



India Eurasia Research Forum (IERF)

SPECIAL REPORT:

“BRICS at a Crossroads: Young BRICS Experts on the Future of BRICS”

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BRICS INDIA SURVEY 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“BRICS at a Crossroads: Young BRICS Experts on the Future of BRICS”

The India Eurasia Research Forum (IERF) takes great pride in announcing the launch of a special report, “BRICS at a Crossroads: Young BRICS Experts on the Future of BRICS”. The report comes at a time when BRICS marks two decades of existence. The expanded BRICS framework has emerged as an important global platform, bringing together diverse states with rising stakes regionally and globally, yet often with differing visions of the international system and competing geopolitical interests. In 2026, India will host the Eighteenth BRICS Summit on September 12-13 in New Delhi, on the theme “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability.”

BRICS at a Crossroads examines the BRICS journey by asking leading young BRICS experts from Russia, China, South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia and Kazakhstan for their thoughts on this important global platform, including their country’s place in BRICS and the place of BRICS in an emerging multipolar world. Most of the experts emphasise resilience and cooperation as the most important pillars of India’s BRICS chairship this time. The experts also propose some novel suggestions to strengthen BRICS cooperation, such as establishing a permanent secretariat, building a BRICS Plus Implementation and Policy Coordination Cluster, and a BRICS Business Card for promoting intra-BRICS business mobility.

Another central component of this special report is the BRICS India Survey 2026, which offers, for the first time, original empirical insights into perceptions of BRICS among India’s youth conversant in international affairs. The survey poses a total of ten questions, which will help both the general readers and BRICS-related institutions around the world to understand perceptions surrounding BRICS’ role in fostering a multipolar order, the main drivers behind the recent expansion, and India’s emerging role within the bloc. By capturing youth perspectives, the study contributes to understanding global perceptions towards BRICS and its vision for inclusive global governance.



INTRODUCTION

Rahul Gupta, Sujal Yadav and Saumya Tomar

India assumes the BRICS chairmanship for the fourth time, and this year, its theme centres on “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability.” However, after two decades of independent existence and multiple rounds of expansion, BRICS stands at a Crossroads: the forces of cooperation, competition and conflict coexist, alongside increasingly contradictory impulses in the international financial system. In the last two decades, the post-Cold War era of unipolarity has shifted definitively towards multipolarity, but the transition has been more chaotic than initially interpreted. Although the global economy is highly interdependent today, the expanding arc of regional conflicts and rising incidences of unilateral actions are fracturing global trade, disrupting supply chains, eroding trust in multilateral institutions, and undermining the rules of international conduct. To navigate this complex landscape, IERF’s special report “BRICS at a Crossroads” presents the diverse perspectives of the younger generation of BRICS experts, whose critical analysis of the systemic shifts driving BRICS cooperation will be essential to reimagining the bloc’s agency on the global stage.

1.1. BRICS at a Crossroads

“BRICS at a Crossroads” reassesses the role of BRICS as an intergovernmental forum of leading developing and emerging-market countries in promoting a just and equitable world order in the twenty-first century. The current international order is under immense strain, with the once-accepted customs of international law widely set aside in favour of unilateral force and hegemonic stability. Cooperative multilateralism is giving way to competitive multilateralism as rival geopolitical blocs led by major powers constrain the agency of middle and small powers. This is accompanied by a retreat from globalisation, as ‘complex interdependence’ translates into ‘weaponised interdependence’ and ‘regionalisation’ rather than ‘globalisation’ becomes the norm. The result is an undoing of the great strides made in the global economy since the end of the Cold War and a retreat into economic nationalism. Unfair trade practices, in the form of non-UN-designated sanctions and tariffs, along with artificial suppression of energy supplies, are harming the global economy at an unprecedented scale.

1.2. The Crisis of Post-Cold War Institutional Legitimacy and the Global Governance Landscape

The last two decades have seen a reversal in the legitimacy of the UN system, as long-pending reform demands remain unfulfilled, including those concerning the Security Council. The international financial system created by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is no longer the universally accepted framework for development financing, as a network of state and non-state financial institutions exerts greater, although uneven,

influence. The international security paradigm, if it ever existed, has taken a setback, as UN-backed Peacekeeping initiatives decline sharply, with major powers acting either in minilateral groupings or independently. The result is a rising possibility of a world of 'forever wars' as regional conflicts multiply. This leads to a domino effect, in which a crisis in one region spills over into the neighbouring one, producing cumulative negative effects for everyone. Progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals has nearly stalled. Among those affected, developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are the worst hit by food insecurity and rising inequality. Climate change has become precarious as wealthy countries pivot away from sharing the burden of the green transition with their developing counterparts, amid near-total stagnation toward green energy transition goals.

1.3. Regional Conflicts in an Era of Geopolitical Fragmentation

In conditions of unbalanced multipolarity, where leading world powers are unrelenting in pursuing their national interests, there are fewer options for restraining great-power rivalries. The Middle Power agency has been on the rise, but Major Powers continue to act unilaterally and often undermine global governance institutions. As a result, regional conflicts have multiplied since the first decade of this century, and they are now much harder to contain. The regional conflict in West Asia between Iran, the US and Israel is a case in point; these wars are now running longer and are more destructive in scope in terms of the use of long-range weapons and attacks on civilian populations and infrastructure. Other geopolitical flashpoints have emerged in places like Sudan and Palestine, where regional powers have become stakeholders in the conflict rather than in its resolution. This is eroding trust in institutions once intended to preserve peace, as regional security frameworks have largely proven ineffective at both peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

1.4. BRICS and the Question of the Global South

The existing multilateral institutions see a widespread decline in legitimacy and authority to contain the worst tendencies of international power politics. Major platforms, such as the G7 and the G20, suffer from decision paralysis, internal distrust between developed and developing members, and declining institutional effectiveness. At a time when multilateral institutions and regional forums are suffering from growing internal fissures and are pitted against one another, BRICS has emerged as an important international platform that brings together the world's leading and developing economies, particularly those from the Global South. It might not yet be an alternative platform for global governance, but it is an additional force for good in a world stretched between rival factions and competing governance frameworks. BRICS' strongest aspect of identity is its majority composition of developing countries from the Global South, along with a claim to a more representative and inclusive international order. Its normative heft rests on its reformist tendency, which operates under the UN umbrella and heightens the stakes for non-Western states in the international system.

