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BRICS in Latin America: Opportunities and Constraints of Cooperation

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Abstract. The article examines the prospects and challenges associated with the potential expansion of BRICS in the Latin American region. The research is based on the application of PESTLE and SWOT analytical frameworks, which make it possible to structure the factors of interaction and provide a systematic assessment of its dynamics. The paper consistently examines the key determinants of this process. The political context is shaped by the counteraction of the United States, the intra-regional dynamics of the “pink tide,” and Brazil’s role as a regional leader within the bloc. Economic factors — such as the complementarity of national economies, access to investments from the New Development Bank, and opportunities to enter new markets — serve as the main incentives for Latin American countries. In addition, the study highlights the influence of social factors, particularly the pro-Western orientation of regional states, as well as the importance of technological cooperation and legal aspects related to the informal status of BRICS. The authors identify the strengths (economic potential, ideological appeal) and opportunities (amplification of the “Global South” voice, implementation of infrastructure projects) that foster closer cooperation. At the same time, the paper outlines the weaknesses (institutional amorphousness, internal contradictions) and threats (external geopolitical pressure, regional instability) that constrain the integration of Latin American countries into the BRICS framework. In conclusion, the authors argue that the most sustainable form of engagement could be the “BRICS+” model, which envisages expanding the circle of dialogue partners without granting full membership. This approach would make it possible to minimize risks and strengthen the position of the association in the global system.

Keywords: BRICS, BRICS expansion, Latin America, BRICS+, Brazil

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Introduction

Founded in 2009, the BRICS grouping was initially conceived as an association of emerging economies with significant influence on global development. Annual meetings of BRICS leaders and representatives at various levels, the establishment of the first institutions, and the expansion of multilateral projects have led to the formation of one of the most visible and widely discussed actors in contemporary global political processes. Originally comprising four member states, BRICS today includes ten full members and thirteen partner countries that have joined the BRICS+ framework, creating a space for a “polyphonic international dialogue” [1].

Despite the diversity among its member states, BRICS continues to evolve, drawing new partners into its orbit of cooperation. Recently, particular attention has been paid to the potential expansion of BRICS membership and partnerships in the Latin American region. The situation surrounding Argentina’s refusal to join the association, the inclusion of Cuba and Bolivia as partner countries, the expressed interest of other states such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, and the emergence of scholarly research on the potential accession of Latin American countries to BRICS [2] have further highlighted the relevance of this issue.

This article examines the challenges and prospects of BRICS cooperation with Latin American countries.

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The analytical framework is structured through the application of PESTLE and SWOT methodologies. The PESTLE approach is employed to identify political, economic, social, technological, legal, and international factors influencing the interaction, while the SWOT analysis serves to summarize and systematize the prospects for the development of relations, taking into account existing strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential and current threats and opportunities.

Results and Discussion

Key Factors Shaping BRICS – Latin American Cooperation

The foreign policy environment largely determines the prospects for Latin American integration into BRICS. The key international political factor is the position of the United States, which is concerned about the growing influence of China and Russia in the Western Hemisphere [3], as well as about the overall strengthening of BRICS. In response, within the framework of the G7, the United States announced its own infrastructure investment programs – Build Back Better World [4], later transformed into the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. Although these initiatives currently lack sufficient financial backing, their primary political objective is to demonstrate to Latin American countries that they have an alternative and the support of the West.

Another important political factor is the intra-regional dynamics of Latin America. In recent years, the region has experienced a so-called “pink tide” [5]—the rise to power of left-centrist governments (in Mexico, Argentina until 2023, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Brazil), many of which are sympathetic to the ideas of multipolarity and South–South integration. These governments view BRICS member states as natural partners sharing the values of sovereign development [6].

However, the political pendulum in the region is well known for its swings: a change of government can fundamentally alter the country’s foreign policy course. A vivid example is Argentina, where the previous left-centrist administration applied for BRICS membership, but its right-liberal successor, Javier Milei, who favors closer ties with the United States, withdrew the application.

Therefore, policy continuity remains a crucial factor: for successful integration into BRICS, regional countries must achieve an internal political consensus on this issue, ensuring that changes in government do not lead to abrupt foreign policy reversals. Otherwise, the reliability of Latin American partners will continue to be questioned.

Another important factor concerns the position of the leading BRICS countries regarding the role of Latin American states within the association and within their broader foreign policy strategies. China has consistently supported the expansion of engagement with the region, while Russia has a long-standing history of cooperation with Latin American states, even though the region still largely remains on the periphery of Russia’s foreign policy agenda. Brazil, as both a BRICS member and a regional leader, seeks to act as a representative of the entire region. This means that, politically, the selection of “candidate” countries for partnership will be filtered both by extra-regional powers and by the considerations of the regional hegemon.

