



MIT Center for
International Studies



Sustainability Strategies: Insights from the BRICS Group

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1. Geopolitics and Sustainability Strategies

U.S. government's retreat from climate & SDGs, EU regulation
New powers – convergence, leverage, policy opportunities

International Organization

Formal, treaty-based
Secretariat, rules
E.g. UN, WTO

Alliance

Formal, use (or non-use) of military force
E.g., NATO

Informal Group

Regular meetings
Shared norms, practices
No secretariat
E.g. BRICS

Coalition

Issue-specific, ad hoc
E.g. Coalitions of the willing

2. BRICS as a Strategic Actor

Mission (BRIC est. 2009, South Africa invited in 2010)

More
democratic &
just multipolar
world order

Reform global
institutions, esp.
economic/
financial

Serve emerging
economies &
developing
countries

(BRIC Joint Statement, 2009)

BRICS today:

NDB (\$43bn), deepening of cooperation

Has over 180 mechanisms, business and civil society cooperation

11 members, 10 partners

Can BRICS Change Global Governance?



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Global Perspectives

The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?

Global Memo by ORF, SWR, SAIIA, SVOP, SII, RSIS, FGV, and CFR
Aug 31, 2023



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BRICS promotes fairness, justice in global governance by upholding real multilateralism China Daily editorial

chinadaily.com.cn | Updated: 2023-08-22 20:31



BRICS Convergence Index



Papa et al. 2023

BRICS-level policy harmonization

- **Institutional output**
- Range 0% = no BRICS statement/action on policy issue to 100% creating a formal institution to coordinate policies

Convergence among actors within BRICS

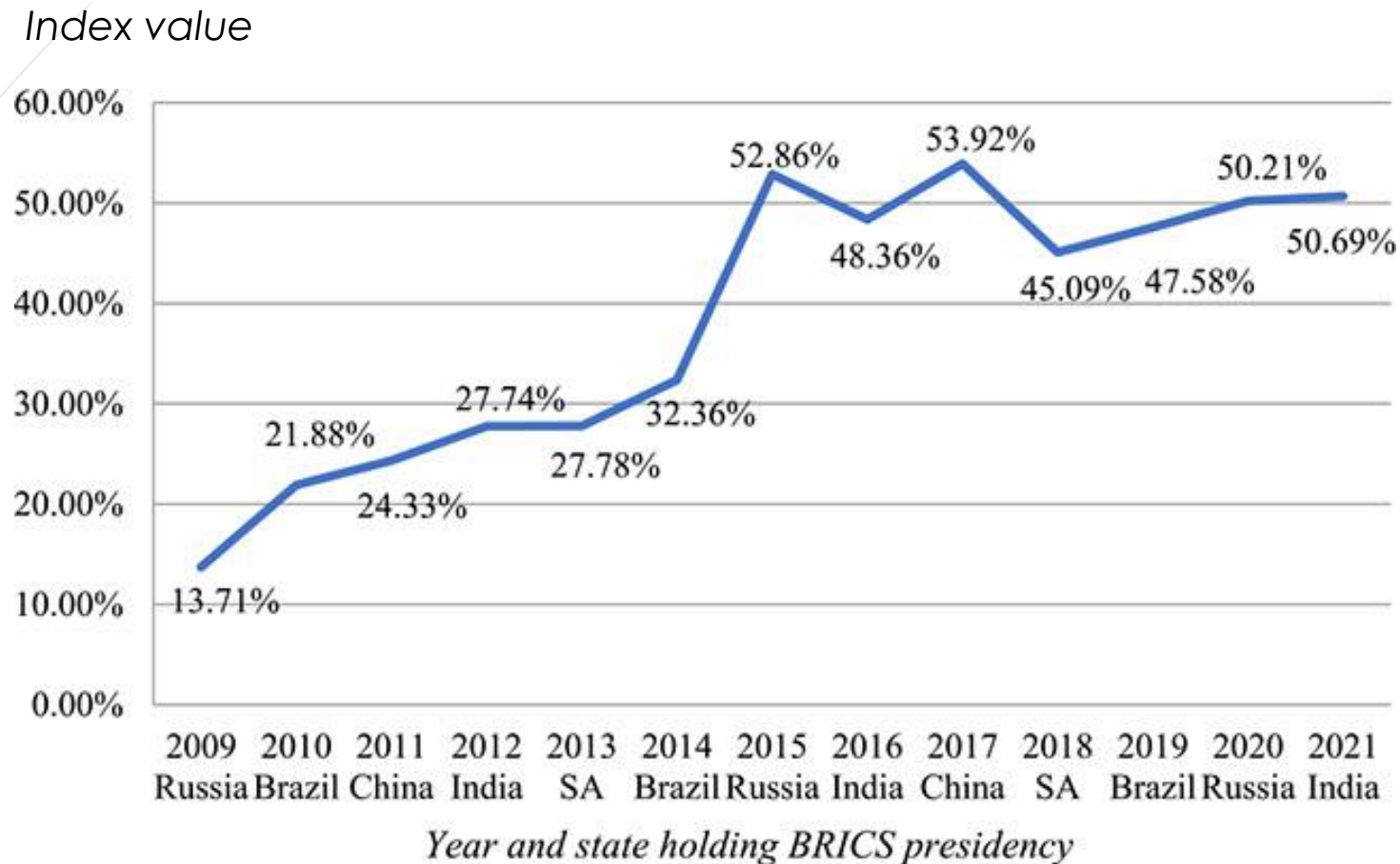
- **Transnational communication among BRICS actors**
- Range 0%= no actors to 100% leaders, officials and civil society

