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The First Fifteen Years of the BRICS¹

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Abstract

At the first BRIC(S) summit in 2009, leaders of the major emerging market countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) from different continents committed to build a democratic and transparent economic architecture, support the efforts of the Group of 20 (G20) to reform the international financial institutions, restore growth, and deepen intra-group cooperation. Since then, views expressed in the literature on BRICS (expanded to include South Africa in 2010) have ranged from the harsh dismissal of BRICS as a meaningless investment banker's acronym to its identification as a new power centre with a profound impact on the global economic order.

The authors offer an updated, systematic assessment of BRICS' evolving institutional dynamics, performance, and contribution to cooperation among its members, and to global governance as a whole. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, they identify the major achievements of each of the BRICS' 13 annual summits through the three five-year hosting cycles, the leaders' agreements on 933 collective commitments, and their countries' compliance with them at a level of 77% overall. Further, they highlight the expansion of the group's agenda into 34 subjects, the process of building the intra-BRICS institutions with the New Development Bank (NDB) as its hallmark, and its extensive second track networks including Business, Think Tanks and Academic, Trade Unions, Parliamentary, Youth and Civil BRICS.

In its first 15 years, BRICS expanded and sustained its institutional dynamics, depth, and performance despite external and domestic challenges, tensions between the members, and the unprecedented tests of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing socio-economic crises since 2020. Established as a dialogue and policy coordination forum, it matured into a transregional governance institution with a comprehensive political-security, socio-economic, and people-to-people agenda. Its dense institutional networks, flexibility, continuity, and foundational principle of moving forward only on issues acceptable to all members were vital factors for BRICS' resilience and evolution. Although broadening its agenda inhibited deepening cooperation, there was considerable continuity across the annual presidencies. Progress on intra-BRICS cooperation was more tangible than that on international architecture reform, despite the group's unwavering commitment to an equitable international order. Its consensus-based working methods sometimes constrained the group's leadership. However, BRICS proved its value as a platform for facilitating its members' bilateral relations and convergence in approaches, promoting their role in global governance, and advancing a more inclusive, representative, and effective international institutional system.

Keywords: BRICS; international institutions; global world order; New Development Bank; G20.

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Introduction

The BRIC group of Brazil, Russia, India and China, whose leaders convened at their first summit in Russia in 2009, united the major emerging market countries from different continents. Their leaders committed to build a democratic and transparent economic architecture and support the efforts of the Group of Twenty (G20) to reform the international financial institutions (IFIs) and restore growth. BRIC leaders pledged to deepen intra-group cooperation in the interests of emerging market and developing countries. Created as a dialogue and policy coordination platform, BRICS (established after South Africa joined BRIC in 2010) has matured into a transregional governance mechanism with a comprehensive political, security, economic and social agenda [Chakraborty, 2018].

The literature on BRICS' evolution and performance ranges widely. It includes a harsh dismissal of BRICS as "a fable of our time" [Wallerstein, 2016], a sceptical assessment of it as a club incapable of developing a collective world order vision due to its political and ideological heterogeneity [Nuruzzaman, 2020], and a critical judgment of it as a disruptive force posing normative and structural challenges to the existing liberal international order [Beeson, Zeng, 2018]. It also includes comprehensive accounts of its development and role in world order [Stuenkel, 2020a], studies of the forum's origin and geopolitical determinants of its evolution [Cooper, 2016], research on individual BRICS countries' international political economy [Li, 2019], and an evaluation of BRICS as an alliance exerting a profound impact on the global economic order [Hopewell, 2017].

Analysis of the bilateral trade and investment relations between BRICS countries supports the claim that there is a gap between the rhetoric and reality of intra-BRICS economic cooperation [Hooijmaaijers, 2021]. China's role is perceived as critical for the success of BRICS' collective actions, yet China's institutional initiatives, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative, are regarded as China's choice to champion its own solutions to global governance rather than do so through BRICS cooperation [Duggan, Ladines Azalia, 2020]. However, despite the asymmetries between its members and its limited impact on global governance reform [Larionova, Shepelov, 2021], BRICS remains "a core of south-south cooperation, promoting the interests of a group of developing countries in global governance for a more balanced global architecture" [Duggan et al., 2021]. BRICS has created a network of institutions to advance cooperation between the members and has sustained its institutional dynamics, despite domestic and external challenges.

