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# Sponsorship behaviour of the BRICS in the United Nations General Assembly

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## ABSTRACT

The formation of informal groupings of states is a manifestation of the global shift in economic power. One such a grouping is the BRICS, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which stands out for its importance due to its economic weight, its coverage across continents and the numerous internal differences. The BRICS have collectively flexed their muscle and expressed their intentions to extend their cooperation at the United Nations (UN). Proposals in the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA) take the form of resolutions, which can be written and co-written by the UN member states. This so-called sponsoring of resolutions is a way to push agenda items forward. Using a large-N network analysis, we examine the patterns of co-sponsorship of the BRICS of resolutions adopted in the UN GA plenary sessions. We find that the BRICS cooperate on fields such as economic issues, however, they do not form a coherent bloc when it comes to resolution sponsorship. These results raise the question in what way the BRICS actually cooperate at the UN level.

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## Introduction

The formation of informal groupings of states is a manifestation of a major shift in international relations. These groupings often focus on intergovernmental interaction, and include the G8 and G20.<sup>1</sup> The grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) lacks geographical convergence, economic similarity and convergence in internal politics, which makes the so-called BRICS an unusual grouping.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, scholars have noted that this group stands out for its importance, due to its economic weight and its span across continents.<sup>3</sup> One of the goals of BRICS as a grouping has been to enhance their power on the international stage and collectively challenge the Western-led world order.<sup>4</sup> In their joint statements, the BRICS express their intention to extend their cooperation within the United Nations (UN).<sup>5</sup> In this way, BRICS cooperation would be in line with activities of other regional groupings, which externalise their internal concerns at the global stage.<sup>6</sup>

Given the expressed wish of the BRICS to cooperate on the UN level, and given that they already organise themselves as a network outside of the UN,<sup>7</sup> we expect them to engage in closer cooperation on policy proposals following their institutionalisation. Whereas earlier

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scholarship has looked at the voting patterns of BRICS at the UN,<sup>8</sup> we use a different metric: we look at the co-sponsorship behaviour of BRICS countries in the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA). The study of co-sponsorship allows us to examine whether the BRICS use the UN GA to push forward agenda items that they would like to address. To this end, we analyse 633 resolutions which were proposed in the UN GA between 2000 and 2018. In particular, we are interested in finding out whether the institutionalisation of BRICS in 2011 led to increased collaboration among the BRICS in the UN GA – in other words, whether the BRICS delivered on the expectation of increased cooperation at the UN. Increased co-sponsorship would magnify BRICS' power in the international field, insofar as by sponsoring resolutions, they can push forward policy changes that are aligned with their own interests.

We focus on the UN GA because, as Voeten states, '[it] is the only forum in which a large number of states meet and vote on a regular basis on issues concerning the international community.'<sup>9</sup> The study of the behaviour of states in the UN GA over an extended period of time has for a long time been considered to be one of the suitable options to study underlying preferences of states over a large number of issues.<sup>10</sup>

To analyse co-sponsorship, we turn to network analysis. The tools of network analysis for the study of co-sponsorship have been widely used in the recent political science scholarship as a way to analyse how actors cooperate in different settings. Network analysis has been used recently to study co-sponsorship patterns in the US Congress, in the *amicus curiae* letters to the US Supreme Court, or in state legislatures in the US.<sup>11</sup> By examining different aspects of the network formed through their co-sponsorship activities, we are able to scrutinise the BRICS' cooperation in the UN GA. We focus on the behaviour of the BRICS in the UN GA plenary sessions.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we will review the scholarship on the cooperation in the UN GA, as well as the role of BRICS in the UN GA. In the following section, we will offer a brief methodological discussion about the use of network analysis for study of international cooperation. The fourth section will discuss the results of our analysis, and the fifth section concludes the paper.

## BRICS and cooperation at the UN GA

Scrutinising the behaviour of the BRICS in the UN assumes that the BRICS cooperate on an international political level. This assumption is based on their efforts to coordinate policies which are reflected in their strategies and inter-ministerial processes.<sup>12</sup> Heads of governments have been meeting since 2008, and from 2013 onwards the leaders also meet during G20 summits.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, they have been publishing joint statements and action plans. As argued by Laïdi,<sup>14</sup> the impact of the BRICS can be assessed based on the degree of political coherence among them, as well as their capacity to influence the international system. Yet, the lack of obvious transformations has led to criticism of BRICS as diplomatically ineffective,<sup>15</sup> due to their internal heterogeneity.<sup>16</sup>

Ever since the birth of the BRICS formation, the grouping's voting cohesion at the UN GA has been studied extensively. Ferdinand<sup>17</sup> analysed the voting cohesion of the BRICS in 1974–2008 and found a greater and continuous tendency of the BRICS voting compared to the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UN SC) to vote in favour of UN GA resolutions. Voting cohesion among BRICS is higher than in the UN GA as a whole,

but a little lower compared to other developing countries. As Ferdinand argues, within the BRICS there has been a clear divergence between the greater cohesion of India, Brazil and South Africa and the somewhat lower cohesion of Russia and China. In contrast to these findings, Hooijmakers and Keukeleire<sup>18</sup> suggest, that in general, there was no cohesive BRICS voting bloc in the UN GA in 2006–2014. Moreover, they also find that despite a number of BRICS' statements in which the UN is mentioned, and in which the commitment to cooperation is expressed, there has been no significant increase in voting cohesion between the BRICS since the start of the consultations in the BRICs framework in 2006.

