

# China's Leadership in BRICS Governance<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The BRICS is an international summit institution that provides a platform for the world's leading emerging economies to discuss issues of global governance from a development-centered perspective. This article examines of China's leadership role in the BRICS, drawing on quantitative indicators of China's performance within the BRICS since its first summit in 2009, to the most recent summit in 2021. This article also develops a model of leadership based on quantitative performance measures of deliberation, decision-making, and compliance. This analysis shows that China is predominantly a facilitative and exemplary leader. Its leadership focuses on shaping BRICS discussions on its priority subjects, particularly development and macroeconomics, in addition to leading by positive example through achieving high compliance with its summit commitments.*

**Keywords:** BRICS, China, Global Governance, Development, Macroeconomics

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## Introduction

Given the context of China's rise and America's retreat in global affairs, the future of global governance looks increasingly uncertain. The issue of whether China is a willing, capable, or desirable global leader is highly contested [Boateng, 2021; Larson, 2020; Ly et al., 2019; Wan, 2014; Wang, French, 2014; Zhao, 2018], and the changing nature of global governance issues creates further challenges. As the world faces increasing challenges from a variety of spheres including economic, political-security, climate change, health, digitalization, terrorism, crime and corruption, and others, questions surrounding the future of global governance and its leadership are only increasing in importance and urgency. The most recent crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has further posed a difficult challenge to the international community, as it seeks to deal with its short and long-term health, economic, social, and political consequences.

China's engagement with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa, which together form BRICS, provides a useful empirical case for understanding the broader topic of China's leadership role in global governance. BRICS is significant for China and for the world in several ways. Group of 7 (G7) and the Group of 20 (G20), BRICS is an international summit institution where leaders attend annual meetings to discuss pressing international challenges. As a

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counterpart to the G7 club of advanced economies, BRICS represents a club of leading developing countries and emerging economies. In this way, BRICS is a platform that allows China to reaffirm and bolster its status as a developing country. In addition, BRICS' increasingly diverse agenda allows its members to discuss a wide array of important global challenges from a developing-country perspective. Since its first summit in 2009, BRICS has engaged with an increasingly diversified agenda that touches on not only traditional issues of economics and geopolitics, but also issues such as climate change, energy, health, digitalization, human rights, socio-economic policy, food and agriculture, among many others. BRICS now is an all-encompassing summit institution that provides a platform for China and other members to deal with a wide range of issues of global significance.

In this article, China's leadership role in BRICS is studied through an assessment of China's performance within BRICS from its first summit in 2009 to its most recent summit in 2021. Specifically, this article asks: what kind of leadership role has China played in BRICS and why? This question has generated several distinct schools of thought, which will be reviewed below. The main findings of this study are then summarized, followed by an overview of the data and methodology used in this article, in addition to an explication of the concept of leadership adopted herein. An assessment of BRICS' performance from 2009 to 2021 is offered to provide the contextual background of China's leadership, followed by a quantitative assessment of China's leadership within BRICS and an explanation of several salient causes of China's leadership. Finally, there is a discussion of the prospects for the upcoming 2022 BRICS summit.

## Schools of Thought

### ***China as an Ambitious, Reform-Seeking Leader***

The first school of thought characterizes China as an ambitious, reform-seeking leader within BRICS. B. Hooijmaaijers [2021] argued that China's leadership of BRICS is oriented toward the ambitious goal of reshaping global economic governance. Specifically, China exerts its weight to push forward BRICS' institutional initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the contingent reserve arrangement (CRA). Moreover, China pursued its own institutional initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIIB) alongside its leading role in promoting BRICS institutions. However, according to this school, this leadership faces difficulty as China's ambitions within BRICS will inevitably clash with its independent institutional creations.

### ***China as a Growing, Coalition-Building Leader***

The second school characterizes China as a coalition-building leader within BRICS. L. Wang, Y. Zhang, and H. Xi [2021] argued that China's role in BRICS has grown from that of a participant from 2006–09, to a practitioner from 2009–17, and finally to a leader since 2017 when China held the Xiamen BRICS summit. This leadership role was marked by China's promotion of the BRICS+ model, which aims to engage more emerging markets and developing countries in a cooperative relationship. The authors further argued that China's leadership is focused on the creation of South-South linkages and toward developing a model of BRICS cooperation based on a diversified network of development partners that engages a wider array of developing countries in the cause of solidarity.

### *China as a Cautious and Assertive Status-Seeking Leader*

The third school characterizes China as a cautious, status-seeking leader that is becoming more assertive over time. A. F. Cooper and A. B. Farooq [2016] argued that China's approach to BRICS is a demonstration of its status-seeking behaviour, while its approach to substantive leadership of BRICS is more cautious, as it often adopts a wait and see approach. However, over time, China's leadership in BRICS has become more assertive. This is particularly the case in matters of national interest. Moreover, China's leadership focuses on its relationship with the United States and the rest of the West, rather than specifically on developmental issues. This view of China as a status-seeking leader is further developed in a more recent article by A. F. Cooper and Y. Zhang [2018]. Specifically, they argued that China adopted a "dualistic strategy" that allows it to be both an insider and outsider in the global system. This strategy plays a crucial role in allowing China to gain status as a rising power, while at the same time allowing it to construct a sense of solidarity with the non-western developing world. China's leadership is bolstered by its unmatched scale of resources, which has led to a large degree of agentic confidence.

### *China as a "Mixed Perspective" Leader in BRICS*

The fourth school characterizes China as a multifaceted leader. J. Y. S. Cheng [2015] applied traditional western concepts in international relations to analyze China's leadership role in BRICS and argued that China's approach to BRICS exhibits elements of realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism. First, China recognizes its domestic challenges and takes BRICS as an opportunity to work together with members with shared interests to enhance its own domestic agenda while also enhancing its role in international affairs. Second, China takes a liberal institutionalist perspective toward its goal of reforming international institutions as a response to the existing institutions' inadequacies. Third, from a constructivist perspective, China aims to enhance its influence in international institutions by establishing a discourse of representing the interests of developing countries to strengthen their legitimacy. Specifically, articulating the interests of developing countries through BRICS facilitates China's efforts to enhance its leadership of the evolving international institutional framework.

### *International Leadership With Chinese Characteristics*

Finally, the fifth school develops a theoretical account of a distinctly Chinese style of international leadership: "international leadership with Chinese characteristics." P. Bo [2021] argued that China played a significant role in promoting the development of BRICS but has no intention nor requirement of becoming the hegemon within it. Instead, its leadership consists of three major components. First, China demonstrates facilitative leadership, a type of leadership that emphasizes collective governance with other leaders rather than leading alone, promotes an inclusive vision of global governance, and aims for the empowerment of other developing states. Second, China demonstrates constructive leadership, which emphasizes the crucial role of institutional construction, interest construction, and ideational construction. Third, China demonstrates exemplary leadership which is "morally oriented" toward establishing a harmonious world order, self-transformation, and the provision of intellectual guidance through providing a long-term vision for the international community. In particular, Bo argued that China's leadership in BRICS is an empirical demonstration of "international leadership with Chinese characteristics" and that its leadership of BRICS corresponds with the three stages of BRICS' institutional development: first, in the establishment of an emerging power

platform from 2009–10; second, in its expansion from 2011–12; and third, in its deepening institutionalization from 2013–18.

### *Remaining Puzzles*

While the schools of thought surveyed above provide an abundance of useful theoretical concepts surrounding China's leadership role in BRICS, there remains a gap in the evidence that is used to support these theories and models of leadership. Most existing arguments on China's leadership role are based on qualitative evidence and the detailed process tracing of China's initiatives and engagement with BRICS. In this article, a quantitative, data-driven approach is applied to the question of what kind of leadership role China has played in BRICS. By analyzing China's performance in a number of dimensions using concrete, measurable data, this study provides a novel approach to assessing the nature of China's leadership role in BRICS and provides firm groundwork to both bolster and challenge existing accounts of China's leadership.

### *Thesis*

It is argued in this article that China is a strong and flexible leader within BRICS. Based on an assessment of quantitative data along several dimensions of performance, China's outstanding performance has been strong and sustained. Specifically, China has demonstrated two distinct types of leadership within BRICS: deliberative leadership and exemplary leadership. First, China's leadership role can be compared to that of a leading facilitator guiding the direction of BRICS' summit deliberations. While China's leadership style is more assertive in certain specific areas such as health, its general leadership style is more facilitative in nature. Second, China is also an exemplary leader that leads by positive example. On this dimension, China leads by example unilaterally in its highest priority subjects of development and macro-economics, while it leads cooperatively with other BRICS partners in the areas of health and trade. Overall, China exhibits a flexible style of leadership that varies across subjects: it is both a deliberative and exemplary leader within BRICS, and its leadership exhibits a mixture of facilitation and assertiveness, as well as unilateralism and cooperation. The main sources of China's strong but flexible leadership style are its vulnerabilities from recent global shocks, the failure of existing western-dominated multilateral organizations, its predominant capabilities, its converging political characteristics with other BRICS members, its domestic political cohesion, and BRICS' role as the club at the hub of a network of new plurilateral summit institutions.

## Theoretical Framework, Methodology, and the Concept of Leadership

### *The Concept of Leadership*

The concept of leadership that is developed in this paper is based predominantly on J. Kirton's adapted systemic hub model of governance [Kirton, 2013, 2016; Kirton, Wang, 2021]. In this model, the assessment of a country's leadership focuses on the member's place in, and contribution to, the institution's existence and success, its shared or unilateral initiatives, its ability to attract followers to affect the summit outcome in a desired way, and its coalition building, among other things [Kirton, 2016]. Specifically, the model applies a quantitative assessment of performance to the individual member. This model encompasses six distinct performance dimensions and outlines six causes of high performance. This analysis draws on

the most salient dimensions and causes of performance outlined in the systemic hub model to develop a new model of leadership that is most informative for assessing China's role in BRICS. Specifically, two types of leadership styles are identified. The first type is deliberative leadership, and the second is exemplary leadership. Both types of leadership correspond with specific quantitative measurements of performance.

