

GUEST EDITOR NOTE

BRICS Expansion: A Comprehensive Analysis of Global Power Shifts and Economic Integration

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<https://doi.org/10.21684/2412-2343-2024-11-3-5-8>

Recommended citation: Niteesh Kumar Upadhyay, *BRICS Expansion: A Comprehensive Analysis of Global Power Shifts and Economic Integration*, 11(3) BRICS Law Journal 5–8 (2024).

The BRICS acronym means Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. BRICS is an intergovernmental body focused on investing in the economic development of BRICS nations. In 2006, Brazil, Russia, India, and China created the BRIC Group, which was later joined by South Africa in 2009 and made BRICS. The geopolitical development around the globe increased membership in this group. From BRICS, it is now known as BRICS+, as Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE joined the group on 1 January 2024.

If we see the growth and expansion of BRICS, initially it was formed to “highlight investment opportunities” in these groups of countries, however, with the change in the economy, geopolitical reforms are expected in the BRICS+ group. These ideas are welcomed in *BRICS Law Journal* and have been fully recognized in the various issues.

In the future, we may see a few more countries join BRICS+, as Saudi Arabia has yet to join and participate in the activities of the organization officially. Initially, Argentina was also expected to join the BRICS group but in December 2023 Diana Mondino, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina Republic refused to join the group. This expansion of BRICS can be perceived as a major progress for those nations who wish to strengthen the global south.

BRICS+ states also see the inclusion of three world’s largest oil-producing countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran). BRICS+ countries account for the world’s

45% population, around 30% of the world's land surface, and approx. 20% of world trade. It is a moment of pride for BRICS indeed.

BRICS+ states have diverse economic, political, and diplomatic issues. Joining BRICS is a step towards bringing transparency to the ideology of these countries. Moreover, countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, and India have differences of opinion on the majority of geopolitical issues that need to be understood through the platform of the *BRICS Law Journal*. For example, in the future, on one hand, the BRICS group has to maintain the cordial relationship of group members with each other, and on the other hand, it must come up with a common payment gateway, a monetary system for de-dollarization, and various other economic and social schemes. Iran has joined the BRICS, while Saudi Arabia's status remains uncertain, possibly due to its rivalry with Iran. Russia aims to use BRICS to demonstrate strong alliances post-Ukraine special military operation, while China's anti-West stance and its ties with India must be balanced.

BRICS Law Journal has been serving the academic community for a long time with scholarly articles specially written by academicians worldwide. With the change from BRICS to BRICS+, the Journal's influence and reach will also expand. **"BRICS Expansion: A Geopolitical Triumph of Partner Countries,"** authored by Vladimir Gavrilenko and Victor Shenshin, discusses in detail the importance of the BRICS+ intergovernmental group and how it may surpass G7 nations in the future in terms of GDP and political influence, as Russia, India, and China are part of BRICS+. In their article, the authors mention Britain as the locomotive of the world economy. In their paper, they focus on various areas that will boost the BRICS+ economy, including having a common payment system and BRICS arbitration for fast redressal of disputes between BRICS countries. The article also reflects how many countries like Turkey, Bangladesh, and others have shown keen interest in joining the BRICS. After discussing various aspects of BRICS cooperation ranging from economics, anti-terrorism, anti-corruption, etc., they concluded that BRICS is not a military alliance; it is simply a platform for coordinating positions and developing mutually acceptable solutions based on sovereignty, independence, and respect for each other.

"On the Way to BRICS+ Digital Sovereignty: Opportunities and Challenges of a New Era," authored by Elizaveta Gromova and Daniel Brantes Ferreira, discusses the crucial issue of digital sovereignty, which is very important for the development of BRICS. Limited literature on digital sovereignty talk primarily about the development of cooperation between BRICS countries on issues related to digitalization and information security, but not much discussion or deliberation is on the topic of digital sovereignty. This article is perfect to fill the research gap that is discussed above. It reflects the affirmative action taken by Russia in terms of achieving the aim of digital sovereignty by the end of 2030. The "Sovereign Internet Law" (Federal Law No. 90-FZ of 1 May 2019) in Russia created a stepping stone for the national internet traffic routing system and centralized management of digital assets. The People's Republic

of China is a pioneer in developing and implementing digital sovereignty, taking its early steps in the 1990s by generating the “Great Firewall.” India also made progress in the field of digital sovereignty by implementing the Information Technology Act 2000, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (the “IT Rules”), and various other rules, including gaming rules, cyber café rules, etc. The article mentions the development of digital sovereignty-related development and laws within all BRICS countries in brief including the countries that recently joined BRICS and are making attempts in the field of digital sovereignty. This article concluded with the understating that despite several obstacles and barriers to achieving BRICS+ digital sovereignty, the expanded bloc undoubtedly has the potential to become true “hawks of digital sovereignty.”

