

Research Article

The Norm Cycle of the Global Economic Order with the Emergence of BRICS

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the shift in the global political economy with the emergence of BRICS as part of the life cycle of international norms. As a global economic cooperation formed in June 2009, BRICS demonstrates its existence regardless of the different ideologies, identities, and interests of its member states. Although BRICS sparked discourse regarding its existence as an emerging power in the global political economy constellation, the participation of countries shows a positive trend. This study assumes that the inclusiveness, egalitarianism, democracy, and multipolarity plays as new norms. To analyze the shift in the global economic order with the emergence of BRICS, this study applies a qualitative research method with an interpretive approach. The Constructivist approach, norm life cycle by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, is used to describe the phenomenon. The results show that the shift in norms in the global economic order indicates the degree of norm promotion in the contestation of new global political economy norms which occurred due to the existence of BRICS. As norm entrepreneurs, BRICS promotes new norms through active socialization. However, BRICS institutionalization in NDB, CRA, and de-dollarization still require more substantial internalization to achieve the consolidation of the economic order.

Keywords: BRICS, Global Economic Order, Ideational, Norms Life Cycle

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to describe the shift in the global economic order brought about by the emergence of the BRICS. The argument developed in this research is that BRICS, as norm entrepreneurs, promotes its core principles, such as inclusivity, an egalitarian approach, and non-intervention, through multilateral and non-confrontational mechanisms. To trigger the threshold and reach the norm cascade, BRICS faces contestation from the old norms. BRICS' outreach and promotional efforts have increased the number of participating countries. However, the degree of adoption and legitimacy of BRICS member countries and those not yet joining will determine the threshold at which new norms displace old ones. BRICS was initially just a classification of countries based on economic performance, but it gradually transformed into a global institution that promotes a new identity, not centered on the West (Policy, 2024). The idea of breaking away from Western centrality represents a shift in nations' behavior, driven by global economic shifts.

BRICS is a concrete manifestation of global integration, which no longer refers solely to geographical boundaries. It began as an economic idea and later evolved into a political and strategic bloc because of broader global forces and shared interests among its members. Since its official formation and inauguration on June 16, 2009, the popularity of BRICS in the international system has increased significantly. This is indicated by the increase in BRICS membership over time: from the initial idea of consisting only of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, South Africa became the fifth member in 2001, officially transforming BRIC into BRICS. (O'Neill, 2001). BRICS membership is expanding, with Egypt, Argentina, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates joining in 2023 (Feragamo, 2024). The emergence of BRICS was driven by several motivations, such as a desire for a multipolar order and the enhancement of economic cooperation, so it was not an accidental agenda. The participation of new countries in BRICS shows that, as a new global institution, it opens new possibilities for the global political-economic order to achieve shared prosperity.

The current global order is dominated by the West, both socially, economically, and politically. The presence of core countries in shaping global political and economic order and institutions influences the dynamics of the international structure and the domestic conditions of the countries involved. The BRICs (prior to South Africa's membership) were initiated based on their healthy economic growth performance relative to that of the G7 countries in 2001-2002 (O'Neill, 2001). Strategically, this performance indicates that G7's status quo as the determinant of the global economic order is beginning to be questioned. The healthy economic growth of countries outside the G7, including China, Russia, India, and Brazil, is considered a savior for the global economy during the recession. This has given rise to predictions that a shift or change in the global economic order is needed, both in monetary, fiscal, and trade terms. This is especially true given the global political security turmoil at that time, following the events of September 11 in the United States. (O'Neill, 2001).

BRIC gained momentum as a new actor offering hope for the global economic order. Individually, the BRIC countries demonstrated strong growth, but collectively, they still could not surpass the G7 countries (Mayara Souto, 2025). However, the performance of Brazil, Russia, India, and China during the crisis raised hopes for a shift in global economic order away from the dominance of the United States and Europe. Regarding the status of emerging market economies, the BRIC acronym coined by Jim O'Neill certainly implies a grand goal: realizing a more egalitarian global economy by recognizing the economic power of emerging markets. The idea of a global economy that upholds the principles of mutual trust, mutual respect, shared interests, and a common approach to emerging economic and development issues underpins the formation of BRIC (Policy, 2024). In other words, the BRICs offer an inclusive opportunity for countries to join forces to achieve equitable economic growth, with 4% GDP growth while worldwide growth stood only 3,3% (Mayara Souto, 2025).

This paper assumes that BRICS ideologically brings the current global order into a different context, namely, an egalitarian, democratic, and non-conflictual global political-economic order. The institutional features of BRICS that uphold consensus in decision-making processes and the absence of supranational elements, such as an official secretariat, are among the BRICS's attractive features (Policy, 2024). For countries seeking a more open global institutional order, the BRICS is seen as an institution capable of this goal. This is because, ideologically and politically, the BRICS promote multipolarity, sovereignty, and reform global governance.

The cooperation does not imply shared democratic values, but rather a structural push toward multipolarity and global governance reform (Hurrell, 2018). One member state that embodies these values, for example, is Brazil. China does not embody democracy in the liberal-constitutional sense. However, elements of openness found in BRICS rhetoric are visible in China's external behavior. Compared to other founding members, Russia, India, and China, Brazil prioritizes a diplomatic and non-coercive approach to pursuing its foreign policy (Carneiro, 2019). This is because domestic political structures can influence the formation and implementation of international norms (Cortell & James W. Davis, 2000). However, this research will not discuss how domestic factors influence international norms, but rather how the results of the international relations process can trigger changes in international behavior and norms.

