

## **Institutionalising a South First Approach at Global Front**

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## **1. Abstract**

The paper aims to cover the current dynamics of the world concerning institutionalising a south-first approach on the Global front. There has been a remarkable shift in the developing countries which were earlier considered part of the third world but are now being considered part of the decision-making process at the front on various aspects. The paper focuses on the transition from the third world towards the formation of the global south which has been possible due to international forums such as the G-20. Then, the BRICS has also been covered for its composition, economic and security development which forms the crucial bloc of the global south. The increasing importance of the southern countries due to the Indo-Pacific region has also been analysed in the paper to offer a possible way forward.

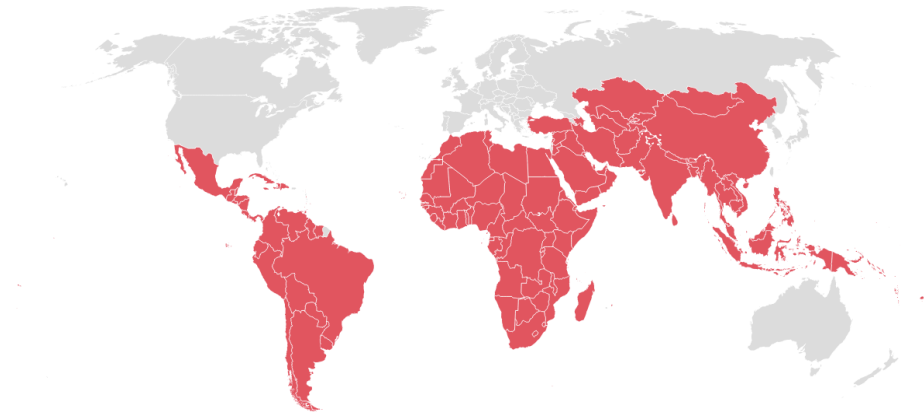
**Keywords: Global South, G-20, BRICS, Indo-Pacific, India, Third World.**

## **2. Introduction**

It was during the Cold War when the world was divided into North and South. The North was mostly correlated with the Western world, while the South largely corresponds with the developing countries and the Eastern world. States that are generally seen as part of the Global North tend to be wealthier, less unequal, and considered more democratic and developed countries that export technologically advanced manufactured products. In contrast, the Southern states are generally seen as poorer developing countries with younger, more fragile democracies heavily dependent on primary sector exports and frequently share a history of past colonialism by Northern states. Post World War II, the United Nations was created to bring down the discrimination amongst the North-South and to provide enough opportunities to the countries of the global south. Over the years, the fact of the United Nations being aligned towards the North was being realised by the other part of the world and a need for an unbiased forum was felt whose conditions aligned with that of the third world. This eventually led to the formation of various blocs of the southern countries which led to the realisation of their interests. Hence, this then led to the need to put the South first approach on the global front.

### 3. Transition from the Third World to the Global South

#### The Global South Map



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Image Source: [The World Economic Forum](#)

The Global South, as discussed earlier in the paper, is a terminology used to depict the geopolitical grouping of certain countries rather than geographical. The above map clearly shows the grouping often referred to as the global south. The term global south emerged with the emergence of the then-known third world, which were majorly the colonies of Europe and the other half of the global north. In the later phase, third-world countries were classified as the ones who adopted the non-alignment policy including the developing and under-developed countries. The transition from the Third World to the Global South is embarked by the central focus being shifted from simply development towards geopolitical relations of power.

