



THE EXPANSION OF BRICS MEMBERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE

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Abstract

The BRICS bloc has witnessed significant transformations recently, as it has played an important role in reshaping international relations and determining the future of the global economy. This bloc expanded its membership in 2024 by forming a group of six countries, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and Argentina, in an attempt to highlight its presence as an influential force on the international and commercial levels.

On this basis, this research paper aims to highlight the components and capabilities of these new countries and monitor their most important goals, which are expected to achieve many gains and effects on international trade by joining the BRICS group.

Keywords: BRICS, emerging powers, membership expansion, effects, international trade

INTRODUCTION

BRICS is one of the most important and modern international alliances. It has been able to achieve the fastest economic growth in a short period in a world witnessing great and rapid change, especially in light of the request of many countries to join this bloc, which means expanding its geographical area and increasing its capabilities.

The membership was expanded, which was not automatic, but rather based on several meetings between several countries, which represented the cornerstone during the summit on August 22 and 24, 2023, by inviting six new countries to join its full membership starting from January 1, 2024, in response to calls to accelerate the procedures for establishing the BRICS Plus bloc, to enhance its role on the world map to connect its east to its west and open its arms to connect its north to its south. These countries, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and Argentina, have received support and acceptance from BRICS leaders, with the aim of increasing the bloc's influence, which will inevitably contribute to imposing itself in its management of international trade, which will witness a new chapter with this expansion.

Importance of the study:

The importance of the topic, as it is one of the current topics, namely the expansion of BRICS membership, which represents the emerging powers of the global economy, which requires identifying this new bloc of six BRICS countries by shedding light on the motives leading these countries to request membership by addressing the most important initiatives to expand the bloc, highlighting the components and qualifications of these new countries and their goals within this bloc, and anticipating the future of BRICS-Plus in light of the strong influence and role played by the bloc towards international trade.

Study objectives:

This study aims to target a set of the following objectives:

- Giving an idea about the motives for expanding BRICS membership by analyzing the gains and possibilities of these six countries joining the BRICS bloc.



- Tracking the attempts and initiatives of BRICS-Plus to influence international trade in terms of the centers of power and influence in it in a way that achieves the expansion of the volume of trade exchanges and control over global markets.

Study Problem:

The subject of the study stands by raising a central question about the issue of these countries joining the BRICS bloc and what is the expected benefit from it in light of the current regional and international challenges, especially since this expansion will affect the aspect of international trade, which made it possible to formulate the main problem of the study, which is as follows: To what extent does the expansion of BRICS membership affect international trade?

Based on the problem of the study, a set of sub-questions are included:

- What are the most important initiatives to expand membership in the BRICS bloc?
- What are the motives and components of the accession of these new countries to the BRICS alliance?
- What are the effects of expanding BRICS membership on international trade as a reality and in the future?

Methodology:

This study relied on a combination of methods: The first method was the historical method to track the expansion of the bloc through the most important initiatives and events it knew; secondly, the descriptive method we used to present the motives and objectives of the BRICS bloc, and thirdly the analytical method in order to provide information and capabilities that qualified these six new countries for BRICS and their future impact on international trade, all of which serve the subject and help answer the various questions raised.

RESEARCH TERMINOLOGY:

Bloc: a process of association between two or more countries; the economic relations between these countries are closer than they are with the rest of the world's countries to reach very advanced stages of economic integration and merger (Mittaine & peguerul, 1999, p. 61).

BRICS refers to the initials of five countries: Brazil (B), Russia (R), India (i), China (C), and South Africa (S). It is an English term equivalent to the French ABRIC or BRICA. The term itself was coined by Jin ONeill of Goldman Sachs, a Wall Street bank, in 2001 under the title "Building a Better Global Economy BRICS" and was then reused in a statement issued by the organization in 2006. With the joining of South Africa in 2010, the term BRICS was adopted, which represents the emerging international bloc (Stuenkel, 2020, pp. 3-4).

International trade is one of the branches of economics that specializes in studying international trade transactions, represented by the movement of goods, services, and capital between different countries, as well as the trade policies implemented by the countries of the world to influence the movement of goods, services, and capital between those different countries (Al-Sattari, 2009).