This article contributes to the extensive and expanding literature on BRICS by reviewing the group's institutional dynamics, performance, and engagement with its outreach countries and second track partners, and by exploring the causes of its evolution and resilience. Qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied to do so. The authors draw on content analysis of BRICS documents, including declarations by leaders and ministers, working group and task force plans and reports, statements of officials, outlines of priorities for presidencies, the New Development Bank (NDB) documents and annual reports, and international institutions' and other related documents. The analysis relies on empirical evidence from the studies of BRICS members' compliance with the key commitments made at the summits. Compliance is understood as national governments' actions aimed at implementation through formal legislative or administrative regulations, budgetary or resource allocation, or other measures taken to execute summit commitments. Commitments are defined as discrete, specific, publicly expressed, collectively agreed statements of intent by summit members

that they will undertake future actions to move toward identified welfare targets.² Assessment of compliance with priority commitments carried out by the BRICS Research Group at the University of Toronto and the Centre of International Institutions Research of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration includes data sets for 89 commitments that reflect the essence of the summits' decisions in a representative way.³

The First, Formative Cycle: Defining Priorities, Building Institutions, Agenda, and Identity (2008–13)

BRICS summitry was preceded by foreign ministers' meetings, held since 2006 on the margins of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, and by meetings of future-BRIC(S) finance ministers and central bank governors (FMCBG), who held their first consultations on the eve of the G20 FMCBG meeting on 7 November 2008 [BRIC, 2008]. The first BRICS summit communiqué clearly signalled the group's shared aspiration to address the legitimacy crisis of the international financial and monetary order through reforms of the regulatory and supervisory frameworks and multilateral institutions, centred in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the Financial Stability Board (FSB). The March 2009 BRIC FMCBG meeting reinforced the message, urging a quota review, a significant realignment of the IMF and WB quotas, a new allocation of IMF special drawing rights (SDRs), and a study of the reserve currencies' role in the international monetary system (IMS). The latter reflected the debate among BRIC members over the idea of supplanting the dollar with a supranational currency, as proposed by China [Zhou, 2009] and supported by Russia [President of the RF, 2009]. However, with no BRIC consensus on creating a multilateral or SDR-based reserve currency governed by the IMF, BRIC did not pursue this further. The foundational principle of moving forward only on issues acceptable to all members became vital for BRIC(S)' development, while also constraining its leadership potential.

At their first summit in Ekaterinburg, Russia in 2009, BRIC leaders committed to support the G20 in dealing with the financial crisis, advance the reform of IFIs, and promote a stable, predictable, and more diversified IMS. They defined the BRIC(S) goals of building a just, multipolar, world order and promoting cooperation among members. Coordination on the key issues of the international institutions (IIs) agenda and pursuit of financial architecture reform became an inherent feature of the BRICS process. The September 2009 FMCBG meeting proposed a shift of quotas and shares of 7% in the IMF and 6% in the WB in favour of emerging market and developing countries [BRIC, 2009]. The proposal eventually became the Seoul G20 summit's decision on quota shifts of 6% and 5%, respectively. BRIC launched its agriculture ministers' meeting to discuss food security. The decision to organize a business forum and a conference of think tanks parallel to the 2010 summit in Brasilia began engagement with the business and epistemic communities.

Support for the G20 as the premier forum for international economic coordination and advancement of II reform remained at the core of the BRIC(S) first four presidencies, amidst a rapidly expanding agenda. At the April 2010 Brasilia summit, chaired by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, leaders emphasized the need for a comprehensive and balanced outcome of the Doha round of multilateral trade talks, promised to sustain efforts to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs) by 2015, pledged to develop cleaner, more affordable and sustainable energy systems, and committed to promote the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Institutional expansion continued. Trade ministers met for the first time in Rio de Janeiro to coordinate positions on the Doha round talks. The academic and business forums were institutionalized, launching track two cooperation. The first joint statistical

² Full description of the methodology, see Global Governance Program [2020].

³ The assessment methodology uses a scale from -1 to +1, where +1 indicates full compliance with the stated commitment, -1 indicates a failure to comply or action taken that is directly opposite to the stated goal of the commitment, and 0 indicates partial compliance or work in progress, such as initiatives that have been launched but are not yet near completion and whose final results can therefore not be assessed. Each member receives a score of -1, 0, or +1 for each commitment. For convenience, the scores are converted to percentages, where -1 equals 0% and +1 equals 100%. The formula to convert a score into a percentage is $P=50 \times (S+1)$, where P is the percentage and S is the score. For full data on BRICS compliance refer to [Global Governance Program, 2020]

publication was released as a step toward harmonization of BRIC statistical information. South African president Jacob Zuma took part in the Brasilia summit as an attendee. In December 2010, South Africa was invited to join the group as a full member [Besada, Tok, Winters, 2013]. In 2011, BRIC thus became BRICS.

BRICS' pursuit of multilateralism was coupled with the development of intra-BRICS cooperation and a collective response by members to persistent challenges and new risks. At the Chinese-hosted Sanya summit in April 2011, leaders committed to cooperate on strengthening international information security and combating cybercrime. The concurrent presence of all five members in the UN Security Council provided an opportunity and impulse for closer coordination on peace and security issues. Given the impact of food and economic insecurity on health and the financial challenges for global health governance, BRICS launched its ministers of health dialogue. They also agreed to establish a global health agenda for universal access to affordable medicines and health commodities, including collaboration with IIs to increase access to quality and safe medicines, vaccines, and other medical products. To address the excessive volatility of agricultural prices, ensure food security, and advance sustainable agriculture, leaders created the Agricultural Cooperation Working Group and adopted an action plan for 2012–16. An agreement signed among their development banks sought to foster an inter-bank mechanism. Thus, BRICS launched coordination on cyber [Gao, 2018] and health issues [Larionova et al., 2014] long before these challenges loomed large on the global agenda.