Concerning this shift towards the quest for power, China has been a country in the global south that has significantly developed since its 1978 economic reforms and is currently the second-largest economy at \$ 18.536 billion. This has been complemented by growth in its hard power by having the 3rd largest military in the world. On the other hand is India which suffered due to the British even after its independence, has now grown out to be the 5th largest economy at \$3942 billion and strategically has the 4th largest army in the world. At the same time, its geographical positioning gives it an edge in influencing the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific which is of global importance currently. Moreover, the importance of regional organisations is rising such as BRICS which accounts for almost 37% of the world GDP and consists of countries like Russia, China, and India that are of military importance.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the ASEAN group being the 5th largest economy in the world is also of utmost importance for the world regarding trade

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<sup>1</sup> [Business Today](#)

in the Indo-Pacific region. Likewise, several other countries such as Brazil, Indonesia etc and other regional organisations also have a major stake in the transition towards the rise of the southern part of the world.

#### **4. The Quartet of G-20 Presidency**

The Group of Twenty [G20] is an intergovernmental forum for international economic cooperation representing around 85% of the global GDP, over 75% of the world trade and about two-thirds of the world population. The G20 Presidency is steered by a particular country that hosts and sets the agenda for the summit. The host country getting to set the agenda has an opportunity to put forth its national concerns and interests on the global front, according to which various resolutions are passed upon.

The Global South has this opportunity due to the quartet of G20 presidencies, two of them being Indonesia and India having hosted the summit consequently in the years 2022 and 2023 respectively. This will be followed by Brazil in the current year 2024 and then in 2025 by South Africa. The following would help in understanding the success of the Indonesian and Indian presidencies and expectations from the Brazilian and South African presidencies in putting forward the aspirations of the Southern world.

##### ***A. Indonesia's Presidency:***

The G20 Presidency in Indonesia being the first in the quartet of summits of the Global South was necessary in framing an agenda that would be carried forward by the Troika of India, Brazil and South Africa. The first summit since Russia had begun its aggression against Ukraine, the 2022 summit at Bali presented an opportunity for Indonesia to showcase the standpoint of the Global South and its capability to reassure the trust in multilateral forums such as that of G20. The European Council President, Charles Michel had mentioned before the summit that 'this G20 is one of the most difficult ones that there have ever been' majorly because of the tense geopolitical situations and economic slowdowns because of COVID-19. Contrary to various such negative expectations, the final communique was endorsed by the world leaders at the summit. The endorsement of the declaration amid tense situations was itself considered to be a success, for which the President of Indonesia Joko Widodo was praised by the diplomats.

At the same time, the emerging nations from the Global South- India, Mexico, Argentina and South Africa were also decisive in overcoming differences between traditional geopolitical players and enabling the G-20 to produce the declaration.

The interests of the Global South were also mirrored in the declaration of the need to address food security, strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness and response through the Pandemic Fund, boost education etc. As a part of the climate agenda, the developed countries were urged to fulfil their agenda to deliver on the goal of jointly mobilising US\$100 billion in

climate finance per year by 2020 and annually through 2025 to address developing countries' needs. Hence, the assertive approach of keeping the interests of the Global South was very well accomplished in the Indonesian G-20 presidency.

### ***B. India's Presidency:***

The Indian Presidency was assumed in December 2022 with a slogan of 'Vasudaiv Kutumbakam' i.e. One Earth, One Family, One Future, with the leader's summit beginning in September 2023. The priorities set by the presidency were rightly set considering the national interest and the aspirations of the Global South. These priorities encompass a wide range of substantive discussions, including strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth, accelerating progress on sustainable development goals, women-led development etc. These priorities are also supported by 125 countries from the Global South during the "Voice of the Global South Summit" in January 2023.

The inclusion of the African Union consisting of 55 member states in the G20 summit is a remarkable achievement of the Indian presidency in putting forward the agenda of Global South assertively. The AU forms about one-quarter of the United Nations membership; hence, getting a platform for international economic discussion at the G20 is of great importance.

Secondly, it was the efforts by the Indian presidency to bring to consensus the European and Middle Eastern countries namely UAE and Saudi Arabia for establishing the India-Middle-Eastern-Europe Economic Corridor [IMEC]. The corridor will be very significant in direct trade between the countries leading to cost reduction and depicting the growing influence of the Global South geopolitics. Hence, throughout the summit, India made sure to institutionalise a south first approach at the global front.