Over the past two decades, the popularity of BRICS among developing countries has been evident in the increasing number of countries joining. Until now, this phenomenon has been studied only as part of the action-reaction relationship between states and the international system, particularly in the context of global power dynamics, responses to Western dominance, and reform of global governance (Chen & Zhang, 2025). State participation in international institutions and organizations has been examined solely from a through a materialist lens, focusing on economic and military interests. The emergence of BRICS cannot be explained solely on economic grounds, but also by immaterial factors that are substantial in its formation and institutionalization.

Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink explain that changes in economic governance in the 1970s and 1980s enabled the emergence of different behaviors among nations (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Given the current popularity of the BRICS, the assumption that changes in state behavior are due to economic factors cannot be dismissed. The emergence of BRICS cannot be examined merely as a response to the dominance of Western economic powers, but also as part of a shift in norms. The expansion of BRICS membership, which, according to Joseph Nye's analysis, now represents 45% of the world's population, is irrelevant if it is linked only to efforts to consolidate and resist American and European dominance in the global economic order (Nye, 2025). While Joseph Nye's observation that the expanded BRICS grouping now represents around 45 % of the world's population highlights its growing demographic and symbolic weight, his analysis cautions against interpreting this expansion purely as a geopolitical bloc mobilized to against

the United States and Europe. This study treats membership growth not as evidence of an anti-Western coalition, but as an empirical site for examine how BRICS-associated governance norms are selectively adapted, institutionalized, or resisted by different member states. In this sense, Nye's critique reinforces the analytical approach adopted here; the relevance of BRICS enlargement lies less in its aggregate size or counter-hegemonic rhetoric than in the extent to which expansion is accompanied by concrete forms of policy alignment, institutional coordination, and norm internalization across diverse domestic contexts.

Terminologically, the abbreviation BRICS also does not refer to political power, as is often discussed by academics today. O'Neil referred to the economic potential of the BRIC countries (O'Neill, 2001), but shifted to the political efforts of Global South. This research specifically examines how BRICS introduces new norms to into the global political economy order, as part of the cycle of international norms. The turmoil in the global economic order since 2001 has led to changes in countries' behavior within the system. This behavioral change refers to the decline in the international community's trust (distrust) in the capabilities of large global economic institutions dominated by America and Europe, to realize economic growth and equitable prosperity (Anderson, 2024; Özkan, 2011).

The inability of the US, as the hegemon in international monetary affairs, to overcome its domestic crisis, and the economic growth experienced by China, have further undermined the legitimacy of long-standing global institutions (Mohan, 2009). This prompted the formation of new institutions capable of addressing the inability of existing institutions. In the norm cycle approach, this fact indicates that the old norms that have dominated the order are at a critical point, making it possible for new norms to emerge alternatives. A new set of policies and norms was developed to accommodate better the interests and values aligned with the needs of the Global South. In their research, Iman Bastanifar et al. even coined the term BRICSIZATION, which refers to the achievement index of the BRICS's joint efforts to break away from Western centrality, particularly the US dollar (Bastanifar, Khan, & Koch, 2025). The international community's distrust of the existing system of governance has changed, and the economic growth of several countries amid an unhealthy system has become a driving force behind the emergence of BRICS and new international norms.

The BRICS are described as norm entrepreneurs, whose role is to introduce and promote new norms in the global economic order. The norms that are the main principles of BRICS, such as inclusivity, egalitarianism, and multipolarity, are actively socialized by BRICS as norm entrepreneurs through their for state sovereignty and democracy. The BRICS collectively promote sovereignty and non-intervention norms, resisting unilateral external action and affirming the autonomy of states in global governance; this is evidenced by their R2P in Libya (Nuruzzaman, 2022). The stage of norm emergence is marked by the formation of BRIC in 2001 and its transformation into BRICS in 2011 with the participation of South Africa. After its emergence, the norms built by BRICS are in a normative contest with the current global economic order, which is still dominated by norms established by the

United States and its allies after World War II. In this study, norm contestation is understood not as a discrete stage within the norm life cycle, but as a social practice that may occur at multiple points along the processes of emergence, diffusion, and institutionalization. Thus, rather than collapsing the two frameworks, the analysis traces how BRICS norms enter contestation with the established Post-War economic order, while recognizing that contestation can both accompany and interrupt different phases of the norm cascade.

Norm contestation shows how new BRICS norms and old norms interact, such as the existing liberal interventionism. Brazil even proposed Responsibility While Protecting to counter the interventionism (Stefan, 2017). Thus, BRICS can contribute to their active socialization. The BRICS norm cascade stage is indicated by the increasing number of countries joining and increasing adoption of norms by new member countries. Interestingly, despite forming a new community, BRICS still relies on the G20, G7, IMF, and World Bank in its operational mechanisms. This shows that BRICS is building a global economic order not based on confrontation but on an egalitarian approach, and not an attempt at counter-hegemony, as neorealism assumes.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research Design and analyzes a range of textual sources, including the BRICS summit declaration, policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature, to examine how the existence of BRICS has shaped state behavior and contributed to emerging norms in global political-economic governance. The analysis follows an interpretivist approach, involving close Reading and contextual interpretation of texts in relation to geopolitical developments and institutional processes. This paper also uses thematic analysis to process the qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis in the social sciences aims to explore phenomena by identifying, analyzing, and uncovering patterns (themes) within them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The material is coded thematically through a hybrid inductive-deductive process. Inductive coding allows themes to emerge from the data, such as narratives of multipolarity, institutional reform, South-South cooperation, and sovereignty. In contrast deductive coding is informed by theoretical frameworks from Constructivist International Relations and Global Political Economy, including concepts of norm diffusion and contestation. Themes are compared across cases and over time to trace discursive shifts, both points of convergence and divergence among BRICS members, and evidence of norm articulation. In doing so, this study an interpretive process-oriented thematic analysis, enabling an exploration of how BRICS functions not only as a material coalition but also as a site of normative, yet discursive, innovation in the global system.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The argument developed in this paper is that the existence of BRICS in the international system is a manifestation of a shift in the behavior of the international