BRICS' New Delhi summit in March 2012 faced weak economic recovery prospects, significant downside risks from advanced economies' monetary easing policies, a rise in debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratios in Group of 7 (G7) countries [IMF, 2012], excessive capital flow volatility, and delayed IFI reform. Leaders thus focused on maintaining macroeconomic stability and setting up a new development bank to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects. At their informal meeting on the sidelines of the G20's Los Cabos summit in 2012, BRICS leaders discussed reserve pooling and swap arrangements in national currencies. They asked their finance ministers to examine the feasibility of such initiatives. To enhance intra-BRICS economic cooperation, the BRICS development banks signed the Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency and the Multilateral Letter of Credit Confirmation Facility Agreement. Amid mounting geopolitical tensions and regional conflicts, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, BRICS cooperation on political and security issues expanded significantly, both among leaders and foreign affairs ministers.

In 2013, the South African presidency produced several institutional and governance innovations. The eThekweni declaration reiterated the BRICS members' concerns over the risks of, and negative growth consequences for, emerging and developing countries from advanced countries' unconventional monetary policy and the slow pace of global governance architecture reform. Leaders committed to explore new models of equitable development and inclusive growth, building on the members' respective economic strengths. Most importantly, the leaders committed to establish the New Development Bank (NDB) and a contingent reserve arrangement (CRA) with an initial size of \$100 billion to provide mutual support in case of liquidity pressures and contribute to strengthening the global financial safety net [BRICS, 2013].

As host, South African president Jacob Zuma held the first BRICS outreach session to promote cooperation between BRICS and African countries. BRICS promised to support African countries' industrialization through stimulating foreign direct investment, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the diversification of imports. BRICS leaders also pledged to support the UN and African Union in facilitating the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. BRICS education ministers, at their first meeting, agreed to promote cooperation between universities. The first BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Ministerial established a strategic framework for cooperation. The newly created BRICS Business Council met with BRICS leaders to provide business perspectives on intra-BRICS cooperation priorities. The BRICS Think Tanks Council was launched to generate ideas on governance innovations.

Thus, in the first cycle, BRIC expanded into BRICS by adding South Africa and launched an outreach dialogue. Its institutional framework evolved rapidly in the formal and informal tracks. After 2011, the leaders held informal consultations on site just before the G20 summits. BRICS steadily expanded

its agenda, combining continuity and innovation, and consistently promoting global governance architecture reform.

The Second Cycle: Unity Despite Tensions (2014–18)

These expansions accelerated [Kirton, 2015] in the second five-year cycle of BRICS presidencies. The cycle began at the Fortaleza summit in June 2014 with the agreement to establish the NDB and the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement. The NDB's articles of agreement provided for an initial subscribed capital of \$50 billion distributed equally among the founding members, voting power equal to the member's subscribed shares in the capital stock, and an initial authorized capital of \$100 billion. The bank's primary functions included support of infrastructure and sustainable development projects through the provision of loans, guarantees, equity participation, and other financial instruments; cooperation with IFIs and national development banks; provision of technical assistance; and the establishment of special funds [BRICS, 2014a]. The CRA terms defined the initial total and distribution of committed resources,⁴ the instruments,⁵ access limits, and procedures and conditions for request and approval of swap transactions [BRICS, 2014b]. The leaders pledged to raise economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level and to develop a road map. BRICS reiterated commitments to the UN MDGs and promised to work with the UN to achieve an ambitious proposal on the subsequent SDGs.

Given the role of information and communications technology (ICT) and the Internet in sustainable development, BRICS leaders discussed cooperation on ICT research and development. Their national security advisors were asked to establish a group of experts to develop proposals on cybersecurity cooperation and coordination in the UN. Their national development banks signed the Cooperation Agreement on Innovation. A strategic framework defining the institutional structure and modalities for cooperation in science, technology, and innovation was established by the respective ministries. A joint session with the leaders of South American countries was held on multilateralism and international cooperation on peace, security and sustainable development. In response to Australian prime minister Tony Abbott questioning President Putin's participation in the G20 Brisbane summit in light of the events in Ukraine [Mosendz, 2014], BRICS explicitly stated the members' shared position that "custodianship of the G20 belongs to all Member States equally and no one Member State can unilaterally determine its nature and character" [Government of South Africa, 2014c].