These findings contrast to the work of scholars concerning the 'rising powers'. While BRICS have not been able to bring about any revolutionary reordering of the international system,<sup>19</sup> strengthened by their newly gained economic weight, they have tried to challenge the status quo within the existing institutions and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs).<sup>20</sup> Even though these rising powers do not come close to challenging the US in its hegemony, it is clear that in their upswing, the BRICS have flexed their muscle to advocate for a more prominent role in the current Western-led international order, and are likely to continue to do so. Several scholars have stated that the BRICS' increase in economic power has been followed by a greater willingness, assertiveness and ability to exert influence, as they have already shown in multiple IGOs.<sup>21</sup> This willingness is partially underlined by a shared view among the BRICS of the current world order as being unfair.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, in his work on the BRICS, Mielniczuk<sup>23</sup> explains how the interests of the BRICS states became more convergent over time, and how they increasingly focused on the same topics. The BRICS have expressed similar positions on topics such as non-intervention, respect for international law, restructuring of the global order and developmental issues. However, one has to point out that this perceived shared outlook of the world may be limited by the numerous differences that exist between the BRICS states, for example, but not limited to, their internal governance structures, economic policies and views on human rights issues.<sup>24</sup>

Cooperation among the BRICS nations has increased considerably since the 2011 consolidation into their current formation. The BRICS have joined hands and participated in the international field following the current, Western-led global order.<sup>25</sup> They have displayed cooperation in a number of IGOs in order to reach common objectives and push forward shared interests. As stressed by Abbott and Snidal, the role of IGOs is crucial: 'Formal IGOs have played a major role in many, if not most, instances of interstate collaboration.'<sup>26</sup> IGOs allow states to reach objectives that they would not have been able to reach without them. The UN GA is special in this regard, as it is considered the eminent platform to push forward foreign policy preferences, a place where 'international politics is played out'<sup>27</sup> and in which foreign policy preferences can be expressed.<sup>28</sup>

Such increased cooperation is to be expected, according to the realist scholars of international relations. According to the realist 'balancing' theory, cooperation between states happens when states face a common threat and pool their resources to defend themselves against this threat.<sup>29</sup> Such theory provides the basis for the 'counterhegemonic bloc hypothesis', presented by Voeten.<sup>30</sup> Through this counterhegemonic bloc, rising powers can challenge the power of the hegemon, in this case the US. The formation of such a bloc might be seen as self-help behaviour of the states to ensure their own survival in the anarchic environment in which they operate. By forming such a bloc, states challenge the existing rules and principles of the international system. Voeten<sup>31</sup> finds that in 1991–1996, a counterhegemonic voting bloc existed in the UN GA, of which, among others, China and India were

part. This proves that states, notwithstanding their internal differences, can form a coherent voting bloc to challenge the US hegemony.

Prior research has shown similar assertiveness of the BRICS in the UN SC, on which they all occupied a seat in 2011. As members of the UN SC, they showed coherent voting behaviour. The BRICS abstained from supporting a draft resolution on Syria and the following human rights violations.<sup>32</sup> According to Armijo and Roberts<sup>33</sup> these joint positions are a sign of conciliation and coordination between the different BRICS states, given that some of the positions seemed to not necessarily reflect self-interest. In their New Delhi Declaration published in 2012, the BRICS look back on their shared year in the UN SC and state their intention to 'underscore our commitment to work together in the UN ... in the years to come'.<sup>34</sup> However, one year later, in 2012, when all BRICS except for Brazil were still serving on the UN SC, Russia and China vetoed resolutions for which India and South Africa voted in favour. A common denominator for the BRICS in the UN SC can be found in their shared disapproval of the use of force or sanctions.<sup>35</sup> The BRICS' efforts to reform the UN SC and to gain influence have been rather unsuccessful,<sup>36</sup> partly due to the differences in power that exist between China and Russia as permanent members on the one hand, and the other BRICS states on the other hand.

## Method

In the light of the current global order, it is interesting to have a new look at sponsorship behaviour within the UN GA and see whether the BRICS show sponsorship cohesion. Moreover, Ferdinand<sup>37</sup> recommends further research into the diplomatic behaviour of the BRICS within the different bodies of the UN. With this research, we aim to further clarify the patterns of BRICS co-sponsorship activities and provide an explanation for this.

### *Why study resolution co-sponsorship?*

The cooperation of states at the UN GA has been traditionally studied by examining voting and voting cohesion. One of the first academics to study the voting patterns has been Bruce Russett.<sup>38</sup> The scholarship was further developed by Erik Voeten, who studied the transformations of voting alignments in the UN GA after the end of the Cold War.<sup>39</sup> One of Voeten's key take-away messages was that the East–West and North–South divides, present during the Cold War, remain present even after the end of the super-power competition. However, he also found an 'emerging counterhegemonic voting bloc'<sup>40</sup> composed of rising powers that challenge the US-led global order.<sup>41</sup> Yet, as Hooijmakers and Keukeleire<sup>42</sup> discuss, focusing on voting behaviour shows only a tip of the iceberg – only the output of the ongoing processes at the UN GA.