community and the formation of new norms in the global economic order. This refers to Finnemore and Sikkink's explanation of international norms, which states that there is a cycle that begins with the emergence or origin of norms and continues through the process by which norms influence behavior (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). International Relations studies note that there are many definitions of norms, as this field is also multidisciplinary. In political science, for example, a norm is defined as a reference standard or reference for behavior. In contrast, in the social sciences, what is referred to as a standard of behavior is an institution. As March and Olsen explain, an institution is a relatively stable set of practices and rules that then shape the behavior of a group (March & Olsen, 1984). In the regime analysis, norms serve as a reference for standards of behavior, specifying rights and obligations (Krasner, 1983). Norms are an inseparable part of institutions and regimes and are an important element that directs and aligns the behavior of actors in to achieve desired interests.

International and domestic norms are closely related, with domestic norms potentially driving the emergence of new international norms. Furthermore, international norms will be irrelevant if they fail to permeate domestic structures and be incorporated into domestic norms, leading to varying degrees of interpretation and compliance (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the context of the emergence of the BRICS, the historical rise of institutions that uphold the principles of openness and egalitarianism cannot be separated from Brazil's role as the first to initiate them. Brazil, with its egalitarian foreign policy and its emphasis on diplomatic rather than coercive approaches, has influenced the approach chosen by BRICS as a new global institution (Carneiro, 2019).

This paper examines how the BRICS institution, has shaped norms in the global economic order. One argument is that the emergence of norms within the structure was driven by changes in state behavior, particularly BRICS, during the economic crisis. Dynamically, BRICS then undertook a series of diplomatic efforts to attract countries, particularly those geopolitically located within the Global South, to participate in strengthening new international norms. To examine the emergence and internalization of international norms by the BRICS, this paper draws on the Finnemore and Sikkink norm's life-cycle framework.

According to Finnemore and Sikkink, norms have a life cycle or evolve in line with changes in behavior and logic. At the same time, some academics separate norms from rationality; Finnemore and Sikkink argue that the two are inseparable. Norms and rationality are linked in a norm life cycle, which they call strategic social construction, where actors rationally plan the reorganization of preferences, identities, or social contexts (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the current global economic order, the dynamics of the global political economy are driving the emergence of rational actors in shaping policy direction. These dynamics include repeated economic crises that indicate a delegitimization of the existing economic order. The rationality of countries in reorganizing their orders towards more egalitarian preferences, identities, or contexts that are not oriented towards the West, has led to the emergence of shared norms and new institutions. The emergence

of new norms (norms emergence) is triggered by a shift in the behavior or rationality of actors towards the structure, which is then promoted by the norm-former (norms cascade) and thus internalized by other actors and within the structure (norms internalization) (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The series shows how global norms diffuse through behavioral drivers.

In this study, BRICS is identified as a norm entrepreneur, or agent responsible for the emergence of strong ideas about appropriate behavior in the global community. Finnemore and Sikkink explain that the emergence of norm entrepreneurs, or agents initiating new norms, occurs when the alternative frameworks they introduce confront old norms (*norms contestation*) (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Contestation of norms essentially includes not only objections to, violations and compliance with norms, but also critical engagement to clarify various meanings (Wiener, 2020). BRICS is creating new norms because existing norms may be at a crucial tipping point. This analysis will be further elaborated before new norms need to be promoted (norms cascade), so that they are internalized (norms internalization).

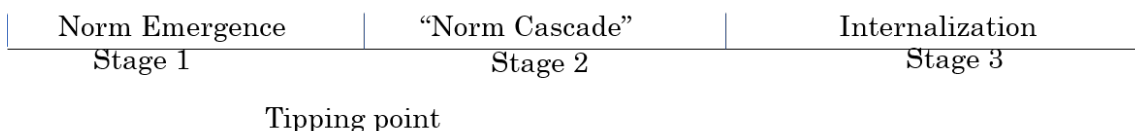
Antje Wiener explains that contestation of norms creates tension (though not conflict) between institutions formed by social forces and those formed by formal constitutions. This contestation contributes to the legitimacy of new norms and their influence on normative change (Wiener, 2020). This study does not explicitly use Wiener's theory to describe how the new norms promoted by BRICS confront older norms rooted in the socio-cultural background of World War II, such as the Bretton Woods System. However, the confrontation between norms is an inevitable part of the current process of change in the global economic order.

