INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL PROSPERITY

The politics of national and international climate policy:
Exploring the role of sovereignty, cooperation, and peer pressure on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the BRICS.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of sovereignty, cooperation and peer pressure on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the BRICS countries, within the context of the first global stock take in 2023, and looking ahead to the next generation of NDCs that are due for submission in 2025. To achieve this, this study will use a qualitative research approach to review the NDC submissions of the BRICS countries, the Joint Statements from the annual BRICS summits, and other secondary data to understand the extent to which climate policies are designed within the political and national circumstances that make the adoption of such policies likely. This research highlights that, as envisaged by the Paris Agreement, the BRICS countries NDCs are developed in light of different national circumstances. However, this is currently allowing the BRICS to shy away from effective climate mitigation and collective action, in pursuit of their own short-term political priorities. The BRICS have institutionalised their relationship and have cooperated successfully to promote the interests of developing countries in global climate governance. Although they have an opportunity to shape climate policy and assume a leadership role as a coalition, this will depend on the extent to which they can find and maintain common interests. This study highlights that there is a clear will domestically for BRICS countries to strengthen their climate commitments and concludes that it is time for the BRICS to 'graduate' to developed countries in the climate regime, stop creating an 'illusion of action', and start shouldering responsibility for climate change as an immediate global priority.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background for this study

The inaugural assessment report of the IPCC was published in 1990, which "underlined the importance of climate change as a challenge with global consequences and requiring international cooperation" (IPCC, n.d., p. 1). Since then, there has been a significant increase in international frameworks, conferences and action plans.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was established in 1992 to "avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system" (UNFCCC, n.d. f, p. 1), and adopted the "so-called convention-protocol approach, through which—as a first step—the institutional framework is established under the convention and only as a second step are commitments agreed upon to address the problem at hand through subsequent protocols" (Kuyper, Schroeder and Linner, 2018, p. 349). The treaty has a total of 198 ratifications (197 states and the EU), and each year a Conference of the Parties (COP) is convened, including representatives from all 'parties', and a growing spectrum of stakeholders from non-party 'observer' organisations (non-governmental organisations including financial institutions, civil society, local communities and the private sector), to review progress and take decisions to promote the implementation of the treaty (CISL, n.d.). The conferences themselves typically provide the space to finalise and formalise the outcomes of discussions which have taken place throughout the year, through both informal and formal negotiations, including inter-sessional 'technical' meetings and a 'Pre-COP' which takes place months in advance (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, 2023). Generally, at the end of each conference, which increasingly include a variety of side-events, a binding agreement or statement is released publicly.

By 1997, following two years of negotiations, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, operationalising the UNFCCC, and "legally binding developed country Parties to emission reduction targets" (UNFCCC, n.d. c, p. 1). These developed or industrialised countries are referred to as 'Annex 1' countries and include members of the OECD and 'economies in transition'. Despite this perceived progress, "the US Senate refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, citing potential damage to the US economy as their motive, setting a precedent for countries such as Canada and Japan to pull out of the deal without penalty in 2011" (Bassetti, 2022, p. 2). Therefore, momentum began to stall, and this came to a head in Copenhagen in 2009 at COP15, which despite much expectation, went significantly wrong, with Barack Obama aware that the US Senate would not agree to binding targets, China and India disrupting progress in pursuit of their own interests, and even the Danish government providing a venue that was too small, meaning many 'observers' were denied access (Maslin, Lang and Harvey, 2023). Parties arrived "with a 200+ page draft and [left] with a five-page Accord that was only 'taken note of' - not adopted – hurt[ing] the legitimacy of the UNFCCC"

(Allan *et al*, 2023, p. 925). In fact, The Bolivian delegation "summed up the way the Copenhagen Accord was reached: 'anti-democratic, anti-transparent and unacceptable'" (Maslin, Lang and Harvey, 2023, p. 4).

The Paris Agreement, adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, must be understood within the context of these failures - "it combines earlier design elements, incorporates others, and adds new ones" (Allan *et al*, 2023, pp. 916-917). Crucially, it adheres to the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', meaning that "while there is a duty on all countries to take climate action, the types of action they take will depend on their differing national circumstances (UN, 2021, p. 1), or as Victor puts it, "every country has its own national interests and needs the flexibility to align what it does globally with what is doable locally" (Victor, 2015, p. 1).

It was hailed as a breakthrough in climate negotiations, overcoming years of gridlock, with a goal to limit "the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels… and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels" (UNFCCC, n.d. e, p. 1). Central to the Paris Agreement are the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which countries are required to submit every 5 years, and which "embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change" (UNFCCC, n.d. d, p. 1). Collectively, these climate action plans will "determine whether the world achieves the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement" (UNFCCC, n.d. d, p. 1). The latest round of updated NDCs were required to be submitted by 2020, and the next iteration is due by 2025, with the intention that "successive NDCs will represent a progression compared to the previous NDC and reflect its highest possible ambition" (UNFCCC, n.d. d, p. 1).

In addition to this, every 5 years a global stocktake is conducted to assess progress against the goals of the Paris Agreement. The first of these concluded at COP28 in 2023, and warned that the "world is significantly off track in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement and urgent action is needed to combat the growing threats posed by climate change" (UN, n.d., p. 1). The stocktake "can help policymakers and stakeholders strengthen their climate policies and commitments in their next round of NDCs, paving the way for accelerated action" (UN, n.d., p. 1).

The above background begins to highlight the role of national sovereignty in international climate governance and collective action. Particularly key to this climate governance and action are the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), who "represent a particular class of states ('advanced developing countries', 'major emitters', 'major economies') whose development choices are critical to the future of climate change but whose governments have all too often proved to be obstructionist and negative" (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 464).

1.2 Scope, aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the role of sovereignty, cooperation and peer pressure on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the BRICS countries, within the context of the first global stock take in 2023, and looking ahead to the next generation of NDCs that are due for submission in 2025.

This study will review the NDC submissions of the BRICS countries; namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Additional literature, documentation and data relating to multilateral BRICS cooperation, emissions and energy profiles, and local perceptions will be analysed, to explore to what extent climate policies are designed within the political and national circumstances that make the adoption of such policies likely.

The primary research questions for this study are:

- How do political and national circumstances influence the design of the BRICS countries NDCs?
- To what extent have the BRICS countries effectively cooperated to influence international climate policy, and what is the potential for this going forward?
- How is international and local peer pressure contributing to progress and convergence in the BRICS countries NDCs and climate ambition?

1.3 Rationale and significance

Despite 30 UN Climate Change Conferences and wide-ranging actions at national and local levels, global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions are 60% higher than in 1990 and continue to rise (Stoddard *et al*, 2021). Global action to date in response to climate change and its impacts has predominantly focussed on the development of "global frameworks and agreements to guide progress" (UNFCCC, n.d. b, p. 3) which have "not generated action at anywhere near the rate, scale or depth needed to avoid potentially catastrophic futures" (Wamsler *et al*, 2020, p. 227). These dominant approaches have, so far, "focused on the external world of wider socio-economic structures, governance dynamics, economic incentives, and technology" (Wamsler *et al*, 2020, p. 227). And efforts are often confronted by "the resilience of the Westphalian construct of the modern state which prioritizes territorial sovereignty and national interests over global governance priorities" (Murombedzi and Chikozho, 2023, p. 13).

This is particularly interesting when analysing the role of the BRICS. The BRICS countries comprise 41.9% of the world's population and generate over 42% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong, 2024). Despite this, and their growing economic and political influence, their role in global climate governance, and the contents and credibility of their climate commitments remains relatively under-scrutinised. There has been debate around the capacity of the BRICS to act as a coalition and effectively shape international agendas and outcomes, given their diverse economic and political structures (Downie and Williams, 2018), and there is now a need to apply this same debate to global climate governance.

With the first global stock take concluding in 2023, and the next generation of NDCs due for submission in 2025, this is a pivotal moment to explore the continued role of national sovereignty in designing NDCs, but also the role that cooperation amongst the BRICS and the global South, and international and local peer pressure could play in driving forward ambition, in line with the Paris Agreements intention of progression from one NDC to the next. This study will therefore look to analyse the role of peer pressure within and outside of the BRICS bloc, and the impact this may have on their climate ambition and their ability to act as a coalition on global climate governance.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The current failure to mitigate against climate change can be associated to a variety of factors. Lamb and Minx (2020) provide four over-arching explanations in their research on the political economy of national policy;

> "One prominent explanation is that a top-down global agreement on burden sharing, technological transfers and climate finance is needed… Another… puts the blame on intrinsic human characteristics… A third avenue focuses on social and infrastructural sources of carbon 'lock-in'… A fourth explanation centres on the political economy of energy transitions" (Lamb and Minx, 2020, pp. 2-3).

Conversely, Averchenkova and Chan (2023) have identified several 'drivers' of political commitments to net zero;

> "International peer pressure and leadership… supranational legal requirements… historical context and political culture…economic… political party competition… climate vulnerability… science and knowledge" (Averchenkova and Chan, 2023, pp. 2-3).

This literature review will initially focus on providing an overview of current literature and research relating to two of the factors explored above; national climate policy and international climate governance, to frame the discussion later in this study. It will then also look to further contextualise the landscape of NDCs, the Paris Agreement and current research relating to the BRICS.

2.1 National climate policy

A significant number of climate policies are enacted at the national level, and the scale and scope of these policies are influenced by a number of factors. The short-term political election cycles are at odds with the long-term nature of climate policies; "enacting policies today to cut greenhouse gas emissions won't have a discernible impact on global warming for decades, if not centuries. That's because we have already locked in significant warming due to our historical emissions" (Harder, 2019, p. 2). National politics is often influenced by immediate issues, such as unemployment, economic growth and global conflict. Harris (2021) details, "… more often than not, climate action never makes it to the top of the list, and at the very least is watered down. For most countries, then, climate governance is very largely a function of domestic political considerations" (Harris, 2021, p. 62). However, given that climate change is cumulative, if effective policy implementation continues to be delayed, the problem becomes more severe and more difficult to solve (Harder, 2019).

How climate change is perceived will also depend on the local context. Some countries face a clear existential threat, and climate change is a national priority (e.g. island states at risk from sea-level rise), for others, climate denial is common and climate change is viewed as a threat to national interests, whilst some see climate action as a threat (e.g. where economies are reliant on fossil fuels) (Harris, 2021). Further still, for

some countries, “climate change may even be perceived as an economic opportunity… Russia, for example, sees benefits in the opening of Arctic sea routes due to global warming” (Harris, 2021, p. 61). However, “for most other countries, climate change falls somewhere in the middle: it is viewed as a long-term threat worthy of action, but other national interests… often weigh heavily on politicians and policymakers” (Harris, 2021, p. 62). Another issue for politicians is that climate action does not always have a strong rallying call, as policies can often result in disruption to the status-quo and short-term costs, and rhetoric to ‘slow down damage’ hardly generates excitement amongst voters.

