BRICS and the Reshaping of Global Order: Navigating Power Shifts in Multipolarity

By

Stephen Egwuatu Amadi, PhD.
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
stephen.amadi05@gmail.com
08032667347

Abstract

The transformation of the global order from unipolarity to multipolarity marks one of the most defining features of 21st-century international relations. The rise of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has significantly altered global power dynamics by challenging Western dominance and promoting a more inclusive model of global governance. This paper examines how BRICS contributes to reshaping the world order through economic, political, and diplomatic collaboration. It identifies structural inequalities in global institutions and explores how the bloc's initiatives redefine global norms and power distribution. Drawing on Neorealism and Constructivism, the study evaluates BRICS' collective identity and strategic balancing behavior. Findings reveal both opportunities and contradictions within BRICS' vision of multipolarity. The study concludes that BRICS is a vital yet evolving actor in global politics and recommends deeper institutional cohesion, enhanced South-South cooperation, and inclusive global reform for sustainable multipolarity.

Keywords: BRICS, global order, multipolarity, power shift, international relations

Introduction

The transformation of the global order has become one of the most significant developments in contemporary international relations. The unipolar moment that followed the end of the Cold War dominated by the United States and Western liberal institutions, appears to be waning as emerging powers challenge the status

quo. Among these, the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have become a powerful symbol of a shifting balance in global power and governance. Their collective rise signifies not merely an economic transformation but a broader political and ideological reconfiguration that questions Western hegemony and seeks a more equitable, multipolar world order.

The BRICS alliance represents a diverse coalition of nations united by a shared desire to reform global governance structures such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and United Nations Security Council, which they perceive as disproportionately dominated by Western interests. The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) reflects BRICS' commitment to fostering financial independence, regional development, and South-South cooperation. These initiatives underscore the bloc's intention to create alternative pathways for global development that prioritize inclusivity, mutual respect, and sovereignty over the conditionalities often associated with Western aid and investment.

However, the internal diversity of BRICS presents both opportunities and challenges. While the grouping brings together nations from different continents with varied political systems, cultural traditions, and economic strengths, this diversity often translates into divergent national interests. China's economic dominance, Russia's strategic assertiveness, India's balancing diplomacy, Brazil's developmental aspirations, and South Africa's continental leadership create a complex web of interactions that can both strengthen and constrain collective action. Yet, despite these asymmetries, BRICS remains a potent symbol of the Global South's agency and a forum for articulating alternative visions of global order.

The growing influence of BRICS must also be viewed within the context of multipolarity, a structural shift in which power is dispersed among several centers rather than concentrated in one. This trend is evident not only in economic statistics but also in diplomatic alignments, trade diversification, and institutional innovation. The rise of BRICS challenges traditional Western-led narratives of globalization, development, and democracy by emphasizing pluralism, respect for sovereignty, and the right of nations to pursue distinct development models.

This study, therefore, examines how BRICS contributes to the reshaping of the global order in an era of multipolarity. It explores the bloc's role in redefining power dynamics, institutional arrangements, and global norms through both material and ideational dimensions. The research seeks to understand whether BRICS can evolve from a loose coalition into a transformative force capable of institutionalizing an equitable and sustainable international system. In doing so, it situates BRICS as both a response to Western dominance and an experiment in global governance that embodies the aspirations of the 21st-century multipolar world.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

The discourse on BRICS and the reshaping of the global order requires a conceptual and theoretical grounding that captures both the structural realities of power redistribution and the ideational contestations shaping international relations today. Understanding BRICS' role in global transformation demands a synthesis of key concepts—global order, multipolarity, and emerging powers, and the application of relevant theories, particularly Neorealism and Constructivism. These perspectives provide analytical tools for explaining how power, interests, and ideas interact in redefining global governance.

Conceptual Clarifications

Global Order: Global order refers to the overall pattern of power relations, institutions, norms, and rules that structure interactions among states and other international actors. Traditionally, it has been anchored in Western liberal values—democracy, free markets, and human rights embedded in institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Following the Cold War, the United States-led unipolar order was characterized by liberal hegemony and the globalization of Western norms (Ikenberry, 2011). However, the rise of new centers of power, such as China and India, has challenged the coherence and legitimacy of this order. BRICS embodies this contestation by promoting alternative frameworks that emphasize sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual respect.