Economic pragmatism and perceived benefits constitute the main driving force behind BRICS expansion for Latin American countries. On the one hand, there is

an observable objective convergence of economies: over the past decade, China has become the largest trading partner of South America [7]. At the same time, the countries of the region are interested in attracting foreign direct investment and credit flows from other BRICS members. The New Development Bank (NDB) of BRICS has announced its plans to admit new members and to finance projects beyond the founding countries [8]. For Latin American economies, participation in the association could provide access to substantial financial resources and investment opportunities.

In addition, an important factor remains the potential access to new markets and participation in large-scale interregional projects. Latin America is rich in natural resources — oil, lithium, copper, agricultural and industrial products — all of which are in high demand among BRICS countries characterized by high resource intensity. The integration of logistics chains (for instance, the supply of Bolivian lithium for Chinese industry with the assistance of the BRICS New Development Bank) would generate mutual benefits for the participants, with BRICS serving as an important negotiation platform for such projects.

Overall, economic factors are largely favorable to the expansion of BRICS: the complementarity of national economies, the region's demand for investment, its potential as a market for BRICS exports, and the emergence of alternative financial instruments all provide a solid foundation for closer cooperation. The key question, however, is whether the countries will be able to make effective use of the opportunities provided and to minimize the associated risks.

The socio-cultural environment and public opinion also influence the prospects for BRICS expansion in the region. Historically, anti-interventionist and anti-imperialist sentiments have been strong in Latin America, shaping broad support for an independent foreign policy course. On this basis, cooperation with the countries of the Global South may receive public approval — particularly in states where disappointment with traditional cooperation under international financial institutions remains high (such as Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, and Ecuador).

At the same time, social factors may also play a constraining role. A significant portion of the population and elites in Latin America maintain close cultural and educational ties with Europe and North America and are oriented toward Western values and discourses. For them, an alliance with BRICS members — often portrayed, as a result of effective Western public diplomacy, as an “anti-Western” bloc adhering to alternative values [9]—may appear undesirable. In the region, the decision to join BRICS could potentially become the subject of broad public debate. In Argentina, for instance, the announcement of the country's invitation to BRICS triggered discussion: while some political forces and experts emphasized potential economic benefits, others warned of the risks of isolation from the West and excessive dependence on China. Although the debate was curtailed by the change of government, this episode illustrates the significance of social perception as a factor influencing integration dynamics.

Another social aspect concerns the presence of large diasporas and enduring connections between Latin America and BRICS countries. The Chinese diaspora, for example, is substantial in Peru; Cubans maintain long-standing ties with Russia; and Indian communities are present in Guyana and Brazil. These networks can serve as “bridges” of mutual understanding, facilitating exchange and cooperation. At the same time, linguistic barriers and cultural distance between Latin America and other BRICS states remain objective factors that may slow the establishment of closer formal and informal contacts.

Public support for integration will to a large extent depend on tangible outcomes: if societies perceive improvements in the economic situation, job creation, and new opportunities for growth resulting from cooperation with BRICS, attitudes are likely to become more favorable.

Scientific and technological development, along with digital infrastructure, constitutes an important dimension shaping the potential for cooperation with BRICS. The BRICS countries — particularly China, India, and Russia — possess advanced technologies in a wide range of fields, from space exploration and nuclear energy to information technology and biopharmaceuticals. For Latin American states, this opens opportunities for technological exchange and joint innovation. There are already successful examples: since the 1980s, Brazil and China have been jointly developing remote-sensing satellites under the CBERS program, which is now supported by the BRICS Committee on Space Cooperation. Established in May 2022, this committee has become a new platform for deepened interaction among member states in this field.

In recent years, issues related to the digital economy and artificial intelligence have become increasingly prominent on the BRICS agenda. By integrating into these initiatives, Latin American countries can gain access to both expertise and investment in their technological sectors.

The legal environment and regulatory framework also determine the boundaries and modalities of cooperation with BRICS. Since BRICS is an informal association without a founding treaty [10], accession does not require the ratification of an international agreement. This simplifies the expansion process: a political decision at the highest level is sufficient to admit a new member. At the same time, the absence of a clearly defined legal status means that the juridical nature of obligations among participants remains ambiguous. Within BRICS, memoranda of understanding and “roadmaps” are signed, but they are largely declarative and framework in nature. The expansion of membership may further dilute consensus, increase internal fragmentation within BRICS, and foster the emergence of interest-based coalitions.

Although there are no direct legal contradictions between BRICS membership and other international commitments, the issue remains diplomatically sensitive. The legal factor also concerns the characteristics of national legislation in Latin American countries related to foreign investment, banking regulation, and trade regimes. If BRICS, through the New Development Bank (NDB), finances projects in Latin America, it is essential that the host countries ensure transparent regulatory frameworks for the operation of international financial institutions. Sanctions regimes may also play a role: by joining a bloc that includes Russia and Iran, Latin American states would need to maneuver carefully to avoid the risk of secondary sanctions.