Russia's BRICS 2015 presidency continued the institutionalization. The NDB and the CRA became operational. The national development banks signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation with the NDB providing for the joint mobilization of funds and project financing. In the official track arose the first meetings of ministers of energy, environment, labour and employment, industrial policies, communication, culture and youth, heads of tax authorities, and senior officials in charge of international development cooperation. In the second track, the Civil BRICS, Youth BRICS and Parliamentary Forum launched the dialogue between the members' civil society and legislatures. The Memorandum of Understanding on Establishing the BRICS Network University spurred closer cooperation between the members' universities. The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership sought to boost economic cooperation.

The global governance agenda covered a broad range of issues, from UN reform, global health security, and post-2015 development goals to improving sovereign debt restructuring processes. BRICS reiterated its commitment to work in the G20 on macroeconomic policy coordination, financial regulation, base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS), and IFI reform, promoting the priorities of developing countries and emerging markets. The leaders called on the U.S. to ratify the 2010 IFI reforms by mid-September 2015. The Russian presidency continued outreach consultations with regional partners, discussing sustainable economic growth and global and regional governance with the leaders of the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) members, and the SCO observer states.

⁴ China—\$41 billion. Brazil, Russia and India—\$18 billion each. South Africa—\$5 billion.

⁵ Liquidity and precautionary.

India's 2016 presidency sought to promote implementation, balance innovation and continuity in the agenda, sustain institutionalization, and better integrate cooperation mechanisms. On economic governance, leaders reiterated their commitments on advancing negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda, IFI reform, and cooperation for strong, sustainable and inclusive growth. They expressed support for implementation of BEPS, emphasizing that profits should be taxed in the jurisdiction where the economic activity is performed and the value is created. BRICS adopted the ICT Development Agenda and Action Plan to deepen BRICS cooperation on ICTs. The Digital Partnership provided for coordination of national digital agendas, strengthening business-to-business (B2B) engagement, technology transfer and standardization in ICTs, capacity building, e-government development, and coordination within the International Telecommunication Union and other international organizations. On the political-security agenda, BRICS advanced cooperation on combating terrorism, blocking sources of terrorist finance, fighting money laundering, drug trafficking, and criminal activities, and countering misuse of the Internet and ICT. Leaders confirmed the UN's key role in addressing ICT security and promised to work together for the adoption of the rules, norms and principles of responsible behaviour of states, including through the UN Group of Governmental Experts, which was going through a period of contradictions due to the differences in the U.S.- and Russian-sponsored approaches. They created the BRICS Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism to coordinate efforts. The outreach summit focused on expanding trade and investment cooperation with the BIMSTEC members.⁶

In 2017, preserving unity, despite conflicts and contradictions among members, was one of the presidency's priorities. Five days before the summit, India and China began an expeditious disengagement of their border military forces at Doklam [Government of India, 2017], ending an almost three-month stand-off. President Xi Jinping, in his address at the BRICS Xiamen summit, called for doubling the members' efforts "to comprehensively deepen BRICS partnership and usher in the second 'Golden Decade' of BRICS cooperation" [Xi, 2017]. The Chinese presidency sought to produce tangible outcomes on BRICS' economic cooperation and people-to-people engagement and to consolidate BRICS' unity for a more just, equitable, secure, and representative international political and economic order.

Progress on intra-BRICS cooperation was more visible than that on fostering global governance reform. The Framework on Strengthening the Economic and Technical Cooperation, the BRICS E-Commerce Cooperation Initiative, the BRICS Trade in Services Cooperation Roadmap, and the Outlines for BRICS Investment Facilitation defined goals, areas, and actions for trade and investment cooperation. The heads of tax authorities' communiqué specified areas of intra-BRICS and international cooperation on tax, including through a BRICS customs mutual assistance agreement. The establishment of a BRICS local currency bond fund was proposed to promote the development of BRICS local currency bond markets. Expansion of cultural networks⁷ and initiatives⁸ advanced amity between the people. The Chinese initiative on BRICS+ as a new platform for dialogues with other major developing countries or groups of countries did not continue beyond the Chinese presidency. But the dialogue with Egypt, Kenya, Tajikistan, Mexico and Thailand on the 2030 Agenda and building partnerships for development kicked off a debate on outreach as a mechanism for forging regional and bilateral alliances across continents and bringing together the regional integration blocks in which BRICS economies play a leading role [Lissovolik, 2017]. BRICS survived the India-China military conflict unbroken [Verma, Papa, 2021].

In 2018, South African president Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, who had succeeded BRICS veteran Jacob Zuma in February 2018, was expected to focus on domestic affairs after a political crisis in the African National Congress and Zuma's resignation. Some experts assumed that Ramaphosa would

⁶ Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

⁷ The BRICS Alliance of Libraries, Alliance of Museums, Alliance of Art Museums and National Galleries as well as Alliance of Theaters for Children and Young People.

