



BRICS: Brick by Brick to be an Alternative Global Framework (?)

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ABSTRACT

BRICS is an important emerging power that has gradually caught international attention. There have been several breakthroughs done by BRICS that made the existing dominant powers turn their head towards BRICS, the United States, for example. Throughout their annual summit, they persistently resonate with the importance of being more representative and inclusive in the context of world order. On the other hand, as an entity, it is still considered nebulous; some say it is a forum, a strategic partnership, and officially called itself an informal group of states as written on the BRICS' website. It raises the question of how BRICS can pursue a substantial goal of becoming an alternative global framework when it is still considered a nebulous entity. Instead of analyzing it through economic context as many studies on BRICS have done, the authors use the inclusive governance principles - a recent concept in understanding global order - to analyze BRICS' capability to become an alternative global framework.

Keywords: BRICS; inclusive; global framework; informal; institutionalization

ABSTRAK

BRICS adalah kekuatan baru yang penting yang secara bertahap telah menarik perhatian internasional. Terdapat beberapa terobosan yang dilakukan oleh BRICS yang membuat kekuatan dominan yang ada menoleh ke arahnya; Amerika Serikat misalnya. Sepanjang pertemuan tahunan, BRICS terus menerus menyuarakan pentingnya menjadi lebih representatif dan inklusif dalam konteks tatanan dunia. Di sisi lain, sebagai sebuah entitas, BRICS masih dianggap samar-samar; ada yang mengatakan bahwa BRICS adalah forum, kemitraan strategis, dan secara resmi menyebut dirinya sebagai kelompok negara informal seperti yang tertulis di laman resmi BRICS. Hal ini menimbulkan pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana BRICS dapat mengejar tujuan substansial untuk menjadi kerangka kerja global alternatif ketika masih dianggap sebagai entitas yang samar. Alih-alih menganalisisnya melalui konteks ekonomi seperti yang telah dilakukan oleh banyak penelitian tentang BRICS, penulis menggunakan prinsip-prinsip tata kelola pemerintahan yang





inklusif - sebuah konsep terbaru dalam memahami tatanan global - untuk menganalisis kemampuan BRICS untuk menjadi sebuah kerangka kerja global alternatif.

Kata Kunci: BRICS; inklusif; kerangka kerja global; informal; institusionalisasi

Introduction

Throughout the years, BRICS has caught international attention. The group has been evolving, and recently, during the latest Summit in Kazan, Russia, the forum officially welcomed the new members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Moreover, 13 nations were added as “partnering countries,” including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Tyler & Trinh, 2024). Western media also had eyes on BRICS since the host of the 16th Summit last October was Russia, speculating that the event was dominated by Russian influence (de Carvalho, 2024). The US president, Donald Trump, recently made a commentary which many considered a threat towards BRICS, as he stated that “*We require a commitment from these countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency nor back any other currency to replace the mighty US dollar or they will face 100% tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful US economy*” (Wearden, 2024). In the first decade of the 21st century, rapid acceleration of global processes emerged, and growing new trends in global development require new approaches to key aspects of the rapidly changing situation in the world and a new vision of priorities in the Kremlin’s policy, taking into account Russia’s increased responsibility for setting the international agenda and shaping the system of international relations (Manurung, 2021). Moreover, the globalization process and global competition have undermined the ability for countries, including Russia, to act alone, which in turn forced them to create an ally in this new multipolar world (Hutabarat, 2017).

The member countries of BRICS are considered the world’s emerging economies. This perception emerged not out of nowhere. For some time, BRIC only referred to an economic name (Scaffardi, 2014). Since the initial phase of its creation, the man behind the acronym of BRIC, Jim O’Neil, in the analytical report of global investment of his company, forecast that China, Russia, India, and Brazil, the four emerging markets with promising economic development, would catch up with - and by 2050 overtake - the G7 countries (the USA, Japan, Canada, France, Italy, Germany United Kingdom) in terms of total GDP (Bono, 2023). Then, in the first joint statement of BRIC Countries Leaders in 2009, the third highlight point within it stressed the point of financial institution reformation as stated: “*We are committed to advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the world economy. The emerging and developing*





economies must have greater voice and representation in international financial institutions” (BRIC Leaders, 2009). One of BRICS’ renowned breakthroughs happened in 2015 when the New Development Bank (NDB) was created as its financial infrastructure. Consequently, the economic context that has been embedded in most of BRICS’ development has preponderated the existing literature when discussing BRICS.

