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Holanda Montenegro, Renan; Mesquita, Rafael
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ARTICLE

Leaders or Loners? How Do the BRICS Countries and their Regions Vote in the UN General Assembly*

Renan Holanda Montenegro

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil

Rafael Mesquita

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil

The so-called emerging powers, including the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), typically present themselves as natural leaders of their regions. Although physical size confers them the status of regional powers, their role as leaders depends on the consensual acceptance of their would-be followers. Can it be affirmed then that the countries under the influence of the BRICS show convergent positions? Can the five BRICS be considered *de facto* leaders of their regions? This article sets out to answer these questions by analysing the behaviour of the BRICS and their regional partners in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The research design replicates the data from Voeten (2013) in order to compare the average affinity between each of the BRICS countries and their regions in the votes of the UNGA from 1992 to 2014. The data indicate a high level of regional cohesion for Brazil, China and South Africa when compared to Russia and India. The findings corroborate the literature in relation to Brazil and South Africa but conflict with what has been produced on the regional leadership of Russia, India and China.

Keywords: BRICS; emerging powers; regional leadership; UN general assembly.

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For replication, see www.bpsr.org.br/files/archives/Dataset_Montenegro_Mesquita

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The new emerging powers, also called regional powers, have drawn increasing attention in the international political arena, particularly the bloc formed by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which has attracted considerable attention from scholars of the topic. Despite exhibiting diverse characteristics among themselves, these new emerging powers share, among other things, the fact that they present themselves as natural leaders of their regions (HURRELL, 2006; LIMA, 2010).

Presenting oneself as a regional leader is a form of rallying support from multilateral institutions, notably the United Nations (UN). This has a special meaning for the emerging powers, since the five members of the BRICS group to some extent adopt a discourse of reforming the existing international liberal order (MILANI, 2011). The regions play a fundamental role in this project, given that they form another level in the chain of global governance and that they can be true incubators where potential transformations of international society can be nurtured by the initiative of an influential state (HURRELL, 2007). Making the vision of diverse actors converge around a reformist project is not a question just of power, but also one of legitimacy. While their material pre-eminence gives them the status of regional powers, their recognition as leaders, in turn, depends on the acceptance by those supposedly being led by them.

Hence, the objective of this article is to analyse the extent to which the BRICS countries de facto lead their regions. Therefore, we have divided the five countries into zones of influence delimited as follows: 01. Brazil and the Union of South American Nations (USAN); 02. Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); 03. India and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); 04. China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); 05. South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These five blocs were selected because the literature identifies them as the main spheres of influence projection by those nations as regional powers.

Methodologically, we use regional cohesion in multilateral votes as an indicator of leadership. More specifically, we measure the degree of convergence of the BRICS with their regions by analysing a voting database at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The objective is to investigate the level of affinity between each of the BRICS and the countries in their spheres of influence.

The hypothesis to be empirically tested is whether the status of these countries

as regional powers generates cohesion with their regions in UNGA votes, an indicator of regional leadership. The main test used to perform this evaluation is Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The similarity (or difference) between the means recorded for each power should indicate whether or not their status as a power promotes regional cohesion and whether, consequently, these countries can be considered leaders.

The article is structured as follows: a presentation of the literature on emerging powers and the actions of the BRICS in this new international context; a description of the BRICS as regional powers and an investigation of each country's relations with its zone of influence; a presentation of the methodology used; a discussion of the results and concluding remarks. In this way, we hope to provide a theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature on the regional leadership of emerging powers.

The BRICS in the context of the new emerging powers

Middle powers are an ambiguous category. Depending on the authors and their theoretical affiliation, different attributes are proposed to determine which countries belong on this list. The economic and political rise of large peripheral countries at the start of the twenty-first century have made the limits of the concept clearer insofar as the behaviour of these new actors contrasts with earlier expectations concerning 'middle powermanship'.

The new emerging powers, also called second-generation middle powers and regional powers, include countries like Brazil, India, China, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia and others. For their part, the traditional, or first generation, intermediary powers generally include Canada, Australia, the Nordic countries and South Korea. Some constitutive and behavioural characteristics distinguish the new powers from their predecessors, for example, material capabilities superior to the other middle countries, the exercise of a proactive and – to some extent – reformist role within the international system, and a self-perception as a country destined for a greater leading role (FLEMES, 2010; STUENKEL, 2011). For this study, the primary interest is their attitude vis-à-vis the region. The emerging powers present themselves as natural leaders of their regions as a form of rallying support for projects aimed at obtaining a higher global status (HURRELL 2006; JORDAAN, 2003; VALENCIA and RUVALCABA, 2012).

Among the emerging powers, the group that has captured most attention over the last decade is composed of the BRICS countries. The 'BRIC' acronym was originally

proposed by the Goldman Sachs investment bank in 2001 to indicate the emerging markets that would become the world's main economies by 2050. The term became a political reality when, from 2009 onward, summits between these countries began to be held and, two years later, South Africa was added to the group.

Precisely because the group's creation derived from a suggestion by a third party rather than from the countries' own initiative, the BRICS¹ seem to be, for some authors, somewhat artificial. They emphasize the countries' differing political and economic systems (ALMEIDA, 2010; ARMIJO, 2007) and the absence of a common identity (BRÜTSCH and PAPA, 2013). Conversely, the group shares a discourse in favour of multipolarity and development, and was historically marginalized from the main structures of world economic governance (FOUCARDE, 2013; MIELNICZUK, 2013).

Hurrell (2006) indicates that the BRICS possess physical and symbolic characteristics that justify their grouping: 01. they have economic, military and political resources; the capacity to contribute to the international order; internal cohesion allowing effective state action; 02. they believe that they deserve more status in the global setting; 03. they have developed informal channels of cooperation among themselves; 04. they differ from the first generation of middle powers due to their ambivalent posture in relation to the liberal order.

The creation of new institutions like the G20 (which supplanted the G8), the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and increased participation in already existing entities (IMF) are taken as signs of their greater influence and qualified contribution to global governance (CARVALHO et al., 2015; LIMA, 2010).

Leadership, regionalism and the United Nations

For the five BRICS, assuming regional leadership may be either a cornerstone or a stumbling block in the affirmation of their status as a major power (FLEMES, 2013). In International Relations, the definition of what constitutes a leader, and its differentiation from similar concepts like hegemon and power, is fairly unsystematic and varies depending on the author. For this study we set out from the understanding that the five

¹ Some of the works dated prior to 2011 analyse just the group of four countries without considering South Africa. In order to maintain the fluidity of the text, we shall ignore this difference.

BRICS can be considered regional powers. The literature contains diverse criteria defining what constitutes a regional power, generally proposing an objective dimension (material capabilities) and an intersubjective dimension (recognition and legitimization by other actors) (NOLTE, 2010). Destradi (2010) lists three basic requirements for the status of regional power: 01. belonging to the region in question; 02. having material capabilities superior to the rest of the region; and 03. exerting some kind of influence in the region.

For the BRICS, the three conditions are satisfied. Using the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC)², we can observe that the five powers are notably superior to their neighbours. While the physical criteria can be measured objectively, the intersubjective dimension requires a more detailed analysis. We believe that the distinctive element of what constitutes a leader resides in this second dimension, since, in Ikenberry's definition (1996), leadership involves not just 'power' but also 'purpose':

Leadership may involve the ability to not just 'twist arms' but also to get other states to conceive of their interests and policy goals in new ways. This suggests a second element of leadership, which involves not just the marshalling of power capabilities and material resources. It also involves the ability to project a set of political ideas or principles about the proper or effective ordering of politics. It suggests the ability to produce concerted or collaborative actions by several states or other actors. *Leadership is the use of power to orchestrate the actions of a group toward a collective end* (IKENBERRY, 1996, p. 388, our italics).