⁸ BRICS Culture Festival, Action Plan of Promoting BRICS Media Cooperation, Chengdu Initiative of 2017 BRICS Friendship Cities and Local Governments Cooperation Forum, Fuzhou Initiative of the BRICS Political Parties, Think-Tanks and Civil Society Organizations Forum.

not be an enthusiastic member of the BRICS club that South Africa had joined under his predecessor. However, Ramaphosa used the BRICS presidency to build relationships with the other BRICS leaders. The key message BRICS conveyed was a renewed commitment to stability, multilateralism and prosperity. BRICS emphasized support for the UN's central role in international affairs, building a fair, just and equitable international order, and addressing common traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Amidst the unprecedented crisis in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the leaders pledged to develop the legal framework of the multilateral trading system and overcome the impasse in the WTO Appellate Body.

Intra-BRICS institutional innovations included the establishment of the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution. The impressive second track programme of 24 events, bringing together youth, business, academics, film-makers, city governors, and media in different parts of South Africa, emphasized the centrality of the people-to-people dimension in BRICS cooperation. The outreach dialogue with the leaders of Rwanda, Uganda, Togo, Zambia, Namibia, Senegal, Gabon, Ethiopia, Angola, and the African Union Chair confirmed South Africa's commitment to making the most of its BRICS membership to foster its members' cooperation with the countries of the continent.

Thus, despite conflicts between the members [Chaulia, 2021], domestic and external challenges, and changes in the members' leaders,⁹ BRICS sustained its institutional dynamics, expanded its cooperation agenda, consolidated its outreach dialogue, and deepened people-to-people engagement and coordination for multilateralism and equitable international order.

The Third Cycle: Standing the Tests of Divisions, COVID-19 and the Pandemic-Induced Crisis (2019-)

Brazil's Jair Messias Bolsonaro, elected in October 2018, took office in January 2019. He promised a drastic change in foreign policy, priorities for deepening trade and investment relations with the U.S., Brazil's accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and differences with other BRICS members over his intention to invite to the outreach session Venezuela's Juan Guaidó, whom none of the other BRICS countries recognized as president [Stuenkel, 2020b]. Thus, expectations of Brazil's presidency were low. However, despite a late start,¹⁰ cooperation proved productive. Under the theme of economic growth for an innovative future, the agenda centred on strengthening cooperation in science, technology, and innovation, engagement on the digital economy, and invigoration of the fight against transnational crime. The programme included the traditional formal and informal summits—16 ministerial and 66 senior officials' meetings—consolidating cooperation on the full spectrum of issues. BRICS adopted a framework for the iBRICS Network (a mechanism for cooperation between science parks, technology incubators and accelerators) to foster mutual knowledge, capacity building, and advancement of BRICS innovation systems, and endorsed the BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Work Plan 2019–2022. The leaders supported the launch of the dual-track negotiation process under the auspices of the UN on universally agreed norms, rules and principles for responsible behaviour of states in ICTs. Unable to forge a consensus on establishing legal frameworks for ensuring security in the use of ICTs, BRICS agreed to continue the discussion of both the Russian initiative on a BRICS intergovernmental agreement and the Brazilian proposal on bilateral agreements among BRICS countries. Although BRICS cooperation did not make significant breakthroughs and the outreach meeting was cancelled, the BRICS' spirit and institutional dynamics were sustained.

In 2020, Russia, as host, had prepared to steer BRICS to strengthen multilateralism and deepen economic cooperation and contacts between people, under the theme "Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth." While the theme remained valid, the focus of deliberations and the mode of engagement changed in response to the eruption of the COVID-19

⁹ Narendra Modi, member of Indian People's Party, succeeded Manmohan Singh of the Indian National Congress in May 2014. Xi Jinping assumed office in spring 2013, after Hu Jintao's retirement.

¹⁰ The first sherpas meeting was held mid-March.

pandemic and the social and economic crisis it caused. The NDB promptly committed \$10 billion for crisis-related assistance, including financing healthcare, social safety-related expenditures, and support for economic recovery. By June, it had provided \$4 billion worth of emergency finance to China, India, Brazil and South Africa. It successfully placed two issues of a \$1.5 billion, 3-year COVID response bond and a \$2 billion, 5-year COVID response bond in international capital markets. The CRA stood ready with its liquidity and precautionary instruments to respond to balance of payments pressures, if needed.

Engagement moved online smoothly. More than 150 events were held, and 30 documents were adopted almost as planned, including the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership for 2021–2025 and the Counter Terrorism Strategy. BRICS COVID-19 response actions included an exchange of information, support for the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative, and a commitment “to work to ensure that, when available, the vaccine is disseminated in a fair, equitable and affordable basis” [BRICS, 2020]. The members coordinated in the G20 and supported its commitments as they had in 2008–09. Stocktaking and publication of a report that assessed the achievements of the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership between 2015–2020 introduced accountability in BRICS, which had been absent before 2020. The live-streaming of the virtual summit demonstrated BRICS’ openness to the world and its people, but it was not a true high-table summit of the leaders’ face-to-face informal meeting. The group’s engagement was again affected by the standoff on the China-India Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, which had erupted in June 2020, and by the tensions in the countries’ bilateral relations, including economic cooperation [Madan, 2020].

