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## **BRICS countries' annual intergovernmental declaration: Why does it matter for world politics?**

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### **Abstract**

At their yearly summit, the bloc of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) countries issues an annual intergovernmental declaration. While these declarations are scrutinised for challenges they allegedly represent for global affairs, how they self-construct a positive representation about their global purpose is little studied. Notably, there is insufficient examination of the political deliberations behind the statements among the five different countries. By conducting a thematic content analysis based on coding content of the first ten intergovernmental declarations from 2009 to 2018, it is found that BRICS countries speak positively of their cooperative role to solve world problems without mentioning any internal disagreement. In parallel, they present Western institutions negatively in their communication strategy. An absence of deliberations does not imply an apolitical discourse. On the contrary, it can be a deliberate political communication strategy especially among the five different countries aiming to showcase alignment about their purpose in world politics.

Keywords: BRICS declarations; thematic content analysis; world politics; positive self-presentation; intergovernmental communication strategy; political discourse

### **Introduction**

The Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) bloc of countries meets annually at their interstate summit where they issue their yearly intergovernmental declaration. The BRIC countries, initially without South Africa, was coined in a Goldman Sachs economic report in 2001. Goldman Sachs's researchers projected the BRIC countries' economic ascendance based on statistical calculations related to Gross Domestic Product (GDP),

market growth, and trade (O'Neill, 2001; Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003). While BRIC was meant to be a country acronym coined in a Western investment bank's report, the four countries formed an unlikely intergovernmental platform in 2006 to be later joined by South Africa in 2010. From 2009 to 2018, there were ten consecutive annual BRICS Heads of State's summits. Despite their different economic, cultural, and political backgrounds, the configuration uses the weight of their combined advancement in political, economic, and social arenas to promote a united discourse about their combined purpose in world politics.

In this research article, I argue that the BRICS intergovernmental official statements are not sufficiently analysed. Beyond their critique of deficiencies in the international financial system led by Western countries, the BRICS countries' 'rhetorical announcements [found] in their formal Declarations and Communiqués' (Gautier et al., 2014, p. 163) give the impression of evolving over time. For example, during the initial years, it was the Foreign Ministers of the four BRIC countries who initiated discussions in September 2007 about their potential of working together on current world development problems, including global finances, food crisis, and climate change alongside the Group of Eight (G8) member states and other emerging economies through the Heiligendamm process (G8 Summit 2007 Heiligendamm, 2009). The Heiligendamm process meant to institutionalise a high-level dialogue between the G8, of which Russia is a member, and the important emerging economies namely Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa with the aim of addressing the 'biggest challenges the global economy is facing today' (G8 Summit 2007 Heiligendamm, 2009). BRIC Foreign Ministers used this narrative to '[reaffirm] the commitment of the BRICs to work together and with other states ... to strengthen international security and stability, ensure equal opportunities for development to all countries' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2008, notes 1–2). Five months later, the 2007-8 financial crisis became the impetus justifying the conversation exchange among the BRIC Finance Ministers (Brazil Ministry of External Relations, 2008, note 1). By projecting the logic that the BRIC economies demonstrated resilience during the financial crisis, the government officials saw an ideal opportunity to set the global economic agenda through their configuration namely during the 2009 G20 summit (The Economist, 2009).

Over time, the BRICS countries' declarations evolved to include additional areas for cooperation in the world order. They adapted their political communication strategy. Meanwhile, any deliberation and argumentation, that is, debate, internal disagreements,

and critique of each other that may feature in BRICS countries' intergovernmental discussions are not reflected in the annual declarations. It is precisely the discourse about the configuration's purpose in world politics and their cohesive communication in their intergovernmental declaration, which I explore in this research article. The aim is to make theoretical sense of the BRICS political discourse given that it is not known how they deliberate among themselves to produce a unified annual declaration despite their respective country differences.

More specifically, I use a thematic content analytical approach based on coding content to explore the politically motivated discursive strategies of the BRICS configuration's first ten intergovernmental declarations from 2009 to 2018. I argue that the grouping engages in a strategy of 'positive self-presentation (boasting) and negative other-presentation (derogation)' (van Dijk, 2006, p. 126). In other words, the positive or good dimension of BRICS are accentuated while their negative side is de-emphasised or never mentioned. Concurrently, the opposite is applied for others, that is, their negative dimension is prioritised and anything positive about the other is disregarded. I conclude that the BRICS governments utilise expressions with positive connotations when presenting their vision about world order. There is no indication of political deliberation or disagreement, that is, the five governments never express any critique towards one another or hold each other responsible for imbalances in global economic development and other areas. Instead, they speak positively of their cooperative role to solve world problems while subtly criticising rivaling Western institutions and casting them in a negative light in their official discourse. These conclusions provide insights about the BRICS configuration's intergovernmental communication strategy to manufacture a positive narrative about the grouping's purpose in world politics. An absence of deliberations does not imply an apolitical discourse. On the contrary, it can be a deliberate political communication strategy.

