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BRICS versus G7: Contesting Economic Weight, Institutional Legitimacy, and Geopolitical Order in a Multipolarising World — A Systematic Literature Review and Analytical Study

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Abstract

The post-war international order has long been organised around the institutional and economic primacy of the Group of Seven (G7) — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Since the early 2000s, however, a rival grouping of large emerging economies, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and, from 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates), has grown from a speculative acronym coined inside an investment bank into a functioning bloc with its own summit process, development bank, and payment infrastructure. This paper undertakes a systematic literature review (SLR) combined with an analytical, data-driven comparison of BRICS and the G7 across four dimensions: aggregate economic weight, institutional architecture, trade and financial interdependence, and geopolitical alignment. Using secondary data drawn from the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, Statista-aggregated IMF series, and peer-reviewed and grey literature published mainly before 2024, the study finds that BRICS(+) has overtaken the G7 in purchasing-power-parity (PPP) terms — reaching roughly 32–35 percent of world GDP in 2023–2024 against the G7's 29–30 percent — while the G7 retains a decisive lead in nominal GDP, per-capita income, financial-market depth, and rule-setting authority within existing multilateral institutions. The paper argues that the BRICS–G7 relationship is better understood as asymmetric institutional competition within a single, interdependent global economy than as a clean bipolar rivalry, and that the bloc's internal heterogeneity — spanning authoritarian and democratic states, energy exporters and importers, and rival regional powers (China and India) — constrains its capacity to act as a unified pole. The paper concludes with an assessment of what continued BRICS expansion and de-dollarisation efforts mean for global governance reform, and identifies avenues for future comparative research.

Keywords: *BRICS, G7, multipolarity, global governance, purchasing power parity, de-dollarisation, systematic literature review, international political economy*

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1. Introduction

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, the architecture of the global economy was set overwhelmingly by a small club of industrialised democracies. The Group of Seven, formalised after the 1973 oil shock and the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed-exchange-rate system, functioned for decades as the de facto steering committee of the world economy, coordinating monetary policy, setting the terms of trade liberalisation, and dominating the shareholding structures of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.[20] That arrangement is now under visible strain. A parallel grouping — BRICS — has emerged not from a formal treaty process but from an analyst's shorthand: in 2001, Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill coined the acronym "BRIC" to describe Brazil, Russia, India, and China as economies whose combined weight would reshape global demand and investment patterns over the following decades.[1] What began as a forecasting label was adopted by the four governments themselves, which held their first formal summit in 2009, admitted South Africa in 2010–11 to form "BRICS," and in 2023–2024 undertook the bloc's first substantial enlargement, admitting Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (with Saudi Arabia invited but not yet formally acceded, and Argentina declining its invitation).[5]

The economic case for taking BRICS seriously as a counterweight to the G7 rests substantially on purchasing-power-parity calculations. IMF data, aggregated and visualised by outlets such as Visual Capitalist and Statista, show that on a PPP basis the five original BRICS economies overtook the G7 in combined GDP as early as 2018–2020, and that by 2023 BRICS accounted for approximately 32.1 percent of global GDP (PPP) against 29.9 percent for the G7, with the gap widening further in 2024 to roughly 35 percent versus 30 percent.[2,3,4] This is not a marginal shift: as recently as 1995, BRICS collectively accounted for only 16.9 percent of world GDP (PPP), meaning the bloc's share roughly doubled in under three decades — a trajectory driven overwhelmingly by China's industrialisation and, to a lesser degree, India's more recent acceleration.[3,4]

Yet PPP-weighted GDP is only one lens on comparative power, and arguably not the most consequential one for questions of financial hegemony, technological leadership, or military reach. Measured in nominal (market-exchange-rate) dollars — the metric that matters for debt servicing, reserve currency status, and the pricing of globally traded commodities — the G7 retains a substantially larger share of the world economy, estimated at around 44 percent as of the mid-2020s, down from roughly two-thirds in the early post–Cold War period but still far ahead of any individual BRICS member or the bloc's nominal aggregate.[4] Per-capita income gaps are starker still: IMF data show the United States' PPP-adjusted per-capita GDP at roughly $80,035, more than three times China's $23,382, while India — the most populous BRICS member and the bloc's fastest-growing large economy — trails every G7 member by a wide margin despite a near five-fold increase in per-capita output since 2000.[12]

These divergent metrics point to the central puzzle this paper addresses: in what sense, and to what degree, does BRICS constitute a genuine rival pole to the G7, as opposed to a heterogeneous coalition of convenience whose members share more grievances against the existing order than they share strategic objectives with one another? The question matters because both blocs increasingly describe themselves — and are described by commentators — in civilisational and systemic terms: the G7 as custodian of a "rules-based international order" and the BRICS as a platform for a fairer, more "multipolar" alternative favoured by

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much of the Global South.[17,19] Understanding whether that framing reflects material reality or aspirational rhetoric requires a disciplined comparison of what each bloc actually controls: output, trade flows, reserve assets, institutional votes, and the capacity to set rules that others must follow.

This paper contributes to that understanding in three ways. First, it conducts a systematic literature review of scholarly and institutional publications on BRICS–G7 comparative political economy, applying explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria in the manner of a scoping review. Second, it triangulates that literature against current secondary economic data — GDP (PPP and nominal), per-capita income, trade shares, and reserve-currency indicators — to build an evidence-based comparative profile of the two blocs, presented through tables and figures. Third, it applies an analytical lens drawn from international political economy to interpret what the resulting asymmetries mean for debates on de-dollarisation, supply-chain "decoupling," climate governance, and digital sovereignty, in each case triangulating multiple, sometimes opposing, scholarly perspectives rather than adjudicating a single "correct" view. Where relevant, the paper draws on recent interdisciplinary scholarship examining specific facets of this contest — including work on supply-chain decoupling and strategic competition,[13] the use of environmental agreements as instruments of great-power positioning,[14] cyber-diplomacy as a domain of twenty-first-century statecraft,[15] and digital sovereignty movements in the Global South[16] — alongside the core economic-history and international-relations literature on BRICS and the G7.

The stakes of this inquiry extend beyond academic classification. How BRICS's rise is characterised has direct policy consequences on both sides of the relationship. If the convergence documented in Section 6 is read as evidence of a comprehensive, coordinated power shift, G7 governments face pressure to respond with defensive economic-security measures — export controls, reshoring subsidies, and tighter conditionality on multilateral lending — of the kind already visible in recent industrial policy. If instead the more qualified reading developed in this paper is correct — durable convergence in aggregate output alongside persistent G7 advantages in financial depth, technological leadership, and coordination capacity, combined with substantial and likely growing heterogeneity within BRICS itself — then policy responses premised on treating BRICS as a unified strategic bloc risk being both economically costly and analytically mistaken, potentially accelerating the very fragmentation (of trade, of technology standards, of financial infrastructure) that a more calibrated policy response might avoid. Equally, BRICS-aligned policymakers who treat PPP-GDP convergence as self-evidently translating into commensurate institutional authority risk overestimating the bloc's near-term capacity to reshape institutions such as the IMF, whose governance structures — as this paper documents in Section 7 — have proven resistant to reform even as the underlying economic balance has shifted substantially in BRICS's favour.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 states the study's objectives. Section 3 details the SLR and analytical methodology. Section 4 traces the historical formation of both blocs. Section 5 reviews the relevant scholarly literature thematically. Section 6 presents the comparative economic analysis, with tables and figures. Section 7 compares institutional architecture and governance capacity. Section 8 examines trade, financial interdependence, and de-dollarisation. Section 9 offers a multi-perspectival geopolitical analysis. Section 10 presents two illustrative case studies. Section 11 discusses the findings, Section 12 states the study's limitations, and Section 13 concludes.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study pursues four specific objectives:

- To systematically map the existing scholarly and institutional literature comparing BRICS and the G7 as economic and geopolitical formations, identifying its major themes, methodological approaches, and gaps.
- To construct an up-to-date, source-triangulated comparative economic profile of the two blocs across GDP (PPP and nominal), per-capita income, trade share, and reserve-currency indicators.
- To analyse, from multiple theoretical and normative perspectives, the institutional and geopolitical implications of BRICS's rising economic weight for the G7-anchored post-war order, including debates on de-dollarisation, supply-chain realignment, and global governance reform.
- To identify the structural constraints — chiefly internal heterogeneity and unresolved bilateral rivalries within BRICS — that condition the bloc's capacity to act as a coherent counterweight to the G7, and to propose directions for future comparative research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a mixed qualitative design combining a **systematic literature review (SLR)** with **analytical (secondary-data) research**. The SLR component follows the general logic of scoping-review guidance such as the PRISMA-ScR framework, which emphasises transparent search, screening, and charting procedures even where a full meta-analysis is not feasible because the underlying literature is conceptually and methodologically heterogeneous — a condition that clearly applies to BRICS–G7 comparative scholarship, which spans economics, international relations, area studies, and policy analysis.[18] The analytical component treats institutional datasets (IMF World Economic Outlook series, WTO trade statistics, and institutional summit documents) as the primary evidentiary base for the comparative sections, following the standard practice in international political economy of using macro-level indicators to test claims made in the qualitative literature.