One of the challenges faced by regional powers, therefore, is whether or not they are capable of transforming their power into the capacity to influence other nations to concur with their projects. This is because the leader-follower dynamic is a complex one. Although the emerging powers tend to present themselves as benevolent leaders, their behaviours often generate negative externalities for economically less developed neighbours (NEL and TAYLOR, 2013). Smaller states may adopt strategies based around resistance, adaptation or neutrality in response to the rise of a powerful neighbour (LOBELL, JESSE and WILLIAMS, 2015).

² The CINC combines six indicators: total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure. The averages of each BRICS country and the other countries from their regions between 1992 and 2007 are: Brazil (0.025), USAN (0.002); Russia (0.051), CIS (0.003); India (0.067), SAARC (0.004); China (0.156), ASEAN (0.005); South Africa (0.007), SADC (0.001) (Correlates of War, National Material Capabilities Dataset, v4.0).

As we shall see below, the criteria for regional belonging and influence are also met by the BRICS countries, albeit with qualifications in some cases.

Brazil and USAN

Since its first days as an independent nation, the monarchic, Portuguese-speaking and gigantic Brazil was the 'Other' of the republican, Hispanic and fragmentary Latin America – and vice-versa (BETHELL, 2009; GALVÃO, 2009). Brazilian foreign policy at the beginning of the twentieth century sought closer relations with the American continent, but with little effectiveness and 'cognitive dissonances' between the role that Brazil believed itself to be performing in the region and how its neighbours perceived it (SANTOS, 2005, p. 08).

The most significant change towards regionalism was the creation of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) in 1991. The trade bloc was a huge experiment in open regionalism, characterized by an intergovernmental structure whose low level of institutionalization helped preserve the domestic preference of its members for maintaining autonomy (VIGEVANI and CEPALUNI, 2007). However, the integrationist project has encountered a series of obstacles for diverse motives: a lack of economic complementarity, a low level of infrastructural integration, persistent unilateralisms and vulnerability to financial crises (SANAHUJA, 2012).

In this context, the Union of South American Nations (USAN) is the most wide-ranging of a new generation of postliberal initiatives that emphasize political coordination rather than commercial integration³. Founded in 2008, USAN responds to a long-held ambition of Brasilia to unite all 12 South American countries in a single organisation. According to Sanahuja (2012), USAN meets the Brazilian interests in regional leadership and accommodates the objectives of other countries due to its promises of infrastructure, market diversification and mutual assistance.

The renewed regional activism, however, does not answer the question of whether Brazil is effectively a leader. Some authors argue that other South American states have sought to counterbalance Brazil (FLEMES and WEHNER, 2015), and that Itamaraty (the Brazilian Foreign Office) sees the region as a means rather than an end (LAZAROU and LUCIANO, 2015; SPEKTOR, 2010; VIGEVANI and CEPALUNI,

³ Mercosur itself has become increasingly focused on political cooperation and a practice of regional governance rather than integration (MEDEIROS; LIMA and CABRAL, 2015).

2011). Others contend that the idea of counterbalancing is inapplicable to the South American context where a logic of consensus-seeking (*concertación*) prevails (MERKE, 2015). They argue that the country has transcended self-interested regionalism and secured a position as 'leader of development' (PINHEIRO and GAIO, 2014), or an 'instrumental' and 'situational' leader, managing to guide the region's countries towards consensual decisions at critical moments, whether through entities that it itself created or through direct mediation (MOURÓN and ONUKI, 2015, p. 21).

Burges (2015) believes that Brasilia capitalized in the region in the 1990s by exerting a 'consensual hegemony' based on ideas. In the following decade, demands for payoffs emerged and Brazil proved itself to be less willing to meet them due to its limited resources, unleashing gradual challenges to its leadership, as illustrated by the nationalization of Bolivian gas (2006) and expulsion of Brazilian companies from Ecuador (2008). Although payoffs and direct investment have become an ever more important part of Brazilian regionalism, there is no consensus in the literature on how persuasive Brazil has been as a paymaster (LAZAROU and LUCIANO, 2015; PINHEIRO and GAIO, 2014). This leads some authors to argue that the Global South has become more important than the South American region in Brazilian foreign policy (MALAMUD and RODRIGUEZ, 2013; MESQUITA and MEDEIROS, 2016; STEINER, MEDEIROS and LIMA, 2014).

Russia and CIS

Ever since the dismantling of the Soviet Union, analysts have attempted to explain what Russia's ambitions are in this new setting. Although it is fairly unclear how much space Russia occupies and wishes to occupy in the contemporary world, it is widely agreed that the country has acted as a revisionist power, seeking to re-establish its position in the status quo of the Cold War period.

The country's approximation with the East, especially the Central Asian region, is palpable. More recently, Russia has also aroused animosity in its relations with Western powers, principally after separatist episodes in the Ukraine and due to its involvement in the war in Syria. Previously there had already been clashes with members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on issues relating to humanitarian intervention in Kosovo.

One of the main vectors of Moscow's contemporary foreign policy has been

the attempt to recover the zone of influence over the former Soviet republics. In this sense, the Community of Independent States (CIS) has a strategic importance (ZHEBIT, 2003). Besides Russia, the CIS, founded in 1991, is formed by ten former Soviet republics. These are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. This is a region where conflicts between Russia and the US are considered likely, especially over access to energy resources.

Kramer (2008) asserts that Moscow has made it clear that the CIS is its zone of influence and that the role of other major powers in the region must be minimized. Russia's influence as a regional hegemon, though not fully consolidated, aims to preserve at least some of the impact that the country had when it was a superpower in the Cold War era (ALLISON, 2004).

The literature presents a consensus concerning the contemporary interests of Russia commanded by Vladimir Putin and his foreign policy strategy of reconstructing 'Great Russia'. The idea is to re-establish Russian control over geographic areas originally established by the Tsar empire, Central Asia among them (NYGREN, 2008). Russia still fears and works to prevent the states that make up the CIS, especially the Ukraine, from allying with the United States and joining NATO (TRENIN, 2009).

The fact is that, in spite of the efforts at economic approximation, Russia never invested in the CIS as much as during the era of Soviet domination. The relation with the other countries of the bloc is marked by notable differences. While Russia maintains good relations with nations like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the same cannot be said of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, at least in recent years (BOONSTRA, 2008).

Notwithstanding some isolated issues, the literature is virtually unanimous in asserting that Russia's leadership in CIS is clear and natural. Save for the case of integration in Southeast Asia through ASEAN, where there is no power leading the process, practically all the regional processes involve a leader. This is the case of the United States in NAFTA, Brazil in Mercosur, South Africa in SADC, India in SAARC and Russia itself in CIS (VISENTINI, 2011).

India and SAARC

Analysts who study India's self-image have noted that the country displays a certain lack of enthusiasm concerning its international role, derived from the belief that it should have a higher profile than the one currently enjoyed. One fact clearly illustrating this impasse is the Indian government's repeated concern over the occupation of Afghanistan by US/NATO forces (QUILICONI and KINGAH, 2015).

In this sense, the regional dimension has a considerable importance for Indian foreign policy – and South Asia began to cohere as a region following the creation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. The forum was created to improve the economic and social development of member states. As Paranjpe (2002) explains, SAARC has a double significance within the regional context: 01. it functions as a forum of cooperation that consolidates South Asia as a region with a global reach; and 02. it legitimizes Indian hegemony, recognised internally, as a regional leader.

