as a supporter of the EU's liberal strategies. In contrast, BRICS adopt a different strategy that often contests the EU's leadership in setting norms. At the same time, the EU focuses on regulatory influence and spreading standards, especially in areas such as climate policy, trade, and human rights. BRICS emphasises sovereignty, non-interference, and development cooperation (Stuenkel, 2020).

BRICS also differs from the EU in economic and trade governance. The EU functions as a cohesive customs and regulatory block, while BRICS operates as a loose alliance without formal binding structures, relying on cooperation between governments (Roberts, Armijo, & Katada, 2018). This flexibility allows BRICS members to resist EU regulatory influence, such as the European Green Deal's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which BRICS views as protectionist and a threat to development goals (Bastos, 2022). Thus, BRICS focuses on strengthening its bargaining power, forming coalitions with other developing nations, and resisting EU influence.

Another major difference is the internal cohesion of these groups. The EU operates under a supranational model with binding institutions such as the European Commission and European Court of Justice. In contrast, both BRICS and G7 depend on intergovernmental consensus. However, the G7 is more aligned with the EU because of shared values and overlapping membership. On the other hand, BRICS deals with internal issues, such as tensions between China and India and South Africa's limited economic influence, which hinder its ability to effectively counter EU strategies (Hurrell, 2018). These internal challenges diminish BRICS' capacity to present a strong alternative to the EU, despite its emphasis on multipolarity.

In conclusion, the institutional strategies of BRICS and the G7 differ sharply when compared to the EU. The G7 supports EU liberal values, promoting a rules-based order based on democracy, free markets, and collective security. In contrast, BRICS challenges the EU's normative power by advocating for sovereignty and development priorities, while also facing hurdles related to internal unity. This positions the G7 as a natural ally for the EU in global governance, while BRICS serves as both a challenger and a counterbalance to European influence.

BRICS policies towards the United Nations

The policies of BRICS towards the United Nations have consistently focused on a comprehensive reform of the United Nations (UN) system, with reference to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in ensuring that there is fairer representation and



decision-making space for developing nations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil et al., 2025). These policies are anchored on the long-standing perceived imbalance in the United Nations governance structures, where five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council popularly known as the P5 which include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China has veto power, while emerging economies especially BRICS nations such as India, Brazil, and South Africa lack permanent representation at the United Nations Security Council.

One of the classic examples of this advocacy was seen at the 2011 BRICS Summit in Sanya, China, where BRICS member states unequivocally demonstrated their support for India, Brazil, and South Africa's aspirations for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. This further strengthens BRICS's position on the need to reform the UNSC to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities of the 21st century (BRICS Summit Declaration, 2011).

Similarly, at the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, in 2024, BRICS member states further reaffirmed their support and commitment to adherence to the United Nations Charter and advocated for Palestine's full participation in the UN, based on the two-state solution framework, which reflects past collective positions of BRICS on peace and security in the Middle East. This is in line with the BRICS long-standing position on the need for respect for international law and multipolar world order, as demonstrated during the 2014 Fortaleza Declaration, where BRICS leaders called for the United Nations to take decisive actions on issues relating to international security seriously while resisting unilateral military interventions by any state within the international system (BRICS Fortaleza Declaration, 2014).

Moreover, BRICS states, through their Foreign Ministers forum, have emphasised transparent, merit-based processes for senior UN appointments and equitable geographic representation, highlighting the need for diversity and preventing domination by a single bloc or country within the UN Secretariat (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil et al., 2025). A clear example of this principle was the BRICS joint statement in 2021, during António Guterres' reappointment as UN Secretary-General, where BRICS nations demanded a more open selection process for top UN roles, ensuring that developing nations' candidates were really considered (UN News, 2021).

However, progress has been negligible due to entrenched resistance from the current permanent members of the UN Security Council, who are reluctant to dilute their veto powers. Furthermore, internal divergences within BRICS, such as China's hesitancy to endorse India's UNSC ambitions, have slowed down cohesive lobbying efforts. As a result, BRICS has been more successful in raising awareness and keeping the reform debate active rather than enacting structural changes within the UN.

Conclusively, BRICS' unified stance has been instrumental in keeping the reform agenda alive at the UN General Assembly, where they often coordinate votes to reflect Global South interests (Stuenkel, 2020). Yet, critics have argued that internal contradictions like China's reluctance to endorse Japan or India's full UNSC ambitions are continuing to undermine the bloc's effectiveness (Alden & Vieira, 2018).



BRICS policies towards the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

The BRICS nations support the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as a critical institution for a transparent, rules-based, inclusive, and non-discriminatory international trading system, which has been encouraging. However, BRICS policies towards the WTO have been that it must evolve to reflect the shifting balance of economic power toward emerging markets. This position was reinforced during the 2011 Sanya BRICS Summit in China, where member states requested that WTO rules better accommodate Global South interests, especially in agriculture and intellectual property rights (BRICS Summit Declaration, 2011). BRICS have also consistently criticised protectionist practices by the Global South, such as agricultural subsidies by the European Union and the United States, which distort trade and harm Global South exporters. For instance, during the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference, BRICS countries advocated for food security provisions to protect farmers in countries like India and Brazil from the effects of subsidy-driven dumping by the Global South (WTO, 2013).