3.2 Search strategy and sources

Sources were identified through: (a) the reference corpus supplied for this study, screened for topical relevance to BRICS–G7 comparative political economy; (b) targeted searches of institutional databases and publications (IMF, World Bank, WTO, BRICS and G7 summit documentation); and (c) academic and policy literature on BRICS institutionalisation, de-dollarisation, and multipolarity, prioritising material published before 2024 to capture the analytical literature that predates — and can therefore be tested against — the bloc's 2024 enlargement and the most recent IMF data releases used for the quantitative update in Section 6.

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3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Table 1 summarises the screening criteria applied to candidate sources.

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Topical relevance	Direct treatment of BRICS, G7, global governance reform, de-dollarisation, multipolarity, or related great-power economic competition	Sources with no substantive link to BRICS/G7 comparative political economy (e.g., unrelated disciplinary topics)
Source type	Peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports (IMF, WTO, World Bank, SAIIA), summit communiqués/declarations, reputable data-journalism syntheses of IMF/WTO data	Opinion pieces with no data basis, promotional or non-attributable content
Publication window	Predominantly pre-2024, to anchor the conceptual literature; 2024 data releases used only for the quantitative update	Undated sources lacking verifiable provenance
Language/availability	English-language or with available English abstract/summary	Sources not retrievable or verifiable

3.4 Analytical framework

The comparative-economic sections apply a straightforward accounting framework: aggregate and per-capita GDP (nominal and PPP), trade shares, and reserve-currency composition are compared directly using the most recent IMF-sourced figures, without adjustment, to avoid introducing unverifiable estimates. Where sources disagree marginally on point figures (for instance, whether BRICS+ accounted for 35 percent or approximately 40 percent of world GDP-PPP in 2024, depending on whether the ten-member "BRICS+" or a narrower definition is used), both figures are reported with their respective sources so that the reader can see the methodological source of divergence rather than a single, false-precision number.[2,3] The geopolitical sections apply an explicitly multi-perspectival method: for each major debate (de-dollarisation, decoupling, climate diplomacy, digital sovereignty), the paper presents the position most associated with Western/G7-aligned scholarship, the position most associated with BRICS/Global South-aligned scholarship, and a third, more sceptical or synthesising position, consistent with standard practice in comparative international-relations scholarship of representing contending schools rather than adjudicating a single truth claim.

3.5 Limitations of the method

Because BRICS is an evolving grouping — its membership changed materially between 2023 and 2025 — any comparative dataset is necessarily a snapshot. The paper addresses this by dating every quantitative claim to its source year and by treating the 2024 enlargement as a distinct analytical event (Section 4.3) rather than folding it silently into the original five-member baseline used in most of the pre-2024 literature. A fuller discussion of methodological limitations appears in Section 12.

4. Historical Background

4.1 The G7: institutionalising post-war Western primacy

The G7's origins lie in the informal "Library Group" finance-minister meetings convened after the 1971 collapse of the Bretton Woods gold-dollar peg, formalised as the G6 in 1975 and expanded to the G7 with Canada's addition in 1976.[20] Russia's inclusion between 1997 and 2014 (as the "G8") and subsequent suspension following the annexation of Crimea underscores a defining feature of the group: unlike BRICS, membership has historically been treated as conditional on adherence to a shared liberal-democratic and market-economy orientation, rather than fixed by treaty. The G7's practical influence has rested less on formal legal authority — it has no charter or secretariat comparable to the United Nations — and more on its members' combined weight inside weighted-voting institutions: the IMF, the World Bank, and, historically, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization system. Scholars of international order, notably Ikenberry, have characterised the resulting arrangement as a "liberal international order" — a system of rules, institutions, and alliances constructed and underwritten primarily by the United States and its G7 partners after 1945, extended after 1989 to encompass much of the formerly non-aligned and post-communist world.[19]

4.2 BRIC to BRICS: from acronym to summit process

The BRIC concept was explicitly a forecasting device, not a political project, at its 2001 inception: O'Neill's Goldman Sachs paper argued that Brazil, Russia, India, and China would together account for a rapidly growing share of global output and should be weighted accordingly in investment portfolios and in the governance of institutions such as the IMF.[1] The four governments themselves adopted the label from roughly 2006 onward, holding informal ministerial meetings before convening the first head-of-state BRIC summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in June 2009. South Africa was invited to join in December 2010 and participated in the 2011 summit in Sanya, China, creating the "BRICS" acronym still in use.[6,7] Two institutional milestones followed: the 2014 Fortaleza Declaration established the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), explicitly framed as alternatives — not replacements — to the World Bank and IMF, intended to give members a financing channel less exposed to G7-dominated conditionality.[6,8] The NDB began lending operations in 2015 and has since expanded its membership beyond the original five states to include Bangladesh, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay as borrowing members, while explicitly pursuing a strategy of increasing the share of loans disbursed in members' local currencies rather than the US dollar.[9]

4.3 The 2023–2024 enlargement

The most consequential recent development in BRICS's institutional history occurred at the August 2023 Johannesburg summit, where the bloc announced invitations to Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to join as full members from January 2024.[5] Argentina's incoming government under Javier Milei declined the invitation;

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Saudi Arabia has engaged with the bloc but has not, as of the period covered by this review, formally completed accession; Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE did join, giving rise to the informal label "BRICS+" or "BRICS11" used in much of the post-2024 data literature.[5] This enlargement is analytically significant for two reasons. First, it materially changes the bloc's aggregate economic weight — the inclusion of major oil producers (Saudi Arabia's prospective membership, the UAE's, Iran's) shifts BRICS's profile toward greater energy-exporter representation, with implications for potential commodity-pricing and payment-currency coordination discussed in Section 8. Second, it increases the bloc's internal heterogeneity along precisely the political dimension that most differentiates it from the G7: BRICS+ now spans parliamentary democracies (India, Brazil, South Africa), a one-party state (China), an increasingly personalist authoritarian system (Russia), a theocratic republic (Iran), and monarchies or quasi-monarchical systems (the UAE, and prospectively Saudi Arabia) — a diversity of regime type that several scholars argue limits the bloc's capacity to articulate a coherent alternative governance model, as distinct from a shared critique of the existing one.[7,17]

Table 1b situates the enlarged bloc's member states against one another on the dimensions most relevant to the heterogeneity argument developed throughout this paper: regime type, approximate 2023 PPP-GDP world rank, and primary economic profile.

Member (year joined)	Regime type	Approx. PPP-GDP world rank, 2023[2,3]	Primary economic profile
China (2009)	One-party state	1	Advanced manufacturing, exports
India (2009)	Parliamentary democracy	3	Services, IT, large domestic market
Russia (2009)	Personalist authoritarian system	~6	Hydrocarbons, minerals
Brazil (2009)	Presidential democracy	~8	Agriculture, commodities
South Africa (2011)	Parliamentary democracy	~30s	Mining, regional financial hub
Egypt (2024)	Presidential republic (limited pluralism)	~20s	Suez transit, energy, agriculture
Ethiopia (2024)	Federal parliamentary republic	Lower-middle income	Agriculture, manufacturing growth
Iran (2024)	Theocratic republic	~20s	Hydrocarbons (sanctions-constrained)
United Arab Emirates (2024)	Federal absolute monarchy	High income, smaller population	Hydrocarbons, logistics, finance

This table makes visible, in a single view, the heterogeneity emphasised throughout the literature reviewed in Section 5: the enlarged bloc spans the world's largest and among its smaller (by population) economies, democracies and non-democracies, diversified manufacturing exporters and hydrocarbon-dependent economies, and states with starkly different relationships to the G7-led sanctions and security architecture (Iran and Russia both

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operate under extensive Western sanctions regimes, while the UAE and Egypt maintain substantial, largely undisrupted economic and security ties with G7 members). Any analytical framework that treats “BRICS” as a unitary strategic actor must contend with this underlying diversity, which is precisely why Section 9 of this paper develops a multi-perspectival rather than a single-actor analytical approach.