Despite pursuing a foreign policy aimed at consolidating its regional leadership, India has proven cautious in relation to its neighbour Pakistan, a US ally. The Indian government interprets the United States-Pakistan alliance as a US attempt to contain the projection of Indian power in the region. Another attitude that reverberates negatively with New Delhi is the fact that the United States favours a dictatorship in the relatively small Pakistan rather than dialogue with a conspicuously democratic country (NEL and STEPHEN, 2010).

Quiliconi and Kingah (2015) observe that India's determination to be a leader is widely recognised among its neighbours in South Asia, who initially showed some apprehension concerning New Delhi's covert ambitions. The expansion in the economic relations with India benefitted the region's economies and allowed the Indian government to make numerous concessions, situating the country at the centre of South Asia's development process.

Political interference has also been a feature of New Delhi's regional actions at various junctures. India showed the first signs of its regional hegemonic authority in Bangladesh, in 1971, when it formulated policies backing the liberation movements in the neighbouring country. In 1987, the Indian government also intervened during an ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka and in the following year responded incisively to a military coup in the Maldives. India shows a compulsion to bolster its

national security at regional level, reflecting the geopolitical instability of the part of the world where it is inserted (BHASIN, 2008).

For many authors, the persistent regional instability explains India's reluctance to assume effective leadership of SAARC. Pattanaik (2006), for example, argues that SAARC still lacks any effective leadership. Hostilities against India are related to the stability of small states in the region since India is seen as a country that actively supports democracy and secular forces, thus generating uncertainties vis-à-vis its neighbours.

Bhasin (2008) also contends that the regional role played by New Delhi does not fully match the qualities demanded of a leader. India tends to support or sponsor projects rather than facilitate new ventures per se. Generally speaking, in spite of its natural leadership, India does not explicitly pursue a collective regional strategy.

China and ASEAN

For centuries the notion of an international order for Chinese emperors was based on the concept of 'tianxia', or 'everything under heaven'. During this period, the belief in a celestial mandate that conferred a specialness to the Chinese Empire was the country's official line of action, turning supremacy into a kind of natural law (KISSINGER, 2011).

After the country's opening, Chinese diplomacy increased the priority given to the country's international reinsertion, especially within the UN system. The objective was to guarantee independence and stability, making it unnecessary to depend any longer on some special more powerful ally. In this sense, the polarizing scenario of the Cold War and the emergence of a new international conjuncture after the fall of the Berlin Wall formed the basis for the reformulation of Chinese foreign policy, including its regional project (VISENTINI, 2011).

Specifically in relation to ASEAN, the literature identifies a considerable evolution in China's approach to the bloc over the last fifteen years. The Association represents the main process of integration in Asia and a focal point of disputes between China and Japan over regional leadership. Even so, the literature suggests that China's interaction with the Association is still far from influential. Lijun (2009) notes that China even expressed some hostility at the time when ASEAN was founded in 1967, alleging that the bloc was an accomplice of the United States.

It was China's response in the wake of the 1997 Asian crisis through loans and decisive contributions to regional economic stability that sealed closer ties between the country and Southeast Asia. This new proactive stance advanced Chinese interests by presenting the country to the region as a peaceful power (BRESLIN, 2008; XINBO, 2009).

The literature suggests that Chinese diplomacy since the opening initiated by Xiaoping has rested on three core aspects: 01. the historical legacy of non-interventionism; 02. national strategic interests, now unencumbered by ethical and ideological questions; and 03. suspicion concerning the interventionism of other powers, especially Western nations. As we can see, the discourse of the foreign threat is still very much present in the regional issues faced by China. "In contrast to the almost continental isolation of the United States, China is surrounded by a triangle of power: Russia to the north, India to the south and Japan to the east" (LYRIO, 2010, p. 222).

In general terms, the literature indicates that China cannot be deemed a regional leader in Southeast Asia. It is recognised as an important actor, certainly, but the country does not exert *de facto* leadership. Actions in the military field have proven threatening to ASEAN's member countries. The bloc has also shown concern over a potential fall in direct foreign investments, above all because China absorbs a substantial part of these investments at a global scale with particular impacts on Asia. China's affiliation to the WTO also raises concerns among nations with a similar industrial base to China's, especially in the area of electronics (SIMÕES, 2012).

South Africa and SADC

Formerly one of the pariahs of the international community due to apartheid and nuclear proliferation, South Africa today is a liberal democracy considered a model for the unstable region and the preferred interlocutor of developed countries wishing to establish themselves on the continent (SCHOEMAN, 2000).

At regional level, though, the nation's prestige is less consensual. In fact, the regionalism seen in recent decades in the southern portion of the African continent was initially sparked by a shared antagonism against South Africa and the apartheid regime, beginning in 1975 with the Frontline States, and followed in 1980 by the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). In 1992, SADCC

was transformed into SADC and, two years later, South Africa, now free of apartheid, became the eleventh member of the bloc, which began to pursue the idea of integration and not just cooperation.

Today SADC has fifteen members and a total GDP of US\$ 658 billion (53.3% of which comes from South Africa)⁴. Since its readmission into the global market, South Africa has attracted considerable flows of investment and has exploited its competitive advantages to expand its economy across the African continent, which has given its regional presence a neoliberal aspect.

South African leadership is perceived somewhat ambiguously, therefore. On one hand, we can observe gestures that express a desire to engage in a cooperative role. The discourse of the African Renaissance has sought to affirm the 'Africanness' of South Africa's foreign policy, while simultaneously aspiring to reconcile pan-Africanism with the neoliberal agenda (ALDEN and SOKO, 2005, p. 383). The formulation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2001, attempts to expand SADC's trade and security agenda, and direct investments in neighbouring countries all signal a commitment to the region's prosperity and peace.

On the other hand, South Africa has produced a string of diplomatic failures, such as its 'quiet diplomacy' during the crisis in Mugabe's Zimbabwe, affecting perceptions of its capacity to lead. Domestic pressures have also slowed down ratification of SADC's trade protocols (ALDEN and LE PERE, 2009), maintained non-tariff barriers (NEL and TAYLOR, 2013), and the economic asymmetry in the region has led Pretoria to prioritize extra-regional gains like the signing of the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) with the EU in 1999 (AMOS, 2010).

Ethnic-civilizational arguments are used by minor states to delegitimize the 'rainbow nation' as the natural leader of the black continent. The pro-Western bias of Pretoria's foreign policy has earned it the stigma of being anti-African and a subaltern of the West in the eyes of countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe (ALDEN and SOKO, 2005; SCHOEMAN, 2000).

For Alden and Le Pere (2009), South African hegemony fades the farther away we move from its immediate region: it is 'manifested' in SACU, 'contested' in

⁴ Data for 2013 from the World Bank. Source: <http://data.worldbank.org/>. Accessed on December 28, 2015.

SADC and 'unrealized' in the continent as a whole. Furthermore, in ideational terms, its leadership is not legitimized due to the ambiguity inherent to its foreign policy, divided between a sense of regional solidarity/community and the domestic imperatives of a regional power within a globalized economy (ALDEN and LE PERE, 2009).

In light of these interpretations, it becomes clear that each BRICS nation exhibits a singular regional dynamic. For this study, our main focus of interest resides in the fact that the regions are an extra layer in multilevel global governance. Since we define leadership as the capacity to make the views of various actors converge, the UNGA, as a legislative body, is an ideal field for analysing the foreign policy preferences of countries and the degree of cohesion between states. Analytically, the tools most frequently used to study the Assembly have been the calculation of indices or proportions that show agreement between dyads of countries, such as the Index of Agreement, S-scores, Index of Voting Cohesion or other methods such as spatial analysis⁵.