This study acknowledges that the two strands of scholarship drawn upon here operate at different analytical registers and should not be treated as conceptually interchangeable. Finnemore and Sikkink's norm life-cycle framework is primarily concerned with the gradual processes by which norms emerge, diffuse, and become internalized, through socialization. By contrast, Wiener's work highlights that diffusion and socialization do not necessarily result in acceptance or incorporation; instead, actors may engage in selective, strategic, or critical adaptation. Such that contestation becomes a constitutive social practice through which norms are negotiated, reconfigured, strengthened, or even weakened at the discursive and meaning-making level. In this analysis, these two approaches are used in a complementary rather than conflated manner. The norm life cycle perspective informs tracing of how BRICS articulates and projects particular order norms. At the same time, Wiener's conception of contestation provides a lens for examining how these norms are challenged, adapted, and reinterpreted, both internally among BRICS members or externally in relation to the broader international political-economic order.

Changes in the new global economic order will be influenced by the degree of internalization of norms within the system. This occurs when norms reach or even exceed a threshold, thereby creating acceptance and shaping new behaviors. Finnemore and Sikkink describe norm internalization as a condition in which new

norms, having passed through the cascade, are no longer the subject of public debate. Internalized norms will eventually emerge as standards of behavior and compete for support (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The condition is that the norm reaches a threshold or critical point allowing it to be internalized by the wider system.

Figure 1: Norm Life Cycle by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998)



The tipping point shown in the figure refers to the process of norm promotion by norm entrepreneurs, which reaches a cascade stage after a threshold is crossed, which it points the norm entrepreneur has convinced state leaders to adopt the norm. In the context of international law, an indicator of this threshold is the number of countries that ratify the treaty used as the basis for international law (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the case of BRICS, this threshold is indicated by the increasing participation of other countries after South Africa in the BRICS group. The accession of Arab countries and, most recently, Indonesia, indicates that BRICS has succeeded in persuading other leaders, especially those from the Global South, to join. Several factors are driving these countries to join, and norms are entering a cascade phase.

Both external and internal factors influence the norm cascade. Conformity, international and domestic legitimacy, and individual self-esteem influence the extent to which a norm will be followed and internalized. States will engage in certain communal behaviors due to a sense of identity, as Fearon argues that identity is also part of a particular social category (Fearon, 1999). Meanwhile, conformity refers more to the evaluative relationships formed between states within the international structure. Thus, states' participation in new normative flows is primarily driven by peer pressure, and their adherence to norms demonstrates their adaptation to the ongoing changes (Axelrod, 1986). In the BRICS context, South Africa's participation, for example, is driven not only by its rational interest in expanding access to economic cooperation, but also by its desire for regional legitimacy and self-esteem as a country with significant influence on the African continent's political and economic landscape. Similar motivations also underlie Ethiopia's, the Arab countries', and Indonesia's participation in BRICS. Regarding legitimacy, both international and domestic legitimacy are equally important in encouraging a state to participate in the flow of international norms. This is because domestic legitimacy can build support and encourage a state to participate in political institutions and alternatives, and international legitimacy will strengthen domestic trust in its government (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

At a threshold, a different dynamic will emerge, as more countries adopt new norms. Rather than explaining this as the result of international contagion, Finnemore and Sikkink attribute this adoption to active international socialization by norm entrepreneurs. This differs from the assumptions of Neorealism, which explain the state's response to international regimes, including through a passive

socialization process, called contagion (Waltz, 1993). BRICS' active promotion through multilateral forums such as the G20 is an indication of the intended socialization process. This behavior has implications for the interest of developing G20 member countries seeking alternatives for their development agendas. The discussion will be divided into several sections, namely, an explanation of BRICS' position as norms entrepreneurs amidst behavioral shifts in the global economic order and the emergence of new norms. This discussion will examine the process of by which BRICS promotes new norms and the internalization of norms by these countries.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

BRICS as the Emerging Power and Norm Entrepreneur

The emergence of BRICS, as previously explained by Jim O'Neill's analytical document on the economic growth of countries, and his predictions about the economic sustainability of non-superpowers. O'Neill's report argued that emerging economies would ensure the future growth and health of the global economy (O'Neill, 2001). Since the global economic crisis of 2008, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have become major players in global geopolitics. Although each has a different domestic political and economic background, these five countries have compromised to institutionalize new norms. According to Kenneth Waltz's conceptualization, countries with growing capabilities can challenge the international order potentially changing it and disrupting the system's equilibrium (Waltz, 1993).

However, Waltz's conceptualization still emphasizes the distribution of power within a given sphere among countries. In the context of BRICS, its emergence is examined as phenomenon of emerging power, particularly in political-economic terms. Clarisa Giaccaglia defines emerging economic power as referring to countries whose economic power is increasing and not derived from dominant Western powers (Giaccaglia, 2016). Based on the Goldman Sachs report, BRICs are indeed relevant as emerging economic and exhibit a hierarchical transition that differs from Waltz's description of the balance of power.

BRICS represents emerging economic powers outside the dominant Western powers, particularly from the Global South. This group of countries is politically marginalized, despite its significant economic growth (O'Neill, 2001). Marginalization in the global economic order is inseparable from the role of dominant countries, which, institutionally and geopolitically, perpetuate the political and economic position of the Global South, categorized as developing or underdeveloped. The binary system of dividing countries does not reflect actual geographic conditions, but rather is based on justifications for the countries' economic, political, and socio-cultural characteristics. Alfred Sauvry's writing, depicting a world map based on economic development and justifying the UN as a legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and the Cold War, demonstrates that the North-South dichotomy essentially refers only to differences in character. The West and the North refer to countries that tend to be capitalist, so their economic growth and

political dynamics are influenced by values of freedom and are considered modern. Meanwhile, the East or South are groups of countries with ideological characteristics outside of capitalism, whether communism or values and traditions foreign to the West (Sauvry, 1986). In this regard, the institutionalization of BRICS is also inseparable from the character of its member countries, which are differ from Western standards.