During the September 2024 BRICS Trade Ministerial Meeting in Moscow, BRICS nations agreed to create a policy coordination platform within the WTO to strengthen the voice of the developing nations in negotiations on digital trade, agricultural subsidies, and trade facilitation (Infobrics, 2024). This strategy was anchored on earlier efforts made by the bloc, such as the BRICS Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement of 2015, which sought to enhance coordination on trade rules, supply chains, and investment standards. The 2014 Fortaleza Declaration also underlined BRICS opposition to unilateral trade measures such as sanctions and tariffs, arguing that they undermine the spirit of WTO-based multilateralism (BRICS Fortaleza Declaration, 2014).

In a related development, in May 2025, the BRICS Joint Declaration, by its Trade Ministers, called for the restoration of the WTO Appellate Body, which has been redundant since 2019 due to the United States' refusal to appoint new judges (BRICS Trade Ministers, 2025). The implication of this is that the redundancy of the WTO Appellate Body that has affected international trade has been seen in the U.S.-China tariff disputes (2018-2020) (Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021). At present, U.S.-China tariff disputes have continued to hinder international trade due to the absence of a fully functioning appellate mechanism at the WTO. Today, BRICS nations have continued to argue that such dysfunction undermines the predictability of the current international trade order, which they seek to reinforce through multilateral dialogue and legal reform.

It is pertinent to note, however, that India and China have worked within BRICS to block harmful agricultural subsidy policies pushed by G7 nations, by building on joint positions right from the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference (WTO, 2013). Nevertheless, BRICS has not yet achieved significant reforms at the WTO due to resistance from developed economies, especially the U.S. and EU, which prioritise bilateral trade deals and new digital trade rules (Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021). The creation of a BRICS policy coordination platform during the 2024 Moscow summit is a step in the right direction, but the efficacy of this mechanism remains untested in shaping future WTO negotiations (Infobrics, 2024).

At the WTO level, BRICS has emerged as a defender of multilateral trade frameworks, opposing unilateral trade measures like the U.S.-China trade tariffs that disrupted global



markets. The bloc's insistence on reviving the Appellate Body and resisting protectionism was reaffirmed during the 2025 BRICS Trade Ministers' Meeting, where members stressed that any meaningful global trade order must give developing countries greater bargaining power. However, while BRICS' influence is evident in maintaining pressure for WTO reform, the organisation's slow pace of structural change and the rise of regional trade agreements (RTAs) have hindered concrete results. A classic example is the failure of WTO negotiations on agricultural subsidies, where, despite BRICS' joint stance, developed nations like the U.S. and EU have continued to maintain high domestic support for their farmers, undermining fair competition.

BRICS policies towards the European Union

It is pertinent to note that BRICS does not engage directly with the European Union (EU) as a bloc in official forums; rather, each BRICS member nation relates to the EU independently. In recent years, BRICS declarations have continuously shown strong criticism of EU-imposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAM), which were alleged as disguised protectionist measures that negatively affect competitive exporters from BRICS countries (India Today analysis of summit communiqué, 2025; Drishti IAS, 2025). Similarly, CBAM, which imposes tariffs on imports based on their carbon emissions, is seen by BRICS members, especially India, China, and South Africa, as an unfair trade barrier that disproportionately targets the Global South, which is still reliant on carbon-intensive industries. For instance, during the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), India and China jointly denounced unilateral carbon tariffs, arguing that they violated the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" under the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2021). Similarly, during the 2023 Johannesburg BRICS Summit, BRICS leaders warned that green tariffs such as the EU's CBAM risked "weaponising climate policies" against emerging markets, especially in steel and cement exports from Brazil, India, and South Africa (BRICS Johannesburg Declaration, 2023).

It is also important to note that BRICS does not name the EU explicitly in formal UN or WTO statements; it has condemned unilateral trade barriers, including CBAM and other green tariff mechanisms that seek to undermine the principles of fair trade and **equitable** development for developing nations (BRICS Trade Ministers, 2025). In related development, South Africa's Trade Minister, in a 2024 statement, criticised CBAM as violating WTO non-discrimination rules and announced plans to coordinate with BRICS partners to challenge the measure at the WTO level (Mail & Guardian, 2024). This replicates BRICS' wider opposition to climate-related trade barriers that disproportionately penalise the Global South while ignoring the historical emissions of advanced economies, especially the U.S, Britain, France, Italy and Canada.

BRICS' policies have largely centred on criticising climate-linked trade barriers, notably the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). BRICS leaders, particularly from India, China, and South Africa, have described CBAM as a form of "green protectionism" that penalises exporters from the Global South. For example, during the 2023 Johannesburg Summit, BRICS leaders issued a joint statement warning that CBAM and similar measures could increase the economic marginalisation of developing economies, particularly in industries like steel and cement. While these criticisms have drawn



international attention to the equity implications of climate trade policies, BRICS has not been able to significantly influence EU policymaking, which remains firmly committed to its Green Deal agenda. Instead, BRICS countries have been compelled to negotiate bilaterally with the EU rather than as a unified bloc, limiting their collective leverage.