1.5. From BRICS to BRICS Plus

After the latest round of expansion, BRICS represents around half of the world's population and over 40 per cent of global GDP. In terms of world trade, BRICS members account for over a quarter of global trade, and intra-BRICS trade is increasing. Many of its members rank among the world's top producers of commodities, including grains, fertilisers, oil and natural gas, and rare earth minerals. The BRICS grain exchange initiative is a noteworthy proposal to leverage this strength and can be expanded later to broaden the trade basket. On the trade front, intra-BRICS trade is growing, with over 50 per cent now settled in local currencies, though mostly bilaterally. Many members, however, remain wary of replacing one global currency with another and support an intra-BRICS payments system. This is the outcome of an ongoing debate over the primacy of the US dollar, as most BRICS members reject the weaponisation of any currency to curtail trade and distort market forces in favour of the few, and instead seek an egalitarian, globally integrated, and digitalised national payment system. This approach fits well with the logic of diversification, derisking and strategic autonomy in an era of geoeconomic fragmentation.

With eleven full members and ten partner countries, BRICS is also a geographically and strategically diverse bloc. With representation from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, it now parallels the G20 in scope and breadth, but does not intend to replace it. BRICS members have enshrined respect for the UN system since their inaugural summit and seek a peaceful yet reformed multilateral system that reflects the global distribution of power. As BRICS transforms into BRICS Plus, signifying an expanded membership and agenda, countries identifying as part of the Global South constitute the majority. Many of the erstwhile leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, such as India, Egypt and Indonesia, are members of BRICS, giving it a more rooted identity as a peaceful non-Western grouping based on sovereign equality, inclusive and non-competitive multilateralism. To avoid negative framing, BRICS members have explicitly rejected the use of ideological markers or labels such as "Anti-West" or "Non-West" to define BRICS. Like India, most of them view BRICS as a complementary multilateral platform for political and economic socialisation as the space for dialogue shrinks globally.

Over the years, the areas of cooperation within the BRICS framework have also expanded from an initial focus on economic cooperation and reform of the international financial system to encompass food and energy security, connectivity and infrastructure, digital governance and public health, and political and security cooperation, among others. It is to the credit of BRICS' resilience that, despite a lack of strong institutions and a secretariat, BRICS has two functioning initiatives - the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), both established in 2014 at the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil. The primary objectives of the two institutions are to fund sustainable development projects and provide short-term liquidity support to participating countries. Over the years, the NDB and the CRA have become successful examples of promoting South-South cooperation within the BRICS framework. If a functioning intra-BRICS payments system becomes a reality, this triad could provide important impetus for a more inclusive and egalitarian international financial system for the Global South.

1.6. Reimagining BRICS agency in a Fractured World

However, BRICS' growing internal diversity is also a source of weakness, as critics point to the disparate socio-economic and political make-up of its member states. A visible symptom of this growing heterogeneity is a lack of internal cohesion, as BRICS lacks a strong institutional foundation. Unlike the SCO, it lacks a permanent secretariat or bureaucracy to manage its day-to-day affairs. Rather, the member country that holds the BRICS Presidency is tasked with setting its agenda, providing secretarial support, and following through on its business during that year. A more serious issue, however, is that divergent geopolitical interests among members could impede the BRICS agenda. This is because decision-making within BRICS relies on consensus, which is hard to achieve in a heterogeneous setting.

Previously, bilateral issues among members, such as between India and China over border delimitation, have acted as irritants. With rapid membership expansion, new pressure points have emerged in recent years. For instance, during the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting on May 14-15 in New Delhi this year, there was no joint declaration due to objections to the draft language from some members over the ongoing conflict in West Asia. According to reports, Iran pushed for an explicit condemnation of violations of its sovereignty. In contrast, the UAE wanted a statement on attacks on commercial maritime vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. Evidently, the potential for conflict among new BRICS members complicates decision-making within the bloc and exacerbates existing internal contradictions.

However, convergence on all political and economic issues is neither expected nor desirable for BRICS. Rather, BRICS should focus on resilience by building a broader consensus on a limited set of achievable issues. This would include promoting trade in national currencies and greater cooperation among the central banks of member countries, ensuring proportional representation for developing countries in UN bodies, developing a digital sovereignty framework that respects data localisation, and maintaining principled opposition to external interference in regional affairs. As BRICS evolves in a complex multipolar environment, IERF's special report, "BRICS at a Crossroads," examines expert perspectives on the grouping's trajectory. It places special emphasis on understanding what membership in BRICS entails for member states, giving voice to new members as well as those from the Global South. Throughout, the report raises an important yet unanswered question: can BRICS realistically shape norms and, in what ways, can it shape global governance in the coming decades? Will BRICS remain a complementary forum within an existing but fraying order?

The following sections comprise the responses of six leading IR experts from BRICS countries to the set of questions around BRICS shared by IERF.

Russia, China, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia are full members of BRICS, whereas Kazakhstan holds partner country status. The BRICS partner country status was created during the Sixteenth BRICS summit held in Kazan, Russia, in 2024.

BRICS EXPERT INSIGHTS



Irina Bajaj, Russia

“BRICS has the potential to become one of the core regulatory institutions of the emerging multipolar order. Its innovative significance lies in its pursuit of coordination through negotiated balance rather than hierarchy.”

Q1) BRICS has expanded rapidly in recent years and operates in an increasingly fragmented world order. From your national perspective, how do you assess BRICS' significance in a multipolar world? Has BRICS evolved into a coherent multilateral platform with shared strategic purposes, or does it remain primarily a forum for symbolic solidarity with limited institutional depth?

The significance of BRICS is not that it creates multipolarity; It is already an objective reality. The more difficult task is to make it governable. A world composed of several sovereign centres of power, without mechanisms for reconciling their interests, risks producing fragmentation rather than a stable international order. This is where the strategic significance of BRICS lies. It represents an attempt to institutionalise polycentrism without reproducing hegemony: coordination without subordination and collective influence without a dominant power prescribing others' political choices. In this sense, BRICS has the potential to become one of the core regulatory institutions of the emerging multipolar order.

Whether BRICS has become coherent must not be taken as a contradiction. The members differ on individual conflicts, regional priorities and relations with other centres of power. But a broader convergence already exists: sovereign equality, a more representative distribution of international decision-making power, and opposition to the monopolisation of global governance by any single centre. Moreover, BRICS should not be measured against the institutional density of the European Union or the strategic discipline of military alliances. Its innovative significance lies in its pursuit of coordination through negotiated balance rather than hierarchy. It has moved beyond symbolic solidarity, but its institutional capacity has not yet caught up with its political weight. The challenge now is to convert growing polycentric power into effective collective agency, without sacrificing the sovereignty that gives BRICS its legitimacy.