BRICS has an eclectic ideological outlook, including strengthening global multilateralism promoting more inclusive, equitable, development-oriented economic reforms, and advancing global ethics (Zondi, 2022). Although the domestic factors of the member countries are diverse, their characteristics are similar, so institutionally, BRICS reflects these characteristics. Brazil, India, and Africa, for example, have similar socio-economic characteristics. These three countries are large, resulting in high GDPs, measured by domestic production of goods and services. Their vast territories and significant economic activity are also offset by socio-economic issues, such as high unemployment, which tends to slow economic growth (Kanyane, 2022). Despite their significant economic growth, they are considered slow in the global economic landscape because the character of developed, capitalist countries dominate the benchmarks for economic growth and development. These three countries represent most of the Global South, which is conceptualized as a region of developing and less developed countries (Tomlinson, 2003). Meanwhile, China and Russia, although economically larger and stronger than the other three member states, share the same political character: they are both reluctant to be dominated by the United States and its alliances (Kanyane, 2022). These characters help instituonalize BRICS, and synergize for inclusive development, despite different social and political problems in the domestic sphere.

In the life cycle of international norms, domestic norms, customs, and conditions are intertwined with the global order and potential contestations. Not only do Brazil's local characteristics and norms influence the core principles of BRICS, but the political and economic conditions of member states also fundamentally contribute to BRICS' capacity to face and overcome crises. Tatomir and Hibiki quantitatively measured the potential for local crises in BRICS countries to escalate into global crises (Tatomir & Hibiki, 2025). Their research suggests that domestic crises in each country and how they are accomodated should be comprehensively examined to prevent them from escalating to the global level. According to Tatomir and Hibiki, one trigger that allows local crises to escalate to the global level is the herd behavior of BRICS countries (Tatomir & Hibiki, 2025). These findings are relevant to the view that international norms resonate with domestic affairs, where legitimacy will determine the sustainability of both international and domestic norms that contribute to their formation (Cortell & James W. Davis, 2000; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The position of BRICS as norm entrepreneurs is primarily determined by their local behavior, as supporters of the process of promoting the new norms.

The Bretton Woods-era global economic paradigm, which also contributed to the North-South dichotomy, is considered outdated and no longer able to guarantee

the sustainability of the global economy and development. In fact, the behavior of countries within the global structure is no longer solely driven by material economic factors. As evidence, despite Goldman Sachs publishing a report on healthy economic growth in the South, what led to BRICS integration was precisely the push to develop alternatives beyond the economic prescriptions of the North or the West (O'Neill, 2001). The existence of BRICS is crucial in this context, as norm entrepreneurs, creating issues and interpreting them through their new frameworks of inclusiveness and multipolarity in the global political economy. As explained previously, BRICS must confront old frameworks or norms that have long been part of the global economic order.

The alternative frameworks brought by BRICS must be able to construct new cognitive frameworks so that their strategies can be understood by a wider public (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Multilateral institutions such as the IMF, WTO, and the World Bank (which are also legacies of Bretton Woods) are experiencing crises, particularly regarding the supremacy of agreements and the effectiveness of policies during crises, especially when dealing directly with large countries (Boughton, Lombardi, & Malkin, 2017). This multilateral crisis clearly ordes legitimacy and creates opportunities for norm contestation (Wiener, 2020).

The dynamics of the global economic order are changing with the new BRICS norms. Within this emerging norm cascade, for example, Global South countries are slowly beginning to adopt and support existing institutionalization. The driving factor for countries adopting these new norms is more aware than mere transmission (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The transparency, inclusiveness, and egalitarian approach promoted by BRICS are not entirely new ideational values within the international structure, but in current developments, existing multilateral organizations are considered to lack accountability in creating an order that embodies these values.

South Africa's participation in the BRIC group in 2011, and subsequent transformation into BRICS represent an institutionalization effort that supports the flow of norms. One factor that drives countries to participate and be align with the norms brought by BRICS is the desire for legitimacy. South Africa, for example, decided to join because of the opportunities it offered to deepen cooperation with Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Furthermore, its participation in the emerging power group raised South Africa's profile both on the African continent and internationally (Daniel & Virk, 2014). South Africa adheres to existing norms driven by a sense of identity, one of which is its status as a highly industrialized nation on the continent. This is where identity awareness plays a significant role in the adoption and strengthening of international norms. This is because identity refers not only to social categories but also to self-respect and is a source of national dignity (Fearon, 1999).

The observation in this research is well taken, and the analysis, therefore, treats the characterization of BRICS as an emerging power and potential norm entrepreneur as an empirical question, rather than an assumed attribute. Rather than presuming the extent or coherence of BRICS's power, the study examines the

specific dimensions through which influence may be expressed, such as material, institutional, and discursive. Furthermore, it also identifies the governance norms that BRICS articulates across these domains. Attention is also directed to the mechanisms through which such norms are communicated and potentially internalized among their members, including policy coordination, shared narrative framing, institutional practices, and selective adaptation. In doing so, the argument acknowledges that BRICS's status as an emerging power is neither uniform nor uncontested, and that norm entrepreneurship within the group may vary in scope and form, affecting different issue areas and member states' contexts.

