



# global POLICY

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## A DECADE OF BRICS: Indian Perspectives for the Future

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

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The formation of BRICS was an unprecedented and unlikely event in history. Originally conceived as a handy acronym describing the emerging economies of the world, the economic term came into being as a political entity in 2006, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. The foreign ministers of Brazil, Russia, India, and China met during the conference and agreed to bring their respective heads of state together for annual summits to discuss shared political and economic interests. The inaugural summit meeting of the grouping, held in Yekaterinburg on June 16, 2009 was characterised by productive dialogue and a strengthening of relations. Subsequent meetings inspired a note-worthy addition to the coalition in 2011, as South Africa was invited to join, bringing the BRICS grouping to its full standing.

Observers of the geo-political world order have long espoused the refrain that BRICS is characterised by three I's – Ideology, Issues, and Institutions. Yet, the group's inception did not necessarily come about as result of common ideology – each nation had varying motivations dictating their decision to enter into the

grouping. Russia, rising from the ashes of the Soviet Union, viewed the possible alliance as a mechanism to bring change to the global governance architecture dominated by the US and its allies. China deemed the formation of the coalition a key measure in furthering its economic and political ambitions. Brazil saw BRICS as a vehicle through which it could transform itself from a regional power to a global power. South Africa, moving on from the ignominy associated with apartheid, needed the grouping to legitimise its standing in the world as the tallest leader in Africa. India saw BRICS as a ladder that would allow it to make the jump from the geo-economic assembly line to the high table of global management.

Despite the divergent rationales behind each member's motivation for joining the alliance, there remained some commonalities. The embedded power structures within the Western hemisphere were a key driver of aggregation for BRICS. Each member of the coalition believed that the existing global governance institutions did not allow them the influence due to them. Yet, none of the countries were capable of asking for significant change by themselves. They came to

the realisation they needed an entente that would force a more inclusive governance architecture. These were the foundational drivers that led to the creation of this group. Moreover, even as these five countries came together, there were two ideals around which BRICS would organise their cooperation. First, each nation's sovereignty would be paramount within the power structures of the world. Second, each state would seek greater democracy in the international decision-making process, regardless of domestic regimes.

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## To survive, BRICS must shift focus towards institutions and issues.

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As we approach the first decade of BRICS, the ideological incoherence among its members is apparent, as each nation continues to pursue its own agenda. Russia has capitalised on the malaise that plagued Europe and the United States after the 2009 financial crisis, positioning itself as the most important political player in the Middle East and perhaps even in Europe. Brazil and South Africa have succumbed once again to internal strife, as economic woes and systemic corruption force them to turn their focus inward. The divergent ideologies of the member states are perhaps most evident in the current border standoff between India and China as the latter's ambitions to dominate Asia becomes apparent. The proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides further indications of China's bid to ride roughshod over India's sovereign concerns.

Given the contemporary reality, it seems that BRICS nations will be unable to agree on a common political ideology. Therefore, in order for the alliance to survive, the focus must be shifted to the remaining two I's – Institutions and Issues. To manage the paradox of geo-

political tensions and mutually beneficial prospects, a greater focus must be placed on cooperating on key issues important to each nation and the continued institutionalisation of the grouping. The creation of affiliated organisations and bodies such as the New Development Bank and a convergence on matters significant to all five member nations will allow members to pursue sovereign interests while still permitting for the continued existence of the BRICS vehicle. This volume, featuring commentary from pre-eminent scholars and emerging next generation researchers, attempts to put forward measures that can separate and insulate the group from the vagaries of international discord.

The first chapter of the volume provides an overarching framework by examining the history of global governance structures which have long been dominated by developed nations from powerful geographies. In *BRICS Role in Global Governance Processes*, H.H.S. Viswanathan and Shubh Soni discuss the events that have led to the current state of affairs and the opportunities and challenges that can be derived from it. Viswanathan and Soni propose key areas that the BRICS grouping can focus on to better position themselves in the global framework, including a reformation of global taxation norms and an expansion of the mandate of the New Development Bank.

In the next chapter of the volume, Samir Saran and Aparajit Pandey attempt to address the gap in institutional cooperation among alliance members by putting forth the argument for the creation of a BRICS-centric research institution tied to the New Development Bank. *The Case for the New Development Bank Institute* illustrates how the new research organisation could provide institutional support for the New Development Bank. Saran and Pandey go on to propose avenues through which the institute could help BRICS develop intellectual heft in an increasingly data-driven world by focusing on

forward-thinking research streams such as the creation of a BRICS-centric digital free trade zone and the formation of a BRICS Energy alliance.