Multipolarity: Multipolarity describes an international system in which several major powers coexist and exert significant influence over global affairs. It contrasts

with unipolarity, where one state dominates, or bipolarity, where two rival powers compete for supremacy (Waltz, 1979). Multipolarity implies a diffusion of power, allowing for greater diversity in global decision-making. For BRICS, multipolarity is both a strategic goal and a normative vision. It represents not merely a redistribution of material capabilities but also an ideological rejection of Western dominance and a call for more equitable global governance.

Emerging Powers and South-South Cooperation: Emerging powers refer to states that are rapidly increasing their economic and political influence in the global system but have not yet reached the status of traditional great powers. BRICS nations are exemplary of this category. Through South-South cooperation, they promote mutual development, technological exchange, and alternative economic models less dependent on Western financial systems (Puri, 2020). This cooperation aims to rebalance global relations and enhance collective self-reliance among developing nations.

Theoretical Foundations

Neorealism (Structural Realism): Neorealism, pioneered by Kenneth Waltz (1979), views the international system as anarchic, meaning that no central authority governs state behavior. States act primarily to ensure survival by accumulating power and maintaining relative gains. Power balancing, whether through alliances, economic initiatives, or military build-up, is a key strategy for managing insecurity in such a system.

From a neorealist perspective, BRICS represents a collective balancing mechanism against Western hegemony. After decades of U.S.-led dominance, BRICS states seek to counterbalance the influence of Western institutions and to create autonomous centers of power. The formation of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) can be interpreted as instruments of soft balancing, providing economic alternatives that reduce dependency on Western-controlled institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (Layne, 2018).

Moreover, neorealism explains intra-BRICS dynamics as a function of power asymmetry. China's economic might positions it as the de facto leader within the

bloc, generating both opportunities for global influence and tensions with partners wary of its dominance. Russia's strategic assertiveness and India's cautious balancing act reflect classic realist behaviors, pursuing national interests while leveraging collective platforms for greater global leverage (Acharya, 2017). Thus, neorealism captures the pragmatic, interest-driven dimension of BRICS cooperation.

Constructivism: Constructivism complements neorealism by highlighting the social and ideational dimensions of international politics. It posits that global structures are not merely defined by material power but are socially constructed through ideas, identities, and shared meanings (Wendt, 1999). In this view, BRICS is more than a geopolitical alliance, it is a normative project aimed at redefining the principles of global governance. BRICS' emphasis on respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, and equitable development challenges the liberal norms that have dominated the post-World War II order. By articulating discourses of multipolarity and South-South solidarity, BRICS constructs an alternative identity for the Global South as an autonomous agent in world politics (Stuenkel, 2016). The bloc's collective statements, such as in the BRICS Summits and Declarations, reflect a shared identity rooted in resistance to Western hegemony and the pursuit of a just international order.

Constructivism also explains how BRICS members frame their cooperation as a moral and developmental endeavor rather than a zero-sum competition. Their rhetoric of shared prosperity and inclusive globalization embodies an ideational counter-narrative to neoliberal capitalism. However, constructivist analysis also exposes contradictions: while BRICS promotes equality, internal hierarchies and divergent political systems complicate the creation of a unified identity.

Synthesizing Neorealism and Constructivism: A dual-theoretical approach provides a more nuanced understanding of BRICS' behavior and influence. Neorealism explains the strategic motivations behind BRICS, states pursuing relative power and security in a competitive system, while Constructivism elucidates the ideational and normative underpinnings of their cooperation. Together, they reveal that BRICS operates simultaneously as a power bloc and a values-based coalition.

For example, the establishment of the NDB is not only a realist act of financial autonomy but also a constructivist statement of solidarity with developing nations. Similarly, BRICS' advocacy for reforming the UN Security Council reflects both pragmatic concerns about representation (realism) and normative commitments to fairness and inclusivity (constructivism).

This synthesis underscores the complexity of contemporary global politics, where material and ideational forces intersect. BRICS embodies both the realist logic of balancing and the constructivist ambition of reshaping norms, a hybrid dynamic that reflects the evolving character of multipolarity in the 21st century.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study integrates the notions of power redistribution (from neorealism) and normative transformation (from constructivism). It views the reshaping of the global order as a dual process involving:

Material Realignment – the redistribution of economic, political, and strategic capabilities among major powers; and

Ideational Reconfiguration – the emergence of new norms, discourses, and institutional practices that redefine global governance.