### ***C. Upcoming Brazil's Presidency & South Africa's Presidency:***

The G-20 presidency of Brazil in the current year 2024 and of South Africa in 2025 will be crucial for carrying forward the agenda of the South on the the global front. The theme of the Brazilian G20 is "Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet" and one of the priorities being reforming the global governance institutions, which to some extent conveys its motives in the summit to lead the aspirations of the Global South ahead.

The agendas taken up by the precedent presidencies of Indonesia and India as well agendas of utmost importance like that of strengthening Global Health Infrastructure, Ensuring food security, digital economy and challenges such as economic recovery etc must be taken up in the upcoming presidencies of the two countries as well. As part of South Africa's G-20 presidency, it will have a decisive role to play in making the voice and interest of the newly added African

Union heard and acted upon at its summit. Hence, this would ensure the success of the efforts in putting ahead the Global South agenda through the quartet of presidencies of the region.

## 5. Rising Role of BRICS in Global Governance

The BRICS is an intern-governmental organisation consisting of countries namely Brazil-Russia- India- China- and South Africa. It is a geopolitical bloc popularly known to be formed to counterbalance the influence of Western-dominated global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]. BRICS consisting of developing nations, plays a crucial role in asserting the interests of the Global South on the geopolitical front. Over time, BRICS has evolved to include more members, economically being more competent to the G-7 nations than before and having a major stake in international security.

### A. Expansion of the organisation

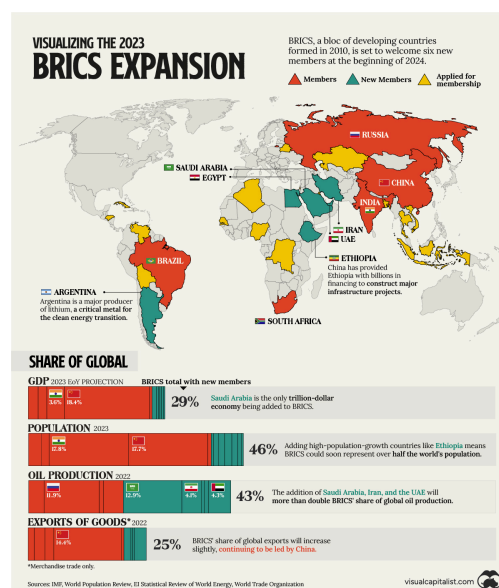


Image Source: [Visual Capitalist](https://visualcapitalist.com)

The BRICS, established in 2009, was an organisation consisting of only four developing countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India and China and later joined by South Africa in 2010. Recently, the Middle Eastern and North African countries [MENA] have joined BRICS at the beginning of 2024 and various others are willing to join soon.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for the same is the fact that the West dominates the prominent global bodies and hence BRICS is being seen as an alternative that would provide various benefits for the member countries such as development finance, increased trade and investment.

<sup>2</sup> [Indian Council of World Affairs](https://www.indiancouncilofworldaffairs.org/)

The inclusion of the MENA countries into the bloc will provide them a platform to cooperate on a broad spectrum of issues and emphasize a sustainable world order and it would also bring to them economic gains along with associated political leverage. In January 2024, as six new members joined the BRICS, the bloc is now comprised of 46% of the world's population, contributing 29% of the global GDP and controlling 43.1% of the world's oil supply. The current informatics are further expected to be leveraged as over 40 countries have expressed their interest in joining BRICS. The expansion of the organisation has been supported by one of its founding members and a growing economic giant i.e. India, when the Prime Minister of the country expressed his support towards including more countries and believing it would enhance BRICS as an organisation. The organisation represents a quarter of the economy and comprises some of the most powerful emerging nations, and the new members are expected to shape the global economic and geopolitical dynamics significantly leading to the rise of the Global South.