The use of voting in the UNGA as a measure of regional cohesion is not problem-free, especially in terms of its validity (TOMLIN, 1985) and the relation between votes and latent preferences (VOETEN, 2004). Nevertheless, we believe that the benefits of this metric outweigh any limitations. After all, although agreeing does not always imply being a follower, being a follower always demands agreement. In particular, since the dataset records votes made by all countries on the same questions, it offers a standardized measure that allows direct comparison between the BRICS nations and their regions, avoiding the problem of a loss in the validity of the concept when transposed to different contexts (PRZEWORKSKY and TEUNE, 1970). Moreover, as the analyses of regional powers have thus far been limited either to case studies or to qualitative comparisons, we believe that the field will benefit from a quantitative analysis based on a single metric.

Methodology

We analysed the voting pattern of the five BRICS countries in the UNGA and of the other states located in their spheres of influence as an indicator of the degree of cohesion between leader and followers. Box 01 lists the countries under the

⁵ See Bailey et al. (2015) for a review and discussion.

leadership of each of the BRICS by region.

Box 1. Regional leadership of the BRICS

BRICS leader	Zone of Influence	Followers
Brazil	USAN	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela
Russia	CIS	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldavia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan
India	SAARC	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka
China	ASEAN	Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam
South Africa	SADC	Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Seychelles

Sources: USAN (<http://unasursg.org>), CIS (<http://cisstat.com/eng/cis.htm>), SAARC (<http://saarc-sec.org>), ASEAN (<http://asean.org>), SADC (<http://sadc.int>).

The number of countries varies in each of the analysed blocs: there are 11 in USAN, 10 in CIS and ASEAN, 07 in SAARC and 14 in SADC. Nonetheless, this variation does not undermine the results since the intention of this study is to carry out a means comparison test. Differences in the number of cases in each sample are thus irrelevant (PALLANT, 2007).

Voeten's database was used (United Nations General Assembly Voting Data, 2013)⁶. In total the database has four available datasets. For our own empirical investigation, we selected only the set that compiles data on affinity based on the analysis of dyads (pairs of countries).

We used just four of the 23 variables from the set. Our dependent variable is an index of affinity that uses three categories of data (01 = yes, for approval of a resolution; 02 = abstention; and 03 = no, representing an opposed vote). The index is created on the basis of the affinity observed between dyads of countries and varies from -01 (lowest similarity of interests) to 01 (highest similarity). Affinity is calculated via the indicator 'S', the mathematical formula for which is:

⁶ Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/12379>. Accessed on January 14, 2016.

$$S = 1 - \frac{2 \times (d)}{d_{\max}}$$

where 'd' represents the sum of the metric distances between the votes of a particular dyad in a given year, and 'dmax' is the maximum distance possible between these same votes. The other three variables utilized are: country 01, country 02 and year.

The analysis covers the time interval between 1992 and 2014. This period was selected because Russia only officially joined the United Nations in 1991, when the Soviet Union was 'transformed' into the Russian Federation. South Africa, for its part, was suspended from the UNGA from 1974 to 1994 as part of the international embargo against apartheid. From 1993 on the database once again records its votes in the UNGA.

The list with the codes for each country is the same as the Correlates of War's (COW). The basic unit of analysis is the dyad 'BRICS leader – led country'. The statistical test used was the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), a technique that compares the distribution of a quantitative variable (discrete or continuous) between three or more groups.

ANOVA is utilized to evaluate information on the mean of the variable of interest in different groups, also termed treatments. Specifically, our empirical analysis assessed the distribution of affinities between five treatments involving each of the BRICS and its region of influence⁷.

In this way we were able to empirically test whether a BRICS country's status as a regional power generates actual cohesion in the voting patterns of its neighbours, as predicted by the theory. Below we formally describe the hypothesis to be tested.

$$H_0: \bar{x}_1 = \bar{x}_2 = \bar{x}_3 = \bar{x}_4 = \bar{x}_5$$

$$H_a: \bar{x}_1 \neq \bar{x}_2 \neq \bar{x}_3 \neq \bar{x}_4 \neq \bar{x}_5$$

The null hypothesis asserts that the means of the groups are equal; in other words the difference between them is equal to zero. The alternative hypothesis asserts that the means of the five treatment groups differ from one another (or, at least, one of them diverges). Confirmation of the null hypothesis shows that regional power status generates equal levels of cohesion in voting; a high mean indicates that

⁷ The histogram with the distribution of the variable is available online in Appendix 01 on the BPSR website.

all the powers are leaders, a low mean that none of them are. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis corroborates the opposite: regional supremacy does not necessarily lead to cohesive voting patterns in the multilateral context – and consequently differences exist in the levels of affinity between at least one of the BRICS members and its neighbours.

The results of this hypothesis will reveal whether being a power is a necessary and sufficient condition for regional cohesion, with cohesion taken as an indicator of leadership. We can expect that the status of a power to be a strong explanatory factor in cohesion since: 01. powerful states can encourage emulation and thus "lead by example" (IKENBERRY, 1996, p. 398); 02. they possess the material, institutional and ideational resources to pay for acquiescence; and 03. they have the incentive to try to create a regional order that meets their interests (NOLTE, 2010). If we observe cohesion in all five cases, we can be more confident that the status of being a power is a necessary and sufficient condition for leadership, but if there are cases where the level of cohesion diverges from the rest, this status cannot be considered a sufficient condition.

Utilization of ANOVA requires the research design to possess a quantitative dependent variable (DV), either discrete or continuous, and an independent grouping variable (IV) whose K is higher than 2⁸. In total, the study population contains 1,172 dyads, the result of the interactions between 57 countries. As well as ANOVA, this research also makes use of descriptive statistical techniques (minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation). All the information reported in this section is intended to increase the study's transparency and guarantee the replicability of the results (JANZ, 2016; KING, 1995).

⁸ For categories with two groups, the t-test is applied. ANOVA was chosen due to the research characteristics. Techniques like regression analysis, for example, demand exclusively quantitative variables (or the creation of dummies). Furthermore, as our work uses a grouping IV and focuses primarily on comparing means, we concluded that Analysis of Variance would be the most suitable tool. Finally, it should be emphasized that the regression analysis effectively leads to the same results as ANOVA. For the purposes of comparison, we created dummies and used South Africa as a reference to run a linear regression (LSQ). The regression coefficients are identical to the difference between the means (Dif.) presented in Figure 01. The model's constant was 0.887 ($p < 0.001$). The 'F' and p-value are the same as reported in Table 01. The model had a r^2 of 0.480 (adjusted $r^2 = 0.478$).

Results

The global mean of affinity between the five BRICS leaders and the 52 countries from their regions over the 22-year period was 0.830. Table 01 indicates that the South Africa/SADC, Brazil/USAN and China/ASEAN blocs scored above the average, while India/SAARC and Russia/CIS scored below. The coefficient of variation (CV)⁹ also reveals that Russia/CIS is not only the group with least affinity on average, it also shows the highest heterogeneity (17.97%), indicating that some CIS members are much more closely allied with Russia than others. The least heterogeneous groups are ASEAN and SAARC¹⁰.

