WORKING PAPER

№ 97 / 2026

African Countries in BRICS: New Opportunities for Economic and Political Cooperation

Daria Zelenova
Sofia Zamesina
Andrey Ufimtsev
Ekaterina Abramova

RIAC
Russian International Affairs Council

RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

MOSCOW 2026

Russian International Affairs Council

Authors:

Daria Zelenova, Ph.D. in Political Science; **Sofia Zamesina**; **Andrey Ufimtsev**; **Ekaterina Abramova**

Reviewer:

Igor Loshkaryov, Ph.D. in Political Science

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Svetlana Gavrilova, Ph.D. in History (Lead Editor); **Konstantin Sukhoverkhov**, Ph.D. in Political Science; **Katerina Trotskaya**; **Daniil Rastegaev** (Publishing Editor)

African Countries in BRICS: New Opportunities for Economic and Political Cooperation: Working Paper No. 97 / 2026 / [D. Zelenova et al.; edited by S. Gavrilova, K. Sukhoverkhov, K. Trotskaya, D. Rastegaev]; Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). – Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2026. – 36 p. – Authors and editors are listed on the reverse side of the title page.

ISBN 978-5-6054795-8-1

This working paper examines the strategies pursued by South Africa, Ethiopia, and Egypt in engaging with BRICS. Despite their diverse national contexts, all three countries view BRICS membership as a means of strengthening their international agency and promoting more equitable socio-economic development. Using the African cases as a lens, the paper identifies the main drivers of BRICS enlargement and assesses both the opportunities and the challenges associated with the bloc's growing African dimension.

The opinions expressed in this working paper reflect solely the personal views and analytical outlook of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Non-Profit-Making Partnership Russian International Affairs Council.

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Introduction. The African Track in BRICS: In Search of New Forms of Participation

Daria Zelenova

The expansion of BRICS in 2024 through the accession of two African states (Ethiopia and Egypt) and the admission of two additional African countries (Nigeria and Uganda) as partner states in 2025 has prompted discussion about the emergence of an African track within the bloc. The ongoing transition toward a more multipolar world order and the gradual erosion of Western dominance in international affairs, against the backdrop of the growing economic weight of new centers of power, have generated considerable interest among Global Majority countries in non-Western forums and frameworks for cooperation. BRICS, together with its New Development Bank (NDB), as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), is increasingly viewed by these states as an important platform for strengthening their political and economic agency. Despite Africa's continued underrepresentation in global governance institutions, the past decade has witnessed a growing presence of African countries in a number of international forums and clubs. In 2024, the African Union was admitted to the G20,[1] while discussions intensified regarding the possible inclusion of African states as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The shifting global balance of power and the rise of non-Western centers of influence have revived interest in alternative visions of world order—ideas that have been actively debated in Africa since the era of decolonization and the 1955 Bandung Conference.[2] The continent has increasingly advanced its own development models and initiatives, which are also finding expression within emerging non-Western platforms such as BRICS.[3] Growing African interest in cooperation within BRICS reflects both the development priorities that African countries have set for themselves in the medium term and the flexible format of cooperation offered within BRICS.[4]

During 2024–2025, several African countries—including Angola, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, the Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, and Equatorial Guinea—publicly expressed interest in deepening cooperation with BRICS and potentially joining the bloc. BRICS appeals to African countries as a global forum that provides a platform for discussion on a wide range of issues. Moreover, the new category of "partner country" enables states to engage with those working groups and cooperation tracks that they consider most relevant for advancing and implementing their own priorities and initiatives.

The inclusive participation model embodied in BRICS outreach practices has become one of BRICS' defining features. Many African experts view BRICS as the

[1] Abramova, I.O. Africa in the Contemporary World Order Model: A Significant Player or an Outsider? // Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law. 2018. No. 11(5). Pp. 6–21.

[2] For example, one of the key centers for producing critical analyses of globalization and the Western-centric system of international relations is the prestigious Institute for Social Research, founded in 1966 following the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba. It was reorganized in 2015 as an initiative of social movements.

[3] See, for example: Africa's Strategic Partnership with BRICS and Other Emerging Countries. Eds. S. Zondi and H. Adogo. Jacana, 2025.

[4] See: Africa 2025: Prospects and Challenges. HSE University Press: Moscow, 2025.

only genuinely functioning forum for developing an alternative to the Western-centric international order.[5] The elements of an economic alternative being advanced within BRICS are seen across the continent as an important instrument for pursuing independent development strategies. This is particularly evident in the case of Ethiopia, which has sought to diversify its sources of development assistance while actively engaging with different BRICS members. For other African states, such as Egypt and South Africa, BRICS serves as an important political instrument for global positioning and the projection of influence beyond their borders.

A joint study conducted by the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and MGIMO University[6] found that the increasing politicization of global governance has become, for African actors, not only a question of resource allocation but also one of renegotiating symbolic hierarchies. African elites are concerned with who sets the rules and who possesses the authority to shape economic policy. This is reflected in their critical assessment of existing institutions of global governance, coupled with demands for reform aimed at ensuring broader representation of African interests. In this context, support for alternative financial mechanisms and settlements in national currencies is viewed by African experts not merely as a technical solution but as an instrument for strengthening economic sovereignty.

At the same time, despite strong demand for participation in BRICS from African countries, the continent has yet to achieve full representation within the economic bloc. A degree of geographical imbalance remains, largely driven by political considerations: membership has been extended to states that, first, have expressed a clear interest in joining and, second, share certain BRICS principles while demonstrating an independent foreign policy orientation. Despite the accession of new African members, two entire subregions—Central Africa and West Africa—remain unrepresented.[7] Nigeria participates in BRICS as a partner country and, like Uganda—another African BRICS partner—does not possess voting rights in the adoption of key decisions. The policies pursued by these countries within the BRICS framework, as well as the initial results of their integration into BRICS, have yet to be fully assessed.

Nevertheless, a defining feature of BRICS is its horizontal structure and "flexible geometry,"[8] which has enabled three successful rounds of expansion without the establishment of a formal secretariat or charter. BRICS functions as a platform for consultation and the exchange of views, avoiding rigid institutionalization and refraining from encroaching on the sovereignty of its member states. Batalov

[5] According to data from an expert survey conducted by the BRICS Africa Strategy Studies Center in partnership with MGIMO University.

[6] Preliminary results of the study were partially published in: Nikolskaya, M., Matveeva, A. BRICS as a Brand and Its African Dimension // Valdai International Discussion Club. 28.07.2025.
URL: https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/briks-kak-brend-i-ego-afrikanskoe-izmerenie/

[7] The authors adhere to the concept of geographical regional divisions as defined by the United Nations.

[8] For more on BRICS' "flexible geometry," see: Suslov, D.V., Bordachev, T.V. The Vanguard of the World Majority: A New BRICS Identity on an Unchanged Foundation // BRICS Russia Expert Council. 01.05.2024.
URL: https://clck.ru/3TFzbr

classified BRICS as an "institution-club,"[9] a format that, despite its informality and lack of enforcement mechanisms, can exert a tangible influence on the international agenda and can be regarded as a fully-fledged actor in international relations. It is also important to take into account the impact of BRICS multilateral diplomacy and the flexible cooperation mechanisms offered through the BRICS Outreach and BRICS+ formats, which provide opportunities for non-member states to establish contacts in areas of particular interest to them. As Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov has repeatedly emphasized, the BRICS model of interaction is based on the absence of a "confrontational agenda" and "should serve as a foundation for a more just multipolar world order."[10] Thanks to its innovative format of engagement, BRICS summits have, over the past two decades, evolved into major non-Western multilateral forums. Alongside the official track, a vibrant public diplomacy dimension has also emerged. BRICS has developed a number of regular and effective Track Two mechanisms—including the BRICS Academic Forum, the BRICS Civil Forum, BRICS Youth Schools, and the Russia–BRICS Expert Council—each of which serves as an important platform for the exchange of ideas and values. These initiatives also provide opportunities for critically assessing the activities of BRICS' official governmental structures.

Given the growing demand for participation, BRICS is likely to face the challenge of preserving its attractiveness amid the current process of institutionalization. The question of expanding the group to include additional African participants is important for each individual country primarily in terms of the specific opportunities it provides for advancing national interests in the economic and political spheres. At the same time, Africa's weakest point within BRICS is its collective positioning inside the group. In the authors' view, this challenge could be addressed by involving the African Union (AU) more closely in cooperation with BRICS.

In this working paper, the authors analyze the experience of the three African BRICS member states since their inclusion in BRICS and assess which indicators of socioeconomic development are associated with potential participation in BRICS. These findings may be used to inform future projections regarding the expansion of the organization's membership.

[9] Batalov, E.Ya. The New Institutionalization of International Politics // International Trends. 2016. Vol. 14, No. 1. Pp. 6–25.

[10] "Ryabkov Explained the Secret Behind BRICS" // Vesti. 24.06.2024. URL: https://www.vesti.ru/article/4019991

South Africa in BRICS: Africanizing the Global Agenda

Daria Zelenova

South Africa's accession to BRICS in 2011 can be regarded as the starting point for the development of the bloc's African track. At the time, there were doubts about the inclusion of an African state, but support from Russia and China helped South Africa secure full membership in the group. Fifteen years later, the country's key achievements within BRICS include the active promotion of a pan-African agenda, the strengthening of South–South dialogue, engagement through the New Development Bank (NDB), and the incorporation into BRICS declarations of principles and initiatives that align with South Africa's national interests.