### **Significance of the BRICS configuration's declarations**

Since their first official gathering, the BRICS configuration succeeded in formalising and sustaining intergovernmental parastatal bodies. They created a BRICS Interbank Cooperative Mechanism, a New Development Bank (NDB), a BRICS Health Ministers' Forum, a BRICS Academic Forum and Civil BRICS or BRICS Civil Society among other initiatives (Bohler-Muller and Kornegay, 2013; Hooijmaaijers, 2021; Thompson and Wet, 2018; Kirton, Kulik and Bracht, 2014). According to Cooper (2016), this is a rare

occurrence for middle powers, including Russia and China, which tend to avoid agreeing to ‘some form of institutionalization’ (p. 529). Yet, through these government-sanctioned platforms and despite their differences, the government leaders manage to project a unified vision about the purpose of their conglomeration for world politics especially for the South. Their aligned vision is evident, for example, in their conjoint declarations echoing their commitments for effective cooperation among their respective governments particularly in the interests of developing countries and emerging market economies (BRICS Information Centre, 2009, note 15; 2010, notes 5, 8, 11; 2011, notes 6, 7, 15; 2012, notes 4, 8, 9, 11, 13; 2013, notes 3, 9, 13; 2014, notes 3, 8; 2015, notes 3, 11, 15, 19; 25; 2016, notes 10, 42; 2017, notes 3, 6, 69; 2018, note 9). Their yearly statement about multilateralism suggests multi-level discussions with diverse ministerial representatives, think tanks, and involving people-to-people exchanges among the five countries. It evokes a cooperative spirit originating from the South, which aims to rival unidimensional Northern or Western instances of collaboration (Bergamaschi and Tickner, 2017).

Additionally, in the context of South-South development, the BRICS configuration is debated in policy papers and academic research to play a key role in challenging traditional North-South relations by offering an alternative model for multidimensional cooperation (Morazan et al., 2012; Richmond and Tellidis, 2013; Sahle 2010, p. 109; Harmer and Buse, 2014). Although it is complex to locate an exact definition of BRICS as a configuration given their stark differences, the grouping is often associated with the global South in the academic literature. This was the case in journal articles published as part of a special issue on ‘Rising Powers and South-South Cooperation’ in *Third World Quarterly*. Gray and Gills refer to BRICS as ‘expanding Southern economies’ (2016, p. 594) and Muhr (2016, p. 640) calls them ‘Southern partners’. Thakur (2014) argues that the ‘BRICS natural international constituency is the global South’ (p. 1794). In 2021, *International Political Science Review* also published articles related to a symposium on the theme of ‘The BRICS, Global Governance, and Challenges for South-South Cooperation in a Post-Western World’ (Duggan et al., 2021; Hooijmaaijers, 2021).

Associating BRICS with the global South is paradoxical because in the annual intergovernmental declarations from 2009 to 2018, South-South cooperation was only mentioned once (BRICS Information Centre, 2015, note 66) whereas the expression ‘North-South’ has been articulated thrice (BRICS Information Centre, 2012, note 12;

2015, note 66; 2017, note 6). In all these instances, they were expressed in relation to redressing North-South development imbalances. Nevertheless, in all declarations, the joint statements refer repeatedly to emerging and developing economies as well as greater representation for poorest and vulnerable communities (BRICS Information Centre, 2009, note 6; 2010, notes 15–18; 2012a, note 9; 2013, notes 13–15; 2014, note 21; 2015, note 33; 2016, notes 30, 32; 2018, note 68). It is suggested that their intent is to voice not only their issues about the global North or West but also the concerns uttered by actors situated in the non-core sphere of the world order, that is, from semi-peripheries and peripheries. Arguing that the latter are under-represented and do not enjoy equal status in the world order, the BRICS configuration frames a way of presenting itself as speaking on behalf of the South. Meanwhile, the five government leaders communicate their configuration's purpose with no indication about the high-level deliberations behind their political discourse.

From an external perspective, it is argued that BRICS countries do not aim to challenge the existing order in the international economic system. Instead, the configuration seeks to make it more representative (Larionova and Shelepov, 2022). de Coning et al. (2014) also suggest that the configuration's strategy is a matter of coexisting with the West whilst Glosny (2010) argues that there is already an acceptance of the existing order by China. When commenting on 'global integration and transnational capitalist class formation' within BRICS, Robinson (2015, p. 1) also concludes that their cooperative strategies are not intended to challenge the existing world order. Despite external scepticism about the configuration's challenge to status quo, the five governments' annual declaration projects an illusion of converging with the aim of changing Western-centric rules of global governance (Sharma, 2022; Yang, 2022). While practically this is not the case, on a discursive level, operating in the interests of a more representative world order is reflected in the rationale of their very existence (Larionova and Shelepov, 2022).

Meanwhile, civil society organisations and social movements within BRICS are critical of the five governments' intensive capital accumulation strategies and the discourses from above claiming to pursue capital in the name of less developed countries while pretending to be different from the global North (Bond, 2013; Bond and Garcia, 2014; Garcia and Bond, 2016). The commonly acknowledged message from participants involved in the grassroots organisations is that the meaning of the BRICS governments' initiatives is different for the people (Brics-from-below, no date). They see the BRICS

projects as guided by capitalist or profit-making incentives, which will have little impact on improving the lives and livelihood of the people at the bottom level of the configuration. For this reason, they view the BRICS projects designed by the governments as disconnected from the reality of the mass population's perspectives and consider the government plans as a means of controlling patterns of development for state interests. Therefore, overall, there are three dimensions for consideration. First, external world views are sceptical of BRICS. Second, internally, the configuration is challenged by some grassroots organisations. Third, despite these ironies, the configuration succeeds in delivering an annual declaration that articulates a positive mandate of its role in world politics.