### ***B. Economic Uprising***

The BRICS over the years has grown economically with the development in each of its member states. Currently, the five-member grouping is home to 40% of the world population, which controls 26 % of the global GDP. With the addition of six new members to the forum, the GDP share will jump to 30% and the share of the population will be 46 %. The available data shows that the BRICS has outdone the G7 countries in terms of purchasing power parity, accounting for 35.6% and 30.3% of the global GDP respectively. By 2028, these figures, are to shift in the favour of BRICS, accounting for 36.6% against 27.8% of the G7 countries and the collective weight in the global economy of the BRICS being \$58.9 trillion.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the share in the global merchandise of the forum is set to rise from 20 % to 25%, and that of global service increases from 12% to 15%. The share of the bloc in the global forex reserves would also increase by 600 basis points to 45%. However, the biggest impact will be on the share of global oil production which will increase to 40% from the current 18%, while the current oil intake share will jump from 27 % to 36%.<sup>4</sup> This massive increase in share of oil trade is a result of Saudi Arabia joining the bloc which has the second highest oil reserves after Russia, and this oil math will be a potential game changer for payment system and price discovery. This has been complemented by the establishment of the New Development Bank [NDB] to provide loans for infrastructure projects. The NDB has grown significantly and made a substantial contribution to promoting clean energy sources in the BRICS and to infrastructure development. Hence, the economic development of the BRICS nations is also leading to the rise of the Global South.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Economic Times](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Economic Times](#)

### ***C. International Security***

The international security of a bloc or a country is majorly dependent on the military capabilities of the same, the other factors being that of diplomacy, treaties etc. Looking at the composition of the five member countries of the BRICS, the three major powers in terms of military in the world are Russia, China and India. Russia is a country of the global south that has faced aggression from the West in the past, especially after the breakdown of the USSR, the military capabilities of the country were challenged by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO]. The war of Russia with Ukraine can be seen as a proxy war of Russia against the whole of the West, the setback of Ukraine in the ongoing war is proof of Russia's military power. Secondly, China has been a country that has constantly been engaging in acquiring ports and building infrastructure for strategic purposes through its debt trap policy and diplomatic relations. This has also been complemented by its military, which is the third largest in the world. The other major power in the bloc is India which ranks 4th in the world for its military capabilities and also is a nuclear power as the other two nations of the bloc mentioned above. The constant war of India against terrorism is something that sets it apart for having the most active armies of the world. South Africa and Brazil also contribute to a certain extent to international security but with the joining of the MENA countries like Saudi Arabia, and Iran which have energy resources of oil and nuclear power respectively, the capabilities of the bloc have risen. Hence the growing military capabilities of the BRICS nations can be noticed which is contributing towards increased international security of the bloc.

## **6. The Strategic Importance of the Indo-Pacific Region**



Source: [Map of Indo-Pacific Region](#)



In the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific Ocean has emerged as one of the crucial regions of international contestation and competition, yet also of cooperation. The rising importance of the region is directly proportional to the economics of global trade and commerce, and therefore a potential area of economic prosperity for the countries in the region and also for other trading countries of the west. It accounts for 65 % of the world's population, 63% of the world's GDP and 46% of the world's merchandise trade. The region also dominates 50% of the world's maritime trade.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Indo-Pacific is home to some of the most diverse global commons of the world, making great-power rivalry over access to such resources a potential flashpoint in the region.

In the quest for dominance in the region, it is the Global South that has a very decisive role to play. China is one such country that through its heavy movements in the region with a strategic policy like that of debt trap to capture ports and string of pearl strategy have various naval bases to an extent that have provided them a prominent position in the region.