South Africa pursues a policy of "active non-alignment," seeking to balance its role as a leader of Africa and the Global South while maintaining multilateralism as the guiding principle of its foreign relations.[11] The country's economic dependence on the European Union and the United Kingdom—which remain its largest trading partners and primary sources of foreign direct investment—also helps explain Pretoria's cautious approach toward its non-Western partners.[12] Despite persistent political disagreements between South Africa and the EU, primarily over the conflict in Ukraine and Pretoria's refusal to impose sanctions on Russia, as well as differing positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, both sides continue to deepen relations within what South African policymakers describe as a "pragmatic partnership."[13] In addition, South Africa's growing ties with the UK should be taken into account. These relations are increasingly centered on cooperation in the fields of economic development, security, and energy. London actively finances just energy transition projects and advocates South Africa's shift from coal-based generation toward renewable energy sources.[14] Relations with the United States have entered a period of crisis following the return of the Trump administration. Washington's unprecedented decision not to invite Pretoria to participate in the G20 summit in Miami, together with the imposition of 30% tariffs on South African goods and the scaling back of assistance programs, has encouraged South Africa to strengthen its partnerships with non-Western centers of power, particularly China.

Multilateralism remains a foundational principle of Pretoria's foreign policy. It is reflected in the country's early policy documents and is closely linked to the promotion of human rights, democracy, and respect for international

[11] See, for example, the statement by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola: Lamola, R. How Non-Alignment Shapes South Africa's Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World // Daily Maverick. 02.09.2025. URL: https://clck.ru/3TFzgw

[12] For a detailed breakdown of FDI flows into and out of South Africa, see: FDI In and Out of South Africa by Country // CODERA. URL: https://codera.co.za/fdi-in-and-out-of-south-africa-by-country/

[13] See, for example, the joint press release of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation and the European Union following the latest EU–South Africa Summit: Joint Press Release: 16th European Union–South Africa Ministerial Political Dialogue // Department of International Relations & Cooperation, South Africa. 19.02.2025. URL: https://dirco.gov.za/joint-press-release-16th-european-union-south-africa-ministerial-political-dialogue-19-february-2025/

[14] See, for example: South Africa–UK PACT // UK PACT. URL: https://www.ukpact.co.uk/country-programme/south-africa/

law.[15] The relatively peaceful transition to majority rule in 1994 and the adoption of the country's first progressive constitution in 1996 helped establish South Africa's image as a responsible global actor. Having endured a long and difficult struggle against apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC) succeeded in peacefully dismantling an unjust political system, thereby accumulating substantial long-term political capital. It is therefore unsurprising that, throughout its three decades in power, the ANC's efforts as the country's dominant political force were directed toward overcoming the international isolation that South Africa experienced during the apartheid era.

In addition, guided by the principle of *ubuntu*[16]—often translated as "I am because we are"—South Africans actively promoted South–South dialogue while pursuing the country's regional ambitions. The apartheid regime had acquired a reputation within the region as an aggressor, most notably through its intervention in Angola aimed at eliminating political opponents. In the security doctrine of the new democratic South Africa, this approach was replaced by a commitment to peaceful coexistence with neighboring states. Pretoria increasingly positioned itself as a guarantor of peace and security across the region. In particular, South Africa consistently acted as a mediator in peace processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Sudan, and later Mozambique, while participating in peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations. Under the leadership of South Africa's second president, Thabo Mbeki, Pretoria also played a major role in transforming the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union in 2002 and in establishing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a central pillar of the AU's socioeconomic agenda. While maintaining its self-image as the "voice of Africa," South Africa steadily strengthened the continent's position in global debates. In 1999, South Africa joined the G20 and has since remained the only African country represented in the forum. Its role in articulating and advancing the interests of the continent within this multilateral framework has reinforced Pretoria's position as an important bridge between the Global North and the Global South.

With the rise to power of Jacob Zuma in 2009, South Africa continued the course toward strengthening multilateralism and expanding South–South cooperation that had been initiated under Thabo Mbeki. At the same time, Zuma's presidency marked a shift toward closer engagement with China and Russia. In 2013, Moscow and Pretoria signed a Declaration on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. China became South Africa's largest trading partner in 2009 and has retained that

[15] See, for example: Emelyanenko, E. The Principle of Ubuntu in South Africa's Domestic and Foreign Policy // International Aspect. 2023. No. 4(1). Pp. 12–35.

[16] The key conceptual document defining South Africa's foreign policy strategy is the White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, officially titled "Building a Better World – The Diplomacy of Ubuntu," adopted in 2011. The preamble states that the philosophy of ubuntu offers an approach to international relations that respects all nations, peoples, and cultures and is based on the principle of their equal dignity. It asserts that it is in a state's national interest not only to care for itself but also to contribute to the positive development of other countries and societies. Similarly, national security is understood through the lens of "human security"—the protection of human life, dignity, and well-being as a universal objective. See: Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu. White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy // South African Government. URL: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/foreignpolicy0.pdf

position ever since.[17] In 2011, with active support from Russia and China, South Africa joined BRICS. At the time, the country's GDP was significantly smaller than that of the other members. Nevertheless, Pretoria's soft power, rooted in its commitment to the principles of ubuntu and the construction of a multiracial democratic republic, combined with its global positioning as a representative of the African continent's interests, contributed to its acceptance as a full member of BRICS. According to South African experts, Pretoria's accession effectively transformed BRICS from an economic bloc into a broader strategic and geopolitical project encompassing all inhabited continents and focused on representing the interests of the Global South.[18]

Perhaps the most tangible outcome of South Africa's participation in BRICS has been its contribution to the Africanization of the bloc's agenda. This highlights the country's potential as an "agent of change" within the BRICS framework. Having spent decades in international isolation during the apartheid era, Pretoria, through a decade of active diplomacy, succeeded in integrating itself into an emerging non-Western international structure and exerting a noticeable influence on its formation and subsequent development. Since officially joining BRICS in 2011, South Africa has consistently incorporated African priorities into the bloc's agenda. In doing so, Pretoria has pursued a strategic South–South foreign policy while simultaneously advancing its own national interests as a leading regional power.

A key mechanism for expanding dialogue on African issues was the introduction of BRICS outreach practices, the invitation of neighboring non-member states to participate in discussions, which began at the Durban Summit in 2013. Held under the theme *"BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization,"* the summit itself was a landmark event for the continent. It was there that the South African government first invited the Chairperson of the African Union and the Chairperson of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee to participate in the summit, laying the foundation for a regular dialogue between the African Union and BRICS.[19] In addition, at South Africa's initiative, outreach activities were extended to representatives of Africa's regional economic communities (RECs).

In 2018, during its second BRICS chairmanship, South Africa advanced several initiatives aimed at strengthening the African dimension of the bloc's agenda. At Pretoria's proposal, the BRICS Working Group on Peacekeeping was established to enhance cooperation among member states in UN peacekeeping operations and broader efforts to maintain international peace and security.[20]

South Africa's African track within BRICS has also been advanced through its engagement with the NDB. As one of the Bank's founding members, Pretoria has

[17] South Africa. Exports, Imports, Trade Partners // The Observatory of Economic Complexity. URL: https://oec.world/en/profile/country/zaf?selector345id=2018&selector2790id=trade_i_baci_a_07

[18] De Carvalho G., Gruzd S. & Wu Y. S. The BRICS expanded: Shaped by – or shaping – the global order? South African Journal of International Affairs. 2025. No. 32 (1–2). Pp. 1–8.

[19] Shubin V. South Africa in the BRICS: Last but not Least. International Organizations Research Journal. 2015. Vol. 10. No. 2. Pp. 229–247.

[20] Larionova M. South Africa's BRICS Presidency: Regional Power at the Helm of a Global Governance Forum. Vestnik RUDN. International Relations. 2015. No. 1. Pp. 125–134. URL: https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/10377

secured concessional financing for major infrastructure projects. By 2024, South Africa's NDB investment portfolio had reached USD 6.5 billion. A substantial share of this financing was denominated in South African rand. The major loans were directed toward major infrastructure and social development projects, outlined in Table 1. Despite ongoing criticism regarding the transparency of fund utilization, experts generally assess the impact of NDB financing as positive, primarily because it has been directed toward socially significant development initiatives. Two projects aimed at mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have already been completed, and their implementation is widely regarded as successful. Moreover, approximately half of all loans are issued in rand, reducing foreign exchange risks and aligning debt servicing obligations with revenues generated in the national currency.

Table 1. New Development Bank Projects in South Africa*

Project Title	Project Status	Currency	Borrower Type**	Year	Value, USD million***
Project Finance Facility for *Eskom*	Approved	US Dollar	Public Sector	2016	180
Durban Container Terminal Berth Reconstruction Project	Approved	South African Rand	Non-Public Sector	2018	281
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction and Energy Sector Development Project	Approved	US Dollar	Non-Public Sector	2018	300
Battery Energy Storage Project	Approved	South African Rand	Public Sector	2019	417.8
National Toll Roads Improvement Program	Approved	South African Rand	Public Sector	2019	479.7
Renewable Energy Sector Development Project	Approved	South African Rand	Non-Public Sector	2019	79.4
Lesotho Highlands Water Transfer Project Phase II	Approved	South African Rand	Public Sector	2019	221
Medupi Thermal Power Station Environmental Protection Project	Cancelled	US Dollar	Public Sector	2019	480
National Toll Roads Management Program	Approved	US Dollar	Public Sector	2020	1,000
South Africa Emergency COVID-19 Response Support Program	Completed	US Dollar	Public Sector	2020	1,000
South Africa Emergency Economic Recovery Support Program Following COVID-19	Completed	US Dollar	Public Sector	2021	1,000
Development Bank of Southern Africa Renewable Energy Development Project	Approved	US Dollar	Non-Public Sector	2022	100
Municipal Water Supply Program	Cancelled	US Dollar	Public Sector	2003	1,000

Project Title	Project Status	Currency	Borrower Type**	Year	Value, USD million***
Freight Rail Sector Improvement Program	Approved	South African Rand	Public Sector	2024	989.1
Limpopo Central Hospital Project	Proposed	South African Rand	Public Sector	2025	241.7
Development Bank of Southern Africa Sustainable Infrastructure Project	Proposed	South African Rand US Dollar	Non-Public Sector	2025	107.9
Magalies Bulk Water Supply System Project	Proposed	US Dollar	Public Sector	2025	205
Metropolitan Municipal Services Infrastructure Modernization Program	Proposed	US Dollar	Public Sector	2025	1,000

**Proposed projects are highlighted in yellow; approved projects in green; cancelled projects in red.*
***Non-public-sector borrowers may include state-owned corporations.*
****For projects denominated in rand, values were converted using the exchange rate prevailing on the date of loan proposal (for proposed loans) or approval (for approved loans). Source: Compiled by the authors based on data available on the New Development Bank website*[21]

An analysis of BRICS declarations adopted during South Africa's chairmanship demonstrates that the country's national interests, as articulated in its strategic and doctrinal documents, have been institutionally reflected in the language of official BRICS statements.[22]

At the same time, the wording and tone of BRICS declarations on issues of particular strategic importance to South Africa—such as climate change and human rights—have clearly reflected South Africa's priorities. This demonstrates both the potential for advancing a more inclusive agenda within BRICS itself and Pretoria's broader commitment to promoting its key development priorities through multilateral platforms.

