The Changing Dynamics of Global Power Politics and the Future of International Relations

Ekereke Victor Akan, Ukpeye Ofongutom Robinson

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to analyze the evolving nature of global power politics, focusing on the emergence of new powers and its potential impact on international relations. The study aimed to explore the impact of emerging powers on the distribution of global power, analyze the strategies used by emerging powers to increase their international influence and identify the consequences of the shifting global power dynamics for international relations. The research design used was qualitative with the type of research being documentary analysis. The data were sourced from relevant books, journal articles, institutional publications, reports and other secondary sources and analyzed thematically in relation to the research questions. The study was based on the Balance of Power Theory and complemented by the concept of Multi-polarity. The findings showed that the emergence of new powers such as China, India, Brazil, Russia and South Africa has led to a dramatic rebalancing or redistribution of power in the world in economic, military, technological and diplomatic spheres. The research also revealed that emerging powers use strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, South-South cooperation and multilateral engagement and institutional platforms like BRICS to augment their influence and restructure parts of the current international order. Moreover, the results indicated that the power shift is creating a more complex and unequal multipolar international system that is marked by strategic competition and ongoing interdependence. The study finds that emerging powers are not just replacing the existing international order, but changing it. The study calls for more reform of global governance institutions, more cooperation among the emerging powers, and the development of effective multilateral institutions to manage great-power competition.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the international system has been characterized by continuous changes in the distribution of political, economic and military power among states. International relations therefore represent a dynamic system in which powerful states compete, cooperate and adjust their strategies in response to changing power configurations. Morgenthau (1948) identifies the pursuit of national interests and the struggle for power as central features of international politics, while Waltz (1979) emphasizes the distribution of capabilities among states as a major determinant of the structure and behavior of the international system. Consequently, changes in the relative power of major states have significant implications for international stability, global governance and the future direction of international relations. Historically, the international system has experienced different configurations of power. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterized by competition among several European powers, resulting in a relatively multipolar system. The Second World War subsequently transformed the global distribution of power, elevating the United States and the Soviet Union as the two dominant superpowers. Their ideological, military and geopolitical rivalry defined the bipolar international system during the Cold War (Waltz, 1979). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States emerged as the predominant global power. Wolfforth (1999) describes the post-Cold War period as a historically distinctive unipolar system because of the concentration of military, economic and political capabilities in the hands of the United States.

However, the dominance of the post-Cold War unipolar order has increasingly been challenged by changes in the distribution of global economic and strategic capabilities. China's rapid economic expansion, India's growing economic and technological influence, Russia's continuing military and strategic significance, and the

increasing importance of regional powers such as Brazil and South Africa have contributed to the emergence of additional centers of global influence. Cooper and Flemes (2013) observe that emerging powers have become increasingly influential in international affairs and have adopted foreign policy strategies aimed at strengthening their positions within the international system. These developments have intensified scholarly debates about whether the world is moving towards multi-polarity, renewed bipolarity or a more complex distribution of international power. Economic strength remains a major foundation of global influence because states with substantial productive capacity, trade networks, financial resources and investment capabilities can convert economic advantages into diplomatic and strategic influence. The growing interdependence of national economies has also expanded the channels through which states interact and exercise influence internationally (Keohane & Nye, 1977). China's integration into global production networks, international trade and investment has significantly enhanced its capacity to influence economic and political developments across different regions. At the same time, military capabilities remain important in determining national security and strategic influence. China's military expansion, India's defense modernization and Russia's nuclear and conventional military capabilities have contributed to changing strategic calculations among major powers, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Technological advancement has further complicated the distribution of global power. Developments in artificial intelligence, semiconductor production, telecommunications, cyber technology, biotechnology, space exploration and advanced manufacturing increasingly influence national competitiveness, military effectiveness and strategic autonomy. Nye (2004) explains that power extends beyond coercion to include the ability to attract, persuade and influence the preferences of others. Technological leadership can therefore strengthen a state's economic position, military capabilities and international reputation. China's growing scientific and technological capacity illustrates the increasing importance of technological competition in the redistribution of global influence. These changes have renewed interest in multi-polarity, which refers to an international system in which several major states or centers of power possess significant capacity to influence global outcomes. Peters (2022) discusses the movement from Cold War bipolarity through post-Cold War unipolarity towards a more multipolar international order, while Zhou (2024) highlights the growing influence of emerging economies and the Global South in shaping contemporary international relations. Nevertheless, the emergence of new powers does not necessarily imply the complete decline of established powers. Rather, it reflects an evolving distribution of capabilities and influence among a broader range of international actors.