Table 01. Descriptive statistics of the affinity between BRICS leader and region

Bloc	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation	Cv (%)
South Africa / SADC	0.886	0.214	1	0.093	10.49
Brazil / USAN	0.882	0.531	0.969	0.063	7.14
China / ASEAN	0.876	0.660	1	0.054	6.16
India / SAARC	0.787	0.605	0.935	0.051	6.48
Russia / CIS	0.679	0.281	0.895	0.122	17.97
Total	0.830	0.214	1	0.115	13.86

F = 267.875; p-value < 0.01

Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

The results indicate a statistically significant p-value ($F=267.875$; $p<0.01$), which allows us to reject the null hypothesis, showing that having the status of regional power does not necessarily elicit the same degrees of affinity in multilateral votes. In order to ascertain the difference between groups in more detail, we applied the Tukey method, which generates confidence intervals for all the paired differences between the

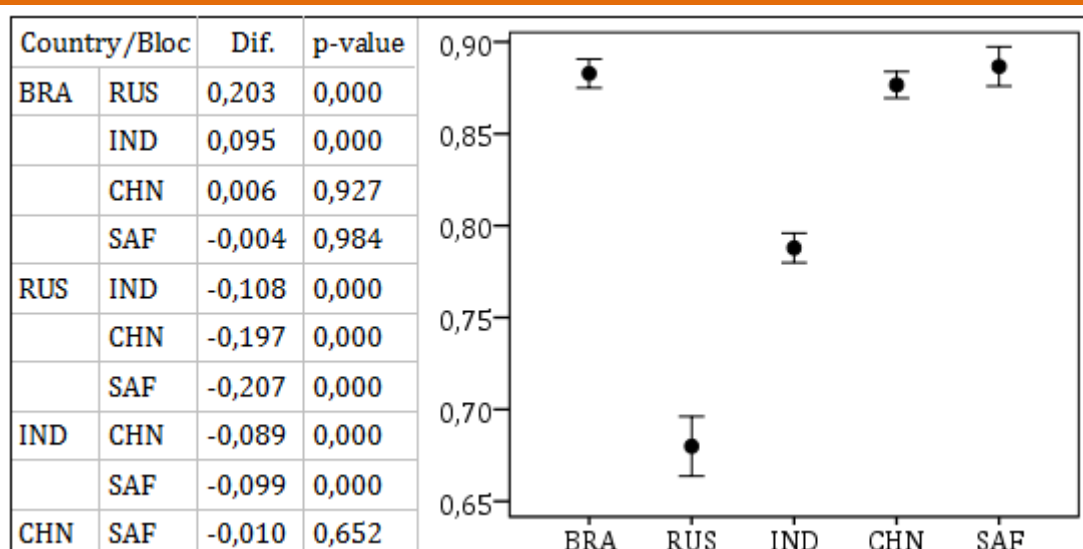
⁹ Obtained by dividing the standard deviation by the average, the figure is transformed into a percentage by multiplying the result by 100.

¹⁰ In addition to comparing means, we also tested the hypothesis of equality of variances. Here we should stress that variance conveys indicates the dispersion of the votes of the supposedly led countries in relation to the leader, but does not provide data on how affinity – our DV – behaves between the analysed dyads, whether it is high or low. The result proved to be highly significant ($F=0.000$), which allows us to accept the alternative hypothesis that the variances between the analysed groups are not equal, meaning that some regional groups are more heterogeneous than others.

means of the groups under analysis.

The results show that the difference between the means is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) for all the blocs except between Brazil/USAN and China/ASEAN, Brazil/USAN and South Africa/SADC, and China/ASEAN and South Africa/SADC. As we have seen, USAN, ASEAN and SADC were also the groups that scored above the general average of the five blocs. This finding implies that there was no expressive difference between these three blocs, only in relation to the CIS and SAARC. As Figure 01 shows, the latter two had statistically significant differences in comparison with the other blocs and between themselves.

Figure 1. Multiple comparisons of regional affinity between the BRICS



Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

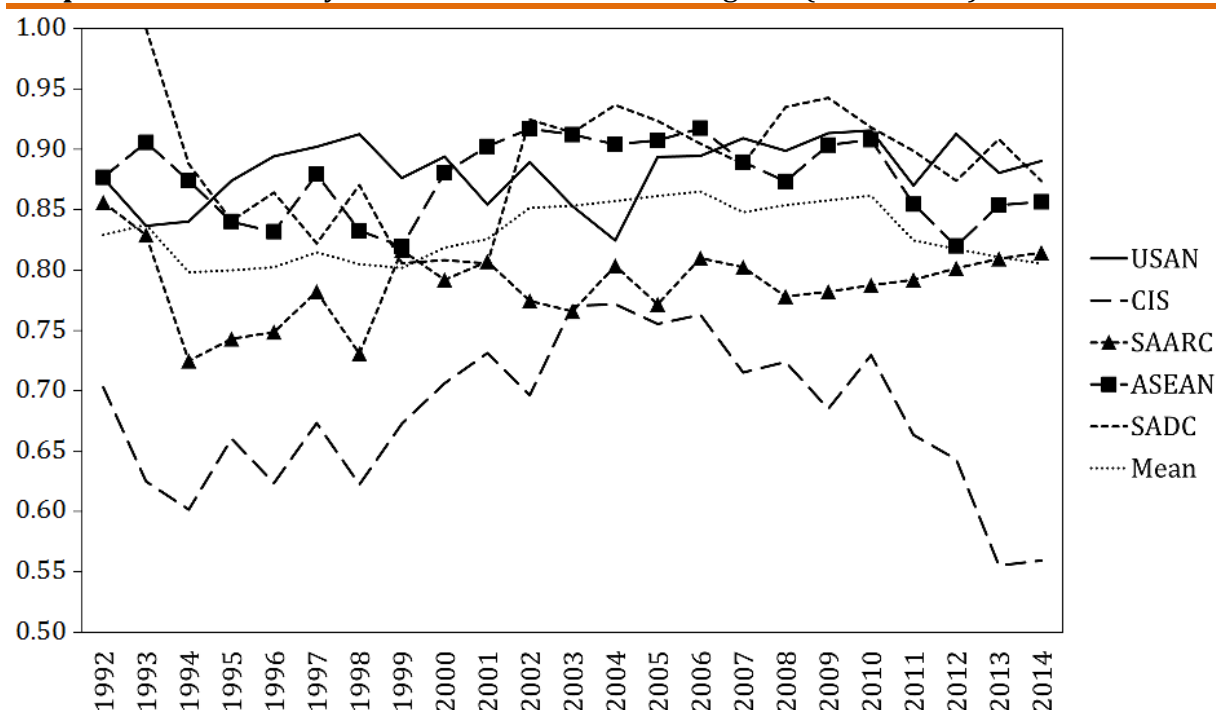
From this we can infer that South Africa, Brazil and China effectively showed the same level of affinity in their regions, while they differed significantly from the regional cohesion displayed by India and Russia, and that these two also differed from each other. We were also interested on how these means behaved over time. The oscillation over the 22-year timespan of the analysis is depicted in the graph 01 below¹¹.

A downward trend can be perceived for Russia/CIS. Despite a peak in the 2000s, a sharp decline in affinity can be seen from 2012 on. India/SAARC displays an

¹¹ The Appendix 02 contains the complete list of led countries and the respective scores in the variable measuring the degree of affinity. It is available on line on the BPSR website.

upward trend, though still showing levels lower than at the start of the series. All the blocs display a trend towards lower cohesion in the 1990s, followed by an increase in the 2000s, and a new fall after 2010 in the cases of South Africa/SADC, China/ASEAN and more drastically Russia/CIS.