Nevertheless, although the current discourse was mainly about the economic side of BRICS, it somehow contradicts its ultimate goal regarding world order. The international order constructed by the West since the beginning of the 16th century is now being challenged by these so-called rising powers (Käkönen, 2014). Many argue that its creation aimed to offer an alternative within the prevailing global framework, which predominantly comprises developed economies of the Global North (Megre & Castro Ribeiro, 2024). The range of its priorities has expanded over time, as can be seen from the latest Kazan Declaration, formulated as the result of its 16th Annual Summit. It emphasized issues such as international financial system reform, the ongoing Middle East conflict, and pandemic prevention, and it touched upon joint projects in the tourist sphere (BRICS, 2024).

Building on the argument in the previous paragraph that stated the purpose of BRICS creation is to provide an alternative global framework over an existing world order, this paper will try to answer the question of how close BRICS is as an international actor to becoming one since it is still defined as a nebulous entity. The title of nebulous entity towards BRICS is driven by its informality in operationalizing its actions. At various points, it has referred to itself as a forum, a platform, a mechanism, a partnership, or a strategic partnership, among others, and it has also been called an alliance or a bloc; however, it is neither (Ndzendze, 2023). This article aims to bring another nuance of discussion (other than economic and political perspectives) that focuses on the capability of BRICS as an international actor to reach its ultimate purpose.

Literature Review

BRICS as a nebulous entity

The birth of BRICS was unique compared to other renowned international cooperation. European Union, for example, was driven by the need for regional integration, and its expansion was accelerated due to the historical factor of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Contipelli, 2016). For BRICS, its existence was coming from a research report by Goldman Sachs’ Global Investment Research Division in 2001. Jim O’Neill, the author of the report titled “Build Better Global Economic BRICs, projected that over the coming 10 years, the weight of the “BRICs”- especially





China - in world GDP would grow significantly (Goldman Sachs, 2019). From the research report to the establishment of BRICS, Russia was the one who initiated the formation by assembling the four countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). The first meeting in the BRIC format took place on 20 September 2006 on the sidelines of the 61st session of the UN General Assembly in New York. The meeting was attended by the ministers of foreign affairs of Russia, Brazil, and China and the minister of defense of India, who all agreed to develop multifaceted cooperation among the four countries (BRICS, 2024). South Africa joined a year later by invitation from China, forming the five-country grouping that would persist for more than a decade (Ferragamo, 2024).

In today's world, international cooperation is more and more characterized by informality (Bono, 2023). This wave of change in constructing the relationship between actors in the international arena emerged by the end of the 20th century. As Ernani Contipelli argued in her article: "... globalization had resulted in the emergence or re-emergence of new actors in the global economy. These countries are challenging the political and economic hegemony of the Western powers, which previously constituted the global order. With the rise of these powers, the traditional model of international cooperation has been challenged by the appearance of informal and flexible multilateralism determined by political and economic pragmatism..." (Contipelli, 2016). International forums such as the G8, G20, or the Arctic Council that do not have all the features of an international intergovernmental organization are usually defined as quasi-organizations (from Greek "quasi" – pseudo), para-organizations, or as informal international institutions (Bono, 2023). The features here refer to charter, headquarters, or dedicated staff who work in the fixed secretariat.

In the case of BRICS, recent studies are mostly leaning towards defining BRICS as an informal institution. The coalition is not a formal organization but rather a loose bloc of non-Western economies that coordinate economic and diplomatic efforts around a shared goal. BRICS countries seek to build an alternative to what they see as the dominance of the Western viewpoint in major multilateral groupings, such as the World Bank, the Group of Seven (G7), and the UN Security Council (Ferragamo, 2024). Moreover, the official website defines BRICS as an informal group of states comprising the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of South Africa (BRICS, 2015a). Marta Bono intensively discussed in her study the BRICS' definition as she argued that *"The critical thing with BRICS lies in this continuous tension between a very high degree of informality and institutionalization tendencies, which raises doubts as if BRICS might be experiencing a transition period into becoming an international organization or if this is a perpetual situation that makes it extremely different from other international cooperation experiences"* (Bono, 2023). The argument





regarding BRICS as a nebulous entity was added by Lucia Scaffardi, stating that even though it is still considered a shapeless entity, the BRICS countries are beginning to share objectives but do not necessarily want to use the same instruments (Scaffardi, 2014).