### *Deliberative Leadership*

Deliberative leadership reflects the ability of a member to generate discussion on its priority issues areas among fellow BRICS members. There are two degrees to which deliberative leadership can be exercised. The first is facilitative deliberative leadership, in which the leader plays the role of a leading facilitator in a discussion. Facilitative deliberative leadership is assessed using the quantitative measurement of deliberation. Deliberation refers to how much the leaders discussed the subject in question at the summit. Specifically, the percent of deliberation on a specific subject reflects the relative weight that the subject received at summit discussions, relative to other subjects. Thus, if a member's priority subjects are also subjects of high deliberation by BRICS, then the member has demonstrated facilitative deliberative leadership, as it has exercised leadership in shaping the direction of BRICS discussion toward subjects that it cares about the most.

The second and deeper degree to which a leader can exercise deliberative leadership is labelled assertive deliberative leadership. The corresponding quantitative assessment of performance from the systemic hub model is decision-making. Decision-making is measured by the number of commitments that BRICS members made on a specific subject area. Thus, if the subjects of a leader's highest priority also achieve high performance in BRICS decision-making (that is, BRICS adopted a high number of commitments on the subject), then the leader has further demonstrated its deliberative leadership as it has succeeded in getting the other BRICS members to make politically binding commitments on subjects that it cares about most. In this sense, it has demonstrated assertive deliberative leadership.

Facilitative and assertive leadership are not mutually exclusive. While leaders can be purely facilitative (as when BRICS has high deliberation on subjects that the leader cares about without making a high number of commitments), or purely assertive (as when BRICS makes a high number of commitments without having high deliberation on the subjects that the leader cares about), leaders can often be both facilitative and assertive (as when, on the subjects that the leaders care most about, BRICS achieves both high deliberation and makes a high number of commitments).

### *Exemplary Leadership*

Exemplary leadership is leading by doing. This type of leadership is a way of demonstrating responsibility, political will, political capacity, and accountability. The quantitative performance dimension of the systemic hub model that corresponds with exemplary leadership is the dimension of delivery, measured by compliance scores. Compliance scores assess how well a country has complied with the commitments that it made on specific subjects. A comparison of a country's compliance scores relative to other BRICS members will show whether the country is an exemplary leader. Thus, a country is an exemplary leader if it has achieved the highest or at least higher-than-average compliance scores relative to other BRICS members.

Here, leadership can again be distinguished into two further styles: a country can either be a unilateral exemplary leader or a cooperative exemplary leader. This categorization focuses on the leader's relationship with other members of the institution and asks the question: does the leader lead alone or with other countries? First, if a country's compliance score is the highest

among BRICS members and it is the only country that has achieved this high compliance score, then this country is leading unilaterally. In other words, this country alone is setting an example for the rest of the BRICS members that demonstrates its leading responsibility, accountability, and political will. Second, if a country's compliance score is the highest but is matched by one or more other BRICS members, then it is leading cooperatively. In other words, two or more BRICS members have both achieved the same highest ranking compliance score and thus are leading cooperatively by example.

### ***Data and Methodology***

The conception of leadership developed above focuses on three dimensions of performance outlined in the systemic hub model: deliberation, decision-making, and delivery. These are the dimensions most pertinent to the question of China's relationship with BRICS and most meaningful for understanding China's leadership. These dimensions also have the most voluminous amount of quantitative data available from 2009–21 for analysis and evaluation. This article will draw on the data collected by the BRICS Research Group, in cooperation with the Center for International Institutions Research, RANEP, Moscow, that cover the entire length of the summit history from 2009–21.

Deliberation is measured by coding the text of each summit's final declaration for words that are relevant to the specific subjects of study. For example, in the first area of development, a list of development-relevant key words were generated; these key words were then searched for in each of the final declarations of the BRICS Summits from 2009–21; the final number of words spent on development and its percentage of the total word count of the declaration are then used as the quantitative measurement of BRICS' deliberation on the subject of development.

Decision-making is measured by coding the text of each summit's final declaration for future-oriented, politically binding commitments. A set of criteria for what constitutes a commitment has been developed by the G20/G7/BRICS Research Groups. The final list of commitments is then grouped according to subject area. The number of commitments on a particular subject at each summit is the quantitative measurement used to assess decision-making performance on that subject.

Finally, delivery is measured by compliance scores. Since 2009, the BRICS Research Group, in cooperation with the Center for International Institutions Research, has conducted country-specific compliance assessments that measure how well each specific BRICS members has complied with its summit commitments. The compliance period is marked from the end of the summit assessed to the date of next summit. During this period, information about the country's public actions that are relevant to the commitment being assessed are collected and summarized in compliance reports. Each country is then given a score on the –1, 0, +1 scale, where –1 indicates no compliance, 0 indicates partial compliance, and +1 indicates full compliance [G7 Information Center, 2019]. These data also allow for a comparison of compliance among different members across different subjects and over time.

The data used in this article are disaggregated by subject. This allows for an assessment of leadership that is subject-specific and will shed light on which subject areas China's leadership is strongest. Specifically, this study will focus on five main subject areas: development, macroeconomics, trade, climate change, and health. These subject areas were selected for several reasons. Most importantly, these are subjects that are on the top of China's list of global governance priorities, as determined by the pre-summit speeches of Chinese leaders. Thus, a focus on China's top five priority subjects will allow for an assessment of how well China's priorities are reflected in BRICS summits. Furthermore, in terms of breadth, these areas cover both the

traditional development core of BRICS' distinctive mission and the main areas of economic governance (trade and macroeconomic policy), as well as emerging areas of global governance that pose an existential threat to humanity (health and climate change).

## Overview of BRICS Performance, 2009–21

### *Deliberation*

Data on BRICS' subject-specific deliberation show that BRICS members discuss a wide range of subjects to a significant degree. Deliberation has been overall strong on each of the five subject areas surveyed in this article. Based on deliberation data from 2009–21, BRICS' first and most important priority is development, followed by macroeconomics in second place, trade in third place, climate change in fourth, and health in fifth. This shows that BRICS' distinctive mission of development, and its distinctive status as a representative of developing nations, has retained its central position over time. Along with development, economic issues have also occupied a significant place on BRICS' agenda throughout all summits. Finally, beyond its development and economic core, BRICS has also paid substantial and sustained attention to non-economic issues of global governance such as climate change and health.

### *Development*

Development has been a significant subject of focus for BRICS since its first summit. Overall, on average across all of its summits BRICS devoted 35% of its deliberations to the subject of development. BRICS' deliberation on development remained mostly steady throughout the history of BRICS summitry, with the exception of a major, but short-lived, dip in 2014–15. At its first summit in 2009, BRICS devoted 344 words to the subject of development, which accounts for 35% of its total summit deliberation. Development remained a significant subject, accounting for more than 35% of summit deliberations from 2009–13, reaching a peak in 2013 of almost 46%. In 2014, deliberation on development dropped to 8% and further dropped to 7% in 2015. Then, in 2016, deliberation climbed to over 45% and reached an all-time high of 51% in 2017 at the Xiamen summit. Following Xiamen, development deliberation declined slightly but remained significant at greater than 30% from 2018–21 (see Appendix 1A and Graph 1A).

### *Macroeconomics*

The subject of macroeconomics has also been a significant priority for BRICS. Overall, BRICS has devoted an average of 33% of its summit deliberations to the subject. However, there is an overall trend of decline on macroeconomic deliberations. BRICS began strong at its first summit in 2009, dedicating 57% of its deliberations to macroeconomic issues. Following 2009, deliberation on macroeconomics declined gradually, reaching an all-time low of 13.9% in 2014. Following the 2014 summit, macroeconomics deliberation rose slightly to 41% in 2017 at Xiamen. This was followed by another decline, as deliberation dropped gradually to a low of 22.8% at the most recent summit in 2021 (see Appendix 1 and Graph 1B).

### *Trade*

BRICS' third priority is trade. Overall, BRICS has devoted an average of 19% of its summit deliberations to trade. In terms of trends over time, trade deliberation was unstable in the first few years of BRICS summitry but has remained stable and strong since 2015. At its first summit in 2009, BRICS devoted close to 36% of its deliberations to the subject of trade. This

was followed by a dramatic decline in 2010, when only 6.8% of the communiqué was devoted to trade. Trade deliberation increased to 25.5% in 2012 but fell to 11.7% in 2014. Starting in 2015, trade deliberation began to stabilize at around 20%, with just two exceptions: a slight dip to 16.8% in 2016 and a drop to 15.7% at the most recent summit in 2021 (see Appendix 1 and Graph 1C).

### *Climate Change*

Climate change is BRICS' fourth priority. Overall, BRICS has devoted an average of 19% of its summit deliberations to climate change. This is the same overall deliberation level on as the subject of trade, demonstrating the significance of climate change as a non-economic, priority subject for the BRICS institution. Overtime, BRICS' deliberation on climate change has undergone two phases. The first is marked by a gradual decline. BRICS devoted over 20% of its deliberations to climate change at its first few summits from 2009–12. However, this was followed by a gradual decline from 2013–17, reaching an all-time low of 9.7% at the Xiamen summit. After 2017, however, climate change deliberation gradually increased, reaching 15% in 2018, 16% in 2019, 21% in 2020, and 22% in 2021 (see Appendix 1 and Graph 1D).

### *Health*

BRICS' fifth and final ranking subject priority is health. Overall, BRICS has devoted an average of 14% of its summit deliberations to health. Over time, there has been a generally increasing trend, with a dramatic rise in health deliberations in recent years. BRICS began with a relatively insignificant amount of deliberation on health, at 6.8% in 2009. This increased gradually to 16.3% in 2012. Following 2012, there was a gradual decrease to an all-time low of 1.9% in 2014. After 2014, health deliberation increased. This increase was gradual at first, reaching 7% in 2015, 6% in 2016, 14% in 2017, and 9% in 2018. A more dramatic increase in health deliberation began in 2019, as deliberation reached 25.7% in that year, 25.6% in 2020, and 44.5% at the most recent summit in 2021 (see Appendix 1 and Graph 1E).

### **Decision-Making**

Overall, BRICS has made a total of 933 future-oriented, politically binding commitments, across all subject areas and all of its summits. The number of commitments made at individual BRICS summits has gradually increased over time, with a peak in performance at Ufa in 2015 and Hangzhou in 2017. BRICS began by making a total of 15 commitments at its first summit in 2009. This increased gradually to 31 commitments in 2013. A more dramatic increase to 86 commitments came in 2014, followed by a jump to a peak of 127 commitments at the 2015 Ufa summit hosted by Russia. In 2016, decision-making dropped to 45 commitments. However, this was followed by another surge to a high of 128 commitments at the 2017 Xiamen summit. After 2017, decision-making decreased slightly but reached an all-time high of 194 commitments at the 2020 summit (see Appendix 2).