4.4 Divergent institutional logics

A useful way to summarise the historical divergence is that the G7 institutionalised primacy within a system it largely built, whereas BRICS has institutionalised a shared grievance — under-representation in that system’s governance — without yet resolving whether its response is systemic reform (working within IMF/World Bank quota structures) or systemic exit (building parallel institutions such as the NDB, the CRA, and BRICS Pay). The literature reviewed in Section 5 suggests both strategies are being pursued simultaneously, often by the same member states, which is itself an important empirical finding about the bloc’s political character.

5. Literature Review

This section synthesises the screened literature (per Section 3.3) around five recurring themes: (i) BRICS as an economic-forecasting category versus a political actor; (ii) institutional alternatives and de-dollarisation; (iii) multipolarity and international-order theory; (iv) sector-specific competitive dynamics (supply chains, climate diplomacy, cyber and digital domains); and (v) critiques of BRICS coherence.

5.1 From forecasting category to political actor

O’Neill’s original 2001 paper was narrowly concerned with portfolio allocation and IMF/World Bank governance weights, explicitly noting that the four economies shared no political or institutional connection at the time of writing.[1] The subsequent literature is largely an account of how a market-research label acquired agency: Chatin and Gallarotti’s edited volume traces the process by which BRIC governments adopted the acronym as a diplomatic identity, using it to coordinate positions in G20 negotiations, UN Security Council reform debates, and climate talks well before the bloc had any dedicated institutions of its own.[7] This “constructivist” strand of the literature treats BRICS’s coherence as performative and evolving rather than given — a point with direct bearing on how one should interpret the bloc’s 2023–2024 enlargement, which several commentators frame less as deepening economic integration than as an expansion of diplomatic coalition-building among states seeking leverage against G7-dominated institutions.[7,17]

5.2 Institutional alternatives and de-dollarisation

A second strand focuses on the NDB and CRA as concrete institutional products of BRICS cooperation. Cattaneo, Biziwik, and Fryer’s early policy analysis of the CRA situates it within the broader landscape of regional and South–South financial safety nets, arguing that its primary value to members lies less in its (relatively modest) $100 billion notional size than in the signalling effect of a Global-South-governed liquidity backstop that does not carry IMF-style conditionality.[6] Cooper’s analysis of the NDB traces its evolution “from material

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leverage to innovative capacity" — that is, from a symbol of BRICS's aggregate financial weight toward a genuine, if still junior, infrastructure lender competing for project pipelines with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.[8] The de-dollarisation literature — represented in this review by contemporaneous reporting on NDB local-currency lending targets and BRICS Pay, a nascent cross-border payment messaging initiative — documents a clear policy direction (the NDB's stated goal of raising local-currency lending from roughly 22 to 30 percent of its loan book) without yet showing evidence of a structural challenge to the dollar's roughly 47–58 percent share of global reserves.[9] This is a case where the analytical and rhetorical literatures diverge: official BRICS and NDB statements describe de-dollarisation as a strategic objective, while most independent financial-market analyses treat near-term dollar displacement as unlikely given the depth, liquidity, and legal predictability of US Treasury markets relative to any BRICS-currency alternative.

5.3 Multipolarity and international-order theory

A third strand situates BRICS within broader international-relations debates on the transition from a unipolar (post–Cold War, US-centred) to a multipolar system. Ikenberry's account of the "liberal international order" provides the theoretical baseline against which most BRICS-focused scholarship implicitly argues: if the post-1945 order was built and enforced by a US-led coalition (essentially the G7 plus extended security allies), then BRICS's rise represents either a rules-respecting expansion of stakeholders within that order or a rules-revising challenge to it, and the scholarly literature is genuinely split on which characterisation better fits the evidence.[19] Russian-language and Russia-based scholarship reviewed in this study — exemplified by a recent comparative analysis situating BRICS as a "center of interfacing civilizations" — tends toward the stronger, order-revising interpretation, emphasising the bloc's civilisational and soft-power dimensions alongside its economic institutions.[17] Western and mainstream economic-data journalism, by contrast, more often frames the bloc's rise in narrower economic-convergence terms — as the natural consequence of industrialisation catch-up by very large, populous economies (above all China and India) — without necessarily implying a coordinated political challenge to G7 primacy.[2,3,4]

5.4 Sector-specific competitive dynamics

A fourth, more recent strand of literature examines BRICS–G7 competition in specific functional domains rather than at the level of aggregate economic weight. Work on global supply-chain "decoupling" documents how G7 industrial policy (reshoring, friend-shoring, export controls on advanced semiconductors) and China's countervailing efforts to diversify its own supply dependencies have jointly accelerated a partial fragmentation of previously globalised production networks, with material consequences for trade patterns between the two blocs.[13] A parallel literature examines how environmental and climate agreements have become an arena of positional competition rather than purely cooperative governance, with G7 states using climate-finance conditionality and carbon-border mechanisms in ways BRICS states frequently characterise as protectionism in disguise, while BRICS members simultaneously seek leadership roles in South–South climate finance and renewable-energy investment.[14] Cyber-diplomacy and digital-sovereignty scholarship extends this sectoral analysis into the information domain: research on state weaponisation of the internet documents an intensifying contest over technical standards, data-localisation rules, and platform governance in which G7 states generally promote a multi-stakeholder internet-governance model while several BRICS members — particularly China and Russia — advocate a state-sovereignty model, with important implications for how Global South states, courted by both blocs, structure their own digital-governance regimes.[15,16]

5.5 Critiques of BRICS coherence

A final, important strand of the literature is explicitly sceptical of treating BRICS as a coherent strategic actor at all. Several scholars point to unresolved and in some cases intensifying bilateral tensions within the bloc — most notably the India–China border dispute, which has produced periodic military stand-offs since 2020 — as evidence that BRICS functions more as a diplomatic forum for aggregating grievances against G7-led institutions than as a bloc capable of collective strategic action, a point reinforced by the group's inability to agree a common position on Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with India, Brazil, and South Africa declining to join Western sanctions while stopping well short of endorsing Russia's actions.[7,8] This critique is directly relevant to the analytical framing adopted in Section 9 below, which treats BRICS cohesion as a variable to be assessed issue-by-issue rather than assumed.

5.6 The energy and commodity dimension of enlargement

A sixth theme, which has grown rapidly in the literature specifically in response to the 2023–2024 enlargement, concerns the changing commodity profile of BRICS membership. The original five-member bloc already included two major energy producers (Russia in hydrocarbons, and Brazil and South Africa in a range of other commodities), but the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE — together with Saudi Arabia's unresolved but actively discussed accession — shifts the bloc's aggregate profile further toward hydrocarbon-exporter representation.[5] Commentary reviewed for this study argues that this shift is strategically significant for the de-dollarisation agenda discussed in Section 8.2: because oil and gas remain predominantly priced and settled in US dollars (the "petrodollar" system), any meaningful move by major oil-exporting BRICS members to price and settle a growing share of energy trade in non-dollar currencies would represent a far more consequential challenge to dollar centrality than the NDB's relatively modest local-currency lending targets. At the same time, the literature notes an important internal tension this creates: BRICS's traditionally stated commitment to leadership on renewable-energy transition and South–South climate finance (Section 5.4) sits uneasily alongside a membership base increasingly weighted toward fossil-fuel export revenues, a tension explored further in the climate-diplomacy discussion in Section 9.4.

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5.7 Summary of the literature review

Table 2 summarises the six thematic strands, their principal claims, and the sources drawn on in this review.