Within this framework, BRICS is conceptualized as both a driver and a product of global transformation, an actor navigating between pragmatic self-interest and collective identity formation.

Above all, the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings reveal that the rise of BRICS cannot be understood solely through economic indicators or institutional initiatives. It must be analyzed as part of a broader transformation of the international system in which material power, normative aspirations, and identity politics converge. By combining neorealist and constructivist perspectives, this study situates BRICS within the dialectic of power and principle, offering a comprehensive lens through which to examine its evolving role in reshaping global order and sustaining multipolarity.

Historical Trajectories of Global Power and the Emergence of BRICS

The emergence of BRICS as a geopolitical bloc cannot be fully understood without tracing the historical evolution of global power structures and the forces that led to the reconfiguration of the international system. The world order has evolved through distinct historical phases—imperial dominance, bipolar rivalry, and unipolar hegemony, each shaping the nature of global governance, economic relations, and international diplomacy. BRICS arose as a response to these historical imbalances and as a manifestation of the Global South's growing agency in global affairs.

From Imperialism to the Bipolar World: The early 20th century was characterized by European imperial dominance, where colonial empires controlled vast territories across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The global order was Eurocentric, defined by the extraction of resources, economic dependency, and the subjugation of non-Western societies. The two World Wars destabilized this order, leading to the decolonization movements that reshaped global politics in the mid-20th century. Newly independent states sought self-determination and equitable participation in global governance but remained marginalized in decision-making institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, and IMF, which were established under Western leadership (Mazrui, 2010).

The onset of the Cold War introduced a bipolar system, dominated by ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This period saw developing nations caught between competing blocs, leading to the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which championed neutrality and South-South solidarity. However, the NAM lacked the structural power to influence global governance significantly. The end of the Cold War in 1991 marked the collapse of bipolarity and ushered in an era of unipolar dominance led by the United States, a period defined by liberal globalization, military interventions, and the expansion of Western-led economic institutions (Fukuyama, 1992).

The Unipolar Moment and Its Discontents: The 1990s and early 2000s were marked by what Charles Krauthammer (1990) termed the "unipolar moment," where U.S. political, economic, and military preeminence appeared uncontested. The liberal international order, anchored in institutions like the World Trade

Organization (WTO), IMF, and NATO, expanded globally, promoting market liberalization, democracy, and human rights. Yet this order also deepened global inequalities. Developing nations faced economic dependency, structural adjustment programs, and political marginalization, while Western powers retained control over financial and decision-making mechanisms.

The 2008 global financial crisis became a turning point. It exposed the vulnerabilities of the Western-led financial system and accelerated the search for alternative centers of stability and growth. Emerging economies, particularly China, India, and Brazil, demonstrated resilience and became drivers of global economic recovery. Their increasing influence revealed the limits of unipolarity and created momentum for new multilateral frameworks outside Western control (Keukeleire & Hooijmaaijers, 2014).

The Formation of BRICS: From Concept to Coalition: The term BRIC was first coined in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs to describe the rising economic potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Initially an economic acronym, it evolved into a political coalition when these states recognized their shared interests in reforming global governance. The first official BRIC meeting took place in 2006 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, and the first BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009. South Africa joined in 2010, transforming the bloc into BRICS, thus giving it continental representation from Africa, and broadening its legitimacy as a voice of the Global South.

The timing of BRICS' institutionalization coincided with a period of geopolitical flux, the aftermath of the global financial crisis, waning Western influence, and the rise of China as a global economic powerhouse. The founding principles of BRICS were laid out in the 2009 Joint Statement, emphasizing multipolarity, inclusivity, non-interference, and mutual respect for sovereignty. These principles represented both a critique of Western dominance and an assertion of a new developmental paradigm that sought balance between globalization and sovereignty (Stuenkel, 2015).

The creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) in 2014 institutionalized BRICS cooperation. The NDB's focus

on infrastructure and sustainable development reflected the bloc's intent to provide alternatives to the World Bank, while the CRA aimed to provide liquidity support to members in times of financial instability, reducing reliance on the IMF. Through these instruments, BRICS demonstrated that the global South could mobilize collective resources for common development goals.

BRICS and the Emerging Multipolar Order: The rise of BRICS coincided with the gradual erosion of Western dominance and the emergence of multipolarity as the defining feature of the 21st-century international system. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Russia's strategic resurgence, and India's growing technological and demographic clout all underscore the diffusion of global power. Collectively, BRICS members account for nearly half of the world's population and over a quarter of global GDP (World Bank, 2024). Their growing economic interdependence and strategic alignment have made them central to global governance debates, from climate change to trade, energy, and digital transformation.

Yet, BRICS' influence extends beyond material power. The bloc challenges the normative foundations of the liberal order by promoting principles of equality, non-interference, and pluralism. It envisions a world where regional institutions and diverse civilizational perspectives coexist within a decentralized system of governance. This normative stance contrasts sharply with the interventionist tendencies of Western powers, making BRICS not just a geopolitical actor but also an ideational movement for redefining the rules of the global game.

However, BRICS' vision of multipolarity faces internal constraints. Divergent interests, such as China's global ambitions, India's democratic identity, Russia's security assertiveness, and Brazil's and South Africa's domestic challenges, complicate unified policy action. Moreover, global crises such as the Russia-Ukraine war and U.S.-China tensions test the bloc's coherence. Despite these challenges, BRICS continues to function as a critical platform for dialogue, collective bargaining, and South-South cooperation, embodying the pluralist reality of the emerging global order.

In sum, the historical trajectory from Western imperial dominance through bipolar rivalry and unipolar hegemony to multipolarity reveals that BRICS is both a product and a driver of systemic transformation. Its formation reflects accumulated grievances against historical injustices, unequal global governance, and Western-centric models of development. BRICS represents a conscious effort by emerging powers to reclaim agency and redefine international norms on their own terms.

While internal asymmetries persist, the bloc's collective influence signals the transition toward a more inclusive and diversified world system. The evolution of BRICS demonstrates that the global order is no longer shaped solely by Western power but increasingly by a multiplicity of actors, cultures, and developmental paradigms. As the 21st century unfolds, BRICS stands at the intersection of history and possibility, a manifestation of the enduring quest for a just and multipolar world.

BRICS and Global Governance in Practice

The emergence of BRICS as a coalition of major emerging economies has profoundly influenced the evolving dynamics of global governance. While the bloc initially coalesced around economic cooperation, its growing political engagement and institutional innovations have expanded its influence into areas such as finance, development, climate change, health, and technology. BRICS' engagement in these domains reflects its dual aspiration: to reform global governance structures and to establish alternative platforms that promote inclusivity and equity. This section examines how BRICS has translated its ideals into practice, assessing its contributions, challenges, and implications for the global order.

Reforming Global Financial Architecture: One of BRICS' most tangible contributions to global governance has been its challenge to the Western-dominated financial architecture. For decades, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have been criticized for their governance structures, which disproportionately favor developed countries, and for imposing policy conditionalities that often undermine the sovereignty of developing nations (Chin,

2014). In response, BRICS created alternative mechanisms designed to give developing economies greater voice and autonomy.

The New Development Bank (NDB), established in 2014 and headquartered in Shanghai, embodies this vision. Its primary mandate is to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies. The NDB operates on the principle of equal shareholding and voting rights, ensuring that all members, regardless of their economic size, possess equal representation. This model contrasts with the IMF and World Bank's quota systems, where voting power is determined by financial contributions. By promoting financial inclusivity, the NDB seeks to reduce dependency on Western institutions while strengthening South-South cooperation (Humphrey, 2020).

Complementing the NDB is the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), a $100 billion framework aimed at providing liquidity support to members during balance-of-payment crises. Functionally, like the IMF, but without its structural adjustment conditions, the CRA enhances the financial resilience of developing economies. Together, these instruments represent an attempt to decentralize global financial governance and democratize access to development finance. However, despite their potential, both institutions face challenges of limited scale and scope relative to the IMF and World Bank, as well as bureaucratic inefficiencies that have slowed project implementation (Breznitz, 2021).