“Legal Framework for Impact Financing in the Digital Economy: What the Future Looks Like for the BRICS+ Countries,” authored by Anna Belitskaya and Yulia Kharitonova, discusses the evolving field of fintech and its future impact on the BRICS economy. BRICS prioritizes economic growth based on digital cooperation in areas of trade facilitation, investment, consumer protection, and support for small and medium-scale industries. This article reveals various important aspects, including the New Development Bank, legal challenges in BRICS nations related to digitalization, cyber fraud, private investment in fintech and its importance, etc.

“Legal Support of Artificial Intelligence in Countering Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Regimes in the BRICS+ Countries,” authored by Marina Aksenova, discusses a significant topic of opportunities and challenges in combating economic crimes, which include money laundering and terrorism financing, which are necessary for world peace and especially important for BRICS countries if they want to have peace, security, and economic development.

The article discusses in detail how artificial intelligence can be a path-breaking tool to control financial crimes and terrorist funding and how BRICS nations can work together and create a framework/action plan to curb such crimes. The article emphasized that the data analysis, pattern recognition, and predictive modeling techniques of AI make it an excellent tool for detecting and preventing complex money laundering schemes, scams, and terrorist funding-related economic activities. These tools can process a large amount of data with precision because of which even the tiniest suspicious activity will not go unnoticed and all anomalies are flagged on time. This comprehensive article also discussed “Black Box Syndrome” and how AI tools can be biased, creating a profound ethical consideration. The AI tools can inherit and amplify biases in outcomes as they are sometimes trained on biased and discriminatory data.

“Agreements on Release of Contractual Liability of Entrepreneurs in Russia and China,” authored by Svetlana Zimneva and Xiao He, takes a comparative approach between Russia and China and discusses the conclusion of agreements on the release or limitation of civil liability. A comparative legal analysis of indemnity

agreements and their consequences showed that the legislation and legal doctrine in each state have specific features.

“BRICS Alliance: A SWOT Analysis and the Potential Implications for Ending the Dominance of the USD,” authored by Ahmed Alrefei, discusses the probability of having a common currency and reducing the dependence of BRICS on the dollar. There are disagreements on the possibility of having a common currency, and with BRICS+ now, it is even more challenging to have a common currency. In my opinion, the de-dollarization efforts of BRICS are now a distant dream.

The article mentions why the intent of de-dollarization is so strong among the BRICS, as more than half of Russia’s foreign exchange reserve was frozen by Western countries after 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine. Even Russia was kept out of the SWIFT system, which is necessary for international payments. This increased the discussion on having a common payment system for BRICS and also a common currency. China also faced some restrictions on exports by the U.S., especially in semiconductors and chip fabrication technology. Both of these events are driving the BRICS member states to think about new modes of currency and payment systems. The article discusses in detail the practical problems like the need for a common central bank and developing convergence among member countries for a common currency for BRICS, etc. After doing a SWOT analysis of the BRICS group the author suggests that de-dollarization can be achieved by the BRICS nations, which will economically and politically make the BRICS+ group a more powerful group.

“Who Does International Law Serve?,” authored by Maxim Mateykovich and Alexander Skorobogatko, states that International Law plays a crucial role in preventing and resolving conflicts, facilitating cooperation in security, trade, and human rights protection, and expanding to include individuals as subjects. The evolution of International Law reflects a balance between state sovereignty and the need for global order, with a growing focus on human rights and effective dispute resolution, and groups like BRICS+ can play a very crucial role in these contemporary times.

This special issue of the *BRICS Law Journal* discusses in detail the political, social, and economic aspects of BRICS cooperation. The research papers by authors from various BRICS+ countries discuss opportunities and challenges to BRICS and also to the newly added countries to the BRICS group – digital sovereignty, digital autonomy, fintech, AI, etc. I wish the best of luck to the Journal.

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