The resolution co-sponsorship provides a new (and hitherto surprisingly not widely used) avenue for studying processes of cooperation. Early studies in this stream originate already in 1960 and focused on comparing East–West and North–South cooperation.<sup>43</sup> Yet, these studies have not been followed by more recent analysis of co-sponsorship behaviour in the UN GA.<sup>44</sup> This is rather surprising given that the study of co-sponsorship flourished elsewhere, for example in the study of the US domestic political system.<sup>45</sup> Scholars in this area use co-sponsorship patterns to reveal long-term coalitions, which are 'often used to pursue

strategic goals at reduced costs, shape public debate by influencing a broader platform, gather information, and receive symbolic benefits.<sup>46</sup>

To empirically analyse co-sponsorship, we turn to the tools of network analysis, and map patterns of co-sponsorship as a network. We conceptualise UN member states as nodes, and any joint co-sponsorship as an undirected tie between them. Network analysis allows us to examine the behaviour and interactions of the BRICS and relate them to the larger network of the UN GA. This allows us not only to see how much the BRICS co-sponsor with one another, but also how their co-sponsorship activity relates to the UN GA as a whole. In this way, we are able to identify the roles the BRICS states play within their grouping, be it central players or less-connected outsiders. We combine the network topology and statistics provided by network analysis with a qualitative assessment of the sponsorship behaviour of the BRICS grouping. Qualitative assessment is required to provide more information on the type of resolutions that are co-sponsored by the BRICS. This includes the topics discussed in the resolutions, as well as possible other co-sponsors of the specific resolutions. The latter is important to distinguish coordinated efforts of the BRICS as a grouping from coincidental cooperation on resolutions sponsored by a large number of states.

### **Data**

We look at BRICS co-sponsorship in the period 2000–2018, but split this period into two parts: 2000–2010 and 2011–2018. The year 2011 was chosen as a cut-off point, because that was when South Africa joined BRICS and the grouping found its current shape. We analyse all draft resolutions discussed by the UN GA in this period.<sup>47</sup> We removed resolutions submitted by the President of the UN GA, as well as resolutions sponsored by a single country from our sample. Thus, we are left with 633 resolutions.

We also assigned each resolution a code based on the topic it addresses: Middle East, disarmament, nuclear disarmament, human rights, colonialism and economic issues, adopting Voeten's coding.<sup>48</sup> Voeten's coding is exhaustive, but fails to address one theme – internal matters of the UN, related to the structure, tasks and role of the UN. We thus coded these as 'internal matters' resolutions.

### **Metrics**

We assess the following four characteristics of the BRICS network in the UN GA sponsorship activities.

#### **Network density**

The network density of the BRICS is relevant as it compares the number of connections, i.e. the number of resolutions the different BRICS states co-sponsor together with the potential number of connections. A complete network has a value of 1, meaning that it contains all possible edges. We compare the density of the BRICS' network as cooperation on resolutions in the UN GA in the years after their development as a common group with the years before. An increased density of their networks would imply enhanced cooperation in the UN GA. Comparing the network density of the BRICS' network to the overall UN GA allows us to put

the development of the network density of the BRICS into perspective regarding overall developments in the UN GA.

### *Weighted degree centrality*

Weighted degree centrality assigns an importance score based purely on the number of ties held by each node and the weight of these ties. It reveals how many direct connections each agent has within the network. Hafner-Burton et al. describe the strength of a tie as dependent on both the magnitude and the frequency of interactions between two nodes.<sup>49</sup> We calculate the weight of a tie based on the number of resolutions the different nodes (states) have co-sponsored together. A higher degree of centrality may either be explained by a higher number of ties or by ties that are relatively stronger compared to the ties of other actors. In other words, an increase in the weighted degree centrality can be explained by an increase in the number of ties a node 'possesses' or an increase in the strength of existing ties.

To gain a more complete picture, we also retrieve the network density and the weighted degree centrality for the whole UN GA, and compare it with the development of the weighted degree centrality of the BRICS countries.

### *Communities*

An essential part of network analysis is the identification of different groupings within a network. Communities consist of states that show aligned sponsorship activities; states that co-sponsor the same resolutions often and that show above-average levels of cooperation. We identify communities through the modularity statistic, which looks for the nodes that are more densely connected with one another than with the rest of the network.<sup>50</sup>

### *Weight of ties*

Besides characteristics of the nodes within the network, one can also identify certain characteristics of the network's ties. The more resolutions two states co-sponsored, the higher the weight of the tie.

## **Results**

As discussed earlier, we look at the UN GA in 2000–2018, split into 2000–2010 and 2011–2018. In this section, the results of the network analysis are discussed and enriched with a qualitative assessment of the cooperation patterns of the BRICS.

### *UN GA plenary*

Table 1 presents the network statistics of co-sponsorship patterns in the UN GA plenary. We see in this data that co-sponsorship patterns vary over time, but also across issues. Before starting, however, we should note that there is no resolution in either of the periods that would be sponsored exclusively by the BRICS countries as a group.

