



Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional

ISSN: 0034-7329

ISSN: 1983-3121

Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais

Fernandes, Ivan Filipe; Freitas, Vinicius Ruiz Albino de; Onuki, Janina  
The BRICS and Brazilian public opinion: soft balancing or economic strategy?  
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional, vol. 64, no. 2, e012, 2021  
Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202100212>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=35866230011>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's webpage in redalyc.org

UABM [redalyc.org](https://www.redalyc.org)


Scientific Information System Redalyc

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Project academic non-profit, developed under the open access initiative


**Ivan Filipe Fernandes<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Federal do ABC, Santo André, SP, Brazil  
(ivan.fernandes@ufabc.edu.br).

 ORCID ID:  
orcid.org/0000-0002-4236-4393


**Vinicius Ruiz Albino  
de Freitas<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Federal do ABC, Santo André, SP, Brazil  
(freitas.vinicius@ufabc.edu.br).

 ORCID ID:  
orcid.org/0000-0002-6893-3347

**Janina Onuki<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Relações Internacionais  
São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil  
(janonuki@usp.br).

 ORCID ID:  
orcid.org/0000-0001-9033-1863

#### Copyright:

- This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author and source are credited.
- Este é um artigo publicado em acesso aberto e distribuído sob os termos da Licença de Atribuição Creative Commons, que permite uso irrestrito, distribuição e reprodução em qualquer meio, desde que o autor e a fonte originais sejam creditados.



## The BRICS and Brazilian public opinion: soft balancing or economic strategy?

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202100212>

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 64(2): e012, 2021

### Abstract

The paper examines Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS, verifying whether the soft balancing strategy finds support on public opinion, by using survey data from the *Brazil, the Americas and the World Project*. Results indicate that the attitudes toward the BRICS countries are similar to those toward other relevant partners. Moreover, attitudes toward the BRICS are not associated with a rejection of the US, which points to the possibility of soft-balancing having support in national public opinion.

**Keywords:** BRICS; Soft balancing; Public opinion.

Received: May 31, 2021.

Accepted: October 18, 2021

### Introduction

The resilience of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as an international coalition is a counterintuitive and intriguing phenomenon. Created two decades ago as an acronym to typify a group of emerging countries, the BRICS gradually increased its levels of institutionalization and political significance. The inclusion of South Africa later on was aimed at tightening the tone of the political arrangement. When a coalition is formed to solve problems of collective action, its durability depends, ultimately, on the cohesion of interests (Cepaluni et al. 2012). Therefore, throughout its trajectory, some analysts advocated that the BRICS was a weak coalition due to the heterogeneity of interests of the countries that constituted it (Laidi 2012).

The case of IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) is equally intriguing and counterintuitive for the opposite reasons: it was a coalition with a short lifespan and much higher levels of shared interests than the BRICS. IBSA played an important symbolic and normative role, since this was an arrangement formed by three major

regional leaders and emerging economies (Flemes 2009). Although there was no act of dissolution of IBSA, governmental meetings simply stopped occurring as the BRICS gained traction.

Previous studies have shown that the solution to this puzzle was to separate the endogenous and exogenous dimensions in the constitution of those interests. Endogenous interests, whatever the substantive dimension considered (trade, human rights, environment, etc.), are, in fact, heterogeneous. Nevertheless, the convergence of exogenous interests was forged by the coalition's significance in terms of global governance (Jordan 2021). The BRICS presented and made itself a vector for changing global governance, acting by soft balancing the global hegemonic powers.

The 2008 financial crisis was instrumental in strengthening the multipolarity equilibrium and transforming the BRICS into a coalition with common positions in several areas. It started with global financial governance, solidifying the demand for reforms (Kirton 2015). The most relevant action was the formation of the G-20, with the objective of changing international governance with the expansion of the decision-making forum on global economic architecture (Stuenkel 2015). Another initiative was the New Development Bank (NBD), a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS members. In the long term, it means the building of an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions (Latino 2017). The formation of the coalition and the degree of convergence were analyzed in detail by Fernandes and Cardoso (2017).

However, despite enormous opportunities, the BRICS presents some challenges for global geopolitics and Brazilian foreign policy. First, the subject of democracy is an Achilles heel of the group. While South Africa, Brazil and India are vibrant democracies of the Global South, Russia is marked by electoral authoritarianism and the Chinese system fully rejects the Western democratic liberal organization (Önişönis and Gencer 2018). Second, trade with China, the main partner within the BRICS, has a clearly North-South nature. Brazil exports agricultural and mineral commodities and imports manufactured goods that are technology-intensive and have higher added value (Melo and Amaral Filho 2015).

In this sense, it can be argued that even though the BRICS has great potential, proposing a rebalancing of global governance, it has less domestic relevance, at least to Brazil, since heterogeneities prevail in relations within members. Given this situation, this research intends to assess Brazilian public opinion about the BRICS and its members over the past decade.

The focus is to analyze whether Brazilian public opinion converges to the idea of soft balancing proposed by the country's diplomatic elites. Alternative views could be the rejection of the project to create a coalition in the Global South as a consequence of the support to the American partnership, or of the existence of an economic drive between the BRICS support and public opinion.

For this endeavor, we analyzed the data made available by the *Brazil, the Americas and the World* (BAW) Project, which carried out three waves of surveys in 2010, 2014 and 2019. The project provided data on Brazilian public opinion about international issues and foreign policy<sup>1</sup>. We found evidence indicating that Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS are similar to attitudes

<sup>1</sup> All datasets and questionnaires can be download at the website <https://las-americas.github.io/cebrap/>.

toward other important partners, specifically the US and Argentina. Besides, we show that there is no contrast between those attitudes toward the great Western power and the support for the coalition, pointing to a non-convergence between anti-hegemonic goals and anti-American attitudes.

## Attitudes regarding the BRICS

The soft balancing strategy uses non-military instruments to slow, thwart and undermine the unilateral policies of global superpowers. To this end, it involves institutional strategies, such as the formation of coalitions or diplomatic alliances – for instance BRICS, IBSA, G3, G21 and many other international institutions proposed by emerging powers (Pape 2005; Gries 2005; Flemes 2010). The literature on international coalitions has systematically shown the relationship between the BRICS and soft balancing strategies (Oliveira and Onuki 2019; Moradifar and Yazdani 2017).

However, the domestic expression of these strategies is an almost non-explored issue. How much do the societies of the BRICS members support them? The purpose of the paper is to answer this question. In other words, we are interested in assessing the perception of these countries' societies regarding the coalition as an instance of soft balancing. Our empirical data consist of a longitudinal series of opinion surveys collected over a decade.

Public opinion reinforces the soft balancing thesis of Brazilian foreign policy if three basic premises are observed. The first is that the BRICS is perceived as a coalition with sufficient strength to oppose the great powers in the international game. Otherwise, the ability to rebalance the order becomes ineffective. The second is that support for an emerging economy, or for a coalition of its kind, is not given in detriment of great powers. Within a competitive logic of rebalancing – and not a zero-sum game – supporting the BRICS should represent an alternative and not an opposition to the US or Europe, and it is not intended to discredit them. The third is that this capacity to oppose the great powers is seen as positive for the country. We show that the three elements are presented at Brazilian attitudes toward the BRICS.

At first, in order to demonstrate this soft balancing hypothesis, we analyze the evolution of the support for the BRICS and its member countries in Brazilian public opinion throughout the last decade. It is essentially a descriptive effort, since there are no studies that have analyzed the BRICS from the perspective of public opinion – except for the contribution of Oliveira and Onuki (2019). Therefore, how Brazilians know and position themselves in regard to the most daring national cooperation in the Global South is almost an unexplored subject. Our data indicate that the way Brazilians evaluated the BRICS members is very similar on how they evaluated other important international partners.