Table 2 summarizes South Africa's objectives and activities within BRICS, illustrating how the country has used its membership to advance both national and continental interests while contributing to the evolution of the bloc's agenda.

Thus, South Africa's fifteen years of participation in BRICS have demonstrated the willingness of BRICS to serve as a platform for advancing the interests of the Global South, including those of Africa. For Pretoria itself, the integration of African priorities into the BRICS agenda has reinforced its status as an emerging middle power with growing influence in global governance. South Africa's historical experience of a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy,

[21] All Projects // New Development Bank. URL: https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/

[22] See, for example: Framework Document on South Africa's National Interest and its Advancement in a Global Environment // Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Republic of South Africa. URL: https://dirco.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/sa_national_interest.pdf

Table 2. South Africa's Trajectory of Participation in BRICS

South Africa's Objectives in BRICS	Key Initiatives / Actions	Constraints and Challenges
Promoting African interests and enhancing Africa's role in global governance	Integration of African priorities into BRICS declarations; positioning South Africa as the "voice of Africa"	Limited economic resources compared to other BRICS members; dependence on larger partners
Strengthening South–South cooperation	Active participation in BRICS summits; expansion of dialogue between BRICS, African countries, Brazil, and South Africa	Need to balance relations with non-Western partners while maintaining economic ties with the West
Expanding cooperation between BRICS and African organizations	Launch of the **BRICS Outreach** format at the Durban Summit (2013); invitations extended to representatives of the African Union and NEPAD; development of dialogue with Africa's regional economic communities	Limited institutionalization of BRICS engagement with African regional organizations; **the African Union is not represented within BRICS**
Strengthening South Africa's international standing as a regional power and representative of the Global South	Active role in shaping the political agenda of BRICS; promotion of ideas related to a multipolar world order and the role of the Global South	Need to balance the role of Africa's leader with national interests; accession of new African countries introduces additional voices representing the continent
Securing financing for infrastructure and economic development	Extensive **use NDB resources**; loans for infrastructure, energy, logistics, water supply, and COVID-19 recovery projects	Criticism regarding transparency in the use of funds; dependence on external financing
Promoting international security and peacekeeping	Initiative to establish the **BRICS Working Group on Peacekeeping** (2018)	Limited capacity of BRICS as a security institution
Maintaining a multidirectional foreign policy ("strategic non-alignment")	Simultaneous development of relations with BRICS, the EU, and other partners	Strong economic dependence on the EU (South Africa's largest trading partner and source of FDI), which constrains foreign policy flexibility

Source: Compiled by the author

together with its active role in multilateral diplomacy, has helped legitimize this position in the eyes of other African states. South African policymakers proceed from the assumption that the emerging multipolar world order has not yet fully taken shape and that its future contours will depend in large measure on the actions of both South Africa and the African continent. Pretoria therefore sees its particular mission as promoting African agency within the system of global governance. To advance these objectives, BRICS has thus far proven to be the most effective platform, one in which national differences have not prevented member states from pursuing a constructive and development-oriented agenda.

Ethiopia: A Strategic Choice in Favor of Multi-Vector Cooperation and the Diversification of Development Assistance

Sofya Zamesina

At the beginning of 2024, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia joined BRICS. This development was both unexpected and, in many ways, a logical outcome of the country's evolving foreign policy. While Ethiopia had previously played only a limited role in BRICS-related initiatives, its position began to shift after 2022, when the country participated for the first time in the 14th BRICS Summit at the invitation of China.[23] In June 2023, Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally submitted an application to join BRICS.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed described Ethiopia's accession to BRICS as one of the country's greatest diplomatic achievements.[24] The development of multilateral partnerships has been a defining feature of his foreign policy agenda. Under his leadership, Ethiopia has placed greater emphasis on enhancing its regional and international standing while pursuing broader strategic objectives, including the prevention of regional conflicts, the attraction of financial support, and the promotion of capacity-building and knowledge exchange.[25]

When addressing parliament in November 2023, Abiy Ahmed emphasized that Ethiopia's decision to join BRICS was rooted in the country's commitment to strengthening cooperation among Global South nations. He argued that membership in the bloc was fully consistent with the principles of mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty, and the protection of national interests that underpin Ethiopian diplomacy.[26] This rhetoric closely aligns with the positions of many BRICS member states and allows Ethiopia to frame its accession within the broader context of its longstanding policy of non-alignment.

The development of regional ties was complemented by Ethiopia's strong economic performance. In 2023, the country became the largest economy in East Africa, recording annual GDP growth of 8.1%.[27] Above all, Addis Ababa views participation in BRICS as an opportunity to expand its economic partnerships and gain access to additional financial resources for development. According to Demissie, a consultant at the Ethiopian Policy Studies Institute, membership in BRICS provides access to foreign investment, new technologies, and global markets, while also facilitating the country's integration into international supply chains.[28]

[23] Ethiopia: China invites Ethiopian Prime Minister to BRICS summit // My Views on News. 2022. URL: https://myviewsonnews.net/ethiopia-china-invites-ethiopian-prime-minister-to-brics-summit/

[24] PM Abiy: Ethiopia's membership in BRICS would contribute to realizing South-South Cooperation // Fana. 2023. URL: https://clck.ru/3TG5ME/

[25] The Abiy Doctrine: One year of Ethiopia's new foreign policy // African Arguments. 2019. URL: https://africanarguments.org/2019/04/the-abiy-doctrine-one-year-of-ethiopia-new-foreign-policy/

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ethiopia Macro Poverty Outlook // World Bank. 2025. URL: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-eth.pdf

[28] BRICS instrumental for Ethiopia to engage in win-win partnerships with member states: Scholar // Fana. 2024. URL: https://www.fanamc.com/english/brics-instrumental-for-ethiopia-to-engage-in-win-win-partnerships-with-member-states-scholar/

Ethiopia's pursuit of the economic benefits associated with BRICS membership is largely driven by its domestic development challenges. Despite rapid economic growth, the country remains classified by the World Bank as one of the world's least developed economies.[29] Although growth rates have remained high, Ethiopia's economy has faced significant structural challenges. After 2018, GDP growth began to slow, largely as the effects of the low-base growth model gradually diminished. As part of its state-led development strategy, Ethiopia invested heavily in the construction of roads, power grids, hydropower facilities, and industrial infrastructure, often relying on external borrowing to finance these projects. By the early 2020s, however, the country was facing increasing fiscal constraints. The exchange rate was maintained through administrative controls, while inflation accelerated into double-digit territory.[30] By 2022, these pressures had evolved into a full-scale financial crisis characterized by chronic budget deficits and a rapid increase in external debt, which exceeded USD 30 billion.[31]

The situation was further aggravated by a combination of external and domestic shocks. The armed conflict in the Tigray region (2020–2022) required substantial government spending on defense and post-conflict reconstruction, while the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected key sources of foreign exchange earnings, including the tourism sector and remittances from migrant workers.[32] At the same time, macroeconomic policies based on an overvalued exchange rate and delayed structural reforms contributed to a persistent current account deficit, chronic shortages of foreign currency reserves, and stagnating export revenues.[33]

The crisis peaked when Ethiopia defaulted on its Eurobond obligations. In late 2023, the country failed to make a USD 33 million coupon payment on a USD 1 billion Eurobond issue.[34] This development not only placed Ethiopia alongside Zambia and Ghana, which had also experienced sovereign debt crises, but also significantly undermined international market confidence in the National Bank of Ethiopia, further restricting the country's access to traditional sources of external financing. Against this backdrop, Ethiopia's leadership views membership in BRICS as a strategic opportunity to overcome the systemic financial crisis.[35]

[29] World Bank Country and Lending Groups // World Bank.
URL: https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups

[30] The World Bank in Ethiopia // World Bank. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview

[31] External Debt Stocks, total // World Bank Group.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.DOD.DECT.CD?locations=ET

[32] Macro Poverty Outlook. Country by Country Analysis and Projections for the Developing World // The World Bank. 2025.
URL: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf

[33] Annual public sector debt portfolio analysis // Ministry of Finance of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. 2023.
URL: https://www.mofed.gov.et/media/filer_public/40/7e/407ed68c-fc85-4867-a1c0-888c34bfa21d/dpa_no_24.pdf

[34] Ethiopia becomes Africa's latest sovereign default // Reuters. 2023.
URL: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-becomes-africas-latest-sovereign-default-2023-12-26/

[35] "This is the moment to renovate and revitalize multilateralism", the Ethiopian Ambassador stated // BRICS Brazil 2025.
URL: https://brics.br/en/news/this-is-the-moment-to-renovate-and-revitalize-multilateralism-the-ethiopian-ambassador-stated

It is expected that BRICS financial initiatives will help Ethiopia address its domestic crisis by providing alternative sources of financing. Particular hopes are pinned on BRICS financial cooperation mechanisms, especially the NDB. Ethiopian experts argue that, unlike traditional Western lenders, which provide loans subject to stringent macroeconomic conditions, the NDB is capable of financing infrastructure projects "without preconditions or coercion," based on the country's actual development needs.[36] Although Ethiopia identified accession to the NDB as a priority for 2025, the country had not yet become a member as of early 2026.