Graph 01. Mean affinity between BRICS and their regions (1992-2014)



Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

The only bloc to deviate from this pattern was Brazil/USAN, which showed higher means from 1995 to 1999, precisely the period when the intrabloc trade within Mercosur expanded the quickest. Mercosur's share in Brazilian trade peaked in 1998, when the zone represented 16.8% of the country's trade balance, and has been declining ever since. The higher level of cohesion in the 1990s corroborates the proposition advanced by Burges (2015) concerning the consensual hegemony that Brasilia was able to foment during the period, but was unable to consolidate in the following decade.

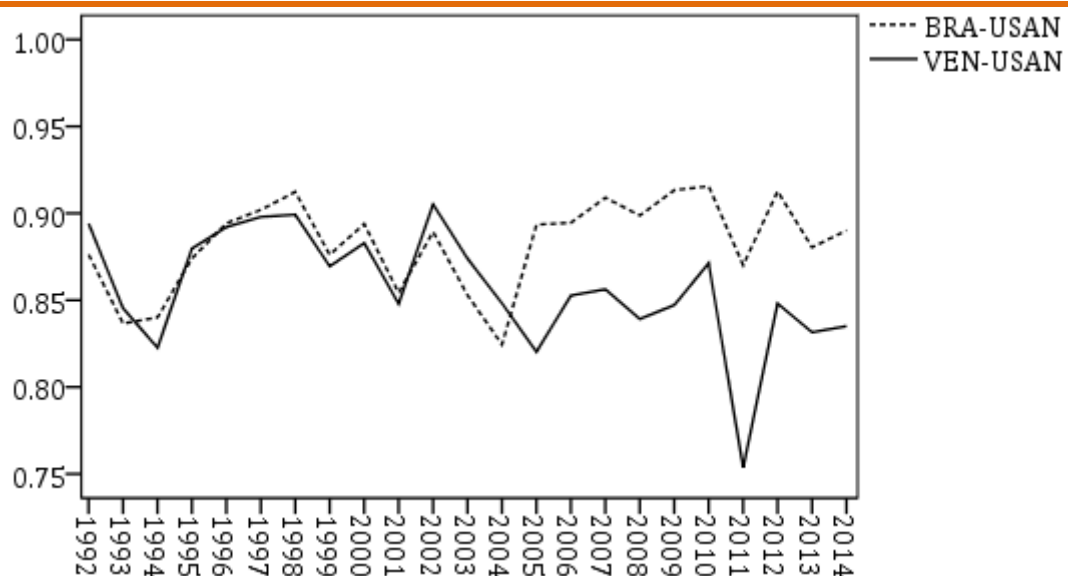
It is interesting to note that, concerning the countries that experienced a rise in regional cohesion between the late 1990s and the 2000s, this increase preceded the creation of the BRIC acronym in 2001. It is also notable that in all the blocs, save for India/SAARC, the tendency after the BRICS summits began to be held in 2009 has been

one of decline.

As the literature suggests that smaller states may engage in balancing strategies against the hegemon, we also checked whether the main competing countries displayed some kind of pattern of alignment indicative of a contra-hegemonic project, siding either with another member of the bloc, or with an extra-regional power.

Argentina was the country that agreed the least with Brazil. However, the time series analysis shows that the gap was only observable in the 1990s. Since 1995 the agreement between Brazil and Argentina has been rising and for most of the 2000s and 2010s has been very close to the group's mean. The literature also describes how Caracas sought closer ties with Buenos Aires over the 2000s. Loans made by Venezuela and ideological affinities between both countries have been taken as an example of soft balancing against Brasilia's leadership (FLEMES and WEHNER, 2015). The data, however, reveal that Argentina has clearly been closer to Brazil than to Venezuela. This tendency is not exclusive to Argentina either. While the cohesion of the USAN countries with Brazil is 0.883, their cohesion with Venezuela is 0.857 ($t=-2.874$; $p\text{-value}<0.01$). The gulf between the two leadership candidates has widened in particular since 2005.

Graph 02. Mean affinity between Brazil-USAN versus Venezuela-USAN (1992-2014)

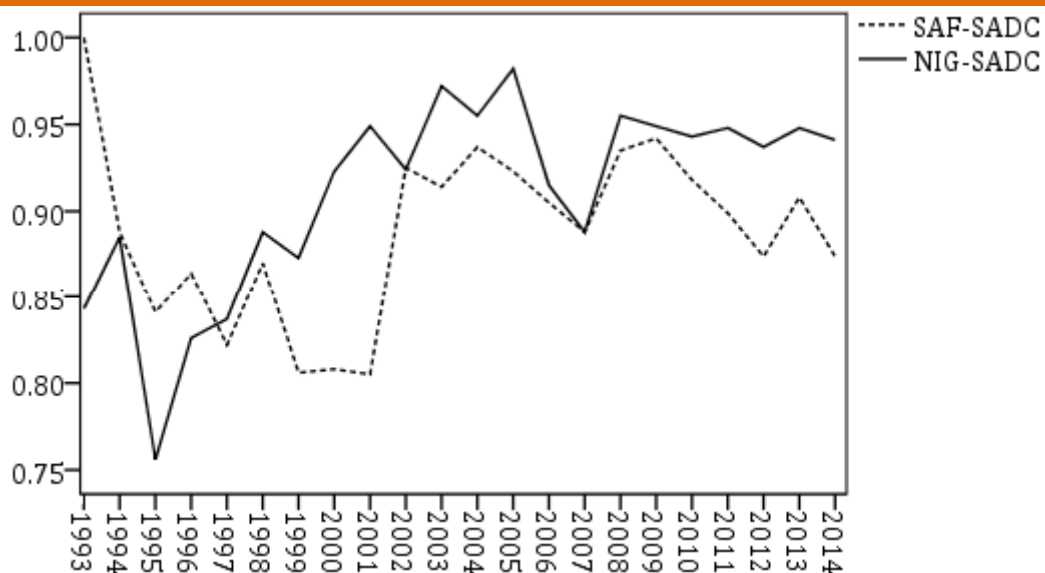


Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Africa's biggest adversary in SADC, the country showed greater affinity with Congo (0.93) and

Angola (0.91). It also scores much more closely with Nigeria (0.87) than with South Africa. The lowest levels of agreement were in 1996 and 1999. Indeed the mean in 1996 (0.214) was the lowest among all the blocs during the period studied. The DRC does not appear to be alone in this tendency. From 1997 onward, the cohesion between the SADC countries and Nigeria was higher than that with South Africa. Mozambique was the country closest to South Africa, a fact perhaps explained by the nation also being the main recipient of South Africa's Foreign Direct Investments (ALDEN and LE PERE, 2009).