Trade, Economic Cooperation, and Development Initiatives: Economic cooperation remains at the heart of BRICS' agenda. The bloc collectively accounts for about 25% of global GDP and over 16% of world trade (World Bank, 2024). Annual BRICS summits have emphasized policies that promote trade liberalization among members, enhance investment flows, and strengthen technological collaboration.

BRICS' engagement in trade and development extends beyond intra-bloc relations. It seeks to reshape global economic governance through advocacy for fairer trade practices and reform of institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO). The members have often criticized protectionism and the dominance of Western economies in setting trade norms. For instance, during the BRICS Summit

in Johannesburg (2018), the leaders called for a multilateral trading system that is open, transparent, and based on rules that reflect contemporary realities rather than post-war power distributions.

The bloc's approach to development also emphasizes sustainability and innovation. The BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR), launched in 2019, promotes collaboration in digitalization, artificial intelligence, and green technologies. This initiative signals a strategic shift from traditional industrial development to a focus on future-oriented economies capable of competing in the global knowledge market. Such efforts reflect BRICS' ambition not only to reform existing institutions but also to create new frameworks that embody the developmental aspirations of the Global South.

BRICS and Global Political Governance: Beyond economic engagement, BRICS has increasingly asserted itself in the political and security dimensions of global governance. The bloc advocates for a more representative and democratic international system, particularly within the United Nations (UN). BRICS countries consistently call for comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to ensure equitable representation of developing regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Thakur, 2020). India, Brazil, and South Africa have expressed aspirations for permanent seats, arguing that the current UNSC structure reflects outdated post-World War II realities.

BRICS' engagement in peace and security has primarily emphasized non-intervention, respect for sovereignty, and multilateral dialogue. These principles contrast with the interventionist tendencies of Western powers and align with the bloc's broader ideological stance on global governance. While BRICS has not formed a military alliance, it promotes cooperative security initiatives such as the BRICS Counterterrorism Working Group, which seeks to address global security threats through intelligence sharing, capacity building, and legal cooperation.

The bloc also engages in coordination within international forums like the G20, where it often presents unified positions on issues such as climate finance, digital taxation, and development aid. By harmonizing its diplomatic stance, BRICS

enhances the collective bargaining power of emerging economies and challenges Western dominance in global agenda-setting.

BRICS and Global Health and Climate Governance: In global health governance, BRICS has emerged as a crucial actor, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bloc demonstrated solidarity through the exchange of medical supplies, vaccine diplomacy, and collaborative research initiatives. China and India played pivotal roles in vaccine production and distribution under frameworks such as the COVAX Facility and bilateral humanitarian assistance. These efforts underscored BRICS' capacity to complement, and in some cases, compensate for the shortcomings of Western-led responses (Ghosh, 2022).

On environmental issues, BRICS has positioned itself as an advocate for equitable climate governance. The bloc supports the Paris Agreement and calls for differentiated responsibilities that account for historical emissions by developed countries. The BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting provides a platform for coordinating national environmental policies, promoting green finance, and supporting renewable energy development. The collective stance underscores the bloc's commitment to sustainability while rejecting Western-imposed models that neglect developmental needs. However, tensions persist, China's coal reliance, Brazil's deforestation, and India's industrialization challenge the bloc's environmental credibility (Viola & Lima, 2020).

Challenges and Contradictions in BRICS Governance Practice: Despite these achievements, BRICS faces significant challenges in institutionalizing its influence. The most pressing issue is internal asymmetry. China's overwhelming economic power, accounting for more than 70% of BRICS' total GDP, creates an imbalance that complicates decision-making. Russia's geopolitical confrontation with the West, India's rivalry with China, and domestic instabilities in Brazil and South Africa further hinder cohesion (O'Neill, 2021).

Moreover, BRICS' operational effectiveness is limited by its consensus-based decision-making process, which often results in broad declarations rather than binding policies. Unlike the European Union or ASEAN, BRICS lacks a permanent secretariat or enforcement mechanism to coordinate and implement decisions

systematically. This loose institutional framework, while preserving state sovereignty, reduces the bloc's ability to act collectively in moments of crisis.