Subject-specific data show that the five selected subjects are significant priorities in BRICS' decision-making. Ranking first in the overall number of commitments made at all BRICS summits is the general issue area of international cooperation. Trade ranks second overall and is the first-ranking substantive issue area of BRICS decision-making. This is followed by regional security and crime and corruption in third and fourth place. Macroeconomics ranks fifth, followed by development in sixth. Climate change and health rank 13th and 16th overall. As the subject-specific data show, BRICS decision-making covers a large array of different issue areas beyond the traditional development and economic core. The five selected subjects



represent both the subjects at the highest level of BRICS' decision-making priority within the development-economic core (development, trade and macroeconomics), as well as the significant mid-ranging priority subjects outside the economic core (health and climate change).

### *Trade*

Trade is BRICS' first substantive priority in decision-making (ranking after only the broad and non-substantive category of commitments on international cooperation). From 2009–21, BRICS made a total of 68 commitments on trade. Only one commitment on trade was made at the first BRICS summit in 2009, and decision-making on trade has increased gradually since then. Decisions on trade reached a high of nine trade commitments made at the 2012 New Delhi summit. This was followed by a decline from 2013–19. Another peak was reached in 2020, when BRICS made a total of 20 trade commitments. However, at the most recent 2021 summit, BRICS made only three commitments on trade (see Appendix 2).

### *Macroeconomics*

From 2009–21, BRICS made a total of 58 commitments on macroeconomics. No commitments on macroeconomics were made at the first summit in 2009, but macroeconomics has been a subject of BRICS' decision-making thereafter. Macroeconomics decision-making reached a peak at the 2014 summit where a total of eight macroeconomics commitments were made. After 2014, decision-making declined. In 2020, macroeconomics decision-making reached an all-time high of 21 commitments. At the most recent 2021 summit, however, decision-making plunged to only two (see Appendix 2).

### *Development*

Development is BRICS' fifth substantive priority in decision-making. From 2009–21, BRICS made a total of 47 commitments on development. At its first summit in 2009, BRICS made one development commitment. This was followed by a surge to five made at the 2010 summit. In 2011–12, development decision-making dropped, but it climbed to a higher peak of seven commitments in 2014 and an all-time high of 11 in 2017 at Xiamen. The number of development commitments dropped thereafter to five in 2018, none in 2019, three in 2020, and one in 2021 (see Appendix 2).

### *Climate Change*

From 2009–21, BRICS made a total of 32 commitments on climate change. At its first summit in 2009, BRICS did not make any commitments on climate change. In 2010, it made one commitment on climate change, and in 2011, at the Sanya summit hosted by China, decision-making reached a peak of six commitments. After Sanya, decision-making on climate change dropped again, but climate change commitments were made at all summits with the exception of 2014 (see Appendix 2).

### *Health*

From 2009–21, BRICS made a total of 28 commitments on health. The first health commitment was made at the 2011 Sanya summit. The next health commitment was made at the 2012 summit. No health commitments were made in 2013–14. In 2015, an all-time high of six health commitments were made at the Ufa summit hosted by Russia. This dropped to two commitments in 2016 and climbed to five commitments at the 2017 Xiamen summit hosted by China. In 2018, one health commitment was made, and none was made in 2019. Finally, there

was a surge at the most recent summits in 2020 and 2021, which made seven and five health commitments, respectively (see Appendix 2).

### ***Delivery***

From 2009–20, a total of 96 priority commitments were assessed for country-specific compliance. The overall average for BRICS' compliance across all summits, members and issue areas is +0.53 or 77%. Thus, BRICS' delivery performance is strong overall. By member, the highest performing member is China, with an overall average compliance score of +0.65 or 83%. This is followed very closely by India at +0.64 or 82%. In third place is Russia at +0.57 or 79%. In fourth place is Brazil at +0.42 or 71%, and fifth is South Africa at +0.37 or 69%.

Among the five selected subjects, the highest performing subject is health, which has an overall compliance average of +0.83 or 92%. In second place is macroeconomics at +0.78 or 89%, followed by development and climate change both at 0.72 or 86%, and finally followed by trade, with an average compliance of +0.36 or 68% (see Appendix 3).

### ***Health***

On health, seven priority commitments were assessed from the years 2011, 2015–18, and 2020. In 2011, average compliance with the assessed health commitment was 100%. This dropped to 70% in 2015–16. Health compliance then climbed back to 100%, a level that was sustained from 2017–20. By country, the strongest compliers are China and South Africa, with an average compliance of 100% on their health commitments.

### ***Macro***

On macroeconomics, eight priority commitments were assessed from the years 2013 and 2015–20. Overall compliance is strong and stable as compliance was 100% in all years assessed with the exception of 2013, when average compliance was 60%, and 2020, when average compliance was 75%. By country, the highest complier is China, with an overall compliance average of 100%.

### ***Development***

On development, 10 priority commitments were assessed from the years 2010–20 (with the exception of 2015 and 2019). Overall, compliance was high and solid throughout the years. BRICS began with a compliance average of 100% with its first assessed commitment in 2010. This dropped slightly to 90% in 2011, 70% in 2012, 80% in 2013, and 90% in 2014. Compliance climbed back to 100% in 2016–17. However, in the most recent years, average compliance dropped to 70% in 2018 and 2020. By country, the highest complier is China, with an overall average compliance of 100%.

### ***Climate Change***

On climate change, five priority commitments were assessed from the years 2011–12, 2016, and 2019–20. In 2011, compliance with the assessed commitment was 90%. This dropped to 60% in 2012, climbed back to 90% in 2016 and 2019, and most recently, compliance with the assessed climate commitment in 2020 reached 100%. By country, the highest complier is Russia, with an overall average compliance of 100% with its climate change commitments. In second place are Brazil and India at 90% each, and in third place is South Africa at 80%. China ranks last, with an average compliance of 70%.

### *Trade*

On trade, 10 priority commitments were assessed from the years 2010–20 (with the exception of 2015 and 2019). Compliance with trade commitments fluctuated over time, and compliance scores varied more widely. In 2010, compliance began low, at 0%, as no countries complied with their trade commitments. This increased to 70% in 2011 and dropped to 50% in 2012. In 2013, average compliance with trade commitments was 100%, but this was followed by a drop to 0% in 2014. In 2016, compliance climbed back to 100% and dropped slightly to 80% in 2017–18. Most recently, in 2020, average compliance climbed back to 100%. By country, the highest-ranking complier is South Africa, with an average compliance of 78%. China ranks second, with an average compliance of 75%.

## China's BRICS Leadership

### ***China's Deliberative Leadership***

China's deliberative leadership can be assessed through an analysis of how well China's priorities are matched by BRICS through summit deliberations and decision-making. China's priorities are determined through the subject-specific coding of China's pre-summit speeches, following the same method of coding for BRICS' summit deliberation. Specifically, the speeches are coded for the five selected subjects of this study—development, macroeconomics, trade, climate change, and health. China's pre-summit speeches include speeches that Chinese leaders made in the pre-summit period (from the end of the previous summit cycle to the start of the cycle being assessed). The selected speeches are either from the Chinese leaders' speeches at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) or at the World Economic Forum, since these are two of the most prominent occasions that offer a summary of China's global governance priorities. In addition, the repetition of these occasions each year provides a consistent point of analysis throughout all BRICS summits.

The resulting data on China's priorities on the selected subject areas show that China's priorities from 2009–21 can be ranked as follows: in first place is development, on which overall deliberation was 67%; in second place is macroeconomics, on which average deliberation was 48%. This is followed by health and climate change, ranked together in third place, on each of which average deliberation was 21%. In fifth place is trade, on which overall deliberation was 16%. In most of these subject areas, China has demonstrated strong and consistent deliberative leadership, in both facilitative and assertive ways.

### *Development*

China's deliberative leadership is most pronounced in development, the subject that China cares about most. As China's first-ranking priority subject, China's leadership on development is always facilitative, and at times assertive. On average, from 2009–21, BRICS dedicated 35% of its summit declaration texts to the subject of development. Similarly, in decision-making, BRICS has made a total of 47 commitments on development. This makes development the sixth highest ranking substantive subject of BRICS' decision-making. In these ways, China has demonstrated both facilitative and assertive deliberative leadership, as its first-ranking priority of development has achieved not only high deliberation in BRICS but also high decision-making.

China and the BRICS also follow a similar trend in their prioritization of development over time (see Graph 4A). Trends in China's prioritization of development can be divided into three main phases. In the first phase from 2009–12, development took up a substantive propor-

tion of Chinese leaders' speeches. In the speeches preceding the 2009 summit, development accounted for 81% of the total text. This decreased slightly to 78% in 2010, increased to 88% in 2011, and reached an all-time high of 92% in 2012. For BRICS, this first phase of high prioritization of development lasted until 2013. From 2009–13, BRICS' deliberation on development has been significant, as the subject accounted for 35% of summit deliberations in 2009, 41% in 2010, 40% in 2011, 36% in 2012, and 46% in 2013. Strong BRICS deliberation was accompanied by an increase in decision-making. While BRICS only made one commitment on development in 2009, this increased gradually to six development commitments in 2013. Thus, in this first phase, China's facilitative and assertive leadership was strong.

The second phase, from 2013–19, was marked by China's lower level of prioritization of development, though the subject remained significant, and China's leadership remained strong. In 2013, development accounted for 66% of the total text of Chinese leaders' speeches. This dropped to 61% in 2013 and 57% in 2014, then increased to 73% in 2016, and dropped again to 66% in 2017, 49% in 2018, and 55% in 2019. For BRICS, this second phase began one year later in 2014. In 2014, development deliberation fell to 8%, and this was followed by a further fall to 7% in 2015. However, starting in 2016, BRICS' performance on deliberation began to rise. In 2016, leaders dedicated 45% of summit deliberations to development, and development deliberation for BRICS has remained high since 2016. In decision-making, the number of commitments on development was at seven in 2014 and increased to a peak 11 in 2016, but fell to zero commitments in 2019. Thus, in this second phase, China demonstrated continued facilitative leadership, but declining assertive leadership.