Inclusive Governance Principles

The authors will use a current concept known as the five key principles to develop a more comprehensive discussion of the BRICS' evolution. These principles were introduced by Ahmet Davutoglu in his recent book titled "Systemic Earthquake and the Struggle for World Order" to explain the global order as the world is still experiencing a crisis in the post-Cold War Era. He used these principles to envisage the future of global order as he stated in his book that we might assert the existential nature of five key principles in the reconstruction of national, regional, and international order: **inclusiveness, internal consistency, interest optimization, implementation, and institutionalization** (Davutoğlu, 2020). The authors chose these principles as the analytical framework due to two reasons. The first point is that there is a need to assess BRICS much more deeply than just from the economic-driven factors of its development in order to understand how this regional intergovernmental organization, as an emerging power, has the potential to influence the current international order. As argued by Amitav Acharya (Acharya, 2017), we are currently living in this multiplex world, which means a world of interconnectedness and interdependence, where elements of the liberal order survive but are subsumed in a complex of multiple, cross-cutting international orders. Consequently, globalization, which had primarily resulted from liberalist values, may take a different form today. It became less likely to be driven by trade and more by developmental concerns, which created more opportunities for emerging powers to have a greater voice.

The second reason is that these five key principles could set a more relevant basic assumption for understanding the contemporary international system, as they cover a wide range of analytical angles. In his article (Davutoğlu, 2017), he explains how the phenomenon of the last three centuries has differentiated our understanding of world order. The balance of power characterized the 19th century, while the 20th century tended to move toward international order. Currently, in the 21st century, the focus should be on global governance. He further explained that what distinguishes global governance from international order is that it extends beyond dialogue among nation-states to an interactive relationship among human beings; therefore, a multilateral, values-based, fair, and inclusive form of governance is necessary.

Assessing BRICS through each lens will give a far-reaching analysis of the BRICS' capabilities to pursue its goal. The first principle of inclusiveness is the most important one because





it emphasizes integrating an order into the system and involving all related actors to create a more sustained order at any level (national, regional, or international). The second one is the internal consistency principle, which is closely related to the first principle. Davutoglu explains in his book that there are two minimum conditions to achieve internal consistency: an internally consistent system of values jointly supported by the order's actors and mechanisms to ensure the practical implementation of these values (Davutoğlu, 2020). These first two principles were placed as an idealist foundation because it deals with the harmonization of values and mechanisms (Davutoğlu, 2020).

The third and fourth principles of interest optimization and implementation are in correlation with each other, as Davutoglu defined as the realpolitik framework. When discussing interests, struggle between related actors is naturally present. Interest optimization is about creating an environment that optimizes mutual interests by keeping competing interests within the scope of rational negotiation (Davutoğlu, 2020). Furthermore, he explained that there are three kinds of struggle to maximize interest: win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose. The win-win option is when all the concerned parties are satisfied with the result of the negotiation by getting their fair share. The win-lose option is when the negotiation is losing its rationality due to the winning party's excessive self-confidence and the loser's loss of confidence. As he elaborates in his book, when it happens, a tendency not to conform to the order's values and the system's rules manifests itself to such an extent that any shared belief in the sustainability of the order is destroyed.

In contrast, when a lose-lose option occurs, there are two possible scenarios: the parties either relapse into a state of disorder or advocate a new set of rules that they believe will maximize their interests. The recurring "non-success story" of the lose-lose option in international relations first shakes trust in the order. Then, it leads to the domination of an ever-expanding psychology of pessimism over the process (Davutoğlu, 2020).