Despite these developments, the nature of the emerging international system remains contested. Some interpretations suggest that the increasing strategic competition between China and the United States could produce a new bipolar order. Others argue that such a perspective underestimates the influence of India, Russia, the European Union, Japan, Brazil, South Africa and other regional powers. Hurrell (2018) emphasizes the growing pluralism of global power, suggesting that contemporary international relations cannot be adequately explained through the dominance of a single state or a straightforward division between two superpowers. The emerging global order may instead reflect an uneven distribution of military, economic, technological and diplomatic capabilities across several influential centers. The changing distribution of power also raises questions about the adequacy of existing institutions of global governance. Although emerging powers have acquired considerable economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities, many international institutions continue to reflect power arrangements established decades ago. This disparity has generated demands for greater representation, institutional reform and increased participation in international decision-making. The growing significance of BRICS, the G20, regional organizations and alternative financial institutions illustrates efforts by emerging powers to expand their influence over global governance. However, these arrangements do not necessarily replace existing institutions; rather, they may operate alongside them, producing an increasingly complex and overlapping institutional structure.

China's rise constitutes a particularly important dimension of these developments. Its growing influence in international trade, finance, infrastructure development, technology and global supply chains has strengthened its international position. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China has expanded its economic and diplomatic engagement across Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. Its technological advancement and increasing strategic capabilities have also intensified competition with the United States. At the same time, India's growing influence and the activities of other emerging powers have introduced

additional centers of decision-making into the international system. Many of these states pursue strategic autonomy by maintaining relationships with competing major powers rather than aligning exclusively with one dominant state. This behavior complicates conventional explanations of alliance formation and makes contemporary international relations more fluid and less predictable. Another important concern is whether the changing distribution of power will produce peaceful adjustments or intensify international conflict. Historical experience suggests that shifts in relative capabilities can generate security dilemmas, arms competition and strategic rivalry. Contemporary competition between the United States and China in technology, trade, military affairs and the Indo-Pacific illustrates the potential tensions associated with changing power relations. Nevertheless, the growing influence of emerging powers does not automatically imply the inevitability of conflict, as states may also pursue cooperation, diplomatic accommodation and institutional reforms to manage their differences.

Furthermore, emerging powers do not necessarily share identical interests or strategic objectives. Although countries such as China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa participate in BRICS and other multilateral platforms, their national interests and foreign policy priorities frequently differ. Disagreements concerning Russia's intervention in Ukraine, relations between China and the United States, tensions between India and China, rivalries in the Middle East and competing economic interests demonstrate the difficulties involved in establishing a unified alternative to the existing international order. Consequently, collective initiatives by emerging powers must be examined in relation to both their capacity for cooperation and the limitations imposed by their differing interests. The central problem, therefore, extends beyond the emergence of new global powers to the implications of their growing influence for the structure, institutions, norms and strategic behavior of international relations. Although emerging powers have acquired increasing economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities, uncertainty remains regarding the nature of the international system taking shape. It is unclear whether these developments represent a transition towards genuine multi-polarity, a temporary redistribution of influence, a new bipolar configuration dominated by the United States and China, or a more complex and uneven multipolar order. There is also the question of whether emerging powers will transform existing institutions, establish alternative arrangements or pursue a combination of both approaches. These uncertainties create the need for a systematic examination of the changing dynamics of global power politics and their implications for the future of international relations. Accordingly, this study examines the rise of emerging powers, their influence on the distribution of global power, the strategies they employ to expand their international influence, and the implications of these developments for international competition, cooperation and global governance. The study is intended to contribute to a clearer understanding of the evolving international system and the possible directions of its future configuration.

Research Questions

i. What strategies have emerging powers adopted to increase their influence in global politics and reshape the international order?
ii. What are the implications of the changing global power structure for the future of international relations?
iii. How has the rise of emerging powers affected the distribution of global power and the structure of international relations?

Conceptual Review Global Power Politics

Global power politics is the term used for processes of competition, cooperation and negotiation of states and other influential actors in the international system in order to achieve political, economic, military, strategic and diplomatic interests. It is about the distribution and use of influence among states and how powerful actors influence international rules, institutions, decisions and outcomes. Famously, Morgenthau (1948) formulated the theory of international politics as a conflict for power and national interest, which states always try to safeguard and promote their interests in an international arena where competition and uncertainty prevail.

Global power politics, as a concept, has been traditionally linked to relations of major powers. In the 1800s,

European powers like Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary vied for strategic influence. This was followed by the two World Wars which changed the distribution of power in the world and the Cold War which created a bipolar world of the United States and Soviet Union. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the international system was basically unipolar, meaning that the United States had unparalleled military, economic and diplomatic power (Wolfforth, 1999).

But the nature of the global power politics has been altered significantly in the 21st century. China's economic rise, India's growing international presence, Russia's strategic revival, the enduring significance of the European Union, and the rising roles of Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and other regional powers have led to a more nuanced power dynamics.

So, it is not possible to understand the contemporary global power politics only in the frame of military competition. The resources of economic capacity, technological innovation, and control over strategic resources, financial influence, diplomatic networks, institutional membership and cultural attraction are now important sources of power (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2004).