Study plan:

Accordingly, we divided the study topic into the following two axes:

First axis: The conceptual framework for expanding BRICS membership.

Second axis: The impact of BRICS expansion on international trade.

First axis: The conceptual framework for expanding BRICS membership.

The truth is that talk about expanding BRICS membership has not stopped since the first years of announcing the establishment of the bloc, especially after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent division and dispersion in the global system and the trend towards forming economic and development alliances, which was reflected in what is known as the dual orientations of the



BRICS alliance by adding new countries to it on the one hand. Some countries are seeking to join it, on the other hand, in order to enhance its position and role in the future.

Accordingly, our study in this axis will be limited to giving an overview of the BRICS countries' openness to expanding membership as a first point, then moving on to explaining how new countries join BRICS membership as a second point.

First - An overview of the BRICS membership expansion:

The BRICS bloc witnessed the openness of member states to expand their membership, with China and Russia being the most vocal supporters of rapid expansion (Swaran, 2023) with the aim of forming a greater competitor to the Group of Seven major industrialized countries. India, Brazil, and South Africa were less enthusiastic about expansion on the basis that each had its details, especially adding new members.

Accordingly, we will clarify the most important motives and summits that called for expanding membership, which thus constitute goals and gains for the bloc. This is what we will explain in succession:

1- Motives for expanding BRICS membership:

It is noteworthy that the international circumstances in which the BRICS bloc began the process of expanding membership constitute an extremely sensitive stage, which can be explained as follows:

- An attempt to isolate Russia internationally due to its war on Ukraine and unprecedented economic sanctions on it will negatively affect the Russian role in accelerating the BRICS + project and building a new global geopolitical system.
- The escalation of the political and economic conflict between the United States and China due to the dispute over Taiwan Island and the South China Sea (Qourea & Gutierrez, 2023, p. 541).
- Seeking to diversify the sources of financing for the New Development Bank of BRICS by expanding the lending basket for the countries of the South as an alternative to the conditions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.
- Lessons of the coronavirus pandemic, as the BRICS bloc's efforts to expand membership, come as a result of containing the spread of the "Covid-19" pandemic and the subsequent adoption of policies of total and partial closure and the growth of the "concept of trade protectionism," in parallel with the closure of major industrial centers, and the slow recovery phase of global and emerging economies (Zahran).

2- The most important summits for expanding BRICS membership:

The most important summits for expanding BRICS membership are among the most important international events that constituted new starting points to accelerate the process of expanding the bloc and allowing more members with emerging economies to join it with the aim of creating a more just and rational world, and this is what we will work on clarifying in succession:

a. **On September 4, 2017**, BRICS held the ninth summit in Xiamen, China, and was joined in this summit by Thailand, Mexico, Egypt, Guinea, and Tajikistan as observer countries to discuss the "BRICS PLUS" plan, which aims to expand the bloc to include emerging economies from the global south. Still, the controversy is about how to expand, as it proposed integrating entire groups such as the Eurasian Union (EAEU), the South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAARC), the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Saad, 2023, p. 3).

b. **On July 27, 2018**, The 10th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, was attended by seven African heads of state, in addition to Argentina, Turkey, Egypt, and Angola. This summit focused on establishing South-South cooperation and partnership with Africa. South Africa also



continued the "BRICS Plus" initiative launched by China in 2017. Turkey attended the summit here as the head of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Carolina, 2018, pp. 59-63).

c. **On June 23, 2023**, The BRICS countries held the 14th virtual summit in Xinhua, hosted and chaired by China. It was noted that the process of expanding membership and expanding cooperation within the BRICS framework had begun, with discussions continuing on the issue of expanding membership and setting standards and procedures for this process on the basis of consensus (Kala, 2023, p. 99) to create a multipolar global system and facilitate trade and credit, while making the group's membership in the "New Development Bank" open to all countries, not just BRICS countries.

d. **22 to 24 August 2023**: The BRICS group announced at the conclusion of its 15th summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the second expansion of this bloc, with the announcement by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa of the acceptance of 6 new countries to join the BRICS group of emerging economies: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Argentina, to become full members of BRICS, with the membership of the six countries to take effect on January 1, 2024 (2023, p. 1).