As the fourth principle here, implementation refers to the need to maintain a power structure that ensures the protection of values and the enforcement of rules. Davutoğlu further explains that in the context of international order, there are three important issues in terms of power-order relations: (i) the legitimacy of uses of force designed to protect or restore order, (ii) the reflection of national power structures on international institutions, and (iii) how power–representation, and power–justice balances are to be achieved in the international order. The principles of justice and representation are significantly needed in order to create an inclusive order (Davutoğlu, 2020). As the fifth principle, institutionalization is considered a significant qualification for order formation at any level. In his writing, Davutoğlu argues that the most important point to note during periods in which the national and international systems are on a





dynamic course is that institutionalization needs to be based on a dynamic process of restructuring, not a static perception of order. In order to survive, institutional structures need to be in the right amount of flexibility. If excessively flexible, the international structure would be harmed, and on the other hand, if it is too rigid, it would lead to the risk of collapse (Davutoğlu, 2020).

Methods

In conducting this research, the authors use qualitative research methodology to analyze the existence of BRICS and its capabilities through the five lenses of the inclusive governance principles described in the previous section. This methodology is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us to understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Punch, 2013). To be more precise, the authors use an interpretive method, which enables them to not only analyze ‘what’ discovered in the text but also look further at ‘how’ certain political actions are taking place and ‘why’ related decisions or moves are made (Wiesner, 2022).

Moreover, the authors will conduct analyses based on the primary and secondary data collected chiefly from online sources. There are 16 declarations of all BRICS’ annual summits in total, including joint statements from the first two summits held by them, which are considered primary data for this paper. All of them are accessible through BRICS’ official website. To support the analysis derived from these official documents, speeches from BRICS leaders and statements from related actors will also be utilized, as they stem from similar circumstances, namely the BRICS annual summits’ sequence. The secondary data will be from academic literature, books, news from trusted sources, and also interviews conducted regarding BRICS. Those collected data will be systematically analyzed by inserting each most related lens under the aforementioned analytical framework.

Discussions

Before undertaking a comprehensive analysis of BRICS values and development, it is worthwhile to examine how BRICS differ from other international forums, such as the G20, as briefly mentioned in the previous part of this paper. It is also considered a para-organization or an informal intergovernmental organization. The G20 was established through the convening of finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 countries, as well as a representative of the European Union (Hilbrich, 2022). The 2008 financial crisis prompted them to meet on an annual basis, as evidence that the world needed more global coordination in tackling today’s challenge (Sverdrup & Nahem, 2017). Even though BRICS follows this same nuance of transnational





cooperation, what differs between BRICS and the G20 the most is in the context of their primary goals and central values, which they have consistently stated in their annual summit declarations. For instance, the BRICS has been highlighting the need for an alternative global governance, as the current order lacks equal representation, and hopes that this cooperation could pursue that goal. Due to this goal, inclusivity became the most priority value for BRICS in its implementation, which will be elaborated thoroughly within this section. As for the G20, the cooperation is never about rejecting the current Western-dominated era. As critically explained by (Barabanov, 2025), the G20 is somewhat broader in its goal, which, based on its declarations, is to find a better solution to address uncertainties in global development.

a. BRICS through an inclusiveness ‘eye’

Inclusive has become a growing term used in many contexts within international order. As mentioned in the previous section, Davutoğlu highlighted two essential elements in defining inclusiveness: ‘involving’ and ‘integrating’ to have a sustained order. Another example of how ‘inclusiveness’ has been commonly used is in the context of conflict resolution. The word ‘inclusivity’ is considered one of the essential norms that are urged to be applied within the peace mediation process. As the United Nations has defined it in its guidance for effective mediation, inclusivity refers to the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation process (Burg, 2015). ‘Represented’ and ‘integrated’ resonate with the need for being heard and included in the process of mediation so that the outcome of mediation is not just about what is best for them but, more importantly, allied with their needs.

BRICS started to show interest in using the word ‘inclusive’ at the second annual summit held in Brazil. Its joining statement stated, *‘We reiterate that such cooperation is inclusive and non-confrontational. We are open to increasing engagement and cooperation with non-BRICS countries, in particular emerging and developing countries, and relevant international and regional organizations’* (BRICS, 2010). Since then, the word ‘inclusive’ has been written consistently in the official BRICS documents of each annual summit. It specifies the intention to engage emerging and developing countries due to its eagerness to create a cohesive platform for them. The key to the BRICS’ international influence is “the power of the superpowerless world” (Bono, 2023). As Jyrki Kakonen argues in his article, an organization can also be useful to its members if the members somehow complement each other politically and economically (Käkönen, 2014). BRICS’ intention to be ‘involved’ is consistently shown throughout the years, as can be seen in the declaration of the latest Summit in Russia that says, *“We note the emergence*





of new centres of power, policy decision-making and economic growth, which can pave the way for a more equitable, just, democratic and balanced multipolar world order. Multipolarity can expand opportunities for EMDCs to unlock their constructive potential and enjoy universally beneficial, inclusive, and equitable economic globalization and cooperation' (BRICS, 2024b). The group sees itself as part of the collective of powers rising together (Bono, 2023). BRICS somehow believe that emerging power countries have their potential and need to be equally treated in the global order; involvement in the process does matter.