Global power politics is thus not only based on competition but also on cooperation. States can rival each other for territory, markets, technology, military power and institutional leadership, while simultaneously collaborating on climate change, trade, global health, terrorism and other transnational challenges. Keohane and Nye (1977) show that the present international system is one of multiple channels of interaction in which states can be both competitors and partners at the same time. In this study, the term global power politics is defined as the evolving matrix of competition, cooperation and influence between existing and emerging powers to influence the distribution of material resources, international institutions, and global decision-making.

China as an Emerging Global Power

The most important recent model of an emerging power becoming a major global power is China. China's economy has undergone remarkable transformations and growth since the start of economic reforms in the late 1970s. It has been able to grow its economy and expand its spending on defense, technology and development abroad and diplomatic initiatives. The Belt and Road initiative has also increased China's economic ties with the outside world. China has called countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America to deepen its relations with them via infrastructure, trade and investments. The rise of China has implications for the existing order in the world. It questions the Western states' traditional dominance in economic and technological power and yet engages in the current international institutions. The Chinese case is therefore an example of how the modern power transition is complex in nature: China is a part of and a challenger to parts of the current global system. The most important recent model of an emerging power becoming a major global power is China. China's economy has undergone remarkable transformations and growth since the start of economic reforms in the late 1970s. It has been able to grow its economy and expand its spending on defense, technology and development abroad and diplomatic initiatives. The Belt and Road initiative has also increased China's economic ties with the outside world. China has called countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America to deepen its relations with them via infrastructure, trade and investments.

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India as Emerging Power

India as Emerging Power is also one of the rising powers with growing presence on the international stage. International influence is provided by its large population, growing economy, military strength, technological advancements, and strategic location.

India has been a follower of strategic autonomy and not been in line with any one big power. It is a member of BRICS, Quad and other international groupings, which shows its flexible approach to global politics.

The rise of India is important as another major center of power has entered the international system. India's role in Asia and the global system is likely to grow if the country's economy and technology continues to develop.

The example of India also illustrates the fact that emerging powers are not necessarily interested in joining a fixed geopolitical bloc. However, they can have several partnerships to maximize the interests of the country.

BRICS and Cooperation between Emerging-Power Countries

BRICS has emerged as a key institutional vehicle for cooperation amongst emerging powers. The group was first formed by Brazil, Russia, India and China, and later joined by South Africa, and has grown in terms of its membership and impact on the world. BRICS aims to deepen economic ties, to give the developing economies a greater say and to reform global governance structures. The BRICS is important because it seeks to transform the economic power of emerging economies into political and institutional power. The establishment of institutions linked with BRICS reflects the growing ability of emerging powers to establish alternative global governance institutions, as Stuenkel (2016) argues.

But BRICS should not be seen as a geopolitical bloc. Its cohesion remains hampered by national interests, political systems and strategic priorities. India has been a follower of strategic autonomy and not been in line with any one big power. It is a member of BRICS, Quad and other international groupings, which shows its flexible approach to global politics. The rise of India is important as another major centre of power has entered the international system. India's role in Asia and the global system is likely to grow if the country's economy and technology continues to develop. The example of India also illustrates the fact that emerging powers are not necessarily interested in joining a fixed geopolitical bloc. However, they can have several partnerships to maximize the interests of the country.

Empirical Review

The shift in world power politics, and the emergence of new powers, has been the focus of much scholarly work, especially since the end of the Cold War. Various studies have explored the topic from various angles such as the rise of China and India, the rise of BRICS, the influence of the Global South, and the shift from unipolar to multipolar world, the changes in global governance, and their implications for the future of IR. The fact that the distribution of power is shifting is more or less accepted in the empirical literature, but the nature of the new order is still very much in dispute, with some seeing it as multipolar, others as bipolar, and others as a modified version of U.S.-led order.

Peters (2022) analyzed the history of the change in the international system from bipolarity to uni-polarity and finally to what he calls complex multi-polarity. Peters noted that the world's system underwent a significant structural shift after the Cold War ended with the U.S. as the world's leading superpower. But the global financial crisis of 2008 and the ongoing economic development of nations like China and India helped to shape a more complicated distribution of power. Peters believes that the present system shows signs of multi-polarity instead of simply American unipolarity. The value of this study is that it points out 2008 as a critical year in the development of world power politics. The financial crisis not only revealed the vulnerabilities in Western economies, but also revealed the growing economic importance of the emerging economies. Peters' argument confirms the assumption of the present study that power is not permanent on the global scale. Instead, economic crises, technological change, demographic shifts and strategic developments can have a profound impact on the distribution of international capabilities.

One of the more recent evaluations of the debate on multi-polarity is given by Bajpai and Sharma (2026). In their study, they analyzed if multi-polarity has become a defining feature of the current international order and what this means for global stability and governance. The authors analyzed alternative views of the present system, such as those asserting that the United States is still the primary world power, arguments for a bipolar

world that includes the United States and China, and those suggesting multiple centers of power are diffused. They argue that it is not a simple polarity to reduce the current global politics. Rather, the distributions of different dimensions of power can vary. The concentration of military, economic, technological and diplomatic power may not be in the same states. This is pertinent contribution for the present study as it brings the concept of multidimensional multi-polarity into the picture. One country can be strong economically but not so strong militarily, whereas another country can be strong militarily but not so strong economically. The study therefore proposes that the global power politics of the present day is an overlapping of centers of influence, and not a single hierarchy with an easily identified center.