From a political perspective, it is not in the BRICS countries' interests to project internal differences. An intergovernmental declaration is, after all, a document declaring agreed standards among the state members. These are not legally binding. In a statement of agreements, it is not logical to project disagreements. However, it is relevant to question how different members known to share varying political and cultural ideologies overcome internal differences such as to communicate a coherent annual declaration. It is assumed that different states can share assumptions and beliefs about the world order that motivate them to cast aside internal disagreements in the general statement because of their primary motivation to present themselves positively as a better alternative grouping in world politics. Thus, the BRICS configuration's annual general statement becomes analytically relevant to be scrutinised because it communicates an oversimplified agenda. The declarations deliver generalised standards about an emerging grouping by deliberately manufacturing ways of conceiving the configuration through specific content of their choice. Beyond the attempt to avoid projection of internal disagreements which is an expected strategy in government declarations, it is, therefore, important to concentrate on the internal workings and meaning-making processes in the BRICS configuration's declared statements to understand how they manufacture their position in world politics despite their differences.

### **Theorising political discourse in the absence of deliberation and argumentation**

In theory, political discourse is concerned with finding links between language and politics (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, 2016; Wodak, 2009; Chilton, 2004). In political discourse analysis, the 'political field... is inherently connected with

argumentation and deliberation, though this is not to say that *all* political discourse is argumentative or deliberative' (Fairclough, 2018, p. 248). 'Argumentation ... is a verbal, social activity, in which people attempt to criticize or justify claims ... [the] intended perlocutionary effect is convincing an interlocutor to accept a standpoint' (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, 23). '[D]eliberation involves weighing reasons in favour of one or several proposals and reasons against' (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p. 26).

In the absence of deliberation and argumentation, a discourse can still be political and convey power relations (Hay, 2007). For example, a discourse can define and influence the understanding of reality in addition to categorising subjects and objects within social boundaries while also being powerful in discarding alternate meanings, which do not fit dominant discourses (Martin, 2002, p. 23). In the BRICS intergovernmental declarations, I argue that there are precisely attempts to prioritise some meanings while discarding others. More pertinently, there is a notable gap in understanding the deliberation and argumentation that takes place in the production of the yearly declaration. Every annual statement is issued without an indication of the discussion and potential debate involved in the generation of the document.

The implication of not understanding how ideas are deliberated among the BRICS countries is an assumption that the configuration's integration is innate and that it flows organically from alleged shared interests for the South. A second implication is not paying attention to actual global situations or world problems that would have paved the way for the five countries to develop a plan of action for achieving particular goals that they conceived linguistically about their global intent (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). As argued by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, p. 24), strategies 'are developed and formulated in discourse'. Nevertheless, I do not aim to employ a theoretical framework prioritising goals or motivations from outside the discourse of BRICS to rationalise their collective purpose because it is beyond this research article's scope to do so. Instead of extra-linguistic goals, I concentrate on the internal language used by the government leaders to document the configuration's political purpose including how they self-construct their collective image. Therefore, to theorise the process by which the different countries can offer aligned aspirations using linguistic means, I propose a customised documentary research to examine the political communication strategy in the BRICS annual declaration. I use a thematic content analytical approach based on coding content to identify how common ideas about the global South in world politics are manufactured in the BRICS declarations.

### **Relevance of documentary research for a study of the BRICS declarations**

“‘Document’ is a general term for an impression left on a physical object by a human being’ (Bell and Waters, 2014, p. 126). It can also be kept in electronic format. In the BRICS context, the intergovernmental declarations, different ministerial documents, and statements produced by the government-approved platforms are fundamental to be examined because they illuminate an understanding of past events, which led to the development of the configuration. Since documents provide key chronological insights of past events, they help researchers identify the ‘historical roots of specific issues and can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under investigation’ (Bowen, 2009, p. 30). This helps to establish whether the information produced in the document is a reaction to a significant event or crisis and how they are related to broader discussions. Therefore, the advantage of document research is that the facts in terms of extracts, quotations, or entire texts from policy reports, meeting minutes, or discussion papers, yield data that can simultaneously be organised into key themes or categories for analysis (Labuschagne, 2003).

Document analysis, in a study of BRICS, is also valuable because it ‘requires data selection, instead of data collection’ (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). This implies that the method does not affect the data being collected. Instead, the data available in documents are already collected. As a result, the next step consists of evaluating the content. Various official documents on BRICS are accessible in the public domain. Notably, the BRICS Information Centre is a website free of any affiliation, which serves ‘as a leading independent source of information and analysis on the BRICS interaction and institutions’ (BRICS Information Centre, no date). Its publications encompass all the official BRICS countries’ declarations since 2009 and include key ministerial documents from the five states. Therefore, a rich collection of documentary content is already available on the BRICS and does not need to be collected through primary data gathering.

Another important factor to acknowledge is that the conventional approach to using documents as a research method focuses on studying documents as resources, that is, ‘containers of content’ (Prior, 2004, p. 77) or ‘inert carriers of content’ (Prior, 2011, p. 95). While Prior (2011) acknowledges the approach of studying documents through its content, that is, the meaning of what is ‘in’ the document, she proposes that how ‘documents are used as a resource by human actors for purposeful ends’ (p. 95) is neglected. Beyond studying documents as simply modes of instructions or reports of events, documents also act as agents as they are ‘always open to manipulation by others:



as allies, as resources for further action, as opponents to be destroyed, or suppressed' (2004, p. 76).

Despite the strengths of documentary research for a study of BRICS, whether full access to an organisation's documents and archives can be granted is not guaranteed. Moreover, the official documents pertaining to the examination of historical events may not necessarily offer a true glimpse because some items, while originally discussed, may not be officially recorded into an organisation's 'institutional memory' (Lamont, 2015, p. 82). According to Lamont (2015), it is uncommon in studies of international relations 'to have full access to an organization's official records, although this is more common for the historian investigating organizations that no longer exist or researching an event that happened long ago' (p. 81).