Furthermore, we identified the determinants of acceptance or rejection of the BRICS by Brazilians. The debate on the BRICS is interesting because besides soft balancing strategies, it could be seen as a way of deepening Brazilian economic integration to global markets or as a flirtation with anti-American ideological positions. This makes the case of public opinion about the BRICS

a phenomenon of interest, as we show that economic explanations and anti-Americanism are not important determinants of positive support for the BRICS.

For the analysis of the economic determinants, we use the main models of the open economy politics. The literature indicates two major groups of causal explanations (Kuo and Naoi 2015). There are economic determinants, based on international trade models focused on the endowment of factors (Scheve and Slaughter 2001), economic sectors and the position of individuals as consumers of imported products (Baker 2010). There are also determinants of an ideational nature: nationalist and pessimistic individuals would be less likely to approve the expansion of trade (Kaltenthaler and Miller 2013; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006) and the gender gap in the assessment of globalization and international free trade, since women are, in general, more protectionist (Mansfield et al. 2015). Pinheiro et al. (2021) and Fernandes et al. (2018) detail the empirical application of these models in Brazil and Latin America, respectively.

Oliveira and Onuki (2019) indicate the existence of a cleavage in regard to the ideas of international power, hegemony, and concentration of power, which would affect Brazilians' attitudes toward China. The authors found evidence that individuals resistant to liberalism, therefore favoring protectionist measures such as tariff barriers, have positive attitudes about the emergence of China as an alternative power to the US. Other studies have analyzed sectoral effects of the exchange with China. Urdinez and Campello (2020) show that China's localized commercial shocks influence the views of Brazilians on the country's integration to global markets, both at the level of citizens and legislators.

The case of Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS becomes a good case for verifying economic, political and ideational explanations, and the soft balancing strategies. International trade policy studies tend to assume that self-interest would be the main factor affecting individual preferences. However, evidence from two decades of studies put these explanations into question, pointing to the preponderance of ideational factors and values (Lake 2009).

The case of the intermediation of interests between Brazil and the BRICS is strained toward the power struggle in the international system, clearly indicating a projection of the soft balancing strategy to the public opinion. The BRICS seem to take strategic questions about the international system as more important than the consequences of increasing bilateral or plurilateral trade between the members. In this sense, we believe that this work will contribute to the understanding of Brazil's public opinion in regard to the phenomenon of South-South Cooperation effort with the greatest impact in the last 20 years.

## Evolution of Brazilian public opinion about the BRICS and the other member countries (2010-2020)

The first step of our analysis was to collect data from the *Brazil, the Americas and the World* (BAW) Project. The project has so far collected three waves of public opinion data – 2010, 2014 and

2019 – allowing us to assess the evolution of public opinion over the past decade. While the 2010 survey does not ask any specific questions about the coalition, the 2014 and 2019 surveys do. We divide the analysis of the data as follows. First, we analyze the evolution of Brazilian public opinion about China, India, Russia and South Africa. Then, we evaluate the data about the BRICS.

## Opinion on the BRICS member countries

The first set of questions focuses on the opinion of Brazilians on the BRICS members, and we compare them with the assessment made about the country's main trading partners: Argentina and the United States. Respondents answer on a scale from 0 to 100 what their opinion about the country are. The results are shown in **Table 1**.

China had one of the most positive assessments, behind only the US. During the three waves, it even reduced the gap with the US, drawing attention to the emergence of China as an alternative to American hegemony, in line with the soft balancing strategy. On the other hand, there is a less favorable view on Russia, South Africa and India, with Russia's approval slightly below Argentina's.

It is noteworthy that the optimistic outlook in regard to India and China has grown in the period, with an increase of 15 percentage points for both countries. There was also a significant reduction in the number of non-respondents between 2010 and 2019: from 12% to 5% in regard to the US; 28% to 6% in regard to China and 30% to 10% in regard to India. This shows that Brazilians are taking stances on the main international partners.

The results present preliminary evidence on soft balancing strategy on public attitudes. During the decade, there was increased support of Brazilian bilateral relations with all the five countries. This indicates, at least descriptively, that the increased support for the BRICS member partnerships was not driven by the reduction of support of more traditional partners such as the US and Argentina.

**Table 1. Opinion of Brazilian about the BRICS member and other partners (0 to 100).**

|              | 2010                | 2014                | 2019                |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Argentina    | 40.5<br>(39.1-41.8) |                     | 44.5<br>(43.1-46.0) |
| USA          | 51.5<br>(50.0-53.0) | 59.9<br>(58.2-61.5) | 60.5<br>(58.9-62.1) |
| South Africa |                     |                     | 41.6<br>(40.1-43.1) |
| China        | 40.9<br>(39.4-42.3) | 51.8<br>(50.2-53.5) | 55.1<br>(53.6-56.7) |
| India        | 25.1<br>(23.8-26.5) |                     | 40.3<br>(38.9-41.7) |
| Russia       |                     |                     | 44.0<br>(42.4-45.6) |

Observation: Confidence intervals for the mean.

Along with the three waves of the survey, individuals also classified bilateral relations between Brazil and each of the countries mentioned in Table 1. The options were Partnership, Friendship, Rivalry and Threat. The concepts mean, respectively: a greater integration of the two countries (Partnership), a relationship without relevant tensions (Friendship), some tensions (Rivalry) or great distance and threats (Threat). The answers are shown in **Table 2**.

In general, the decade is marked by a slight decline in the positive outlook on Brazil's relations with the US and China, and a slight increase in the positive outlook on bilateral relations with Argentina, indicating strong stability and consistency toward all. Table 2 shows that, on average, 60% of Brazilians regard the relationship between Brazil and Argentina as positive, and this number does not vary much over the years. The perception of the US is even more positive: in 2010 it almost reached 80%, and in 2014 and 2019 it was nearly 70%. The relationship between Brazil and China is always in an intermediate position between those with the US and Argentina: about 70% of Brazilians have positive attitudes toward Brazil-China relations. The ratio is steady throughout the waves.

The opinions about Brazil-India relations indicate similar patterns to that with China, showing no significant changes between 2014 and 2019. Opinions about bilateral relations between the other BRICS partners – Russia and South Africa – were only included in 2019. Among all the BRICS partners, Brazil-South Africa relations are the best rated by the Brazilian public, with 70% of positive assessment. On the other hand, relations with Russia have the worst results among the selected countries.

The descriptive evidence indicates once again that attitudes on Brazilian bilateral relations with the BRICS members are not associated with changes in attitudes toward Argentina and the US. Furthermore, the magnitudes of values indicate that Brazilians' attitudes toward relations with the US are similar to those with the emerging Chinese power. The data are closely connected with Morgenstern and Bohigues (2021), whose findings indicate that, for Latin-Americans, attitudes toward the United States do not covary with the attitudes toward China.