The final phase for China began in 2020, when development accounted for 81% of the total text of Chinese leaders' pre-summit speeches. Although this dropped to 58% in the pre-summit speeches of 2021, development again took up 85% of Xi Jinping's speech at the most recent 2021 UNGA speech, which preceded the upcoming 2022 summit. Thus, it is likely that this marks a new phase in China's increasing prioritization of development. For BRICS, deliberation in 2020–21 remained significant at greater than 3%. Decision-making, however, saw a slight drop to three commitments in 2020 and just one commitment in 2021. Here again, China remained a facilitative leader, but not an assertive leader.

### *Macroeconomics*

China's second highest priority subject is macroeconomics. China's prioritization of macroeconomics was strong and stable overtime, as the subject took up an average of 48% of all pre-summit speeches by Chinese leaders. Starting at the pre-summit speeches of the 2009 summit, macroeconomics accounted for 47% of Chinese leaders' speeches. This was followed by a slight decrease to 46% in 2010, an increase to a peak of 72% in 2011, and a decrease to 71% in 2012, 47% in 2013, and 41% in 2014. There was another slight increase to 53% in 2015, followed by a decrease to 47% in 2016, another increase to 53% in 2017, and a decrease to 44% in 2018. In 2019, macroeconomics accounted for only 37% of pre-summit speeches. From 2020–21, there was a return to the prioritization of macroeconomics as the subject accounted for 59% of the text of pre-summit speeches in 2020 and 56% in 2021. However, at the most recent 2021 UNGA speech, Xi devoted an all-time low of 22% to the subject of macroeconomics.

BRICS has dedicated an overall average of 33% of its summit deliberations to the subject of macroeconomics, and macroeconomics is also the second highest priority for BRICS. Over time, China and BRICS also followed similar trends in their macroeconomic deliberations. For example, macroeconomic deliberations were relatively higher at the earlier summits, experienced a drop to an all-time low in 2014, and began a recovery in 2015 when macroeconomics stabilized as a significant priority for both China and BRICS (see Graph 4B). In terms of decision-making, macroeconomics ranks as the fifth highest performing subject. A total of 58

commitments were made by BRICS on macroeconomics. Thus, on macroeconomics, China is both a facilitative and an assertive leader.

### *Health*

China's third highest priority is the subject of health. Overall, BRICS has dedicated an average of 15% of its summit deliberations to the subject of health, which makes it the fifth ranking deliberation subject after development, macroeconomics, trade, and climate change. However, over time, BRICS' deliberation on health has seen a dramatic increase, particularly since 2018. Thus, China's leadership on health can be divided into two main phases.

In the first phase from 2009–17, health was generally a subject of high priority for China but not for BRICS. Health took up a significant portion of China's pre-summit speeches with only a few exceptions. In 2009, 31% of the text of Chinese leaders' speeches was devoted to health, followed by 30% in 2010, 26% in 2011, and 24% in 2012. In 2013, there was a dip to 8%, but this was followed by an increase to 16% in 2014, a slight decrease to 10% in 2015, an increase to 19% in 2016, and to 20% in 2017. For BRICS, health was not a significant subject of deliberation, and it did not ever surpass 15% of total summit deliberation from 2009–17. Similarly, decision-making on health was low throughout this phase. Thus, China was not a deliberative leader in health during this first phase.

In the second phase, which began in 2018, China's leadership became more pronounced. China's prioritization of health began low at 4.5% in 2018 and 8% in 2019, but it increased dramatically to 77% in 2020 and 46% in 2021. For BRICS, deliberation on health also increased starting in 2019, when it reached 26%; it stayed high at 26% in 2020 and increased to an all-time high of 45% in 2021. Similarly, decision-making on health reached an all-time high in 2020 at seven commitments, followed by five in 2021. These were the first and third highest performing years of health decision-making in BRICS' history. Thus, during this second phase, China became both a facilitative and assertive leader (see Graph 4C).

### *Climate Change*

China's fourth priority is climate change. China's leadership on climate change has been less pronounced. On average, it has dedicated 21% of its pre-summit deliberations to climate change, which is matched closely by BRICS, which has dedicated an overall average of 19% of its summit deliberations to the subject of climate change.

China's prioritization of climate change was moderately significant and relatively stable over time, with only a couple of peaks and dips. Starting in 2009, 31% of the text of China's pre-summit speeches was devoted to climate change, followed by 35% in 2010, 25% in 2011, 24% in 2012, 21% in 2013, 17% in 2014, and 13.7% in 2015. A peak in prioritization came in 2016, when China devoted 42.5% of its pre-summit speeches to climate change. This was followed by a drop to 12.5% in 2017, a slight rise to 15.5% in 2018, and a plunge to an all-time low of 6.3% in 2019. In 2020, climate change prioritization increased to 31%, followed by 25% in 2021, and 21% at the most recent pre-summit speeches of 2022.

For BRICS, deliberations on climate change were relatively weak overall. Climate deliberations began high in 2009–12, saw a general decrease from 2013–17, and increased again starting in 2018. However, deliberation never surpassed its peak of 31% in 2010. Similarly, on decision-making, BRICS' performance on climate change was relatively weak, but with several exceptions. BRICS made a total of 32 commitments on climate change, which ranks 13th among all BRICS subjects. Recently, a peak in performance came in 2020 when BRICS made 10 climate change commitments. Thus, on climate change, while China did not demonstrate sustained leadership, there are signs of a recent rise in China's assertive leadership in 2020,

when China's prioritization of the subject increased, and when BRICS' decision-making on the subject increased dramatically (see Graph 4D).

### *Trade*

China's fifth priority is trade. This priority began to be voiced in 2010, when China dedicated 18% of the text of its pre-summit speeches to trade. This increased to 23% in 2011, fell to 19% in 2012, and dropped to 8% in 2013. In 2014–15, 23% of the text of pre-summit speeches was devoted to trade, followed by 12% in 2016, 23% in 2017, 9% in 2018, 19% in 2019, and 10% in 2020. In 2021, trade accounted for an all-time high of 31% of the text of pre-summit speeches. On average, China devoted 16% of its pre-summit speeches to trade.

Here, China's facilitative leadership was strong, as BRICS has devoted an average of 20% of its summit deliberations to trade. This number remained relatively stable, with a few exceptions in the early years of the BRICS summit. China also demonstrated strong assertive leadership. BRICS has made a total of 68 commitments on trade, which account for more than 7% of its overall commitments. Trade ranks as the first substantive area of decision-making performance, placing only after the general issue area of international cooperation. Over time, there has also been an increase in China's assertive leadership. BRICS' decision-making on trade increased dramatically from 2009–12 and reached a peak of nine commitments in 2012. This was followed by relatively stable performance from 2013–19. In 2020, BRICS saw another peak to an all-time high of 20 commitments on trade (see Graph 4E).

### *Summary of China's Deliberative Leadership*

Overall, China has been a strong deliberative leader in the BRICS on all of its priority subjects except climate change. In development, macroeconomics, health, and trade, China's deliberative leadership was almost always facilitative, and at times assertive. Its facilitative leadership was most pronounced in development, macroeconomics, and trade, on which it has been a facilitative leader since the beginning. On health, China only recently exercised its leadership, and it has done so in both facilitative and assertive ways. In many subjects, China's assertive leadership also increased in recent years.

## China's Exemplary Leadership

China's exemplary leadership is assessed using BRICS compliance data disaggregated by member and subject. Here, leadership is assessed through a comparison of China's average, subject-specific compliance with those of other BRICS members.

China's leadership is strongest in the subjects of development, macroeconomic, and health. In these three subjects, China's average compliance through all BRICS summits was +1.00 or 100%, which means that China fully complied with all of its commitments on these subjects at all assessed BRICS summits. Its leadership is most pronounced in development as its average compliance of 100% is 14% higher than the overall BRICS average of 86%. In second place is macroeconomics, on which China's average compliance of 100% is 11% higher than the overall BRICS average of 89%. In third place is health, on which China's average compliance of 100% is 8% higher than the overall BRICS average of 92%.

In these three subjects, China's leadership style varied. On macroeconomics and development, China's leadership style is the closest to the image of a unilateral, exemplary leader. On macroeconomics, it is the only member that achieved an average score of 100%, and its score is 6% higher than the member ranking in second place, Brazil, at 94%. On development, China

is also the only member that achieved an average score of 100%, and its score is 5% higher than the second-ranking member, India, at 95%. On health, China is a cooperative leader. It led cooperatively, by example, with South Africa, who also achieved an overall average of 100%.

On trade, China's leadership by example is weaker. Its overall average compliance with its trade commitments is +0.50 or 75%, which is 7% higher than the overall BRICS average of 68%. On this subject, the exemplary compliance leader was South Africa, with an overall average compliance of +0.56 or 78%, which is 3% higher than that of China. Thus, while China's leadership is relatively weaker compared to other subjects, it still leads cooperatively with South Africa on trade.

On climate change, China did not lead by example, but rather fell behind other members. China's average compliance of +0.40 or 70% is 16% lower than the overall BRICS average of 86%. Here, the compliance leader was Russia, whose overall average compliance was 100%.

Thus, overall, China has been a strong exemplary leader in most subjects except climate change. This pattern of leadership is similar to China's deliberative leadership, which was also strong on most of its priority subjects except climate change. In terms of leadership style, China is a unilateral exemplary leader on its highest priorities of development and macroeconomics, a cooperative leader on health, and a weaker but nonetheless cooperative leader on trade.

## Causes of China's BRICS Leadership

### ***Shock Activated Vulnerability***

Shock-activated vulnerability helps explain some of the variations and developments in China's leadership over time. The most important shock that came recently was the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019. China's particular vulnerability is rooted in its large and aging population, as well as its experience as the country first hit by the virus. The effects of this shock were seen most clearly in the subject of health. While China's leadership of health began in 2018, the more dramatic surge in China's prioritization of health and BRICS' performance on health came after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, in 2020, BRICS' decision-making on health increased to an all-time high of 9%. BRICS' delivery on its health commitments also reached a high of 100% in 2020, which means that all BRICS members had fully complied with their health commitments. In addition, China's cooperative exemplary leadership with India on health can be explained by their shared vulnerability as the countries with the highest populations as well as the highest size of aging populations within BRICS (See Graph 6).