Norms Contestation and BRICS Institutionalization as Cascade

In the norm cascade cycle, identity awareness is closely linked to the degree of adoption and reinforcement of international norms. This is because identity is a crucial factor in legitimacy, respect, and conformity in social interactions and in belonging to a particular social category (Fearon, 1999).-the need for and awareness of identity drive countries' participation in BRICS. Currently, BRICS has eleven members, with Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates participating (BRICS, 2025). For the Arab Peninsula countries, which are currently members of BRICS, US dominance in the global political landscape has so far placed them as geopolitically marginalized and labeled repressive. The US's unilateralism has, in fact, made other countries, including the BRICS founders, uncomfortable (Burton, 2021). This factor is one of the many driving forces behind the four Arabian Peninsula countries joining BRICS.

The element of conformity also plays a significant role in their participation and the strengthening of BRICS institutionalization, as BRICS' attention to the Arab Spring and other dynamics in the Middle East region has encouraged adaptation. As Axelrod points out regarding conformity in evaluative relations between countries, BRICS' strong attention, while still upholding the principle of non-intervention in any changes in the Middle East, motivated Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to participate (Axelrod, 1986). Their international image as a country in a conflict-ridden region and through a repressive government needs to be improved with significant policy changes at the multilateral level, namely by joining the BRICS.

The participation of Arab countries in BRICS represents an actualization of the norms cascade. Finnemore and Sikkink state that conformity, the motivation to gain international recognition, and increased self-esteem can facilitate this process (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The Bretton Woods paradigm placed the United States and its European allies in veto positions in various multilateral institutions and forums, allowing them to interfere with the sovereignty of other countries within the system. BRICS, in a confrontational manner, seeks reform within the system by emphasizing norms that respect countries' sovereignty and opposing intervention. For Arab countries, the BRICS norms promise to at least free them from Western interference in their sovereignty, particularly regarding the nature of their domestic politics (Burton, 2021). Joining BRICS allows Arab countries to increase their role in the global economic order and have gain greater freedom, including grater

opportunities to expand global economic activities without being hampered by Western legitimacy. This fact also indicates that the promotion of norms by BRICS in the Arab region has positive implications for the sustainability of the norm contestation process at the international level.

The contestation of norms in the current global economic order indicates a contestation between old norms inherited from the West and new norms promoted intensively by the BRICS. This process positions old and new norms on an equal footing, allowing them to interact. However, for the new norms introduced by the BRICS to reach a threshold, institutionalization is necessary. Institutionalization refers to the integration of norms into policies, international law, and the rules of other international organizations, thus giving rise to a wave of norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In other words, the core norms and principles promoted by BRICS will emerge and be identified by the system when they are embodied in the policy instruments that are implemented and followed. The BRICS principles of democracy, non-intervention, and inclusive multilateralism are institutionalized in synergy with the G20 agreements. This demonstrates that, rather than confronting the status quo, BRICS is becoming an alternative group for the South (Xing, 2019).

BRICS also institutionalized an egalitarian approach based on multipolarity, including through the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) system. The NDB's emergence was seen as a counter-hegemonic effort, as its establishment stemmed from the dissatisfaction of BRICS member with the performance of the IMF and the World Bank. This was seen as marking a shift in world order, which had previously been managed and regulated by US-initiated post-war agreements (Xing, 2019). The NDB and CRA were established by the BRICS not only to mobilize funding and resources for sustainable development but also to ensure the resilience of member countries amid frequent global economic turmoil. This alternative represents a shift in norms within the global political economy, and the participation of other countries in this system demonstrates a growing degree of acceptance of this structure.

As previously explained regarding the contestation of norms, the NDB and CRA are indicators of both the institutionalization of BRICS and the intended contestation. The continuity of global monetary and fiscal mechanisms that still reflect the dominance of the United States and the dollar, for example, has not been displaced by the emergence of new economic powers. The institutionalization of the NDB and CRA by BRICS in reality still refers to the global economic order inherited from World War II, where the mechanism of establishment and management still relies on the size of the contribution provided by member countries of 55% and the member vote may not exceed 20% (Schöllmann, 2014). Although it serves as an institutionalization of the main norms and principles of BRICS, NDB Performance, and CRA, its operations are not seen as threatening the current global economic order. Europe itself still sees these financial institutions as an additional option in global banking, especially for developing countries. BRICS also continues to involve the IMF in monitoring the economic performance of borrowing countries

(Schöllmann, 2014), so that the sustainability of NDB and CRA policies is in principle still tied to a more established economic order.

The idea of de-dollarization, within the norm cycle, can be interpreted as an effort to socialize the new norms introduced by the BRICS. Practically, de-dollarization is not a new idea in the global economic order. Countries affected by dollar volatility due to their high degree of financial dollarization have begun implementing alternative strategies to mitigate the adverse effects on their economies. An example is Latin America, which has begun implementing de-dollarization due to its high financial dollarization, a long-term consequence of its past crises (García-Escribano & Sosa, 2011). De-dollarization, as part of the BRICS outreach program, cannot be considered an attempt to delegitimize the dollar, but rather an alternative approach to reducing the intended financial dollarization. While it's true that de-dollarization is driven by high levels of dissatisfaction with the United States' ability to manage its budget deficit, which has impacted the dollar, and the global crisis, more strategic and complex efforts are needed to break free from dollar dependence truly.