**Table 2. Evaluation of Brazilian bilateral relations within the BRICS countries and other partners**

|                      | 2010 |      | 2014 |      | 2019 |       |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
|                      | N    | %    | n    | %    | n    | %     |
| <i>Argentina</i>     |      |      |      |      |      |       |
| Friendship           | 627  | 31.4 | 626  | 33.3 | 625  | 33.8  |
| Partnership          | 589  | 29.5 | 479  | 25.5 | 564  | 30.5  |
| Rivalry              | 492  | 24.6 | 484  | 25.7 | 299  | 16.2  |
| Threat               | 108  | 5.4  | 132  | 7.0  | 156  | 8.4   |
| NS/NR                | 184  | 9.2  | 160  | 8.51 | 205  | 11.09 |
| <i>United States</i> |      |      |      |      |      |       |
| Friendship           | 765  | 38.3 | 716  | 38.1 | 652  | 35.3  |
| Partnership          | 828  | 41.4 | 635  | 33.8 | 663  | 35.9  |
| Rivalry              | 119  | 6.0  | 136  | 7.2  | 119  | 6.4   |
| Threat               | 103  | 5.2  | 210  | 11.2 | 248  | 13.4  |
| NS/NR                | 185  | 9.3  | 184  | 9.8  | 167  | 9.0   |

continue



Table 2. continuation

| <i>China</i>        |     |      |     |       |     |       |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| Friendship          | 627 | 31.4 | 562 | 29.9  | 563 | 30.5  |
| Partnership         | 847 | 42.4 | 659 | 35.0  | 709 | 38.3  |
| Rivalry             | 154 | 7.7  | 155 | 8.2   | 122 | 6.6   |
| Threat              | 120 | 6.0  | 225 | 12.0  | 233 | 12.6  |
| NS/NR               | 252 | 12.6 | 280 | 14.9  | 222 | 12.0  |
| <i>India</i>        |     |      |     |       |     |       |
| Friendship          |     |      | 675 | 35.89 | 654 | 35.37 |
| Partnership         |     |      | 572 | 30.41 | 600 | 32.45 |
| Rivalry             |     |      | 93  | 4.94  | 112 | 6.06  |
| Threat              |     |      | 100 | 5.32  | 158 | 8.55  |
| NS/NR               |     |      | 441 | 23.44 | 325 | 17.58 |
| <i>Russia</i>       |     |      |     |       |     |       |
| Friendship          |     |      |     |       | 456 | 24.66 |
| Partnership         |     |      |     |       | 570 | 30.83 |
| Rivalry             |     |      |     |       | 166 | 8.98  |
| Threat              |     |      |     |       | 359 | 19.42 |
| NS/NR               |     |      |     |       | 298 | 16.11 |
| <i>South Africa</i> |     |      |     |       |     |       |
| Friendship          |     |      |     |       | 763 | 41.27 |
| Partnership         |     |      |     |       | 572 | 30.94 |
| Rivalry             |     |      |     |       | 94  | 5.08  |
| Threat              |     |      |     |       | 141 | 7.63  |
| NS/NR               |     |      |     |       | 279 | 15.09 |

The most negative attitudes – Rivalry and Threat – toward Brazil's bilateral relations are with Argentina (with a surprisingly average of 30%) and Russia (28.4%). It is important to point out that while about 25% classify relations between Brazil and the neighboring country as Rivalry, 20% perceive the country of Vladimir Putin as Threat, which indicates a greater distrust toward Russia. Once again, Brazilians' views on China and the US are similar, signaling an approximation of public opinion with the soft balancing strategy. About one in five of the respondents classified the relations as negative, either in regard to the American or the Asian powers. In fact, for both relations there was about 5% increase in the negative perception over the decade. The negative perception of relations with South Africa and India is lower, close to 12%.



**Table 3. Brazilian public opinion on countries based on the level of trust they inspire to the world peacekeeping**

|                                   | 2010 |      | 2014 |      | 2018 |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| which country you trust the most  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|                                   | n    | %    | n    | %    | n    | %    |
| USA                               | 825  | 41.3 | 664  | 35.3 | 612  | 33.1 |
| China                             | 266  | 13.3 | 257  | 13.7 | 238  | 12.9 |
| Russia                            | 40   | 2.0  | 85   | 4.5  | 82   | 4.4  |
| France                            | 296  | 14.8 | 175  | 9.3  | 274  | 14.8 |
| UK/England                        | 64   | 3.2  | 81   | 4.3  | 231  | 12.5 |
| None                              | 166  | 8.3  | 235  | 12.5 | 100  | 5.4  |
| NS/NR                             | 297  | 14.9 | 299  | 15.9 | 195  | 10.6 |
| Others                            | 46   | 2.3  | 85   | 4.5  | 117  | 6.3  |
| which country you trust the least |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|                                   | n    | %    | n    | %    | n    | %    |
| USA                               | 430  | 21.5 | 461  | 24.5 | 529  | 28.6 |
| China                             | 415  | 20.8 | 262  | 13.9 | 330  | 17.9 |
| Russia                            | 429  | 21.5 | 548  | 29.1 | 564  | 30.5 |
| France                            | 73   | 3.7  | 35   | 1.9  | 46   | 2.5  |
| UK/England                        | 131  | 6.6  | 116  | 6.2  | 75   | 4.1  |
| None                              | 94   | 4.7  | 89   | 4.7  | 41   | 2.2  |
| NS/NR                             | 396  | 19.8 | 251  | 13.4 | 165  | 8.9  |
| Others                            | 32   | 1.6  | 119  | 6.3  | 99   | 5.4  |

The following question explores which country inspires greater and lesser confidence in maintaining world peace. The question does not cover all countries that matter to this assessment of Brazilian foreign relations, focusing only on the UN Security Council (SC) members with veto power (China, United States, France, England and Russia) – even though there was the possibility of pointing another country not listed. The answers are shown in **Table 3**.

An interesting result is that, among the permanent member of the SC, only the US inspires great confidence in Brazilians. About 30% to 40% trust the United States as the most reliable country to maintain world peace. However, this perception is shrinking. While in 2010 more than 40% entrusted this mission to the US, in 2019 only 30% did so. France comes in second with approximately 15% of responses, while China and England are slightly behind. In addition, Russia, according to the previous findings shown in Table 2, has the lowest approval rate among the SC members.

The results are reversed when respondents are questioned about the countries that generate more distrust. About 20% to 30% of Brazilians understand that the US and Russia are the least reliable to maintain world peace, indicating an ambivalence of Brazilians' attitudes toward the US and a consistent distrust toward Russia. In addition, the results pointing to distrust have increased to both countries in the past decade. The answers on China, in turn, indicate 15% to 20% of

distrust, showing that the number of Brazilians suspicious of China is larger than those who trust it. Although the number is not highly significant, we can identify the same structure of attitudes toward the US, indicating a relatively convergent assessment and ambivalence toward both.

The previous questions indicate a reasonable openness of the respondents concerning the BRICS countries, especially when compared to the other two major international partners in Brazil – US and Argentina. Nevertheless, we still have some exclusive questions aimed at analyzing Brazilians' attitudes toward the Chinese expansion, vis-à-vis the maintenance of American hegemony. Analyzing China is fundamental to the soft balancing strategy. The importance of the BRICS in the international system is ultimately a result of the significant increase in Chinese relevance. Recently, the topic has aroused a heated debate in part of the West, especially in countries like the US and Brazil.

In 2014 and 2019, Brazilians were consulted about their feelings on the US and China in two sets: Trust or Distrust; and Admiration or Contempt. **Table 4** presents these data. In 2014, the trust was higher in the US (40%) than in China (35%), and in 2019 the feeling of trust fell in both to 30%. In turn, the distrust grew from around 50% (2014) to 60% (2019) for both powers, with no significant differences between them. With regard to the feelings of admiration or contempt, the distribution is also equivalent. About 60% of Brazilians admire both countries and 25% felt contempt for them. Again, the data show that Brazilians' attitudes toward China are similar to attitudes toward US. Comparing them as the two great powers that are expected to strain the international system in the coming years, it is meaningful to note that the level of support and rejection are essentially similar, once again suggesting the track of soft balancing on public opinion. Again, the descriptive data indicate that attitudes toward the US are similar to those with the emerging Chinese power.