In analyzing how BRICS represents the principle of inclusiveness, another element to be looked at is how BRICS has intensively pushed the reformation of several existing international institutions. Based on the continuous statements made officially by BRICS somehow portray their desire to be more integrated into the existing international system, as written in BRICS' Joint Statement of the BRIC Leaders of 2009: *'...we reaffirm the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN with a view to making it more efficient so that it can deal with today's global challenges more effectively. We reiterate the importance we attach to the status of India and Brazil in international affairs and understand and support their aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations.'* (BRIC Leaders, 2009). What it wants is the reform of various international institutions in order to provide a rightful place and voice for emerging nations with regard to defining the norms and rules of international interaction (Käkönen, 2014). Being part of the existing system, the UN, for instance, became important for BRICS since they understood themselves as a platform for dialogue and cooperation amongst countries that represent 43% of the world's population (from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America) and they believe the transcontinental dimension of their interaction adds to its value and significance (BRICS, 2012).

b. BRICS through an internal consistency 'eye'

Besides inclusiveness, internal consistency is another principle that falls under the idealist foundation. When talking about the idealist foundation, it means how certain values or norms are being adjusted within a system, which in this paper refers to BRICS as part of the world order horizon. In examining BRICS' consistency in upholding specific values created internally, first, what needs to be observed is whether they already have a set of values that they agreed on collectively. The second is observing whether BRICS has a mechanism for implementing those values.

BRICS has organized 16 annual summits since its establishment. Within each official declaration of the BRICS Summit, all the points agreed on during the summit are written accordingly, and some principles or spirits - the terminology that BRICS use in the document -





can be considered their agreed values in implementing all the decisions. When looking through the declaration, specifically analyzing a set of spirits or principles, they do not have a consistent manner. Especially in their first six summits, the word 'equality' was only written consistently in the first and second summits, along with other values such as mutual respect, cooperation and coordinated action, and collective decision-making of all states (BRICS, 2012). However, their values started to be written consistently since the seventh summit in Russia that stated in the fourth point of the declaration, *'We emphasized the importance to strengthen BRICS solidarity and cooperation and decided to further enhance our strategic partnership on the basis of principles of openness, solidarity, equality, and mutual understanding, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation'* (BRICS, 2015c). This set of principles was consistently written until the ninth summit.

The principles or spirits were not jumbled again in the subsequent five annual summits. However, it is intriguing that in the tenth summit's declaration in South Africa in 2018, the word 'democracy' was incorporated within its set of values. Their principles were written comprehensively at the latest summit organized last year in Russia, which can be seen as a fulfilled version of all values incorporated since the first summit. There were eight points of spirit or values in the 16th Declaration, which stated, *'We reaffirm our commitment to the BRICS spirit of mutual respect and understanding, sovereign equality, solidarity, democracy, openness, inclusiveness, collaboration and consensus'* (BRICS, 2024). It can be concluded that BRICS has started to have an internal system of values even though it has not yet been consistent because there were missing points of values from one summit to another.

As the second condition to achieve internal consistency, the mechanism to ensure values implementation, BRICS as an entity, is still inadequate. When they incorporated certain terminologies to indicate their agreed principles or spirits, they did not define the meaning of each value in a way that they understood them as a set of values to uphold the implementation of stated actions in the Declaration. This condition tends to cause each member of BRICS to have their own definition, which may lead to distinctive ways of implementing action or programs. The purposes and goals established by BRICS during the summits and meetings are the same for all its members, but the way each state acts to meet these goals could vary, respecting each state's unique character, which is not denied or ignored by BRICS as a group (Bono, 2023).