The technology aspect of the emerging-power influence has been a growing field of study. For instance, Wu, Esposito and Evans (2024) discussed China's evolving role in the global scientific collaboration network. They analyzed millions of international scientific collaborations to determine the changing patterns in the leadership of science between four regions – China, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. The research revealed significant increases in China's scientific leadership positions from 1990 to 2023. China has also made substantial progress in closing the gap with the U.S. and other Western scientific and technological hubs in various fields such as AI, semiconductors and advanced communications. This discovery is significant, as it shows that influence of the emerging powers is not only measured in traditional terms (GDP, military spending). Science and technology are now becoming important components of the strength of a nation. The study, therefore, confirms the notion that knowledge, technology and innovation will become more crucial aspects of future global power politics.

Abdel-Latif and Popescu (2025) did an empirical study of international economic effects emanating from the leading emerging economies. They examined G20 emerging economies and examined how much economic shocks in these economies affect the global economy. The results suggest that China's economic shocks have the tendency to produce larger and broader effects on global economic activity, inflation and commodity prices. This contrasts China with many other emerging economies, and illustrates just how far China's economic performance has become intertwined in the global arena. China has gained a systemic economic power, as evidenced by the study. It is no longer just a function of its own national economy, but also of the impact of its economic decisions on other nations. This is especially relevant to the current research as it illustrates how economic interdependence can be a means of global influence.

Jacobs and Van Rossem (2024) empirically explored the possibility of regarding Brazil, Russia, India and China as a group of rising powers. It looked at the four countries' integration into global political, economic and military networks, by means of material and relational indicators of power. The researchers challenged the notion that the BRICs form a homogenous group, just because they all have rapid economic growth. They found that there were significant variations in how the four countries amassed and used international power. All four had material capabilities and the relationships to global political, economic and military networks varied greatly. For instance, China was well integrated in global economic and technological networks, and Russia still had a strong military and strategic influence. Brazil and India had different regional and diplomatic styles. Its significance in the present study is that it shows that the notion of "emerging power" is not just one of economic growth. Global power is multi-faceted and encompasses economic, military, political, technological and institutional power. So, GDP alone cannot be used to explain the shift in the pattern of global power.

This paper investigates the relationship between China and the BRIC countries and evaluates how BRIC cooperation can be utilized in the interest of China's strategic objectives in international arena in the era of uni-polarism. The study revealed that China valued cooperation with Brazil, Russia and India more and more because it was a way of minimizing its reliance on the United States and limiting unilateral U.S. influence. But Glosny also discovered that the cooperation between BRIC nations was constrained by the conflicting interests of the countries. The countries were not in a traditional alliance and their cooperation was partial and not all-encompassing. Hence, China sought BRIC cooperation along with bilateral ties with other big powers.

The significance of this finding lies in the fact that it contradicts the notion that emerging powers form a bloc to oppose the West. Rather, emerging powers can cooperate on some topics, and compete or disagree on

others. BRICS should thus be seen as a mechanism of strategic coordination, and not as a military or ideologically-based alliance. The study gives an important background to understanding the present-day evolution of BRICS. The fact that the organization has been institutionalized and expanded indicates that the limited cooperation found by Glosny has become more enduring in the sense of multilateral cooperation.

Through bibliometric analysis of highly cited research publications, Bornmann, Wagner and Leydesdorff (2024) investigated the scientific development of BRICS countries. The study examined the output of the most highly cited scientific publications from 1990 to 2010 and compared the BRICS' performance with that of the countries with the highest scientific output. The authors observed that, except Russia, the growth rate of highly cited scientific publications in BRICS countries was higher than that of the well-known leading scientific countries. They also noted that scientific collaboration networks of all BRICS countries got more and more involved in international networks. The Chinese scientific collaboration was especially tightly coupled with the U.S. The results show that the emerging powers' phenomenon is not only economic and military but also in the field of production of knowledge. The competitiveness and economic productivity and strategic autonomy of countries are increasingly dependent on their scientific and technological capacity. The study thus adds to the debate that the new international order is a multidimensional one. A capacity to produce scientific knowledge and technological innovation can be an important asset in influencing international affairs.

Stuenkel (2024) explored the evolving dynamics between the Global South and the international system. The paper concentrates on the shift of economic and political gravity from the West and what it means for the liberal international order.

Stuenkel notes that many other countries outside the West are less and less willing to side with Western powers on key geopolitical issues. The reaction of many countries from the Global South to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is an important example. Many developing countries did not take a consistent stance either pro-West or pro-Russian, but one that served their national interests. The study therefore argues that the new international system could be seen as one of overlapping spheres of influence and a lower level of agreement on international norms. This is an important discovery for the current investigation as it shows the growing strategic independence of emerging and developing countries. Their actions show that international politics is becoming less predictable, with countries more and more rejecting the idea of having foreign policies dictated by the preferences of the established powers.