Starting with the Middle East, we notice a decrease in network density in the two periods, which suggests that countries' cooperation on this issue decreases over time. The drop in the average weighted degree suggests the same – connections in the network in the post-2011

**Table 1.** UN GA Network statistics.

	Number of resolutions		Network density				Weighted degree centrality			
	2000–2010	2011–2018	2000–2010		2011–2018		2000–2010		2011–2018	
			UN GA	BRICS	UN GA	BRICS	UN GA	BRICS	UN GA	BRICS
Middle East	82	35	0.719	0.8	0.539	0.2	459.6	8.4	324.7	1.2
Disarmament	82	55	0.918	1	0.749	1	640.5	25.2	441.5	22.8
Colonialism	7	6	0.913	1	0.775	0.6	145.6	4.8	67.1	5.6
Economic issues	44	20	0.385	0.5	0.548	0.9	135.9	3.2	112.2	8.8
Human rights	92	53	0.88	1	0.629	1	452.7	4	414.9	12.4
Development	169	97	0.929	1	0.761	1	1619.5	64.4	645.2	28.8
Internal UN matters	34	27	0.592	1	0.476	0.4	291.3	22.4	123.8	2.8

period are less strong. The pattern is similar among the BRICS countries – whereas in the pre-2011 period the network density of the BRICS network is comparatively high (0.8), it drops substantially *after* the institutionalisation of BRICS, namely to a fourth of the original value. The average weighted degree declines similarly. This suggests that despite the BRICS efforts to act as an actor in the Middle East,<sup>51</sup> their mutual actorhood on the global level in the UN actually decreased during this period.

Figure 1 demonstrates the same effect. We can see that only Russia co-sponsored resolutions with China and India (separately). Different colours of the individual nodes suggest that in the whole sample of the UN GA, the BRICS countries belong to completely different camps, when it comes to the issues related to the Middle East. This is a marked change from the pre-2011 period, when four out of five BRICS countries (all but South Africa) belonged to the same camp. We may also remark that the thickness of the ties between nodes decreases, suggesting that the BRICS countries co-sponsor fewer resolutions among themselves.

Moving on to disarmament, we notice a similar pattern of a decrease in the density of the overall network although, comparatively speaking, on the issues of disarmament, the co-sponsorship density is one of the highest. Among the BRICS countries, we remark that there is no change in the network density – in both periods, all BRICS countries co-sponsor at least one resolution with one another. Figure 1 shows that the pattern of cooperation is very similar over time, and especially Russia and China appear to be central nodes in this network. However, we see that Brazil belongs to a different community than other BRICS countries, and closer analysis of Brazil's co-sponsorship reveals that it tends to co-sponsor resolutions on disarmament mainly with European powers, such as France, Germany, Netherlands or Denmark. A closer look also shows changes over time. For example, Brazil has the strongest tie (sponsors the highest number of resolutions) with South Africa (of all BRICS countries), but changes pattern: whereas in the period 2000–2010, the two countries cooperated on resolutions on 'zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic', they do not do so in 2011–2018, even though resolutions on this topic continue to be submitted. Resolutions co-sponsored by all BRICS, such as the one on 'building a peaceful and better world through the Olympic ideal' or 'the declaration and program of action of a culture of peace', tend to be the ones attracting very large numbers of sponsors. We therefore do not observe any BRICS-specific activity or sponsorship of any new 'BRICS-only' resolutions.

Before discussing the co-sponsorship of issues related to colonialism, it is worth mentioning that the issue of colonialism is one of the smaller themes, and there are comparatively fewer resolutions dealing with it. On colonialism, the overall density of the UN GA network decreases, as does the density of the BRICS network. Looking at the BRICS community in



Figure 1, we observe that in the period 2000–2010, Brazil was not a member of the same community. However, in the period of 2011–2018, it is South Africa and Russia that are not members of the same community. Looking at the resolutions sponsored, in the first period, all BRICS sponsored a resolution related to ‘the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade’; whereas in the second period, the BRICS states sponsored a resolution on ‘the permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade’.