Externally, BRICS operates in an environment dominated by entrenched Western institutions and alliances. Its initiatives, such as the NDB remain relatively small compared to the IMF or World Bank, limiting its transformative impact. Additionally, Western skepticism and media framing often portray BRICS as a fragile or opportunistic coalition rather than a coherent alternative order.

In practice, BRICS has become an important laboratory for alternative models of global governance that prioritize inclusivity, sovereignty, and South-South cooperation. Its institutional innovations, economic initiatives, and normative assertions have collectively expanded the horizons of global governance beyond Western parameters. Nevertheless, the bloc's internal divisions and limited institutionalization constrain its transformative capacity.

BRICS has succeeded in creating a platform for dialogue and reform advocacy but remains a work in progress as a cohesive power bloc. Its future impact on global governance will depend on its ability to overcome asymmetries, deepen institutional cooperation, and balance national interests with collective ambitions. If it manages these challenges effectively, BRICS could become a cornerstone of a truly multipolar, equitable, and sustainable world order.

Findings and Analytical Reflections

The evolution of BRICS from a loosely defined economic concept into a structured political and institutional bloc represents a defining feature of the 21st-century global order. The findings from the preceding analysis reveal that BRICS functions both as a platform for reform and a symbol of resistance to Western-dominated global governance. Its activities illuminate deeper structural shifts in international relations, reflecting a move from unipolarity toward multipolarity, and a growing demand for inclusivity in global decision-making.

Multipolarity and Redistribution of Power: The most visible finding is BRICS' contribution to the redistribution of global power. Since its formation, the bloc has challenged the hegemony of the United States and its allies, advocating for a more

balanced global order that reflects contemporary economic and political realities. The collective GDP and demographic strength of BRICS countries, coupled with their regional influence, have elevated their status as indispensable global actors. This transformation demonstrates the declining monopoly of the Global North and the rise of a more pluralized international system.

The expansion of BRICS to include new members such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE further amplifies its global reach and legitimacy. This enlargement demonstrates a pragmatic shift from a narrowly defined economic grouping to a more diverse geopolitical alliance representing multiple regions and interests (BRICS Joint Declaration, 2023). In effect, BRICS has become both a voice of the Global South and a counterweight to Western dominance.

Institutional Innovation and South–South Solidarity: Another major finding is BRICS' commitment to institutional innovation. Through the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), BRICS has provided alternative mechanisms for global financial governance. These institutions challenge the monopoly of Bretton Woods systems by offering more flexible, equality-based financial arrangements. Unlike the IMF and World Bank, which are often criticized for policy conditionalities that erode sovereignty, the NDB emphasizes partnership and mutual benefit (Humphrey, 2020).

These institutional frameworks also promote South–South solidarity, encouraging knowledge sharing, capacity building, and infrastructural investment across developing regions. For instance, NDB-funded projects in renewable energy and transport infrastructure in South Africa, Brazil, and India demonstrate the bloc's practical commitment to sustainable development. However, despite these achievements, the NDB's limited capitalization and slow project rollout reveal operational constraints that may limit its global transformative potential (Breznitz, 2021).

Ideological Coherence and Strategic Ambiguities: A third analytical insight concerns the ideological diversity within BRICS. While the bloc is unified in its critique of Western hegemony, it lacks internal ideological coherence. The member states differ widely in their political systems, economic structures, and foreign

policy orientations. China's authoritarian capitalism contrasts sharply with India's democratic governance; Russia's confrontational stance toward the West often conflicts with Brazil's preference for diplomatic neutrality.

This heterogeneity generates strategic ambiguities that impede consensus on global issues such as climate change, security interventions, and digital governance. Moreover, China's economic preponderance risks turning BRICS into a China-centric platform rather than a genuinely multilateral coalition. These asymmetries highlight the inherent tension between sovereignty preservation and collective action, a paradox at the heart of BRICS diplomacy (O'Neill, 2021).

Global Governance Impact and Limitations: The findings also indicate that BRICS has succeeded more as a normative actor than as an institutional alternative. Its influence lies in agenda-setting, discourse transformation, and symbolic power, not in replacing existing institutions outright. BRICS summits, declarations, and policy statements consistently challenge the Western monopoly on defining the rules of global governance. The bloc promotes a discourse centered on equality, non-interference, and mutual respect principles that resonate strongly with developing nations seeking reform of global institutions like the UN Security Council and the WTO (Thakur, 2020).