The shock from the 2008 financial crisis also bolstered China's leadership, particularly in the area of macroeconomics and development. As BRICS noted in its 2009 declaration, the poorest developing countries have been hit hardest by the financial crisis. Thus, the crisis has not only revealed the fragility of the advanced economies in the West, but also the vulnerability of developing economies in the Global South. This crisis, as well as the other financial and economic crises that followed, continued to emphasize China's and BRICS' economic interconnectedness with the rest of the world, and thus their vulnerability. In turn, this contributes to an explanation of China's strong and sustained leadership on the subjects of macroeconomics and development.

### ***Multilateral Organization Failure***

The failure of multilateral organizations to adequately represent and address China's concerns is another cause of China's leadership within BRICS. While the lack of representation at

western-dominated institutions is an important and long-standing concern of all developing countries, this is especially impactful for China as China has become the world's second largest economy and one of its most significant geopolitical powers. Despite its willingness and capability to contribute to global governance, Chinese nationals have had no significant roles in leading UN institutions, and China is not home to any secretariats of UN institutions. This failure of multilateral organizations has prompted China to pursue more of its international objectives in BRICS, alongside its developing country partners. The lack of representativeness of multilateral organizations has also led BRICS to push for the reform of these organizations, leading to important achievements, particularly regarding reform of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Similarly, BRICS has also established its own institutions such as the New Development Bank and the contingent reserve arrangement in 2012 to 2014. Overall, the lack of progress of western-dominated institutions played an important role in motivating BRICS' achievements in IFI reform and the creation of new institutions. This has further provided the foundation for China's deeper engagement with BRICS, as BRICS provides not only a platform for China to pursue the goals of global institutional reform, but also a platform through which China can participate in creating new institutions that better represent the needs of the developing world.

More specifically, the failure of the Doha development round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has led to China's strong and sustained leadership on development and trade in BRICS. The Doha Agenda began in 2001 with the aim of addressing the concerns of developing countries in global trade. However, negotiations broke down in 2008, and attempts thereafter to revive the talks were without success. Thus, rather than relying on the WTO, China demonstrated its leadership on development and trade within BRICS, primarily as the leading facilitator of BRICS' discussions on these subjects.

### ***Predominant Equalizing Capability***

China's growing gross domestic product (GDP), and its sheer size, which surpasses those of the other BRICS members by a significant amount, continues to incentivize China to take on a leadership position within BRICS (see Graph 5B). At the same time, China's economic capabilities also stand out in terms of GDP growth rate. While growth has slowed in recent years and has led to a similar pattern of economic slowdown across all BRICS countries, China still has the highest growth rate among all BRICS members. Most recently in 2020, China became the only BRICS member with a positive GDP growth rate, as all other BRICS members had experienced negative growth rates (see Graph 5C). As the largest and fastest growing economy in BRICS and thus the one with the greatest amount of economic resources, China has a unique capability to play a leadership role. This incentivized and created the material conditions for China's leadership, particularly in areas such as macroeconomics and development, where China's leadership was unilateral in nature.

On the subject of trade, China's capabilities to a great extent surpass the rest of BRICS. In 2020, its merchandise exports reached \$2.59 trillion, much higher than other BRICS members, whose exports range from \$85 billion to \$332 billion [World Bank, 2021]. This explains China's sustained leadership on trade within BRICS. However, as a proportion of GDP, China's trade volume is much closer to its BRICS partners and is lower than those of South Africa, Russia and India (see Graph 5D). In fact, South Africa has the highest volume of trade as a percent of GDP, and this explains its cooperative exemplary leadership with China on the subject of trade in the BRICS.



### ***Converging Political Characteristics***

China's leadership can also be attributed to the converging political characteristics of the BRICS members. Setting itself apart from the other international summit institutions like the G7 and G20, BRICS is an institution that represents developing states in the Global South. This shared characteristic provides the basis for the group's common vision and solidarity. BRICS thus provides an important platform for China to affirm and bolster its status as a developing country. In addition, BRICS is a small and tightly knit group of countries with not only similar economic status but political status as well. In terms of regime type, BRICS as a group has ranked relatively lower on the global democracy index. South Africa, the highest-ranking member, ranks 45th on the 2020 global democracy index, followed by Brazil in 49th position, India in 53rd, Russia at 124th, and China at 151st [The Economist, 2020]. Thus, while there is still a diversity of regime types within BRICS, China's rank is much closer to its BRICS partners than those of other summit institutions like the G20.

### ***Domestic Political Cohesion***

China's strong leadership role is also bolstered by its high degree of domestic political cohesion. From 2009–20, China has only experienced one major leadership shift from the Hu Jintao regime to the Xi Jinping regime. Both regimes enjoyed a high degree of cohesion at home, allowing China to speak with one firm voice abroad. In addition, the transition from the Hu regime to the Xi regime did not shift China's fundamental priorities for global governance. For example, the regime's focus on economic development and economic growth has remained stable and unaltered, and the subjects of development and macroeconomics have remained at the top of China's international agenda, demonstrated by the high percentage of international speeches dedicated to these subjects throughout both Hu's and Xi's regimes. Thus, the stability of China's fundamental priorities has facilitated China's strong and sustained leadership in BRICS, particularly on the subjects of development and macroeconomics.

### ***Club at the Hub***

Finally, BRICS' position as the club at the hub of a network of new plurilateral institutions has also contributed to China's leadership within, particularly in the area of development. As a result of the failure of western-dominated institutions to adequately represent the interests of developing countries in the Global South, China has taken the initiative to develop a series of parallel international institutions that are oriented more toward the needs of developing countries. These institutions include, most notably, the BRI and the AIIB. In addition, China's leadership role in BRICS is bolstered by its role in other parallel institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the East Asia summit, the ASEAN Plus summit, and others. These plurilateral institutions connect leaders of developing states from the Asian and Eurasian regions and allow for members to interact on multiple occasions to discuss global governance issues from a regional and development perspective. One prominent example is China's hosting of the 2017 Xiamen BRICS summit, which was bolstered by the synergies created by China's participation in a wide network of interconnected, development-focused summit institutions. In March 2017, China hosted the Boao forum to discuss Asia's regional cooperation; this was followed by the BRI forum hosted by China in May to discuss China's infrastructure investment initiatives in the Eurasian region. In June, China participated in the SCO summit, which had just incorporated India into its organization as a full member, which was followed by China's participation in the East Asia Forum with its East Asian neighbours. Following this,

China hosted the Xiamen BRICS summit in September. This summit was then followed by the ASEAN+ summit where China met with its South Asian regional partners; and finally, in November, China participated in the Summit of the Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries to discuss cooperation with its neighbouring European region. Thus, China's engagement with BRICS is part of a larger engagement pattern of China's with a diverse network of regional institutions where development is a priority subject of common concern. As a result, its development leadership in BRICS is facilitated by the international experiences that China has derived from its participation in a wide range of development-oriented institutions. These institutions, and China's development initiatives like the BRI and AIIB, also provide China with a great deal of resources on which it can draw to lead by positive example.

## Conclusion: A Future Research Agenda and Prospects for the 2022 BRICS Summit

### ***Summary and Future Directions***

Overall, China's leadership style has been strong but flexible. Since the first BRICS summit in 2009, China has demonstrated deliberative leadership and exemplary leadership in the areas of development, macroeconomics, health, and trade. China has acted as both the leading facilitator, shaping the course of BRICS' discussions, as well as a leader by positive example, staying accountable to its own political commitments and leading by doing. Its leadership style was flexible in that it has been both facilitative and assertive in its deliberative leadership, and it has led by example both unilaterally and cooperatively with others.

One area of weakness in China's leadership, on both the deliberative and exemplary dimensions, is climate change. While climate change has been a long-standing priority for China's global governance agenda, China has not succeeded in leading BRICS on climate change. Deliberation, decision-making, and delivery performance remain in need of improvement. At the most recent UNGA speech by President Xi in 2021, climate change accounted for 21% of his speech, making it an important Chinese priority once again. As the host of the 2022 BRICS summit, China has a unique opportunity to bolster BRICS' performance on climate change. In China's previous terms as host of the summits in 2011 and 2017, BRICS saw a sharp rise in performance in many subjects. For example, on decision-making, there was a surge in the number of development commitments, the number of trade commitments, and the number of health commitments at the 2017 Xiamen summit, and there was a surge in the number of climate change commitments at the 2011 Sanya summit. Thus, China could replicate its success in Sanya by facilitating further discussion on climate change and increasing its assertive leadership to push for a greater number of climate change commitments from BRICS members.

While this article has outlined a model and thesis of China's leadership style in BRICS, it also leaves many questions unanswered. These questions provide the foundations for a fruitful future research agenda. Most importantly, the concept of leadership is currently restricted to a single country and involves identifying the country's priorities and matching it to BRICS' deliberation, decision-making, and delivery, in order to determine in what dimensions and styles the country leads. However, this conception of leadership leaves unattended the important possibilities of cooperative leadership. In several issue areas, such as development and health, China's priorities could very well match those of its BRICS partners, particularly India. Thus, it is highly likely that China has led cooperatively with India on these issues. An expanded model of leadership that adds a further dimension of intra-BRICS leadership relations would allow for an examination of how BRICS members lead together to jointly achieve desired results.

Relatedly, an expanded conception of leadership would allow for a consideration of how political relationships between BRICS members affect or shape cooperative leadership. One important example is the Sino-Russian relationship. On an institutional level, this relationship has set the foundation for their joint participation in many international institutions, with prominent examples being the SCO and the BRI. By outlining and analyzing possible instances of cooperative leadership, it is possible to relate countries' institutional cooperation more broadly to their geopolitical and strategic relationships. Most importantly, this expanded framework would allow for a consideration of important and relevant geopolitical factors that may impact institutional cooperation within BRICS and beyond. For example, given the current Russia-Ukraine conflict and the varying ways in which BRICS members have responded, an important line of inquiry would analyze how changing geopolitical relations between BRICS members affect their cooperation (or cooperative leadership) within BRICS. A further dimension that would add depth to this kind of inquiry is a comparative dimension between BRICS and other relevant institutions. By expanding this framework of analysis to include China and other BRICS members' leadership (and instances of cooperative leadership) in other organizations in which BRICS members participate, it is possible to compare the significance of BRICS to each group member, and gain insights on possible changes in BRICS' position (such as potential weakening of BRICS due to the emergence of the BRI, which might take away China's attention, or due to the Eurasian Economic Union, which might take away Russia's attention). Overall, through an expanded concept of leadership and an expanded analytical framework that goes beyond a single member's leadership and beyond leadership in a single institution, a wide range of important factors can be taken account of, and a broader range of institutional phenomena may be understood.