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia has repeatedly emphasized the country's commitment to expanding multilateral cooperation. A particularly important place in this strategy is occupied by cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). As Diane Sayinzoga, Head of the organization's Regional Office for Africa, has noted, partnership with UNCTAD contributes to the creation of a favorable macroeconomic environment in Ethiopia and helps strengthen foreign investors' confidence in the Ethiopian market.[37] Addis Ababa has adopted a similar approach in its cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.[38]

Ethiopia ranks among the world's ten largest recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA).[39] Traditionally, the concept of ODA refers to financial and technical assistance provided by member states of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). These include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Denmark, for whom assistance to Ethiopia has long been intertwined with broader objectives of political influence in the strategically important Horn of Africa region. Within the framework of its institutional cooperation with the DAC,[40] Ethiopia's Ministry of Finance concluded agreements with 19 development partners during the 2022/23 fiscal year, covering 75 projects with a total budget of USD 1.7 billion.[41] By the late 2010s, China had emerged as a significant new donor to Ethiopia through the Belt and Road Initiative. China's aid model differed fundamentally from Western approaches in its emphasis on concessional financing for infrastructure projects and its close alignment with the needs of Ethiopia's rapidly growing economy.[42] At the same time, the pool of donors expanded to include states from the Persian Gulf and several Asian economies, many of which later became members of the expanded BRICS group.

[36] Ethiopia: How Ethiopia BRICS Membership Can Benefit Itself and the World // All Africa. 2024. URL: https://allafrica.com/stories/202410240114.html

[37] UNCTAD Lauds Ethiopia's Ongoing Macroeconomic Reform Policy as Positive Move // ENA. 2024. URL: https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_4988550

[38] IMF approves "landmark" Ethiopia bailout // BBC. 2024. URL: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn074en1z7mo

[39] Aid at a glance // OECD. 2024. URL: https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2024/05/aid-at-a-glance.html.

[40] The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a forum in which donor-country governments and multilateral organizations come together to discuss development assistance aimed at helping developing countries reduce poverty.

[41] Ministry of Finance of Ethiopia. Annual Development Cooperation Report of Ethiopia. Ethiopian Fiscal Year 2015 (2022/2023). Addis Ababa. 2024 // DPG-Ethiopia. URL: https://clck.ru/3TG5Xy

[42] Bartenev, V.I., Glazunova, E.N. Development Assistance: A Lecture Course. Moscow: World Bank, 2012. 408 p.

The combination of traditional assistance from Western donors and Chinese investment and lending has led to qualitative transformation in the nature of international assistance to Ethiopia. This shift reflects not only the broader global redistribution of economic influence but also the deliberate strategy of the Ethiopian leadership to diversify the country's external partnerships.[43]

Thus, when examining Ethiopia's external economic relations, it is important to consider not only its engagement with BRICS countries but also its longstanding partnerships with Western donors. Domestic political rhetoric reflects an ambivalent attitude toward different models of international cooperation. On the one hand, Ethiopian officials acknowledge the importance of Western assistance in addressing basic social needs, particularly in the education and healthcare sectors, which are closely linked to the country's poverty reduction agenda. On the other hand, a different perspective informs cooperation with new partners, where priority is given to the qualitative rather than quantitative dimensions of assistance. Chinese investments are viewed as more promising because they are directed toward financing productive infrastructure capable of addressing structural constraints and generating multiplier effects across related sectors.[44] This dichotomy reflects the multidirectional nature of Ethiopia's contemporary development strategy: the need to balance social stabilization, supported by traditional donors, with economic transformation, backed by new partners.

Notably, although the practical economic benefits of BRICS membership have yet to become fully apparent, Ethiopia attached considerable diplomatic significance to its participation in the organization immediately after joining. At the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed not only outlined the country's vision for its contribution to the work of the group but also held a number of meetings on the sidelines of the forum, including with the leaders of key member states. An agreement was reached with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to expand trade and investment ties between the two economies. During talks with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, the parties discussed the further deepening of China–Ethiopia cooperation, with particular emphasis placed on new areas of collaboration ranging from industry and mineral extraction to artificial intelligence and clean energy.

Participation in BRICS is already expanding Ethiopia's bilateral agenda with the world's largest developing economies. The institutionalization of this new area of engagement is also reflected indirectly in the establishment of BRICS-related coordination mechanisms within the Ethiopian government, including the appointment of special representatives and the creation of working groups responsible for cooperation with BRICS.[45]

[43] Mario E., Olivie I. China and Western Aid Norms in the Belt and Road: Normative Clash or Convergence? A Case Study on Ethiopia. Journal of Contemporary China. 2021. No. 134. P. 267–284.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ethiopia: How Ethiopia's BRICS Membership Can Benefit Itself and the World // The Ethiopian Herald. 2024. URL: https://allafrica.com/stories/202410240114.html

In addition to external financing, the Ethiopian government identifies access to the Red Sea[46] and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as key drivers of economic growth and energy security. The dam was officially inaugurated in September 2025. It should be noted that since the start of the project, Ethiopia has maintained complex relations with Egypt—another African member of BRICS—as Cairo fears that the dam could restrict its access to the waters of the Nile and regards the project as an "existential threat."[47] Notably, 7% of experts surveyed by the Ethiopian Economic Association believe that participation in BRICS could create additional opportunities for resolving this longstanding dispute. Economists suggest that membership in the economic bloc may help Ethiopia elevate negotiations with Egypt over the dam to a new level.[48]

Ethiopia also positions itself as a "green" voice within BRICS. The country is one of the few in Africa whose electricity generation is almost entirely based on renewable energy sources: 91% of installed capacity comes from hydropower, with the remainder generated from wind and geothermal energy. In 2011, Ethiopia adopted the Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) Strategy, one of the first policy frameworks of its kind on the African continent. Addis Ababa has consistently promoted hydropower development and the Green Legacy Initiative as practical models of low-carbon industrialization that can be replicated across the Global South. On this basis, Ethiopia may contribute to the formulation of a common BRICS position on climate finance.

Table 3 summarizes Ethiopia's objectives and activities within BRICS, providing a structured overview of the country's goals and engagement within BRICS.

Table 3. Ethiopia's Trajectory of Participation in BRICS

Ethiopia's Objectives in BRICS	Key Initiatives within BRICS	Constraints and Challenges
Access to alternative sources of financing. Securing NDB loans without the stringent political and macroeconomic conditions typically associated with European institutions	**Chinese investments and projects.** Between 2000 and 2021, more than 311 Chinese-funded projects were implemented in the country; priority sectors included industrial parks, energy, and digital infrastructure. China remains Ethiopia's largest bilateral partner within BRICS.	**Dispute with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).** Egypt views the dam as an "existential threat" and uses regional organizations to exert pressure on Ethiopia. BRICS has not yet become a platform for resolving this dispute.
Diversification of external partnerships and reduced dependence on Western donors. Participation in BRICS is viewed as	**Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).** The inauguration of the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa aligns with the	**Tension between commitments to the IMF and the logic of BRICS.** In July 2024, Ethiopia concluded a USD 3.4 billion credit agreement with the

[46] Ethiopian PM affirms "no plans for invasion over Red Sea ports access" // Africa News. 2020. URL: https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/14/ethiopian-pm-affirms-no-plans-for-invasion-over-red-sea-ports-access/

[47] Ethiopia's unilateral GERD operation an 'existential threat' to all Egyptians: Irrigation minister // State Information Service. 2023. URL: https://clck.ru/3TG6zf

[48] Degye G., Amdissa T., Dawit T. Does Ethiopia benefit from joining the BRICS? Ethiopian Economics Association (EEA). Policy working paper. 2024. URL: https://eea-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Working-Paper-23-2024-BRICS.pdf

an instrument of a multidirectional foreign policy, providing access to investment, technology, and global markets without political conditionality.	BRICS emphasis on sovereign infrastructure development.	IMF, one of the key conditions of which was a transition to a market-based exchange rate, resulting in a 30% devaluation of the birr. Western lenders demand far-reaching structural reforms, whereas the NDB promotes financing without political conditionality.
Enhancing influence in global governance. Ethiopia advocates reform of international financial institutions and greater representation of developing countries, including a revision of IMF quotas that do not reflect the country's actual economic potential.		**The practical economic benefits of participation remain limited.** As of early 2026, Ethiopia had not yet joined the NDB, despite identifying accession as a priority for 2025. A significant gap remains between Ethiopia's expectations and the institutional capacities of BRICS.

Source: Compiled by the author

Egypt's BRICS Strategy: Expectations of Economic Benefits and Enhanced Prestige

Andrey Ufimtsev

The Arab Republic of Egypt, the most populous Arab country and one of Africa's leading economies, joined BRICS in 2024. According to the Johannesburg criteria, BRICS membership is open to "developing or emerging countries that possess regional and global influence."[49] Egypt meets these requirements: it plays a pivotal role in the politics and economy of North Africa and controls the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important trade routes. Egypt therefore fits naturally into the framework of an expanding BRICS partnership, representing a typical Global South state seeking greater involvement in global governance institutions.