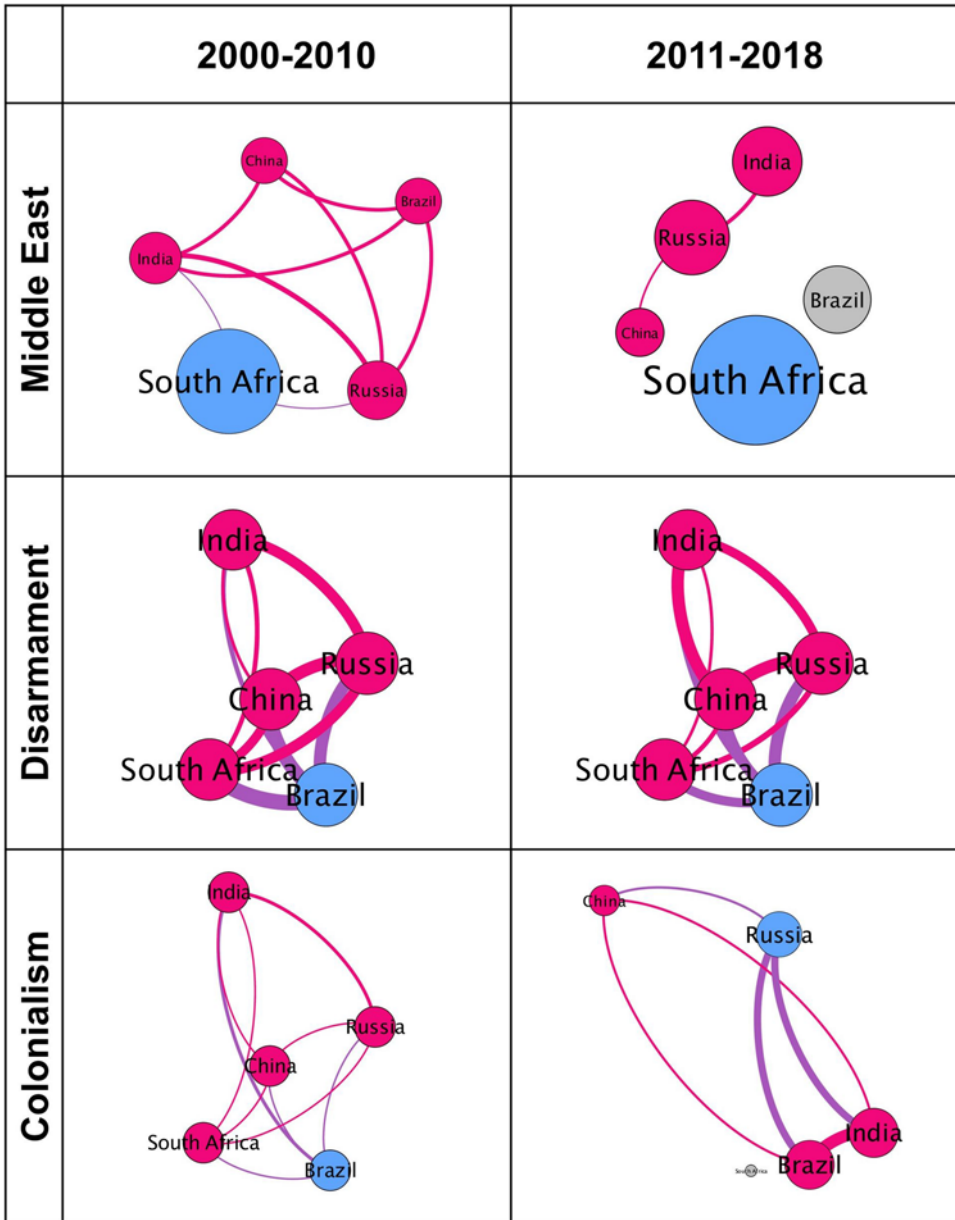


Figure 1. BRICS co-sponsorship networks.