3 - BRICS objectives of expanding membership:

The BRICS Johannesburg Summit sought to achieve a set of goals:

- a. Inaugurating a multipolar world as an alternative to the unipolar system's policy
- b. Improving global governance by promoting a more flexible, democratic, and accountable multilateral international system.
- c. Establishing an alternative international economic system using a unified currency to pay trade payments instead of the dominance of the US dollar over global financial policies.
- d. Increasing the participation of emerging markets and developing countries in international organizations and multilateral forums by encouraging the use of national currencies in international trade and financial transactions, whether within BRICS countries or with trading partners.
- e. Promoting the common interests of the global south through decision-making processes in global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Summit, 2023, pp. 2-3).
- f. Promoting transparency and coordinating positions in international forums such as the United Nations and the G20.
- g. Promoting global security, peace, and stability for economic growth and political stability.
- h. Unifying BRICS efforts to ensure improving the quality of growth by encouraging innovative economic development based on advanced technology and skills development (Farouk, 2024, p. 9).

Second - The accession of the six new countries to BRICS membership:

As explained in detail in the first section of this study, the leaders of the bloc agreed to accept the membership of the six countries mentioned above, which is, of course, a major step towards expanding the scope of the group and increasing the representation and influence of BRICS countries. Especially since these six countries add new economic diversities to the five BRICS countries. The basis on which the decision to accept the membership of any of the six countries was based and the non-acceptance of the other countries that expressed their desire to join the bloc needed to be clarified. From all of this, we will monitor the most important motives and reasons that made these six countries seek to join the bloc. We will review the most important components that qualified them to be accepted within the BRICS bloc, on the one hand, and what they will achieve in terms of gains and privileges, whether as new countries or for the countries of the bloc, on the other hand... This is as follows:

1- Motives for the six countries to join BRICS:



It is certain that the six countries' reasons and motives for seeking BRICS membership varied greatly, and we will work to clarify this in succession.

- The six countries' accession to BRICS membership is a move away from international tensions, especially the dominance of the United States of America and NATO and their quest to enter a multi-power system led by China and Russia (Al-Bayati, 2023) .
- Saudi Arabia and the UAE seek to diversify their economic and security partnerships internationally with emerging industrial markets and to play more independent roles from Washington.
- Egypt seeks to find solutions to its complex economic and financial crises and gain some political appreciation after its recent decline in regional influence in the Middle East and Africa.
- Iran seeks to alleviate the impact of Western sanctions and revives efforts to isolate it by establishing alternative commercial and technical relations with Western countries (IFR, 2023).
- Ethiopia faces financial collapse and varying degrees of geopolitical instability, especially given the lukewarmness in its Western relations over the past few years.
- Argentina stands on the brink of bankruptcy and seeks BRICS support for its collapsing economy through facilities from the BRICS Development Bank (Situation, 2023).

2- The strengths of the six new countries:

These six countries have some capabilities and components that represent an addition to BRICS. Accordingly, we summarize the most prominent of them according to each country as follows:

Egypt: Its accession is due to the strength of economic and political relations between it and the bloc countries. It enjoys an important strategic location on global transportation routes. It is an important partner for China in achieving the Belt and Road Initiative (El Sayed), as its population reaches 107 million people in 2023 (Zahran), in addition to its geopolitical position in the Middle East and Africa region, as well as its membership in the League of Arab States and the African Union.

Saudi Arabia: Its accession is due to the strength of its economic and trade relations with some BRICS countries, such as China and India. It is the largest economy in the Middle East, with (El Sayed) 19% of the world's oil reserves, 12% of global production, and more than 20% of oil sales in global markets, in addition to having a refining capacity of more than 5 million barrels per day, domestically and abroad (Al-Alami, 2024), in addition to its strategic location, as its population in 2023 exceeds 36.9 million people (Zahran), and its continuous efforts to increase the diversification of its non-oil sources of income by opening new markets for trade and investment.