Although the inherent limitations attached to documentary research can be a disadvantage, the primary objective of treating documents as 'social facts' must not be overlooked.

Documentary sources are not surrogates for other kinds of data. We cannot, for instance, learn through written records alone how an organization actually operates day by day. Equally, we cannot treat records – however 'official' – as firm evidence of what they report ... This recognition or reservation does not mean we should ignore or downgrade documentary data. On the contrary, [since they construct particular kinds of representations using their own conventions] our recognition of their existence as social facts (or constructions) alerts us to the necessity to treat them very seriously indeed (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, p. 58).

Therefore, documents are an important source of information because they contain a rich amount of data. Through analysis, they also explain the processes through which a document's content becomes a dominant one on a social level.

### **A thematic content analysis of the BRICS declarations**

A thematic content analytical approach based on coding content provides the means to study the meanings of the official governmental documents produced on BRICS, which consolidate a socio-political reality about the configuration by prioritising certain views over others. Themes are not found in documents' data. Instead, they are derived and 'actively crafted by the researcher, reflecting their interpretative choices, instead of pre-existing analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2016, p. 740). Thematic content analysis is not

about counting words or phrases. Instead, it is ‘a qualitative method for uncovering a collection of themes’ (Fugard and Potts, 2015, 669). In my article’s context, it is used to unravel how content from the BRICS annual intergovernmental documents is organised through patterns to create meanings.

For explaining the internal workings and meaning-making processes in the BRICS configuration’s declared statements, the recurring themes in their official declarations, how they are presented, and the themes omitted over the years are identified. Three steps are followed in this thematic identification process. The first consists of a preliminary open coding. The second step consists of formulating abstract categorical proposals to connect the open codes and find relationships among them. The third step involves identifying an umbrella or central theme to capture the essence of the other sub-categories.

***Phase one: open coding***

Open coding is used in early stages of research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), to ‘uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein’ (p. 102). An open code refers to a broad label or an expression, which encapsulates the denoted or literal meaning of the raw data collected (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 102). To arrive at the number of open codes per annual declaration as shown in Table 1 below, I used Rivas’s (2012) zig-zag approach for coding themes, which is a process of collecting and analysing data. It begins with starting to identify code titles in the data and continuing the process until ‘gaps in the data are filled or new and unexpected themes unpacked’ (Rivas, 2012, p. 369). The end of the process is reached ‘when no new themes emerge from the data (which is called saturation of themes)’ (Rivas, 2012, p. 369).

Table 1. Number of statement points and open codes per BRICS annual intergovernmental declaration from 2009 to 2018

Year	Location	Declaration statement	Statement points	Number of open codes
16 June 2009	Yekaterinburg, Russia	Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders	16	72
15 April 2010	Brasília, Brazil	Second BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Joint Statement	31	55
14 April 2011	Sanya, China	Third BRICS Summit: Sanya Declaration	32	11

		<i>Broad Vision, Shared Prosperity</i>		
29 March 2012	New Delhi, India	Fourth BRICS Summit: Delhi Declaration <i>BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity</i>	50	19
27 March 2013	Durban, South Africa	Fifth BRICS Summit <i>BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation</i>	47	8
16 July 2014	Fortaleza, Brazil	6 <sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit: Fortaleza Declaration <i>Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions</i>	72	8
9 July 2015	Ufa, Russia	VII BRICS Summit: Ufa Declaration <i>BRICS Partnership – a Powerful Factor of Global Development</i>	77	14
16 October 2016	Goa, India	8 <sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit <i>Building Responsive, Inclusive and Collective Solutions</i>	110	11
5 September 2017	Xiamen, China	9 <sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit: BRICS Leaders Declaration <i>BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future</i>	71	3
27 July 2018	Johannesburg, South Africa	10 <sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit: Johannesburg Declaration <i>BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution</i>	102	6

Akin to Rivas's (2012) zig-zag approach, when identifying the themes or code titles in the initial stages of analysing the BRICS annual documented statements, I started in a chronological order with the first declaration, which was also the briefest. I identified 72 open codes, that is, broad labels, which encapsulated the literal meanings of each of the items written in the document. I generated a code title for every coherent item mentioned in the document. The code titles in the starting stage were rough expressions: words or

phrases, which encapsulated the essence of the data. I either used some of the words and phrases from the document verbatim as open codes or paraphrased a few of them. For example, I reworded 'Merit-based' to 'Meritocracy'. In the second declaration, the number of new themes fell to 55. I continued until the number of open code titles per declaration was exhausted. This first stage of coding each of the items in every declaration meant that I read all the statement sentences sequentially to deduce the code titles. I treated the data uniformly and many unexpected themes were discovered in the BRICS declarations such as 'Outer space', 'Railways', 'Youth', or 'Film' amongst others.

There were numerous repetitive open codes in either the same declaration that I was analysing or the other following ones. I intentionally separated some of the codes. For example, when employing the word 'Cooperation', the intergovernmental leaders' statements speak of different types of cooperation: 'macroeconomic cooperation'; 'technical cooperation'; 'investment cooperation'; 'agricultural cooperation'; 'inclusive cooperation'; and many more. If I had combined the data into the umbrella code 'cooperation', I would have simply concluded that BRICS economies are largely interested in macroeconomic policy coordination, which was primarily emphasised in the first declaration. The types of cooperation that the five countries seek to engage in evolved and diversified into a variety of fields in comparison with their first declaration.