Rai (2022) explored the link between Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, international institutions and global power politics. The aim of the study was to examine the ways in which the rise of states, regional powers and smaller states use international institutions to advance political and economic agendas. The study claims that the emergence of the Chinese power has paved the way for changes in international institutions and has opened new ways for states to pursue their interests. The BRI is a significant platform for China to develop economic ties and enhance its international influence. The significance of this study in the current research is that emerging-power influence does not have to be direct and coercive. In today's power politics infrastructure financing, trade, investment and international institutional involvement are important. The results thus suggest that economic connectivity may serve as a geopolitical lever.

Houghton (2024) studied emerging powers from the lens of international political economy (IPE) and has suggested that the scholarship has been focused too much on China and India. The study signals the growing regional and international influence of countries like Indonesia, Turkey and South Africa. Houghton contends that these countries have transitioned from a developing country position to an increased geopolitical importance, due to the evolution of the international economic and political framework. Their growth corresponds with changing trade and investment trends, regional leadership, and their interaction with the western-dominated global system. The study is important because it adds to the empirical knowledge of emerging powers beyond the most commonly researched cases. It shows that the current process of global politics is not about China, but multiple rising centers.

Zhou (2024) discussed the evolution of the Global South and its impact on the international order today. The study outlines three major stages of the emergence of the Global South: decolonization (1945-1989), globalize-

tion (1990-2008) and the collective rise of emerging economies (from around 2009 onwards). The study suggests that the economic and political influence of developing countries has significantly transformed the power dynamics in the world. Emerging economies have gained more influence in the international institutions, global markets and international negotiations. Zhou's research backs up the idea that the present change is not a transitory one. The emergence of new powers is part of a historical process of the Global South's growing presence in the international arena. This study is thus very pertinent to the current research because it places the current phenomenon of emerging powers in the context of the evolution of the international system.

Dahi and Demir (2025) explored the connection between multi-polarity and the emerging South-South relations. They examined the assumption that the Global South is becoming more influential in the international system, and that this will result in a more equitable system. They conclude that South-South cooperation has grown significantly, including in the fields of trade, investment, finance and security. However, the authors caution that the emergence of new powers can generate new forms of hierarchy. The new international economy can be characterized by inequalities, with stronger emerging economies exerting a great deal of influence over weaker developing ones. This is important because it adds an important caveat to the multi-polarity debate. Multi-polarity does not necessarily equalize the status of states. Even in a multipolar world there can be huge disparities in economic and political capacities. The study thus lends itself to a more critical understanding of the new multipolar order.

Anagba, Adamu and Olotu (2026) explored BRICS and the politics of multi-polarity with emphasis on the increasing influence of BRICS in global governance. Their study contends that BRICS is no longer a purely economic grouping, but also serves as an influential forum for shaping international governance. The authors discuss projects such as the New Development Bank and initiatives related to the reduction of reliance on the western dominated financial structures. They believe that BRICS is a threat to the representativeness and effectiveness of the traditional institutions like United Nations, IMF and World Bank. The study is particularly relevant in that it offers up recent evidence that BRICS has emerged as a significant feature in the discussion on global power reconfiguration. However, the argument of the study has to be understood in the context of studies which have pointed out intra-BRICS differences. It is expanding in membership, which gives it a greater collective economic weight, but diversity of interests can also make it harder to have a coherent foreign-policy agenda.

Coquid, Lages and Shepelyansky (2023) explored the potential impact of a theoretical BRICS currency on international trade. The authors built a mathematic model based on the data from United Nations Comtrade for 194 countries and the global trade network in the period from 2010 to 2020 to evaluate possible currency preferences. Their model indicated that, from trade relationships only, a hypothetical BRICS currency would gain significant preference from countries in the international trading system. But the authors themselves expressly said that their model was not considering political and other non-economic factors. The study offers valuable empirical findings on the potential to diminish the dominance of USD in international transactions. But its conclusions should not be read as proof of the fact that BRICS will certainly become a dominant alternative currency. Instead, they illustrate the potential economic underpinnings for more monetary diversification.

In 2024, Wu, Esposito and Evans conducted a large-scale analysis of international scientific collaboration to explore China's scientific ascendancy. Their study measured shifts in the leadership of world science and the status of China in comparison to the U.S., UK, and EU. The study revealed significant progress in scientific leadership in China from 1990 to 2023. The growing strength of China's scientific and technological research has significant implications for international power as technological capabilities are becoming more and more an important factor in economic competitiveness, military effectiveness and strategic autonomy. The study consequently demonstrates that the global distribution of power is becoming more and more intertwined with competition over knowledge and technology than just with military or economic resources.