Public opinion can also have a huge sway on climate action. Climate change is “a non-linear problem” (Markman, 2018, p. 1); its effects can be distant and difficult to visualise (Markman, 2018). Lamb and Minx (2020) explain “humans are uniquely unsuited to perceiving the proximity and severity of climate change, and consequently taking actions… we struggle with ethical and socio-temporal aspects of climate change mitigation, such as the need to shoulder the costs of mitigation on behalf of distant victims and future generations. A ‘perfect moral storm’ locks society and its institutions into inaction… human infrastructures have built-in sources of inertia that severely constrain the speed and ambition of transitions” (Lamb and Minx, 2020, p. 1).

2.2 International climate governance

Stoddard *et al* (2021) note that, “at the international level, a key response to climate change has been to develop a regime—a form of governance centred on a legal treaty that enables cooperation and negotiation between sovereign states, based on agreed principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures” (Stoddard *et al*, 2021, p. 659). The outcome of such regimes have varied. They have “raised awareness, promoted learning, established reporting and monitoring systems, galvanized large sections of civil society, and achieved some convergence of norms” (Stoddard *et al*, 2021, p. 659), yet subsequent climate action has not kept up with the speed and scale of the problem.

This may be a result of a global system that “divides the world into nominally sovereign states whose legitimacy and meaning derive from acting upon their individual, separate interests” (Harris, 2021, p. 58). International climate governance is therefore significantly impacted by the self-interest of countries and further hampered by insufficient sanctions or incentives to drive action and mitigation, leading countries to “minimise costs, avoid strong commitments, and freeride on the actions of others” (Lamb and Minx, 2020, p. 1). The world’s largest emitters have “failed to decisively lead in addressing climate change, both in achieving significant emission cuts and providing adequate and predictable finance, which could have built trust and impetus for a ‘race to the top’” (Stoddard *et al*, 2021, p. 661). International frameworks may in fact create an ‘illusion of action’, “compromised by political grandstanding and wider geopolitical game-playing” (Stoddard *et al*, 2021, p. 661), whilst enabling countries to carry on as before. Similarly, Harris (2021) explains;

> "there is a case to be made that the very process of governing climate change internationally has been intended, at least by some countries, to prevent more aggressive action. There is an impression that many of the agreements reached during COP negotiations were 'empty', actually designed to give the impression of progress when none had been realised, in the process legitimising the lack of collective action and, in effect, preventing more effective climate governance" (Harris, 2021, p. 58).

2.3 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the Paris Agreement

The COP21 conference held in Paris in 2015, "was the culmination of efforts to move international climate governance away from top-down collective mandates to bottom-up national pledges… This bottom-up approach to climate regulation – essentially self-regulation – for the first time openly put the sovereign autonomy of states foremost, albeit in the cause of achieving a common, global objective to govern climate change more effectively" (Harris, 2021, p. 50). It was "celebrated as 'the world's greatest diplomatic success', 'a climate diplomacy masterpiece' and 'a model of effective global governance'… largely ascribed to the agreement's novel approach, which offers extensive flexibility for member countries and enables each party to freely choose the ambition level of its NDC" (Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin, 2023, p. 2).

Allan *et al* (2023) analyse the institutional design of the Paris Agreement, explaining that all parties have 'symmetrical' responsibilities regardless of whether they are developed or developing nations (Allan *et al*, 2023). They detail the various elements which make the agreement a 'goldilocks' solution, "by combining ambitious goals, universal participation, nationally determined responsibilities, and a ratchet mechanism within a hybrid agreement" (Allan *et al*, 2023, p. 918). The 'ratchet mechanism' is "designed to progressively increase the overall level of commitment… [and] operates through cycles of pledge and review. Every 5 years, countries are invited to submit or update their NDCs" (Allan *et al*, 2023, p. 918). Combined with the 'no backsliding' principle and the global stocktake which takes place three years after each submission, there is an expectation that countries pledges will get progressively more ambitious. Bultheel, Morel and Alberola (2016) explain that this "new transnational approach of climate governance also relies on (i) multiple cooperative frameworks to accelerate sharing of best practices and afford access to low-carbon solutions for all Parties and actors, and (ii) a stronger 'peer pressure' system to maintain and enhance existing commitments and actions from all stakeholders" (Bultheel, Morel and Alberola, 2016, p. 1).

Linked to this, Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin (2023) explore the role of social pressure in international climate politics, noting that "given that the Paris Agreement has no enforcement mechanism and that implementing strong enforcement measures is politically infeasible in the realm of international politics, social pressure may be one of the few tools these actors can use to incite positive change" (Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin, 2023, p. 2). Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin (2023) go on to discuss "how strong

social pressure concerning ambition might cause a compliance gap that could prove difficult or even impossible to bridge" (Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin, 2023, p. 2), and conclude that "social pressure may be counterproductive… it is essential for further research to determine whether and if so, how and what types of social pressure work" (Stankovic, Hovi and Skodvin, 2023, p. 4). Similarly, Bressand and Ekins (2021) explain "the science-informed discourse of which IPCC reports are the cornerstone is far from having achieved the global 'discursive hegemony' that Europe's 'lead by example' discourse assumes. In the era of the sovereign determination of NDCs when China's New Silk-Road initiative promotes hundreds of coal-fired plants, the international context also requires high levels of reflexivity on the part of the climate epistemic community" (Bressand and Ekins, 2021, p. 4).

In recent years, literature relating to the role of the NDCs has been growing. Mills-Novoa and Liverman (2019) explore the "discursive narratives embedded in the NDCs" (Mills-Novoa and Liverman, 2019, p. 1) and highlights "the stark contrasts in NDC discourses between North and South, as well as between historical emitters and emerging economies… reflecting deeper debates regarding justice and equity between nations within the UNFCCC negotiations" (Mills-Novoa and Liverman, 2019, p. 1). Jernnäs *et al* identifies the "governance mechanisms proposed by states in their NDCs… and how cross-national patterns of roles for the state break or converge with conventional patterns of international politics" (Jernnäs *et al*, 2019, p. 1).

2.4 BRICs

The term BRIC was initially coined by Jim O'Neill in a 2001 Goldman Sachs report entitled 'Building Better Global Economic BRICs' analysing the economic growth expected in Brazil, Russia, India and China (Duggan *et al*, 2022). These emerging powers soon became "a major political coalition in international affairs and gained incremental significance in global governance" (Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong, 2024, p. 1). They started a political dialogue process in 2006 and in 2009 the first BRIC Summit was held, which has brought together leaders of the BRIC governments on an annual basis since then (Duggan *et al*, 2022). In 2011, South Africa joined this grouping "as an economic outperformer in the Global South … taking the BRICs to BRICS" (Chatterjee and Naka, 2022, p. 2), and on 1 January 2024, the BRICS admitted four new members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, whilst Saudi Arabia are understood to be considering an invitation to join. This new grouping has been informally referred to as BRICS+ (European Parliament, 2024).

There has been much debate about the success of the BRICS in forming a cohesive geopolitical bloc to challenge the traditional industrial powers of the West. Chatterjee and Naka (2022) note that the "initial cohesion is increasingly impossible to sustain amid differing and at times even conflicting political interests amongst the BRICS countries. Heightened India–China hostility in recent years and the muted economic performance of Brazil and South Africa have undermined the BRICS' potential for co-ordinated geopolitical influence and economic policies, respectively (Chatterjee and Naka, 2022, p. 4). Similarly, Duggan *et al* (2022) suggests that the internal

institutionalization of the BRICS – the strengthening of the BRICS cooperation and expanding the BRICS agenda – remains limited, and the group operates as an issue-based body. There is no common strategy or grand vision among them. However, the countries primarily have in common that they value respect for their national sovereignty, stress economic growth and development, and perceive the existing multilateral order in which they are underrepresented as unjust." (Duggan *et al*, 2022, p. 3).

Therefore, others argue that the annual government meetings coordinating various multilateral policies points to a success story as the BRICS have "gradually progressed in their bilateral and multilateral dialogue and cooperation processes on various issues… and despite having ideological and political differences, this loose coalition has developed into a formal economic and political partnership" (Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong, 2024, p. 2). The BRICS also present a potential for south-south cooperation, "as it connects regions… [and] acts as an integrator of the developing world. [It] is an attempt to enhance cooperation within a group of developing countries for strengthening stability and enhancing the role of developing countries in global governance" (Duggan *et al*, 2022, p. 6), and standing against imperialism and colonisation (Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong, 2024).

Despite more extensive research on the economic and geopolitical influence on the BRICS, there has been limited research into the NDCs of the BRICS. Particularly relevant to this study; Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong (2024) explores climate governance pathways for BRICS in the post-Paris era, Downie and Williams (2018) explore the role of the BRICS in global climate governance post-Paris Agreement, and Basso and Viola (2022) describe the extent to which the BRICS are engaged in the low-carbon transition.

Based on this, there is a general consensus on the significant role that the BRICS will play in climate governance going forward, as Kuyper, Schroeder and Linner (2018) explains;

> "The question of who are the significant countries in international climate governance, and who will be significant as we move into the implementation of NDCs, is changing with the emergence of new markets and uptake of noncarbon technologies. In 2007, China overtook the United States as the highest gross emitter of GHGs. This ushered in a shift in focus from historical emissions to emission rate increases of rapidly developing countries, in particular China, but also India, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico" (Kuyper, Schroeder and Linner 2018, p. 348).

Alongside this, global climate politics is often analysed through a lens of North-South relations, where emerging powers are viewed as a problem and stalling effective climate action. However, as Hurrell and Sengupta (2012) explain:

> "Unequal development and inequality remain at the heart of the problem of global environmental politics. On the one hand, there is the range of

> environmental problems caused by the affluence of the industrialized countries; by the extent to which this affluence has been built upon high and unsustainable levels of energy consumption and natural resource depletion; and by the 'ecological shadow' cast by these economies across the economic system. On the other, there is the widely recognized linkage between poverty, population pressure and environ mental degradation. Sustainable development is an inherently global issue, both because of the high levels of economic interdependence that exist within many parts of the world economy and because it raises fundamental and unavoidable questions of justice concerning the distribution of wealth, power and resources between rich and poor" (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 482).

This study will look to build on this literature to explore the role of cooperation and peer pressure in impacting the climate policies and action of the BRICS.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research is aligned to the pragmatic paradigm, which places the "research problem as central and applies all approaches to understanding the problem" (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p. 28). This allows for "multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis" (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p. 188). This study employs mixed methods, allowing different perspectives to be understood.

This study used a qualitative research approach and offers a thematic, case study and discourse analysis of the role of sovereignty, cooperation and peer pressure on the design and contents of the NDCs of the BRICS countries. The concept of comparative policy convergence is incorporated to understand how and why the different positions of the BRICS may lead to a common point over time.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The analysis is made up of publicly available secondary data. This initially includes a qualitative analysis of the nationally determined contributions (NDC) of the BRICS countries, as available on the UNFCCC NDC Registry (UNFCCC, n.d. a). This analysis focuses on the latest NDC published by each country, although previous NDC submissions were also analysed to provide context and commentary on progression where applicable. The different positions and commitments taken by the BRICS countries were recorded and categorised to identify common themes and areas of convergence or divergence.

Alongside this, a qualitative analysis of the Joint Statements of the BRICS summits was conducted, from each year between 2009-2023 to understand the extent of cooperation amongst BRICS countries on climate policy and commitments. These statements were retrieved from the BRICS Information Centre website from the University of Toronto (University of Toronto, n.d.). The Joint Statements of the Environmental Ministers were also analysed as part of this study, from each year between 2015-2023.

