



Research Article

Leveraging BRICS' Expansions for Africa's Security and Development: A Dependency Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the opportunities and challenges that BRICS expansion presents for Africa's security and development. It adopts Dependency Theory as its analytical framework and uses qualitative documentary research based on scholarly literature, official BRICS documents, development-finance reports, and publications of international and regional institutions. The study employs qualitative content analysis to identify recurring patterns concerning development finance, economic diversification, security cooperation, power asymmetry, and dependency. The analysis produces three principal findings. First, expanded BRICS engagement can broaden Africa's external economic options through additional sources of infrastructure finance, investment, technology cooperation, and South-South economic relations. Second, BRICS provides channels for political and security dialogue, including cooperation on counter-terrorism and peace and security, while individual BRICS members such as China have contributed to African peacekeeping capacity. Third, expansion does not automatically remove structural dependency: unequal bargaining power, commodity-oriented trade, divergent interests among BRICS members, and geopolitical competition may reproduce or diversify existing forms of dependency. The study therefore argues that the developmental value of BRICS engagement depends less on alignment with the bloc itself than on African agency, institutional capacity, value addition, and coordinated bargaining. It recommends an African Union-supported framework for articulating common interests, stronger scrutiny of financing arrangements, promotion of local industrial capacity, and a pragmatic foreign policy that preserves diversified external partnerships.

Keywords

BRICS, Africa, Development, South-South Cooperation, Security

1. Introduction

Today, we live in a world where many societies are extremely poor, while few others are exceedingly rich. In Africa, millions live in abject poverty. Africa is home to more than 460 million people living in extreme poverty, accounting for 55% of global poverty [1]. Development shortfalls contribute to this dire situation, and insecurity in Africa has grown more troubling in recent times, taking on new forms that affect people

daily. The African Development Bank estimates that the continent faces an annual development-financing gap of roughly US\$400 billion [2, 3]. Also, African countries face a wide range of communal and ethno-religious conflicts and cross-national security threats, from illicit trafficking to extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabaab, terrorism, and violent extremism [4]. These endemic problems do not only hinder sustainable

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development and Africa's recovery, but also raise renewed debate about how African states can diversify external partnerships and mobilize additional resources without reproducing forms of dependence that limit policy autonomy.

BRICS is relevant to this debate because it has evolved from the original BRIC grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, and China into a broader forum for political, diplomatic, economic, and financial coordination among Global South countries. South Africa joined the grouping in 2010, while Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined the expanded configuration in 2024; Indonesia became a full member in January 2025 [5, 6]. As of 2026, BRICS therefore comprises eleven members. Its partner-country category also includes African states such as Nigeria and Uganda, although partner status should not be confused with full membership [5, 7]. India assumed the BRICS presidency in 2026, following Brazil's 2025 presidency [8].

The expansion changes the context in which Africa engages BRICS. The enlarged grouping has greater geographical reach and economic weight, but it is also more heterogeneous. The literature identifies both transformative and sceptical interpretations. Optimistic perspectives view BRICS as a platform through which emerging powers can promote greater representation of the Global South and reform international institutions, whereas critical perspectives caution that new South-South relationships may reproduce resource-extraction patterns and unequal power relations [9, 10]. Omoigberale [11] purported that the expanded BRICS combines ambitions for global institutional reform with pragmatic adaptation to existing structures, while Taylor [10] draws attention to the possibility that BRICS may diversify rather than eliminate Africa's external dependency.

In lieu of the above, this study therefore, examines how Africa can engage the expanded BRICS in ways that contribute to development and security architecture while reducing the risk of new forms of dependency. Specifically, the study examines the development opportunities associated with expanded BRICS engagement; assesses the potential contribution of BRICS-related cooperation to African security; and identifies structural, governance, and geopolitical challenges that may constrain African benefits. The central argument is that BRICS should be understood neither as an automatic developmental solution nor simply as another source of dependency. Its implications depend on the terms of engagement, the bargaining capacity of African states, and the extent to which African institutions convert external opportunities into domestic productive capacity.

2. Conceptual Explanation of BRICS

BRICS is a formal intergovernmental forum for political and diplomatic coordination among Global South countries, aimed at boosting economic clout and influence in global governance. According to Mukhtar [12], BRICS formation reflects strategic, economic, and geopolitical factors, aiming to

increase influence in global governance and to broaden its reach by including Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. The concept began in the early 2000s with the term "BRIC" (Brazil, Russia, India, China), coined by Jim O'Neill in 2001 to describe four rapidly growing economies likely to become major global players in the global economy, because these countries were experiencing rapid economic growth and were seen as potential drivers of the global economy [13]. The first BRIC summit occurred in 2009 in Russia, marking the group's formal establishment. South Africa joined in 2010, expanding the forum to BRICS [12].