S/N	New Powers	Main source and Power	Global Role
1	China	Strong Economy + Military and Technological Advancement	Rival to US, leader of Alternative institutions
2	India	India is the World fastest giving economy @ 7.0% in 2025 and2026. Population and strong economic growth. Strong military assets.	Bridge between West and Global South.
3	Brazil	Largest economy in Latin America.	Major Voice in Latin America.
		Moderate Military, Agriculture & Diplomacy	A key player in climate issues.
4	North Korea	Nuclear power and large army	Serves not as an economic but military power. Bargaining through threat of use of nuclear weapons and drones on South Korea and US bases

Source: Reuters, 2026

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study combines Balance of Power Theory with the concept of Multi-polarity to explain changing global power dynamics, the rise of emerging powers and their implications for international relations. Balance of Power Theory, associated with Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979), argues that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to protect their national interests and security by strengthening their capabilities, forming alliances and responding to shifts in relative power. Multi-polarity complements this perspective by explaining the structural distribution of power among several influential states and centers, including China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa. Together, the framework explains how emerging powers influence strategic competition, international cooperation and the evolving global order. It also provides a basis for examining internal balancing through economic, military and technological development, as well as external balancing through strategic partnerships, diplomatic coalitions and multilateral institutions such as BRICS. The study further draws on Power Transition Theory, Complex Interdependence Theory and Hegemonic Stability Theory to broaden the analysis of global power shifts. Power Transition Theory explains the potential for competition when rising powers challenge established powers; Complex Interdependence Theory highlights the economic, technological, political and social connections that encourage both cooperation and competition; while Hegemonic Stability Theory examines the relationship between dominant powers, international stability and demands for reform in global governance. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide an analytical basis for understanding the emergence of new power centers and assessing whether changing global power relations will produce greater cooperation, intensified strategic rivalry or a reorganization of the international system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive/historical research method as well as documentary research design and relied primarily on secondary data obtained from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, doctoral dissertations, official publications, institutional reports, policy documents and credible electronic sources. Data were collected through a systematic process of identifying, screening, reviewing and extracting relevant information from academic databases, libraries and institutional repositories. The collected materials were organized according to major themes relating to global power politics, the rise of emerging powers and transformations in the international system. Qualitative thematic content analysis was employed to examine, compare and synthesize the arguments and empirical evidence in the selected documents in line with the three research questions. The documentary approach was considered appropriate because it facilitated a critical understanding of historical developments, institutional changes and shifting global power relations, drawing on

relevant scholarly literature and reports from international organizations. Bowen (2009) provided the methodological basis for the documentary research and content analysis approach adopted in the study.

Evaluation of Research Questions through Documentary Content Analysis Research Question One:

How has the rise of emerging powers affected the distribution of global power and the structure of international relations?

The documentary content analysis indicates that the rise of emerging powers has contributed to a gradual but significant reconfiguration of the distribution of global power and the institutional structure of international relations. Analysis of the economic, military, technological, diplomatic and institutional dimensions reveals that the expanding capabilities of China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa have challenged the historical concentration of influence among established Western powers. Their growing economic weight, military modernization, technological advancement and increased participation in multilateral institutions have enhanced their capacity to shape international decisions and contest aspects of the existing global order. These developments lend support to arguments that the international system is moving towards greater multi-polarity (Peters, 2022; Zhou, 2024). Nevertheless, the persistence of substantial American economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities complicates the assumption that unipolarity has been entirely superseded (Wolfforth, 1999). The evaluation therefore suggests that the redistribution of global power is neither uniform across all dimensions nor sufficiently complete to establish an unequivocally multipolar system. Rather, the international order is undergoing a transitional process characterized by the coexistence of established power structures and emerging centers of influence. The principal finding is that the rise of emerging powers has weakened the exclusivity of Western dominance and expanded the range of actors capable of influencing international outcomes, without eliminating the structural advantages retained by established powers.

Research Question Two:

What strategies have emerging powers adopted to increase their influence in global politics and reshape the international order?

The documentary evidence identifies strategic autonomy, multilateral coalition-building, economic diplomacy, South-South cooperation, institutional reform and alternative institution-building as interrelated strategies through which emerging powers seek to translate their growing material capabilities into sustained international influence. India's engagement with competing major powers illustrates the pursuit of strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships and the preservation of foreign-policy flexibility. Similarly, BRICS provides an institutional platform through which participating states articulate shared concerns, coordinate selected positions and seek greater influence over global governance debates (Stuenkel, 2016). China's Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates how infrastructure investment, trade and economic partnerships can serve broader diplomatic and geopolitical objectives, while the establishment of the New Development Bank reflects efforts to diversify development financing and strengthen the institutional capacity of emerging economies. These strategies indicate that emerging powers are not merely responding to changes in the international system; they are also seeking to influence its rules, institutional arrangements and distribution of decision-making authority.