Secondary data was also used to frame the scope of analysis and contextualise the study and develop case studies. This includes existing relevant literature and research, as well as data from Climate Watch, which offers open data on climate progress and emissions (Climate Watch, n.d.), and Climate Action Tracker (CAT), which monitors and assesses governments progress against climate targets (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). Data from the UNDP's People's Climate Vote 2024 was also used to understand how people are experiencing climate change and perceptions of climate progress and action in the BRICS countries (UNDP, 2024).

3.3 Scope and limitations

This study will focus only on Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and not the additional, recently admitted or invited BRICS+ members, namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Given the nature of the qualitative analysis, some findings may be open to a level of interpretation and subjectivity, which will be noted in a transparent way throughout.

Ethical considerations have been taken into account throughout this study, although given the nature of research being solely publicly available secondary data, with no research participants, the ethical risks are low.

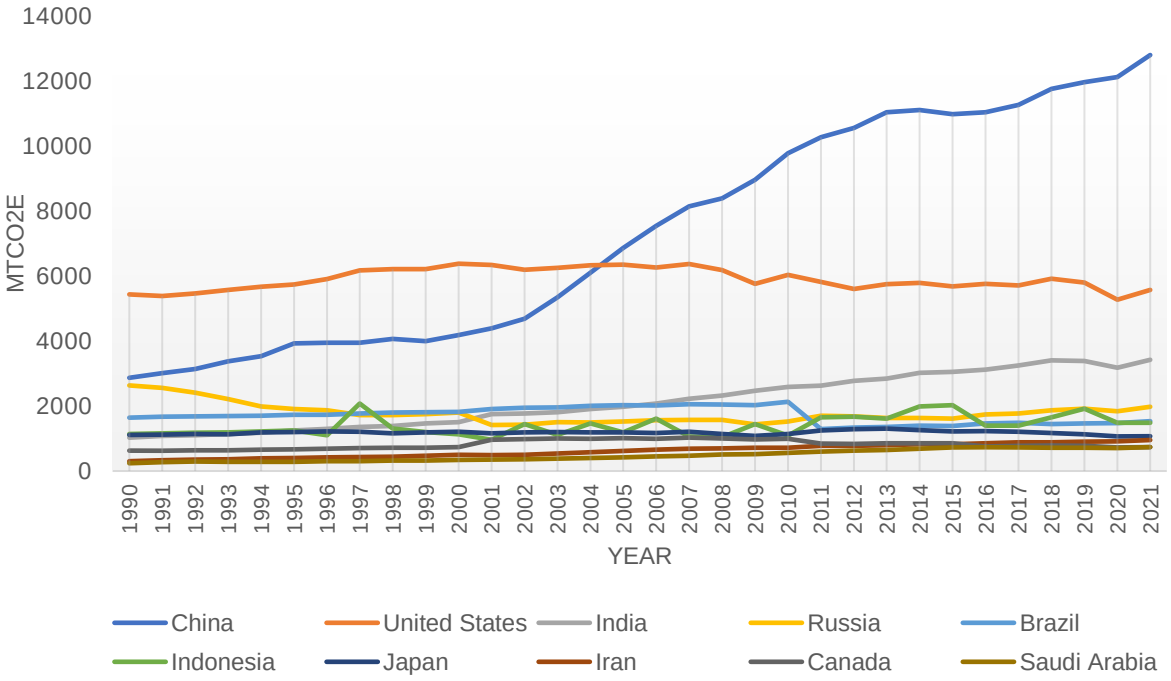
Chapter 4: Climate ambition and policy within the BRICS

4.1 GHG emissions and energy demand

By its very nature, climate change is a global crisis, with global consequences. However, historically, some countries have contributed significantly more to global CO2 emissions, and others, often some of the least developed countries, are particularly vulnerable to its effects. This has led to calls for those who have contributed the most to the problem, to take the greatest responsibility for solving it. As explained by Stoddard *et al* (2021);

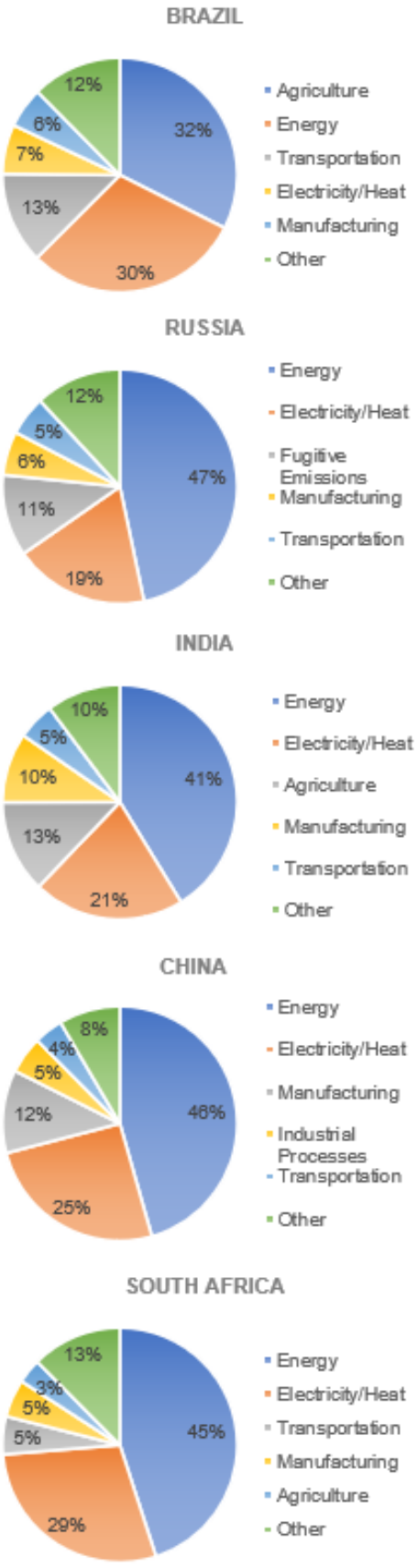
> "The average per capita emissions in the so-called least developed countries (LDCs) have been 10 times lower than in other developing countries and close to 40 times lower than in developed countries. These numbers expose the highly unequitable nature of climate change, not least since LDCs are among those already suffering the worst consequences of a rapidly changing climate… Recent research suggests that globally, the wealthiest 10% have been responsible for as much as half of the cumulative emissions since 1990 and the richest 1% for more than twice the emissions of the poorest 50%" (Stoddard *et al*, 2021, p. 656).

***Figure 1**: Top 10 cumulative greenhouse gas emitters (1990-2021)*



***Source:** Climate Watch* (n.d.)

Figure 2: *BRICS greenhouse gas emissions by sector (1990-2021)*



Source: Climate Watch (n.d.)

This is often referred to as 'climate justice' or the 'just transition'. The UNFCCC acknowledges this through countries 'common but differentiated responsibilities' and within the Kyoto Protocol, "industrialised (Annex I) countries committed to absolute emission reduction or limitation targets, whereas all other (non-Annex I) countries had no such obligations" (Pauw, Mbeva and Van Asselt, 2019, p. 1). Under the Paris Agreement Article 4 paragraphs 4-5, "Developed country Parties should continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets… Developing country Parties should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts, and are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances… Support shall be provided to developing country Parties for the implementation of this Article" (United Nations, 2015, p. 4). In this way, the Paris Agreement represents a subtle differentiation and a more dynamic interpretation of common but differentiated responsibilities; "as countries' circumstances evolve, so too will their common but differentiated responsibilities" (Pauw, Mbeva and Van Asselt, 2019, p. 2).

Against this context, it is important to understand the emissions profile of the BRICS. As illustrated in Figure 1, the BRICS are among the top emitters in the world. Between the period 1990-2021, China has the highest cumulative emissions, followed by the US, India, Russia and Brazil, whilst South Africa rank 16th. There are several different methods that can be used to calculate who the

‘largest polluters’ are, including cumulative emissions (as above), annual emissions and per capita emissions. Within the context of analysing a countries nationally determined contributions, all of these methods should be considered to understand national circumstances and also the role historic polluters, who developed on a high-carbon pathway, can play in “financing and investing in low-carbon technologies elsewhere” (Ritchie, Rosado and Roser, 2023, p. 4). As Basso and Viola (2022) explain, the BRICS countries, with the exception perhaps of South Africa, and alongside the US, EU, UK, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea, are ‘climate powers’ – “countries that own a significant share of global emissions and have the human and technological capacity to pursue decarbonisation” (Basso and Viola, 2022, p. 124).

Figure 2 also shows the greenhouse gas emissions by sector in each of the BRICS countries during the period 1990-2021. For each of Russia, India, China and South Africa, the largest source of emissions are from the energy sector, followed by the electricity / heat sector. Brazil is the exception, where the largest source of emissions is from agriculture (32% of total emissions).

Despite some of these similarities, there are still significant variations in their interests as a result of the differing reliance on oil, gas and coal. As Downie and Williams (2018) highlight, “in China, India and South Africa coal is the largest source of energy demand, whereas in Russia and Brazil it is oil and gas. Critically however, these variations are problematic because as large energy consumers, China and India especially, have an interest in reducing their dependence on imported fossil fuels, whereas Russia and Brazil as large producers of oil and gas have an interest in increasing exports and higher prices” (Downie and Williams, 2018, p. 405).

This is important context when reviewing the nationally determined contributions of the BRICS countries, the policies and actions that are being prioritised, and the potential for future cooperation.

4.2 Climate targets and decarbonisation policies

The first round of NDCs were submitted to the UNFCCC in 2015 and 2016, following the ratification of the Paris Agreement. As stated in Article 4 paragraph 9 of the Paris Agreement, “Each Party shall communicate a nationally determined contribution every 5 years in accordance with decision 1/CP.21 and any relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement and be informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake” (United Nations, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, countries submitted updates to their first NDCs in 2020 and 2021, with the next iteration due next year, in 2025. Countries should aim to submit these by February 2025, ahead of COP 30, scheduled for November 2025 in Brazil, and these should represent a progression from the previous submission. Included in Table 1 below are the NDC submissions to date for the BRICS countries. In some cases (as with Brazil below), countries have provided additional updates to their NDCs outside of the 5-year submissions. This is aligned to Article 4 paragraph 11, which sets out that “A Party may at any time adjust its existing nationally determined contribution with a view to enhancing its level of ambition” (United Nations, 2015, p. 5).