Theme	Principal claim	Key sources
Forecasting category to political actor	BRICS's coherence is constructed and performative, built through diplomatic coordination rather than given by economic complementarity	[1,7]
Institutional alternatives / de-dollarisation	NDB and CRA are genuine but still junior institutions; de-dollarisation is a stated strategic goal with limited structural progress to date	[6,8,9]
Multipolarity / international-order theory	Scholarship is split between "order-revising" and "convergence-driven" readings of BRICS's rise	[17,19]
Sector-specific competition	Decoupling, climate diplomacy, and digital/cyber governance are increasingly explicit arenas of BRICS–G7 rivalry	[13,14,15,16]
Coherence critique	Internal rivalries (especially India–China) and divergent responses to the Ukraine war undercut claims of unified BRICS strategy	[7,8]
Energy and commodity dimension	2023–2024 enlargement shifts BRICS toward greater hydrocarbon-exporter weight, with implications for de-dollarisation and internal climate-policy tension	[5,14]

6. Comparative Economic Analysis

6.1 Aggregate output: PPP versus nominal GDP

The single most consequential empirical fact in the BRICS–G7 comparison is that the two metrics conventionally used to measure "the size of an economy" now point in opposite directions for the relative ranking of the two blocs. On a purchasing-power-parity basis — which adjusts for differences in price levels and is generally considered the more accurate measure of real living standards and domestic productive capacity — BRICS(+) overtook the G7 in combined GDP between 2018 and 2020 and has extended its lead since. IMF-sourced data show BRICS at 32.1 percent of world GDP (PPP) in 2023 against 29.9 percent for the G7, widening to approximately 35 percent versus 30 percent in 2024; a separate IMF-based estimate covering the enlarged eleven-member BRICS+ grouping places the bloc's 2024 share as high as 40 percent, reflecting the inclusion of additional large economies (Indonesia's associate participation and the four new full members) not captured in narrower five-member calculations.[2,3] Figure 1 presents the 2023–2024 comparison; Figure 3 places it in the longer historical context of the bloc's rise from 16.9 percent of world GDP (PPP) in 1995.

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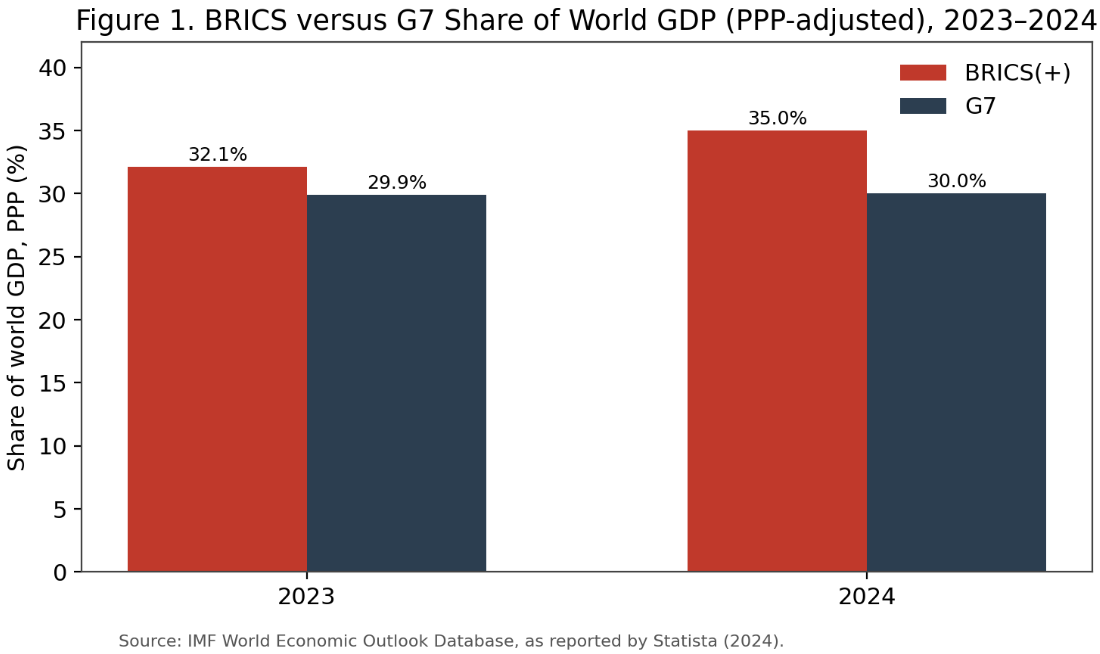

Figure 1: BRICS vs G7 GDP share PPP

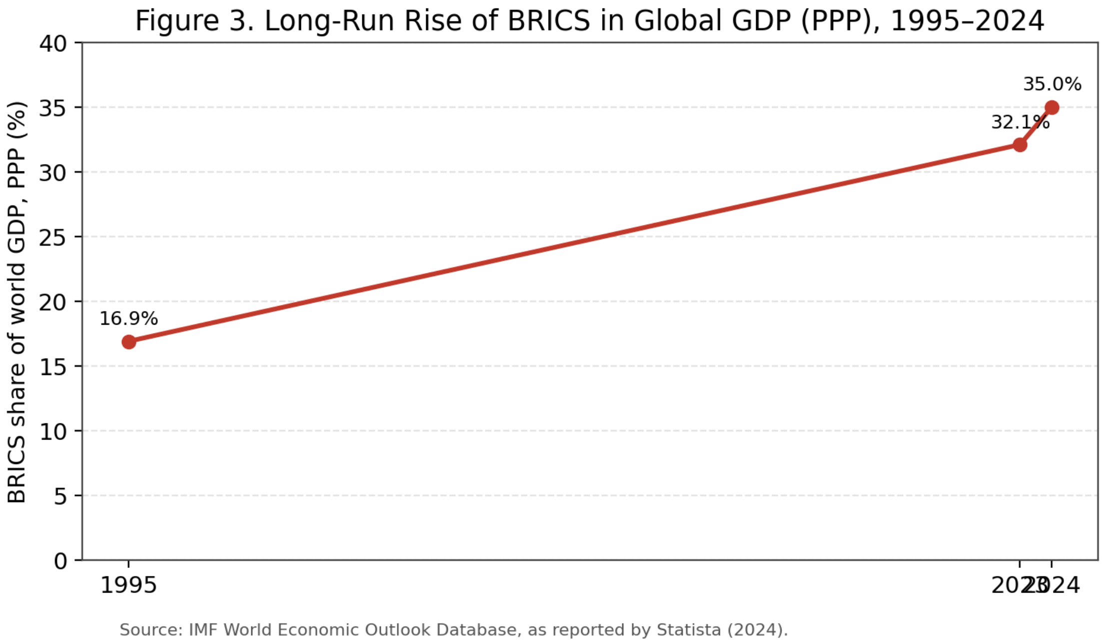

Figure 3: BRICS long-run trend

On a nominal (market-exchange-rate) basis, however, the ranking reverses. The G7's nominal share of world GDP is estimated at roughly 44 percent as of the mid-2020s — down substantially from close to two-thirds in the early 1990s, but still comfortably ahead of the BRICS+ nominal aggregate.[4] This divergence is not a statistical curiosity; it reflects a structural reality of the global economy. PPP weighting corrects for the fact that a unit of

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output costs less to produce in lower-wage economies such as India or Egypt than in Japan or Germany, which mechanically inflates the PPP-measured size of lower-income, high-population economies relative to their nominal, dollar-denominated weight. For questions of real purchasing power and domestic productive capacity, PPP is the more informative metric; for questions of who can borrow most cheaply in global capital markets, who prices globally traded commodities, and whose currency underwrites the reserve system, nominal GDP and financial-market depth remain more directly relevant, and on those measures the G7's advantage, while narrowing, persists.

6.2 Per-capita income: a persistent and consequential gap

Aggregate GDP comparisons, however striking, understate a dimension of comparative advantage that matters greatly for questions of soft power, consumer-market depth, and human development: per-capita income. Figure 2 compares PPP-adjusted per-capita GDP for the United States (the G7's largest economy) and China (BRICS's largest economy and, on an aggregate PPP basis, the world's largest economy overall). IMF data place US per-capita GDP (PPP) at approximately $80,035 against China's $23,382 — a ratio of roughly 3.4 to 1.[12] Japan, despite recording the lowest per-capita GDP among G7 members, still exceeds every BRICS member on this measure; India, the most populous BRICS state and the bloc's fastest-growing large economy in relative terms, records by far the lowest per-capita GDP of the (former) five-member BRICS grouping, notwithstanding a near five-fold increase since 2000.[12] This gap matters analytically because it complicates any simple narrative of "BRICS overtaking the G7": in terms of aggregate productive weight the overtaking has plausibly already occurred (on a PPP basis); in terms of average living standards, technological sophistication per capita, and the depth of domestic consumer markets relevant to multinational investment decisions, the G7 economies remain substantially ahead of even the strongest BRICS members, and India in particular remains a lower-middle-income economy by most per-capita measures despite its large aggregate size.