Convergence at sub-BRICS level

- **Sub-BRICS intergovernmental collaboration**
- Bilateral 25%, >1 bilateral 50%, trilateral 75%, quadrilateral 100%

Index = the mean of values for 3 convergence pathways for 1 policy issue in 1 year & monitor over time
Based on 47 policy issues – political economy, security, sustainable development; 2,444 observations

Overall Increase in BRICS Convergence 2009–2021



Source: Fig. 1, Papa et al., 2023.

Top convergence areas - Index

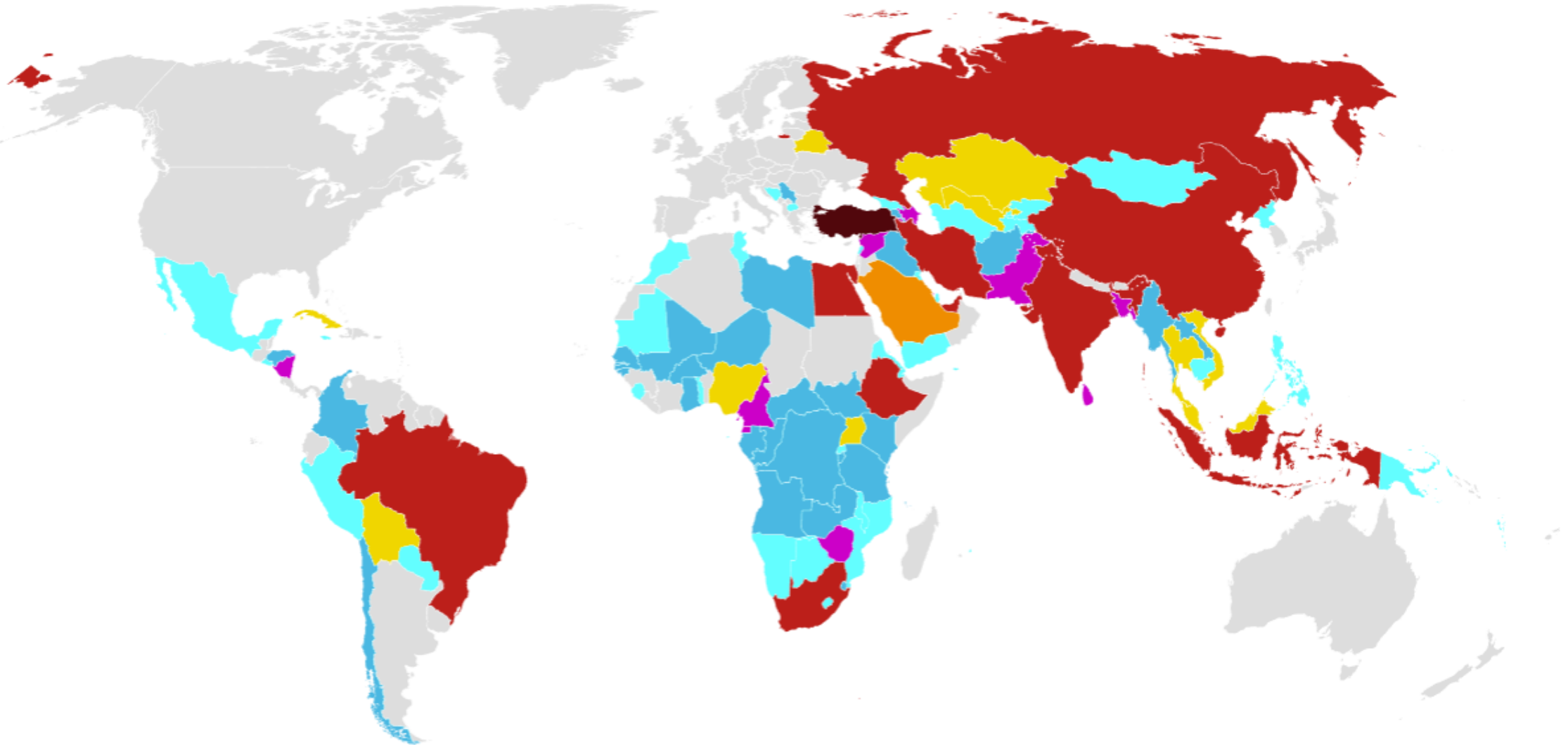
- Industrial development
- Climate, CBDR
- Agriculture
- UN development agenda