Table 1: *BRICS NDC's submissions to date*

Country	NDC Submission(s)	Date
Brazil	Brazil First NDC	21/09/2016
	Brazil First NDC (updated submission) 2020	09/12/2020
	Brazil First NDC (updated submission) 2022	07/04/2022
	Brazil First NDC (updated submission) 2023	03/11/2023
Russia	Russian Federation First NDC	25/11/2020
India	India First NDC	02/10/2016
	India First NDC (updated submission)	26/08/2022
China	China First NDC	03/09/2016
	China First NDC (updated submission)	28/10/2021
South Africa	South Africa First NDC	01/11/2016
	South Africa First NDC (updated submission)	27/09/2021

Source: *Compiled by author from the UN NDC Registry* (UNFCCC, n.d. a)

Table 2: *Net Zero targets within the latest NDCs of the BRICS*

Country	Net Zero or Carbon neutral target	Interim / other targets	NDC target[1]	Comprehensiveness of net zero target design[2]
Brazil	2050	Reduce GHG emissions by 43% below 2005 levels in 2030.	Almost sufficient	Poor
Russia	2060	Reduce GHG emissions by 30% below 1990 levels by 2030	Critically insufficient	Poor
India	2070	Reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% by 2030 from 2005 level	Insufficient	Poor
China	2060	Reach a CO2 emissions peak before 2030	Highly insufficient	Poor
South Africa	2050	Annual emissions will be in a range from	Insufficient	Target information incomplete

[1] As assessed by the Climate Action Tracker (Tracker, n.d.), against a countries 'fair share' contribution to the global effort in reducing greenhouse gas emissions
[2] As assessed by the Climate Action Tracker (Tracker, n.d.)

	350-420 MtCO2e between 2026-2030		

Source: *Compiled by author from the UN NDC Registry* (UNFCCC, n.d. a) *and* Climate Action Tracker (n.d.)

As shown in Table 2, each of the BRICS countries have included a 'Net Zero'[3] or 'Carbon Neutral'[4] target. Brazil has set a carbon neutrality target of 2050 in its latest NDC, which aligns to the original absolute emissions targets submitted when it joined the Paris Agreement in 2016, and moves away from the scaled-back NDC updates communicated by the Bolsonaro administration in 2020, which 'authorised' Brazil to emit much more in absolute terms… than under the original NDC" (Basso and Viola, 2022, p. 141). Brazil has also confirmed interim targets to reduce GHG emissions by 37% in 2025 and 43% in 2030 (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2023), however Brazil has not submitted a long-term climate strategy (LTS) (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

The Russian Federation has set a Net Zero target of 2060 within its LTS submitted to the UNFCCC, which is heavily reliant on negative emissions from its land-use and forestry sectors (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). In their latest NDC, submitted in 2020, the Russian Federation also include an interim target to reduce GHG emissions by 30% below 1990 levels by 2030 (Russian Federation, 2020).

India has set a Net Zero target of 2070 and submitted a Long-Term Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) in November 2022. Within its updated NDC in 2022, India also submitted stronger interim targets, to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP by 2030 from 2005 level (up from 33-35% in original NDC), and to increase the capacity of non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 50% by 2030 (up from 40% in original NDC) (Government of India, 2022). However, given its original NDCs were unambitious, India are actually projected to achieve these updated targets based on its current level of climate action, and therefore they will not necessarily drive real world emission reductions (Climaet Action Tracker, n.d.).

China has set a carbon neutrality target for 2060 and submitted a Mid-Century Long-Term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy along with its updated NDC in 2021. The latest NDC represented an expansion from its original NDC, and set out five overarching targets, including reaching peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030, lowering carbon intensity by over 65% from 2005 level by 2030, and targets relating to non-fossil fuel energy consumption, forest stock volume, and installed capacity of wind and solar power (Climaet Action Tracker, n.d.).

Finally, South Africa has set a Net Zero target of 2050, and within its updated NDC in 2021 committed to annual GHG emissions in a range from 398-510 MtCO2e between

[3] Achieved by abating at least 90% of emissions in line with the latest climate science, with the other 10% reduced through permanent removals. Net Zero covers scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions and prioritises actual reduction of emissions (Workiva, 2024).
[4] Balancing emitted carbon with an equivalent amount of offsetting or removal. Carbon neutral typically focuses on scope 1 and 2 emissions and allows for a significant proportion of emissions to be offset through carbon credits (Workiva, 2024).

2021-2025 and in a range from 350-420 MtCO2e between 2026-2030 (South Africa, 2021). The updated NDC also moves away from the 'peak, plateau and decline GHG emissions trajectory range' set out in its original NDC (South Africa, 2021).

The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) has assessed each countries NDC targets against a countries 'fair share' contribution to the global effort in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (on a scale from critically insufficient to 1.5 degrees Paris Agreement Compatible). As shown in Table 2, none of the BRICS countries have been assessed to be Paris compatible, whilst China's NDC target is assessed to be 'highly insufficient' and Russia's 'critically insufficient' (i.e., if all countries were to follow Russia's approach, global warming could exceed 4 degrees Celsius) (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). The CAT has also assessed the comprehensiveness of the design of each countries net zero targets against good practice, taking into account scope (target year, emissions coverage, international aviation and shipping, reductions or removals outside of own borders), target architecture (legal status, separate emissions and removal targets, review process), and transparency (carbon dioxide removals, comprehensive planning, clarity on fairness of target). Each of the BRICS countries, with the exception of South Africa (for which target information is incomplete), has been assessed as 'Poor' (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

Table 3: *Decarbonisation policies and actions of the BRICS*

Country	Decarbonisation policies and actions	Policies and actions[5]
Brazil	• Strengthening policies and measures with a view to achieve, in the Brazilian Amazonia, reach zero illegal deforestation by 2030, and restoring and reforesting 12 million hectares of forests by 2030 • Reducing emissions by 48.4% from 2005 levels by 2025, and by 53.1% from 2005 levels by 2030. Increasing the share of sustainable biofuels in the Brazilian energy mix to approximately 18% by 2030 • Achieving 45% of renewables in the energy mix by 2030, expanding the use of renewable energy sources other than hydropower in the total energy mix to between 28% and 33% by 2030; expanding the use of non-fossil fuel energy sources domestically, increasing the share of renewables (other than hydropower) in the power supply to at least 23% by 2030, including by raising the share of wind, biomass and solar;	Insufficient

[5] As assessed by the Climate Action Tracker, against modelled domestic pathways. "Modelled domestic pathways reflects a global economic efficiency perspective with pathways for different temperature ranges derived from global least-cost models" (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.)

	• Achieving 10% efficiency gains in the electricity sector by 2030. • In the agriculture sector, strengthen the Low Carbon Emission Agriculture Program (ABC) as the main strategy for sustainable agriculture development, including by restoring an additional 15 million hectares	
Russia	• Limiting GHG emissions to up to 70% compared to 1990 levels by 2030, taking into account the maximum possible absorptive capacity of forests and other ecosystems, and subject to sustainable and balanced socio-economic development • Increasing energy efficiency in all sectors of the economy • Developing the use of non-fuel and renewable energy sources • Protecting and improving the quality of natural sinks and storage of greenhouse gases • Financial and tax stimulating the reduction of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions	Highly insufficient
India	• 'Lifestyle for Environment' as a key to combating climate change • Reduce Emissions Intensity of its GDP by 45 percent by 2030, from 2005 level • Achieve about 50 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030, with the help of transfer of technology and low-cost international finance including from Green Climate Fund (GCF) • Create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. • Enhancing investments in development programmes in sectors vulnerable to climate change, particularly agriculture, water resources, Himalayan region, coastal regions, health and disaster management.	Insufficient
China	• Increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 25%, to increase the forest stock volume by 6 billion cubic meters from the 2005 level, and to bring its total installed capacity of wind and solar power to over 1.2 billion kilowatts by 2030. • Lower CO2 emissions per unit of GDP by over 65% from the 2005 level	Highly insufficient

	• Aim to have a 20% non-fossil share in primary energy consumption and a 39% share in generation, with renewables making up half of the country's installed capacity and half of incremental growth in power demand	
South Africa	• South Africa's annual emissions will be in a range from 398-510 MtCO2e between 2021-2025 and in a range from 350-420 MtCO2e between 2026-2030 • Initiatives include power sector investment plan as set out in the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan, the Green Transport Strategy, enhanced energy efficiency programmes, and the recently implemented carbon tax	Insufficient

Source: *Compiled by author from the Climate Action Tracker* (n.d.) *and latest NDC submissions* (Federative Republic of Brazil, 2023), (Russian Federation, 2020), (Government of India, 2022), (People's Republic of China, 2021), (South Africa, 2021)

Table 3 above, sets out further details of the decarbonisation policies and actions included within countries latest NDCs. As Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong (2024) note, "BRICS countries have focused policies mostly on energy transition and efficiency improvements, the increase of forest carbon sinks, and national emission reduction systems (carbon budgets, national emission reduction inventories, etc.). However, there are some differences in their policy setting: China, Brazil, and India set up more specific targets in their policy documents and their NDCs, while Russia and South Africa focused on giving directional targets" (Mukhia, Shen and Xiaolong, 2024, p. 3).

In the section below, we will review these policies and progress against them in further details, particularly exploring to what extent they are designed within the political and national circumstances that make the adoption of such policies likely.

4.1 Political and national circumstances

Brazil

Brazil's emissions profile and energy mix differs from other BRICS countries. Land use and forestry account for the largest share of Brazil's GHG emissions, and relative to other BRICS countries, Brazil is low-carbon– 46.03% of the energy consumed in 2019 came from low-carbon sources – and it's economy is not energy-intensive (Basso and Viola, 2022). However, Brazil's climate change policy has changed significantly since 2007, largely reflecting its national circumstances. As Hurrell and Sengupta (2012) explain;

> "It has consolidated climate change targets in domestic legislation at both the national and, in some major cases, municipal levels. In part, policy change here simply reflects the pattern of Brazil's concrete interests on the climate change issue, with its energy profile dominated by hydroelectric power and biofuels and its GHG emissions by land use change and deforestation. But the prioritization

> of these interests has been mediated and pressed by a closely connected set of domestic political changes—the growth of the environmental movement and green attitudes (92 per cent of the population believe that global environmental problems are very serious); the formation of new business coalitions in favour of policy change; the role of Green parties and green issues within electoral and presidential politics; and the greater willingness to accept external commitments that has followed from greater state capacity to control Amazonian deforestation" (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 478).

Brazil's deforestation policies have been particularly turbulent. There was a drive for better institutional frameworks and law enforcement to contain deforestation in the late 2000s which led to the decline in deforestation rates. However, from 2015, the economic crisis reduced the public pressure for action and a series of government scandals and anti-environmental policies up to 2022 continued to disrupt effective action against deforestation (Basso and Viola, 2022). As Basso and Viola (2022) summarises, "The erratic behaviour of Brazil's deforestation emissions have caused Brazil's position in the climate regime to fluctuate: conservative until 2004; moderate from 2005 to 2010; moderately conservative from 2011 to 2015; conservative from 2016 to 2018; and extremely conservative from 2019 to 2022" (Basso and Viola, 2022, p. 142).

The CAT rates Brazil's policies and action, against fair share, as 'insufficient', indicating that significant improvement is needed to be consistent with the Paris Agreement (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). Although Brazil's "presidency of the G20 summit in 2024 and hosting of COP30 in 2025 highlight its renewed engagement with the international community on environmental issues… there are important and inconsistent elements in some of the new policy developments which cast serious doubt on the government's commitment to ecological transformation and transition away from fossil fuels" (Climate Action Tracker, n.d., p. Brazil). This includes the growth accelerator programme (Novo PAC) which is an investment plan with significant budget for the production and development of oil and gas industries (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

Russia

Russia is an energy-intensive economy and is the world's largest exporter of fossil fuels. This includes being the "second largest oil producer and exporter; second largest producer and largest exporter of natural gas; and third largest coal exporter, according to 2019 data" (Basso and Viola, 2022, p. 136). Energy is therefore crucial for Russian economic development, and this certainly a key factor in Russia's conservative and inconsistent approach to climate and decarbonisation policies (Basso and Viola, 2022).