In 2021, India’s presidency under the theme “BRICS @ 15: Intra-BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus” was blighted by continued waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. India, Brazil and Russia were among the top five hardest hit countries, with almost 33, 21 and 7 million cases, respectively, by the time of the September summit [WHO, n.d.]. Nevertheless, India advanced cooperation by holding more than 150 events, including almost 30 ministerial meetings and more than 40 virtual events in the people-to-people track. Key deliverables included the BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System, agreed by the foreign ministers and endorsed by the leaders, the Action Plan 2021–2024 for Agricultural Cooperation of BRICS Countries, and the BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan. BRICS reiterated its commitment to promote more responsive, effective, transparent, democratic, action- and solution-oriented global governance institutions, especially the UN, the IMF, the WTO, and the WHO, through enhanced cooperation and close coordination in all relevant multilateral fora, including the G20 [BRICS, 2021a].

To advance recovery and inclusive growth, BRICS pledged to strengthen structural reforms, provide support to the most vulnerable groups of the population and businesses, enhance long-term infrastructure investments, and accelerate socially inclusive digital transformation. Recognizing the nexus between sustainable growth and climate change, finance ministers and central bank governors confirmed their commitment to work with the global community to tackle climate change. Simultaneously, they stressed the group’s shared position that measures to combat climate change should not be used to undermine fair economic competition and expressed concern with unilateral climate-related trade barriers such as the European Union’s proposed carbon border adjustment mechanism. This position was reiterated by the ministers of trade. The leaders reaffirmed BRICS’ commitment to achieve all SDGs and close cooperation in the run up to the 2021 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference. The agreement signed by BRICS space agencies on Cooperation on BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation enhanced capabilities in research on global climate change, disaster management, environmental protection, and sustainable socio-economic development.

The BRICS Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, set up during the 2016 Indian presidency, finalized the counter terrorism plan intended to strengthen cooperation between BRICS intelligence, law enforcement, and security agencies for combating terrorism, online terrorist threats, and terrorism financing [BRICS, 2021b]. The plan was adopted before the withdrawal of the U.S. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from Afghanistan in August. The Taliban’s rise to power in Kabul, movements of migrants, and threats of actions by militant Jihadi groups created widespread

anxiety in the region [Bhatia, 2021], to which BRICS sought to respond. The leaders emphasized three priorities: fostering an inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue to ensure stability, peace, and law and order in the country; fighting terrorism and preventing attempts by terrorist organizations to use Afghan territory to carry out attacks against other countries; and addressing the humanitarian needs [BRICS, 2019]. The commitment's Achilles heel was India's concern with "China's inclination to recognise the Taliban government, support Pakistan and turn a blind eye to extremist Islamic groups as long as they stayed away from China's troubled Uyghur province" [Bhatia, 2021]. Russia's role in overcoming the lack of trust and delivering on the commitment will thus be crucial [Chaulia, 2021]. In 2021, the NDB expanded its membership, project portfolio, support to the members' social and economic recovery, and issuance of bonds in international and Chinese markets. The NDB Board of Directors approved the remaining \$3 billion from the \$10 billion emergency assistance facility endorsed in 2020: \$1 billion for Russia to support incentive payments to healthcare personnel, \$1 billion for South Africa to stimulate jobs creation, and \$1 billion for China to revive economic activities and generate employment. The money for financing recovery and sustainable development was raised by issuing a 3-year fixed rate RMB 5 billion bond in the China interbank bond market (CIBM), and a 5-year \$1.5 billion benchmark bond and a 3-year \$2.25 billion bond in the international market. The NDB became one of the first banks to pilot the United Nations Development Programme's SDGs Impact Standards for Bond Issuers. Investments into physical sustainable infrastructure projects, accompanied by support for digital infrastructure development, amounted to almost \$1.5 billion.

Thus, in the third hosting cycle, BRICS withstood the triple tests of the health, social and economic crises, tensions between its members, and the new divisive threats over Afghanistan. It expanded cooperation on health, made progress on digital economy, science, and technology and innovation cooperation, adopted the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership for 2021–2025 and the Counter Terrorism Action Plan. Though most of the activities moved online, the group sustained its internal institutional dynamics. BRICS combined flexibility, innovation and continuity, but held no outreach meetings in 2019, 2020 or 2021. One of the major developments was the NDB's performance.

Dimensions of Performance

BRICS' evolution as an increasingly effective plurilateral summit institution for transregional global governance, with a comprehensive political-security, socio-economic, and people-to-people agenda, is evident in its performance on the key dimensions of producing collective, precise, future-oriented, politically binding commitments, and in having its members comply with them before the next summit takes place.