Institutional output

- Financial institutions
- Industrial development
- Agriculture
- Food
- Health

The BRICS Map: Who's In? Who's Engaged? Convergence vs. expansion and conflict?

Member Invited Member Partner Invited Partner Applied Officials Interested Debating



Papa, Ganesan, Streeter & Das, 2025.

Source: Authors' compilation based on government and media reports (2009-2025). Where status changed, the last status is recorded. This map is a living document. We welcome your input via BRICS Lab at MIT. • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

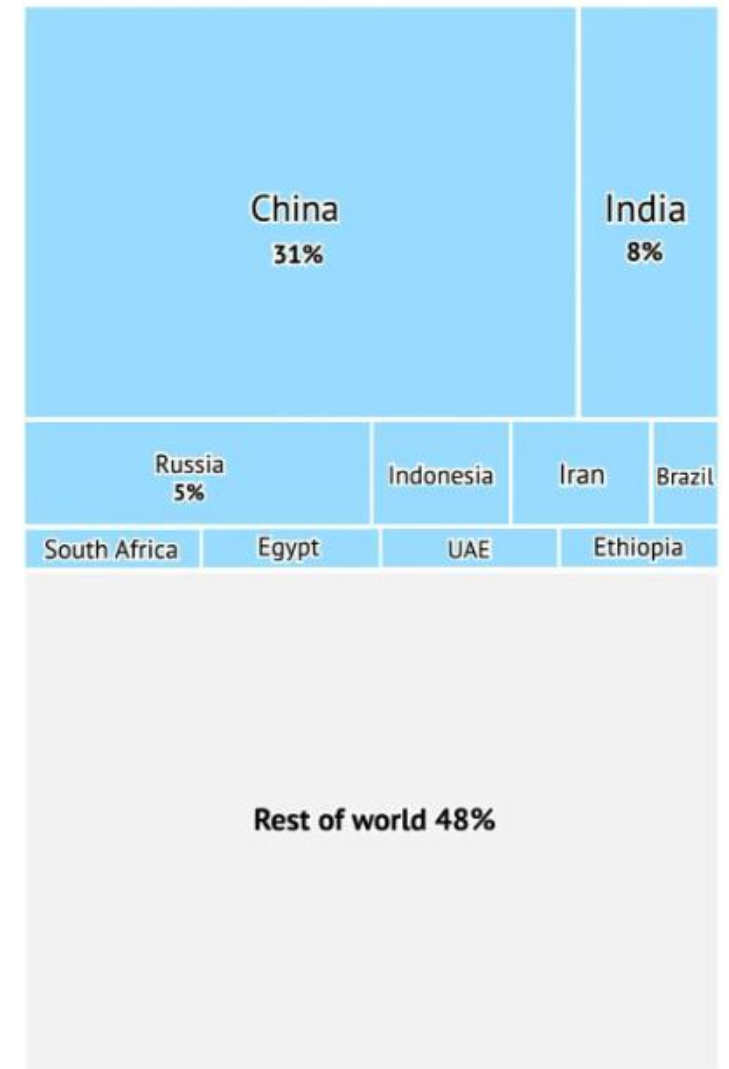
3. Climate Change: Differentiation vs. Leadership