Russia's latest NDC includes a commitment to limit GHG emissions to up to 70% compared to 1990 levels by 2030 (Russian Federation, 2020). However, these targets are widely recognised as unambitious considering that the emissions baseline of 1990

encompasses the entire former Soviet Union and so is extremely high (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). In fact, when Putin announced Russia's emission targets in 2015, "he was only promising either a 1% cut in the 15 years to 2030 or allowing for emissions to actually grow if the effects of forests sucking up carbon are included" (Climate Home News, 2024, p. 1). Furthermore, the UN's carbon accounting rules mean that exported emissions (i.e. from fossil fuels produced in Russia but burned outside of Russia) are not included in its accounts (Climate Home News, 2024, p. 1)

Russia's target for carbon neutrality is heavily reliant on changing land use and using the forestry sector for carbon sequestration purposes, without reducing the use of fossil fuels (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). This, combined with a "heavily watered-down climate bill that, unlike the original iteration of the legislation, does not enforce emissions quotas nor impose penalties on large GHG emitters… [but] simply requires companies to report their emissions from 2024" (Climate Action Tracker, n.d., p. Russia), has led the CAT to rate Russia's policies and action, against fair share, as 'highly insufficient' (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

Finally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has pushed climate change further down the priorities for the Russian government. It has also highlighted a need to replace Western goods on the domestic market, as "the dependence on imported equipment and technologies needed to reduce carbon emissions is 55% in the oil sector, 45% in the coal sector and 31% in the power sector" (BBC, 2023, p. 1).

India

India is also an energy-intensive economy, and is the world's second largest coal producer and importer, using coal for 72.72% (in 2019) for power generation (Basso and Viola, 2022). As a result of this, India is sensitive to changes in global energy markets. As Basso and Viola (2022) explain;

> "The energy transition to renewable sources benefits India by reducing its dependence on imports, improving energy security and expanding access to the population that still does not receive energy services. India is a conservative player in the climate regime and is one of the most active advocates of common but differentiated responsibilities and the doctrine of historic responsibilities. India's myriad of energy transition policies hide conflicting interests:
>
> 1. the country's vast coal reserves and large-scale production, which enhance energy security and access to energy services;
> 2. the ingrained fragmentation of India's political system, which severely thwarts the adoption of coherent national policies and their uniform countrywide implementation;
> 3. the anti-colonial discourse, which shuns important mitigation actions by holding only industrialized countries responsible for the problem – even though India is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change;
> 4. the extreme poverty in which a substantial part of the Indian population lives" (Basso and Viola, 2022, pp. 135-136).

India's vulnerability to climate change includes the increasing intensity and frequency of floods, heatwaves and monsoons. Each of these present significant, health, social and economic consequences, with some studies suggesting climate-related damages in India could total $35 trillion across the next 50 years (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, 2022b).

India's latest NDC, submitted in 2022, includes some more ambitious mitigation measures when compared to its original NDC. In particular, India has recently developed a range of policy documents, including the overarching National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC) and the National Electricity Plan (NEP2023) which contains some ambitious renewable energy plans (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). Other policy developments include the National Green Hydrogen Mission and the Energy Conservation Act, which collectively provide a clearer picture of India's potential future energy portfolio (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, 2022b). However, India have not published any sector-specific mitigation actions and the government is continuing its support for coal, with India having the second largest coal pipeline (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). The CAT have therefore rated India's policies and action, against fair share, as 'insufficient' (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

China

Similarly, China's economy is energy-intensive, and heavily reliant on fossil fuels. China is the largest coal producer and importer, the largest oil importer and generates the most power from renewable sources (Basso and Viola, 2022). Since the 1970s, the rise in manufacturing, industrialisation and urbanisation has significantly increased China's demand for energy. A 2022 report from the World Bank Group notes that;

> "Unmitigated climate change poses a significant threat to China's long-term growth and prosperity. Rising sea levels and risks related to coastal flooding, storm surges, and coastal erosion threaten China's densely populated low-elevation coastal cities, which account for a fifth of China's population and a third of its gross domestic product (GDP). Meanwhile, interior provinces in northern and western China are exposed to more frequent and extreme heat waves and droughts which intensify water security risks and impact agriculture—a major source of income, especially among China's rural poor" (World Bank Group, 2022, p. 22).

This is compounded by growing economic imbalances as China confronts gradually slowing growth and an overreliance on carbon-intensive infrastructure (World Bank Group, 2022).

China's policies have been signalling the ambition to move towards a low carbon economy since it's 12th Five-Year Plan, driven by domestic (e.g. air pollution) and foreign (e.g. global governance) policy factors (Basso and Viola, 2022). In 2021, China submitted its updated NDC and also approved the 14th Five-Year Plan, confirming its 2060 carbon neutral and 2030 peak emissions targets. This latest plan sets out a range

of climate mitigation policies and initiatives, including “emissions control measures for industries and businesses; use of ecosystem services to achieve carbon neutrality; promoting efficient coal use and the transformation of energy-intensive industries (steel, petrochemicals, cement); increased use of railways and waterways for freight transportation; investment in energy efficiency technologies, carbon neutrality and carbon capture, sequestration, use, and storage” (Basso and Viola, 2022, p. 133).

Although China had “announced that it will 'strictly control coal consumption' over the period of the 14th FYP (2021-2025) and phase down coal consumption over the period of the 15th FYP, in 2021 China's yearly coal production reached its highest-ever level and consumption of coal also increased by 4.6 % due to an increase in energy demand” (European Parliament, 2022, p. 4). Therefore, the CAT rated China’s policies and action, against fair share, as ‘highly insufficient’ (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). China is increasingly recognising its vulnerability to climate change, but need to “rebalance its growth model—from traditional infrastructure investment to innovation, from exports to domestic consumption, from industry to high-value services, from high to low carbon intensity, and from state-led to more market-driven allocation of resources” (World Bank Group, 2022, p. 3)

South Africa

Although South Africa is the smallest of the BRICS countries, and therefore has significantly lower total emissions, its GDP is the most carbon-intensive (Basso and Viola, 2022). It is the fourth largest exporter of coal and most of its power is generated from coal, with renewables representing a small share of the energy mix (although this is growing) (Basso and Viola, 2022).

The climate change policy landscape in South Africa has grown over the past two decades (Khavhagali *et al*, 2024). However, during the same period, “South Africa has been through fundamental political and economic changes that have caused turbulence at times and have impacted all policy spheres, including climate change” (Averchenkova, Gannon and Curran, 2019, p. 8). This included the significant growth of post-Apartheid South Africa’s economy and investment in basic services, followed by economic stagnation, widespread corruption and ‘state capture’, which have all impacted climate chance policy (Averchenkova, Gannon and Curran, 2019).

In the run-up to, and since, South Africa’s updated NDC, submitted in 2021, a range of policies and regulations have been approved. This included a carbon tax, the National Energy Efficiency Strategy (setting out financial and fiscal incentives), the Integrated Resourced Plan (setting out an energy transition for the mining and energy sectors) and, following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (including targets for green financing) (Basso and Viola, 2022). Further recent policy developments also include the Just Energy Transition Development Plan (JET IP) and the South African Renewable Energy Masterplan (SAREM), as South Africa look to reform the energy sector (Basso and Viola, 2022). In fact, a report by the Centre for Climate Change Economic and Policy stated;

> “South Africa has put in place one of the most elaborate and consultative climate governance systems observable among developing and emerging economies” (Averchenkova, Gannon and Curran, 2019, p. 3).

The CAT has rated South Africa’s policies and action, against fair share, as ‘insufficient’, although do note that “if considering South Africa’s planned but not yet implemented policies, our rating of policies and actions would go up to “1.5°C compatible. The stringent implementation of proposed economy-wide and sector-specific policy measures would enable South Africa to achieve at least the top end of its NDC target range, falling within the current range” (Climate Action Tracker, n.d., p. South Africa).

This section has looked to provide evidence of how a countries targets and decarbonisation policies are positioned against the national and political circumstances that make the adoption of such policies likely. As detailed, this can include economic and social factors, from the reliance of production and exportation of fossil fuels (e.g., oil, gas and coal production in Russia), to increasing vulnerability to climate change through extreme weather events (e.g., floods and heatwaves in India) and public opinion. This is not unique to the BRICS countries, and to some extent it should be expected that climate mitigation efforts would vary from country to country to reflect national circumstances (e.g. land use change and deforestation will be particularly pertinent in Brazil). However, there is legitimate concern that international climate governance in its current form (e.g. through self-regulated NDCs) allows countries “to maximize their perceived national interests while discouraging them from maximizing collective international and global interests, including those associated with climate change” (Harris, 2021, p. 60).

Chapter 5: Cooperation and peer pressure

The Paris Agreement's ratchet mechanism is designed to progressively increase the overall level of commitment from one NDC to the next. As previously explained, Article 4 of the agreement sets out that developed countries should take the lead whilst developing countries should continue enhancing mitigation efforts, moving over time to economy-wide targets in the light of different national circumstances, and with support from developing countries (United Nations, 2015).

Against this, this section looks to explore the role of the BRICS within international climate governance, by analysing BRICS cooperation on climate amongst themselves and with other developing nations, as a form of south-south cooperation. It will also explore the role that 'peer pressure' could play to drive forward ambition and action, as envisaged by the Paris Agreement.

5.1 BRICS influence on international climate negotiations

In global politics, there is a perception that power is shifting and emerging countries are assuming a more active, prominent and important role on the global stage (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012). Climate politics are often viewed from the same lens. As Hurrell and Sengupta (2012) explain;

> "Periods of shifting power are difficult and dangerous times. Rising states will naturally seek to challenge the status quo and to revise the dominant norms of the system in order to reflect their own interests and values… Although climate change is often associated with economic development, social lifestyles and patterns of consumption, these unavoidably interact with questions of relative power and global inequality. After all, successful national economic development is an essential ingredient of greater national power and autonomy, and major states are unlikely to put themselves at a relative disadvantage through the imposition of 'unfair' environmental constraints. The environment is therefore central to the development–power–autonomy nexus, sharpening resource competition and intensifying distributional conflicts—whether between a declining United States and a rising China, or regionally between China and India" (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 464).

The BRICS influence on global climate policy can be traced back to before the term BRICS was first coined. The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 is seen as a success story for emerging countries and the developing world, as developed nations acknowledged responsibility for previous environmental harms, accepted the notion of common but differentiated responsibilities, technology and resource transfers, and agreed to representation between North and South in climate change negotiations and decision-making processes (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012).

Since then, a similar approach has been taken in climate negotiations by the BRICS, in securing coalitions with developing countries via south-south cooperation and opposing the demands of developed, industrialised countries. This opposition has typically rested on the following grounds; historic responsibility of industrialised

countries for global emissions, commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the need for economic development to achieve a decent standard of living and eradicate poverty in emerging countries, rejecting mandatory emissions reduction targets, and campaigning for climate finance from developed countries (Downie and Williams, 2018). It is also argued that emerging powers have achieved a 'veto-player' status, where they have the power to block international agreements, and they must be 'on board' to make the agreement effective (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012).