Q2. Intra-BRICS cooperation has been complicated by bilateral issues among members since its founding. How do you assess the ability of BRICS to function as a genuinely cooperative platform amid the divergent geopolitical interests of its members? Does BRICS provide a productive framework for managing such tensions, or does it paper over them?

BRICS has demonstrated a genuine, although necessarily selective, capacity for cooperation amid geopolitical divergence. Its effectiveness should not be measured by whether members develop identical positions, but by whether differences in one area prevent cooperation in others. This distinction is important. BRICS neither resolves bilateral disputes nor claims to do so. Territorial disputes, regional competition, and differences over international crises remain primarily addressed through bilateral diplomacy and other appropriate mechanisms. To attribute a conflict-resolution function to BRICS would therefore impose upon it a mandate it was never designed to exercise.

BRICS contribute differently: they limit the multilateral spillover of bilateral disagreements. It provides a framework in which states can preserve fundamental differences while continuing cooperation where interests genuinely converge. This is not the elimination of contradiction, but its functional compartmentalisation. From the Russian perspective, this is particularly relevant to multipolarity. A polycentric international system necessarily contains autonomous centres of power with overlapping and competing interests. If geopolitical alignment were a prerequisite for institutional cooperation, genuinely multipolar institutions would be impossible.

Consensus consequently serves not merely as a decision-making procedure, but as an institutional safeguard: it ensures that cooperation cannot be transformed into political subordination. Therefore, the real test of BRICS is not whether Russia, India, China, Brazil, Iran or other members cease to disagree. It is whether those disagreements prevent cooperation where interests converge. Thus far, they have not. BRICS should therefore be understood neither as resolving nor concealing geopolitical differences, but as institutionalising the capacity to cooperate in their presence.

Q3. India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 is built around the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability". From your national perspective, which of these pillars is most urgent for BRICS to deliver on? If you could recommend one concrete policy reform or institutional change to strengthen BRICS in future, what would it be and why?

Among the four priorities of India's 2026 Presidency, resilience is the most urgent because it provides the foundation for the other three. Innovation, cooperation and sustainability cannot be sustained if trade, investment, technology or critical supply chains remain excessively vulnerable to external disruption. From the Russian perspective, resilience should be understood more broadly than protection against external shocks. It is also institutional: can BRICS preserve continuity and translate collective decisions into outcomes as its membership expands and its agenda becomes more complex? Political weight without implementation capacity ultimately produces limited strategic influence.

This suggests one practical reform: a BRICS implementation review mechanism without creating a supranational bureaucracy. Its mandate would be narrow— to conduct a periodic implementation audit of major commitments: what has been agreed, what has actually been delivered, where implementation is blocked, and which initiatives should be consolidated or discontinued. Such a mechanism would possess no independent political authority. Decisions would remain with member states and continue to be taken by consensus. Its purpose would be to provide institutional memory without institutional hierarchy, while preserving continuity between rotating presidencies. BRICS has already demonstrated its political attractiveness; the greater risk now is an implementation gap between collective ambition and collective capacity.

Irina Bajaj graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), specialising in International Relations and multilateral diplomacy, and pursued European Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University). She has worked with UNDP and Russia's Ministry of Economic Development, focusing on Russia–India relations, defence cooperation, and BRICS.



Peng Bo, China

“BRICS is an inclusive global platform that advocates diverse participation rather than replacing existing international institutions with a hegemonic logic. Despite moderate institutional depth, its expansion gives greater space to Global South issues”

Q1. BRICS has expanded rapidly in recent years and operates in an increasingly fragmented world order. From your national perspective, how do you assess BRICS’ significance in a multipolar world? Has BRICS evolved into a coherent multilateral platform with shared strategic purposes, or does it remain primarily a forum for symbolic solidarity with limited institutional depth?

From my perspective, BRICS carries great significance amid a multipolar and fragmented global order. It has effectively boosted the participation of Global-South nations, which are often selectively overlooked or ignored by Western powers in global governance. Designed as an inclusive rather than exclusive mechanism, BRICS advocates for diverse participation rather than replacing existing international institutions with a hegemonic logic. Though it delivers tangible cooperation outcomes, it has not yet evolved into a tightly aligned multilateral platform with unified strategic objectives. Divergent national interests persist among members, so it still partly functions as a forum for Global-South solidarity with moderate institutional depth. Even so, its expansion reshapes the global discourse space, offering Global-South states a vital venue to voice shared positions and push for fairer global governance.

Q2. Intra-BRICS cooperation has been complicated by bilateral issues among members since its founding. How do you assess the ability of BRICS to function as a genuinely cooperative platform amid the divergent geopolitical interests of members? Does BRICS provide a productive framework for managing such tensions, or does it paper over them?

BRICS is constrained by members' disparate geopolitical interests and lingering bilateral frictions, which prevent full-fledged strategic unity across the grouping. It does not resolve fundamental bilateral disputes among participants, yet it is far more than a mechanism that merely papers over tensions. Offering a productive consultation-centred framework, BRICS provides regular summit-level and working-group channels for members to communicate, mitigate risks and seek common ground amid differences. Rather than forcing uniform geopolitical stances, it prioritises pragmatic cooperation in trade, development financing and global governance reform, allowing members to pursue shared practical interests while reserving disagreements on bilateral or geopolitical matters. Though consensus frequently demands compromise and sensitive bilateral conflicts remain untouched, BRICS demonstrates that diverse major powers can sustain meaningful multilateral cooperation without complete geopolitical alignment, which demonstrates a new paradigm for international relations.

Q3. India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 is built around the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability". From your national perspective, which of these pillars is most urgent for BRICS to deliver on? If you could recommend one concrete policy reform or institutional change to strengthen BRICS in future, what would it be and why?

From my perspective, cooperation is the most urgent pillar of India's 2026 BRICS presidency. Human society is undergoing rapid transformation as technologies such as AI reshape global production. Rather than magnifying inter-state conflicts, BRICS should advance cooperation to build new models of collective progress. Many current international frictions are legacies of World War II, demonstrating that Western-dominated order and mindsets have failed to address shared global challenges. BRICS members should explore fresh collaborative frameworks suited to the intelligent era. As a practical institutional reform, I may propose introducing a BRICS Business Card modelled on the APEC Card. This initiative would streamline cross-border mobility for business professionals, facilitate people-to-people exchanges and boost intra-BRICS trade and investment. It delivers tangible, low-cost gains, fostering trust and deepening practical cooperation amid geopolitical complexities.