Another illustration of BRICS' inadequate mechanism in ensuring the implementation of their values is how they responded to the ongoing situation in Ukraine. Since the seventh summit in 2015, they started to talk about the Ukraine situation in the Declaration by emphasizing their deep concern and urging related parties to comply with all agreements within the Minsk Agreement. It somehow portrayed their solidarity spirit but again failed to put it into a specific





mechanism constructively. As a member state of the UN, each country had expressed its national position through the UN's formal mechanism, which stated within the BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration: *'We have discussed the situation in Ukraine and recall our national positions as expressed at the appropriate fora, namely the UNSC and UNGA. We support talks between Russia and Ukraine'* (BRICS, 2022). As an entity, BRICS did not have a formal mechanism (perhaps not yet) if a member state of BRICS was implicated in a particular conflict that caused them as an entity in a state of internal inconsistency.

c. **BRICS through an interest optimization 'eye'**

BRICS members form a heterogeneous coalition of often competing powers that share one common interest: "to erode the Western hegemonic claims" (Käkönen, 2014). From the beginning of its formation, the suggestive assumptions circling around the BRICS were about how insisted they were on becoming an alternative global framework; it differed from an existing one dominated by the West. Their efforts have been continuously surfacing their presence. Among all the efforts taken, the most prominent was the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB). During the sixth summit in 2014, BRICS constructed the agreement on the NDB, which pointed out all the necessary elements of the NDB establishment as an institution, such as its management, headquarters, and shares. It has been argued that the NDB and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) are meant to mimic the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), respectively (Ferragamo, 2024). This argument aligns with the proposition BRICS consistently made during the annual summit, which was the need for reformation of the IMF in order to become more representative (BRICS, 2013). BRICS tried to make the NDB as representative and inclusive as possible by dividing the task and role of each member country in implementing the NDB, as stated in the declaration of the 2014 Fortaleza Summit: *'...The initial subscribed capital shall be of US\$ 50 billion, equally shared among founding members. The first chair of the Board of Governors shall be from Russia. The first chair of the Board of Directors shall be from Brazil. The first President of the Bank shall be from India. The headquarters of the Bank shall be located in Shanghai. The New Development Bank Africa Regional Center shall be established in South Africa concurrently with the headquarters.'* In contrast with the similar existing dominant institutions, the President of the World Bank continues to be a political appointment by the United States, while a key European figure is typically appointed to the executive director position at the IMF (BRICS, 2014). In this case, it can be suggested that all BRICS member countries obtain the win-win option as they have gained a fair share of influence in running the NDB.





Throughout their annual summit, one of the propositions laid out in the declaration that they agreed upon was the need for the reformation of several existing institutions, such as the UN and IMF. Despite this continuous proposition, it needs to be questioned when looking at BRICS member countries' firmness regarding the reformation of the UN Security Council to be more representative. India has expressed aspiration to be a permanent member along with Brazil, Germany, and Japan (the so-called G4 group) (Patrick et al., 2023). Narendra Modi once stated during the BRICS Leaders' Limited Attendance Meeting in 2015 that, *"No matter what challenges we face - social, political, or economic - we will deal with them more effectively if we complete the UN reform - particularly in the UN Security Council - within the approved timeframe. We urgently need to carry out these reforms if we want this global organisation to retain its importance and relevance in the 21st century"* (BRICS, 2015b). However, the most significant opposition to the G4 proposal came from three of the P5: China, Russia, and the United States; even without saying so openly, China opposes the accession of Japan and India (Patrick et al., 2023). In general, China opposes any increase in the number of permanent members of the UN Security Council since the first potential beneficiary would be India (Käkönen, 2014). Referring to interest optimization 'eye,' this inconsistency among the members of BRICS countries tends to indicate the win-lose struggle option to maximize interest. India, in this context, falls into the losing side of the struggle; even if South Africa and Brazil might be on the same side as India, China, and Russia still have more winning conditions since they both are part of P5 countries. As argued by Ziya O'nis, and Mustafa Kutlay in their article, the China–Russia axis is similar to the Franco-German axis versus other BRICS similar to the Eastern periphery in the EU, which indicates the European style core-periphery structure. If this kind of vertical restructuring of the BRICS might merge, it is likely to generate significant resistance and further friction within the already heterogeneous group (Öniş & Kutlay, 2020).