Egypt's interest in BRICS long predated its formal accession to the organization. In 2013, President Mohamed Morsi participated in discussions on the sidelines of a BRICS summit,[50] and in 2017 President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took part in the Ninth BRICS Summit held in Xiamen, China.[51] On February 20, 2023, Egypt became a member of the New Development Bank, the key financial cooperation institution of the BRICS countries.[52] These steps reflected Cairo's desire to strengthen its engagement with BRICS and expand its participation in its initiatives.

In its public statements, the Egyptian leadership has consistently expressed support for BRICS' core priorities, including the promotion of South–South cooperation, the strengthening of multilateralism, the reform of global institutions, and the advancement of the interests of developing countries. Commenting on the decision to invite Egypt to join BRICS, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi emphasized the country's readiness to "strengthen economic cooperation and amplify the voice of the Global South in addressing existing development challenges."[53] Later, in his address to the BRICS Summit in Kazan, he highlighted the principles of "cooperation and mutual respect" that underpin the organization, called for intensified South–South cooperation, opposed protectionism, and advocated greater participation of developing countries in multilateral institutions.[54] These statements indicate that, at the level of public rhetoric, Egypt supports the objectives and principles articulated by BRICS.

In its statements regarding cooperation with BRICS, the Egyptian leadership places particular emphasis on expanding economic cooperation, including

[49] Does Ethiopia Benefit from Joining the BRICS? // Ethiopian Economics Association. 2024. URL: http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/BRICS-Membership-expansion-guiding-principles-criteria-and-standards-2023.pdf

[50] Meeting with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi // President of Russia. 27.03.2013. URL: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17758

[51] Interview: Sisi promises Egypt's support for BRICS mechanism // Xinhuanet. 2017. URL: http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-08/30/c_136567607_2.htm

[52] Founding Member Countries // New Development Bank. URL: https://www.ndb.int/about-ndb/members/

[53] President El-Sisi's Speech at BRICS Plus Summit // State Information Service. 2024. URL: https://sis.gov.eg/Story/197576/President-El-Sisi%E2%80%99s-Speech-at-BRICS-Plus-Summit?lang=en-us

[54] Egypt's membership in BRICS activated, welcomed by Russia // State Information Service. 2024. URL: https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/190905/Egypt's-membership-in-BRICS-activated%2C-welcomed-by-Russia?lang=en-us

access to the bloc's financial resources.[55] This economic focus is largely driven by Egypt's persistent macroeconomic imbalances. Despite average annual GDP growth of approximately 3.7% between 2014 and 2024, the country continues to face chronic budget[56] and trade deficits.[57] Against the backdrop of sustained population growth—from 27 million in 1960 to 116.5 million by 2024[58]—Egypt must continue to allocate substantial resources each year to social infrastructure and bread subsidies. These subsidies cover approximately 70–80% of the population[59] and account for about 4% of total government expenditure.[60] At the same time, the Egyptian authorities are implementing a number of large-scale infrastructure projects, including the construction of the New Administrative Capital and the city of Ras El-Hekma, the Ain Sokhna–Mersa Matruh railway, the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant being built with Russian participation, and many others. These megaprojects are intended to modernize aging transport and energy infrastructure, stimulate job creation, and relieve pressure on overcrowded urban agglomerations. However, they also require substantial financial investment and contribute to the country's growing debt burden.[61]

To partially address the adverse effects of its debt burden and mitigate broader macroeconomic challenges, Egypt turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance. Cooperation with the IMF in the mid-2010s was accompanied, at the Fund's insistence, by the implementation of programs aimed at reducing the budget deficit, reforming the subsidy system, and increasing foreign exchange reserves.[62] Despite their social costs, these measures resulted in a 150% increase in Egypt's reserves between 2016 and 2019—from USD 17.6 billion to USD 44.5 billion—and also contributed to an improved sovereign credit rating and expanded access to international borrowing markets. As a result, the share of bonds in Egypt's external debt increased from less than 3% to more than 20% by 2022.[63] However, the continued vulnerability of the balance of payments necessitated further cooperation. A subsequent agreement with the IMF included a transition to a flexible exchange rate and reductions in infrastructure spending. In March 2024, these measures led to a devaluation of the Egyptian pound but also eliminated the problem of the dual exchange rate.[64]

[55] Ufimtsev, A.A. Economic and Political Aspects of Egypt's Accession to BRICS // Asia and Africa Today. 2024. No. 11. Pp. 49–56.

[56] Egypt Government Budget // Trading Economics. URL: https://tradingeconomics.com/egypt/government-budget

[57] Egypt Balance of Trade // Trading Economics. URL: https://tradingeconomics.com/egypt/balance-of-trade

[58] Egypt. Population, total // The World Bank. URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=EG

[59] Barnes J. Staple security: bread and wheat in Egypt. Staple security. Durham: Duke University Press. 2022. P. 167.

[60] Breisinger C., Kassim Y., Kurdi S., Randriamamonjy J., Thurlow J. From Food Subsidies to Cash Transfers: Assessing Economy-Wide Benefits and Trade-Offs in Egypt. Journal of African Economies. 2024. Vol. 33. Iss. 2. P. 112.

[61] Orlov, I., Ufimtsev, A. Bricks for the Pyramids: Foreign Participation in Egyptian Megaprojects // Contemporary World Economy. 2024. Vol. 2, No. 2. P. 108.

[62] Roll S. Loans for the president: External debt and power consolidation in Egypt. SWP Research Papers 12/2022. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP). German Institute for International and Security Affairs. 2022. P. 33.

[63] Ibid.

[64] IMF Staff and the Egyptian Authorities Reach Staff Level Agreement on the First and Second Reviews under the EFF Arrangement // International Monetary Fund. 2024. URL: https://clck.ru/3TG76j

In addition to the IMF, Egypt receives financing from the Gulf states, the EU, and a number of international and regional development banks, including the World Bank,[65] the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD),[66] the African Development Bank (AfDB),[67] and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB),[68] each of which imposes its own lending requirements on borrowers. Accordingly, Egypt's interest in the New Development Bank reflects Cairo's desire to further diversify its sources of external financing. The NDB offers the opportunity to obtain concessional loans for infrastructure projects without imposing stringent macroeconomic policy conditions, making membership in the Bank an attractive prospect for Egypt.

Despite the Egyptian leadership's strong interest in cooperation with the NDB, the country's practical participation in the Bank's activities remains limited. Since joining the NDB in 2023, Egypt has initiated only one project worth USD 200 million, a figure that falls well below those of other new members, such as Bangladesh, whose loan portfolio amounts to USD 1.15 billion.[69] This level of engagement also appears modest compared with that of other development institutions operating actively in the country. For example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has invested more than EUR 13.9 billion in Egypt, with a current portfolio of EUR 5.2 billion.[70] At the same time, South Africa's experience demonstrates the potential for expanding participation in the NDB. As of December 2025, the total value of loans approved and disbursed to the country exceeded USD 7.6 billion, including approximately USD 2.8 billion denominated in South African rand.[71] However, it remains unclear whether this experience can be fully replicated in Egypt's case, since South Africa is a founding member of the NDB and enjoys formally established advantages, including the maximum voting share of 20%. By contrast, countries that joined the Bank after South Africa are limited to a maximum voting share of 7%.[72]

Although the Egyptian leadership consistently emphasizes the economic opportunities associated with BRICS membership, in practice, full membership in the organization does not yet entail specific mechanisms capable of substantially intensifying economic cooperation among its members. BRICS neither provides

[65] IBRD: Summary of Current Loans for Egypt, Arab Republic of // World Bank Group. 2025.
URL: https://financesone.worldbank.org/ibrd-summary-of-current-loans-for-egypt-arab-republic-of/DS01329

[66] The EBRD has been investing in Egypt since 2015 // European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
URL: https://www.ebrd.com/home/what-we-do/where-we-invest/egypt.html

[67] Egypt Bank intervention strategy // African Bank Development Group.
URL: https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-north-africa-arab-republic-egypt/egypt-bank-intervention-strategy

[68] Our Projects // Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.
URL: https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/list/year/All/member/Egypt/sector/All/financing_type/All/status/All

[69] Calculations were made as of 30 April 2025, based on data published by the New Development Bank.
URL: https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/

[70] The EBRD has been investing in Egypt since 2015 // European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
URL: https://www.ebrd.com/home/what-we-do/where-we-invest/egypt.html

[71] Calculations were made as of 30 April 2025. Amounts denominated in different currencies were converted using the exchange rate applicable on the date each project was approved, based on data published by the New Development Bank.
URL: https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/

[72] Agreement on the New Development Bank – Fortaleza, July 15 // New Development Bank.
URL: ttps://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Agreement-on-the-New-Development-Bank.pdf

preferential conditions for mutual trade nor offers trade preference arrangements, and it does not function as a formal economic agreement. As a result, membership alone does not guarantee expanded trade or increased investment cooperation.[73] In this context, it would be inaccurate to attribute the volume of Egypt's trade with China, India, or Russia solely to its participation in BRICS, since the bloc offers few mechanisms capable of directly stimulating economic interaction among its members. Moreover, many of the existing mechanisms that could potentially contribute to increased trade or investment do not require full BRICS membership. The economic bloc allows participation in its summits through the BRICS Outreach format,[74] enabling countries to benefit from engagement without formally joining the organization. Likewise, participation in the NDB does not require BRICS membership, as demonstrated by the case of Bangladesh, which, like Algeria, became an NDB borrower without joining the bloc.[75]

However, the limited scope of practical cooperation mechanisms within BRICS does not mean that Egypt lacks interest in participating in the bloc. On the contrary, as noted above, Cairo's interest in BRICS long predated its formal accession: Egypt joined the NDB and participated in BRICS summits before becoming a full member. Immediately after joining the bloc in 2024, Egypt also established the position of the President's Representative to the G20 and BRICS, appointing diplomat Ragy El-Etreby to the role.[76] This development may also serve as an indirect indication of the importance Egypt attaches to its participation in BRICS.