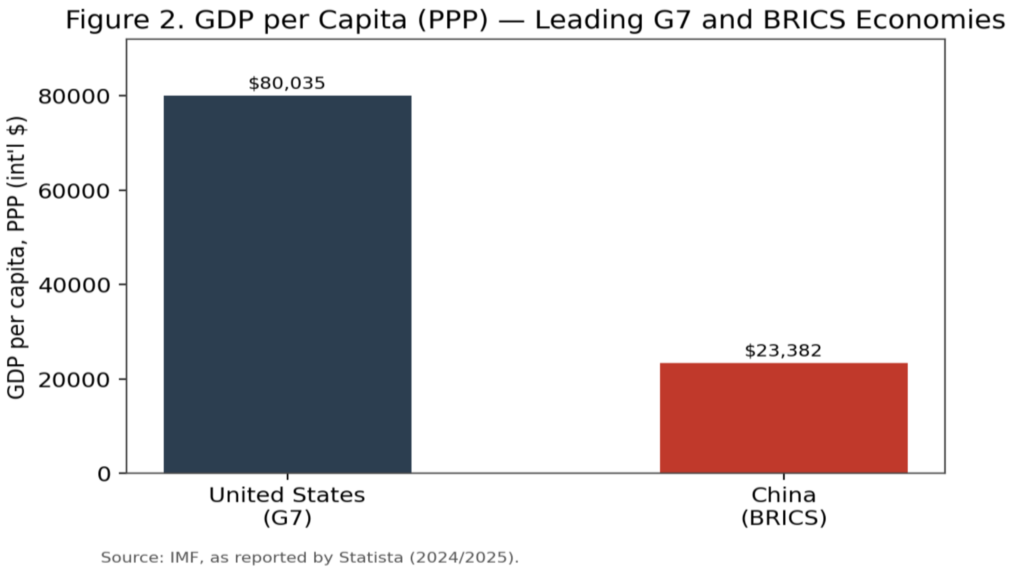

Figure 2: GDP per capita PPP

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6.3 Consolidated comparative table

Table 3 consolidates the principal indicators discussed above into a single comparative reference.

Indicator	BRICS(+)	G7	Source year
Share of world GDP, PPP	~32–35% (five-member/eleven-member range)	~29–30%	2023–2024[2,3]
Share of world GDP, PPP (historical, 1995)	16.9%	n/a (majority share)	1995[3,4]
Share of world GDP, nominal	Substantially below G7	~44%	Mid-2020s[4]
Leading economy per-capita GDP (PPP)	China: ~$23,382	United States: ~$80,035	2024/2025[12]
Founding/current membership	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (2009–2011); + Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE (2024)	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, United States	1975–2024[20,5]
Dedicated multilateral development bank	New Development Bank (est. 2014/2015)	None (relies on World Bank/regional MDBs)	2014[6]
Reserve/liquidity mechanism	Contingent Reserve Arrangement (est. 2014)	IMF quota system (dominant voting share)	2014[6]

6.4 Interpreting the data: convergence without parity

The data assembled in this section support a specific, qualified conclusion rather than a sweeping one. BRICS has achieved genuine and durable convergence with the G7 in aggregate PPP-adjusted output — a fact with real implications for how institutions such as the IMF allocate voting quotas, and for how multinational firms allocate long-run investment toward BRICS consumer and production markets. It has not achieved parity, and is not close to achieving parity, in nominal financial weight, currency centrality, or average living standards. The two blocs are, in this sense, not directly comparable "peer competitors" so much as differently structured formations whose relative strength depends heavily on which metric — and which time horizon — the observer privileges. This qualified reading is consistent with the "convergence-driven" strand of the literature reviewed in Section 5.3, though it does not foreclose the "order-revising" reading, since institutional and geopolitical behaviour (examined in Sections 7–9) can diverge from what raw economic-convergence data alone would predict.

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7. Institutional and Governance Comparison

7.1 Formal architecture

The G7 and BRICS differ fundamentally in institutional design. The G7 has no charter, no standing secretariat, and no independent budget; its authority derives entirely from the individual and collective weight of its members within pre-existing multilateral institutions (the IMF, World Bank, and — historically — the WTO's predecessor arrangements) and from its capacity to coordinate policy among the world's most financially sophisticated economies.[20,19] BRICS, by contrast, has built a modest but growing set of dedicated institutions: an annual leaders' summit with a rotating chair, the New Development Bank headquartered in Shanghai, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and, more recently, an incipient payments-messaging initiative (BRICS Pay) intended to reduce dependence on Western-controlled financial infrastructure such as SWIFT.[6,8,9] This is a meaningful institutional achievement for a grouping that began as an investment-bank acronym, but the scale remains modest relative to the Bretton Woods institutions: the NDB's subscribed capital and loan book are a small fraction of the World Bank Group's, and the CRA's $100 billion in committed (not disbursed) swap lines is similarly modest next to the IMF's roughly $1 trillion in lending capacity.[6]

7.2 Voting power within existing institutions

A recurring grievance articulated across the BRICS-aligned literature is that formal voting power within the IMF and World Bank has not kept pace with the shift in real economic weight documented in Section 6. IMF quota reviews have periodically increased the combined voting share of large emerging economies — China's IMF voting share, for instance, rose materially following the 2010 quota and governance reform, which took effect in 2016 — but BRICS states continue to argue, and much of the reviewed literature concurs, that their aggregate voting share remains disproportionately small relative to their PPP-adjusted economic weight, a mismatch explicitly cited as a driver of the bloc's parallel-institution strategy.[17] The G7, by contrast, continues to hold a combined voting share in both institutions sufficient, in practice, to block quota reforms it opposes, given the supermajority thresholds (typically 85 percent) required for major IMF governance changes and the United States' individual veto-equivalent voting share.

7.3 Coordination capacity

A further institutional asymmetry concerns coordination capacity rather than formal votes. G7 finance ministers and central-bank governors meet with a frequency and a degree of technical staff support that allows relatively rapid, coordinated policy responses — as demonstrated during the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, when G7 (and the broader G20) central banks coordinated liquidity swap lines within days. BRICS's institutional maturity for this kind of rapid, technical coordination remains considerably less developed, a point the literature attributes less to any lack of political will than to the sheer diversity of the bloc's macroeconomic starting conditions — comparing, for instance, China's managed exchange-rate and capital-account regime with Brazil's inflation-targeting floating-rate framework, or Russia's sanctions-constrained financial system with South Africa's

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comparatively open one.[7,8] This heterogeneity, discussed further in Section 9, is a structural constraint on BRICS's capacity to match G7-style rapid coordinated action, independent of the bloc's aggregate economic weight.