**Table 4. Brazilians' feelings toward China and the United States**

|                           | China |      |      |      | United States |      |      |      |
|---------------------------|-------|------|------|------|---------------|------|------|------|
|                           | 2014  |      | 2019 |      | 2014          |      | 2019 |      |
|                           | n     | %    | n    | %    | n             | %    | n    | %    |
| Trust                     | 672   | 35.7 | 559  | 30.2 | 775           | 41.2 | 569  | 30.8 |
| Distrust                  | 948   | 50.4 | 1147 | 62.0 | 979           | 52.1 | 1161 | 62.8 |
| NS/NR                     | 210   | 11.2 | 143  | 7.7  | 93            | 4.9  | 119  | 6.4  |
| Indifferent (spontaneous) | 51    | 2.7  |      |      | 34            | 1.8  |      |      |
| Admiration                | 1046  | 55.6 | 1150 | 62.2 | 1250          | 66.5 | 1184 | 64.0 |
| Contempt                  | 526   | 28.0 | 444  | 24.0 | 397           | 21.1 | 448  | 24.2 |
| NS/NR                     | 196   | 10.4 | 255  | 13.8 | 117           | 6.2  | 217  | 11.7 |
| Indifferent (spontaneous) | 113   | 6.0  |      |      | 117           | 6.2  |      |      |

Nevertheless, despite the similar attitudes toward both countries, the emergence of China as a global power is seen as a more serious threat to Brazilians in 2019 (40%) than in 2010 (30%),

data in Table 5, top panel. Finally, almost 60% of Brazilians regard the growth of the Chinese economy, until it becomes as large as the American, positively (2014 and 2019) – in 2010 the approval rate was 50%. The negative perception about this unfolding of the contemporary economy was of 25% (2010) and 30% (2019). These data are in the lower panel of Table 5.

Once more, descriptive data of Brazilian attitudes toward China and the US indicate that there is no negative correlation among those variables. China's emergence is actually seen as a threat but it is not related to the fact that its economy is becoming as important as the United States'. We can speculate, and further studies should work on this hypothesis, that China's rise is seen as a threat because it also gives rise to the possibility that the international order will face a new Cold War; however, public opinion does not see China's political and economic specificities as a threat.

**Table 5. Attitude of Brazilians toward China as a global economic power**

|   | 2010 |       | 2014 |      | 2019 |      |
|---|------|-------|------|------|------|------|
|   | n    | %     | n    | %    | n    | %    |
| Emergence of China as a global power            |      |       |      |      |      |      |
| Serious threat                                  | 601  | 30.1  |      |      | 740  | 40.0 |
| Important threat, but not serious               | 529  | 26.5  |      |      | 528  | 28.6 |
| Not especially important threat                 | 399  | 20.0  |      |      | 410  | 22.2 |
| Not a threat (spontaneous)                      | 284  | 14.2  |      |      | 6    | 0.3  |
| NS/NR   | 187  | 9.35  |      |      | 165  | 8.9  |
| Chinese Economy being as important as the USA's |      |       |      |      |      |      |
| Positive  | 1041 | 52.05 | 1121 | 59.6 | 1104 | 59.7 |
| Negative  | 516  | 25.8  | 560  | 29.8 | 557  | 30.1 |
| NS/NR   | 220  | 11.0  | 185  | 9.8  | 163  | 8.8  |
| Indifferent                                     | 223  | 11.15 | 15   | 0.8  | 25   | 1.4  |

Overall, the descriptive results indicate that Russia is the country that generates most distrust in Brazilians, and not the current global powers, the US and China. Perceptions about China and the US are reasonably similar, including in the dimension of trust-distrust, in terms of maintaining world peace and assessing bilateral relations. Apart from Russia, the relationship with the other members of the BRICS is as well regarded as the relationship with Brazil's main economic partners.

The emergence of China is seen as a serious threat to Brazil, although its position as a competitor of the US is seen as positive, something that is easily understandable if we consider the different dimensions of the Chinese resurgence. While the "post-Chinese ascension" world sees the possibility of a new Cold War between the two main powers, putting global security at risk, the same phenomenon is regarded as an opportunity for Brazil to project globally as less economically dependent, which explains the ambivalence of attitudes and a reasonably similar view of the two powers.

It is possible to conclude that the perception of a greater risk regarding China's ascension is not associated with a specific view on the Asian country, but on the potential problems related to the rise of a new power. It would be calling into question the balance of the international system, since the world may be entering a new Thucydides trap (Allison 2017). In this sense, the approximation of public opinion with the soft balancing strategy is even more evident.

## The opinion of Brazilians on the BRICS

The 2014 and 2019 surveys had specific questions about the BRICS. First, respondents were asked if they knew the acronym "BRICS". The results indicate a strong lack of knowledge of Brazilians about the coalition. In 2014, only 77 (4%) of the 1881 respondents knew what the acronym meant, while 94 respondents were wrong, and more than 90% said they did not know. In 2019, only 56 (3%) out of 1849 respondents got it right, while 96 answered wrong, and once again more than 90% did not know the answer<sup>2</sup>.

In a second moment, the survey asked the opinion of Brazilians about the coalition itself, and its members were listed. In 2014, there was one question about the interviewees' opinion on the BRICS<sup>3</sup>, with two options, one positive, the other negative: a) The BRICS is a force capable of balancing world power vis-à-vis traditional powers, or b) The BRICS is an embarrassing alliance with countries that are authoritarian or have high levels of social exclusion. In 2019, the two statements were repeated. However, each one of them was placed in a different question that allowed different levels of agreement to them<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 6. Brazilians' attitude toward the BRICS**

| 2014                                   |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
|  | n   | %    |
| Force capable of balancing world power | 708 | 37.7 |
| Embarrassing alliance                  | 658 | 35.0 |
| NS/NR                                  | 515 | 27.4 |

continue

<sup>2</sup> It is important to point out that there is a great lack of knowledge about the terms of international politics among Brazilians. In 2019, only 18 people knew the meaning of the term MRE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and 30% (553 people) knew the term UN (United Nations Organizations). In 2014, the numbers were 29 respondents for the term MRE and, again, 30% (578 people) for the term UN.

<sup>3</sup> The specific question was: *Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa formed a block known by the acronym BRICS. For some, the BRICS are a force capable of balancing world power, when compared to traditional powers such as the US, Europe and Japan. For others, the BRICS are an embarrassing alliance with authoritarian countries, such as Russia and China, or with countries with a high level of social exclusion, like India and South Africa. Which of the two statements do you agree with the most?*

<sup>4</sup> A likert scale was presented as an answer option: I totally agree, partly agree, partly disagree, totally disagree, with the spontaneous option neither agree nor disagree.

Table 6. continuation

| 2019                                     |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
|  | n   | %    |
| Force capable of balancing world power   |     |      |
| Somewhat agree                           | 698 | 37.8 |
| Strongly agree                           | 395 | 21.4 |
| Neither agree nor disagree (spontaneous) | 10  | 0.5  |
| Somewhat disagree                        | 286 | 15.5 |
| Strongly disagree                        | 289 | 15.6 |
| NR                                       | 9   | 0.5  |
| NS                                       | 162 | 8.8  |
| Embarrassing alliance                    |     |      |
| Somewhat agree                           | 535 | 28.9 |
| Strongly agree                           | 283 | 15.3 |
| Neither agree nor disagree (spontaneous) | 11  | 0.6  |
| Somewhat disagree                        | 426 | 23.0 |
| Strongly disagree                        | 396 | 21.4 |
| NR                                       | 11  | 0.6  |
| NS                                       | 187 | 10.1 |

In 2014, 38% of respondents answered that the BRICS was a positive coalition, while 35% considered it an embarrassing alliance. In 2019, 59% of the interviewees agreed (somewhat and strongly agree) with the positive statement (force capable of balancing world power) and 31% disagreed (somewhat and strongly disagree). The negative statement (embarrassing alliance) had 44% of agreement, and the same rate of disagreement (44%). The answers are presented in **Table 6**. The analysis of the determinants of Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS concerns these answers. Due to the different structure of the questions in 2014 and in 2019, we will not unify the databases.