Graph 03. Mean affinity between South Africa-SADC versus Nigeria-SADC (1992-2014)



Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

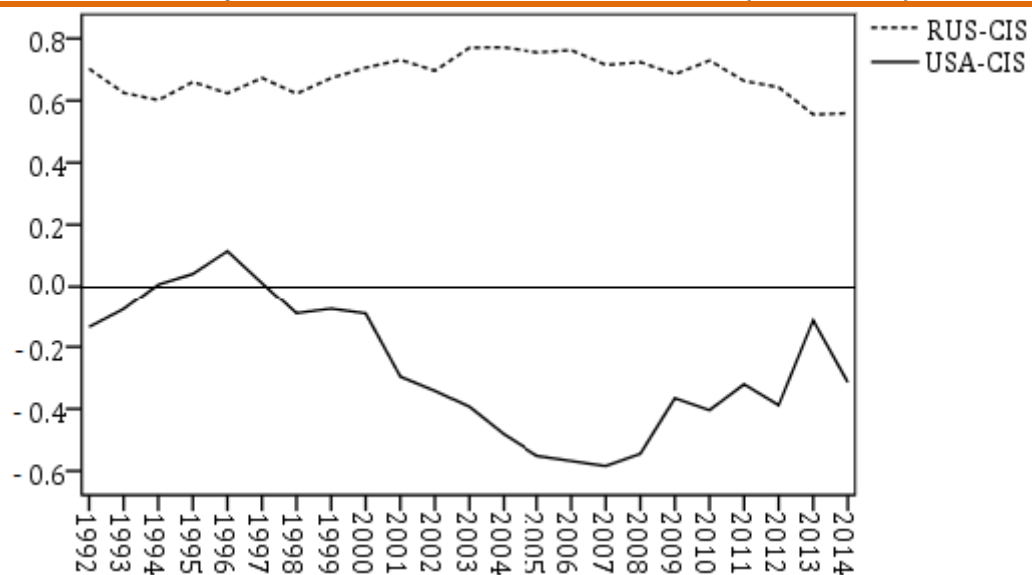
In relation to Russia, we thought it pertinent to assess the affinity between the CIS countries and the United States, which represents Moscow's biggest concern in terms of proclaiming itself the region's leader. Their strategic interests in the area coincide on both energy and military issues, since Russia works covertly to prevent the former Soviet republics from joining NATO. The results, however, point to a low level of affinity between CIS and the United States (-0.261). For the purposes of comparison, Russia was excluded from the latter analysis.

The highest score for a dyad for the entire USA-CIS series was 0.434 with Uzbekistan in 1995. In order to gain some insight concerning the very low level of affinity between the region and Washington, it is interesting to note that, of the 224 dyads observed, just 42 had an affinity higher than zero. Of the latter, 24 are above

0.1. The peak affinity between CIS and the USA occurred in 1996 when the mean reached 0.114. Indeed the period between 1994 and 1997 was the only time from the entire series when the results were positive. The lowest result was observed in 2007 (−0.584). It is interesting to note that the lowest values of the series (the 2000s) coincide with the highest levels of affinity between Russia and CIS.

The low affinity of Russia with members of CIS became clearly apparent in 2014 during the vote at the UNGA on the resolution concerning the integrity of the Ukrainian territory, threatened by the separatist referendum held in the Crimea region. In total, just ten countries voted on Russia's side, only two of which were members of CIS: Armenia and Belarus. Azerbaijan and Moldavia voted against and the other members of the Community abstained or declined to vote. For Trenin (2013), despite the importance of maintaining a good relationship with neighbouring countries, Moscow's contemporary foreign policy does not envisage the members of CIS as central elements in its priorities.

Graph 04. Mean affinity between Russia-CIS versus USA-CIS (1992-2014)



Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

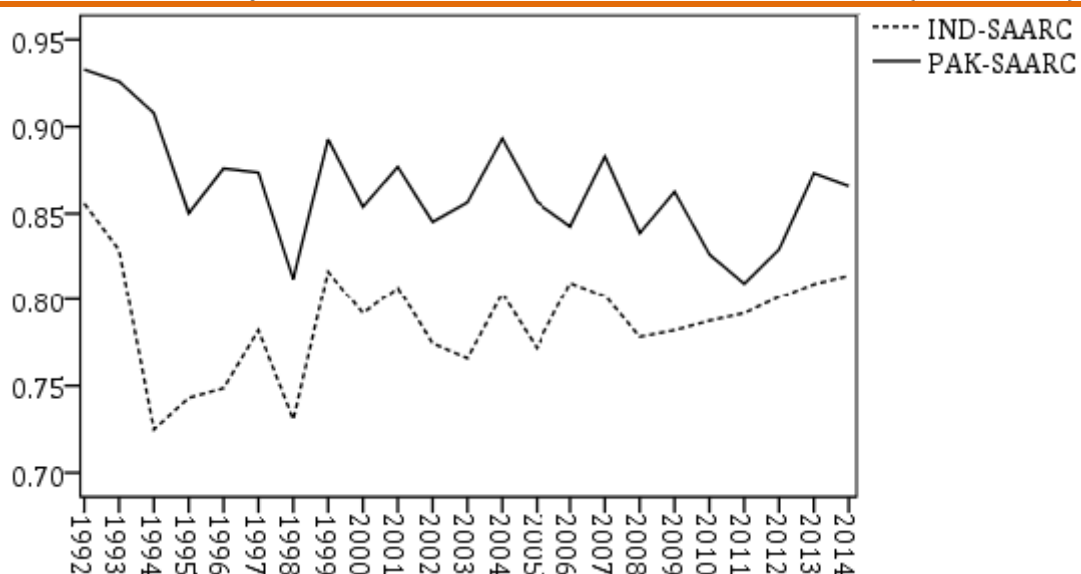
As for India, it called our attention that Pakistan was the dyad to present the greatest affinity within SAARC (0.851). By contrast, the literature points to a recurrent tension between the two countries. Unresolved issues exist on at least three points: 01. borders; 02. the Afghanistan war; and 03. Pakistan's refusal to assure India most favoured nation (MFN) status at the WTO. Bearing this in mind, we

tested the affinity of the SAARC countries in relation to Pakistan. Differently to the case of the United States and CIS, where Russia was excluded in order to maintain the equivalence of the empirical analysis, here we kept India in the group (since the affinity between SAARC and India included Pakistan in the bloc).

The results indicate a high level of affinity between SAARC and Pakistan (0.864). Moreover, the data – statistically significant – indicate that Pakistan effectively possesses the same level of regional cohesion as Brazil, China and South Africa. This observation clashes with what the literature describes: 01. India is taken as a regional hegemon; 02. Indian self-determination in relation to its leadership role is widely recognised by the neighbours; and 03. New Delhi has sought to expand its regional projection (QUILICONI and KINGAH, 2015; VISENTINI, 2011).

On the other hand, our results would seem to indicate something along the lines of what authors like Pattanaik (2006) and Bhasin (2008) argue: SAARC still lacks an effective leader. Questions involving the stability of small (non-democratic) regimes in the region and the quality of the leadership exercised by India comprise the core of the problem. It is also essential to stress the high level of affinity between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the SAARC member with one of the lowest affinities with India. The only dyad that attains the maximum affinity of 1 throughout the entire series is Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1999.

Graph 05. Mean affinity between India-SAARC versus Pakistan-SAARC (1992-2014)