8. Trade, Financial Interdependence, and De-dollarisation

8.1 Trade interdependence, not decoupling, remains the baseline

Despite the rhetoric of rival blocs, BRICS and G7 economies remain deeply interdependent trading partners. China is the largest single trading partner of most G7 economies or a close second, and the European Union's goods trade with China — while showing a narrowing deficit in the most recent reporting period — remains among the largest bilateral trade relationships in the world.[10] This baseline interdependence is the essential context for evaluating decoupling and de-dollarisation narratives: both blocs are attempting to adjust the terms of an existing, deeply integrated relationship rather than severing it outright. The supply-chain literature reviewed in Section 5.4 documents selective, sector-specific decoupling — concentrated in advanced semiconductors, critical minerals, and select defence-adjacent technologies subject to G7 export controls — rather than economy-wide separation, a distinction frequently elided in popular commentary but consistently maintained in the more careful scholarly literature.[13]

8.2 Reserve-currency composition and the limits of de-dollarisation

The US dollar's share of globally disclosed foreign-exchange reserves has declined from roughly 73 percent in 2001 to approximately 55–58 percent in the early 2020s, with reporting from mid-2023 indicating a further drop of several percentage points within a single year — a pace of decline some commentators describe as unusually rapid by historical standards.[11] BRICS institutions have explicitly targeted this trend: the New Development Bank's stated ambition is to raise the local-currency share of its loan book from roughly 22 percent toward 30 percent, and BRICS Pay is being developed as a settlement mechanism intended to reduce reliance on dollar-clearing and SWIFT messaging for intra-bloc trade.[9] It is important, however, to distinguish diversification of reserve holdings (a real, measurable, and gradual trend, partly driven by Western financial sanctions on Russia demonstrating the political risk of dollar-denominated reserves) from wholesale de-dollarisation or the emergence of a single BRICS common currency, which remains, per most of the reviewed financial-market analysis, a distant and technically formidable prospect given the absence of a unified BRICS central bank, capital-account regime, or fiscal backstop comparable to the eurozone's decades-long convergence process. The most credible near-to-medium-term trajectory documented in the literature is not dollar replacement but a "multipolar currency" system in which the dollar remains dominant but shares a somewhat larger share of global trade and reserve functions with the renminbi, the euro, and a small number of bilateral local-currency arrangements.[9,11]

8.3 Sanctions as an accelerant

A distinctive feature of the 2022–2024 period, noted across multiple sources in this review, is that G7-coordinated financial sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine functioned as an unintended accelerant of BRICS de-dollarisation discourse: the freezing of a substantial

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share of Russia's dollar- and euro-denominated foreign reserves demonstrated to other BRICS members — several of which maintain complicated or adversarial relationships with G7 states — that dollar-reserve holdings carry a political risk beyond conventional market risk.[11] This dynamic illustrates a broader analytical point developed further in Section 9: G7 policy instruments designed to constrain a single adversary can have systemic effects on the broader BRICS-aligned world's strategic calculus, independent of whether other BRICS members share Russia's specific grievances against the G7-led order.

8.4 Merchandise trade shares: a second confirmation of the convergence trend

Independent of the GDP-based measures discussed in Section 6, merchandise trade data provide a second, methodologically distinct confirmation of the convergence trend documented in this paper. Analysis by EY India, drawing on IMF and WTO statistics, shows that the BRICS+ group's share of global merchandise exports rose from 10.7 percent in 2000 to 23.3 percent in 2023 — an increase of 12.6 percentage points — while the G7's share fell over the same period from 45.1 percent to 28.9 percent, a decline of 16.2 percentage points.[21] The pattern is essentially mirrored on the import side: BRICS+'s share of world merchandise imports rose from 7.2 percent to 18.9 percent, while the G7's fell from 49.8 percent to 33.7 percent.[21] Figure 4 presents both series. Notably, the "rest of the world" — non-BRICS, non-G7 economies — held a broadly stable share of both exports (44.2 to 47.9 percent) and imports (43.0 to 47.4 percent) across the same period, indicating that the trade-share shift is overwhelmingly a direct transfer of relative weight from the G7 to BRICS+, rather than a more diffuse redistribution across the wider world economy.[21]

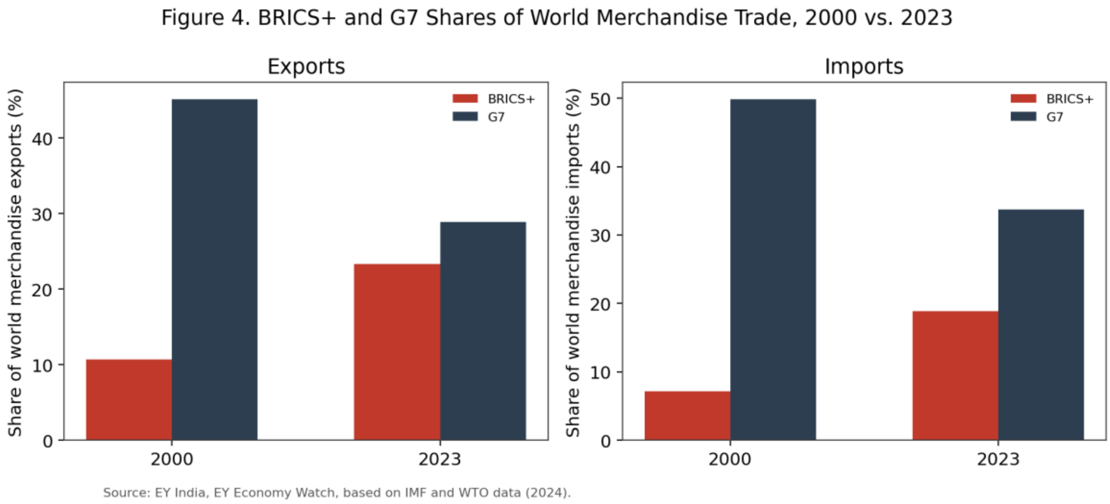

Figure 4: Merchandise trade shares

This trade evidence carries two further analytical implications. First, it is heavily concentrated within a single BRICS member: China alone accounted for 62.5 percent of BRICS+'s total merchandise exports in 2023, up from 36.1 percent in 2000, with India contributing a comparatively modest 7.9 percent.[21] This concentration is a further data point supporting the "internal heterogeneity" thesis developed throughout this paper — BRICS+'s aggregate trade weight is disproportionately a reflection of Chinese manufacturing capacity rather than a broadly shared achievement across the bloc's now eleven members. Second, the same EY

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analysis projects that BRICS+'s export share could overtake the G7's on current trends by approximately 2026, a projection that — if realised — would mean the trade-weight crossover follows the GDP(PPP) crossover (which occurred around 2018–2020) by roughly six to eight years, suggesting trade patterns adjust more slowly than headline output shares, consistent with the sector-specific, gradual character of the "decoupling" literature reviewed in Section 5.4 rather than an abrupt reordering of global commerce.[13,21]

9. Geopolitical and Strategic Analysis: Contending Perspectives

Rather than adjudicate a single "correct" interpretation of the BRICS–G7 relationship, this section presents three analytically distinct perspectives evident in the reviewed literature, each internally coherent and each capturing real aspects of the evidence assembled in Sections 6–8.

9.1 The G7-aligned perspective: managed relative decline within a durable order

Scholarship and commentary most closely aligned with G7 policy circles tends to characterise BRICS's economic rise as real but structurally limited, and the "rules-based international order" as durable despite relative G7 economic decline. On this view, the relevant comparison is not aggregate PPP-weighted GDP but the deeper architecture of the international system — reserve-currency centrality, financial-market depth, technological leadership (particularly in advanced semiconductors and artificial intelligence, sectors where G7 economies and Taiwan retain decisive advantages), and alliance-based security guarantees — all of which remain heavily weighted toward the G7 and its extended partners.[4,19] This perspective treats BRICS's institutional achievements (the NDB, the CRA, BRICS Pay) as meaningful but second-order relative to the scale and embeddedness of Bretton Woods institutions, and treats the bloc's internal heterogeneity (Section 4.3, 7.3) as an enduring structural constraint on coordinated strategic action, rather than a transitional problem the bloc will soon resolve.

9.2 The BRICS/Global South-aligned perspective: overdue redistribution of systemic power

A contrasting perspective, well represented in the Russian, Indian, Brazilian, and South African policy literature reviewed for this study, frames BRICS's rise as an overdue correction to a governance structure that has for decades allocated formal power in inverse proportion to actual economic weight.[17] On this view, the PPP-based GDP convergence documented in Section 6 is not a statistical artefact to be explained away but the central fact requiring institutional accommodation: IMF and World Bank voting shares, UN Security Council composition, and the governance of emerging domains such as internet standards and climate finance should, on this account, be recalibrated to reflect a world in which the Global South — anchored diplomatically, if not always economically, by BRICS — represents a majority of world population and, on PPP terms, a rising and soon-to-be majority share of world output. This perspective treats G7 resistance to such recalibration (for example, the persistent gap between IMF voting shares and PPP-weighted GDP shares noted in Section 7.2) as evidence of an entrenched order defending unearned privilege rather than a neutral, technocratic status quo.