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Boris Zabolotsky, Brazil

“BRICS’ model of cohesion is not based on homogeneity of interests, but on the capacity to generate convergence and build cooperation mechanisms across select areas. It’s this flexibility that allows BRICS to navigate a polarised international order”

Q1. BRICS has expanded rapidly in recent years and operates in an increasingly fragmented world order. From your national perspective, how do you assess BRICS’ significance in a multipolar world? Has BRICS evolved into a coherent multilateral platform with shared strategic purposes, or does it remain primarily a forum for symbolic solidarity with limited institutional depth?

BRICS is increasingly important in shaping a multipolar international order, but its relevance shouldn’t be judged by the same yardstick we use for Western institutions like the EU or NATO. BRICS was never meant to produce homogenised interests or build a fully institutionalised, supranational structure. Its strength lies precisely in its ability to accommodate different perspectives, interests, and development models. Flexible, informal forms of cooperation are essential in a world that is becoming more fragmented and shaped by a hegemonic transition. BRICS enables convergence among countries with very different historical trajectories, political systems and interests, without having to give up what makes them distinct. So I wouldn’t call it simply a forum for symbolic solidarity. Its cohesion needs to be understood differently, not as homogeneity of interests, but as the capacity to generate convergence on specific points and build cooperation mechanisms across different areas. This model, still without any comparable precedent, does come with challenges, but it also represents a potentially innovative way of organising international cooperation. And it’s exactly that flexibility that could give BRICS real traction for navigating an international order that keeps getting more polarised and fragmented.

Q2. Intra-BRICS cooperation has been complicated by bilateral issues among members since its founding. How do you assess the ability of BRICS to function as a genuinely cooperative platform amid the divergent geopolitical interests of its members? Does BRICS provide a productive framework for managing such tensions, or does it paper over them?

The geopolitical divergences among BRICS members are undoubtedly significant and difficult to resolve. However, I do not believe that they necessarily prevent the group from functioning. What the BRICS demonstrates is that it is possible to build shared cooperative agendas even when there is no consensus on broader geopolitical issues. In this sense, I believe that the main merit of the BRICS lies not in resolving disputes among its members, but in preventing these disputes from determining the group's agenda. In this case, there is a kind of compartmentalisation of cooperation: certain conflicts remain at the bilateral level, while states identify areas where their interests can be articulated collectively. When an issue involves directly conflicting strategic interests, it becomes much more difficult to produce common positions or coordinated actions. At the same time, I would avoid saying that the group simply "papers over" its divergences. Many of these differences are externally driven, seeking to generate fragmentation within the group. As long as the BRICS can focus on what unites the group rather than what divides it, there will be progress for all those involved. This is why an increasing number of countries have expressed interest in joining the group. The ability to maintain channels of dialogue and cooperation despite conflicts of interest already constitutes a form of tension management. The success of the BRICS, therefore, should not be measured by its ability to eliminate differences, but by its ability to prevent them from undermining cooperation in other areas.

Q3. India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 is built around the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability". From your national perspective, which of these pillars is most urgent for BRICS to deliver on? If you could recommend one concrete policy reform or institutional change to strengthen BRICS in future, what would it be and why?

From the Brazilian perspective, it is not possible to rank these pillars in order of importance. All of them are important and address different challenges facing the world and the BRICS countries themselves. However, considering the current international context and the ongoing expansion of the BRICS, I believe that the main challenge is to develop mechanisms capable of responding to the Trump administration's unilateral policies, the intensification of the trade war, and the use of sanctions as instruments of international pressure. These coercive instruments are not entirely new; some BRICS member states have faced such pressure for years. I believe that Brazil can use intra-BRICS consultations to engage in dialogue with these countries and learn from their experiences to respond to the policy of encirclement embodied in the "Donroe Doctrine" (an adaptation of the historical Monroe Doctrine by President Donald Trump) in South America. In this sense, the Indian Presidency should place at the centre of its agenda the development of mechanisms that allow BRICS countries to reduce their vulnerability to these measures and strengthen

their capacity for collective action. This could involve, for example, deepening trade and financing mechanisms in local currencies, strengthening alternatives to financial systems subject to external pressure, and creating coordination mechanisms in response to unilateral coercive measures. I recommend establishing a permanent BRICS mechanism for economic and financial coordination to address sanctions, tariff barriers, and other unilateral measures affecting Global South countries.

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Dylan Mangani, South Africa

“The emergence of BRICS represents a desire for a post-liberal governance framework. The grouping exhibits a motivation for fostering greater South-South cooperation by offering alternative avenues for accessing international development finance”

Q1. BRICS has expanded rapidly in recent years and operates in an increasingly fragmented world order. From your national perspective, how do you assess BRICS’ significance in a multipolar world? Has BRICS evolved into a coherent multilateral platform with shared strategic purposes, or does it remain primarily a forum for symbolic solidarity with limited institutional depth?

The emergence of BRICS may be attributed to a desire for a post-liberal governance framework and a determination to break free from the dominance of the Global North. Additionally, BRICS exhibits a distinct motivation for fostering greater South-South co-

operation, particularly through its representation of key regions within the Global South—Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In this context, BRICS signifies a departure from the traditional international financial system led by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), towards a novel mode of engagement that offers alternative avenues for accessing international public development finance. Consequently, institutional endeavours such as the New Development Bank showcase BRICS' ability to wield soft power instruments, thereby contributing to the advent of multipolarity in global financial governance. This evolution highlights how developing regions across the globe have been exposed to novel experiences, resources, and perspectives on the priorities of emerging powers.

Q2. Intra-BRICS cooperation has been complicated by bilateral issues among members since its founding. How do you assess the ability of BRICS to function as a genuinely cooperative platform amid the divergent geopolitical interests of its members? Does BRICS provide a productive framework for managing such tensions, or does it paper over them?