BRICS member currencies, compared to the dollar, remain highly volatile, and the readiness for currency consolidation has yet to be tested (Kanyane, 2022). To achieve true de-dollarization, de-dollarization policies must reach a threshold, where BRICS member countries and those that have not yet joined adopting them as a step to minimize the impact of the global crisis caused by dollar volatility. To date, several regions have implemented de-dollarization policies to overcome the crisis; Southeast Asia, for example, which has, in its Economic Community Strategic Plan for 2026 to 2030, formulated efforts to optimize local currencies (Shan, 2025). The increasing number of countries or regions implementing this policy and joining BRICS will contribute to the cascade and internalization stages of de-dollarization.

This study recognizes that the internalization stage in Finnemore and Sikkink's norm life cycle has been critiqued for implying an almost automatic compliance once a norm cascades and becomes institutionalized, overlooking the persistence of contestation, even at advanced stages of diffusion. Drawing on García Iommi's reconceptualization, internalization is instead understood as occurring at the end of the norm cascade, when a contested norm simultaneously enjoys formal validity, social recognition, and cultural validation, without assuming that conformity becomes unreflective (García Iommi, 2020). This perspective foregrounds the ongoing role of applicatory contestation it acknowledges that norms can both retain contested meanings and remain subject to reinterpretation, resistance, or adaptation even as they achieve widespread legitimacy. By doing so, it aligns with the view of institutionalization as necessary but not sufficient for compliance, and it accommodates the complex, non-linear dynamics of norm acceptance in global governance.

Towards Internalization

This paper assumes that internalization of BRICS norms can occur as more countries join and implement the new policies being promoted. Therefore, the

increasing number of countries participating in the socialization of BRICS norms will be relevant to the degree of internalization. Just as domestic and regional legitimacy, self-esteem, and opportunities for cooperation motivated South Africa to join, they also motivated Indonesia. For Indonesia, participation in BRICS is a strategy not only to boost economic growth but also to increase its political and economic influence at both the regional and global levels. Participation in BRICS will safeguard Indonesia amid the volatility in the the US dollar and open up opportunities for greater trade cooperation with BRICS member countries (Pandito, 2025).

The government's decision to join the New Development Bank (NDB) and commit capital underscores a shift toward alternative multilateral financing mechanisms beyond traditional Western-dominated institutions, with Indonesia outlining a pipeline of projects in infrastructure, renewable energy, and digital connectivity that align with BRICS development priorities (Cabinet Secretariat of The Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Bank Indonesia has also expanded local-currency settlement mechanisms and diversified fthe composition of oreign exchange reserve composition, reducing reliance on the US Dollar, and facilitating cross-border trade in national currencies with partner central banks, consistent with BRICS's dedollarization agenda.

Therefore, Indonesia's accession to BRICS is a strategic decision for as it is often caught in domestic price crises due to its dollar dependence. At the regional level, Indonesia is an influential country, so its participation in BRICS can boost regional and domestic legitimacy for the new norms it brings. A similar context can also be inferred from the participation of Arab countries in BRICS. In other words, domestic legitimacy and acceptance of their governments' participation in BRICS can enhance global legitimacy for BRICS and the norms it socializes for the global economic order. These examples signal that the government's policy is not only rhetorically aligned with BRICS norms of diversified finance and currency usage but also institutionally instantiated through regulatory frameworks, intergovernmental agreements, and central bank practices.

The acceptance of new economic norms, rules, and practices by countries joining the BRICS represents norm internalization. The period of norm internalization does not mean that norm contestation has passed. The shift in the global economic order due to the de-dollarization mechanisms facilitated by the NDB and CRA has prompted hegemonic powers to monitor and scrutinize the promotions carried out by emerging powers (Xing, 2019). In the process, the Western alliance, which had previously been the hegemon, assimilated new norms and emerging powers, while the BRICS reaped the benefits of challenging the status quo. The new norms and rules promoted by the BRICS are currently in the cascade and internalization phase, not yet consolidation.

This is evidenced by a series of promotional efforts and approaches undertaken by the BRICS, which actively engage with global issues without interfering with the sovereignty of other countries. Meanwhile, consolidation will be evident through policy changes, serving as an indicator of the countries involved implementing the norms. This stage demonstrates that existing norms and rules are no longer merely

strategic regulations within the system but have instead become habits or new behaviors.

New behaviors that become habits in BRICS member countries will significantly strengthen norms that promote BRICS. As previously mentioned, in the international order, regulations are not enough to maintain the status quo; trust is needed. The decline in international legitimacy in the global economic order has impacted on the existence of long-established norms. This also applies to BRICS, which promotes new norms for managing the global political economy. The existence of banking and financial institutions established by the BRICS to accommodate member interests and break free from Western hegemony can only be strengthened through by the trust of member countries.

The establishment of the NDB (New Development Bank) and the CRA (Contingent Reserve Arrangement) by the BRICS was principally driven by distrust and dissatisfaction of among BRICS finance ministers with the IMF. However, operationally, the NDB and CRA still use dollars for foreign loans rather than their combined currencies. Furthermore, the CRA remains affiliated with the IMF, providing loans exceeding 30% of its loan quota (Bond, 2016). This fact indicates that, in terms of policy implementation, BRICS has not yet fully freed itself from the hegemony it criticizes. This could undermine the legitimacy of its members and the international structure in general as a whole, casting doubt on BRICS as an institution offering an alternative to non-Western governance. In the internalization of norms, the intrinsic character of the norm is crucial for its influence.