Climate paradox
– leadership in other fields
not in climate – CBDR

2025: Climate leadership
agenda

Share of global CO2 emissions

BRICS 52%



Brazil's BRICS and COP30 presidencies



External orientation, not internal; EU trade
Lack of clarity on Loss and Damage
Tropical Forest Forever Facility

Can BRICS Contribute to the Global Sustainability Agenda?



“BRICS is the new name for development.” Celso Amorim, Lula’s chief adviser; former foreign minister (*Audiovisual/BRICS Brasil*)



BRICS Multilateral Guarantee Mechanism



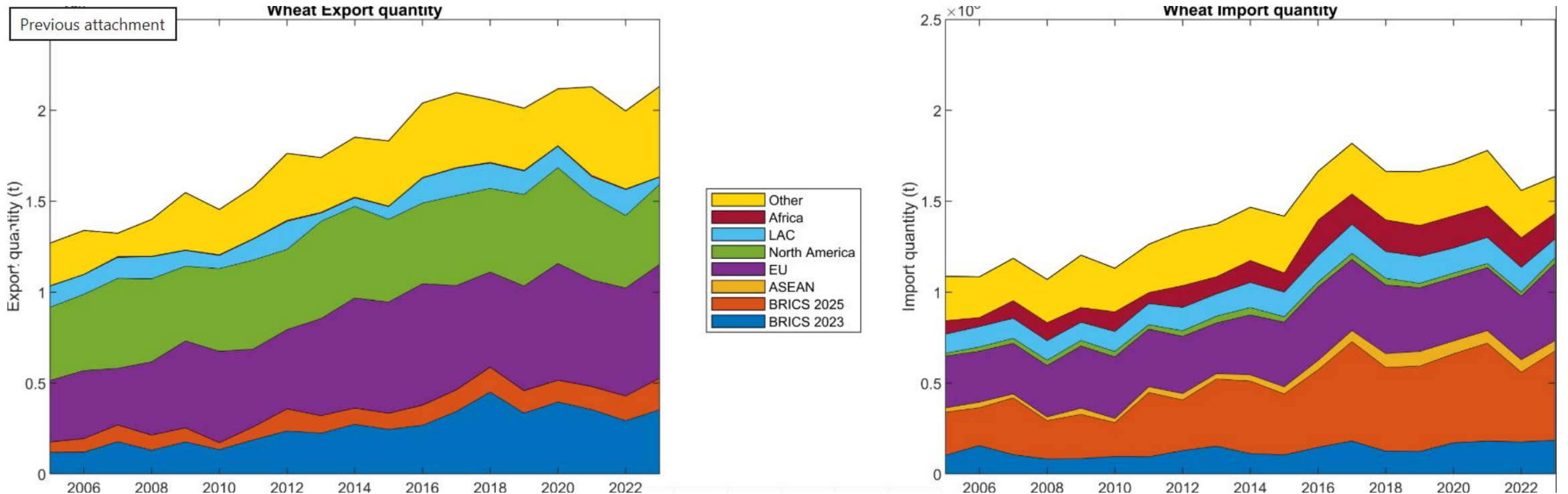
3. Food Security and Agriculture

High policy convergence

2024 Kazan summit: BRICS Grain Exchange - commodities trading platform

2025 Rio summit: BRICS Food Import Financing Mechanism

Wheat Exports & Imports 2005-2023 (Quantity, metric tons)



In Papa, Strzepek and Sixt. 2026. Based on the [Jameel Index for Food and Trade Vulnerability](#) 2025, Russia– China, Egypt, Indonesia

4. Three areas to watch:

1

Deepening cooperation despite geopolitics

Cohesion is functional and structural; multipolarity opens new pathways.

2

Norm and standard setting to reshape governance agendas

BRICS as a norm and standards incubator for the Global South — new approaches.

3

Institutional innovation

New Development Bank, Grain Exchange, and Cross-Border Payments Initiative

Shallow cooperation? Consensus building?



THANK YOU!

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