Another legal aspect is the principle of sovereign equality and non-interference, which is embedded in the ideological foundation of BRICS [11]. This principle is of crucial importance, as Latin American countries traditionally attach great value to sovereignty and the inviolability of borders.

A further legal dimension involves the development of new agreements within an expanded BRICS framework. Should the number of participants grow, the question may arise of granting the organization a more formalized status — such as adopting a BRICS+ Charter that would articulate its goals, principles, and institutional mechanisms. This could mark a new juridical stage in BRICS evolution, although member states’ readiness for such a step remains uncertain. For now, the legal environment for expansion appears flexible, yet it requires

the adaptation of both domestic and external regulatory norms by prospective candidate countries.

Prospects and Challenges of BRICS Expansion in the Latin American Region

This section of the article is based on the application of SWOT analysis, which enables the assessment of prospects for cooperation through the systematization of the strengths and weaknesses of interaction, as well as its opportunities and threats.

Regarding the strengths, first and foremost, BRICS possesses significant economic potential and accumulated experience in multifaceted cooperation, which may prove attractive to Latin American economies. The member countries jointly account for approximately 36% of global GDP and 18% of world trade [12], and they possess substantial financial resources, human capital, and technological capabilities. Within BRICS, the New Development Bank (NDB) has been established to finance infrastructure and other development projects in member and partner countries. For Latin American states, which currently face an investment deficit, access to such alternative sources of capital constitutes a major advantage.

Beyond economic considerations, another important incentive for some Latin American countries is the potential for military-political and technological cooperation with BRICS members. For Russia, amid confrontation with the West, Latin America represents an important vector of foreign policy, allowing it to demonstrate global presence. In turn, certain regional governments that maintain strained relations with the United States view partnership with BRICS as an opportunity to diversify sources of arms supplies and strengthen their defense capabilities. In this sense, BRICS serves as an additional platform for dialogue with key partners on security-related issues.

Secondly, the presence of Brazil, which seeks to play the role of a regional representative within the association, has a positive demonstrative effect on its neighbors. In 2025, the BRICS chairmanship passed to Latin America, with Brazil assuming the leading role. The country continued to advance its own agenda — one that also reflects the interests of other regional states — including the fight against poverty, the reform of the international monetary and financial system, and the transformation of global governance institutions [13].

Thirdly, the ideological appeal of the BRICS format for a number of Latin American elites lies in its image as a “club of developing countries”, where the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference prevail. This is reinforced by the rhetoric of BRICS leaders themselves, who position the association as a platform for developing a common stance of emerging economies — the countries of the Global South or the so-called “world majority” — on the reform of global institutions.

Moreover, the positive experience of cooperation between Latin American states and individual BRICS members contributes to the growing interest in the grouping. This applies to economic, political, and humanitarian dimensions alike. For instance, studies have shown that among the “original five” BRICS countries, all — except South Africa — are actively engaged in Latin America, implementing humanitarian projects with the majority of states in the region [14].

As for the weaknesses, the main challenge of BRICS expansion lies in the absence of consensus among member states regarding the development of a unified

foreign policy strategy and the institutional structure of the association itself. The BRICS countries are highly heterogeneous in their interests; there is no common ideological platform or long-term development strategy for the bloc, which diminishes its overall effectiveness. Each state tends to use BRICS primarily as a discussion platform for advancing its own agenda.

Moreover, BRICS is not an integration-based organization: decisions are made by consensus during the annual summits, but they remain advisory in nature. The lack of institutionalization means that many agreements reached within BRICS remain largely rhetorical. Although this flexibility can be seen as a formal advantage — allowing the format to adapt to changing circumstances — it simultaneously limits the bloc's effectiveness in the eyes of external partners.

An important aspect in this context is the potential competition of interests and the possible reduction in the role of individual members following expansion. For example, Brazil's exclusive position as the sole representative of the region within BRICS previously ensured it a special status; the accession of other Latin American states could weaken Brazil's unique role.

In addition, political disagreements have emerged among BRICS members regarding the pool of potential partners in Latin America. There is no unified view on which states should be invited. A well-known case occurred when Brazil effectively blocked a proposal to invite Venezuela to join the BRICS partnership due to political differences [15].

At the same time, the expansion of BRICS in Latin America opens up a number of opportunities that could strengthen both the association itself and its potential participants.

First, it provides for the deepening of interregional South–South cooperation. The growing global influence of BRICS enhances its authority in advancing and defending the common interests of its members [16]. Latin America's representation in major international forums through several countries would increase the region's weight in shaping the global agenda.