However, the analysis establishes that the effectiveness of these strategies is contingent upon the ability of emerging powers to reconcile their individual national interests with their collective aspirations. Differences in political systems, security priorities, geographical interests and economic objectives constrain the development of a coherent political bloc. This observation is consistent with Cooper and Flemes (2013), who emphasize the distinct foreign-policy orientations of emerging powers despite their shared interest in expanding their international influence. Consequently, institutional cooperation should not be equated with complete strategic convergence. The evaluation suggests that emerging powers pursue a combination of reformist and institution-building approaches: they seek greater representation within existing institutions while supporting alternative mechanisms that increase their autonomy and bargaining capacity. Nevertheless, their success in reshaping the

international order remains dependent on the durability of their partnerships, the consistency of their collective positions and their capacity to convert material resources into enduring diplomatic and institutional authority.

Research Question Three:

What are the implications of the changing global power structure for the future of international relations?

The documentary content analysis demonstrates that the changing distribution of global power has important implications for international security, geopolitical competition, global governance and the future configuration of the international system. One major implication is the intensification of strategic rivalry among major powers, particularly the United States and China, across military, technological, commercial and geopolitical domains. Organski's (1958) power-transition perspective provides a theoretical basis for understanding how shifts in relative capabilities can generate instability when a rising power challenges the position of an established dominant power. Nevertheless, the analysis does not support a deterministic conclusion that power redistribution necessarily produces conflict. Economic interdependence and multilateral institutions can create channels for negotiation, cooperation and the management of strategic disagreements (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Ikenberry, 2011). The implications of the changing power structure therefore depend not only on the distribution of capabilities but also on the institutional mechanisms and diplomatic practices through which competing interests are managed.

A further implication concerns the legitimacy and representativeness of global governance. The increasing influence of emerging powers has strengthened demands for reforms to international institutions, particularly those whose decision-making structures reflect earlier distributions of power. Such demands raise fundamental questions about representation, institutional authority and the extent to which existing global governance arrangements accommodate the interests of developing countries. Although institutional reform could enhance the inclusiveness and legitimacy of international cooperation, progress remains contingent on the willingness of established powers to accommodate changes and the capacity of emerging powers to coordinate their positions. The analysis also identifies three principal possibilities for the future structure of international relations: the continuation of American primacy, the emergence of US-China bipolarity and the development of a multipolar system. However, these possibilities are not necessarily mutually exclusive across all dimensions of power. The United States may retain considerable advantages in certain strategic domains, while China and other influential actors expand their economic, technological, military or diplomatic capabilities. This uneven distribution of capabilities suggests that the emerging international order may assume a complex and pluralistic form rather than conform neatly to a single model of polarity. This interpretation is consistent with Hurrell's (2018) discussion of the pluralisation of international power.

The overall evaluation establishes that the changing global power structure creates a dual dynamic of competition and cooperation. While strategic rivalry and institutional disagreements may increase international uncertainty, the wider distribution of influence also creates opportunities for more inclusive decision-making and a reassessment of established governance arrangements. The future trajectory of international relations will therefore depend on the interaction between power transitions, strategic calculations, institutional adaptation and the willingness of major actors to sustain cooperation. The central implication is that the emerging international order is best understood as a contested and evolving configuration of power whose eventual character will be shaped by both the capabilities of individual states and their capacity to manage interdependence within an increasingly pluralistic international system.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study reveal that the rise of emerging powers has contributed to a gradual redistribution of global power and a significant transformation of international relations. Documentary content analysis indicates that the expanding economic, military, technological, diplomatic and institutional capabilities of China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa have challenged the traditional dominance of established Western powers. Economically, the growing influence of emerging economies in international trade,

investment, industrial production and development partnerships has diversified the sources of global economic influence. This finding is consistent with Keohane and Nye's (1977) argument that economic interdependence creates multiple channels through which states exercise influence. Similarly, military modernization and technological advancement have strengthened the capacity of emerging powers to influence international security, strategic competition and geopolitical calculations. Nye (2004) further demonstrates the importance of power beyond coercive capabilities, including the ability to shape preferences and influence outcomes. The increasing participation of emerging powers in the United Nations, BRICS and the G20 also reflects growing demands for greater representation and institutional reform in global governance. These developments support arguments concerning the movement towards multi-polarity (Peters, 2022; Zhou, 2024), although the continuing economic, military and diplomatic strength of the United States suggests that significant elements of American primacy remain (Wolfforth, 1999). The findings therefore indicate that global power is becoming more dispersed without the complete displacement of established powers, resulting in an international system characterized by competing centers of influence and an evolving distribution of authority.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that emerging powers employ strategic autonomy, multilateral cooperation, economic diplomacy, South-South cooperation, institutional reform and alternative institution-building to expand their international influence. India's engagement with competing major powers illustrates the pursuit of strategic autonomy, while BRICS provides a platform for collective engagement on global governance issues (Stuenkel, 2016). China's Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates how trade, investment and infrastructure development can serve broader diplomatic and geopolitical objectives, while the establishment of the New Development Bank reflects efforts to diversify development financing and strengthen the institutional capacity of emerging economies. South-South cooperation also enables emerging powers to deepen relationships with developing countries and broaden international partnerships beyond traditional Western arrangements. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is constrained by differences in national interests, political systems, security priorities and foreign-policy objectives. Cooper and Flemes (2013) similarly observe that emerging powers maintain distinct foreign-policy strategies despite their shared interest in increasing their international influence. Consequently, the findings suggest that these states seek both to reform existing international institutions and to develop alternative arrangements, although their capacity to transform the international order collectively depends on the consistency of their cooperation and their ability to convert material capabilities into sustained diplomatic and institutional influence.