BRICS has publicly condemned WTO policies, but the bloc lacks a coordinated enforcement mechanism to counter EU regulations because BRICS member states relate individually to the EU, which remains legally entrenched within the EU Green Deal framework. BRICS member states have instead resorted to bilateral negotiations with the EU, such as Brazil's talks on agricultural exports, rather than confronting the EU as a unified bloc (Drishti IAS, 2025). Today, BRICS has successfully framed CBAM as protectionist in global debates, but it is yet to alter the EU's implementation of such measures.

The EU has often favoured bilateral trade agreements instead of dealing with BRICS as a whole. Its agreements with Brazil, through Mercosur, and India, through free trade negotiations, show this preference (Meunier & Nicolaïdis, 2019). In contrast, BRICS does not have a unified trade policy. The differing economic models of its members, such as China's state-led capitalism, India's protectionism, and Brazil's focus on agricultural exports, make it hard to negotiate collectively (Hopewell, 2021). The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) impacts BRICS exporters directly, and their reactions differ. Russia views it as protectionism, Brazil sees it as a threat to its agricultural competitiveness, while China is cautiously negotiating compliance (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). This lack of a unified response weakens BRICS's ability to challenge the EU's trade power.

In terms of security, the EU focuses on multilateral conflict prevention, human rights, and a rules-based order. BRICS, on the other hand, prioritises sovereignty and non-interference (Stuenkel, 2020). Russia's conflict with the EU over Ukraine and China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific have put a strain on their relationship. India, although a BRICS member, tends to side more with the EU and the U.S. on security issues in the Indo-Pacific (Bava, 2021). South Africa, meanwhile, lacks the economic or military strength to significantly impact EU security policy. These differences show that while BRICS can criticise the EU's liberal interventionism, it does not have the internal unity needed to offer a clear alternative security approach.

Beyond climate issues, BRICS views the EU's agenda on human rights, democracy promotion, and digital governance as Eurocentric and sometimes intrusive (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010). For instance, Russia and China resist EU proposals for internet reforms based on data privacy and transparency because they see these as threats to digital sovereignty (Barkin & Senn, 2018). Similarly, Brazil and South Africa have mixed feelings. They support the EU's commitment to multilateralism but oppose conditions tied to development aid. Therefore, while the EU is seen as a strong "norm entrepreneur," BRICS' viewpoint is divided along geopolitical and developmental lines.

The internal divisions within BRICS greatly weaken its bargaining power against the EU. Rivalries between China and India, driven by border disputes and competition for EU trade and investment, hinder coordinated economic diplomacy (Hurrell, 2018). Russia's distancing from Europe since 2014 complicates collective negotiation. Moscow often tries



to undermine EU positions instead of working together. South Africa, despite representing BRICS' Global South identity, has limited influence because of its small economy, which reduces its ability to guide shared positions (Taylor, 2020). These divisions mean that while BRICS wants to balance EU influence in global governance, its fragmented strategies leave it reactive rather than proactive.

On the whole, the EU's relationship with BRICS involves both structural inequalities and disagreements over norms. The EU prefers bilateral deals over working collectively with BRICS, has an assertive security approach, and displays more normative power, highlighting its institutional maturity in comparison to BRICS. Yet, BRICS struggles to resolve its internal conflicts, especially between China and India or Russia and the West, diminishing its negotiating power against the EU. In the end, while the EU shows cohesive institutional strategies, BRICS is limited by conflicting national interests, undermining its effectiveness as a counterbalance in the global arena.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, BRICS policies toward the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and European Union (EU) are strategically aligned with the bloc's long-term goal of fostering a multipolar global order and protecting the economic and political interests of the developing nations. This approach represents a collective rejection of Western dominance in global institutions such as the UN, WTO and EU and a push for greater inclusion of emerging economies in global decision-making processes. Despite this strategic alignment, the efficacy of these policies remains mixed, as structural and geopolitical barriers continue to limit tangible outcomes. Therefore, this study has been able to provide a comparative analysis of BRICS policies towards the UN, WTO and EU, which were lacking in a single study in existing literature. Thus, this study has further strengthened existing literature within the framework of BRICS policies towards multilateral institutions such as the UN, WTO and EU in contemporary times.

Recommendations

- a. BRICS should intensify coordinated advocacy for United Nations Security Council reform, present a unified front for fairer World Trade Organisation rules that support development, and engage the European Union through strategic diplomacy that promotes mutual respect and counters protectionist tendencies.
- b. The United Nations should engage BRICS more directly in institutional reform dialogues to enhance inclusivity and legitimacy in global governance.
- c. The World Trade Organisation should facilitate more balanced trade negotiations by recognising BRICS' collective demands for fairer rules that reflect the developmental needs of emerging economies.
- d. The European Union should adopt a pragmatic partnership approach with BRICS by focusing on shared interests like climate change, digital economy, and global health, despite geopolitical divergences.



- e. BRICS should establish a permanent conflict-resolution and policy coordination mechanism to manage internal disparities in political systems, economic priorities, and strategic interests, thereby strengthening collective coherence and effectiveness.

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