The first observation that draws our attention is that there is not a large majority either against or in favor of the BRICS. The number of people who responded positively (38%) and negatively (35%) to the 2014 question is similar. The same happens in the 2019 survey with the negative statement about the BRICS: the number of people who agree and who disagree is practically the same (818 [44%] of people agree with the negative statement and 822 [44%] disagree). On the other hand, in 2019 about twice as many people agreed with the positive statement (1093 respondents, or 59%) than those who disagreed (575 respondents, or 31%).

Surprisingly, the answers to the positive and the negative questions of 2019 are positively correlated<sup>5</sup>. This indicates that the perception of the BRICS' ability to change the international system is not negatively correlated with the perception that an alliance with authoritarian and unequal countries is embarrassing. That is, the questions do not produce exact opposites as imputed

<sup>5</sup> The spearman rho is 0.25 when we set aside the NR / NS responses.

in the 2014 questions. All of this taken in consideration, in the next section, we will analyze the determinants that led individuals to consider the BRICS a positive alliance in 2014, and capable of balancing the international system in 2019.

## Determinants of Brazilians' positive attitudes toward the BRICS

In order to analyze Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS, we examined the weight of the explanations traditionally brought by the open economy politics and the soft balancing literature. We estimate several logistic regression models that encompass the different sets of determinants considered important. All estimated coefficients are presented in terms of odds-ratios<sup>6</sup>.

First, we analyzed the effects of social background variables widely used in the literature. Second, we analyzed the effects of variables related to attitudes on domestic policy. We included in the second set a variable of the perception of respondents' own economic well-being. Third, we analyzed the effects of attitudes on globalization and free trade, including the perception (positive or negative) of the effects of protectionism – through the acceptance of the reduction of trade barriers and promotion of foreign investments in the national territory<sup>7</sup>.

These three sets of variables constitute the background on which the attitudes toward international politics are analyzed. The first step in the analysis is fundamental, since we try to understand how attitudes on international politics can be positively correlated with the attitudes toward the BRICS. It is important to control for the hardest domestic determinants, since we are dealing with ideas being potential determinants of ideas.

Finally, we assessed the correlation of attitudes toward international politics, specifically the attitudes of individuals toward China and the US, as we want to test whether anti-Americanism could be the main driver of positive attitudes toward the BRICS instead of soft balancing values. For the analysis of the 2019 data, we also included the opinion on all the BRICS countries.

The results are interesting and help us explore the determinants of approval toward the BRICS. **Table 7** shows the results for the background variables. In the panel on the left side are the models estimated with data from 2014 (columns 1 to 4), and in the right we placed the models from 2019 (columns 5 to 8). In columns 1 and 5 we included the background variables; in columns 2 and 6 the questions concerning internal politics; and in columns 3 and 7 the variables related to the individual's view on free-trade, protectionism and globalization. Finally, in columns 4 and 8, we estimated complete models.

In column 1 we identified that, in 2014, there was a monotonic effect of age on the acceptance of the BRICS: the younger the respondent, the more likely to perceive the international coalition in a positive way. The inverse relationship happens for schooling: the more educated are more

<sup>6</sup> We chose logistic regressions, as the BRICS' question of the 2014 wave is dichotomous. For the 2019 wave, we reestimated ordered logistic models in the appendix, as the answer for the BRICS' question was presented in a likert scale format. Results remain the same.

<sup>7</sup> The full description of the control variables and descriptive statistics are presented in the appendix.



likely to support the BRICS. Gender, in turn, repeats the traditional results, men have greater economic and political openness. We found no substantive effects of income and profession, which indicates that the main economic variables are not adequate to explain attitudes toward the BRICS.

The results are confirmed in column 5 for the 2019 survey. There is a negative relationship with age and positive for years of study and income, both measured continuously. Men are also more likely to rate the BRICS positively. The variable of profession is not available in the 2019 survey, but the effects of being part of the Economically Active Population (PEA) are null.

With regard to the internal political dimensions, column 2 and 6, ideology is weakly associated. All results are null, with only a substantive negative effect from those who answered that they do not know or do not have an ideological position, something that is not highly informative. The effect is similar in the 2019 data. Besides, there is no effect of the specific electoral choice, as well as on the pessimism about politics. Finally, a favorable opinion about cosmopolitanism, through the opening of ideas and customs, is associated with a more positive view of the BRICS in both surveys, indicating an expected association between cosmopolitanism and openness to Brazil's south-south international collaborations.

The other economic explanations have shown dubious results. In columns 3 and 7, we find substantive effects among those who identify foreign investments as beneficial to the country, approve the reduction of trade barriers (in the 2014 survey) and are supporters of globalization (results that become null in the complete model). It is noticeable that support for free trade is not associated, suggesting that attitudes toward the BRICS are not connected to a trade logic.

Hence, we can argue that explanations from open economics literature are not strongly related with the support of Brazilians to the BRICS coalition. There is no effect of income variable, indicated by Pinheiro et al. (2021) and Baker (2010) as the most important economic determinant of pro-free-trade attitudes in Brazil and Latin America, respectively. Besides, education is positively related with stronger support for the BRICS, once again incoherent with the provisions of traditional open economics models. As Lake (2009) indicated, education is more closely associated with cosmopolitanism behavior than with economic skills.

Another important result, reproducing Pinheiro et. al (2021) findings for free-trade attitudes, is that a cosmopolitan view of culture and immigration is positively associated with attitudes toward the BRICS. Finally, a rejection of trade barriers and a positive view of international investments are also associated with the BRICS, correlations that should be explored in future studies.

We can conclude, therefore, from the background variables, that there is a relationship between cosmopolitanism and the support for the BRICS, which is clear in the effect of the variables that identify a rejection of nationalism. We can speculate that the relationship with education is also being channeled through this mechanism. In addition, the variables directly related to the productive system, such as income, profession and participation in the PEA, are not associated with the BRICS's view. This suggests that ideational explanations are better candidates to understand the process of forming positive attitudes toward the BRICS.