Above all, the Egyptian leadership's interest in BRICS, despite the absence of concrete mechanisms for cooperation, may reflect expectations of future benefits, particularly in the economic sphere. Indirect evidence of this can be found not only in public statements by government officials[77] but also in publications produced by government-affiliated analytical centers. For example, the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) under the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers notes that participation in BRICS is associated with expanded foreign trade, greater opportunities for economic growth, and increased trade in food products.[78]

Nevertheless, Egypt already derives benefits from its participation in BRICS, although these are primarily intangible and symbolic in nature. First, the

[73] Although the BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025 envisaged "strengthening trade and economic cooperation, including, where possible, through the reduction of barriers to trade in goods and services," there is currently no evidence that any trade barriers have been reduced as a result of BRICS activities. See: BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025. URL: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/file/636aa3edbc0dcc2356ebb6f8d594ccb0/1148133.pdf

[74] BRICS outreach practices refer to the interaction between the member states of the bloc or organization and other actors, including the governments of non-member countries. See: Huanyu, C., Dris, L. An Analysis of the Motivations and Institutionalization of BRICS Outreach Practices // International Organizations Research Journal: Education, Science, New Economy. 2020. Vol. 15, No. 2. Pp. 93–124.

[75] NDB admits Bangladesh as new member // New Development Bank. 2021.
URL: https://www.ndb.int/news/ndb-admits-bangladesh-as-new-member-development-bank-established-by-brics-begins-membership-expansion/

[76] He previously served as the President of Egypt's Personal Representative (Sherpa) to the G20.

[77] Ufimtsev, A.A. Economic and Political Aspects of Egypt's Accession to BRICS // Asia and Africa Today. 2024. No. 11. Pp. 49–56.

[78] Egypt's Relations with BRICS: One year after joining the group – future perspectives // The Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center. 2025. P. 5. URL: https://clck.ru/3TG7GF

Egyptian leadership uses BRICS membership to portray its foreign policy in a positive light for domestic audiences. Pro-government media outlets such as Youm7,[79] Al-Ahram,[80] and Al-Shorouk[81] regularly publish articles highlighting the benefits of participation in the bloc and reinforcing Egypt's image as an influential international actor. Second, participation in BRICS serves an important signaling function. For example, Argentina's rejection of the invitation to join the bloc, announced by the country's newly elected president, Javier Milei, in 2023, signaled a shift in Buenos Aires' foreign policy toward a more pro-Western orientation, with priority given to accession to the OECD and obtaining the status of a NATO Global Partner.[82] Against this backdrop, Egypt's decision to join BRICS can, by contrast, be interpreted as a demonstration of its willingness to pursue a more multidirectional foreign policy extending beyond cooperation with the West alone, as well as an expression of solidarity with the bloc's approach to advancing the interests of the Global South.

Table 4. Egypt's Trajectory of BRICS Participation

Country's Objectives in BRICS	Most Significant Projects / Actions	Contradictions and Constraints
Access to alternative financing through obtaining NDB loans on more favorable terms than those available from the World Bank	Egypt joined the NDB in 2023; one infrastructure project worth USD 200 million has been initiated	Egypt's actual participation in the NDB remains limited; the volume of projects is substantially lower than that of other countries (e.g., Bangladesh and South Africa)
Expanding cooperation with countries of the Global South	Participation in BRICS summits and other BRICS formats	BRICS does not possess mechanisms for promoting economic cooperation (e.g., trade preferences), which limits the bloc's capacity to expand cooperation; the development of engagement with BRICS countries may also have been constrained by the policies of the Donald Trump administration toward the bloc
Demonstrating the success of foreign policy domestically	Media coverage highlighting the benefits of participation in BRICS and reinforcing Egypt's image as an influential international actor	Tangible political and economic outcomes of participation remain limited, making this positioning strategy less effective

Source: Compiled by the author

[79] Between Harsh Reality and a Legitimate Dream: Egypt in BRICS and Other Organizations (Arabic: بين الواقع الصلب والحلم المشروع- مصر في البريكس ومنظمات أخرى) // Youm7. 28.10.2024. URL: URL: https://www.youm7.com/story/2024/10/28/تاريخ-أخبار-مصر-في-البريكس-ومنظمات-أخرى-بين-الواقع-الصلب-والحلم-المشروع/6757412

[80] Ibid.

[81] Egypt in BRICS: Potential Benefits and Numerous Challenges (Arabic: مصر في بريكس: مكاسب محتملة وتحديات كثيرة) // Al Shorouk. 26.08.2023.
URL: https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=26082023&id=b8c8c664-9bcf-4a38-bf00-e2c24d07fad9

[82] Argentina asks to join NATO as President Milei seeks a more prominent role for his nation // Apnews. 2024.
URL: https://apnews.com/article/president-milei-argentina-nato-f16s-military-bf56ef4b18646438500c921250c66e93

Participation in BRICS entails virtually no costs that would make membership burdensome for Egypt. Unlike regional economic organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), MERCOSUR, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), BRICS does not limit its members' ability to protect their domestic markets. Likewise, unlike military alliances such as NATO, participation in BRICS does not entail obligations related to collective security or the risk of involvement in armed conflicts. BRICS provides neither a system of supranational regulation nor mandatory financial contributions, nor does it possess a mechanism for enforcing collective decisions. These characteristics make the bloc particularly attractive to states seeking to diversify their foreign policy relationships.

Political Power and the Level of Socio-Economic Development in the Context of Granting BRICS Membership

Andrey Ufimtsev

As demonstrated above, BRICS enlargement has been oriented toward the inclusion of states with regional or global influence. However, the specific factors underlying decisions to grant full membership or to offer more flexible forms of participation remain a matter of debate. This section seeks to assess which parameters—indicators of economic and political power, as well as levels of socio-economic development—are associated with participation in BRICS. By comparing key macroeconomic, demographic, and institutional indicators across African states that are either BRICS members or partner countries, the analysis identifies which characteristics are associated with inclusion in the organization and which, by contrast, do not constitute barriers to participation. The findings may also serve as a basis for assessing and forecasting the likely trajectories of future BRICS enlargement, both within Africa and beyond.

Table 5 presents the key indicators of economic power and socio-economic development for six African countries that are either full BRICS members, BRICS partner countries, or members of the BRICS New Development Bank. Five of them—Egypt, South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Algeria—are major regional economies, whereas Uganda's economy is comparatively small.

GDP dynamics among African BRICS participants over the 2011–2024 period do not follow a single pattern. The economies of Egypt and Ethiopia recorded substantial growth, particularly in the case of Ethiopia, where nominal GDP more than tripled over the twelve-year period. South Africa, by contrast, experienced a relative contraction even in nominal terms: after reaching a peak in the early 2010s, its GDP declined and, by 2024, remained below its 2011 level. Egypt, meanwhile, experienced a more pronounced acceleration in growth after 2017, allowing it to catch up with—and for a time surpass—South Africa in terms of nominal GDP.

Table 5. Comparison of Key Indicators of Power and Socio-Economic Development in African BRICS Members, BRICS Partner Countries, and NDB Member States

Indicator	Year	Egypt	South Africa	Ethiopia	Nigeria	Uganda	Algeria
Power Indicators							
GDP (nominal), USD billion	2024	389 (40th)	401.2 (39th)	149.8 (59th)	252.3 (53rd)	53.9 (88th)	269.3 (50th)
Population, million	2024	116.5 (13th)	64 (24th)	132.1 (10th)	232.7 (6th)	50 (31st)	46.8 (33rd)
International Reserves (including gold), USD billion	2024	44.9 (44th)	65.4 (36th)	3.8 (106th)	38.6 (51st)	3.4* (111th)	83 (31st)

Indicator	Year	Egypt	South Africa	Ethiopia	Nigeria	Uganda	Algeria
Military expenditure, USD billion	2025	2.4 (60th)	2.8 (55th)	0.9 (84th)	1.1 (77th)	1.1 (78th)	21.8 (20th)
Crude oil and other liquid hydrocarbons production, thousand barrels per day	2024	639 (26th)	92 (49th)	–	1,562.8 (15th)	–	1,380.8 (16th)
Elcano Global Presence Index **	2024	75.8 (35th)	64.7 (38th)	17.7 (70th)	26.1 (58th)	23.2 (63rd)	45.1 (49th)
Socio-Economic Development Indicators							
GDP per capita (PPP), USD	2024	19,094 (92nd)	15,456 (105th)	3,288 (167th)	9,087 (128th)	3,273 (168th)	17,621 (98th)
Human Development Index (HDI)	2023	0.754 (100th)	0.741 (106th)	0.497 (180th)	0.560 (164th)	0.582 (157th)	0.763 (96th)
Urbanization, % of urban population	2024	42.8 (145th)	63.7 (94th)	23.6 (184th)	63.0 (96th)	31.3 (170th)	75.3 (55th)
Median age, years	2025	24.5 (129th)	28.7 (106th)	19.1 (164th)	18.1 (174th)	16.9 (184th)	28.6 (108th)

**For Uganda, data covers 2018.*

***The Elcano Global Presence Index is a composite indicator measuring a country's "presence" beyond its borders. It aggregates, with different weights, indicators of economic presence, military presence, and soft power.*

Source: WTO,[83] SIPRI,[84] Elcano Institute,[85] EIA,[86] UNDP,[87] WHO[88]