Highlighted at BRICS' 15th summit to invites new members, BRICS took a significant step of admitting six new members: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina, and the United Arab Emirates. Argentina under the leadership of its new president turned down the invitation [14]. However, the forum is currently composed of eleven countries: its five original members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and six new members admitted in 2024/25 which are Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, United Arab Emirate and Saudi Arabia but which pending confirmation. While nine other nations including Nigeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan have been officially designed as 'partner countries' [7]. This partner-country category was established at the XVI BRICS Summit in Kazan in October 2024, and African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda and others have officially joined. The partner-countries can only participate in BRICS summits and other high-level events, but they don't have the full membership status or decision-making power [15].

Sufficed to depict here that, the official name of the BRICS forum is BRICS, even after the expansion to include six new member countries. Speaking at a press briefing following the 15th BRICS submit in Sandton, Russia Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov informed that 'everyone said the name should remain that way.' The expanded group is sometimes referred as BRICS+ informally, but the official name for the group is still simply BRICS [3]. This expansion marks a significant milestone in the history of BRICS, demonstrating the grouping's growing influence and appeal, with these new members, BRICS now represents 40% of the World's population and 37.3% of the World's GDP [16].

3. Literature Review and Gaps

Existing literature on BRICS-Africa relations has generated substantial discussion of trade, investment, China-Africa relations, South-South cooperation, and the possibility of reforming global governance. Critical scholarship has also highlighted the possibility that engagement with emerging powers may diversify rather than eliminate dependency [10]. More recent work has examined the expanded BRICS and its implications for international order, power, legitimacy, and global governance [11, 17]. However, three gaps remain relevant. First, much of the earlier Africa-BRICS literature predates the

2023-2025 expansion and therefore cannot fully account for the current membership and partner architecture. Second, economic relations have received greater sustained attention than the interaction between development opportunities and Africa's security architecture. Third, there remains a need for an integrated Dependency Theory perspective that simultaneously considers alternative finance, security cooperation, bargaining power, and the possibility of neo-dependency.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the expanded BRICS through a combined development-security lens. Rather than assuming that BRICS is either a counter-hegemonic solution or another instrument of dependency, the study evaluates the conditions under which engagement may improve African policy options and the circumstances under which existing asymmetries may be reproduced.

4. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework grounds a research study, and this study adopts Dependency Theory of development. Dependency Theory emerged in the 1950s among Latin American scholars like Hans Singer and Raul Prebisch, with prominent proponents such as Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Claude Ake, and others, as a critique of modernization theory. The theory states that, the poverty of the developing countries is not because they are not integrated into world system, or not fully integrated as is often argued by free market economists, but because how they are integrated into the system [18].

The theory particularly guides this study in two directions. First, it helps identify the potential emancipatory dimension of BRICS: access to alternative financing, new markets, technology partnerships, and greater negotiating options may reduce excessive dependence on a limited set of traditional partners. Second, it provides a critical lens for identifying neo-dependency risks, particularly where African economies remain exporters of primary commodities, importers of higher-value manufactured products, or borrowers without adequate productive returns. Dependency Theory thus allows the study to examine both the opportunities and the structural constraints of Africa's engagement with an expanded BRICS.

5. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. Data were collected from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, official BRICS declarations, reports from international organizations, African development institutions, the New Development Bank, and the United Nations. Sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to understanding BRICS-Africa relations, development finance, security cooperation, and dependency.

The study employed qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns within the selected documents. Relevant information was coded and organized into key themes, including development finance, trade and investment, infrastructure development, security cooperation, dependency, governance, and geopolitical competition. The findings were subsequently interpreted through the lens of Dependency Theory.

To enhance credibility, data were triangulated across multiple scholarly and institutional sources, while competing perspectives were critically compared. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the evolving nature of BRICS institutions and membership. Consequently, the findings should be understood as a qualitative assessment of documented opportunities and challenges rather than a causal evaluation of BRICS' impact on Africa's development and security outcomes.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1. The Opportunities for Africa Within the BRICS Forum

Africa countries struggles to leverage their vast natural resource wealth effectively for broad-based development, often due to governance failures [19] and unfavourable global economic structures. The Western powers have historically and unevenly integrated Africa's economies exploiting both its material and financial resources through global trade and the Bretton Woods institutions [24]. This long-standing pattern has contributed not only to Africa's current development challenges but also to its persistent security issues. In recent years, several African countries have begun exploring diversification and alternative partnerships to shift their development trajectories. A notable development is the growing interest among African nations in joining the BRICS bloc, as a potential channel to diversify economic partners, access new sources of investment, and strengthen bargaining power in global governance.