**Table 7. Background and Attitudes on Internal Politics**

| <b>2014-BRICS</b>        | <b>(1)</b>      | <b>(2)</b> | <b>(3)</b> | <b>(4)</b>      | <b>2019-BRICS</b>    | <b>(1)</b>      | <b>(2)</b>    | <b>(3)</b> | <b>(4)</b>      |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|
| Gender                   | <b>1.438</b>    |            |            | <b>1.271</b>    | Gender               | <b>1.480</b>    |               |            | <b>1.349</b>    |
| (0-women; 1-men)         | <b>0.153***</b> |            |            | <b>0.142*</b>   | (0-women; 1-men)     | <b>0.153***</b> |               |            | <b>0.147**</b>  |
| Age: 30 to 39 years      | <b>0.581</b>    |            |            | <b>0.565</b>    | Age in Years         | <b>0.984</b>    |               |            | <b>0.987</b>    |
|                          | <b>0.081***</b> |            |            | <b>0.083***</b> |                      | <b>0.004***</b> |               |            | <b>0.004***</b> |
| 40 to 49 years           | <b>0.703</b>    |            |            | <b>0.720</b>    |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | <b>0.105*</b>   |            |            | <b>0.113*</b>   |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| 50 to 59 years           | <b>0.473</b>    |            |            | <b>0.476</b>    |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | <b>0.084***</b> |            |            | <b>0.088***</b> |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| 60+ years                | <b>0.424</b>    |            |            | <b>0.486</b>    |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | <b>0.084***</b> |            |            | <b>0.101***</b> |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Education:5th Grade      | <b>1.401</b>    |            |            | 1.300           | Years of             | <b>1.069</b>    |               |            | <b>1.034</b>    |
| (Elementary School)      | <b>0.245+</b>   |            |            | 0.235           | Schooling            | <b>0.015***</b> |               |            | <b>0.016*</b>   |
| High School              | <b>1.489</b>    |            |            | 1.192           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| (Incomplete & Complete)  | <b>0.242*</b>   |            |            | 0.204           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Higher Education         | <b>2.741</b>    |            |            | <b>1.987</b>    |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| (Incomplete)             | <b>0.638***</b> |            |            | <b>0.490**</b>  |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Higher Education         | <b>2.731</b>    |            |            | <b>1.987</b>    |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| (Complete)               | <b>0.640***</b> |            |            | <b>0.490**</b>  |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| 1-2 Minimum Wage         | 1.101           |            |            | 1.018           | Log Income           | <b>1.047</b>    |               |            | 1.040           |
|                          | 0.146           |            |            | 0.140           | Reais (BRL)          | <b>0.021*</b>   |               |            | 0.021+          |
| 2-5 MW                   | 1.194           |            |            | 1.035           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | 0.201           |            |            | 0.181           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| More than 5 MW           | <b>1.932</b>    |            |            | 1.636           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | <b>0.542*</b>   |            |            | 0.476+          |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| NA/NR(Income)            | 1.462           |            |            | 1.473           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          | 0.694           |            |            | 0.732           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Occupation:              | 0.871           |            |            | 0.868           | PEA (1-yes; 0-no)    | 1.050           |               |            | 1.027           |
| Private sector           | 0.195           |            |            | 0.199           |                      | 0.132           |               |            | 0.134           |
| Occupation:              | 0.909           |            |            | 0.882           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Liberal professionals    | 0.205           |            |            | 0.205           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Occupation:              | 0.745           |            |            | 0.740           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| unemployed               | 0.211           |            |            | 0.216           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Occupation:              | 0.939           |            |            | 0.908           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Not-PEA                  | 0.226           |            |            | 0.226           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
| Election: 1 PSDB (AN)    |                 | 1.101      |            | 0.996           | Election: 1-PSL (JB) |                 | 1.023         |            | 0.954           |
|                          |                 | 0.133      |            | 0.126           |                      |                 | 0.137         |            | 0.135           |
| Election: 2 Did not vote |                 | 0.81       |            | <b>0.729</b>    | Election: 2 Null/    |                 | 1.047         |            | 1.058           |
|                          |                 | 0.117      |            | <b>0.111*</b>   | Abstention           |                 | 0.147         |            | 0.157           |
| Election: 3 NK/NA        |                 | 0.836      |            | 0.847           | Election:3 Other     |                 | <b>1.418</b>  |            | 1.379           |
|                          |                 | 0.191      |            | 0.201           |                      |                 | <b>0.244*</b> |            | 0.252+          |
| Election: 4 Other        |                 | 1.173      |            | 0.936           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |
|                          |                 | 0.254      |            | 0.211           |                      |                 |               |            |                 |

continue

Table 7. continuation

|  |                 |                 |  |                 |                 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ideology: Center   | 1.401           | 1.387           | Ideology: Center   | <b>1.441</b>    | 1.243           |
|  | 0.244+          | 0.250+          |  | <b>0.216*</b>   | 0.197           |
| Ideology: Right wing   | 1.215           | 1.310           | Ideology: Right-wing   | <i>1.338</i>    | <i>1.321</i>    |
|  | 0.201           | 0.225           |  | <i>0.199+</i>   | <i>0.208+</i>   |
| Ideology: No ideological position                                    | <b>0.500</b>    | 0.616           | Ideology: No ideological position                                    | <i>0.759</i>    | 0.892           |
|  | <b>0.105***</b> | 0.135*          |  | <i>0.125+</i>   | 0.156           |
| <b>Cultural Nationalism (0-nationalist, 1-cosmopolitan)</b>          | <b>1.755</b>    | <b>1.534</b>    | <b>Cultural Nationalism (0-nationalist, 1-cosmopolitan)</b>          | <b>1.798</b>    | <b>1.383</b>    |
|  | <b>0.185***</b> | <b>0.169***</b> |  | <b>0.192***</b> | <b>0.161**</b>  |
| <b>Nationalism toward immigrants (0-nationalist, 1-cosmopolitan)</b> | <b>1.672</b>    | <b>1.493</b>    | <b>Nationalism toward immigrants (0-nationalist, 1-cosmopolitan)</b> | <b>1.299</b>    | 1.199           |
|  | <b>0.194***</b> | <b>0.180***</b> |  | <b>0.143*</b>   | 0.140           |
| viewNEG(past/future) (0-other, 1-negative)                           | 0.945           | 1.013           | viewNEG(past) (0-other, 1-negative)                                  | 1.078           | <i>1.211</i>    |
|  | 0.106           | 0.119           |  | 0.115           | <i>0.139+</i>   |
| Pro-Free-Trade   | 1.000           | 1.001           | Pro-Free-Trade   | 0.998           | 0.995           |
|  | 0.015           | 0.016           |  | 0.011           | 0.011           |
| Pro-Globalization  | <b>1.025</b>    | 1.006           | Pro-Globalization  | <b>1.030</b>    | 1.014           |
|  | <b>0.011*</b>   | 0.011           |  | <b>0.009**</b>  | 0.010           |
| <b>Barriers (0-other, 1-contrary)</b>                                | 0.945           | 0.862           | <b>Barriers (0-other, 1-contrary)</b>                                | <b>1.647</b>    | <b>1.534</b>    |
|  | 0.092           | 0.089           |  | <b>0.162***</b> | <b>0.159***</b> |
| <b>Investment (1:More-Less-benefit)</b>                              | <b>1.226</b>    | 1.012           | <b>Investment (0-other, 1-infavor)</b>                               | <b>2.241</b>    | <b>1.852</b>    |
|  | <b>0.167</b>    | 0.146           |  | <b>0.267***</b> | <b>0.236***</b> |
| <b>Investment (2:Greater-Benefit)</b>                                | <b>1.878</b>    | <b>1.498</b>    |  |                 |                 |
|  | <b>0.254***</b> | <b>0.218**</b>  |  |                 |                 |
| <b>Investment (3:NK/NA)</b>  | <b>0.415</b>    | 0.722           |  |                 |                 |
|  | <b>0.166*</b>   | 0.303           |  |                 |                 |
| N  | 1,881           | 1,881           | N  | 1,789           | 1,849           |
|  | 1,881           | 1,881           |  | 1,849           | 1,789           |

Obs: Logistic models. ORs coefficients. +p&lt;0.1; \* p&lt;0.05; \*\* p&lt;0.01; \*\*\* p&lt;0.001)