UAE: It is a global center for trade and economic development, with a population of 9.5 million people according to 2023. Its strategic location enhances the volume of inter-trade between it and the bloc countries.

Argentina: It has a diversified economy, rich natural resources, and a geographical location as a pivotal country in the global south. It is a member of the G20 and plays a role in international economic and political affairs (El Sayed). Its population will reach 45.7 million in 2023 (Zahran). Therefore, its inclusion in BRICS will enhance economic cooperation in various fields and coordination between other countries.

Iran has a large and diversified economy, depends on oil and gas exports, and has regional influence regarding its nuclear program. Therefore, its inclusion in BRICS will enhance the geopolitical balance of the BRICS bloc in global affairs (El Sayed). Its population will reach 89.1 million in 2023.

Ethiopia: According to 2023 statistics (Zahran), its population reaches 126.3 million people, and it is a regionally important country, especially in East Africa. In addition to its important strategic location on global trade routes, the diversity of its natural resources of energy, minerals, and agriculture and



its joining of BRICS constitute African representation and regional cooperation in the east of the continent.

3- Gains from the six countries joining BRICS:

There are several gains, including the following:

- Strengthening their role globally and regionally in formulating global policies and achieving their interests.
- Diversifying the national monetary chains of these countries reduces dependence on the US dollar in their commercial transactions and access to broad markets that include about 40% of the world's population.
- Increased importation of trade and investment in countries that represent about 25% of global production.
- Confronting global crises represented by food, energy, debt, and climate.
- Increasing opportunities for transferring technology and technical expertise from advanced BRICS member countries.
- Strengthening national security in the face of common security threats (El Sayed).

Second axis: The impact of BRICS expansion on international trade:

With this new expansion, the BRICS Plus bloc now includes ten emerging countries and emerging economies, constituting approximately 45% of the world's population, 40% of global oil production, and 28% of global GDP, controlling 25% of global trade (Liangyan, 2024, p. 1) as indicated Here, despite being officially invited, Argentina did not respond to this call and announced its decision after joining the BRICS group at the end of 2023.

Accordingly, it is expected that doubling the size of BRICS+ as of January 1, 2024, will significantly impact international trade in the long term through several factors, such as political and economic developments in member states, developments in international relations, and global trends, including trade agreements, both bilateral and multilateral. From all of this, we will try to explain this as a first point, then move on to predicting the future of international trade in BRICS Plus as a second point.

First: The impact of the BRICS+ bloc on international trade:

The membership of the BRICS+ bloc, the exemptions and liberalization of trade exchanges, and the intensification of economic relations it provides will be a positive driver in influencing the increase in the volume of international trade by opening up wide markets for trade movement and diversifying foreign investment, and how global supply chains develop to move forward (Qourea & Gutierrez, 2023, p. 547), as well as expanding the use of the new reserve currency, which will constitute a new starting point for the entire global trade scene. This is what we will explain in succession:

1- Increase in the volume of international trade:

The BRICS+ bloc witnessed a significant increase in the volume of its international trade after the inclusion of new countries in January 2024, through several main factors behind this growth:

Growth of internal markets: Given their large population, trade between the BRICS+ countries continues to grow, which led to an expansion within the bloc (Qourea & Gutierrez, 2023, p. 547) and created new opportunities for companies within the group to increase their exports and stimulate the growth of inter- and international trade.

- **Enhancing economic cooperation and integration:** BRICS+ is a unique new platform for cross-regional interaction aimed at enhancing the stability and transparency of the international trading system and strengthening the positions of developing countries in the global economy.



And signing free trade agreements (Liangyan, 2024, p. 2), setting common standards for products and improving working methods, removing customs barriers (Arapova, 2019, pp. 33-34), and overcoming trade protectionist pressures (Liangyan, 2024, p. 2) to facilitate the movement of goods and services. In addition, (Arapova, 2019, p. 43) the inclusion of oil-producing countries, led by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, in the presence of Russia, represents a great opportunity to increase the bloc's oil reserves, especially since the energy market through BRICS+ has a significant impact on global energy prices and markets. (Ishaque, 2024, p. 19)

Opening up markets: BRICS+ countries are implementing economic reforms aimed at expanding their local markets and opening them up to large flows of foreign direct investment. This attracts more global partnerships, creates profitable opportunities for foreign investors (Quelles sont les perspectives d'avenir pour brics entanque groupe économique influent ?, 2023), and increases the volume of international trade.