Four of the BRICS (Brazil, India, China and South Africa) formed the BASIC coalition in international climate negotiations and have also participated in UNFCCC negotiations as members of the G77+China bloc, representing the interests of developing countries. As an Annex I member of the Climate Convention, Russia has adopted a position "in conflict with one of the core negotiating positions of the other four members of the coalition, by arguing that developing countries should be subject to binding emissions obligations" (Downie and Williams, 2018, p. 400). An example of this is the Copenhagen climate conference (COP15) in December 2009, of which the BASIC countries were seen as the villains (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012). In the lead up to Copenhagen, officials from the BASIC countries attended a meeting in China to agree a common negotiating strategy, and succeeded in shaping the outcome of the conference (Downie and Williams, 2018). Although there was no legal treaty produced in Copenhagen, the BASIC countries effectively "[sidelined] Europe and [forced] the United States to negotiate within a very different institutional context" (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 463), and consequently signalling the coalitions power and international profile.

This has undoubtedly led to tension between the BRICS and developed nations (although this tension stretches far beyond climate policy), and pressure for the BRICS to ramp up their ambition and action on climate change. As Hurrell and Sengupta (2012) explain;

> "They represent a particular class of states ('advanced developing countries', 'major emitters', 'major economies') whose development choices are critical to the future of climate change but whose governments have all too often proved to be obstructionist and negative. On the back of such a view come calls for major emerging powers to jettison claims for special treatment or special status: in terms of the trading system they should 'graduate' from the developing country category; in terms of climate change they should not hide behind the idea of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. In other words, they can no longer use underdevelopment or poverty as an 'excuse' to evade assuming their 'responsibilities' as major powers (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 464)".

And there have been some notable, if gradual, developments from BRICS countries, from accepting the scientific view that global temperatures should not exceed 2 degrees Celsius and agreeing to substantially reduce emissions by 2050 in the lead up to Copenhagen, as well as the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, with China

and Russia acting as constructive and responsible stakeholders (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012).

5.2 Cooperation within the BRICS

Despite their perceived differences, "the BRICS have institutionalised their relationship and created a number of mechanisms to foster cooperation in an attempt to demonstrate that the BRICS are not simply a sub-set of emerging economies, but also a group with common interests" (Downie and Williams, 2018, p. 399). Since 2009, the BRICS have held annual summits to discuss issues of mutual interests. They have also convened meetings of ministers from different sectors, including culture, education, health, trade, economic and agriculture, and since 2015 have held an annual meeting with environment ministers. Outside of these formal summits, BRICS countries also meet bilaterally to reinforce cooperation in certain areas, for example China and Brazil released a Joint Statement in 2015 to reiterate commitments on a number of climate-related issues including solar energy and the responsibilities of development nations (People's Republic of China and the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2015).

Table 4 includes a summary of climate discussions and commitments included within the Joint Statements of each BRICS summit from 2009-2023. These references are non-exhaustive but aim to give a sense of the extent to which the BRICS position on climate has changed, or in some cases remained consistent since 2009. For example, there is a subtle development in accountability and responsibility relating to climate change, as follows;

> "We stand ready for a constructive dialogue" (BRICS, 2009)
>
> "The BRICS will intensify cooperation" (BRICS, 2011)
>
> "We are fully committed to playing our part" (BRICS, 2012)
>
> "We express our readiness to address climate change" (BRICS, 2015)

Naturally this will mirror to some extent the discussions and outcomes from the relevant UN climate conferences at the time. One area where the BRICS have remained extremely consistent is their commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. In fact, as illustrated in Figure 3, common but differentiated responsibilities is referenced in each Joint Statement from the BRICS summits except for 2013.

Table 4: *Climate commitments within 'Joint Statements' from BRICS summits (2009-2023)*

Date	Location	Document	Statements on climate (non-exhaustive)
June 16, 2009	Yekaterinburg, Russia	Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders	• "We stand ready for a constructive dialogue on how to deal with climate change based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, given the need to combine measures to protect the climate with steps to fulfil our socio-economic development tasks."
April 15, 2010	Brasília, Brazil	2nd BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Joint Statement	• "The negotiations in Mexico should be more inclusive, transparent, and should result in outcomes that are fair and effective in addressing the challenge of climate change, while reflecting the principles of the Convention, especially the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities."
April 14, 2011	Sanya, Hainan, China	Sanya Declaration	• "The BRICS will intensify cooperation on the Durban conference. We will enhance our practical cooperation in adapting our economy and society to climate change."
March 29, 2012	New Delhi, India	Fourth BRICS Summit: Delhi Declaration	• "We are fully committed to playing our part in the global fight against climate change…" • "We emphasize that developed country Parties to the UNFCCC shall provide enhanced financial, technology and capacity building support for the preparation and implementation of nationally appropriate mitigation actions of developing countries."
March 27, 2013	Durban, South Africa	eThekwini Declaration	• "While acknowledging that climate change is one of the greatest challenges and threats towards achieving sustainable development, we call on all parties to build on the decisions adopted in COP18/CMP8 in Doha"
July 15, 2014,	Fortaleza, Brazil	The 6th BRICS Summit: Fortaleza Declaration	• "Acknowledging that climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing humankind, we call on all countries to build upon the decisions adopted in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC… in accordance with the principles and provisions of UNFCCC, in particular the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."
July 9, 2015	Ufa, Russia	VII BRICS Summit: 2015 Ufa Declaration	• "We express our readiness to address climate change in a global context and at the national level and to achieve a comprehensive, effective and equitable agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change." • "We stress the importance of transfer of technology and scientific knowledge to address climate change and its adverse effects and therefore agreed to conduct joint research on the priority issues of common interest."
October 16, 2016	Goa, India	8th BRICS Summit: Goa Declaration	• "We call on the developed countries to fulfil their responsibility towards providing the necessary financial resources, technology and capacity building assistance to support the developing countries with respect to both mitigation and adaptation for the implementation of the Paris Agreement."

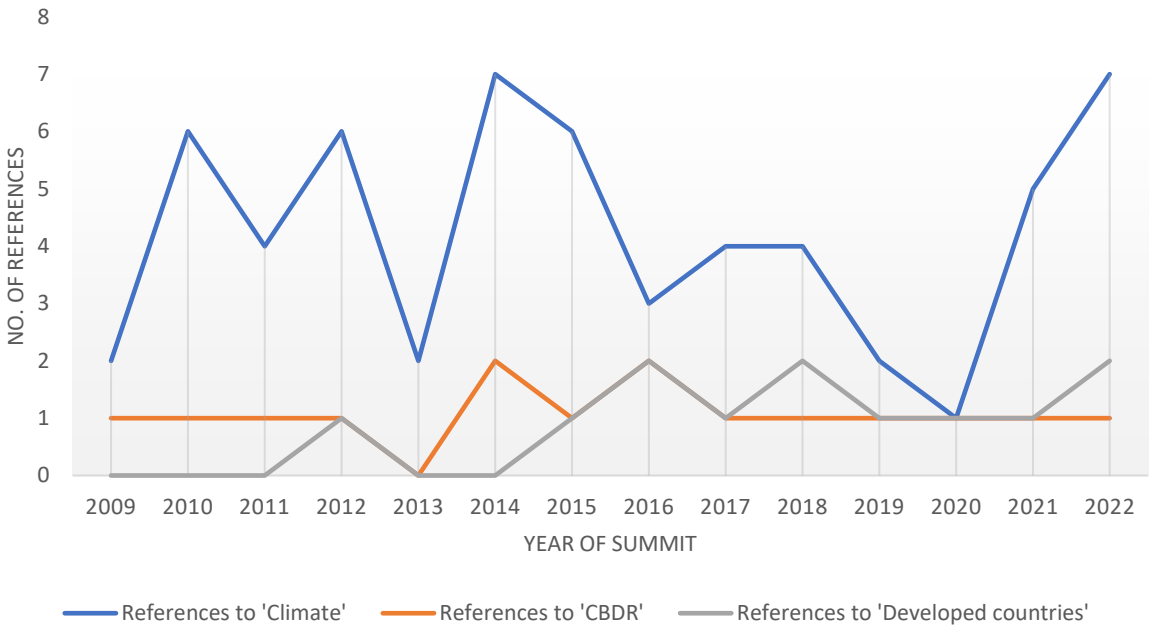
September 4, 2017	Xiamen, China	BRICS Leaders Xiamen Declaration	• "We commit to further promote green development and low-carbon economy… enhance BRICS cooperation on climate change and expand green financing." • "…and urge developed countries to provide financial, technological and capacity-building support to developing countries to enhance their capability in mitigation and adaptation."
July 26, 2018	Johannesburg, South Africa	10th BRICS Summit Johannesburg Declaration	• "We call upon all countries to fully implement the Paris Agreement adopted under the principles of the UNFCCC including the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and urge developed …"
November 14, 2019	Brasilía, Brazil	Brasilía Declaration	• "We urge developed countries…" • "We expect that the first replenishment of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) by the end of 2019 will significantly exceed the initial resource mobilization…"
November 17, 2020	Moscow, Russia	XII BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration	• "We urge developed countries…" • "We welcome the progress within the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology (BEST) Platform, including the initiative to establish the BEST Platform "matrix". We look forward to further strengthening cooperation on environmental issues, in particular combating marine plastic litter as a key focus of the BRICS Clean Rivers Programme."
September 9, 2021	New Delhi, India	XIII BRICS Summit: New Delhi Declaration	• "We recognize that peaking of Greenhouse Gas Emissions will take longer for developing countries, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty." • "We emphasize the need to ensure a holistic approach to climate change, focused on all dimensions including mitigation, adaptation, financing, capacity building and technology transfer along with sustainable lifestyles. We encourage further discussions and events among BRICS countries in this regard." • "We recall relevant Paris Agreement provisions that mandate developed countries…"
June 23, 2022	Beijing, China	XIV BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration	• "…peaking of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions will take longer for developing countries." • "We underline that the developed countries have historical responsibilities for global climate change, and should take the lead…" • "We oppose green trade barriers and reiterate our commitment to enhancing coordination on these issues."
August 23, 2023	Sandton, Gauteng, South Africa	XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration	• "We agree that there is a need to defend, promote and strengthen the multilateral response…" • "We recognise that the Means of Implementation should be enhanced by developed countries…" • "…there is a need for comprehensive financial arrangements to address loss and damage due to climate change." • "We advocate for just equitable and sustainable transitions…" • "We further urge developed countries to honour their commitments…" • "We oppose trade barriers including those under the pretext of tackling climate…"

Source: *Compiled by author from BRICS (2009), (2010), (2011), (2012), (2013), (2014), (2015), (2016), (2017), (2018), (2019), (2020), (2021), (2022), (2023)*

In addition to this, as Figure 3 shows, the BRICS have increasingly referred to 'developed countries'. From a climate perspective, the BRICS have developed a clear focus on the responsibilities of developed and industrialised countries, and we can see the language relating to this become more targeted over the years, as follows;