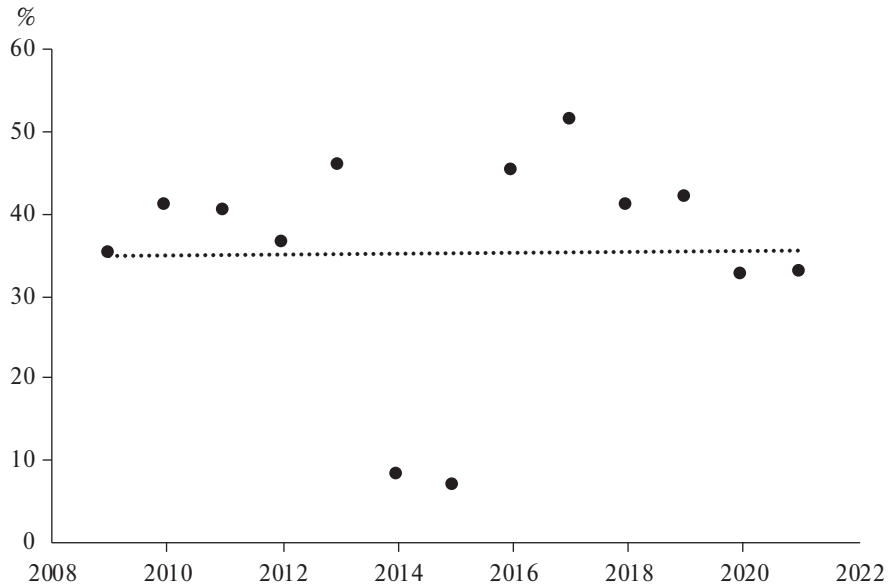
### ***Prospects for 2022***

The 2022 summit is likely to produce strong and stable deliberation and decision-making on China's long-standing priority of development. At his 2021 UNGA speech, President Xi dedicated a significantly high portion (85%) of his speech to the subject of development. Thus, it is likely that Xi will continue to push for further progress in BRICS' governance of development. In addition, Xi devoted 40% of his speech to the subject of health. Thus, health is likely going to be another important issue at the 2022 summit, particularly given the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, economic subjects such as macroeconomics and trade received far less attention at Xi's 2021 speech. Xi dedicated 22% of his speech to macroeconomics, which is much lower than previous years. More strikingly, none of his 2021 UNGA speech was dedicated to the subject of trade. Thus, it is likely that the 2022 summit will sideline traditional economic discussions and focus predominantly on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on the momentum of the 2020 Moscow summit and the 2021 New Delhi summit, China is likely to continue facilitating much-needed discussions on health, and exercise assertive leadership in pushing for a higher number of concrete and politically binding commitments on health, and specifically on responding to the prolonged health, economic, and social consequences of the pandemic. The intersection of health and development is also likely to create new synergies that will hopefully lead to more progress in responding to the multidimensional challenges of the pandemic, particularly for the developing world.

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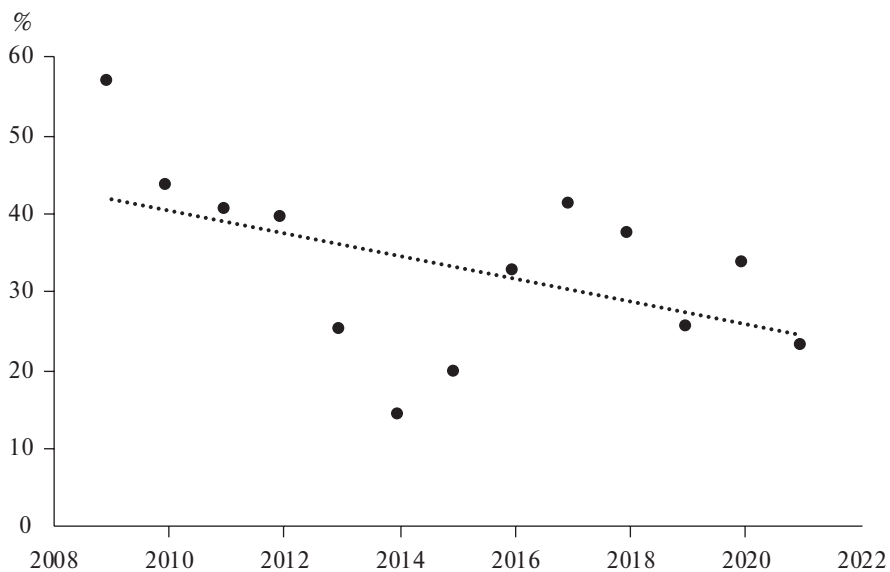
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## Appendix 1: BRICS Deliberation on Major Subject Areas



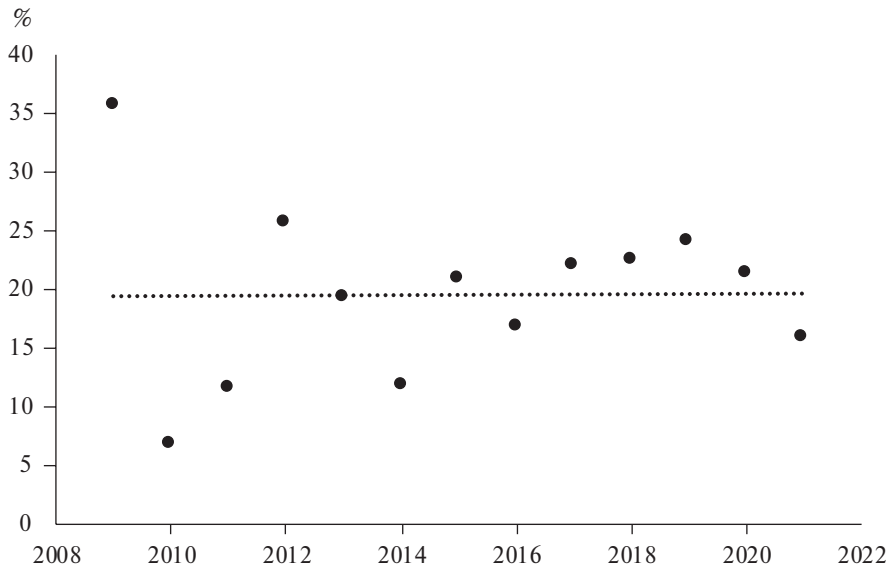
Graph 1A: BRICS Development Deliberation

Source: Prepared by the author.



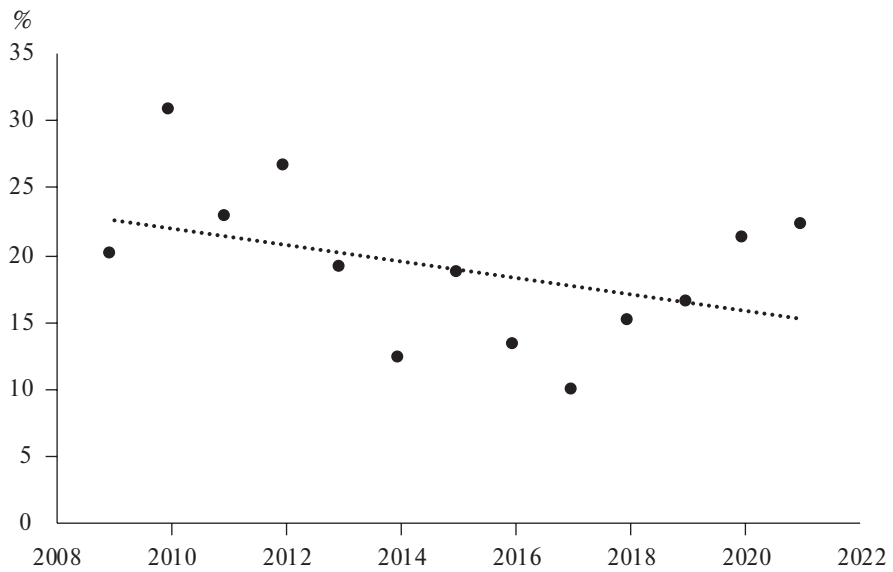
Graph 1B: BRICS Macroeconomic Deliberation

Source: Prepared by the author.



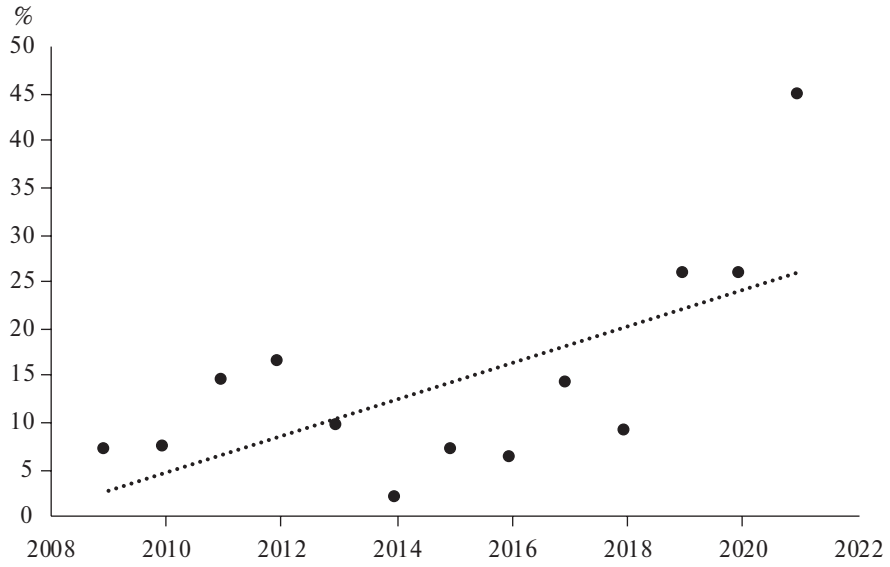
Graph 1C: BRICS Trade Deliberation

Source: Prepared by the author.



Graph 1D: BRICS Climate Deliberation

Source: Prepared by the author.



Graph 1E: BRICS Health Deliberation

Source: Prepared by the author.

## Appendix 2: Decision-Making

Issue sphere	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>933</b>
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

*Source:* Prepared by the author.