Yet, the implementation gap between rhetoric and reality remains significant. The absence of a permanent secretariat or unified foreign policy strategy limits BRICS' ability to act as a coherent force. Its initiatives are often reactive rather than proactive, responding to Western actions rather than setting independent global agendas. Additionally, internal rivalries, particularly between China and India, undermine cohesion and impede the formulation of a unified geopolitical strategy.

Analytical Reflection-The Dual Nature of BRICS: Analytically, BRICS embodies a dual character, both reformist and conservative. On one hand, it seeks to reform the existing international system, advocating democratization of global governance. On the other, it operates within the same system it critiques, benefiting from established global structures while cautiously pushing for change. This duality reflects the pragmatic realism of its members, who prioritize national interests over ideological solidarity.

In conclusion, BRICS represents a significant but incomplete project of global transformation. It has opened new spaces for dialogue, enhanced the agency of the Global South, and redefined the parameters of multilateralism. However, for BRICS to realize its transformative potential, it must deepen institutional integration, harmonize member interests, and strengthen its operational frameworks. Its future relevance will depend not merely on its capacity to challenge the status quo but on its ability to build viable alternatives that embody fairness, equity, and shared prosperity in global governance.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The rise of BRICS represents one of the most consequential developments in global politics since the end of the Cold War. Its formation and steady evolution demonstrate a fundamental recalibration of power in the international system, away from Western dominance toward a more plural and multipolar world order. Through coordinated economic, diplomatic, and institutional efforts, BRICS has established itself as both a symbol of resistance to unipolarity and a vehicle for South–South cooperation. However, the bloc's future relevance depends on its ability to transcend internal contradictions and to transform its normative aspirations into tangible global outcomes.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that BRICS has played a significant role in reconfiguring the structure of global governance. Its collective push for reform in international financial institutions, coupled with the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), provides developing countries with credible alternatives to traditional Western-dominated mechanisms. By advancing multilateralism, BRICS has offered a counter-discourse to neoliberal globalization, one that emphasizes equality, inclusivity, and respect for sovereignty (Thakur, 2020).

Nevertheless, the findings also expose the bloc's persistent institutional and strategic weaknesses. The absence of a unified secretariat, divergent national interests, and asymmetrical power dynamics, particularly China's economic dominance continue to constrain the bloc's cohesion. Internal disagreements on

issues such as security, trade, and political alignment often dilute BRICS' collective influence. Furthermore, its inability to articulate a clear ideological framework beyond anti-Western rhetoric limits its long-term transformative capacity (O'Neill, 2021).

The rise of multipolarity offers both opportunity and risk. On one hand, BRICS provides a platform for rebalancing power and democratizing global decision-making. On the other hand, without a coherent institutional strategy, multipolarity could devolve into fragmented competition rather than cooperative governance. Hence, BRICS' future trajectory will depend on whether it can evolve from a forum of dialogue into an effective agent of transformation in the global order.

The study concludes that BRICS' contribution lies not only in altering global power configurations but also in redefining the philosophy of global engagement. Its advocacy for partnership-based development, mutual respect, and cultural pluralism challenges the ideological homogeneity imposed by Western liberalism. However, realizing these ideals requires strategic consistency, internal solidarity, and deeper institutionalization.

Policy Recommendations

Institutional Strengthening and Governance Reform: BRICS should move toward formalizing its institutional structure by establishing a permanent secretariat or coordinating council to enhance policy continuity and administrative efficiency. This would facilitate more coherent communication, coordination, and monitoring of joint initiatives, ensuring that declarations translate into measurable outcomes.

Internal Cohesion and Conflict Management: Divergent national interests, especially between China and India, must be managed through structured diplomatic dialogue and consensus-building mechanisms. Regular intra-BRICS consultations on security, trade, and technological issues should be institutionalized to prevent strategic mistrust from eroding unity.

Economic and Financial Deepening: The NDB and CRA should expand their capital base and membership to include other Global South economies, enabling greater financial inclusivity. Emphasis should be placed on financing infrastructure, renewable energy, and digital innovation, which align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Strategic Communication and Normative Projection: BRICS must invest in a stronger public diplomacy strategy to articulate its vision for global order. By clearly defining its values, such as non-interference, mutual respect, and shared prosperity — BRICS can enhance its legitimacy as a normative power capable of shaping global discourses rather than merely reacting to Western narratives.