> "We emphasize that developed country Parties to the UNFCCC shall provide enhanced financial, technology and capacity building support for the preparation and implementation of nationally appropriate mitigation actions of developing countries" (BRICS, 2012)
>
> "We stress the importance of transfer of technology and scientific knowledge to address climate change…" (BRICS, 2015)
>
> "We urge developed countries…" (BRICS, 2018), (BRICS, 2019), (BRICS, 2020)
>
> "We recall relevant Paris Agreement provisions that mandate developed countries…" (BRICS, 2021)
>
> We further urge developed countries to honour their commitments… (BRICS, 2023)

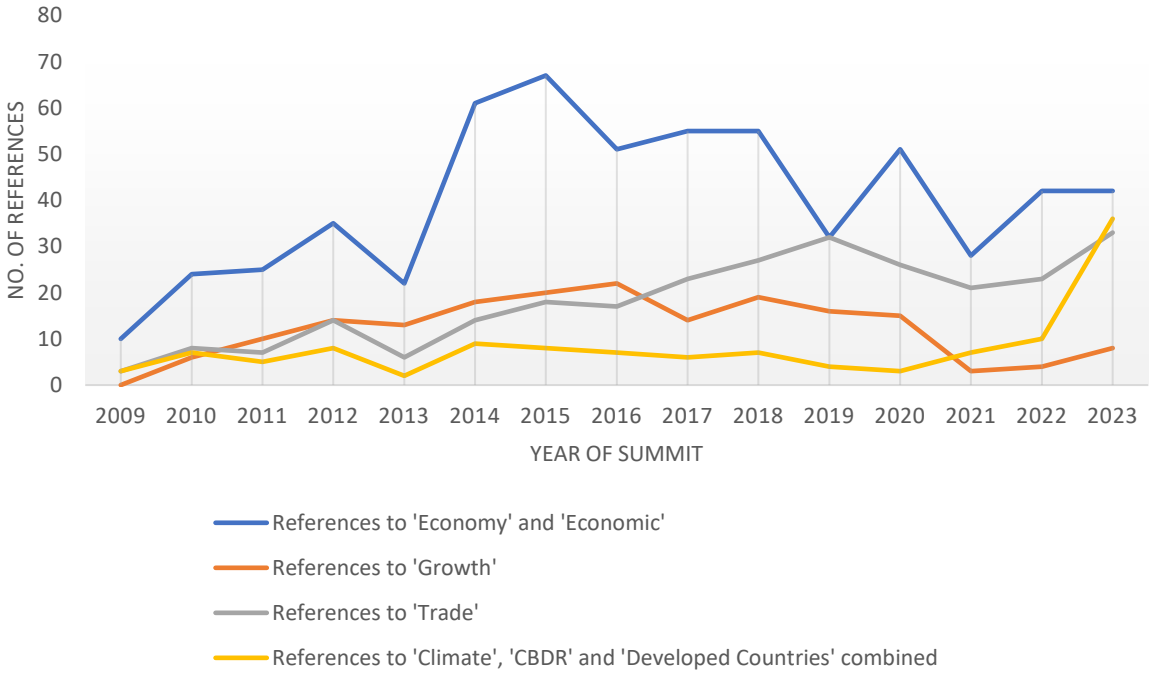
Figure 3: *References to 'Climate', 'CBDR' and 'Developed countries' in BRICS summits (2009-2022)*



Source: *Compiled by author from BRICS (2009), (2010), (2011), (2012), (2013), (2014), (2015), (2016), (2017), (2018), (2019), (2020), (2021), (2022), (2023)*

Although these Joint Statements do not necessarily amount to substantive outcomes, they do represent a coordinated mechanism through which the BRICS countries can align on and present their common interests relating to climate change. This includes a concerted effort to lobby and urge developed countries to do more, as well as representing the interests of other developing countries to avoid strong commitments where possible.

Figure 4: *References to 'Growth', 'Economy' and 'Trade' in BRICS summits (2009-2023)*



Source: *Compiled by author from BRICS (2009), (2010), (2011), (2012), (2013), (2014), (2015), (2016), (2017), (2018), (2019), (2020), (2021), (2022), (2023)*

This should, however, also be put into perspective by understanding some other priorities emerging from the BRICS summits. Figure 4 shows the references to 'Growth', 'Economy' and 'Trade' in comparison to references to 'Climate', 'CBDR' and 'Developed Countries'. Although this is a somewhat arbitrary way of defining priorities, it does indicate that climate is one of a number of different priorities that the BRICS countries have identified common interests in. Not only that, but in this case, the very nature of these priorities may in fact be competing. Despite the theory of 'green growth' and some evidence of short-term decoupling, there is a growing consensus that carbon emissions cannot be absolutely decoupled from economic growth, given the scale of transformation and societal change that is required (Ward *et al*, 2017). As Jackson (2009) explains in his book 'Prosperity without growth';

> “The truth is that there is as yet no credible, socially just, ecologically sustainable scenario of continually growing incomes for a world of nine billion people. In this context, simplistic assumptions that capitalism’s propensity for efficiency will allow us to stabilise the climate or protect against resource scarcity are nothing short of delusional. Those who promote decoupling as an escape route from the dilemma of growth need to take a closer look at the historical evidence – and at the basic arithmetic of growth” (Jackson, 2009, p. 57)

There is general agreement among scholars that the differences between the BRICS countries outweigh the commonalities, and therefore the group is not a consistent coalition in international climate policy (Basso and Viola, 2022). For example, as Stuenkel (2013) explains, Brazil and Russia benefit from high energy prices whereas India is a major energy consumer, the democracies in Brazil, India and South Africa contrast with the autocracies of China and Russia, and there is an unresolved border conflict between China and India (Stuenkel, 2013).

However, the BRICS ability to coordinate in areas where their interests align should not be underestimated. An example of this is the annual environment working group held between environment ministers that have taken place since 2015. Initiatives that have been discussed and developed through this mechanism include the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), designed to fund environmental projects (as of 2022 45 out of 84 approved NDB projects had financed environment-related initiatives (Kiprizli, 2022), and other schemes such as the Working Group in Energy Saving and Energy Efficiency, BRICS Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Dialogue, BRICS Clean Rivers Programme, and BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology (BEST) Cooperation Platform (BRICS, 2018) (BRICS, 2021). This cooperation can be seen beyond the Environmental working group, as the Joint Statement from the BRICS Foreign Ministers in 2022 also “affirmed the BRICS’ individual and joint efforts to ensure the implementation of international climate agreements. This continuing attitude pointed out their ideational orientation toward the category of emerging powers, which offers their willingness and readiness to take mitigation actions as the responsible stakeholders” (Kiprizli, 2022, p. 73). Downie and Williams (2018) identify further areas for BRICS cooperation on climate; energy efficiency, development finance and agriculture, and also note the potential of China and India to form an important bilateral relationship, particularly with regards to coal consumption and solar energy (Downie and Williams, 2018).

Therefore, although the BRICS may not operate as a consistent coalition in global climate governance, there is growing institutionalisation of their relationship. There is certainly evidence that where interests align, for example closing the gap in development financing, the BRICS can continue to influence climate policy in pursuit of their own interests, and at times to the detriment of global collective action.

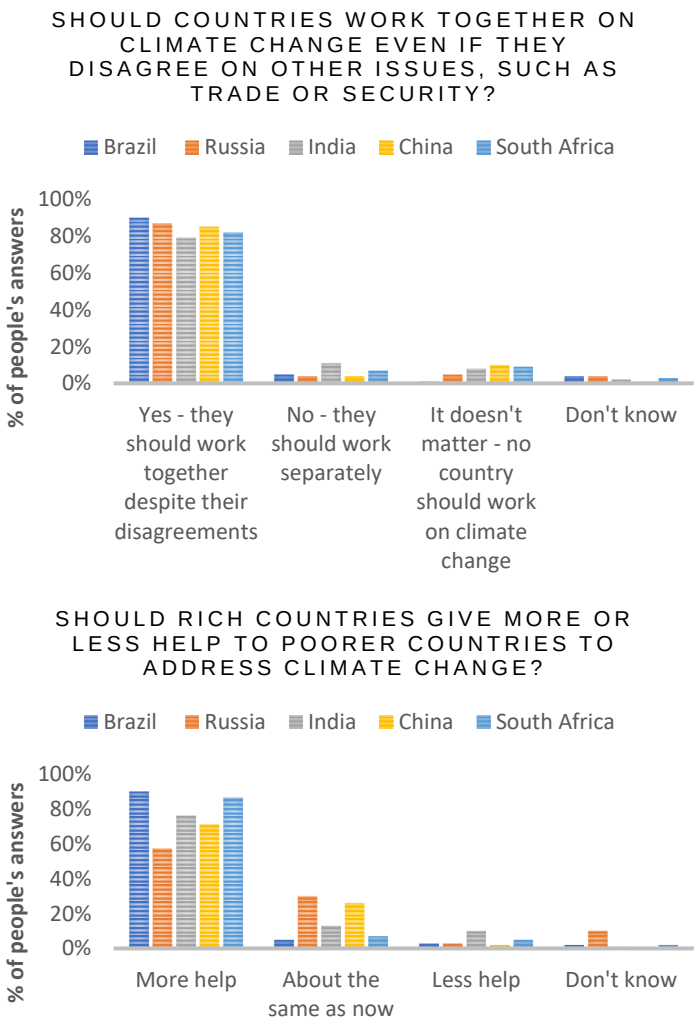
5.3 Local perceptions

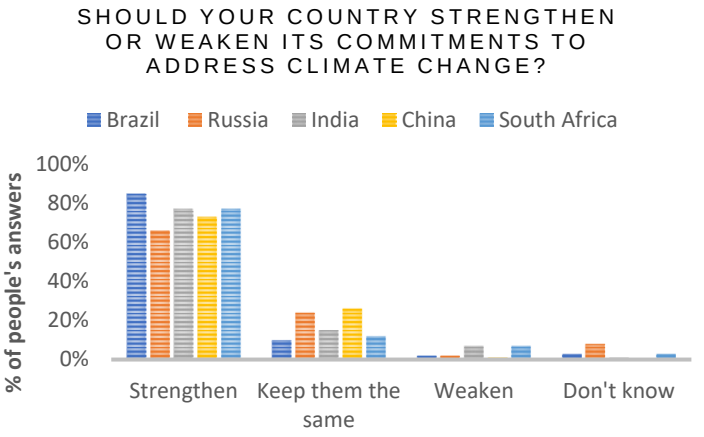
This section will look to explore the perceptions of climate change, climate action and climate governance within each of the BRICS countries and the extent to which this could create peer pressure to enhance commitments and action.