Table 8. International politics attitudes in the positive view toward the BRICS

|                          | 2014: 1       | 2 | 3 | 4              | 2019: 5       | 6 | 7 | 8     | 9     |
|--------------------------|---------------|---|---|----------------|---------------|---|---|-------|-------|
| Favorable Opinion: China | <b>1.004</b>  |   |   | <b>1.005</b>   | <b>1.000</b>  |   |   | 1.00  | 1.00  |
|                          | <b>0.002*</b> |   |   | <b>0.002**</b> | <b>0.002*</b> |   |   | 0.002 | 0.002 |
| Trust: China             | 1.206         |   |   |                | 1.190         |   |   |       |       |
|                          | 0.163         |   |   |                | 0.150         |   |   |       |       |
| Admiration: China        | 1.119         |   |   |                | 1.220         |   |   |       |       |
|                          | 0.157         |   |   |                | 0.150         |   |   |       |       |

continue

Table 8. continuation

|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               |                 |                 |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|----------------|------|----------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Economics-Ascension:<br>China      | 1.172 |                 |                |      | <b>1.310</b>   |      |               |                 | <b>1.400</b>    |
|                                    | 0.142 |                 |                |      | <b>0.150*</b>  |      |               |                 | <b>0.162**</b>  |
| Favorable Opinion: USA             | 1.000 |                 |                |      | <b>1.610</b>   |      |               |                 | 1.38            |
|                                    | 0.002 |                 |                |      | <b>0.282**</b> |      |               |                 | 0.256+          |
| Trust: EUA                         | 0.945 |                 |                |      | 1.12           |      |               |                 |                 |
|                                    | 0.117 |                 |                |      | 0.140          |      |               |                 |                 |
| Admiration: USA                    | 1.143 |                 |                |      | 1.030          |      |               |                 |                 |
|                                    | 0.161 |                 |                |      | 0.130          |      |               |                 |                 |
| Relationship: BR-USA               | 1.201 |                 |                |      | 1.160          |      |               |                 |                 |
|                                    | 0.161 |                 |                |      | 0.150          |      |               |                 |                 |
| Relationship: BR-India             |       | <b>1.572</b>    | <b>1.537</b>   |      |                |      | 1.150         |                 |                 |
|                                    |       | <b>0.196***</b> | <b>0.217**</b> |      |                |      | 0.170         |                 |                 |
| Relationship: BR-China             |       | <b>1.426</b>    | 1.229          |      |                |      | <b>1.330</b>  |                 | 1.25            |
|                                    |       | <b>0.172**</b>  | 0.166          |      |                |      | <b>0.179*</b> |                 | 0.160+          |
| Relationship: BR-Russia            |       |                 |                |      |                |      | 1.130         |                 |                 |
|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      | 0.140         |                 |                 |
| Relationship: BR-South<br>Africa   |       |                 |                |      |                |      | 1.110         |                 |                 |
|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      | 0.180         |                 |                 |
| Favorable Opinion: India           |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | 1.000           |                 |
|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | 0.000           |                 |
| Favorable Opinion: Russia          |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | 1.000           |                 |
|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | 0.000           |                 |
| Favorable Opinion: South<br>Africa |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | <b>1.01</b>     | <b>1.01</b>     |
|                                    |       |                 |                |      |                |      |               | <b>0.002***</b> | <b>0.002***</b> |
| N                                  | 1497  | 1628            | 1881           | 1497 | 1674           | 1700 | 1789          | 1567            | 1620            |

Obs: Logistic models. ORs coefficients. +p<0.1; \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001)

In Table 8, we analyze the effects of attitudes toward international politics in the positive view of the BRICS, controlling for the background and domestic politics determinants<sup>8</sup>. In the left panel we present the data for 2014 and, in the right, for 2019. We introduced the variables in steps. In columns 1 and 5, variables that capture attitudes toward China; in columns 2 and 6, toward the US; in columns 3 and 7, attitudes toward Brazil's bilateral relations with the BRICS countries. In column 8, we present the effects of the opinion on the BRICS' countries only in the 2019 survey, when the variables are available. Finally, in columns 4 and 9 we display the complete models.

On the one hand, we found evidence that there is no negative correlation between Brazil's relationship with the US or Brazilians' attitudes toward the US with a positive view of the BRICS.

<sup>8</sup> The models incorporate as controls the most relevant background variables: age, education, income, sex, both indicators of nationalism, and positive views on reducing barriers and on foreign direct investment. The results of the background variables are not included.

We found, instead, an effect in 2019 of favorable opinion about the US positively affecting attitudes toward the BRICS – which is lost in the complete model.

On the other hand, the view on China seems to be an element for understanding support for the BRICS. In the 2014 model, the variable favorable opinion about China has a positive effect on positive attitudes. In the 2019 model, the positive opinion about the *Chinese economic growth until reaching the stature of the US economy* as beneficial for Brazil increases 1.4 times the individual's chances of having a positive view of the BRICS, clearly indicating a soft balancing track in public opinion.

In regard to the other BRICS' countries, the positive view of bilateral relations between Brazil and India stands out in 2014, as the positive view on South Africa in 2019 is prominent. It indicates that the assessment of the other BRICS members matters<sup>9</sup>.

As expected, given the extremely low public knowledge of the coalition, the support for the BRICS is associated with a positive view of its members – especially China, India and South Africa. Attitudes toward the US do not have an effect. Hence, we can strongly affirm that the positive view on the BRICS is not the result of anti-Americanism, but rather of an intimate relationship with the BRICS countries. This suggests an affinity with a soft balancing strategy, in which the approximation with the powers of the Global South does not require an automatic departure from the North Atlantic partnerships. In addition, there is an association between a positive view of China and its economic rise with the greater approval of the BRICS.

Hence, our data highlight how Brazilian society supports the BRICS coalition as an instance of soft balancing that opposes the world powers. These results are connected with the very well-known Brazilian traditions on foreign policy that first emphasizes relations with the US and Europe (Hirst 2006), and second, is supported by the Brazilian identity of a developing country, which emphasizes South-South relations.

Besides, Brazilian foreign policy options are strongly limited. Brazil is not situated on the core areas of the international system and dominates relatively modest material resources. As the US, followed by Russia and China, remains the dominant powers in the military sphere (Flames, 2010), hard balancing, supported by military alliances, was not and will not be a viable option. Soft balancing does not challenge the US military preponderance directly, and is not correlated with strong sentiments against it, but rather uses non-military instruments to delay, frustrate, and undermine the superpower's unilateral policies (Pape 2005). Those overall results are also connected with Guimarães et al.'s (2020) contribution, which found, using survey experiments, that Brazilian public opinion entirely rejects hard power solutions in South America.

<sup>9</sup> As in the analysis of international politics determinant of support for the BRICS we are dealing with ideas having an effect on ideas, reverse endogeneity could be an important issue, since support for the BRICS could be driving more positive attitudes toward the BRICS members. We discard this possibility because the coalition is not well known by the Brazilian population. On both surveys, less than 5% of respondents knew the meaning of the acronym.

## Conclusion

In view of these findings, we have strong evidence that Brazilian public opinion about the BRICS is not shaped by economic issues or individual conceptions about free trade and globalization. It is mainly defined by respondents' cosmopolitan characteristics, as well as their vision in favor of the rebalancing of the international system. This attitude is translated into a more positive vision of BRICS members, especially China, India and South Africa. It is important to stress that we found a significant rejection of Brazilians in regard to Russia, even though this attitude does not affect the general assessment of the BRICS.

Despite the great lack of knowledge about the BRICS' institutional architecture itself, the clue left by the name of the coalition, which carries the very dimension of South-South Cooperation (plus Russia), points out a respondents' bias in seeing it with optimism. It stems from a positive view of China and the other partners, without being related to open economy politics.