The emergence of the BRICS+ consortium arose from a complex relationship between and among its member states, characterised by both interdependence and zero-sum dynamics. These relationships have been characterised by economic and cultural exchanges, as well as political collaboration in different regions, but geopolitical conflicts have also marked them. To a larger extent, BRICS is yet to cross the Rubicon to establish a productive framework for managing intra-consortium tensions. However, it is important to point out that these tensions have not escalated into full-scale confrontations that threaten the consortium's existence. It can be classified as healthy tension that is competitive and not confrontational. The fundamental distinction is that, for example, both China and India strive for regional dominance in Asia; therefore, their cooperation is often portrayed as aligned, given their membership in the BRICS+ bloc and their bilateral ties. However, this cooperation lacks regularised and institutionalised frameworks. Thus, this gap necessitates a focus on geopolitical rivalry characterised by three indicators: resource conflicts, strategic rivalries, and border–territorial disputes.

Q3. India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 is built around the theme “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability”. From your national perspective, which of these pillars is most urgent for BRICS to deliver on? If you could recommend one concrete policy reform or institutional change to strengthen BRICS in future, what would it be and why?

India's BRICS presidency is best built on the Resilience pillar. While the BRICS consortium has made significant progress in expanding its economic, political and cultural reach, its political, institutional and global capital largely depends on its ability to build resilience-shock mechanisms that enable its member states and those affiliated with the consortium to withstand internal and external shocks. The ideological thrust is that resilience should be conceptualised and operationalised beyond crisis management to a brand-new

approach that integrates productive and institutional capacity to build strategic autonomy while reducing structural dependencies.

Regarding its conceptual approach, India should build its resilience framework around consolidating the BRICS' institutional, technological, cultural, political and economic capacities to withstand global shocks -climate risks, geopolitical tensions, coercive and illegal sanctions, supply chain disruptions, and global health pandemics. Some of these recommendations include exploring the establishment of the 'BRICS Plus Implementation & Policy Coordination Cluster' with an independent scope, separate from summit declarations, rotational annual presidencies, and ministerial roles. Rather, this cluster works as part of the consortium's permanent structures in coordinating and measuring progress.

Dylan Mangani is a Director at the African Prosperity and Governance Agenda and holds a PhD from the University of Venda in South Africa. Originally from Zimbabwe, he specialises in international security and governance studies and has research interests in BRICS and the Global South. He is currently a fellow at Africa Political Outlook and an editorial board member of the BRICS Journal of International Relations and Development.



Sellita, Indonesia

“*In a Polycentric international system, BRICS is shaping a new global distribution of power. Its significance lies in strategic cooperation, consensus-based collaboration, and a shared voice of the Global South*”

Q1. BRICS has expanded rapidly in recent years and operates in an increasingly fragmented world order. From your national perspective, how do you assess BRICS' significance in a multipolar world? Has BRICS evolved into a coherent multilateral platform with shared strategic purposes, or does it remain primarily a forum for symbolic solidarity with limited institutional depth?

In a polycentric international system, BRICS appears as an informal bloc among the main international actors, shaping a new global distribution of power. In the new global economic order, the rise of BRICS adds a transformative dimension to an order long dominated by Western institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. BRICS expansion through the BRICS Plus members echoes the voice of Global South countries, seeking more equitable representation in global economic governance (which is dominated by the G7). The significance lies in strategic cooperation, consensus-based collaboration, and a shared voice in global affairs. In economic reform, BRICS nations are progressively shifting toward settling bilateral trade in national currencies rather than creating a single unified BRICS currency, as supported by the NDB.

Additionally, BRICS has enhanced bilateral cooperation, such as Indonesia and India discussing strategic cooperation spanning data centres, digital industrial transformation, and semiconductors. Through multilateral platforms, BRICS serves as a forum for emerging powers, articulating common positions on issues such as sustainable development, climate change, energy, food security, health, technology, and international finance. However, despite its potential to address geopolitical uncertainties, BRICS has evolved into a coherent

and unified multilateral platform. Although BRICS does not share a unified political agenda, its main principle remains respect for each member's national interest. The BRICS agenda focuses on a flexible coalition of convenience and a strategic platform for the Global South rather than a tightly integrated, coherent, or unified multilateral alliance.

Q2. Intra-BRICS cooperation has been complicated by bilateral issues among members since its founding. How do you assess the ability of BRICS to function as a genuinely cooperative platform amid the divergent geopolitical interests of members? Does BRICS provide a productive framework for managing such tensions, or does it paper over them?

Since its inception, BRICS has not been designed as a military alliance or a monolithic political bloc, but rather as a pragmatic, interest-based platform or issue-based coalition. Its cooperation is grounded in the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states, while maintaining a distinction between bilateral and multilateral relations. Although BRICS members may adopt different approaches to foreign policy and its implementation, the grouping provides a constructive framework for cooperation by establishing shared parameters, particularly in economic governance and financial security. BRICS cooperation focuses on mutually agreed-upon agendas, including the reform of global financial governance, efforts toward gradual de-dollarisation, and the strengthening of the collective position and voice of the Global South. In this context, BRICS summits also provide a relatively neutral forum in which member states can engage in dialogue without the direct influence or pressure of Western states and institutions. This facilitates back-channel diplomacy, enabling BRICS members to explore areas of convergence while managing differences and preserving their respective national interests. Meanwhile, there is no productive framework for managing such tensions yet. However, in my opinion, the BRICS agenda could become increasingly complex as the focus shifts from strengthening economic resilience and the role of its members in global governance to addressing internal conflict and political interests among members.

Q3. India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 is built around the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability". From your national perspective, which of these pillars is most urgent for BRICS to deliver on? If you could recommend one concrete policy reform or institutional change to strengthen BRICS in the future, what would it be and why?

Fragmented supply chains, unilateral economic sanctions, and vulnerabilities in food and energy security characterise the current global landscape. For developing countries like Indonesia and other members of the Global South, the rhetoric of "innovation" or "sustainability" cannot succeed without a robust fundamental economy. BRICS must prioritise an agenda focused on the resilience of food and energy supply chains, insulating them from geopolitical disruptions and global uncertainties. Furthermore, safeguarding economic resilience against international sanctions and embargoes is crucial. One of the most strategic institutional moves to strengthen BRICS for the future is the establishment of a BRICS

Permanent Secretariat, equipped with a protocol for the non-political resolution of disputes. The Secretariat would serve two primary functions: first, managing the standardisation of finance, trade, and economic dispute mechanisms—such as payment systems and tariff barriers; and second, harmonising economic regulations, including standards for customs, logistics, and investment. These measures aim to accelerate the transformation of BRICS from a forum into a strategic institution. Additionally, any schemes proposed through the Secretariat would be based on consensus and would not be legally binding if they conflict with national interests or non-aligned principles.