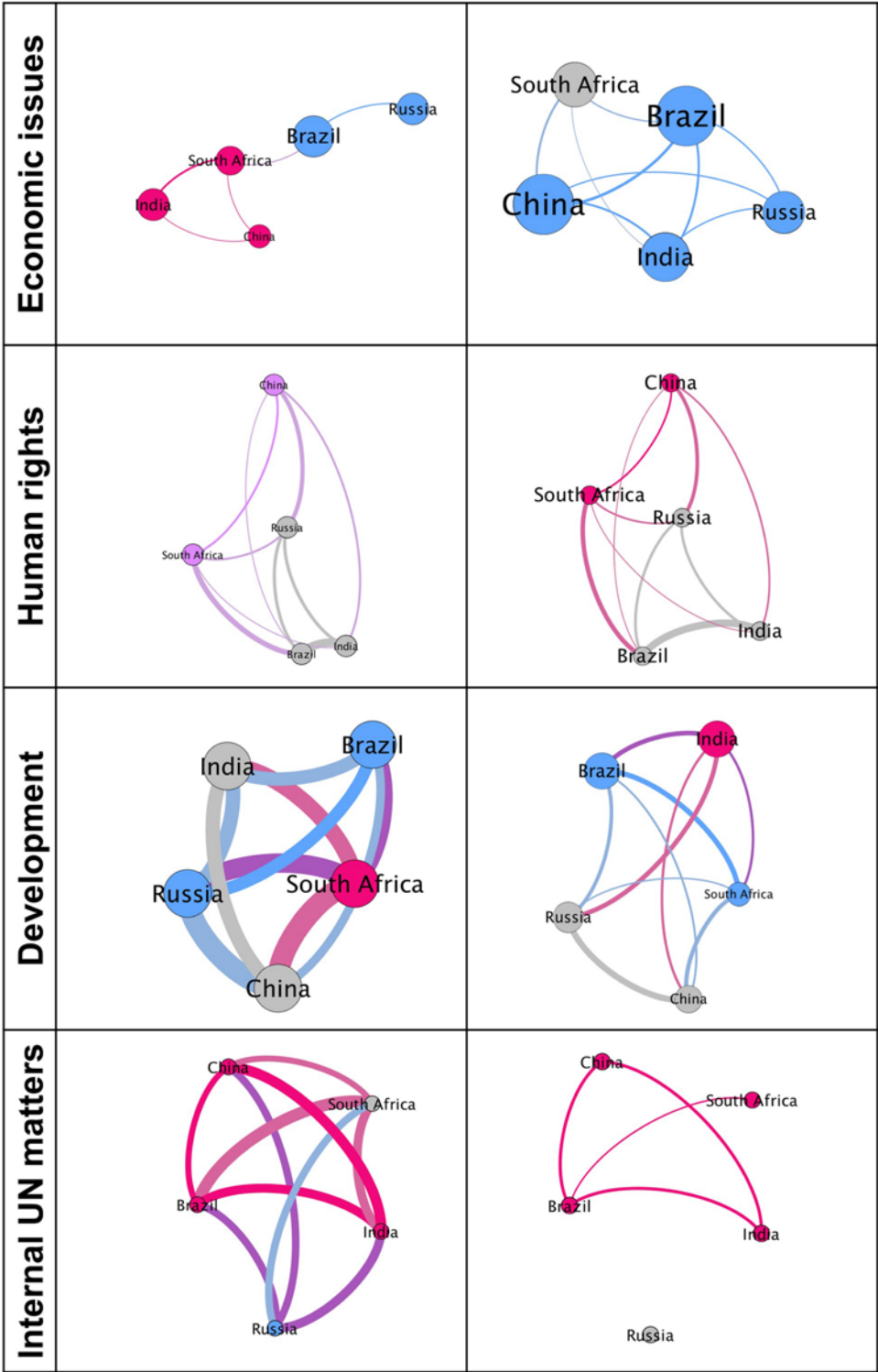


Figure 1. (Continued)

Economic issues are also one of the smaller themes, but we see that this is the only theme where the co-sponsorship density increases over time within the whole UN GA, as well as among the BRICS. At the same time, we notice the decrease in the weighted degree centrality, which suggests that while more countries are connected (demonstrated by increasing density), the connections are weaker (i.e. they co-sponsor fewer resolutions). Looking at [Figure 1](#), we see that not only are BRICS co-sponsoring more, they are also co-sponsoring more together. In the first period, the five BRICS states are divided into two communities; India, China and South Africa are part of one community and Brazil and Russia of another. In 2011–2018, all BRICS except for South Africa were part of the same community in the UN GA. This shows that the four original BRIC states showed above average levels of cooperation, whereas South Africa co-sponsored more often with some European states and Australia, when it comes to the economic issues. In the first period, Brazil is the most central actor of the BRICS in the network of the UN GA, whereas in the second period of analysis, China and Brazil are the most central actors. This pattern fits in line with the argumentation that BRICS are primarily interested in enhancing their economic cooperation, as argued by Narlikar.<sup>52</sup>

As for the human rights, the density of the network of the UN GA has decreased over time. For the BRICS, in both periods the density of the network equals 1, which means that all BRICS countries are connected to one another. However, we notice an increase in the weighted degree centrality, which means that the BRICS countries co-sponsor more resolutions with one another (despite an overall decline in the number of submitted resolutions). [Figure 1](#) confirms this pattern. We see that BRICS countries belong to two different camps, and this division persists over time: China and South Africa belong consistently to a different group to Brazil, India and Russia. This grouping is intriguing, since it does not split the BRICS among the lines of the adherence to democracy. For example, China and South Africa sponsored a resolution on ‘international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development’ and ‘sanitation for all’; while Brazil, Russia and India cooperated on a resolution on ‘permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and transatlantic slave trade’. We see that the weakest is the connection between Brazil and China, completely reverse from the theme of economic issues, where the connection between these two countries is the strongest.

When it comes to the issue of development, we see a decline in the overall density of cooperation, from very high levels. Similarly, the weighted degree centrality drops significantly, suggesting that not only fewer states cooperate (as demonstrated by decreasing network density), but also that they cooperate less. The BRICS, however, have a network density of one in both periods under study. We also see a decline in the weighted degree centrality, which suggests less co-sponsorship overall, but still in line with the rest of the UN GA. [Figure 1](#) again shows that BRICS countries belong to three different communities in each of the periods. In 2000–2010, Brazil and Russia showed cooperation with mostly European states; South Africa’s preferred partners in this field are mainly developed Western European economies; India and China showed higher levels of cooperation with mostly Asian states. In 2011–2018, India cooperated mostly with European and East Asian states, Brazil and South Africa with European countries, while Russia and China co-sponsored mainly with other Asian states. This change shows a new and unexpected reordering of collaboration within the UN GA on international developments. We may also remark that the ties between nodes are weaker after 2011, suggesting fewer co-sponsored resolutions. In both periods, BRICS

all co-sponsored a resolution to 'build a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal', but this was more broadly co-sponsored.

Last but not least, on the internal UN matters, the overall density of the network decreases, and so does the weighted degree centrality. We observe similar patterns among the BRICS. Whereas in the first period, all BRICS co-sponsored with one another, the network density decreases to 0.4 in the post-2011 period. In the post-2011 period, Russia did not co-sponsor any resolution on this topic with any other BRICS country. However, we see that in the post-2011, the other BRICS countries belong to the same community of countries.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we examined the cooperation of the BRICS countries in the UN GA through the network analysis of co-sponsorship patterns within the UN GA. We were in particular interested in finding out whether the institutionalisation of cooperation within BRICS has led to higher actorhood of BRICS on the global scale. We see that, overall, there are no signs of enhanced cooperation among the BRICS in the UN GA. The only exception to this rule is the cooperation on economic themes, where the cooperation is somewhat increased over time.