Ambiguous, unclear norms that ignore the issues at hand will not survive in the international system (Boli & Thomas, 1998). If BRICS wants to strengthen the new norms it promotes, it needs to demonstrate a character that aligns with the needs of countries currently pessimistic about the IMF and World Bank’s roles in managing the global economy. The idea of breaking away from Western hegemony in political economics can be realized not only through the formation of a community that excludes dominant countries, but also through the institutionalization of norms through substantial regulations to establish a new, egalitarian global economic order.

Table 1. Norm Life Cycle on BRICS

Analytical Dimension	Stage 1 — Norm Emergence	Stage 2 — Norm Cascade	Stage 3 — Partial Internalization
Historical Triggering Conditions	Post-2001 systemic shifts; dissatisfaction with Western institutional dominance; under-representation in IMF/WB governance	Post-2008 crisis delegitimizes austerity-based financial governance; demand for development-centric financing	Persistent structural dependence on IMF surveillance & USD benchmarks; coexistence rather than replacement
Core Actors	BRICS founding members as norm entrepreneurs (Brazil, Russia, India,	BRICS member governments, NDB & CRA technocratic bodies, partner states in Global South	Borrowing states, regional partners, IMF-linked monitoring regimes

	China; later South Africa)		
Identity Narrative	“Rising powers” aligned by status, periphery experience, and economic ascent	“Reformist coalition” representing Global South priorities in global governance	“Pluralized governance” identity — alternatives coexist with established institutions
Norms Articulated	Inclusiveness; egalitarian decision-making; multipolarity; sovereignty & non-intervention; South–South cooperation	Development-first financing; complementarity rather than rupture from—Bretton Woods	Pragmatic hybridity; selective autonomy; institutional coexistence
Mechanisms of Articulation / Legitimation	BRICS summits, communiqués, joint declarations, shared rhetoric on reform	Creation of NDB & CRA; policy coordination; expansion through BRICS+ diplomacy	Institutional habituation; routinized lending; cautious monetary experimentation
Evidence of Norm Diffusion	Norm visibility increases; discourse adopted by members	Expansion in issue-areas; NDB lending gains credibility; Global South uptake	Use of BRICS finance alongside IMF & WB; sector-specific local-currency pilots
Scope of Adoption	Limited to founding members (symbolic consolidation)	Broader regional alignment and functional adoption in finance & development	Partial and uneven — varies across sectors and states
Constraints / Boundaries	Lack of institutional instruments; symbolic over practical influence	Resource limits; capacity asymmetry among members; geopolitical divergence	CRA surveillance links to IMF; dollarized trade & reserves persist
System-Level Outcome	Norm visibility and identity formation	Reformist pole within global governance; coexistence with Western institutions	Contestation stabilized as hybrid governance rather than full paradigm shift
Position in Norm Cycle	- Completed	- Ongoing / expanding	Partial — not fully consolidated

CONCLUSION

The emergence of BRICS, which initiated a more inclusive, democratic, and egalitarian global political-economic order, ideologically influenced the evolution of existing norms. The decline in legitimacy of the order managed by the US and its Western allies after World War II shaped the contestation of norms within the international structure. The ideological background of BRICS member countries, such as dissatisfaction with Western hegemony in financial and monetary management and international trade, facilitated the promotion of new norms by norm entrepreneurs, namely BRICS. Changes in the behavior of some countries, which contributed to the emergence of new BRICS norms, were not sufficient to consolidate these norms and rules in the new global economic order. This is because the process of internalizing norms is not only sufficient for changing behavior, but also for shaping new habits that shift and change the existing global economic order.

The role of BRICS as norm entrepreneurs extends beyond building the creation of institutions with an ideological background. BRICS also needs to provide a clear and consolidated socialization mechanism to enable countries to participate in the norms being developed. BRICS needs to ensure that its institutions are ready to implement new norms, such as de-dollarization, to maintain their legitimacy. Regarding the norm cycle, a statistical analysis of the degree of acceptance and legitimacy of BRICS, G20, and G7 member states is necessary to determine the extent of the norm shift. In discussing the stages of the norm cycle, a quantitative approach will clarify the meaning of the norm threshold. This study has limitations in describing each stage, because, to date, research on the international norm cycle remains limited, as most changes in the global order are still studied as a phenomena of causal action and reaction between states and the system.

In line with a Constructivist understanding of norms as socially produced and variably internalized, this study treats the BRICS norm not as an automatic outcome of membership but as a contingent process observable through policy and institutional adaptation. The expansion of BRICS membership, including Indonesia, is analyzed as indicative of a movement toward the cascade stage only insofar as BRICS principles are translated into concrete practices, such as engagement with the New Development Bank, the adoption of local currency settlements mechanisms, and the diversification of development finance partnerships beyond Western-dominated institutions. These developments are understood as forms of selective and strategic adaptation rather than full convergence, allowing the analysis to assess the depth of internalization empirically through the extent to which such practices become embedded in domestic regulatory and institutional frameworks. Further research is needed into the impetus for countries to join BRICS, particularly those from the Global South, as well as into the principle of substantial compliance for the internalization of BRICS norms across various countries.

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