In the first stage of my preliminary coding, the open codes did not necessarily appear to share similar characteristics. Yet, through careful reading of the declarations and comparison among them, a pattern could be noticed. For example, discussions of Western institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were always connected with requests for reforms justified by the vision and principles of creating a non-discriminatory world economic order. Overall, to connect the seemingly unrelated codes, it was helpful to follow Rivas's (2012) logic that 'the function of category development is to systematically group multiple fragments of unconnected literal codes into something meaningful and more analytical and digestible' (p. 376). This led to the second phase of my analysis.

### ***Phase two: abstract categorising***

The second stage of analysing the BRICS intergovernmental declarations consisted of organising the open codes into abstract categories in which they could be broadly grouped and from which meanings could be derived. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), 'categories are inferred by the researcher' (p. 479). Reading and re-reading the

data ‘to become thoroughly familiar with them’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 565) helped in the process of refining the categories and finding links among them. This construction of the categories ‘involves grouping the units [that is, the code titles] into domains, clusters, groups, patterns, themes and coherent sets to form ... [a] symbolic category that includes other categories’ (p. 479).

In the context of the BRICS declarations, some of the abstract categories were constructed according to the literal meanings of the open codes identified in Step 1 (Appendix A: Table 2). Once the list of open code titles was formulated in Step 1, relationships among them were established by considering how they are connected to one another. For example, when attempting to find the relationship among such differing open codes as ‘Health’, ‘Diseases’, ‘Piracy’, ‘Migration’, ‘Disaster management’, or ‘Poverty eradication’ among others, the statements in the declarations were referring to cooperation in these areas with the aim of reaching practical outcomes through a BRICS cooperation. This led to the abstract categorical proposal in Step 2 (Table 2) purporting that a diversity of world problems cannot be addressed unilaterally. Step 2 consisted of making sense of the codes identified in Step 1 by sorting them into broad proposals. This was undertaken by aligning to the original context in the declaration. For example, ‘international financial institutions’, ‘World Trade Organisation (WTO)’, ‘financial crisis’, etc. were compiled to summarise their essence into an abstract proposal to make sense of these open codes. This was achieved by considering that the original context was alluding to issues in the global economic governance framework that required reforms. Thus, by connecting the open codes to the original context, it became possible to extract abstract categorical proposals.

Overall, five abstract categorical proposals were formulated (Table 2). The five proposals are summarised below:

- (1) Practical cooperation among BRICS countries and partnership with other countries in diverse sectors has the potential to reach concrete outcomes in international society’s interests.
- (2) The existing global financial architecture lacks transparency and is discriminatory for emerging and developing countries. The global economic governance structures need to be reformed to reflect inclusiveness and representativeness in the world order.

- (3) Global threats and challenges exist in different forms and jeopardise international security. Poor and developing communities are particularly susceptible. Existing institutions should be reformed to address conflicts, threats, and reach consensus-based decisions through a multilateral approach.
- (4) Cultural diversity is the foundation of BRICS cooperation. Sustainability of common vision and intra-BRICS projects is achieved through exchanges and cooperation in various civil society areas (media, think tanks, youth, parliament forum, local governments, trade union forum, etc.).
- (5) All of the previous themes are formulated on the basis of shared ‘principles of openness, solidarity and mutual assistance’ amongst other ideals and values cherished by the BRICS countries.

### ***Phase three: choosing umbrella themes***

The third step of analysing the declarations consisted of clustering each of the above proposals into overarching themes. Step 2 (Table 2) explained above involved formulating relational statements, which could potentially connect the diversity of open code titles derived from Step 1. Step 3 focused on deciding a central theme. This central category or theme ‘consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what “this research is all about”’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 146). Strauss and Corbin’s (1998, p. 146–7) criteria for selecting a central category were applied. The five BRICS themes were chosen based on their central relationship with the other sub-categories (open codes). The themes were formulated according to frequently used words in the data. Thus, the relationship of the open codes or sub-categories from Step 1 could be explained by relating them to these central themes.

As such, the themes chosen for analysing the BRICS discursive strategies encapsulated the essence of each abstract or broader category and captured the literal meaning of the open codes. Initially four themes were identified: ‘practical cooperation’, ‘global economic governance’, ‘international affairs’, and ‘people-to-people exchanges’. This was not a complicated stage because the repetitive open codes and occasional sub-categories in the original declarations suggested these themes. However, the surprising element from the analysis has been to identify an unexpected fifth theme. There were numerous open codes repeated in each of the broader categories, which expressed the ideals of BRICS cooperation. Given the pattern and the high degree of frequency of repetition of these ‘principles’-related open codes in the four previous categories, these

warranted a theme of their own for future analytical purposes. I discovered that this theme bound the four previous ones to convey coherence about the statements in the declarations. Hence, an additional fourth step (Table 2) entailed formulating a proposal binding the four initial themes.

Overall, the five categories can be defined as follows:

- (1) According to the BRICS intergovernmental declarations, ‘cooperation’ refers to the act of the five countries coming together to create a dialogue, offer potential solutions, and coordinate actions not only about pressing international matters but also regarding future development plans. From 2009 to 2018, the areas requiring cooperation and coordination, according to the governments’ perspectives has diversified.<sup>1</sup> In the BRICS context, this cooperation is not intended to be speculative but rather practical. The BRICS governments aim for cooperation through pragmatic measures, which can be feasibly achieved and can yield noticeable or quantifiable results.
- (2) Under the umbrella category of ‘global economic governance’, the BRICS configuration is referring to the management of international trade and the international financial system. It is distinct from the category of ‘international affairs’ because when referring to matters of international trade and international finance, they request reforms to render the overarching global economic architecture less discriminatory and more transparent.
- (3) Matters pertaining to ‘international affairs’ are less economic-centric. Instead, they are concerned with addressing conflicts, threats, and challenges to territorial integrity or security in the international system.