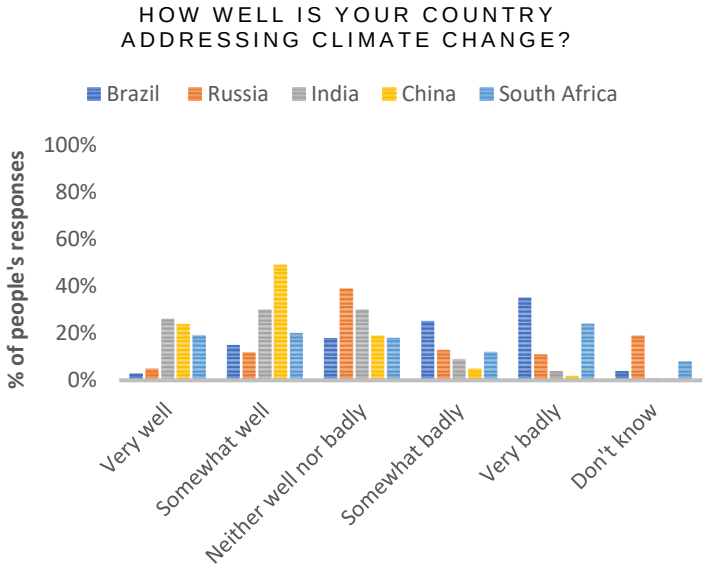
Figure 5 contains a selection of results from the UNDP People's Climate Vote 2024, which was conducted by the University of Oxford and included more than 73,000 participants globally to understand how people are experiencing climate change and what they want leaders to do about it (UNDP, 2024). The results show that the majority of respondents across all BRICS countries agree (i) countries should work together on climate change, even if they disagree on other issues; (ii) rich countries should give more help to poorer countries to address climate change; and (iii) their country should strengthen its commitments to address climate change. This indicates broad support for cooperation amongst BRICS countries and on the international stage, the need for financing for developing countries, and increased climate policy ambition.

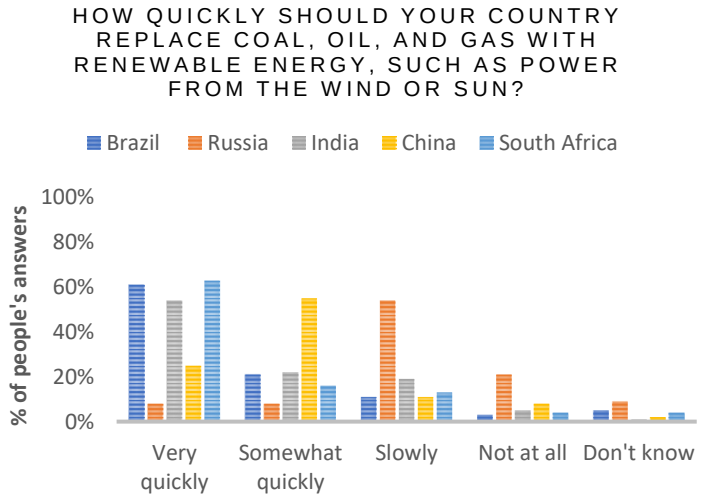
The remaining results included in Figure 5 show some more varied responses. In answer to the question 'how quickly should your country replace coal, oil and gas with

Figure 5: *Results from the UNDP People's Climate Vote 2024*









Source: *Compiled by author from* UNDP (2024)

renewable energy?', the majority of respondents in Brazil, India and South Africa answered 'very quickly', whereas 'somewhat quickly' was the most common response in China, and 'slowly' was the most common in Russia. This reflects to some extent the reliance on certain economies to fossil fuels, particularly in the case of Russia. It also underlines that society often struggles to perceive the severity of climate change and the immediate need for action, unless its effects are impacting everyday lives.

In answer to the question 'How well is your country addressing climate change?', 60% of respondents from Brazil believed their country was doing 'somewhat badly' or 'very badly', and results in South Africa and Russia were distributed across answers. However. 73% of respondents in China, and 56% in India, believed their country was doing 'somewhat well' or 'very well'. Although this could suggest the level of progress within each country against their climate commitments to date, in may also reflect how climate progress is communicated within a country (e.g., by the media), trust in government and a countries perceived 'fair share' in relation to climate action. China, for example,

under President Xi Jinping has shifted its rhetoric on climate change to position itself as a global leader. But as Joyce (2024) argues, “while China has adopted proactive rhetoric positioning itself as a global climate governance leader, the effectiveness of this international identity construction is hampered by discrepancies between rhetoric and action. Still, growing domestic recognition suggests that the changing narratives serve a more pivotal function — as domestic propaganda” (Joyce, 2024, p. 1).” Similarly in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently declared that “We have met the climate targets set under the Paris Agreement ahead of schedule. India is the only nation among the G20 nations to do so” (The Economic Times, 2024, p. 1), despite widespread criticism at the time that these goals were under ambitious.

Overall, the results from this survey suggest that, domestically, there is a clear will within BRICS countries for governments to increase their climate ambition, policy and action. There is also evidence of a growing climate activism movement, with environmental justice organisations continuing to “protest against extracting and processing fossil fuels as a strategy to achieve climate change mitigation… as a result, activism towards decarbonisation is becoming a potentially effective force for reducing CO2 emissions” (Thiri *et al*, 2022, p. 1). Social movements can help to raise awareness, pressure governments and organisations to increase ambition and bring policy changes, promote knowledge transfer and foster just energy transitions, and there is also an indication that indigenous participation has a significant effect on limiting fossil fuels (Thiri *et al*, 2022). However, this increase in climate activism and social movements is also being met with increasing backlash from governments, with an environmental group in Russia being added to a list of ‘foreign agents’ (Frost, 2023), and reports that India are trying to criminalise climate activism (Mundy, 2023).

Therefore, a stronger peer pressure system is undoubtedly required, and local communities within the BRICS countries will have an important role to play in this. As Thiri *et al* (2022) explain, “participation from vulnerable groups, indigenous people, and movements from the Global South is vital in shaping more just energy transition pathways and climate change mitigation” (Thiri *et al*, 2022 , p. 11).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Key highlights

This study has looked to explore the extent to which political and national circumstances influence the design of the BRICS countries NDCs, the level of cooperation amongst BRICS countries in global climate governance, and the role of peer pressure in moving the dial on the BRICS countries climate ambition and action, in the lead up to the next iteration of NDCs, due for submission in 2025.

National circumstances

From the analysis of the NDC submissions of the BRICS, in most cases, commitments and policies have been designed within the national political and national circumstances that make the adoption of such policies likely.

In Brazil, against a turbulent political backdrop, policies have largely reflected the countries interests on climate change and how these have evolved over time alongside a growing environmental movement, with a focus on land use change and controlling deforestation. In Russia, where the economy is heavily reliant on energy and the exportation of fossil fuels, climate and decarbonisation policy has been particularly conservative and inconsistent, with the watering down of commitments and targets which may actually allow for emissions to grow up to 2030. India is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and sensitive to changes in global energy markets, as the second largest coal producer and importer, and therefore recent developments have focussed on both renewable energy plans, and behind the scenes, the governments continued support for coal. China is attempting to publicly position itself as a global leader in climate governance, as it recognises the threat climate change poses to long-term economic growth and its ambitions on the world stage, yet it remains heavily reliant on fossil fuels. Finally, South Africa has developed an ambitious climate governance system in recent years to reform their energy sector, following years of significant political and economic upheaval. Therefore, in line with the bottom-up approach of the Paris Agreement, state sovereignty and short-term political priorities remain key to the design of countries NDCs, although this is not limited to BRICS countries.

Although it is expected that countries NDCs will vary depending on their national circumstances, as is envisaged by the Paris Agreement, this is currently allowing the BRICS to shy away from effective climate mitigation and collective action, in pursuit of their own short-term political priorities. The BRICS countries to date can be seen to have used the NDCs as a negotiating tool, without consideration for longer-term risks. The CAT has assessed each countries NDC targets against a ‘fair share’ contribution and deemed none of the BRICS countries targets to be Paris-aligned, China’s being ‘highly insufficient’ and Russia’s ‘critically insufficient’ (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.). Similarly, the comprehensiveness of the design of each BRICS countries net zero target were assessed to be ‘Poor’ (except for South Africa where target information is

incomplete), and policies and actions were assessed to be ‘insufficient’ or ‘highly insufficient’ across all BRICS countries (Climate Action Tracker, n.d.).

This reiterates that the current level of ambition and underlying policy within each of the BRICS countries NDCs remains insufficient to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius as set out in the Paris Agreement.

BRICS cooperation

In UNFCCC climate negotiations, the BRICS have tended to participate as members of the G77+China bloc or as part of the BASIC coalition (without Russia), and largely representing, to a degree of success, the interests of developing countries.

The BRICS have institutionalised their relationship and created a number of governance mechanisms to allow for cooperation in areas where their interests align. This has included multilateral annual BRICS summits since 2009 and the convening of ministerial meetings across a range of sectors, including an annual environmental working group since 2015, as well as ad hoc bilateral meetings. From a review of the Joint Statements emerging from the BRICS summits and environmental working groups, although there are limited concrete outcomes, they do provide an opportunity for the BRICS to present areas of common interests, particularly in a concerted effort reinforce their commitment to common by differentiated responsibilities and to urge developed nations to act in relation to climate financing. Although there is limited evidence of the BRICS engaging in climate negotiations with each other on areas where they are not aligned, there is some evidence of more concrete developments from areas where they are aligned, including the BRICS New Development Bank.

Therefore, although the BRICS may not act as a consistent coalition, they are (both individually and collectively) crucial to climate mitigation efforts and therefore maintain significant influence over global climate governance.

Peer pressure

Finally, although to date there may be limited peer pressure on climate from within the BRICS group, there remains a strong call from the international community for the BRICS to be responsible stakeholders, cooperate and scale up their ambitions in line with the Paris Agreement. As this study has shown, there is a clear will domestically for BRICS countries to strengthen their commitments to address climate change. This is taking the form of environmental movements and climate activism, which are proven to be effective strategies in achieving climate mitigation (Thiri *et al*, 2022). Despite government backlash in Russia and India, this is only likely to gain momentum as people continue to feel the effects of climate change in their everyday lives.

Many of the BRICS countries will sooner or later be compelled to act by both the direct impacts of climate change on society and the economy, but also by the opportunities presented by the transition to a low carbon economy. This study has shown that the NDCs of the BRICS do not represent sufficient action, and the world is currently significantly off track in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement and mitigating

against the worst effects of climate change (UN, n.d.). As Stoddard et al argue, developed countries have so far failed to lead in combating climate change, building trust, reducing emissions and creating a 'race to the top' (Stoddard *et al*, 2021). The transition to a low carbon economy will require these developed countries, and those historically responsible for emissions to provide adequate and predictable finance, technology transfers and capacity building to developing countries, and the BRICS are already lobbying heavily for this.

However, it is time for the BRICS, as advanced developing economies and major emitters, to stop hiding behind the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, geopolitical gameplaying, and political grandstanding, and graduate to developed countries (Stoddard *et al*, 2021) (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012), as set out in the Paris Agreement. Otherwise, international frameworks may continue to enable an illusion of action and progress, whilst counties largely continue as before.

The BRICS certainly have an opportunity to shape and take a leadership role in international climate governance, particularly given the underwhelming progress from Annex 1 countries. Whilst it is encouraging to see China take steps towards this, it must be accompanied by genuine action, and the BRICS must shoulder responsibility for climate change as an immediate global priority.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

Future research should therefore focus on the evolving nature of the BRICS coalition on climate governance and effective action, and the extent to which they continue to cooperate only where their interests align. This should also be reviewed following the submission of updated NDCs in 2025, to track the progression and role of peer pressure, including from environmental movements, in convergence on coordinated climate policy.

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