

# JOURNAL OF BRICS



# STUDIES

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Editorial

# BRICS Policy Agenda, Partnership and Cooperation

Siphamandla Zondi , Norman Sempijja  & Thulisile Mphambukeli   
Editors

In 2024, the BRICS diplomacy under the chairship of Russia is focused on partnership and cooperation in three key tracks - politics and security, the economy and finance, and cultural and humanitarian ties. Through some 250 events and meetings culminating in the BRICS Summit in Kazan in 22-24 October, the BRICS hopes to expand the range of activities it must undertake to make advances practically in policy areas in these three tracks. This year also marks the full participation of the five new members of BRICS (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) in the whole year of discussion leading the summit and the content of the declaration to be adopted about what steps the BRICS countries agree to undertake to implement their decisions. The developments of the year can be viewed on the website: <https://brics-russia2024.ru/en/>.

The complexity of BRICS lies in the fact that it has to deal with many shifting policy areas. It has been hard-pressed to develop over the past decade a policy agenda that should be the basis for intra-BRICS substantive coherence. These substantive policy agendas have not enjoyed a serious research focus though. They continue to be neglected as the focus continues to be on the geopolitics of BRICS.

The questions about how BRICs handle shared challenges and opportunities in education, health, social policy, housing, urban planning, land, agriculture and so forth deserve attention. Both those that deal with the broad discussion of positions prepared by the common platform as well as case studies of individual country positions and how they might explain collective positions.

But it is pleasing that there is an increasing focus in BRICSology on the nature, extent, depth, and breadth of the policy agenda that makes BRICS. In this edition, papers discuss some of these to varying depths. The policy briefs written by emerging scholars as a key new feature of the journal cover the three critical policy issues of STEM education and the digital skills development in BRICS countries showing that there are signs of growth in this area. The second on the blockchain technology demonstrates how the update of this technology require clear delineation of ethical and regulatory mechanisms to harness the potential for development and minimise the risks of cyber violations of various kinds. The third critically reflect on the varied effect of Chinese investment on youth empowerment in South Africa, showing both challenges and prospects in this regard.

The main research papers tackle similar subjects but with greater depth in terms of research data used and the expanse of argumentation presented. For instance, the paper on digital governance

considered a wide spectrum of issues that this idea entails, showing its complexity while suggesting ways in which digital partnerships in practice simplify this into key factors that must be harnessed. Another paper critically reviews how the United States has responded to the emergence and growth of BRICS, showing that some lost opportunities have happened.

On decolonisation and knowledge production in the context of BRICS, the paper explores the opportunities that arise from adopting a decolonial epistemic angle to understand the developments within BRICS. Another paper considers how modern diplomacy is evolving in the context of the shift towards multipolarity and how this explains the agency of BRICS or responses to the emergence of BRICS. The paper on the conflict in Ethiopia showcases how this new BRICS member has mismanaged an internal conflict in a manner that should raise worries for those wondering if Ethiopia will enrich the BRICS or diminish its standing.

We, hereby, celebrate that the journal has successfully been added to the Directory of Open Access Journals, a major milestone for the young journal, committed to open access to knowledge generated principally through public funds.

I would like to express my thanks to the editorial collective made up of Professor Thuli Mphambukeli in urban spatial studies, Professor Norman Sempijja in political science, Dr Rich Mashimbye in international relations, Mr Mika Kubayi in international political economy, and Helen Adogo is political scientist. I would like to also thank the reviewers who offered their critical appraisal of the papers in this collection.

**Siphamandla Zondi**

Editor-in-Chief

15 June 2024