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<sup>1</sup> BRICS cooperation range from academia, agriculture, biodiversity, banking systems, climate change, culture, currency, diseases’ management, disaster management, education, energy, environment, foreign affairs, finance, health, industry, internet governance, intellectual property, labour and employment, local government, macroeconomic policies, migration, outer space, science, technology and innovation, sustainable development, taxation, trade, to tourism amongst other areas in a growing list of developmental fields.

- (4) People-to-people exchanges allude to interactions among non-governmental actors within the BRICS configuration. In the declarations, these include media representatives, think tanks, youths, political parties, local governments, trade unions, among others.
- (5) 'Principles', in the BRICS declarations, refer to the shared ideals and values which the five governments expressed over the years (Appendix A).

Such an analytical approach is helpful because it narrows down the content of study of BRICS in contemporary politics. The five broad categories allow for a summary of the central themes in the BRICS declarations while also making more visible the critical ideas for study. In the BRICS literature, it serves to avoid condensing studies of the configuration to only matters of global economic governance. Instead, it brings forth new elements such as the focus on people-to-people exchanges. It invites questioning of the timing of this idea's inclusion in the BRICS declarations. On the one hand, prior studies concentrate on the geo-economic characteristics and implications of future GDP projections of the configuration on the existing world order (Becker, 2014; Armijo and Roberts, 2014, Makin and Arora, 2014). Others assume an inherent contribution of BRICS in the global South's interests (Gray and Gills, 2016; Thakur, 2016; Muhr, 2016). On the other hand, the analytical approach in this article distances from such traditional approaches of studying BRICS. Instead, the thematic content analysis helps to explore the intergovernmental configuration's manufacturing of a logic about its purpose in world politics through discursive strategies manifest in their declarations. On this note, the next section proceeds to discuss the findings from the main phases of the thematic content analysis of the BRICS declarations.

### **Manufacturing of the BRICS purpose in the world order: positive self-presentation and negative presentation of the other**

The analysis shows that the annual BRICS leaders' declaration contains a set of documented commitments proclaiming the intentions and common vision of the five countries' governments in a diversity of sectors. Meanwhile, the political deliberations among the five government officials in the generation of the declaration are not shared. Although the declarations are non-binding documents, they are noteworthy because they communicate shared perceptions from the five different governments on a range of topics. The documents are not meant to impose legal obligations on any of the governments.



Instead, the declarations echo and annually repeat their vision, their perceptions of matters of mutual concern in world politics, their planned course of action to address global challenges, and their commitments towards one another.

The ten BRICS intergovernmental declarations are broad in the range of items they cover. They fluctuate in length and address different themes. Nevertheless, there is an evident pattern in the declarations. There are constant items in the documents, which appear on an annual basis, although they may be organised or presented differently. For example, the first Russian declaration contained 16 points setting the foundation for areas of discussion. As illustrated in Table 1, the number of points covered varied annually since this statement. On average, the declarations range from a minimum of 33 to a maximum of 110 points for the period of study from 2009 to 2018. It is important to note that a reduction in the number of points discussed is not a matter of countries excluding previously mentioned items on the agenda. Instead, sub-points may have been grouped together and actions completed given that each of the declaration is followed by an action plan, which is referred to during the next summit. Items which are work-in-progress are identified as such. Moreover, despite every host country assigned a particular theme around which to organise their gathering since 2011, the joint leaders' statements remain focused on the major issues on the international agenda. The annual declaration is, in this way, a presentation of the BRICS approach for cooperation and coordination of their efforts to achieve concrete outcomes in different areas according to their vision.

Overall, ideas from the BRICS intergovernmental declarations centre on the key themes of practical cooperation, global economic governance, matters pertaining to international affairs, and initiatives for people exchanges or cultural diversity – the latter being a theme that only emerged in the analysis from the 2013 declaration onwards. The BRICS leaders mobilise specific meanings and project particular images about themselves through principles, which reflect ideals of unified commitments. The open codes and the patterns in which they recur led to the following reflections:

- (1) First, the five BRICS Heads of State do not have a common spoken language. Yet they manage to employ specific words to convey a sense of commonality in their gatherings. The governments seek to emit a particular impression of their vision and status. No meanings with negative connotations towards any of the five governments are noted. Less desired or alternative perspectives of their grouping are not presented. For example, the five states' positive contributions to solve

global economic problems and generate benefits for all types of economies including emerging and developing countries are emphasised. The five governments never express any critique towards one another or hold each other responsible for imbalances in global economic development and other areas. Instead, they speak positively of their cooperative role to solve world problems.