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9.3 A synthesising/sceptical perspective: asymmetric competition within one interdependent system

A third position, drawn from the more analytically cautious strand of the literature (Section 5.5), treats both of the above framings as overstating BRICS's coherence as a unified actor. On this reading, what is empirically observable is not a "BRICS bloc" competing with a "G7 bloc" in any unified strategic sense, but a set of asymmetric, issue-specific competitions occurring within a single, still deeply interdependent global economy: China competes with G7 economies in advanced manufacturing and technology while remaining their largest trading partner; India balances substantial and growing security cooperation with G7-aligned states (through frameworks such as the Quad) against continued BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation membership; and South Africa, Brazil, and the newer BRICS+ members pursue what is sometimes termed "multi-alignment" — maximising economic and diplomatic optionality across both blocs rather than choosing decisively between them.[7,8] On this account, the analytically useful question is not "is BRICS overtaking the G7?" but "along which specific dimensions, and for which specific member states, is relative bargaining power shifting, and toward what institutional outcomes?" — a framing this paper adopts as its own working conclusion in Section 11.

9.4 Sector-specific illustrations of the three perspectives

The three perspectives outlined above produce visibly different readings of the sector-specific competitions introduced in Section 5.4. In climate diplomacy, the G7-aligned view emphasises the environmental necessity and technical legitimacy of carbon-border adjustment mechanisms and climate-finance conditionality; the BRICS-aligned view treats the same instruments as a new form of trade protectionism dressed in environmental language, particularly burdensome for industrialising economies; and the synthesising view notes that BRICS states are simultaneously significant fossil-fuel producers (Russia, and prospectively Saudi Arabia) and major renewable-energy investors (China leads the world in solar-manufacturing capacity), making any simple bloc-level characterisation of "the BRICS climate position" empirically unsustainable.[14] A structurally similar pattern holds in cyber-diplomacy and digital sovereignty, where G7 states generally promote multi-stakeholder internet governance, several BRICS members (notably China and Russia) promote state-sovereignty models, and a large number of Global South states courted by both blocs pursue pragmatic, case-by-case digital-governance choices rather than wholesale alignment with either model.[15,16]

9.5 Soft power, civilisational framing, and legitimacy contests

A further dimension of the BRICS–G7 contest, distinct from the material measures examined in Sections 6–8, concerns competing claims to normative legitimacy — the ability of each bloc to present its preferred model of global order as fair, natural, or historically inevitable rather than merely self-interested. G7-aligned discourse has traditionally grounded its legitimacy claim in the language of universal liberal values — democracy, human rights, open markets, and a "rules-based" system understood as applying impartially to all states.[19] BRICS-aligned discourse, particularly in its Russian- and Chinese-influenced strands, has increasingly countered with an explicitly civilisational and pluralist framing, arguing that the post-1945 order's rules were themselves drafted predominantly by a small number of Western states and reflect particular, not universal, historical experience — a framing captured in scholarship describing BRICS as a platform for "interfacing civilizations" rather than a single competing ideology.[17] This civilisational framing is strategically significant because it is designed to appeal beyond BRICS's own membership to the much larger set of Global South states that are formally non-aligned with either bloc but whose diplomatic and economic choices — on trade agreements, infrastructure financing, and votes in multilateral forums — matter considerably to the relative influence of both blocs. The empirical record reviewed in this paper suggests this legitimacy contest remains genuinely unresolved: G7 institutions retain far greater formal authority and financial resources, but survey and voting-pattern evidence cited across the reviewed literature suggests a meaningful erosion of the G7's claim to represent a universally accepted normative consensus, particularly among states that experienced the post-1945 order primarily as colonial subjects or Cold War proxies rather than as co-authors of its rules.

10. Case Studies

10.1 India: the paradigmatic multi-aligned power

India offers the clearest illustration of the "multi-alignment" thesis developed in Section 9.3. As a founding BRICS member and a leading voice for Global South institutional reform, India has simultaneously deepened strategic and defence cooperation with G7 members — most visibly the United States, Japan, and, through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Australia — explicitly in response to shared concerns about Chinese regional assertiveness, including the unresolved India–China border dispute noted in Section 5.5.[7] India's economic trajectory also complicates any simple bloc characterisation: it is simultaneously the fastest-growing large BRICS economy in relative terms, a major recipient of G7-origin foreign direct investment seeking alternatives to China-concentrated manufacturing supply chains ("China-plus-one" diversification), and a vocal advocate, within BRICS forums, for institutional reforms — such as expanded UN Security Council representation — that would benefit India specifically as much as, or more than, BRICS collectively. India's case thus demonstrates that BRICS membership does not imply strategic alignment against the G7 on security matters, even as it implies diplomatic solidarity on selected governance-reform questions.

10.2 The EU–China trade relationship: interdependence under strain

The European Union–China goods-trade relationship offers a case study in the "interdependence, not decoupling" pattern discussed in Section 8.1. Official EU trade statistics show a large and persistent goods-trade deficit with China, though narrowing somewhat in the most recent reporting period, alongside continued high absolute trade volumes in both directions.[10] The relationship illustrates the sector-specific character of Western "de-risking" policy: G7 and EU restrictions have concentrated on a narrow band of strategically sensitive technologies (notably advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment) while leaving the much larger volume of conventional manufactured-goods trade largely intact, consistent with the scholarly distinction (Section 8.1) between targeted decoupling and economy-wide separation. This case also illustrates the limits of treating "the G7" as a fully unified actor: individual G7 members have adopted meaningfully different postures toward China-related economic security measures, reflecting differing degrees of economic exposure and differing domestic political coalitions, a heterogeneity within the G7 that mirrors, on a smaller scale, the heterogeneity within BRICS emphasised throughout this paper.

10.3 Russia: sanctions, isolation from the G7, and the limits of BRICS solidarity

Russia's trajectory within BRICS since 2022 offers a third, contrasting case study — one that tests the limits, rather than the strength, of BRICS cohesion. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the G7 and a wider coalition of aligned states imposed the most extensive coordinated financial sanctions regime in modern history, including the freezing of a substantial share of Russia's foreign-currency reserves held in G7 jurisdictions — the episode identified in Section 8.3 as an unintended accelerant of wider BRICS de-dollarisation discourse.[11] Yet the practical response from Russia's fellow BRICS members was markedly cautious rather than actively supportive: India, Brazil, and South Africa each declined to join Western sanctions, preserving continued trade and diplomatic relations with Moscow, but none formally endorsed the invasion, and none extended the kind of concrete financial or security backing that would indicate genuine bloc-level solidarity.[7,8] India in particular substantially increased its imports of discounted Russian crude oil in the years following 2022 — a clear instance of pragmatic economic benefit-seeking — while simultaneously deepening the G7-aligned security cooperation discussed in Section 10.1, illustrating precisely the "multi-alignment" pattern this paper identifies as the more accurate description of BRICS member behaviour than bloc-level strategic coordination. Russia's experience therefore functions as an instructive negative case: it demonstrates that BRICS membership provides diplomatic cover and continued market access for a sanctioned member, but not the kind of institutionalised mutual-defence or financial-backstop commitment that would be expected of a genuine counter-alliance to the G7. This is consistent with the coherence critique reviewed in Section 5.5 and reinforces the paper's central analytical claim that BRICS is best understood as a coalition of convenience among states with heterogeneous, often only partially overlapping, interests vis-à-vis the G7-anchored order.

11. Discussion

The evidence assembled in this paper supports a qualified, dimension-specific answer to the question posed in the introduction. On aggregate, PPP-weighted economic output — arguably the single most-cited statistic in popular commentary on this topic — BRICS(+) has genuinely overtaken the G7, and the gap has widened materially since the bloc's 2024 enlargement.[2,3,4] This is not a trivial or contestable finding; it is corroborated across every institutional and data-journalism source reviewed for this study, notwithstanding minor variation in point estimates depending on whether the narrower five-member or the enlarged BRICS+ definition is used.