Commitments

In producing commitments, performance generally rose (See Appendix A). From 2009–21, the 13 BRIC(S) regular summits made 933 commitments. They began at Yekaterinburg in 2009 with only 15, then climbed somewhat steadily to 127 in 2015, to 128 in 2017, and to a peak of 194 in 2020. By host, Russia averaged 112, Brazil averaged 60, China averaged 83, India averaged 47, and South Africa averaged 56.

By subject, most commitments came on international cooperation, with 99, followed in turn by trade with 68, regional security with 65, and crime and corruption with 61. Then came macroeconomic policy with 58, development and energy with 47 each, food-agriculture and ICT and digital economy with 42 each, IFI reform with 37, fighting terrorism with 34, climate change with 32, and health and financial regulation with 28. Those subjects that have been of continuous concern are international cooperation, trade, and IFI reform with 13 years each, followed by macroeconomic policy, development, and regional security at 12 each. This suggests that BRICS has indeed focused on its

distinctive mission of representing developing countries, and substantially on strengthening intra-BRICS co-operation, supporting the G20, reforming international institutions, and promoting economic growth.

The 99 commitments on international cooperation have been highest at summits hosted by South Africa and Russia with an average of 12 and 10, respectively. The 47 commitments on development have been led by South Africa and China, which averaged 6, while Brazil averaged 4, and Russia and India averaged 2. South Africa has a prominent position on both.

Compliance

Compliance with these commitments by members averaged 77% on the popular scale (or +0.53 on the scientific scale ranging from -1.00 to +1.00) (See Appendix B). Each year, performance has only been in the positive range and usually at a substantial level.

Over time, compliance generally rose to a peak at 89% in 2016 and then slid. Compliance with the assessed 2009 commitments was 100%, with those for 2010 at 63%, those for 2011 at 74%, those for 2012 at 64%, and those for 2013 at 74%. During the first five-year hosting cycle, annual compliance averaged 75%. During the second hosting cycle, compliance rose a little and stayed steady at that higher level. For 2014 it was 70%, in 2015 it was 78%, in 2016 it was 89%, in 2017 it was 79%, and in 2018 it was 85%, for an annual average of 80%. During the third cycle, 2019 had 75% and 2020 had 72%.

Among the members, compliance has been led by India and China, at 83% and 81%, respectively, followed in turn by Russia at 80%. Brazil has 70% and the most recent member, South Africa, has 68%.

By subject, compliance has been led by health and macroeconomic policy at 90%, climate change at 86%, fighting terrorism at 85%, development and energy at 83% each, ICT and digital economy at 80%, and trade and sustainable development at 78% each. BRICS showed below average compliance for crime-corruption at 75%, IFI reform at 62%, finance at 60%, and regional security at 41%. Commitments with fewer than five compliance assessments are led by food-agriculture, the environment, and employment, with 90% each. This pattern shows that BRICS does deliver highly on its mission to support economic growth and promote development. However, progress on the IFI reforms has been inadequate.

Conclusion

In its first 15 years of cooperation, BRICS held 13 annual summits and nine informal summits, produced 933 collective decisions, and complied with them at a level of 77% [CIIR, n.d.]. BRICS established almost 60 intra-group institutions [Larionova et al., n.d.] and an extensive people-to-people network including Business, Think Tanks and Academic, Trade Unions, Parliamentarian, Youth, Civil, and Women Business Alliance dialogues. The group expanded its agenda to 34 subjects. While this broadening sometimes came at the expense of deepening, the members ensured continuity across presidencies. Each of the members revisited the past presidency's priorities at a new level, providing additional impetus to the agenda. By the time of the 13th summit, the NDB had mounted 80 projects amounting to \$30 billion and had admitted the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Bangladesh and Egypt as new members, increasing its representation and legitimacy. With seven bond programmes, the NDB generated liquidity for funding in financial markets, enhancing its financial sustainability through market instruments [Duggan, Ladines Azalia, Rewizorski, 2021]. BRICS sustained its institutional dynamics despite domestic challenges, contradictions between the members, and the unprecedented tests of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing socio-economic crises. Progress on intra-BRICS cooperation was more tangible than that on advancing international architectural reform, despite the group's unwavering commitment to a more equitable international order.

The dense institutional networks, flexibility, continuity, and BRICS' foundational principle of moving forward only on issues acceptable to all members were vital for BRICS' resilience and

expansion. Though the consensus-based working method, coupled with the principle of refraining from imposing any decisions on members of other IIs, sometimes constrained the group's leadership, BRICS proved its value as a platform for facilitating its members' bilateral relations and convergence in approaches, fostering dialogue between its peoples, promoting its members' role in global governance, and advancing inclusive, representative and effective global governance.