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Islam Supyaldiyarov, Kazakhstan

“Kazakhstan’s position within BRICS is one among several avenues through which Astana pursues strategic autonomy. BRICS partner country status is a modest addition to its Multi-vector diplomacy”

Q1. Kazakhstan joined BRICS as a partner country rather than a full member — a new and still-undefined category within the grouping’s architecture. From your perspective, what meaningful engagement does partner-country status offer Kazakhstan?

Kazakhstan’s partner-country status was designed without settled content, and this is more useful to Astana than a fixed template would be. The category exists precisely because BRICS could not agree on what a “partner” should be obligated to do. That unresolved argument, not any deliberate design for Astana’s benefit, is what creates the room Kazakhstan is now using. Partner status carries no obligation to align with BRICS positions on contested geopolitical questions, no vote on admission or declarations and no fixed insti-

tutional entitlements, but it does provide standing to attend ministerial and sherpa-level meetings, engage selectively with the New Development Bank and signal participation in Global South coalition-building without foreclosing other options. For a state whose foreign policy doctrine explicitly rejects binding blocs, that is a feature rather than an oversight.

The risk is that ambiguity can just as easily mean marginality: partner countries do not participate in the agreement process, and nothing in the current architecture guarantees that partner-country views shape the agenda rather than simply endorsing it after the fact. Astana should therefore treat the status as a probationary and exploratory arrangement, not as a stepping stone with a predetermined endpoint. Whether it evolves toward deeper institutional access will depend less on Kazakhstan's preferences than on how BRICS itself resolves the unfinished argument between expansion and coherence.

Kazakhstan's interest lies in using this phase to test specific, bounded forms of cooperation, such as NDB project financing, sectoral dialogues on connectivity and critical minerals, while resisting pressure, external or self-generated, to read partner status as an implicit alignment. The value of the category lies precisely in the fact that it does not require Kazakhstan to decide, yet Astana's task is to keep it that way for as long as the optionality remains worth more than the clarity.

Q2.Kazakhstan sits geographically and strategically between two of BRICS's most powerful members — Russia and China. To what extent does BRICS provide Kazakhstan with a productive framework for navigating these overlapping dependencies? How do you assess BRICS's ability to accommodate the interests of Middle Powers caught between its dominant members?

BRICS does not give Kazakhstan a mechanism to balance Russia against China, and framing it that way misreads both the grouping and Kazakhstan's own position. Astana's dependencies on Moscow and Beijing are structural, such as transit infrastructure, energy transmission, labour migration, security arrangements and asymmetric trade volumes, and no multilateral platform removes them. What a wider forum can do is embed those bilateral relationships in a setting where Brazil, India, South Africa and others also have standing, which marginally reduces the salience of any single bilateral tie and creates alternative channels for economic and diplomatic contact that do not run exclusively through Beijing or Moscow.

This dilution effect should not be overstated. BRICS decision-making still reflects the preferences of its largest economies, and there is no evidence that middle powers or partner countries have meaningfully redirected the bloc's agenda on issues where China and Russia have converging interests. Kazakhstan's agency inside BRICS is therefore best understood as incremental and issue-specific, useful for diversifying financing sources or trade partners at the margins, rather than as a structural counterweight to bilateral asymmetry.

The more accurate description of Kazakhstan's position is that BRICS is one additional venue among several through which Astana pursues strategic autonomy, none of which is sufficient on its own. Multi-vector diplomacy is a portfolio strategy, and BRICS partner status is a modest addition to that portfolio, not a substitute for direct management of the Russia and China relationships.

Q3. India's 2026 BRICS Presidency prioritises resilience, cooperation, innovation and sustainability — themes that resonate differently across the grouping's diverse membership. From Kazakhstan's perspective as a resource-rich, landlocked partner country seeking connectivity and economic diversification, which of these pillars matters most and why?

Among all these factors, resilience carries the most direct analytical weight for Kazakhstan, because it is the pillar that maps onto the country's core structural constraint: landlockedness. For Kazakhstan, resilience is inseparable from transport and trade-route diversification, the expansion of the TITR, alongside continued use of northern and southern routes, so that no single corridor or single neighbour determines market access.

This is not simply an infrastructure agenda. Route diversification affects pricing power, exposure to disruption and ultimately Kazakhstan's capacity to negotiate terms with any single partner; it is where connectivity becomes a component of strategic autonomy rather than a technical logistics question. The same logic extends to digital infrastructure and critical minerals, where diversified processing and export arrangements reduce dependence on any one buyer or transit state.

What BRICS and India can realistically contribute here is narrower than the rhetoric of "resilience" implies: potential NDB co-financing for specific corridor or logistics projects, coordination platforms for digital and customs harmonisation and political visibility for Middle Corridor development among a wider set of Global South economies. BRICS cannot itself resolve the financing gap, the multiplicity of transit-state negotiations or the geopolitical frictions along competing corridor routes. Kazakhstan's task is to treat BRICS as a supplementary channel for financing and visibility within a diversification strategy that must be pursued primarily through bilateral and regional instruments.

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The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent the views of India Eurasia Research Forum (IERF), unless explicitly stated otherwise.

BRICS India Survey 2026

Jyotsna Yadav and Kishan S.

The India Eurasia Research Forum (IERF) presents the ‘BRICS India Survey 2026’ to assess youth perception of BRICS in India. The survey, for the first time, comprehensively assesses perceptions of BRICS among India’s youth conversant in international affairs. The survey findings are discussed below.

3.1. General perceptions of Global Order

About 77.8% (42 responses) of participants perceive the current distribution of global power to be multipolar. A majority of participants perceive India as a major power (55.6%, 30 responses), while 40.7% (22 responses) consider it a middle power within this matrix. This highlights the perception of India as an important power in a growingly multipolar world.

Fig. 1 Current distribution of power in the international system

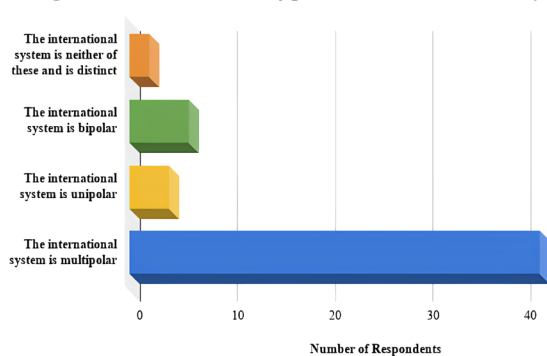
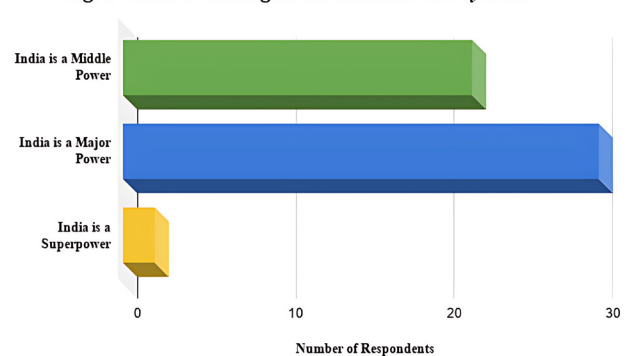


Fig. 2 India’s ranking in the international system?