Africa's engagement with the BRICS, following the addition of new members, presents a constellation of potential opportunities aimed at addressing persistent development deficits and enhancing global influence. Foremost among these is the prospect of mobilizing alternative development finance and infrastructure investment, circumventing traditional Western-dominated institutions perceived as slow, conditional, or insufficient. Scholars have written about the role of the BRICS countries in promoting development to the developing world. Omoigberale [11], opined that the BRICS countries have the potential to act as "counter-hegemonic" powers in the global economy, that the BRICS countries can challenge the dominance of Western institutions and promote alternative models of development to the Global South.

BRICS development cooperation is often presented as a distinctive form of South-South cooperation that prioritizes mutual benefit, equality, and respect for sovereignty. Its main financial institutions are the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), the latter established by the five founding members. The NDB could finance infrastructure and social projects that address development deficits, as illustrated by a loan of up to US\$1 billion approved in 2024 for water and sanitation in South Africa [27]. Its direct reach in Africa is nonetheless narrow. As of 2025, only South Africa (a founding member), Egypt (admitted in 2021), and Algeria (admitted in 2025) are African members, and the bank had approved over 120 projects worth about US\$40 billion across all of its members [26]. For most African states, therefore, NDB finance is for now a prospective rather than an established source of funding. Poverty, youth unemployment, and weak infrastructure are widely associated with conflict risk and with recruitment by armed groups, although the causal relationship is contested and depends on governance and local grievances. Infrastructure and employment-generating investment may therefore contribute indirectly to stability and state legitimacy, but this effect should not be assumed. This economic support reduces the appeal of insurgent recruitment while strengthening state legitimacy and resilience against internal and external security threats.

The BRICS forum also offers Africa a platform for political and security dialogue. At the bloc level, however, security cooperation is largely confined to dialogue and consultation on issues such as counter-terrorism and peace and security. BRICS has no collective defence arrangement or standing peacekeeping capacity, so most operational security cooperation with Africa takes place through the bilateral relationships of individual members and should be analysed as such. China, for example, reports contributing more peacekeepers than any other permanent member of the UN Security Council and in 2015 pledged US\$100 million in military assistance to the African Union to support the African Standby Force and its capacity for immediate crisis response [30]. Such partnerships can widen the range of security partners available to African states. Western-led security approaches have been criticized in the Sahel and the Great Lakes region, and some African governments see alternative partners that do not attach Western political conditions as a way to increase their room for manoeuvre. As the Sahel case in section 5.2.5 shows, however, these arrangements carry their own risks.

6.2. Potential Challenges for Africa in the Expanded BRICS Framework

Africa's involvement in the enlarged BRICS is replete with possibilities but also risks and challenges that can limit potential gains at best or aggravate pre-existing weaknesses at worst, and detract from Africa's ability to derive maximum benefit from the partnership. To be specific, among others potential challenges are categorical highlighted below:

6.2.1. Economic Dependency and Neo-dependency Dynamics

Large asymmetries separate African economies from the core BRICS powers, notably China, India, and Russia, and these asymmetries risk producing unequal partnerships. Africa could remain a primary-resource supplier without meaningful industrialization or value addition [10]. The pattern is already visible in trade data: UNCTAD reports that two-thirds of developing countries (95 of 143) remained commodity-dependent in 2021-2023, and that most countries in Middle and Western Africa earned over 80% of their export revenues from primary commodities [25]. Trade terms, investment conditions, and loans may also favour the BRICS partner, with possible consequences for debt sustainability and policy autonomy. The "debt-trap" narrative should nevertheless be treated with caution, because empirical work has questioned the claim that Chinese lenders deliberately engineer debt distress in order to seize assets [23]. A more defensible concern, and one consistent with the dependency argument, is borrowing without adequate transparency or productive returns. In this sense BRICS engagement could "diversify dependency" rather than liberate Africa [10].

6.2.2. Internal Incoherence and Diverging BRICS Interests

The expanded BRICS comprises states with different political and economic models and agendas, which may not serve the collective objectives of the African continent. Africa often engages BRICS as individual states rather than through a unified continental strategy. Core members, especially China and Russia, may pursue expansion primarily to boost their global influence, with the risk that African development needs are sidelined [20]. Competition among members for influence in Africa could also turn BRICS into a forum for great-power rivalry in which African voices are drowned out.

6.2.3. Governance and Conditionality Concerns

BRICS' emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference may weaken pressure for governance reform, anti-corruption efforts, and human-rights improvements. The absence of governance conditionalities, which many African governments welcome as respect for their sovereignty, could also entrench poor governance practices and hinder sustainable development if it is not matched by robust domestic accountability mechanisms.