Second, the BRICS+ format has the potential to become a platform for the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects [17] linking Latin America with Africa and Asia. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China already cooperates with many countries of the region—21 out of 33 Latin American states have signed memoranda of cooperation — and through BRICS these projects could acquire a multilateral dimension and financing. For instance, Bolivia, having become a BRICS partner, seeks to consolidate its position as a key player in the lithium market by attracting investment from BRICS countries for the development of its vast lithium deposits [18].

Third, the growing participation of Latin American countries in BRICS could stimulate the reform of the global governance system [19]. The collective voice of an expanded BRICS has the potential to exert greater influence on the reform of the IMF, the World Bank, and the UN Security Council [20], promoting fairer representation for developing countries. From its inception, BRICS has sought to foster international cooperation based on the principles of transparency, mutual respect, and multipolarity.

However, the process of BRICS expansion in Latin America also faces significant external threats and risks.

First, geopolitical resistance from the United States and its allies may hinder the involvement of Latin American countries in BRICS. U.S. officials have described the enlargement of the association as “a significant victory for two leading members of the group, increasing China’s political influence and helping to reduce Russia’s isolation” [21]. Joining a format that is increasingly perceived in the West as an “anti-Western alliance” could complicate the relations of these Latin American states with Europe and North America.

Second, the admission of new members with divergent interests could exacerbate internal contradictions and reduce the effectiveness of BRICS, calling into question the rationale for its enlargement.

Third, regional political divisions in Latin America also pose a threat to BRICS expansion. Competition for leadership among the region’s key countries — Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina — or their ideological incompatibilities may hinder the formation of a consolidated regional position toward cooperation with BRICS.

Today, BRICS functions as an influential transregional platform for international dialogue [22] and collective decision-making, addressing not only joint projects but also broader issues of global governance. Although the association was initially established as a dialogue forum primarily focused on economic and financial cooperation, it has gradually evolved into a multidimensional framework. BRICS now regularly engages in social and humanitarian initiatives, such as the establishment of the BRICS Network University, the BRICS Youth Council, and the BRICS Games, among others.

At present, BRICS interacts with Latin American countries across various domains, expanding cooperation formats and demonstrating the association’s capacity to formulate collective responses to global challenges. The enlargement of BRICS during 2022–2025 reflects the growing international interest in the grouping, including from Latin American states. However, the expansion also entails not only positive outcomes but potential drawbacks that may, in turn, become destabilizing factors for the association’s functioning.

Conclusion

It appears that the most effective and sustainable solution lies in the further development of the BRICS+ dialogue format. Rather than increasing the number of full BRICS members, expanding the circle of dialogue partners within the informal transregional BRICS+ framework could: reduce the likelihood of internal contradictions; prevent the emergence of interest-based coalitions and the resulting difficulty in reaching consensus; minimize reputational risks — such as those exemplified by Argentina’s withdrawal from participation; and strengthen BRICS’s global positioning and image, ensuring the association’s stable “in-depth” development while enhancing its soft power potential.

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БРИКС в Латинской Америке: потенциал и пределы сотрудничества

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Финансирование. Настоящее исследование не получало внешнего финансирования.

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Аннотация. Проанализированы перспективы и вызовы, связанные с потенциальным расширением БРИКС в латиноамериканском регионе. Исследование базируется на применении аналитических инструментов PESTLE и SWOT, что позволяет структурировать факторы взаимодействия и дать системную оценку их динамики. Последовательно рассматриваются ключевые детерминанты этого процесса. Политический контекст определяется противодействием США, внутрирегиональной динамикой «розовой волны» и позицией Бразилии как регионального лидера внутри блока. Экономические факторы, такие как взаимодополняемость экономик, доступ к инвестициям Нового банка развития и возможности выхода на новые рынки, выступают главным стимулом для латиноамериканских государств. Кроме того, отмечается влияние социальных факторов, в частности прозападной ориентации стран региона, а также роль технологического сотрудничества и правовых аспектов, связанных с неформальным статусом БРИКС. Выявлены сильные стороны (экономический потенциал, идеологическая привлекательность) и возможности (усиление голоса Глобального Юга, реализация инфраструктурных проектов), которые способствуют сближению государств. В то же время обозначены слабые стороны (институциональная аморфность, внутренние противоречия) и угрозы (внешнее геополитическое давление, региональная нестабильность), ограничивающие интеграцию латиноамериканских стран в структуру БРИКС. В заключении авторы приходят к выводу, что наиболее устойчивой формой взаимодействия может стать модель БРИКС+, предполагающая расширение круга партнеров по диалогу без полноправного членства, что позволит минимизировать риски и укрепить позиции объединения.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС, расширение БРИКС, Латинская Америка, БРИКС+, Бразилия

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