Ever since the BRICS grouping was completed in 2011, the BRICS have published joint statements on their cooperation and their intentions on future cooperation, both outside as well as within the UN framework. Since then, the BRICS leaders have met annually alongside the UN GA sessions, after which they publish declarations on their positions regarding foreign policy issues, which have become increasingly more detailed throughout the years.<sup>53</sup> In 2012 the BRICS published their New Delhi Declaration, in which they stress their commitment to continuing cooperation with the UN.<sup>54</sup> They continued to do so in later declarations, for example the Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan in 2014.<sup>55</sup>

One would expect this cooperation to result in concrete action within the UN structures, for example through coordinated and aligned voting behaviour or the co-sponsorship of resolutions. The voting behaviour of the BRICS has been studied by Ferdinand<sup>56</sup> and Hooijmakers and Keukeleire,<sup>57</sup> who find opposing outcomes on the voting coherence of the BRICS. Our study finds that although the BRICS show enhanced cooperation in some fields since the start of the BRICS cooperation, a clear and joint strategy among the BRICS is lacking. Using the tool of social network analysis, hitherto unused in the study of the role of the BRICS on the global scene, we demonstrate that BRICS role in the UN GA remains very limited. The BRICS fail to form one coherent bloc, which is for example illustrated by the fact that in all of the years analysed in this study, the BRICS never sponsored a single resolution as a grouping (as the EU or Scandinavian countries usually do).

Additionally, in all of the themes evaluated, the BRICS are part of different communities in the UN GA, which proves that their co-sponsorship behaviour is not strongly aligned, and they continue to co-sponsor resolutions with different countries as partners. There is evidence of ongoing cooperation, the statements from the summits, and undeniable attempts to cooperate more,<sup>58</sup> yet barely any of this is reflected at the UN GA. Our results also partially confirm the findings of Laïdi's earlier work, assessing the impact of the BRICS on the degree of political coherence among them.<sup>59</sup> We concur with Laïdi's findings that BRICS countries are heterogenous, and that they do not offer any single counter-hegemonic alternative. If

co-sponsorship behaviour is understood as a sign of political coherence, we conclude that their political coherence in the UN GA is rather low.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, our results contrast with the findings of Ferdinand, who found a great cohesion on the basis of voting similarity between Brazil, India and South Africa in comparison to that between Russia and China.<sup>61</sup> This contrasts with findings in our research which show that China, India and Brazil are often better connected than South Africa and Russia. This finding also underscores the need for multi-method research, and the use of different tools to analyse how active BRICS countries are at the UN. It may be exactly the lack of coherence in co-sponsorship which may explain Pant's finding that the BRICS have not been diplomatically effective in their diplomatic activities.<sup>62</sup>

In line with existing literature, we find no signs that the BRICS would use the UN GA as a platform for revolutionary change in international order. Contrary to Stuenkel's expectations,<sup>63</sup> the BRICS do not seem to challenge the current world order within international institutions and IGOs, at least not through the UN GA as its main deliberative body. Institutionalisation of BRICS did not lead to heightened cooperation at the UN GA. We observe no strengthening of cooperation within BRICS after 2011, and we also observe that there is no increase in coherence among the BRICS countries. They continue to belong to different groups on all of the issues under study. While there is a certain regrouping in terms of which communities BRICS belong to, they never become members of the same community. Our method, the use of social network analysis, allows us to identify exactly which communities BRICS countries belong to, something not done in the prior literature.

Applying a mixed-methods approach allowed us to empirically analyse the BRICS' behaviour, and added value to the outcomes through a qualitative assessment. We examined the density and weighted degree centrality of the BRICS network, as well as the communities of which the BRICS states are a part. Our results suggest that the BRICS have not been able to develop a group position on the topics discussed, which has led to a lack of collective action.<sup>64</sup> By using this novel method, and classifying the resolutions by theme, our paper was able to analyse BRICS cooperation across multiple areas. We can therefore detect differences across different areas. Policy areas addressed in this study include the Middle East, disarmament, colonialism, economic issues, human rights, development and internal UN matters – of which it appears that the BRICS have been able to arrive at consensus only on economic issues.

Our analysis demonstrates that the institutionalisation of BRICS does not lead to increased cooperation on the typical, hard security themes such as disarmament, the Middle East or colonialism. Furthermore, we demonstrate that BRICS countries certainly do not only cooperate on resolutions if this resolution enhances their individual position in the global order. The counterhegemonic bloc hypothesis that Voeten presents in his work<sup>65</sup> does not seem to apply for the co-sponsorship activities of the BRICS, as the BRICS do not form one coherent bloc. Our findings underline the heterogeneity among the BRICS scholars mentioned in earlier work,<sup>66</sup> and show that the BRICS are not yet as effective as some of the regional organisations active in the UN GA.<sup>67</sup>

If we are to analyse BRICS within the framework of regional organisations, the findings might not be too surprising. The relative lack of activity of BRICS at the UN GA may stem from the group's small size and young age. As Panke et al. argue, especially larger and older regional organisations are active at the level of international organisations.<sup>68</sup> Although a different paper by Panke et al.<sup>69</sup> focused on the particular instance of UN GA and found that

smaller sized organisations tend to favour regional organisations' activity, BRICS seems to be impeded by a lack of shared resources (the grouping is poorly equipped), young age and a mismatch in policy preferences. In a way, the old finding by Haas and Rowe<sup>70</sup> still rings true: the emergence of regional cooperation does not automatically translate into externalisation at the supranational level. Although Kim and Russett remind us<sup>71</sup> that the UN is not entirely suited for studying international politics and power relationships in the real world due to the 'one nation–one vote' principle, our paper opens future avenues for research at every turn. Future work should complement this quantitative design with more qualitative analysis, looking more in-depth at cooperation at the national level. Similarly, a study of other groupings could be undertaken to find more generalisable findings about the transformation of co-sponsorship patterns at the UN. Finally, future scholars might find it fruitful to study the behaviour of the BRICS in other IGOs.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Notes

1. Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*.
2. Armijo, "The BRICS Countries."
3. Stuenkel, *Post-Western World*; Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*.
4. Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*; Scaffardi, "BRICS, a Multi-Centre Legal Network."
5. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
6. There is a distinguished tradition of study of regional organizations at the UN: Haas and Rowe, "Regional Organizations in the United Nations"; Panke et al., "Regional Actors in the United Nations"; Prantl, "Informal Groups of States."
7. Scaffardi, "BRICS, a Multi-Centre Legal Network."
8. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN"; Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances"; Kurşun and Parlar Dal, "An Analysis of Turkey's and BRICS' Voting Cohesion."
9. Voeten, "Clashes in the Assembly," 185–6.

10. Bailey et al., "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences"; Brazys and Panke, "Why Do States Change Positions"; Gartzke, "Kant We All Just Get Along?"; Hosli et al., "Voting in the Council"; Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances"; Onderco, "Tell Me What You Want."
11. Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson, "The Evolution and Formation"; Browne, "Multiple Sponsorship and Bill Success"; Campbell, "Cosponsoring Legislation in the US Congress"; Fowler, "Connecting the Congress"; Kessler and Krehbiel, "Dynamics of Cosponsorship."
12. Armijo and Roberts, "Emerging Powers and Global Governance."
13. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
14. Laïdi, "BRICS."
15. Pant, "The BRICS Fallacy."
16. In terms of size, governance systems and relative regional power: Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
17. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
18. Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances."
19. Armijo and Roberts, "Emerging Powers and Global Governance"; Kahler, "Rising Powers and Global Governance."
20. Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*.
21. Narlikar and Kumar, "From Pax Americana to Pax Mosaica?"; Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*; Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*.
22. Mielniczuk, "BRICS in the Contemporary World."
23. Ibid.
24. Armijo, "The BRICs Countries."
25. Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*.
26. Abbott and Snidal, "Why States Act," 29.
27. Kim and Russett, "New Politics of Voting Alignments," 529.
28. Bailey et al., "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences."
29. Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*.
30. Voeten, "Clashes in the Assembly."
31. Ibid.
32. Armijo and Roberts, "Emerging Powers and Global Governance"; Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*.
33. Armijo and Roberts "Emerging Powers and Global Governance."
34. BRICS Information Centre, "BRICS Official Documents."
35. Armijo and Roberts, "Emerging Powers and Global Governance."
36. Ibid.
37. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
38. Russett, "Discovering Voting Groups"; Kim and Russett, "New Politics of Voting Alignments."
39. Voeten, "Clashes in the Assembly."
40. Ibid., 213.
41. Sizeable disagreement about the methodological aspects led to a significant improvement of measurement of similarity of preferences through a dynamic spatial voting model; Bailey et al., "Estimating Dynamic State Preferences". Given that we do not use voting as a measure in this paper, we side-step this discussion.
42. Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances."
43. Jacobsen, "Sponsorships in the United Nations"; Mower, "The Sponsorship of Proposals."
44. Diana Panke discusses resolution sponsorship in a slightly different context, see Panke, *Unequal Actors in Equalising Institutions*.
45. Campbell, "Cosponsoring Legislation in the US Congress"; Fowler, "Connecting the Congress"; Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson, "The Evolution and Formation."
46. Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson, "The Evolution and Formation," 82.
47. We analyse draft resolutions rather than adopted resolutions because UN Digital Library does not list the sponsors of adopted resolutions.



48. Voeten, "Data and Analyses of Voting." We excluded the resolutions dealing with nuclear disarmament because of the low number which did not permit appropriate analysis.
49. Hafner-Burton et al., "Network Analysis for International Relations."
50. Within the software we use (Gephi), the modularity statistic implements the algorithm developed by Blondel et al., "Fast Unfolding of Communities."
51. Blarel and Onderco, "BRICS and the Israel–Palestine Issue"; Amorim, *Teerā, Ramalá E Doha*.
52. Narlikar et al., *Oxford Handbook*.
53. Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances."
54. BRICS Information Centre, "BRICS Official Documents."
55. Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances."
56. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
57. Keukeleire and Hooijmakers, "BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances."
58. Armijo and Roberts, "Emerging Powers and Global Governance."
59. Laidi, "BRICS."
60. Although we did not intend to study BRICS in comparison to other groupings, we can note that BRICS are less cooperative than other groupings of similar size, such as the Scandinavian countries or the Visegrad countries.
61. Ferdinand, "Rising Powers at the UN."
62. Pant, "The BRICS Fallacy."
63. Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*.
64. Panke, "Regional Power Revisited."
65. Voeten, "Clashes in the Assembly."
66. Pant, "The BRICS Fallacy"; Weiss and Wilkinson, *International Organization and Global Governance*.
67. Panke et al., "Regional Organisations in the UNGA."
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Haas and Rowe, "Regional Organizations in the United Nations."
71. Kim and Russett, "New Politics of Voting Alignments."

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