[83] GDP (current US$) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator NY.GDP.MKTP.CD.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD;
Population, total // World Bank Open Data. Indicator SP.POP.TOTL.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL;
Total reserves (includes gold, current US$) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator FI.RES.TOTL.CD.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FI.RES.TOTL.CD;
GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD;
Urban population (% of total population) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS.
URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS

[84] SIPRI Military Expenditure Database // SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. URL: https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex

[85] Global presence ranking // Elcano Global Presence Index. Real Instituto Elcano.
URL: https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en?years=2024

[86] Petroleum and other liquids // U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). International Energy Statistics.
URL: https://www.eia.gov/international/data/world/petroleum-and-other-liquids/annual-petroleum-and-other-liquids-production

[87] Human Development Index (HDI) // United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Reports Data Center. URL: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

[88] Population median age (years) // World Health Organization. Global Health Observatory. Indicator Metadata Registry.
URL: https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/116

It is important to note, however, that in many African countries a substantial share of overall GDP growth has been driven by population growth and the corresponding expansion of the economically active population. Even after accounting for this factor, GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) in both Egypt and Ethiopia exhibits a sustained upward trajectory. In Egypt, GDP per capita (PPP) increased from approximately USD 9,000 in the early 2010s to around USD 19,000 in 2024, enabling the country to gradually narrow the gap with the region's more advanced economies. Ethiopia, despite its much lower starting point—approximately USD 1,100 in 2011—more than tripled its GDP per capita, reaching roughly USD 3,300 by 2024.[89] This performance reflects structural changes in the economy and gradual improvements in labor productivity, although in absolute terms Ethiopia still lags considerably behind both Egypt and South Africa.

One of the key factors underpinning the economic potential and international influence of these countries is the size of their populations (see Table 5). In all cases, population growth has remained consistently strong. Since 2011, the populations of both Egypt and Ethiopia have increased by an average of 1.5–3 million people annually, while Nigeria has recorded annual population growth exceeding 4 million. Even in South Africa, where demographic growth has been more moderate, the population expanded by more than 10 million over the thirteen-year period. This demographic trajectory places increasing pressure on economic and social systems, while simultaneously enhancing each country's economic capacity and political weight.

One possible way of measuring such capabilities is the Elcano Global Presence Index, which seeks to assess a country's influence beyond its borders by combining indicators of economic presence, military presence, and soft power. Fluctuations in the index are driven largely by changes in outward foreign direct investment and the scale of overseas military deployments, including participation in peacekeeping operations. In the case of South Africa, investment activity abroad has been the key driver of changes in the index, whereas for Ethiopia much of the variation is explained by a decline in the number of Ethiopian military personnel deployed overseas. Despite the overall volatility of the indicator, the relative distribution of international presence among these countries has remained broadly stable. The 2024 data, however, show that Egypt surpassed South Africa for the first time, reflecting a shift in the balance of international presence between Africa's two largest economies (see Figure 1).[90]

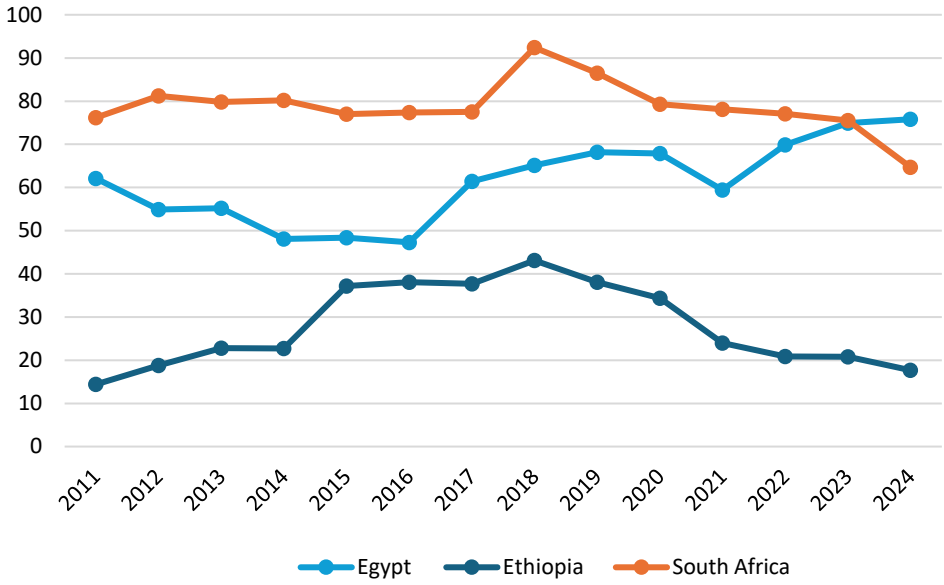
Ethiopia, by contrast, ranks lowest among the African BRICS member states, indicating the relatively limited scale of its current economic and military presence beyond its borders. At the same time, the decision to grant Ethiopia full membership suggests that BRICS enlargement is guided not only by a country's existing international influence but also by its long-term strategic potential. In

[89] GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD. URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

[90] Global presence ranking // Elcano Global Presence Index. Real Instituto Elcano. URL: https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en?years=2024

Ethiopia's case, this potential is shaped primarily by the size and demographic momentum of its population, as well as by its prospects for expanding economic and political influence within the region.

Figure 1. Elcano Global Presence Index Scores for African BRICS Member States, 2011–2024



Source: Elcano Royal Institute[91]

Beyond Egypt, South Africa, and Ethiopia, two other important actors in this group are Nigeria, a BRICS partner country, and Algeria, a member of the BRICS New Development Bank. Both possess substantial reserves of, and production capacity for, fossil fuels. In 2024, Nigeria produced 1,562.8 thousand barrels per day of crude oil and other liquid hydrocarbons, ranking fifteenth globally, while Algeria produced 1,380.8 thousand barrels per day, placing sixteenth.[92] Adjusted for population size, however, Algeria's per capita production is considerably higher—approximately 0.03 barrels per day per person, compared with 0.007 barrels in Nigeria. Higher hydrocarbon revenues enable Algeria to sustain a substantially larger defense budget, making it one of Africa's leading military powers. In 2025, the country's military expenditure is projected to reach USD 21.8 billion (20th in the world), significantly exceeding the corresponding figures for Egypt (USD 2.4 billion), South Africa (USD 2.8 billion), Ethiopia (USD 900 million), and Uganda (USD 1.1 billion; see Table 5).[93]

[91] Global presence ranking // Elcano Global Presence Index. Real Instituto Elcano. URL: https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en?years=2024

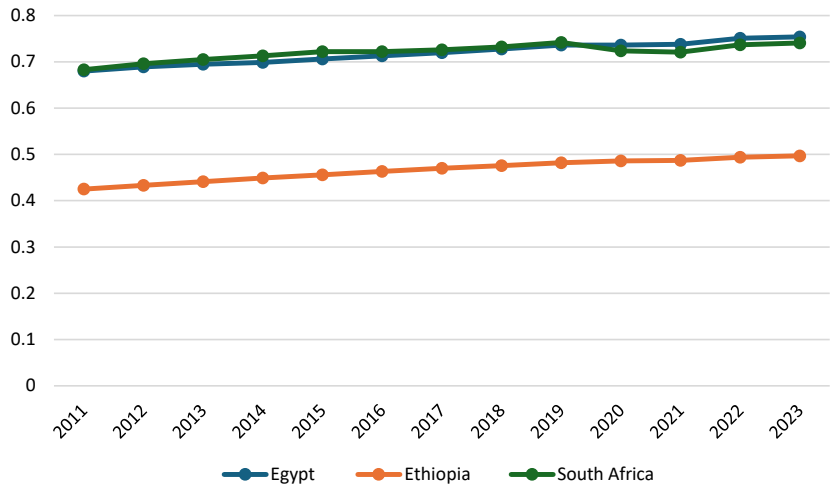
[92] SIPRI Military Expenditure Database // SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. URL: https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex

[93] GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD. URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

The countries under consideration can be divided into two distinct subgroups in terms of their levels of socio-economic development. The first comprises the more industrialized and comparatively more developed economies of Egypt, South Africa, and Algeria. These countries record significantly higher levels of GDP per capita (PPP)—USD 19,094 in Egypt, USD 15,456 in South Africa, and USD 17,621 in Algeria—compared with Nigeria (USD 9,087), Uganda (USD 3,273), and Ethiopia (USD 3,288).[94] They also have higher median ages: 24.5 years in Egypt, 28.7 in South Africa, and 28.6 in Algeria, reflecting longer life expectancy and lower fertility rates.[95] By contrast, Uganda and Ethiopia are characterized by low levels of GDP per capita, the Human Development Index (HDI), and median age (16.9 years in Uganda and 19.1 years in Ethiopia). Nigeria occupies an intermediate position: a relatively high level of GDP per capita by African standards (USD 9,087) is combined with a relatively young population, with a median age of 18.1 years (see Table 5).

Despite differences in their levels of development, all the BRICS members and partner countries considered here recorded improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI) between 2011 and 2024. This upward trend reflects gains in educational attainment, life expectancy, and living standards across the group (see Figure 2).[96]

Figure 2. Human Development Index (HDI) Scores for African BRICS Member States, 2011–2024



Source: UNDP[97]

[94] GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) // World Bank Open Data. Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD. URL: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

[95] Population median age (years) // World Health Organization. Global Health Observatory. Indicator Metadata Registry. URL: https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/116

[96] Human Development Index (HDI) // United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Human Development Reports Data Center. URL: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

[97] Human Development Index (HDI) // United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Human Development Reports Data Center. URL: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

Overall, a comparison of the indicators for African BRICS members and partner countries offers an important insight into the constraints and criteria shaping the bloc's enlargement. The evidence suggests that a low current level of socio-economic development is not, in itself, an obstacle to full BRICS membership, as the case of Ethiopia clearly demonstrates. Despite its relatively low GDP per capita and Human Development Index (HDI), the country possesses a large economy as well as considerable demographic and economic potential, allowing it to be regarded as an important regional actor. By contrast, limited economic and political capabilities—characteristic of countries such as Uganda—appear to constrain their admission as full members and instead favor more flexible forms of participation. This is consistent with the partnership model previously applied to relatively less powerful states or those with more limited long-term potential, including Cuba, Bolivia, Belarus, and Uzbekistan.