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Appendix A: BRICS Commitments by Year and Subject, 2009–21

SPHERE	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
HOST	RU	BRA	CHI	IND	SA	BRA	RU	IND	CHI	SA	BRA	RU	IND	
International cooperation	1	2	2	2	10	6	21	6	12	14	7	9	7	99
Trade	1	2	5	9	3	4	6	2	5	4	4	20	3	68
Regional security	1	0	1	4	5	11	6	4	12	7	6	7	1	65
Crime and corruption	0	0	0	1	1	7	9	3	8	6	11	8	7	61
Macroeconomics	0	2	4	2	3	8	2	3	4	3	4	21	2	58
Development	1	5	1	2	6	7	3	2	11	5	0	3	1	47
Energy	5	9	1	2	0	0	0	0	6	2	2	20	0	47
Food and agriculture	2	0	1	1	0	4	17	0	5	3	0	7	2	42
ICT and digital economy	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	1	5	2	2	16	4	42
IFI reform	1	2	1	4	6	2	3	2	5	2	3	5	1	37
Terrorism	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	4	7	3	1	4	7	34
Science and education	1	1	1	0	0	4	4	0	8	0	0	13	1	33
Climate change	0	1	6	2	1	0	2	1	3	1	2	10	3	32
BRICS cooperation	0	0	3	0	0	3	5	2	6	2	1	8	0	30
Finance	0	4	2	1	0	2	5	1	4	4	1	4	0	28
Health	0	0	1	1	0	0	6	2	5	1	0	7	5	28
International taxation	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	5	4	5	2	0	27
Socioeconomics	1	0	3	2	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	10	0	24
Environment	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	3	4	6	2	21
International information security	0	0	2	0	0	4	7	2	2	1	0	0	0	18
Human rights	0	0	1	0	1	2	5	0	2	0	1	0	3	15
Culture	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	1	6	0	0	1	0	14
Sustainable development	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	14
Infrastructure	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	8	0	10
Non-proliferation	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	2	0	2	9
IGO reform	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	8
Population	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	5
Tourism	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	5
Gender	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Natural disasters	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Peace and security	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Accountability	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sport	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	15	31	38	36	39	86	127	45	128	72	64	194	58	933

Source: calculations made on the basis of the data compiled by the CIIR RANEPa and the University of Toronto

Appendix B: BRICS Compliance by Member and Subject, 2011–20

Subject	NASst	ALL		Brazil		Russia		India		China		South Africa	
All	89	+0.53	77%	+0.40	70%	+0.60	80%	+0.65	83%	+0.63	82%	+0.35	68%
Trade	10	+0.56	78%	+0.40	70%	+0.60	80%	+0.60	80%	+0.60	80%	+0.60	80%
Regional security	9	-0.18	41%	-0.78	11%	+0.33	67%	+0.33	67%	+0.22	61%	-1.00	0%
Macroeconomics	8	+0.80	90%	+0.88	94%	+0.75	88%	+0.75	88%	+1.00	100%	+0.63	82%
Development	8	+0.65	83%	+0.38	69%	+0.63	82%	+0.88	94%	+0.88	94%	+0.50	75%
Health	6	+0.80	90%	+0.67	84%	+0.83	92%	+0.50	75%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%
Terrorism	6	+0.70	85%	+0.33	67%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%	+0.67	84%	+0.50	75%
International taxation	6	+0.63	82%	+0.83	92%	+0.50	75%	+0.83	92%	+0.67	84%	+0.33	67%
ICT and digital economy	6	+0.60	80%	+0.67	84%	+0.67	84%	+0.67	84%	+0.33	67%	+0.67	84%
Crime and corruption	6	+0.50	75%	+0.50	75%	+0.50	75%	+0.50	75%	+0.67	84%	+0.33	67%
Climate change	5	+0.72	86%	+0.80	90%	+0.60	80%	+0.80	90%	+0.80	90%	+0.60	80%
Energy	4	+0.65	83%	+0.75	88%	+0.75	88%	+0.75	88%	+0.50	75%	+0.50	75%
IFI reform	4	+0.23	62%	0.00	50%	+0.25	63%	+0.25	63%	+0.25	63%	-0.25	38%
Finance	4	+0.20	60%	0.00	50%	+0.25	63%	+0.75	88%	+0.50	75%	-0.50	25%
Environment	2	+0.80	90%	+1.00	100%	+0.50	75%	+1.00	100%	+0.50	75%	+1.00	100%
Food and agriculture	1	+0.80	90%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%
Employment	1	+0.80	90%	+1.00	100%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%
Gender	1	+0.60	80%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%	0.00	50%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%
Sustainable development	1	+0.56	78%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%	0.00	50%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%
Human rights	1	+0.20	60%	-1.00	0%	0.00	50%	+1.00	100%	+1.00	100%	0.00	50%

Source: calculations made on the basis of the data compiled by the CIIR RANEPa and the University of Toronto