3.2. Evaluations of BRICS as an Intergovernmental Forum

Almost 79.6% (43 responses) of participants perceive BRICS as a leading international forum, while only 20.4% (11 responses) view it as of minor or little significance. Economic and financial cooperation and being the voice of the Global South are perceived as important areas of cooperation, with a combined 77.7% (42 responses) of participants. In comparison, cultural and people-to-people exchanges are seen as the most important area by 13% (7 responses) of participants.

Fig. 3 First impression of BRICS as an intergovernmental grouping

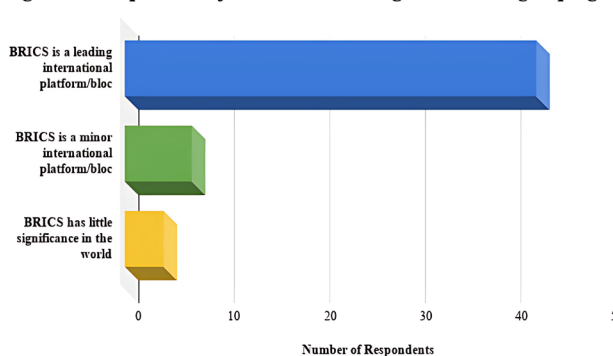
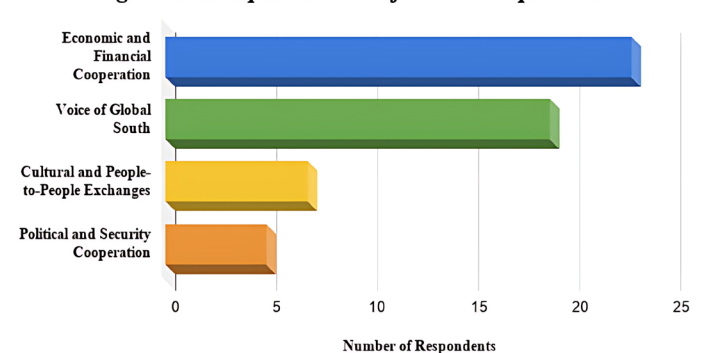
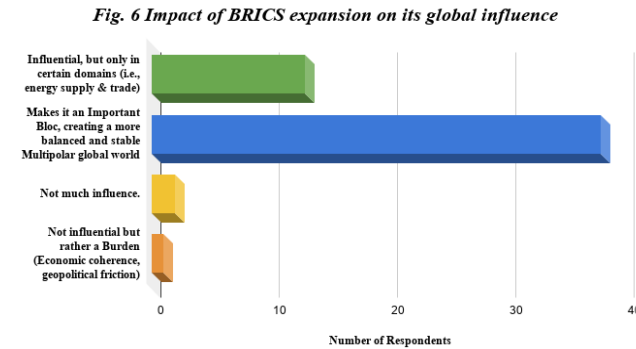
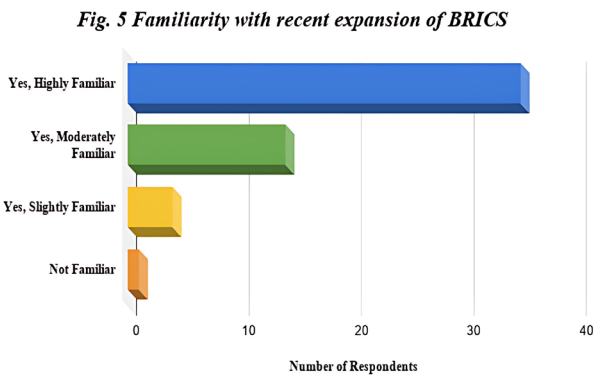


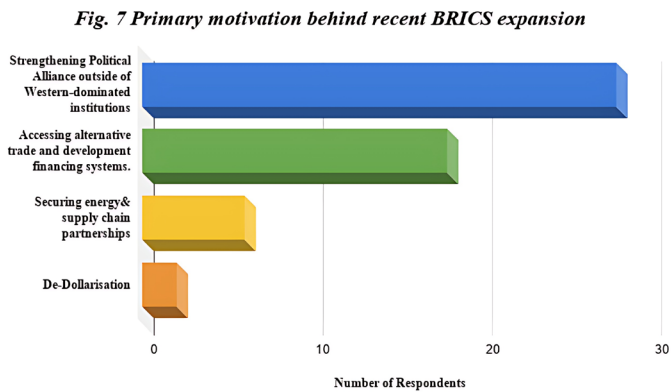
Fig. 4 Most important area of BRICS cooperation



90.7% of participants (49 responses) are either highly or moderately familiar with the recent BRICS expansion of including 6 new nations, namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE; the expansion is perceived by 70.4% (38 participants) to make the forum an important bloc in the creation of a more balanced and stable multipolar global order and 24.1% (13 responses) perceiving it to be influential in certain domains like energy supply and trade.



51.8% (28 responses) perceive the primary motivation for the expansion as strengthening political alliances outside Western-dominated institutions. In comparison, 33.3% (18 responses) see it as motivated by access to alternative trade and development financing systems, with only 3.7% (2 responses) citing de-dollarisation as a motive. This not only demonstrates a strong awareness of BRICS’ position and expansion in recent times but also a perception of the grouping as a leading international forum for economic and financial co-operation and as the voice of the global south.



An interesting contrast emerges where 51.8% perceive BRICS to strengthen political alliances outside the Western-dominated institutions, but only 9.3% perceive the expansion to be motivated by political reasons; this is symptomatic of India’s growing push for strategic autonomy even within non-Western global fora, highlighting the need for a unified global world order, not replacing the West with the East as the centre of the world.