The findings further establish that the changing distribution of global power has important implications for international security, global governance and the future configuration of international relations. The growing strategic rivalry between the United States and China, particularly in military capabilities, advanced technologies, trade and geopolitical influence, illustrates the potential security challenges associated with power transitions. Organski's (1958) power-transition perspective explains how shifts in the relative capabilities of major powers can generate instability when a rising power challenges the position of an established dominant power. Nevertheless, the redistribution of power does not inevitably result in conflict. Economic interdependence and international institutions provide mechanisms for managing strategic disagreements and sustaining cooperation, as demonstrated by Keohane and Nye (1977) and Ikenberry (2011). The increasing demands of emerging powers for reforms in the United Nations Security Council, international financial institutions and other multilateral bodies further highlight the challenges of institutional legitimacy, representation and global governance. Regarding the future structure of the international system, continued American primacy, US-China bipolarity and multi-polarity remain competing possibilities. However, the distribution of economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities across several influential actors suggests that the emerging order may be more complex and pluralistic than any single model of polarity can adequately explain, an interpretation consistent with Hurrell's (2018) discussion of the pluralisation of international power. Overall, the study finds that the rise of emerging powers is reshaping international relations through the redistribution of capabilities, the adoption of new strategies of influence and increasing demands for institutional reform. Nevertheless, the emerging international order remains contested, as established powers retain substantial influence while emerging states face constraints arising from strategic rivalry and divergent national interests. The future direction of global politics will therefore depend on how these actors manage competition, adapt international institutions and sustain cooperation within an increasingly pluralistic international system.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the transformation of power politics, the emergence of the new powers and the future of international relations. The study was based on the Balance of Power Theory and supported by the concept of multi-polarity to explain the transformation of the international system in terms of the distribution of economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities.

The study confirmed that the emergence of the new powers has brought a marked change in the power field of the world. The rise of countries like China, India, Brazil, Russia and South Africa have enhanced their economic, military, technological and diplomatic strengths, and have diminished the extent to which global politics could be explained as solely the domain of traditional Western powers. The results, however, show that this is not the full picture of the displacement of the established powers. Instead, it is a process of the gradual re-distribution and diversification of global power.

The study also identified several approaches that the emerging powers are using to increase their influence: strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, South-South cooperation, multilateral engagement and institutional development. The growing interest of emerging powers in coordination and representation of their interests in global decision-making is reflected in platforms like BRICS. The creation of alternative institutions like the New Development Bank also shows a push to complement or change the global governance structures. The study also found that the shift in the distribution of power is leading to the development of a more multipolar and complex international system. However, this multi-polarity is not balanced as different states have different types and extent of power. There is significant influence from the United States, and China as a major global competitor, and countries with regional, economic, military or diplomatic influence include India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa.

The results also show that the new international structure holds potentialities and difficulties. On the other hand, however, the shift of power can also lead to more representation of emerging and developing countries and reform of global governance. On the other hand, increasing competition among major powers, particularly in the areas of technology, trade, security and strategic influence, could generate geopolitical tensions.

The study also finds that the emergence of the new powers is not replacing the current international order, but rather changing it. The future of international relations will most likely be complex multi-polarity, strategic competition, economic interdependence and continued institutional cooperation. The viability of this new order will largely rely on how existing and new powers can deal with each other through diplomacy, dialogue and well-functioning multilateral bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. International institutions should be reformed in a way that would give emerging powers and other developing states more representation and influence on decisions in response to the finding that the rise of emerging powers is redistributing global power. The institutions like the United Nations, IMF and World Bank need to be reflective of current global power dynamics and not past power dynamics. This would lessen institutional dissatisfaction and give emerging powers a more legitimate way of promoting their interests in the international system.
ii. Given the fact that emerging powers are finding more and more that strategic autonomy, e-commerce diplomacy, BRICS and South-South cooperation are ways to bolster their influence, emerging powers should boost coordinated and mutually beneficial cooperation. It is important to establish cooperation that emphasizes trade, technology, infrastructure, development financing and diplomatic engagement rather than forming rigid geopolitical blocs. More coordination would make it easier for emerging powers to enhance their collective bargaining power and play a more effective role in the restructuring of global governance.
iii. In the context of an emerging multi-polarity and strategic competition, established and emerging powers should enhance multilateral institutions to deal with geopolitical rivalry. Diplomatic dialogue, measures to build confidence and cooperation on arms control and on global challenges should be

carried out on a regular basis, especially between major powers. This would prevent the shift towards a multipolar international order from creating unnecessary conflict, and would foster a more stable, cooperative and representative future international order.

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