The theme of a BRICS Energy alliance is further elaborated upon in *Rebuilding BRICS through Energy*. In this chapter, Aparajit Pandey maps the energy profiles of each member nation and puts forth key areas where coordination can be mutually beneficial for all five member states, including the establishment of alternative oil benchmarks and the formation of a BRICS Energy Policy Institute.

While issues pertaining to international cooperation, open markets, and trade often dominate BRICS discussions, the development needs of the member nations must also be addressed. In *Scripting a New Development Paradigm*, Pulin B. Nayak looks at BRICS through a developmental prism, tracing the growth trajectory of all five member states. Nayak posits that the traditional development pathways espoused by Western scholars are outdated when applied to BRICS, and illustrates the need for new theories from academics and scholars indigenous to the BRICS countries.

The volume moves from theory to implementation as Vikrom Mathur looks at the current state of affairs with regards to BRICS and their achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). *BRICS and SDG's: Prospects of Mini-lateral Action on a Multilateral Agenda* suggests areas of cooperation for the grouping, including the restructuring of global systems to facilitate trade and development finance for emerging economies, and a strengthening of the existing SDG framework.

The volume continues on the theme of development by focusing on a crucial topic that concerns all nations – health. In *Common Health Challenges and Prospects for Cooperation in BRICS*, T.C. James outlines how the BRICS nations have historically dealt with

health challenges under the two global development frameworks – the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and its successor, the Sustainable Development Goals. James summarises each country's unique healthcare model before demonstrating the immense scope for collaboration amongst BRICS countries in healthcare-related fields such as pharmaceuticals and research.

Rising urbanisation trends and climate change effects have coalesced into developmental pressure points for cities within BRICS. Rumi Aijaz attempts to address these issues by proposing policymaking measures aimed at creating smart cities across member nations in *BRICS Vision for Smart Cities*. Suggestions include the formation of innovation hubs, facilitating citizen engagement, and creating international BRICS friendship parks.

The next area of discussion addresses the issue of gender, a topic that is often marginalised in global governance conversations. Urvashi Aneja and Vidisha Mishra help bring to light the institutional gender inequality that is endemic within the BRICS institutional framework, highlighting the issues of gendered language and lack of female leadership within the organisation. *Gendering the BRICS Agenda* goes on to suggest measures that can help catalyse female involvement across all ranges of BRICS activities and dimensions of collaboration.

While development is a vital matter of interest for BRICS, discussion on any world grouping is incomplete without due deliberation on issues of global security, both conventional and new. In *The BRICS Security Agenda: Challenges Galore*, Harsh Pant discusses the origins of BRICS and the commonalities that exist amongst the five member nations on security matters. Pant also highlights the security-related issues on which member states have differing attitudes, and calls for coordination on major international issues, lest political divergence break the coalition.

Having contemplated traditional security challenges, the volume shifts to the question of cyber security issues in an increasingly interconnected world. In *China's Cyber Sovereignty Vision – Can BRICS Concur?*, Madhulika Srikumar depicts the current state of global cyber norms and describes the cyber governance model championed by China. Srikumar goes on to explore the applicability of the Chinese model for the BRICS grouping, and proposes potential avenues of dialogue pertaining to cyber norms amongst alliance members.

The fortification of the BRICS alliance is incumbent upon collaboration across the areas of economics, development, and security that have been elucidated upon so far. To truly prosper, however, BRICS must also be forward thinking. The alliance must be willing to move beyond government to government linkages and occasional summits. While proposing policy mandates and governance measures is undoubtedly essential to any organisation, true progress and innovation comes from constituencies. Fostering conversation amongst the people, academia, and businesses of

member nations can unleash the creative energies of these groups, creating relationships stronger than any multilateral collaboration efforts can achieve.

One of the means that can be used to foster these interactions is in the digital world where member states reside next to each other in a virtual neighbourhood. Cyberspace presents limitless potential in the sectors of finance, trade, and intellectual partnership. By adopting new technology, BRICS can outmanoeuvre the governance structures of the old world.

The formation of BRICS was truly an important endeavour because of its unique approach to global governance. The alliance was born under the premise that every nation, regardless of its economic prowess or military might, had the right to a voice in international matters. While tensions between member states have thrown its future into doubt, if it can seize the economic, developmental, and security opportunities available, there is still potential for BRICS to change the global paradigms that have shaped the world this past century.