

Estrategia de los países en desarrollo : *un bloque independiente de los bloques EE.UU-UE y Rusia-China*

The Wrong BRICS Expansion

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The BRICS group's planned enlargement is a missed opportunity. The world does not need more countries to fall under Chinese and Russian influence, or to align against the United States; rather, it needs a genuinely independent third grouping that can provide emerging economies a counterweight against both camps.

BOSTON – At first blush, it may seem like good news that the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) group will **expand** to include Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Argentina. An 11-strong BRICS+ could be more representative of the world's emerging economies, providing a useful counterweight against American hegemony.



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Yet, in many ways, the announced enlargement represents a major lost opportunity. The world does not need more countries to fall under Chinese and Russian influence, or to align against the United States; rather, it needs a genuinely independent third grouping to provide a counterweight against both the China-Russia axis and US power.

Because the enlargement includes only countries that already have friendly relations with China, BRICS+ is poised to be merely another tool of Chinese diplomacy. Rather than representing the interests of emerging economies, it will allow for greater Chinese involvement in them. Most likely, this will come at the expense of their workers and people, because **Chinese foreign investors tend to tolerate – or even encourage – corruption, reduced transparency, and wasteful megaprojects financed with loans that cannot be easily restructured.**

Moreover, adding Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, and the UAE will turn the BRICS into even more of an **“anti-democratic” club**. Yet among the institutions that emerging economies most need to ensure their future economic and social success, democracy is high on the list. My own **work** with Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and **James Robinson** finds that democratization, historically, has equipped countries to achieve faster economic growth within 5-10 years, reflecting increased investments in education, health, and other public services.

By contrast, Chinese engagement tends to **hamper democratization** and even **foment authoritarianism**. With many emerging economies facing a “**democracy crisis**,” and with a growing number of countries experiencing **weakening democratic institutions**, the new BRICS+ threatens to pour fuel on the fire.

Now that the Sino-American rivalry is intensifying – and potentially reshaping the world order – emerging economies increasingly need their own independent voice. After all, their interests are unlikely to be well served by worsening US-China relations and a reduction in their bilateral trade and financial flows.

Equally, emerging economies need to be able to influence the future of artificial intelligence and other rapidly evolving digital technologies. Even if the current enthusiasm around generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) **turns out to be mostly hype**, **rapid advances in AI and other communication technologies are still likely in the near term, and these will affect all countries, remaking the global division of labor.**

These technologies could have major **negative implications for workers**, especially in the emerging world, where countries such as India are already exporting various white-collar services. Ultimately, both white-collar and blue-collar **workers everywhere may end up competing not against expensive, highly educated labor in rich countries, but against AI-powered advanced software, machinery, and robotics.**

The same technologies are also likely to restructure politics in many countries, as AI-powered social media and misinformation (including deep fakes and other manipulative technologies) increasingly influence public opinion and electoral politics. Most developing and emerging economies do not have the supporting institutions needed to regulate and create guardrails against such disruptions.

Moreover, new technologies are giving governments unprecedentedly **powerful tools** for surveilling their populations and suppressing dissent. **Authoritarian regimes are already sharing technologies and techniques with each other.** Recent research shows that Chinese surveillance technologies are **rapidly being exported** to other non-democratic countries, with **Huawei** alone **exporting** such goods to 50 countries.

As matters stand, the future of technology is being shaped largely by Chinese authorities, US tech giants (with a limited degree of regulatory scrutiny), and – increasingly – European Union rules. None of these poles reflects the interests of the emerging world, and neither will BRICS+, which will most likely do China's bidding.

Fortunately, China's own narrow selection of new members may have created an opening for a promising alternative to BRICS+ to emerge. Other major emerging economies – such as Indonesia, **Turkey, Mexico, Colombia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Kenya** – could form a truly **independent bloc**, with the hope of ultimately attracting Argentina, Brazil, India, and South Africa to join them. Though each of these countries has had its own problems with democratic processes lately, their experience with democracy, together with their economic size, gives them common ground.

Even more to the point, they could collectively declare **independence from both China and the US**, giving the wider emerging world a sorely needed voice in debates about the future of globalization and technology. Such choices are far too important to be left to today's geopolitical rivals.



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