The literature on the economic determinants of free-trade attitudes is not adequate to explain Brazilians' attitudes toward the BRICS. Interestingly, and similar to the results of the literature on attitudes toward free trade, liberalism and globalization, there is an important gender gap. Male respondents present more support to the BRICS than female. We also identify other determinant of an ideational nature, as more cosmopolitan individuals are more likely to approve the coalition.

Even more sensitive is the absence of correlation between the view on the US and optimism about the BRICS. The results reproduce the absence of covariance found by Morgenstern and Bohigues (2021) in their analysis of the relation between the attitudes of Latin Americans toward the US and China.

In addition, we also found an unexpected positive correlation between the positive attitudes toward the BRICS in its international insertion and negative perceptions from the domestic point of view – an embarrassing coalition with authoritarian or strongly unequal countries and with severe problems of social integration. Even with the rejection of the internal characteristics of the BRICS members, there is strong support for their international performance. This positive correlation is another strong indication of the track of soft balancing strategies on Brazilian public opinion, as the respondents are not using a totally schematic approval or rejection of Western partners or BRICS members.

We conclude by corroborating the three elements necessary to identify the mainstay of the soft balancing strategy in public opinion. First, the BRICS are perceived as a coalition with enough strength to oppose the great powers in the game of international forces. Second, the support for the BRICS does not come at the expense of a closer relationship with the US, the great Western power. Finally, the BRICS is viewed positively, notwithstanding internal challenges to member partners, as well as opposing American hegemony. At least, looking on public opinion data about the BRICS, Brazilians are judging Western and South-South partnerships independently.

Future research should investigate the relationship between public opinion and the Brazilian partnership with the specific actors that are part of the BRICS coalition, especially China, which

has already become Brazil's main trade partner and the greatest alternative to Brazil-United States relations. Furthermore, it is important to deepen the analysis of the perceptions and attitudes of the leaders of the Brazilian foreign policy community, in addition to public opinion information, as well as the debate in digital social networks about Brazilian participation and partnerships in the BRICS.

## Acknowledgements

The paper presents partial results of the FAPESP Thematic Project 2010/06356-3, 2013/00445-4, and 2018/00646-1. Preliminary versions were presented at the 12th Meeting of the Brazilian Political Science Association (2020) and a Seminar at the Center for the Study of International Negotiations (CAENI) of the Institute of International Relations of the University of São Paulo (2021) and benefited from the comments of the participants. The authors are grateful for Amâncio Jorge de Oliveira's comments and valuable suggestions, and Gabriela Ferreira's support for the final version of the manuscript.

## References

- Allison, G. *Destined for war: can America and China escape thucydides's trap*. San Francisco, CA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- Baker, A. *The market and the masses in Latin America: policy reform and consumption in liberalizing economies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010.
- Cepaluni, G., M. Galdino, and A. Oliveira. "The bigger, the better: coalitions in the GATT/WTO." *Brazilian Political Science Review* 6, no. 2 (2012): 28-55.
- Fernandes, I., and L. Cardoso. "A política externa brasileira e o grupo do BRICS." *Leviathan*, no. 11 (2017): 121-44. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2237-4485.lev.2015.135212>
- Fernandes, I., F. Pinheiro, and M. H. Almeida. "Individual-level attitudes toward trade: (re) evaluating economic and ideational determinants in Latin America." Paper presented in the I Encontro do Grupo de Relações Internacionais da Alacip. São Paulo, SP: Universidade de São Paulo, 2018.
- Flemes, D. "India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) in the new global order: interests, strategies and values of the emerging coalition." *International Studies* 46, no. 4 (2009): 401-21. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002088171004600402>
- Flemes, D. "O Brasil na iniciativa BRIC: soft balancing numa ordem global em mudança?" *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 53, no.1 (2010): 141-56.
- Gries, P. "China eyes the Hegemon." *Orbis* 49, no. 3 (2005): 401-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2005.04.013>



- Guimarães, F., I. Fernandes, and G. Maldonado. "Domestic attitudes and regional leadership: a survey experiment in Brazil." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16, no. 1 (2020): 98-117. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orz002>
- Hainmueller, J., and M. J. Hiscox. "Learning to love globalization: education and individual attitudes toward international trade." *International Organization* 60, n. 2 (2006): 469-98.
- Hirst, M. "Os cinco 'As' das relações Brasil-Estados Unidos: aliança, alinhamento, autonomia, ajustamento e afirmação." In *Relações internacionais do Brasil: temas e agendas (Vol. 1)*, organized by H. Oliveira, and A. Lessa. São Paulo, SP: Saraiva, 2006.
- Jordan, A. C. "Brics: quo vadis?" *Development Southern Africa* 38, no. 3 (2021): 1-15. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2020.1870932>
- Kaltenthaler, K, and W. Miller. "Social psychology and public support for trade liberalization." *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2013): 784-90. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12083>
- Kirton, J. "Explaining the Brics summit solid, strengthening success." *International Organisations Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (2015): 1-29. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17323/1996-7845-2015-02-09>
- Laidi, Z. "Brics: sovereignty power and weakness." *International Politics* 49, no. 5 (2012): 614-32. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2012.17>
- Lake, D. "Open economy politics: a critical review." *The Review of International Organizations* 4, no. 3 (2009): 219-44. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-009-9060-y>
- Latino, A. "The new development bank: another Brics in the wall?" In *Accountability, transparency and democracy in the functioning of Bretton Woods Institutions* edited by E. Sciso. Basingstoke: Springer, 2017.
- Mansfield, E. D., D. C. Mutz, and L. R. Silver. "Men, women, trade, and free markets." *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2015): 303-15. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12170>
- Melo, M. C. P., J. Amaral Filho. "The political economy of Brazil-China trade relations, 2000-2010." *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 6 (2015): 64-87. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X15593935>
- Moradifar, S., and E. Yazdani. "The explanation of effect and role of Brics on new world order." *Journal Strategic Studies of Public Policy* 7, no. 23 (2017): 43-60.
- Morgenstern, S., and A. Bohigues. "Battling for the hearts and minds of latin americans: covariance of attitudes toward the United States and China." *Latin American Research Review* 56, no. 2 (2021).
- Kuo, J., and M. Naoi. "Individual attitudes." In *Oxford handbook of the political economy of international trade*, edited by L. Martin, 99-181. Oxford: Oxford University, 2015.
- Oliveira, A., and J. Onuki. "Balance of power and international trade: the perception of the brazilian public opinion about China and Brics." In *The coordination of Brics development strategies toward shared prosperit*, edited by L. Wang, and J. Zhao. Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2019.



- Önişönis, Z., and A. Ş. Gencer. “Democratic Brics as role models in a shifting global order: inherent dilemmas and the challenges ahead.” *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 9 (2018): 1791-811. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1438185>
- Pape, R. A. “Soft Balancing against the United States.” *International Security* 30, no. 1, (2005): 7-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288054894607>
- Pinheiro, F., I. Fernandes, and M. H. Almeida. “O bolso ou a ideologia? Determinantes da opinião dos brasileiros sobre globalização e livre-comércio.” *Revista Opinião Pública* 27, no. 2 (2021): 509-48. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-01912021272509>
- Scheve, K., and M. Slaughter. *Globalization and the perceptions of american workers*. Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2001.
- Stuenkel, O. *The Brics and the future of global order*. Lanham: Lexington, 2015.
- Urdinez, F., and D. Campello. “Voter and legislator responses to localized trade shocks from China in Brazil.” *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 7 (2020). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020970233>