3.3. India's approach towards BRICS

A majority of participants (90.7%, 49 responses) believe that BRICS either greatly promotes India's strategic autonomy or is one of many groupings that promote it. 96.3% (52 responses) of participants believe that India must lead the BRICS agenda and commit more resources; this is also the case for Russia, seen as India's closest ally (96.3%, 52 responses) before the expansion, a testament to Indo-Russian all-weather friendship. India is therefore perceived as an important actor that should lead the BRICS agenda and show greater commitment towards the bloc.

Fig. 8 BRICS and the promotion of India's strategic autonomy and prestige in the current international system

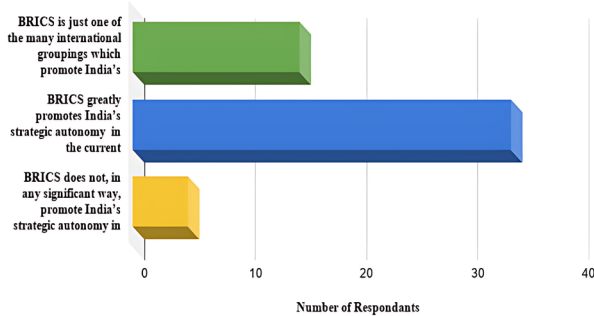


Fig. 9 India taking the lead on BRICS Agenda

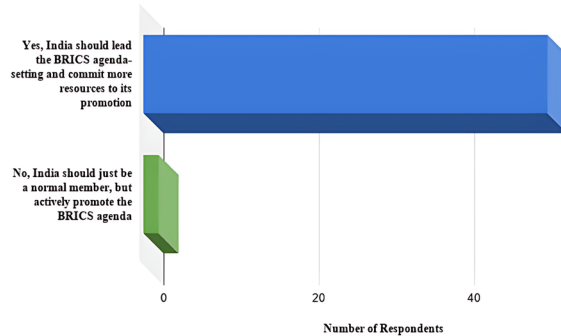
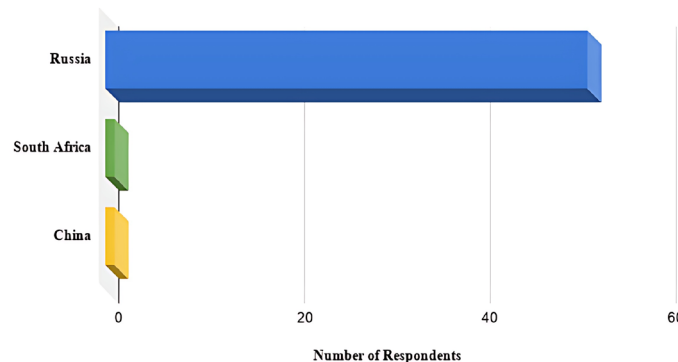


Fig. 10 India's closest ally within BRICS before expansion



The survey findings demonstrate a well-informed awareness of the global order and BRICS among Indian youth, who view BRICS as an important global grouping that fosters a non-Western vision of the world order, with India as a key participant. It also reflects the need for inclusion and diversification of global institutions to create a more just and equitable multipolar world order.

3.4. A Note on Survey Methodology

The BRICS India Survey 2026 is an exploratory, quantitative descriptive study designed to map Indian youth's perceptions and attitudes toward BRICS. Given the study's objective - to provide a pulse check rather than a statistically representative data analysis - the methodology employs non-probability convenience sampling with a sample size of 54 and asks respondents some fundamental questions. The sample comprises students pursuing university degrees at the undergraduate or postgraduate level (68.5%) or engaged in doctoral research (31.5%), with the majority aged 22-31 (73.2%).

Fig. 11 Level of Education of Respondents

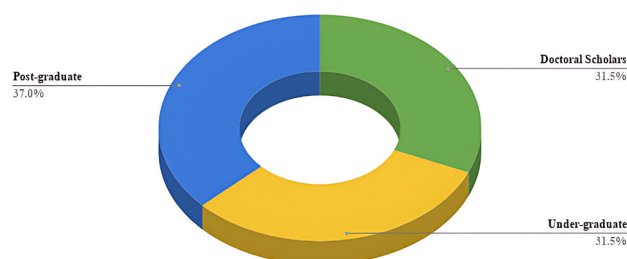
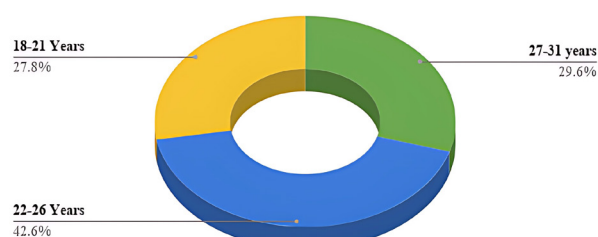


Fig. 12 Age of Respondents



The questionnaire design is structured to progress from general perceptions of global order to specific evaluations of BRICS as an intergovernmental forum and India's approach toward BRICS. By analysing this select segment of the Indian youth, the study identifies prevailing perspectives on India's BRICS presidency, prospects for intra-bloc cooperation, and the potential for deepening youth-to-youth connectivity, including a greater BRICS focus on promoting the study of the grouping through cross-cultural partnerships and university and think-tank connections.

Note: If you want to know more about the IERF BRICS 2026 Survey design or want access to the original survey sample, write to us at connect@indiaeurasia.org

POLICY ON DISCLOSURES

6.1. A Note on IERF's AI Fair Use Policy

Acknowledging the indispensability of AI tools in academic writing, IERF declares that this special report has used Grammarly Pro to improve the draft's language. The graphs in the IERF BRICS Survey have been created using first-hand data collected via a Google Form and generated with online graph-making tools.

6.2. Funding Disclosure

IERF declares that it received no institutional funding, government or private, towards the writing or production of this report. The report is originally conceptualised, designed and typeset by the IERF's in-house editorial team. If you are interested in contributing towards our goal of promoting research and dialogue between India and Eurasia, write to us at connect@indiaeurasia.org or get in touch with our founders.

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India Eurasia Research Forum (IERF) is a New Delhi-based independent research and public-diplomacy initiative dedicated to the comprehensive study of the Eurasian region. IERF aims to bridge the intellectual and strategic gap between India and Eurasia, a vast region comprising Russia, Greater Central Asia and the Caucasus. At IERF, we operate at the intersection of scholarly rigour and diplomatic engagement through cutting-edge research and public diplomacy initiatives. Together, we are building India's first Eurasia-focused research network, bringing together scholars, policy experts, and emerging voices to explore the political, economic, strategic, and cultural dimensions shaping India's engagement with Eurasia.

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