d. **BRICS through an implementation 'eye'**

It will be extremely difficult to form an inclusive order unless the principles of justice and representation are implemented in the power structure reflected in the international order today (Davutoğlu, 2020). In the case of BRICS, how profound they are as an entity in implementing the principles of justice and representation can be examined through how they put into action any set of priorities that are agreed upon and aligned with their collective values. In their 13th annual summit in India, one highlight was strengthening multilateralism. This priority needs to be realized due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides frequently pointing out the importance of multilateralism in the New Delhi declaration, they merged the BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and





Reforming the Multilateral System, which was adopted by their foreign ministers who gathered a few months before the summit virtually. Among the six objectives of the BRICS joint statement in that section, what can be highlighted regarding how intense BRICS prioritizing the needs of a more representative international order was written on the first point, which stated that *'Making instruments of global governance more inclusive, representative and participatory to facilitate greater and more meaningful participation of developing and least developed countries, especially Africa, in global decision-making processes and structures and make it better attuned to contemporary realities'* (BRICS, 2021). Furthermore, adding to the point that BRICS wanted to be more of an inclusive order, it was only a year later, during the Beijing Summit, that BRICS started to explore the expansion possibilities of BRICS member countries. Instead of forming an exclusive entity - as the name of cooperation derived from each founding country member - they tried to be as inclusive as possible by opening up for other countries to join them.

How power representation and power justice balances are in BRICS can be analyzed through the decision-making process they embody. The BRICS heads of state convene annually, with each country taking a one-year chairmanship to set priorities and host a summit (Ferragamo, 2024). Giving an equal chance to every member country to lead resonates with their commitment to give emerging and developing countries a greater voice, as they stated in their first annual summit's joint statement. The BRICS countries converge in two main directions: the first involves the "coordination" between heads of state within the Summits themselves; the second operates at the inter-ministerial level (Scaffardi, 2014). The official statements issued at the end of the Summits are not just the product of the talks held during the Summits themselves, but they are supported by heavy preparatory work carried out by groups with representatives from each of the ministries involved that take place before the Summit (Scaffardi, 2014). This decision-making mechanism might seem more formal than how informal they are as an entity up until now. However, it can be assumed that this flexible style - their own mechanism to run the cooperation, unlike other existing institutions - might be one of the reasons BRICS is still sustained. In the mind of its creators, BRICS was intended to be a loose mechanism of international cooperation characterized by informality and flexibility of both instruments and intents (Bono, 2023).

e. **BRICS through an institutionalization 'eye'**

In discussing the institutionalization side of BRICS, two elements need to be examined. The first one is how closed BRICS is in defining itself as an institution or organization, and the second one is how flexible its existing structure as Davutoğlu explained in his book, institutional structures need the right amount of flexibility to survive. Current debates regarding the





institutionalization side of BRICS are varied and tend to argue that BRICS is still far from being defined as an international organization. Referring to the traditional elements of an international organization, such as a constitutive treaty, charter, headquarters, fixed secretariat (physical or virtual), and dedicated staff or funds to finance its activities (Bono, 2023), the only element that BRICS nearly owns is the virtual secretariat. In 2015, within the last section of the UFA declaration, it was explicitly mentioned that the BRICS website creation was aiming to become a virtual secretariat, as stated, *'We welcome the signing of the MoU on the Creation of the Joint BRICS Website among our Foreign Ministries. It will serve as a platform for informing people of our countries and the wider international community about BRICS principles, goals, and practices. We will explore the possibility of developing the BRICS Website as a virtual secretariat'* (BRICS, 2015c). The president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, also addressed this matter in his remarks and even defined it as if it was already becoming a virtual secretariat, *"The launch of a 'virtual secretariat' will contribute to further reinforcement of the organisation's institutional foundations. This modern internet portal will make it possible to further simplify interaction between our countries, while the public will get access to current information on the BRICS activities"* (BRICS, 2015b). However, BRICS has not put any serious effort into formulating the BRICS website into a virtual secretariat since it was stated in the UFA Declaration nine years ago. Nine other summits were held, and no discussions were initiated concerning virtual secretariat creation, which can be seen throughout all nine declarations where the words 'virtual secretariat' and 'website development' were never mentioned again.