6.2.4. Geopolitical Risks and Diplomatic Trade-offs

Deeper BRICS alignment, particularly if it takes an anti-Western form, could strain Africa's ties with the European Union and the United States, and Western partners might respond with conditionalities or reduced engagement, affecting markets, aid, security cooperation, and investment [21]. In July 2025, for instance, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened an additional 10% tariff on countries that side with

BRICS [22], a measure that, if implemented, would raise costs for African exporters. Africa's dual reliance on U.S. and BRICS markets heightens its vulnerability to abrupt policy shifts, and its traditional non-alignment strategy becomes harder to sustain as the number of overlapping alliances grows.

6.2.5. Security Dependency and Regime-security Risks: The Sahel

The Sahel illustrates how security cooperation with a BRICS member can deepen rather than reduce dependency. Wagner formally withdrew from Mali in June 2025, and its units were taken over by the Moscow-run Africa Corps; a Malian security source told AFP that, whichever name the force bears, the point of contact remains the Kremlin [28]. A UN report accused Mali's army and foreign fighters of executing at least 500 people at Moura in March 2022, an allegation the junta denies, and Human Rights Watch had earlier accused Malian forces and Wagner of deliberately killing at least 32 civilians over an eight-month span [28]. In April 2026, The Sentry reported new deliveries of heavy military equipment to Mali, a significant portion of it reportedly earmarked for Africa Corps units [29].

From a Dependency Theory perspective, such arrangements make regime security dependent on an external patron with its own strategic interests, with little accountability to affected populations or to African regional institutions. They also sit outside BRICS' institutions: membership of the bloc does not by itself regulate how its members behave in Africa, which is why the distinction between bloc-level dialogue and bilateral security ties matters for African policy.

It is pertinent to depict here now that the identification of these potential challenges is not intended to incite fear but rather to offer a comparative and strategic lens through which Africa State Actors can access their alliances rationally. Understanding these risks enables African leaders to make informed choices that align with their national interests, balancing opportunities within BRICS with existing global partnership. This is crucial for leveraging the alliance to advance development goals and effectively address insecurity across the continent, ensuring that engagement with BRICS is guided by pragmatism, mutual benefit, and long-term sustainability rather than reactive or more sided alignment.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

7.1. Recommendations

The findings point to the following recommendations for African state actors and the African Union.

- 1) African Union institutions and national governments should develop a coordinated policy framework that outlines the continent's collective interests within the BRICS bloc. This strategy should prioritize Africa's security, development, industrialization, and infrastructure

needs while promoting African ownership and leadership in all engagements with BRICS partners.

- 2) African State Actors should take advantage of BRICS financial mechanisms of New Development Bank, to access alternative sources of development financing, and ensure that such funding is sustainable, transparent, and aligned with national development priorities, rather than creating new debt traps.
- 3) African Leaders should strengthen their engagement with BRICS security initiatives to enhance regional defense cooperation, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism strategies tailored to Africa's context.
- 4) African policymakers should adopt a balanced foreign policy that strategically engages BRICS while maintaining beneficial relations with Western powers to avoid economic retaliation.

7.2. Conclusion

The expansion of BRICS represents a shift in the global geopolitical landscape, offering both opportunities and challenges for Africa countries. This study have elucidated the opportunities and challenges that expanded BRICS engagement presents for Africa's security and development through the lens of Dependency Theory. Four analytical findings emerged. First, BRICS expansion broadens Africa's external economic options through additional markets, investment relationships, and development-finance channels, particularly through the New Development Bank. Second, BRICS provides a forum for political and security dialogue, while the security contributions of individual BRICS members can support African peacekeeping and counter-terrorism capacity. Third, expansion does not automatically overcome dependency because unequal capabilities, commodity-oriented trade, financing risks, and limited African bargaining power can reproduce or diversify dependency. Fourth, the heterogeneity of BRICS creates geopolitical trade-offs that make coordinated African agency essential.

The evidence therefore supports a conditional interpretation of BRICS expansion. BRICS can provide useful alternatives and additional bargaining space, but it should not be treated as a substitute for African institutional reform, regional integration, domestic resource mobilization, or African-led security mechanisms. The developmental significance of BRICS depends on the terms under which African states engage, the quality of domestic institutions, and the extent to which external partnerships generate local value addition and policy autonomy.

Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CRA	Contingent Reserve Arrangement

NDB	New Development Bank
US (U.S.)	United States
AU	African Union

Author Contributions

Adeyeye Samuel Nifemi: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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