Only the substantial issue areas are included in this chart. Omitted are issue areas with less than 10 references over all years of the summit.



## Appendix 3: Delivery on Key Subjects

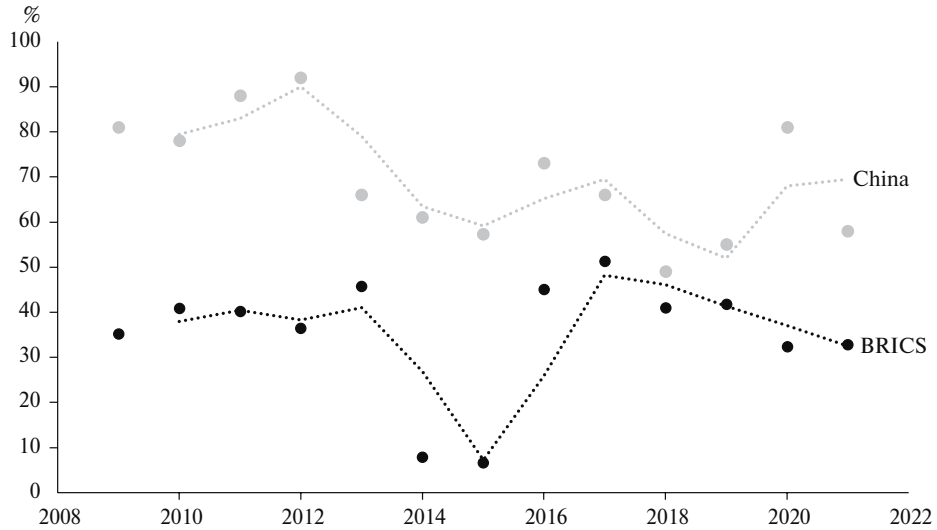
Subject	Summit Year	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Average	Summit Avg
Development (N = 10)	2010	+1	+1	+1	+1		+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2011	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+0.80 (90%)
	2011	+1	0	+1	+1	0	+0.60	
	2012	0	0	0	+1	+1	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)
	2013	+1	+1	+1	+1	-1	+0.60	+0.60 (80%)
	2014	0	+1	+1	+1	+1	+0.80	+0.80 (90%)
	2016	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2017	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2018	0	0	+1	+1	0	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)
2020	-1	0	+1	+1	+1	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)	
Subject Average		<b>+0.50</b>	<b>+0.60</b>	<b>+0.90</b>	<b>+1.00</b>	<b>+0.56</b>	<b>+0.72</b>	<b>86%</b>
<hr/>								
Macroeconomics (N = 8)	2013	0	0	+1	+1	-1	+0.20	+0.20 (60%)
	2015	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2016	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2017	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2018	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2019	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+0.50 (75%)
	2020	+1	0	-1	+1	0	0	
Subject Average		<b>+0.88</b>	<b>+0.75</b>	<b>+0.75</b>	<b>+1.00</b>	<b>+0.63</b>	<b>+0.78</b>	<b>89%</b>
<hr/>								
Trade (N = 10)	2010	-1	-1	-1	-1		-1.00	-1.00 (0%)
	2011	0	0	+1	+1	0	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)
	2012	0	-1	+1	0	0	0	0 (50%)
	2013	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2014	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1.00	-1.00 (0%)
	2016	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2017	0	+1	0	+1	+1	+0.60	+0.60 (80%)
	2018	0	+1	0	+1	+1	+0.60	+0.60 (80%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	
Subject Average		<b>+0.20</b>	<b>+0.30</b>	<b>+0.40</b>	<b>+0.50</b>	<b>+0.56</b>	<b>+0.36</b>	<b>68%</b>

Subject	Summit Year	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Average	Summit Avg
Climate Change (N = 5)	2011	+1	+1	+1	0	+1.00	+0.80	+0.80 (90%)
	2012	0	+1	+1	-1	0	+0.20	+0.20 (60%)
	2016	+1	+1	+1	+1	0	+0.80	+0.80 (90%)
	2019	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+0.80	+0.80 (90%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
Subject Average		<b>+0.80</b>	<b>+1.00</b>	<b>+0.80</b>	<b>+0.40</b>	<b>+0.60</b>	<b>+0.72</b>	<b>86%</b>
Health (N = 7)	2011	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2015	0	+1	-1	+1	+1	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)
	2016	0	0	0	+1	+1	+0.40	+0.40 (70%)
	2017	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2018	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
	2020	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1.00	+1 (100%)
Subject Average		<b>+0.71</b>	<b>+0.86</b>	<b>+0.57</b>	<b>+1.00</b>	<b>+1.00</b>	<b>+0.83</b>	<b>92%</b>

Source: Prepared by the author.

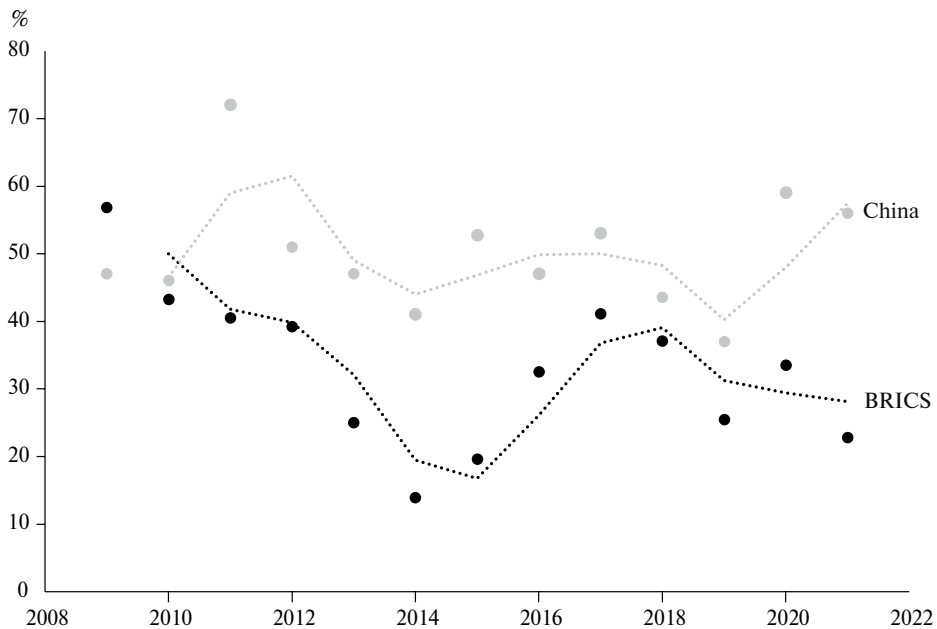
## Appendix 4: China's Subject-Specific Leadership

(The orange datapoints represent China's deliberation on the subject area each summit year, while the blue data points represent the BRICS' deliberation on the subject area at each corresponding summit)



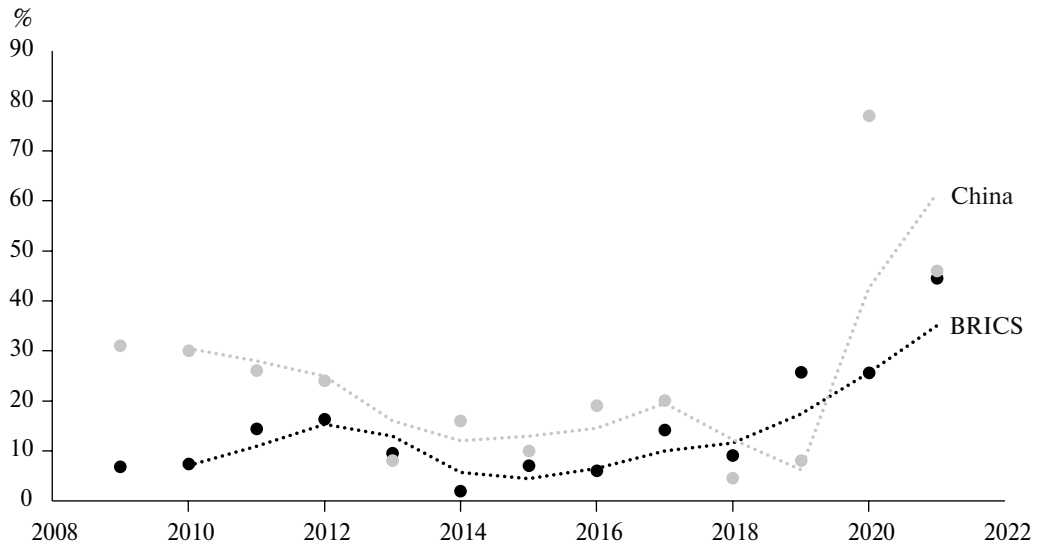
Graph 4A: China and BRICS: Development

Source: Prepared by the author.



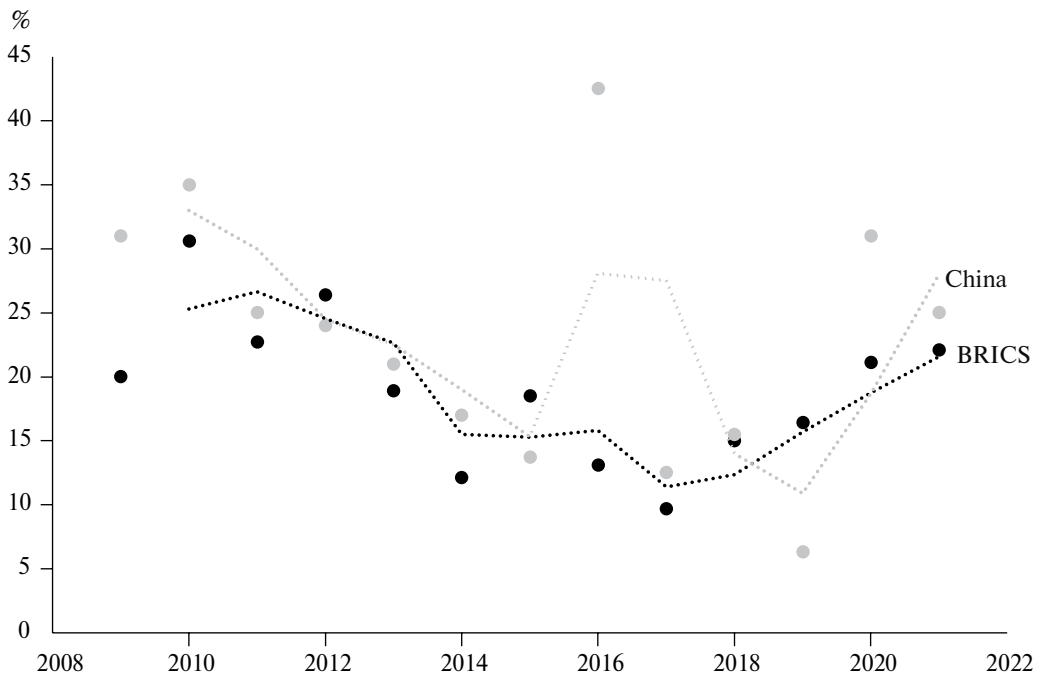
Graph 4B: China and BRICS: Macroeconomic Priority

Source: Prepared by the author.