2- Reshaping global supply chains:

The expansion of the bloc into new trade and investment alliances will lead to the re-network of new global supply chains through:

- **Diversification of sources:** BRICS Plus countries seek to establish a platform for diversifying influence (villanueva, 2024, p. 14) by facilitating the establishment of alternative supply chains, stimulating trade growth, diversifying their trade sources and reducing costs, and promoting e-commerce and market integration (Ishaque, 2024, p. 20) to reduce dependence on Western countries, which leads to strengthening their global supply chain network to enter a new era of global development (Qourea & Gutierrez, 2023, p. 547).

- **Building infrastructure:** BRICS+ countries focus on concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements. For example, The BRICS Development Bank was established to finance and improve infrastructure projects (Quelles sont les perspectives d'avenir pour brics entanque groupe économique influent ?, 2023) such as ports, high-speed railways, and renewable energy projects, which improve the efficiency of supply chains and modernize transportation and logistics systems for trade (villanueva, 2024, pp. 14-15).

- **Technological innovation:** Increased innovation and technological exchange within the BRICS+ group contributes in the medium and long term to changing the global trade structure (Arapova, 2019, p. 43) with the emergence of new technologies that improve the efficiency of international trade, such as the global increase in the number of traded goods and services (Qourea & Gutierrez, 2023, p. 540).

3- Creating a new reserve currency: Through this new financial process, the bloc aims to:

Establishing the BRICS+ financial system: The bloc is working to create a new financial system that includes a new development bank and a new reserve currency based on the currencies of the BRICS+ member countries (Lissovolik, brics-plus : the new force in global governance, 2023, p. 144). This will reduce dependence on the US dollar and Western financial institutions (Ishaque, 2024, p. 19) in international trade.

Stabilizing markets: Progress toward a new unified reserve currency will benefit global financial markets and reduce the risks of currency fluctuations (Lissovolik, brics+Analytic: brics-plus after 2023 expansion summit pathways to peace and security, volume 65, N°2 , 2023, p. 43).

- **Greater influence:** The launch of a new reserve currency will enhance the expansion of possibilities to diversify reserves and reduce the vulnerabilities associated with them, based on the new reserve currency, which could become one of the most important contributions of emerging markets to building a safer and more influential international financial system (Lissovolik, brics+Analytic: brics-plus after 2023 expansion summit pathways to peace and security, volume 65, N°2 , 2023, p. 145)



Second: The future of international trade in BRICS Plus

The future of the BRICS Plus bloc as an influential economic group seems promising, thanks to its strong economic growth, growing regional integration, and increasing geopolitical influence, to become a major player on the global stage by continuing to develop its trade cooperation and strengthening its strategic alliances, so that these new member states can continue to shape the future of international trade to adapt to the influences above that played an important role in increasing the volume of their international trade. Accordingly, in the end, we tried to predict the future of international trade in the BRICS + bloc, which allowed us to envision three main scenarios that are expected to occur, as follows:

1- The success scenario:

It is the most optimistic scenario, based on the assumption that the expansion of BRICS is a unique platform for interaction (Arapova, 2019, p. 33). Influence by bringing The new members have additional potential to shape intra-BRICS+ trade, whether in food markets or energy cooperation through the inclusion of major oil producers or even additional contributions to the BRICS+ New Development Bank. This has enabled the BRICS+ countries to liberalize globalization and increase capital flows available for investment and loans (Maihold, 2024, p. 18) to achieve a positive result as a cohesive bloc (Ishaque, 2024, p. 21) by reducing dependence on the US dollar through the use of local currencies in international trade and financial transactions (as an example, India and the UAE recently agreed to conduct trade in their currencies) and their trading partners, which partially reduces their exposure to future foreign exchange fluctuations. (Aflota & others, 2024, p. 7)