Concerning the flexibility of BRICS's existing structure in the context of institutionalization, what is interesting to analyze is how BRICS defines institutional development. During the Beijing Summit in 2022, BRICS started to discuss the possibility of expanding by welcoming new members into the circle. In response to this possibility, BRICS defined it as part of institutional development, and many serious efforts have taken place since then. In the last part of the Beijing Declaration, they laid out what needs to be done soon about the expansion as stated, *"We support promoting discussions among BRICS members on BRICS expansion process. We stress the need to clarify the guiding principles, standards, criteria, and procedures for this expansion process through Sherpas' channel on the basis of full consultation and consensus"* (BRICS, 2022).

Furthermore, in 2023, a year after this initial step, BRICS already set up the 'BRICS Membership Expansion: Guiding Principles, Standards, Criteria, and Procedures' regulating potential country members. In the sense of flexibility, referring to Davutoğlu's explanation, it can be understood that it is in the right amount of flexibility since BRICS is quite persistent in being





as inclusive as possible by opening its door widely to other countries who want to join and protecting this expansion by setting up specific rules responsively. By doing so, it can be seen that BRICS wants to uphold its existence as an alternative world order; however, it is quite contrary when fewer efforts are made to make BRICS a more institutionalized entity.

Conclusion

For over a decade, BRICS has remained in global attention since its first summit was held in 2009. Serious actions were taken that can be considered as an advancement from the creation of the NDB to a bold decision of welcoming new members into the circle. As this article was drafted, not long ago, Indonesia officially became the first Southeast Asian country to join BRICS. On the other hand, in terms of an entity, BRICS seems to care less about making it into a formal institution like other leading intergovernmental institutions such as the European Union or ASEAN. In the case of ASEAN, it was a long journey until it had its own charter, 40 years after its establishment, to be exact. Nonetheless, the ASEAN put an effort into institutionalization by establishing the ASEAN Secretariat ten years after its formation (Bono, 2023).

Back to the earlier question regarding how close BRICS is to becoming an alternative global framework, based on the analysis that has been made, the authors conclude that BRICS is still far from becoming one since BRICS still holds many inconsistencies internally. BRICS talks a lot about how the existing international institutions, such as the UN and IMF, should have more voices from emerging countries. However, internally, for example, in the case of the possibility of India becoming a part of the UN Security Council, China was implicitly opposed to such an idea. It explains why, in each BRICS declaration of the annual summit, the point of restructuring the UN is written consistently from time to time because some of them are not eager to put it into practice.

Another point of its consistency was concerning the rising members' expansion. BRICS explicitly defines it as institutional development and seriously emphasizes that by setting up specific rules for other countries to join. On the other hand, none of the rules explicitly created how to develop BRICS as an entity. They prefer BRICS as an informal group, and the idea of creating a virtual secretariat has never come into real action until now. It can be assumed that BRICS prefers to do things its own way, which is somehow acceptable, but it will keep raising questions about its consistency. As a reminder, if BRICS looks up a lot to the UN, presumably, BRICS should be able to learn a lot about how the UN as an entity can become an intergovernmental organization that still plays a dominant role worldwide.





In the context of inclusiveness, the authors argue that the BRICS deserve a compliment for their high efforts in incorporating this value internally. BRICS tried to treat all members equally and involve them in playing an important role, such as taking turns holding the presidency. Moreover, its expansion for other countries joining BRICS can also be a sign of how BRICS wants to show the world that these countries also have a similar place to be heard. Nevertheless, it can also be a challenge for BRICS since more members mean more voices need to be heard, and it will be sustained if BRICS finds a consistent way to hold them together. It should be more than just having a similar interest in wearing down the Western hegemony; BRICS need agreeable values and means to keep them united.

As for future research themes, since BRICS has been taking steps in its expansion effort, it would be beneficial to examine the implications of its expansion towards the global south cooperation and also whether its constant value of inclusivity might or might not affect other existing informal intergovernmental organizations. In terms of world order, this article has not extensively discussed comparing the significance of BRICS' involvement in global governance with that of other informal organizations. This theme is important nowadays due to the realization that we are leaning towards the era of what (Acharya et al., 2023) called multiplexity, which emphasizes the relative ability of states to organize cooperation as the key mechanism for global governance.

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