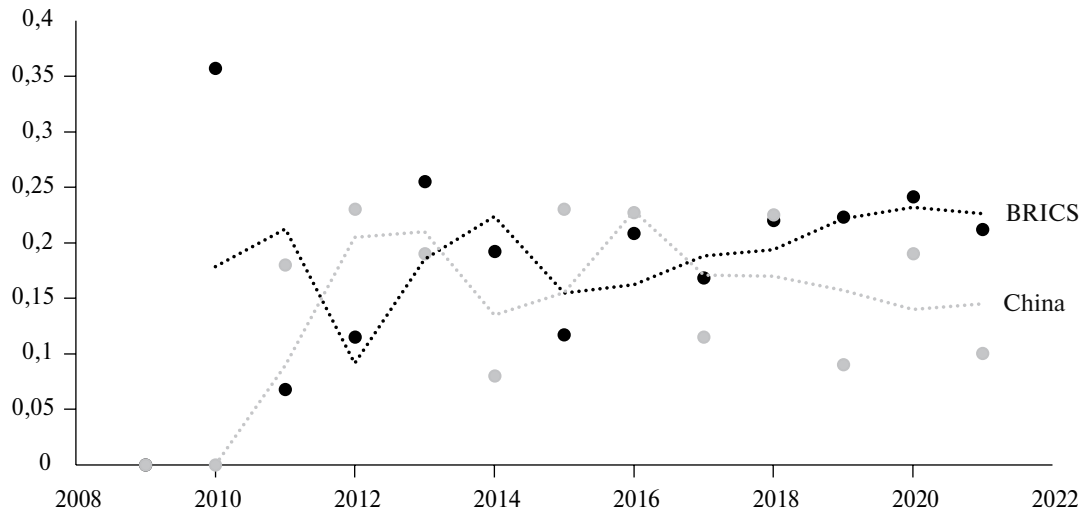
Graph 4C: China and BRICS: Health Priority

Source: Prepared by the author.



Graph 4D: China and BRICS: Climate Priority

Source: Prepared by the author.

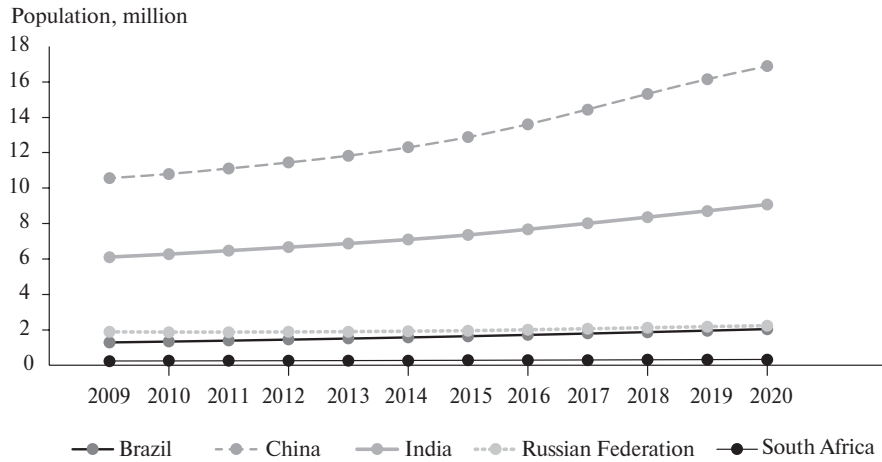


Graph 4E: China and BRICS: Trade Priority

Source: Prepared by the author.

## Appendix 5: Causes of China's Leadership

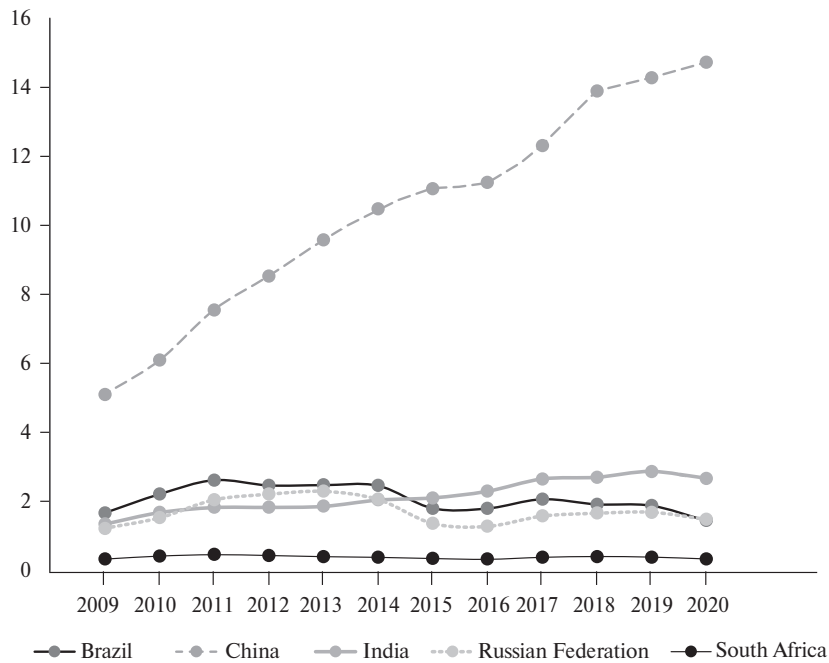
### 5A: Shock-Activated Vulnerability



Graph 5A: BRICS Population (Age Over 65)

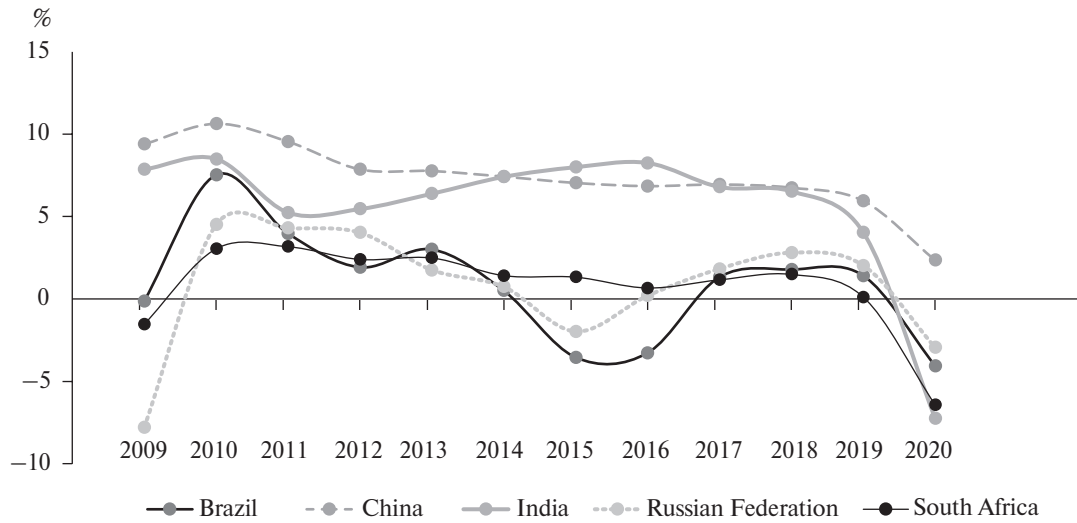
Source: Prepared by the author.

### 5B: Predominant Equalizing Capabilities: GDP



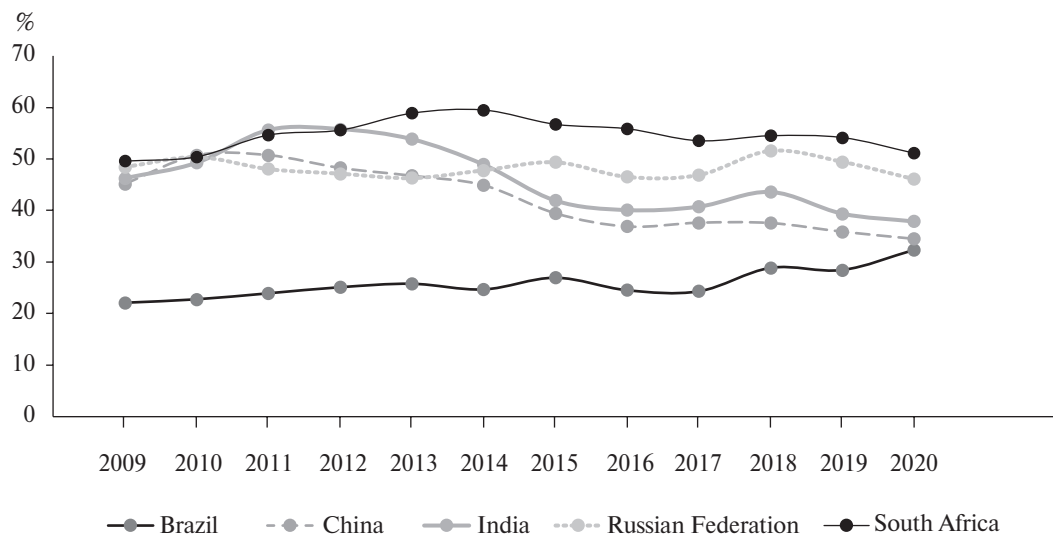
Graph 5B: BRICS GDP 2009-2020

Source: Prepared by the author.



Graph 5C: BRICS GDP Growth Rate 2009-2020

Source: Prepared by the author.



Graph 5D: Trade (% of GDP)

Source: Prepared by the author.