- (2) Second, despite the ten declarations being issued at different periods in time, there is an internal uniformity about the topics they discuss namely their accusations against Western-led organisations such as the World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the United Nations Security Council.
- (3) Third, the structure of the ten declarations is somewhat unchanged. Following their introductory statements, the joint declarations generally proceed to criticise existing organisations mentioned in my previous point, reiterate their commitment to sustainable development while emphasising the concept of sovereignty, and discuss regional and international affairs affecting different countries but particularly conflict-driven states and poorest economies. Although they stress the importance of humanitarian assistance, the respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty is largely emphasised. Finally, in the declarations dated from 2013, the joint statements tended to dedicate their last points to discussions of cultural alliances. The pattern, the frequency of the repeated points, and the structure of the documented items suggest a priority to the matters of discussion set by the governmental leaders. Matters about cultural integration are discussed in the last segments of the declarations.
- (4) Fourth, building on the above point, it is noted that some matters are more extensively covered than others, namely the suggestions and requests for the IMF and United Nations Security Council to be reformed are repeatedly covered both in depth and in breadth.
- (5) Fifth, the BRICS governments utilise expressions with positive connotations when presenting their vision. They employ words with undertones of positive values and ideals to emphasise that their cooperation in diverse fields is based on principles of transparency, sustainability, meritocracy, representativeness, inclusion, respect, and mutual benefits amongst other values.

Overall, the discursive strategies employed in the declarations produce, reflect, repeat, and promote the configuration's status as an important grouping in the world

order. BRICS government-generated documents are not simply a matter of reflecting commitments or action plans for the next annual summit. Instead, they serve to reproduce and reinforce their discourse as popular knowledge. As argued by Fairclough and Fairclough (2016, p. 187), '[t]exts are "multi-functional": ... they provide representations (of people, objects, events)'. For this reason, a critical analysis of the BRICS discursive strategies is necessary, to understand how the governments articulate a 'positive self-presentation' (van Dijk, 2006, p. 126) of their decisions, that is, emphasise meanings about themselves associated with positive connotations while negatively criticising competing views. This positive-self presentation reflects the intentional message and information which the government actors seek to convey. Meanwhile, there is a deliberate absence of their internal political deliberations.

Since political discourse analysis is the study of 'the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties, both at the local, national and international levels' (van Dijk 1997, p. 12), subjecting BRICS intergovernmental declarations to academic scrutiny is necessary to understand how five politically-, economically-, culturally- different countries generate aligned aspirations about their purpose in world politics. In this article, I focus primarily on a thematic content analysis based on coding content of the first ten BRIC intergovernmental declarations and reach a series of five proposals (Table 2) about the BRICS communication of their purpose in the world order. Continuing research is needed to substantiate the validity of these proposals. Paradoxes including internal discrepancies in the BRICS need to be acknowledged to consider whether they contradict the proposed visions.

Another gap to address in future research is the evolution of the declarations after 2019 especially considering recent events including Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This research article is currently limited to the period from 2009 to 2018. The differences in approaches to international affairs including voting patterns in the United Nations' General Assembly warrant further consideration. Likewise, further research can reveal the different approaches by each BRICS country in hosting the annual official summit. The analytical approach in this article can be further broken down to consider the differences in each member country's chairmanship and whether they are influenced to set their annual agenda according to different state motives. Ultimately, the BRICS communication strategies are important to be studied because they are approached in academic studies as projecting a discourse related to the global South (Muhr, 2016;

Thakur, 2014; Gray and Gills, 2016). The declarations are also a critique of deficiencies in world order, which they link with Western institutions. Meanwhile, the BRICS countries' contributions to imbalances in the international system are deliberately not addressed in the intergovernmental declarations. Moreover, they deliberately omit internal political disagreements. It is an intentional political communication strategy, which also ought to be analysed in future research comparing the individual country's communiqués especially related to international and regional crises.

## **Conclusion**

BRICS is a once neutrally coined acronym in a Western investment bank's report, which transformed into a political organisation capable of communicating intergovernmental declarations about important areas in world politics. There is an attempt at harmonisation at their discourse level about what they consider to be pressing global development issues. I argued that the BRICS intergovernmental declarations are not sufficiently analysed to understand their political communication strategies. Using a thematic analysis based on coding content, I offer themes and categories for analysis from the first ten BRICS intergovernmental declarations. While I do not linger to critically develop each of the five proposed themes, I instead offer a broad reflection of the BRICS configuration's manufacturing of their purpose in the world order which they achieve through a positive self-presentation of themselves and negative presentation of Western institutions. Their political communication strategies embedded in linguistic features are worth analysing because the statements appear to offer new ideas over the years when, in fact, follow a pattern and focus on overarching themes. The evolution of the themes prioritising international financial deficiencies in the early years to then include people-to-people and cultural exchanges in 2013 also requires further research. The conclusion reached is that projection of an absence of argumentation and deliberation in the BRICS annual declarations is deliberate. Despite this absence, the political nature of the statements must not be overlooked. Prioritising focus on BRICS as an organically configured organisation in international relations to rival Western institutions distracts from an understanding about how the five different countries manufacture meanings about their collective purpose in the world order. Overall, this article contributes previously unexplored insights about the creation of politically dominant discourses among the different state actors proclaiming to be acting in the interests of the global South in world politics.

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## Appendix A

Table 2 The four steps undertaken to analyse the discourse of the BRICS Heads of State's annual declaration from 2009 to 2018

Step 4					Theme binding the four main themes
Step 3 Central theme binding the open codes from Step 1	Practical cooperation	Global economic governance	International affairs	People-to-people and cultural exchanges	Principles
Step 2 Abstract proposal to make sense of the open codes from Step 1	A diversity of world problems cannot be addressed unilaterally. Cooperation among BRICS countries and partnership with other countries in diverse fields has the potential to reach concrete outcomes in international society's interests.	The existing global financial architecture lacks transparency and is discriminatory for emerging and developing countries. The global economic governance structures need to be reformed to reflect inclusiveness and representativeness in the world order.	Global threats and challenges exist in different forms and jeopardise international security. Poor and developing communities are particularly susceptible. Existing institutions should be reformed to address conflicts, threats and reach consensus-based decisions through a multilateral approach.	Cultural diversity is the foundation of BRICS cooperation. Sustainability of common vision and intra-BRICS projects is achieved through exchanges and cooperation in various civil society areas (media, think tanks, youth, parliament, local governments, trade unions, etc.).	All of the previous themes are formulated on the basis of shared 'principles of openness, solidarity and mutual assistance' among other ideals and values.

