

BRICS's Role Amidst Global Liberal Decline

Liberal democracies are facing serious challenges in the Global North. The emergence of rightist groups has affected the democracy in its homeland, the United States and Western Europe. The retreat of liberal democracy on a global level is the new writing on the wall. In such a scenario, emerging democracies are a ray of hope for democracy across the globe.

Brazil, India, and South Africa as democratic BRICS can be role models for the developing world. But geopolitically, BRICS core idea to reform multilateral fora remains its biggest challenge. The major question is whether BRICS as emerging states in economic growth - and their interests for a multi-polar international system - are enough factors to make it a relevant international actor in world politics.

"It would be possible to think that BRICS countries would not be a meaningful issue were it not for the understanding that the international order constructed by the WEST since the beginning of 16th century is now being challenged by these so-called rising powers. Therefore, discussing the BRICS countries and BRICS as an institution means discussing a change in the international order, and the relative decline of the US dominant position in that order." (Kakonen, 2014)^[i]

Each of the democratic BRICS can play this role actively if they could manage their internal political and economic crisis. BRICS countries have claimed to be clear about their intentions to cooperate in business, media, and civil society groups, as well as to focus on government interactions. The 11th BRICS summit report published in 2020 reads about the efforts made for cooperation to play this role.

"Brazil, under the theme of the summit 'BRICS: Economic Growth for an innovative future', aimed to promote deliverables that would have a direct impact on lives of societies and to emphasize and maximize what BRICS means to all people; while emphasizing the equal role and participation of the BRICS countries." (Muresan, 2020)^[ii]

The summit also declared a clear position on BRICS partnership on strengthening and reforming the multilateral system, improvement in economic and financial cooperation, focus on regional issues within geopolitical context, and refining intra-BRICS cooperation.

Brazil and South Africa have been successfully projecting themselves as regional and global middle powers. Although these two states are facing the challenge of countering corruption and are engaged in re-activating their economic growth, both countries have the potential to emerge as role models for the developing states of the Global South. The case of India varies from these two states. India had been well-positioned among the democratic BRICS to play an important role for the Global South. India was in a good position to play a model role at a regional level, as well as a global middle power. Unfortunately, the recent political and economic challenges that India has been facing clearly suggest that it can no longer play such a role in current circumstances. In recent years Indian democracy has been experiencing a breakdown under extremist-right wing Bhartiya Janata Party. Indian democracy is continuously declining following the country's strong shift towards majoritarianism. Civil rights, media freedom, economic equality, and religious freedom are under serious threat under the Modi government. Religious minorities and other weaker sections of Indian society are facing a threat to their basic survival.

The basic challenge for democratic BRICS is to form a collective platform for teaming up to play an active role on issues related to democratic rights and liberties. Scholars have been questioning the ability of democratic BRICS to form a pro-democracy coalition at the global level.

"The analysis of democratic BRICS perhaps adds to the uncertainty and unpredictability concerning the future of democratic politics on a global scale and notably in the context of the Global South." (Ziya & Alper, 2018)^[iii]

Democratic BRICS have accomplished significant success in creating cross-regional cooperation, besides emerging as important regional and global middle powers. Despite the uncertain and unpredictable scenario, these countries have the potential to serve as role models in the global context.

“BRICS are causing changes in the architecture of international development cooperation, not only with regard to trade and financial flows but also as emerging donors.”^[iv]

-

Challenges as Role Models

In an economic sense there is no doubt that the international order is already changing. China, Brazil and India are expected to continue their economic growth. The middle-range powers all over the world are becoming increasingly important. This change in the rankings of economic order has been challenging the role and influence of current leading economic powers. But there are many challenges to this changing role played by emerging economies like that of BRICS. Their underlying domestic problems surrounding corruption and socio-economic mismanagements serve as one major challenge to tackle. *“Even though Brazil, South Africa and India are all consolidated democracies with considerable rights and liberties, their capacity to act as a role model for the developing countries, is restricted by their underlying domestic problems. These challenges include widespread corruption, creeping majoritarianism, severe socioeconomic inequalities and, particularly in the cases of Brazil and South Africa, stagnant economic growth.”* (Ziya & Alper, 2018)^[v]

Another important challenge for democratic BRICS is the dilemma of being caught between non-democratic BRICS and the Global North. Being representatives of the Global South, they are collaborating with China and Russia, but they are committed to liberal democratic values of the Global North. This dilemma has put democratic BRICS in a situation of collective action problems, limiting their role model capabilities.

Maintaining the continuous democratic trajectory and press freedom is another challenging factor for democratic BRICS to serve as a role model for emerging democracies in the Global South. All three countries are considered to be free democracies, with a good score of political and civil rights, and this has considerably improved since 1990. Press freedom has also increased considerably with an exception of India's worst performance.

“India's weak performance is rather striking and paradoxical given that it has the largest circulation of newspapers and numerous independent television stations in the world. Journalists find it hard to cover sensitive issues, such as Kashmir conflict, under increasing political pressure, which is in line with the growing evidence that press freedoms are in a process of being further undermined during the tenure of the current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.” (Ziya & Alper, 2018)^[vi]

Since Modi took office in 2014, concerns have grown for the rise of ultra-nationalist Hindu sentiments across the country. The recent legislation in the Indian parliament is sending alarming signals for the future of Indian democracy. Extremist tendencies in the Indian government are damaging the social harmony of the country. Indian minorities, particularly Muslims, are facing widespread discrimination at the hands of judicial, legislative, and administrative institutions.

It can be concluded that democratic BRICS are potential role models for the emerging democracies in the Global South. What must be addressed are the domestic socio-political and economic problems faced by the three countries, especially by India. If these countries could manage their domestic problems successfully, they could successfully be role models for emerging democracies of the world.

-

[i] Kakonen, Jyrki. (2014). “BRICS as a New Power in International Relations”. *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*.

[Vol. 6, No. 2 \(2014\), pp. 85-104.](#)

[\[ii\] Muresan, Arina. \(2020\). "Outcomes from the 11th BRICS Summit 2019". Institute for Global Dialogue \(2020\)](#)

[\[iii\] Ziya Öniş & Alper Sükrü Gençer \(2018\). "Democratic BRICS as role models in a shifting global order: inherent dilemmas and the challenges ahead". Third World Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 9 \(2018\)](#)

[\[iv\] Morazan, Pedro et al. \(2012\). "The Role of BRICS in the Developing World". Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Union.](#)

[\[v\] Ziya Öniş & Alper Sükrü Gençer \(2018\): Democratic BRICS as role models in a shifting global order: inherent dilemmas and the challenges ahead. Third World Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 9 \(2018\).](#)

[\[vi\] Ibid.](#)

—