South–South Cooperation and Knowledge Exchange: The bloc should strengthen educational, technological, and research collaborations across member states and other developing regions. Establishing a BRICS Institute for Development Studies could help foster knowledge transfer, policy innovation, and capacity building within the Global South.

Engagement with Existing Global Institutions: Rather than adopting a purely oppositional stance, BRICS should pursue constructive engagement with institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and UN. By advocating reform from within, while offering alternative models of development finance, BRICS can increase its credibility and policy influence.

Digital and Technological Collaboration: Given the increasing importance of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital trade, BRICS should prioritize technological sovereignty and establish collaborative frameworks for digital governance. A joint "BRICS Digital Strategy" could ensure equitable participation in the global technological economy.

Climate Change and Sustainability Leadership: BRICS nations must leverage their collective influence on champion global climate governance. Coordinated policies on renewable energy transition, carbon reduction, and sustainable agriculture would demonstrate leadership in addressing global ecological challenges.

Final Reflection

In essence, BRICS represents the contours of a new world order in formation, one that is plural, participatory, and potentially more equitable. However, the success of this emerging order depends on BRICS' ability to align its internal diversity with a shared long-term vision. The bloc's endurance will rest on deepening cooperation not only for collective empowerment but for global transformation rooted in justice, equality, and sustainable development. BRICS stands at a crossroads: it can either remain a loose forum of rhetoric or evolve into a robust coalition capable of reshaping the 21st-century global order. Its next decade will determine whether it becomes a transformative actor of global justice, or another fleeting experiment in international diplomacy.

References

Adebajo, A. (2020). The rise of the Global South and the reshaping of world order. Oxford University Press.

Allison, R. (2022). Russia, China, and the shifting dynamics of global power: BRICS in multipolarity. International Affairs, 98(3), 623–641. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac045

Barma, N., & Nelson, T. (2019). The BRICS and the evolution of global governance: Challenges and prospects. Global Governance, 25(4), 509–531.

Bond, P., & Garcia, A. (2018). BRICS: An anti-capitalist critique. Pluto Press.

Breznitz, D. (2021). Innovation in emerging economies: Lessons from BRICS nations. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 35(2), 55–77.

BRICS Joint Declaration. (2023). Johannesburg Declaration of the BRICS Summit. BRICS Secretariat.

Chin, G., & Thakur, R. (2020). Will BRICS change the world order? The Washington Quarterly, 43(2), 7–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1771042

Destradi, S. (2021). Multipolarity, multilateralism, and the Global South: The BRICS and the quest for global governance reform. Third World Quarterly, 42(2), 241–258.

Dingwerth, K., & Pattberg, P. (2019). Global governance as a complex system: The BRICS effect. Review of International Studies, 45(5), 812–832.

Flockhart, T. (2020). The coming multi-order world: The redefinition of global governance in the 21st century. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 33(3), 422–444.

Friedman, G. (2021). BRICS and global economic transformation: Challenges of cooperation. Routledge.

Gray, K., & Gills, B. K. (2018). South–South cooperation and the changing global order: BRICS, development, and dependency. Third World Quarterly, 39(9), 1791–1810.

Humphrey, C. (2020). The New Development Bank and the challenge of alternative development finance. Global Policy, 11(3), 299–312. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758- 5899.12788

Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The end of liberal international order? International Affairs, 94(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241

Khanna, P. (2021). The future is Asian: Global order in the twenty-first century. Simon & Schuster.

Lo, B. (2022). BRICS, Russia, and the strategic contest for global influence. Survival, 64(1), 33– 56.

Mielniczuk, F. (2019). BRICS in the contemporary global order: Reformist or revolutionary? Third World Quarterly, 40(1), 28–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1545345

Narlikar, A. (2020). Pax BRICS? The BRICS and the construction of global order. International Affairs, 96(4), 1031–1049.

O'Neill, J. (2021). Building BRICS: The changing face of global economics. Foreign Affairs, 100(5), 75–88.

Thakur, R. (2020). Reforming global governance: The BRICS and beyond. Global Governance, 26(2), 181–200.