Nigeria represents a particularly noteworthy case. Despite its considerable economic and demographic weight, the country has sought to maintain close ties with Western states, which appears to make BRICS partner status more attractive than full membership.[98] Taken together, these observations suggest that decisions on BRICS enlargement are driven primarily by a country's relative power and regional influence, while its level of socio-economic development plays a secondary role and is not treated as a formal barrier to participation. At the same time, a state's foreign policy orientation may also shape the form of its engagement with the bloc.

[98] Andreeva, T.A. "Flexible Integration" in BRICS: A Window of Opportunity for Africa. Analytical Brief // Russian International Affairs Council. Moscow: RIAC, 2025. No. 63. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/gibkaya-integratsiya-v-briks-okno-vozmozhnostey-dlya-afriki/

Conclusion. Prospects and Challenges of the African Track in BRICS

Daria Zelenova

Ekaterina Abramova

BRICS enlargement, through the accession of two new full members and two partner countries from Africa, reflects both the bloc's adaptive response to the structural constraints and crises of the Western-centered system of global governance and its proactive efforts to build alternative institutions that serve the interests of the Global Majority.

Africa is becoming an integral component of BRICS' expanding institutional architecture, and its role within the organization is likely to grow in both importance and complexity. At the same time, the development of the African dimension of BRICS is accompanied by several significant challenges.

First, competition in Africa is intensifying not only along the Global North–Global South divide but also among the non-Western powers themselves, including BRICS members. The most prominent manifestation of this trend is China's expanding economic presence on the continent. African states have consistently sought to avoid becoming the object of a new scramble for resources. Against this backdrop, the multi-vector foreign policies pursued by many African countries can be understood as an important instrument for preserving a balance of interests within the bloc.

Second, in the absence of clearly dominant regional leaders in Africa,[99] an important question arises as to whether individual African states can effectively represent the interests of the entire continent, given its considerable historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political diversity. On the one hand, Ethiopia and Egypt serve as gateways to Africa, while their capitals function as major logistical hubs for the continent. At the same time, both countries are distinctive historical and cultural civilizations situated at the crossroads of several macro-regions. Ethiopia, for example, explicitly acknowledges in its current foreign policy strategy that "the influence of the Middle Eastern countries is more significant than that of its African neighbors,"[100] which are viewed primarily through the prism of Ethiopia's access to maritime routes.[101] At the same time, in its African policy Ethiopia has traditionally presented itself as the center of the Pan-African movement—the headquarters of the African Union are located in Addis Ababa—and, in this sense, sees itself as bearing a special responsibility for its future. Egypt, for its part, has only relatively recently begun to position itself as an African regional power.[102]

[99] Loshkarev, I.D., Protasov, D.V. Regional Powers of the African Continent: Trends and Prospects // World Economy and International Relations. 2024. Vol. 68, No. 4. Pp. 54–65.

[100] The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy. November 2002. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information. P. 65. URL: https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/2002_Ethiopia.pdf

[101] The strategy was adopted more than twenty years ago; however, its key provisions remain largely relevant today.

[102] Loshkarev, I.D., Protasov, D.V. Regional Powers of the African Continent: Trends and Prospects // World Economy and International Relations. 2024. Vol. 68, No. 4. Pp. 54–65.

At the same time, it would be premature to argue that Ethiopia or Egypt have little interest in discussing the most pressing issues on the regional agenda with other BRICS members, particularly given the transnational nature of many contemporary threats and challenges. This is especially true in the field of security, which, as is well-known, constitutes a distinct thematic pillar of BRICS summit declarations. The declaration adopted by the enlarged BRICS membership in Kazan in 2024 already reflects this broader regional perspective. Its security provisions clearly bear the imprint not only of South Africa—with explicit reference to the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) efforts to stabilize the situation in Mozambique—but also of Egypt and Ethiopia. For both countries, questions of national security cannot be considered in isolation from the wider security complexes of the Middle East and North Africa and the Horn of Africa.[103]

Africa's voice within BRICS has undoubtedly become stronger, but it has also become more diverse. Rather than speaking with a single voice, the continent now brings a plurality of perspectives that cannot be expected to converge automatically into a coherent common position. This became particularly evident during the 2025 BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which concluded without the adoption of a consensus final communiqué. The main stumbling block concerned the question of African representation on the UN Security Council. Before BRICS enlargement, bloc declarations had consistently endorsed South Africa's candidacy—alongside those of Brazil and India—for permanent membership. By the conclusion of Brazil's BRICS presidency, however, a compromise had been reached: the issue of expanding Africa's representation on the UN Security Council should be resolved within the African Union in accordance with the Ezulwini Consensus.[104]

Tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia also persist, primarily over the long-standing dispute concerning the waters of the Nile. Thus far, however, this source of friction has not adversely affected the functioning of the enlarged BRICS, owing in large part to the constructive approach adopted by both Cairo and Addis Ababa. From its inception, BRICS was designed around an inclusive agenda while deliberately avoiding issues that primarily serve the interests of only a narrow group of member states. It is also worth recalling that the bloc originally included countries with a history of significant bilateral disagreements—notably China and India.

Finally, the accession of politically influential states that have yet to resolve many of their fundamental socio-economic development challenges—Ethiopia being a prominent example—poses a certain challenge to BRICS' image as an

[103] Abramova, E.A., Zelenova, D.A. The National Security Agenda of African BRICS Members and Partners // RUDN Journal of International Relations. 2025. Vol. 25, No. 3.

[104] In 2005, representatives of African states raised the issue of developing a common position on reforming the United Nations. Following a working meeting in Ezulwini (Eswatini), the African Union adopted the Common African Position (the Ezulwini Consensus). The document commits African countries to maintaining a unified approach to UN reform and to avoiding contradictions among themselves. It envisages an expansion of the permanent membership of the UN Security Council, including the allocation of two permanent seats to African states, whose candidacies are to be endorsed within the African Union. For more details, see: Loshkarev, I.D., Zhuchkov, V.V. Reform of the UN Security Council: The Position of African States // Bulletin of Buryat State University. 2024. No. 2 (60). Pp. 79–85.

association of the world's largest and most successfully developing economies. At the same time, the 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro demonstrated that the bloc's identity is already undergoing a degree of transformation. BRICS is increasingly confident in presenting itself as a platform that amplifies the voice of the Global South in all its diversity.

Looking ahead, BRICS should continue to promote true African approaches to integration and development. This requires greater attention to the body of knowledge and policy thinking developed on the African continent itself, rather than relying primarily on frameworks formulated elsewhere. Africa's aspiration to achieve greater economic integration and prosperity is increasingly aligned with the alternative approaches to security and development that are being advanced within BRICS. For Africa to effectively defend its economic and political interests in the institutions of global governance and their affiliated bodies, however, it will need to speak with a more consolidated voice in international affairs—and within BRICS in particular. Advancing pan-African interests within the bloc requires not only the participation of the continent's major regional powers but also the development of mutually beneficial institutional cooperation between BRICS and the African Union (AU), the continent's main intergovernmental organization, and, in the longer term, with Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs). A comparison between the African Union's strategic framework *Agenda 2063* and successive BRICS summit declarations reveals substantial convergence in their underlying ideas, values, and approaches to several global development challenges.[105] The well-known principle of "African solutions to African problems," which has become a cornerstone of African agency, resonates closely with the principles of sovereign equality and mutual non-interference promoted within BRICS. These principles have consistently received the support of BRICS members and have been reaffirmed in the bloc's summit declarations in recent years.

As argued above, many African states place considerable hope in the development of alternative non-Western institutions within which they can play a greater role in shaping the rules and parameters of cooperation. Whether BRICS will be able to preserve and strengthen African agency, and whether African leaders themselves will be willing to work toward consolidating a common African agenda within the bloc, are questions that will largely determine the future success of BRICS' African dimension.

[105] Zelenova, D.A., Andreeva, T.A. The African Union and BRICS: Mutual Interests and Shared Values // International Organisations Research Journal. 2025. Vol. 20, No. 3. Pp. 84–98.

About the Authors

Daria A. Zelenova, Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Center for African BRICS Studies at the Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Sofia N. Zamesina, Junior Research Fellow at the Center for African BRICS Studies, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Andrey A. Ufimtsev, Junior Research Fellow at the Center for African BRICS Studies, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Ekaterina A. Abramova, Junior Research Fellow at the Center for African BRICS Studies, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to their colleagues from the BRICS Division of the Department of Foreign Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for insightful discussions. They are also grateful to their colleagues at the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences—D. Degterev, S. Volkov, and A. Fedorov—for their valuable comments and constructive criticism.

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AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN BRICS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION

Working Paper No. 97 / 2026

Cover photo credit:
TASS / CFOTO / Sipa USA

Layout—Olga Ustinkova

Format 70×100 $^{1}/_{16}$.
Offset printing.
100 copies.
For non-commercial use only.

Tel.: +7 (495) 225 6283
Fax: +7 (495) 225 6284
welcome@russiancouncil.ru

119049, Moscow,
8, 4th Dobryninsky pereulok

russiancouncil.ru