This has compelled other powers to temper the balance of power in the region. The USA is one such power that stands for a free Indo-Pacific region and has been compelled by the Chinese activities in the region. In order to counter China in the region and ensure its dominance and a free Indo-Pacific, it has collaborated with other South nations, India being the prominent counter to China due to the aligning interest with the USA, some other countries being Indonesia, Singapore etc. These countries have been brought together under the Indian Ocean Rim Organisation to achieve the agenda. The Association of South East Asian Nations [ASEAN] is also a group of global southern countries that have been collaborating with the West for a free Indo-Pacific. This has been a situation of conflict of interest among the nations of the Global South itself, but the fact to be noted is the rising importance of the southern world on the global front.

## **8. Recommendations:**

### ***1. Nurturing the momentum of the G-20 Summits:***

The G-20 summits of Indonesia and India were a success and highlighted and endorsed throughout the summit the interest of the Global South, and this becomes a priority of the upcoming G-20 summits of Brazil and South Africa to maintain the momentum set by the precedents. Some of the areas of focus for the upcoming presidencies can be:

- A. Health: Nurturing and accepting the creation of digital health platforms, crucial for data interchange and advancing telemedicine in areas with limited access, which would require public-private partnerships, also the upcoming presidencies can augment investment in health infrastructure, encompassing

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<sup>5</sup> [ORF](#)

facilities, apparatus, and workforce, backed by both the government and private sectors.

- B. Ensuring Food Security: Brazil and South Africa could leverage the existing Agricultural Market Information System to advance sustainable trade and openness in the agri-food market.
- C. Multilateral Developmental Bank: The need for a substantial increase in MDBs' sustainable lending is underscored by global challenges. Increased inter-MDB cooperation is essential to crafting a unified response to global challenges, particularly those related to sustainable development and climate change. India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa can work together under an informal setup. Their collective advocacy could substantially sway the course of MDB reform, aligning it with the developmental goals and necessities of emerging and growing economies.

## 2. *The Centrality of the Organisations:*

The Centrality of the organisations of the Global South is of utmost importance for putting the agenda of the South on the global front. Currently, in organisations like BRICS, the two prominent countries India and China have a long-standing history of estranged diplomatic relations, which is concerned with border issues due to China's expansion policy. The 1962 Indo-China War, the recent clash at Galwan Valley and a lot more. Hence, it is important to have a consensus between the two countries for smooth coordination in the bloc.

ASEAN is also one such bloc that is facing issues on its centrality majorly after Myanmar's change in governance after the coup. This has caused conflicting opinions within the group on the inclusion of Myanmar post its exclusion after the coup. Hence, a consensus is a must on an immediate basis for keeping up the set momentum for the rising aspirations of the global south.

## 3. *Holistic Development of the BRICS:*

The rising economy of the BRICS over time remains a fact but still, this doesn't prove the economic development of the BRICS as a whole. This is because China alone in the BRICS has accounted for around a quarter of GDP growth, wherein the total contribution was over 45%. The trade growth has also been China-centric, with the contribution from the rest of BRICS remaining quite flat. Except for India, which has experienced an acceleration in economic growth, the growth of other economies of the bloc has been stagnant and minimal. The Bilateral trade within the BRICS countries other than with China also remains low showcasing a clear dependence on China. This clear dependency on China for the economic growth of BRICS must be distributed

rationally by all the members. Only when there is a rational contribution of GDP from the countries of the bloc, it can be said that the BRICS has holistically grown in terms of its economy.

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, through the research paper, it can be observed that the approach of the Global South has begun to change, by putting ahead its interest on the global front in various institutions. The G-20 has been a very suitable platform for the countries of the global south to take up the leadership and put forth their agenda which would eventually contribute towards inclusivity and the quartet of presidencies enabling a rush of interests of the south. At the same time, the various regional organisations and blocs have also been crucial with respect to the formulation of opinions and availability of funds for the development of the countries of the section. Looking at our country India, which has taken an initiative known as the Voice of the Global South, is also a masterstroke in letting the world know the stance of the South as well as for reaching out the needs of the developing countries. Hence, the current momentum of the South should be carried forward keeping into consideration the challenges that must be countered to achieve objectives.

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