<p>Step 1 Open coding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial crisis</li> <li>• G20</li> <li>• UN</li> <li>• Emerging + developing countries</li> <li>• Diversification of international monetary system</li> <li>• Democratic process</li> <li>• Implementation process</li> <li>• International trade</li> <li>• Investment</li> <li>• WTO</li> <li>• Doha Development Agenda</li> <li>• MDGs</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Sustainable development</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Economic development</li> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Socio-economic development</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Macroeconomic cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G20</li> <li>• Financial crisis</li> <li>• Emerging + developing countries</li> <li>• Reform of IFIs</li> <li>• Greater representation in IFIs</li> <li>• Diversification of international monetary system</li> <li>• Implementation process</li> <li>• International trade</li> <li>• WTO</li> <li>• Economic development</li> <li>• Macroeconomic policies</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Risk management</li> <li>• Global governance</li> <li>• Transformations</li> <li>• Economic recovery</li> <li>• Emerging economies</li> <li>• Fiscal policies</li> <li>• Currencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN</li> <li>• Emerging + developing countries</li> <li>• Reform of IFIs</li> <li>• Democratic process</li> <li>• International community</li> <li>• Poorest countries</li> <li>• MDGs</li> <li>• Developing countries</li> <li>• Sustainable development</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Sovereignty</li> <li>• Territorial integrity</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Transit states</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Socio-economic development</li> <li>• Peaceful resolution</li> <li>• Terrorism</li> <li>• Conflicts</li> <li>• Reform of the UN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging + developing countries</li> <li>• Poorest countries</li> <li>• MDGs</li> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Technologies</li> <li>• Development</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Representativeness</li> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Aid</li> <li>• Vulnerable groups</li> <li>• Alliance of civilisations</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Statistics</li> <li>• Exchange</li> <li>• Humanitarian crisis</li> <li>• Synergies</li> <li>• People</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Human rights</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Inequality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Greater voice</li> <li>• Representative</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Meritocracy</li> <li>• Diversification</li> <li>• Principles</li> <li>• Mutual assistance</li> <li>• Democratic process</li> <li>• Legality</li> <li>• Compatibility</li> <li>• Regulation</li> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• Fair burden-sharing</li> <li>• Sovereignty</li> <li>• Agreement</li> <li>• Multilateralism</li> <li>• Plurilateralism</li> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Common but differentiated responsibility</li> <li>• Combined measured</li> <li>• Fulfilment</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Democracy</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical cooperation</li> <li>• Resistance against unilateralism</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Banking systems</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Industrialisation</li> <li>• Green economy</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Urbanisation</li> <li>• Companies</li> <li>• BTTC</li> <li>• SDGs</li> <li>• Piracy</li> <li>• Drug</li> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• EU</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Diseases</li> <li>• Academia</li> <li>• Insurance</li> <li>• Customs</li> <li>• Telecommunications</li> <li>• Disaster management</li> <li>• Budgeting</li> <li>• Railways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IMF</li> <li>• Predictability</li> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• World Bank</li> <li>• Legitimacy</li> <li>• Voting power</li> <li>• Resistance to unilateralism</li> <li>• Non discriminatory</li> <li>• Protection</li> <li>• Banking system</li> <li>• Rules</li> <li>• Green economy</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Sanctions</li> <li>• Avoidance of double standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformations</li> <li>• UN Voting power</li> <li>• Aid</li> <li>• Integration</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Piracy</li> <li>• Drug</li> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• BRICS intelligence forum</li> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• EU</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Diseases</li> <li>• Parliament</li> <li>• North-South</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDGs</li> <li>• BTTC</li> <li>• BRICS University</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Demography</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Sports</li> <li>• Academia</li> <li>• Cultural diversity</li> <li>• Parliamentary Forum</li> <li>• Fauna and Flora</li> <li>• Youth forum</li> <li>• BRICS Trade Unions</li> <li>• BRICS Film Festival</li> <li>• Media forum</li> <li>• Local governments cooperation Forum</li> <li>• BRICS forum of political parties</li> <li>• BRICS Civil Society Organisations</li> <li>• BRICS Parliamentary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multipolarity</li> <li>• Rule of international law</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Mutual respect</li> <li>• Collective decision making</li> <li>• Diplomacy</li> <li>• Common vision</li> <li>• Shared perception</li> <li>• Equitable</li> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Effective</li> <li>• Proactive</li> <li>• Coherence</li> <li>• Harmony</li> <li>• Pragmatism</li> <li>• Incremental</li> <li>• Predictability</li> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• Legitimacy</li> <li>• Resistance to unilateralism</li> <li>• Non discriminatory</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Adaptation</li> <li>• Rule-based</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tourism</li><li>• Sports</li><li>• Local Governments cooperation Forum</li></ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evenness</li><li>• Openness</li><li>• Meritocracy</li><li>• Consensus-based</li><li>• Flexibility</li><li>• Accessibility</li><li>• Universality</li><li>• Justice</li><li>• Accountability</li><li>• Complementarity</li></ul>
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