On every other major dimension examined, however, the G7's relative position is either still dominant (nominal GDP, per-capita income, reserve-currency centrality, financial-market depth) or only gradually eroding (voting power within existing multilateral institutions, coordination capacity, technological leadership in the most strategically sensitive sectors).[4,7,12,19] The paper's central analytical contribution is therefore to resist two symmetrical oversimplifications present in much popular commentary: the claim that "BRICS has overtaken the West," which conflates one favourable metric (PPP GDP share) with comprehensive strategic parity; and the claim that BRICS's rise is a statistical illusion with no real institutional or geopolitical consequence, which understates the genuine — if still modest — institution-building the bloc has achieved through the NDB, the CRA, and incipient de-dollarisation efforts, and ignores the documented shift in reserve-currency composition since 2001.[6,8,9,11]

A second key finding concerns internal heterogeneity. The literature reviewed in Section 5.5 and the case studies in Section 10 converge on the conclusion that BRICS's principal structural weakness, relative to the G7, is not economic but political: the G7's members share a sufficiently similar political-economic model (liberal-democratic, market-capitalist, allied through NATO or bilateral security treaties with the United States) that coordinated action, while never automatic, faces fewer foundational obstacles than it does within BRICS, whose members span radically different regime types, differing and sometimes directly opposed security relationships with the United States, and at least one active, unresolved territorial dispute between its two largest economies (India and China).[7,17] This heterogeneity is likely to intensify rather than diminish following the 2023–2024 enlargement, which added further regime-type and geopolitical diversity (a theocratic republic, energy-exporting monarchies, and states with actively contested relationships with G7 members) without adding comparable new institutional machinery for managing internal disagreement.

A third finding, developed most fully in Section 9, is that the most analytically productive framing of BRICS–G7 relations is neither straightforward rivalry nor straightforward cooperation, but asymmetric, sector-specific competition occurring within a still-deeply-interdependent global economy.[13,14,15,16] This finding has a practical implication for policymakers and analysts in both camps: strategies premised on a clean, bloc-versus-bloc framing — whether "decoupling" rhetoric on the G7 side or "unified Global South" rhetoric on the BRICS side — are likely to be less accurate predictive guides to state behaviour than frameworks that track individual member states' calculated, often issue-specific alignment choices, as illustrated by India's simultaneous BRICS membership and deepening G7-aligned security cooperation (Section 10.1).

A fourth and final finding, drawn together from Sections 8 and 9, concerns the specific role of the 2023–2024 enlargement in reshaping the terms of this competition. By admitting major hydrocarbon exporters, the enlarged bloc has materially strengthened the plausibility of a meaningful, if still partial, de-dollarisation trajectory in energy trade specifically — a domain where even modest shifts in pricing and settlement currency carry outsized systemic significance given the historic centrality of dollar-denominated oil markets to the currency's global reserve status.[5,9,11] At the same time, this same enlargement has deepened the bloc's internal political heterogeneity to a degree that arguably outpaces the institutional capacity the bloc has built to manage it, since neither the NDB nor the CRA nor the BRICS summit process itself has expanded its decision-making machinery commensurately with the near-doubling of full membership.[6,7,8] The net effect, consistent with the "asymmetric competition within one interdependent system" framing developed in Section 9.3, is a bloc whose aggregate economic and commodity leverage has grown in ways directly relevant to specific G7 vulnerabilities (energy-price and currency exposure), even as its capacity for unified political and strategic action arguably has not kept pace — a genuinely double-edged development that neither triumphalist BRICS narratives nor dismissive G7-aligned narratives fully capture.

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12. Limitations of the Study

This study has four principal limitations. First, as a review-and-synthesis study rather than a primary-data collection exercise, its conclusions are only as reliable as the secondary sources it draws upon; where those sources disagree (as with the 32–40 percent range of estimates for BRICS+'s 2024 PPP-GDP share), the paper has reported the range and its methodological source rather than resolving it, which is analytically honest but leaves some residual imprecision. Second, BRICS is an actively evolving institutional entity — Saudi Arabia's accession status, in particular, remained unsettled during the period covered by this review — so quantitative claims tied to current membership should be understood as time-stamped rather than permanent. Third, the requirement to prioritise literature published before 2024 for the conceptual and theoretical sections, while methodologically useful for isolating the analytical literature from the most recent data releases, necessarily means the paper's theoretical framing may not fully capture scholarly reassessments published in direct response to the 2024 enlargement; the paper has addressed this partially by treating the enlargement as a distinct empirical section (4.3) analysed against the pre-existing theoretical literature, rather than assuming the literature had already absorbed it. Fourth, the study's reference base, while spanning institutional data sources, peer-reviewed and edited-volume scholarship, and recent interdisciplinary literature on decoupling, climate diplomacy, and digital sovereignty, is not exhaustive of the very large multilingual literature on BRICS and the G7; a fully comprehensive systematic review, as opposed to the scoping-style review conducted here, would require multi-language database searching (particularly of Portuguese, Russian, Mandarin, and Hindi-language sources) beyond the scope of a single paper.

13. Conclusion and Future Directions

This paper set out to determine, through a combined systematic literature review and analytical secondary-data study, whether and to what degree BRICS constitutes a genuine rival pole to the G7 in the contemporary global economy. The evidence supports a carefully qualified answer: BRICS(+) has achieved real and durable convergence with, and now exceeds, the G7 in purchasing-power-parity-weighted economic output, a shift with genuine implications for how the bloc's members understand their entitlement to institutional voice within the IMF, World Bank, and other multilaterally governed domains. At the same time, the G7 retains substantial and, on several dimensions, decisive advantages in nominal financial weight, per-capita income, reserve-currency centrality, and the depth of institutional coordination machinery — advantages rooted in nearly five decades of accumulated institutional practice that BRICS's own, still-young institutions (the NDB, the CRA, BRICS Pay) have only begun to approximate.

The paper's central interpretive contribution is to argue that the most defensible characterisation of the BRICS–G7 relationship is neither "multipolar transition complete" nor "unipolar order intact," but asymmetric institutional competition within a single, still deeply interdependent global economy — a characterisation that treats BRICS's internal heterogeneity not as a temporary organisational weakness to be outgrown, but as a durable structural feature that will continue to shape how, and how far, the bloc can convert its growing economic weight into coordinated institutional or geopolitical influence. This has practical implications: G7 policymakers who treat BRICS as a unified strategic rival risk mis-forecasting individual member states' behaviour (as the India case illustrates), while BRICS-aligned commentators who treat the bloc's PPP-GDP convergence as self-evidently translating into commensurate institutional power risk underestimating how much of the existing order's authority rests on dimensions — reserve-currency depth, alliance structures, technological leadership — where convergence has been far more limited.

Future research would benefit from three extensions beyond the scope of this study: first, disaggregated, member-state-level analysis of alignment behaviour across specific policy domains (trade, security, climate, digital governance), rather than bloc-level aggregation, following the "multi-alignment" framing developed in Section 9.3; second, systematic tracking of the NDB's and CRA's loan-book and swap-line utilisation data as they mature, to test empirically whether de-dollarisation ambitions translate into measurable financial-flow shifts; and third, comparative institutional analysis of how the 2023–2024 enlargement is reshaping internal BRICS decision-making processes, an area where the empirical record remains thin as the newest members' full participation patterns are still emerging. As both blocs continue to evolve — the G7 through its own internal debates over strategic autonomy and China policy, and BRICS through the ongoing process of absorbing its 2024 enlargement — the analytical task of tracking their relative and often domain-specific power will remain a central concern of international political economy scholarship for the foreseeable future.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Key Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (2011–2023 membership)
BRICS+ / BRICS11	Enlarged BRICS grouping from January 2024, adding Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates
CRA	Contingent Reserve Arrangement — BRICS's $100 billion currency-swap liquidity backstop, established 2014
G7	Group of Seven — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NDB	New Development Bank — BRICS's multilateral development bank, established 2014, operational from 2015
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity — an exchange-rate adjustment used to compare real output/living standards across countries
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication — the dominant global bank-messaging system for cross-border payments
WTO	World Trade Organization

Appendix B: Timeline of Key BRICS and G7 Institutional Milestones

Year	Milestone
1973–1975	"Library Group" finance-minister talks; first G6 summit at Rambouillet[20]
1976	Canada joins; group becomes the G7[20]
1997–2014	Russia participates as the G8; suspended following the 2014 annexation of Crimea[20]
2001	Goldman Sachs coins "BRIC" as an investment-forecasting acronym[1]
2009	First BRIC leaders' summit, Yekaterinburg[6,7]
2010–2011	South Africa joins; "BRICS" acronym adopted[6,7]
2014	Fortaleza Declaration establishes the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement[6]
2015	NDB begins lending operations[8]
2023 (Aug)	Johannesburg II Declaration invites six new members[5]
2024 (Jan)	Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE formally join as BRICS+ members[5]
2024–2026	NDB pursues local-currency lending targets; BRICS Pay development continues[9]