2- Failure scenario:

It is a scenario based on a division between BRICS members who have big differences and tensions with the West in general and the United States in particular (Russia, China, and Iran) (Kotz, 2024, p. 10)

Also, talking about reducing the dominance of the dollar in the BRICS markets + by promoting the new currency of the BRICS + bloc will be difficult to implement because it only serves some members. India here is considered an allied partner of the United States and will not squander its economic gains in favor of siding with one party over the other. It does not want to enhance the influence of the Chinese yuan, especially in light of the trade competition between the two countries, which have witnessed repeated border clashes (Carmody, 2024, p. 16), which may lead to the resulting fragmentation of the BRICS + bloc's effectiveness as a unified force for change and limit its ability to translate its economic power into meaningful global influence (juteen, 2024, p. 7).

3- realistic scenario: It is a more multifaceted scenario, through which we notice that the expansion of BRICS makes it incomplete by including several countries, as some agree with each other or with previous members while emphasizing that the bloc, despite being multicontinental, cannot reach a consensus (Carmody, 2024, p. 16) on the project of using a common currency for international trade for BRICS + to escape from the dollar, which was mentioned as a path that was discussed before the Johannesburg Summit, which received the support of the majority of member states, but it will be difficult if this idea succeeds (Aflota & others, 2024, p. 7), especially since it takes the form of bilateral agreements. However, intra-trade between BRICS + countries is somewhat low, with the exception of bilateral trade with China, and therefore, the scope of such a decision will be limited, with all BRICS members continuing to use the dollar in a large part of their foreign trade (Maihold, 2024, p. 7), which weakens trade integration within the bloc and the economic heterogeneity of these countries, and somewhat limits its ability to influence the course of global trade and the international monetary system

The three future scenarios for the impact of BRICS+ on international trade, as optimistic as the first scenario is, remain far from reality. It is very difficult to determine whether the expansion of the BRICS bloc will have positive effects on the global economy and international trade because this



depends on the speed of the new bloc's adoption of trade systems and the extent to which it moves away from the dollar, in addition to its management of international trade and its dealings with global markets. As for the second scenario, we see it as unlikely at present because it is difficult to judge whether the expansion of the BRICS bloc will have negative effects that will fail on the global economy and international trade due to the inclusion of new huge economies that could raise trade and investment and increase the weight of its share. Finally, the third scenario is the most likely to be achieved in the near future, as the bloc countries are working hard to introduce the new common currency for international trade for BRICS+. Still, it will not reach the point of being an effective international trade pole that can impose its agenda on the rest of the world.

CONCLUSION:

Based on what was presented in the folds of this research study, we concluded that the expansion of BRICS membership represents a turning point in the history of international trade, as it aims to have an impact on reshaping a more just and sustainable global economic system. Accordingly, we extracted a set of results that we will try to summarize as follows:

- 1- As we saw when analyzing the motives of each new country, the expansion of this bloc requires large investments in developing new infrastructure, framing a coordinated policy between countries to facilitate trade, and perhaps most importantly, the willingness to overcome geopolitical differences within member states in favor of a cooperative future.
- 2- The BRICS Plus countries seek to increase the volume of international trade by expanding markets, diversifying supply chains, and creating new investment opportunities.
- 3—The expansion encouraged the development of alternative currencies by reducing the dollar's dominance in international trade and raising the level of trade exchange between them and with the outside world, which led to an increase in trade flows.
- 4- The BRICS Plus countries sought to challenge Western dominance in the global trading system by changing the balance of global economic powers by proposing the formulation of new rules for international trade that reflect the interests of developing countries. In the end, it can be said that the future of BRICS Plus is still a relatively new initiative, which means that its actual impact on international trade is still not entirely clear, making it difficult to assess all the potential effects of expansion in the short term. The path will witness a state of anticipation and uncertainty that will be reflected in its performance in the coming years so that we will see a new chapter in international trade, the results of which depend on many changing factors.

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