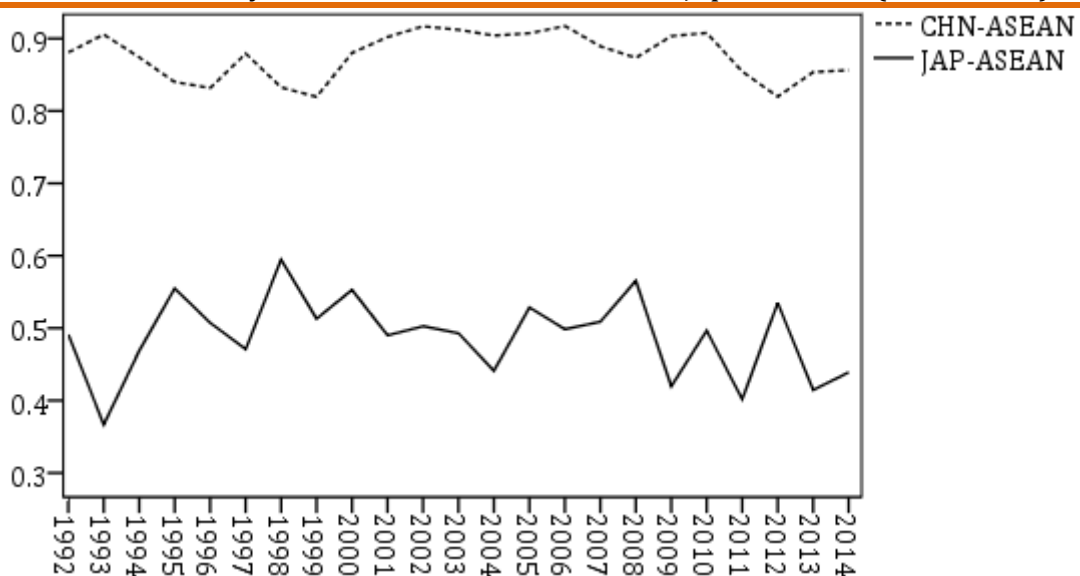


Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

The peak of affinity occurs precisely at the start of the series, reaching 0.932 in 1992. The moments of lowest affinity can be clearly discerned on the graph, shown by two sudden drops. These occurred in 1998 (0.812) and 2011 (0.809).

In the case of China, the literature indicates that its main rival in the dispute for regional leadership in East Asia is Japan. Consequently, we carried out the same tests with ASEAN, this time replacing China with Japan. ASEAN has a low level of affinity with Japan (0.488), which leaves the country far below China. The dyad with the greatest affinity was with Thailand (0.662) in 2008. This disparity becomes evident when we observe that Thailand has the second lowest mean affinity with China (0.827). The visual analysis of the affinity between Japan and ASEAN displays the considerable volatility of these relations.

Graph 06. Mean affinity between China-ASEAN versus Japan-ASEAN (1992-2014)



Source: Voeten (2013) – United Nations General Assembly Voting Data.

The lowest affinity observed was in 1993 (0.366). Subsequently the lowest result is 0.401 in 2011. On the other hand, the highest affinity occurred in 1998 (0.594). As it can be seen, if some kind of dispute for leadership in East Asia does exist, the findings suggest that China has the advantage. Various factors can explain China's high level of affinity with ASEAN. Firstly, it is worth mentioning the strategic partnership existing between the parties, in place since 2003, a fact that institutionalized once and for all the so-called ASEAN+1. Also in the diplomatic field, China established a permanent mission for ASEAN and designated a resident ambassador in 2012. In the

economic arena, China has been ASEAN's foremost trade partner since 2009, as well as being one of the bloc's largest sources of direct investments. More recently, the creation of a bank for investments in infrastructure and the Chinese project for recreating the Silk Road – as well as the extension of the free trade agreement between the parties (ACFTA) – have brought this partnership even closer.

Conclusions

The results demonstrate that the BRICS generally present a considerable level of cohesion with their followers (0.830)¹², but, in line with the alternative hypothesis, their levels of regional cohesion are not the same. ANOVA shows that South Africa, Brazil and China score above average and do not present a significant difference in their means, indicating that they are de facto leaders of their regions. However, there was a significant statistical difference in relation to the means of India and Russia, indicating that New Delhi and, even more so, Moscow cannot be considered regional leaders.

The fact that the five regional BRICS powers did not have equal means tells us that regional power status is a necessary but insufficient condition for the production of regional cohesion. While South Africa, Brazil and China can be considered leaders according to the criteria adopted, the same cannot be said of India and Russia. It would be apposite, therefore, to ascertain which factors are shared by the first three and not shared by the last two as a means to explaining the divergence outcomes.

The BRICS present a common trajectory of less cohesion in the 1990s, greater cohesion in the 2000s (preceding the creation of the acronym), and declining cohesion in the 2010s, with some exceptions. Hence the organisation of summits between the BRICS heads of state from 2009 onward does not appear to have had a positive effect in terms of boosting the leadership of these countries in their respective regions.

The study also examined whether counter-hegemonic blocs might have formed within each region, checking whether the other members of the group showed increased alignment with another state, identified by the literature as a rival for leadership. In the Brazilian case we were unable to detect the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc. The literature points to Caracas as a rival (FLEMES and WOJCZEWSKI, 2011), but what we

¹² For the purposes of comparison, the mean affinity observed between the dyads for all the votes at the UNGA up to 2014 is 0.632. If we take just the votes that took place from 1992 onward, the time span of our research, mean affinity rises to 0.652.

verified was an increasing gap between Brazilian leadership and Venezuela's.

For SADC, the balancing against South Africa seems more explicit: the DRC shows lower agreement with the regional leader, aligning much closer with Angola (another country with a history of disputes with Pretoria and, however, recording above average agreement in the UNGA) and with the second candidate for continental pre-eminence, Nigeria. Although the means of cohesion between SADC and South Africa are high compared to the other BRICS, these are lower than those found for Nigeria, indicating that for almost the entire period under study the positions of the countries of southern Africa converged more closely with those of this regional challenger.

Flemes (2013) argues that regional institutions should be more important for countries that are still distant from obtaining the status of a major power, namely Brazil and South Africa, and that these have been investing in a regionalism institutionalized in concentric circles of influence. However, the data show that these two countries, precisely the least powerful among the BRICS in material terms, exert a degree of regional leadership similar to that of China, the most powerful country of the group. This may be a sign that even emerging powers that have already become great powers, like China, cannot dispense with the cooperation of their regions.

The data also point to some contradictions in relation to the literature on India, China and Russia. In the case of Russia, the literature predicts a high level of affinity with the CIS countries, which was not observed, with its influence being the lowest among the BRICS and declining. The recent territorial issues involving its neighbours, especially Georgia and the Ukraine, may have influenced the fall in Russia's regional affinity over recent years. At the same time, Moscow's efforts to prevent a potential approximation between the former Soviet republics and the United States seems to have borne some fruit, since the affinity between CIS and Washington is extremely low.

India's situation is perhaps the most curious, because of two factors in particular: 01. its biggest regional enemy (Pakistan) is precisely the country with which it has the most affinity; 02. the affinity between Pakistan and SAARC is just as high as the affinity of Brazil, China and South Africa in relation to their own regions. Contrary to what the literature predicts, India's affinity with its region is not so high, despite the growth observed in recent years.

In the case of ASEAN, it is often asserted that China's leadership in the region is not yet consolidated, in particular because of the competition from Japan. However, the

results showed a high level of cohesion between the countries and China, considerably higher than the level observed with Japan. The region's high level of economic dependency on the flows of investment from Beijing seems to be reflected in the level of affinity between the ASEAN countries and China. Recent events involving territorial disputes in the South China Sea, nonetheless, may have repercussions for the relations between Beijing and ASEAN, which has just become a common market – demonstrating the high internal cohesion of the bloc.

Apropos the limitations of the present study and indications for a future research agenda, we stress the importance of maintaining a concern with the validity of the indicator in the comparison between systems (PZREWORSKI and TEUNE, 1970). The high mean of cohesion in USAN, for example, may be a sign of accepted leadership, despite the existence of contrary diagnoses in the literature, or an outcome of the culture of seeking consensus (MERKE, 2015).

We recommend, therefore, testing the validity of the current findings by turning to other metrics capable of measuring with complementary accuracy the regional leadership capacity of the BRICS (TOMLIN, 1985). As our data point to some counterintuitive trends that diverged from the predictions made by the literature (for example, the much higher affinity of Pakistan with SAARC compared to India), employing triangulation may be useful in terms of testing the same hypothesis by alternative empirical pathways (TARROW, 2005).

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