

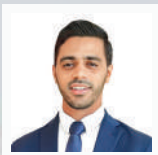


AFRICAN NARRATIVES

BRICS in Rio 2025: A Turning Point or Missed Opportunity for Africa?



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Summary

The 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro convened at a critical geopolitical moment, reflecting the bloc's expanding ambitions and its internal contradictions. With the inclusion of Egypt and Ethiopia, Africa's presence alongside founding member South Africa and key partners like Angola and Nigeria was more prominent than ever. However, despite this symbolic progress, the summit exposed major gaps between BRICS's declared goals and its tangible outcomes. The absence of key leaders and the bloc's weak institutional structures revealed an underlying fragility, while Africa remained largely

on the periphery of core financial and policy initiatives. The New Development Bank has yet to fund African projects, and calls for equitable financing and food security lacked concrete plans. Still, the summit highlighted Africa's rising awareness of its global role and the necessity of multipolar engagement. For the continent to benefit meaningfully, it must coordinate its positions and transition from symbolic participation to strategic action. The Rio summit, therefore, serves as both a wake-up call and a critical test for Africa's evolving place in a fractured global order.

Key Points

- **Strategic Timing:**

The summit occurred amid deep global realignments, offering BRICS a chance to redefine its global role while African nations sought to assert their agency in a multipolar world.

- **Expanded African Presence:**

Africa's involvement grew significantly with Egypt and Ethiopia as new members, marking a historic moment in BRICS-Africa relations and amplifying the continent's potential influence.

- **Weak Institutional Structure:**

The summit exposed BRICS's fragile institutional base and lack of enforcement mechanisms, limiting its capacity to deliver concrete outcomes or manage its growing internal diversity.

- **Symbolism Over Substance:**

Despite lofty rhetoric, the summit produced few tangible results for Africa. Key proposals on investment and development lacked timelines, funding, or clear implementation plans.

- **Persistent Disconnect:**

Africa remains marginal in BRICS's operational agenda, with limited inclusion in cooperation frameworks on critical issues like AI, climate, and health, highlighting a need for deeper structural integration.

- **Unmet Financial Promises:**

African countries prioritized alternative financing through BRICS, but the New Development Bank has yet to support African infrastructure or meaningfully address the continent's debt burdens.

- **Geopolitical Headwinds:**

Renewed threats of tariffs and sanctions from the United States create a difficult balancing act for African nations, complicating their efforts to pursue South-South partnerships without jeopardizing Western ties.

- **Internal African Disunity:**

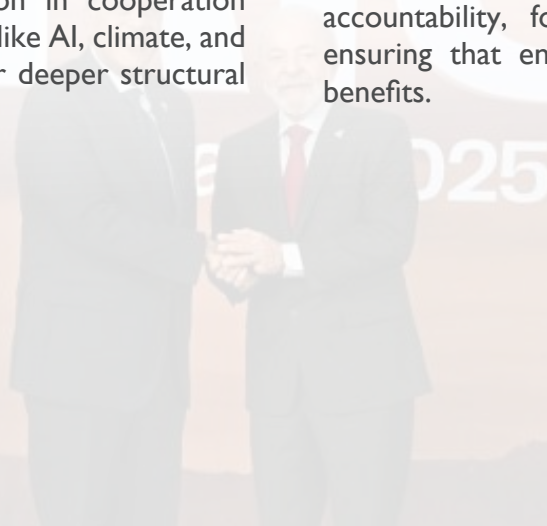
A fragmented approach, evident in the failure to reach a consensus on Security Council reform, continues to undermine Africa's collective influence within the bloc.

- **Selective Gains and Imbalances:**

Ethiopia emerged as a proactive actor advancing its national agenda, while other African members were more passive, revealing disparities in how states leverage their BRICS membership.

- **A Call for a Strategic Shift:**

The summit serves as a test case for Africa to move beyond observer status by demanding accountability, forming unified positions, and ensuring that engagement delivers measurable benefits.



Introduction

The 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro convened at a critical moment of geopolitical realignment. As the international system witnesses a surge in polarization and a decline in the credibility of traditional institutions, countries of the Global South are seeking to reassert their influence on the world stage. The Rio Summit was a key milestone in this endeavor, bringing together founding members, newly joined states, and partner countries in a collective attempt to build a multipolar bloc that reflects the priorities of the South. Represented by five politically and economically significant actors, the African continent had a major stake in this emerging coalition.

Africa's remarkable presence at the summit reflects the bloc's recent expansion. With Egypt and Ethiopia joining South Africa as full members, and Angola and Nigeria participating as key partners, the continent now holds a critical mass within the group. This provides Africa a rare opportunity to advance its developmental and security concerns in forums not dominated by Western powers. However, it also presents challenges, particularly regarding the continent's ability to articulate a unified vision amid internal disputes, such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) crisis, and starkly different governance models.

The summit highlighted a core tension within BRICS: the imbalance between its rapid expan-

sion and its weak institutional structure. While some members view enlargement as a path toward multipolarity, others fear it will deepen internal divisions and undermine the group's effectiveness. This dilemma is compounded by geopolitical friction among members, such as the China-India border conflict. The absence of the Chinese and Russian presidents further underscored the fragility of the bloc's cohesion. In this context, the ambition to construct a credible global alternative remains contingent on BRICS's ability to evolve from a flexible political alliance into an institution with effective mechanisms.

Despite the summit's limited tangible outcomes, Africa's presence signals a growing maturity in how the continent approaches global partnerships. Rather than relying solely on conditional Western support, African states are deepening their engagement with Global South alliances to seek greater policy autonomy. Yet, this raises critical questions about BRICS's readiness to fulfill this role. The bloc continues to suffer from divergent national priorities and a lack of a shared vision for reforming global institutions or launching concrete development initiatives for Africa. Turning the continent's symbolic presence in Rio into real gains will depend on a qualitative shift in BRICS's operational frameworks and its engagement with Africa.

1 "BRICS Countries Finalize Joint Statement Ahead of Leaders' Summit in Brazil"

Asharq Al-Awsat, July 6, 2025 <https://asharq.com/politics/141923>

2 Ronak Gopaldas, BRICS Summit 2025: will slow and steady actually win the race?, Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/brics-summit-2025-will-slow-and-steady-actually-win-the-race>

Cooperating
for an inclusive and
sustainable world.

BRICS
Brasil 2025



MINISTÉRIO DAS
RELAÇÕES
EXTERIORES
GOVERNO FEDERAL
BRASIL
UNIÃO E RECONSTRUÇÃO



Timing and Significance of the Summit

The BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro took place against a complex international backdrop of accelerating geopolitical transformations and mounting economic and security crises. This context gave the summit a strategic importance that transcended a routine gathering, marking a pivotal moment in the bloc's history:

The Rio summit was the first official gathering since the bloc's historic expansion, which brought in new members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. This unprecedented enlargement made the summit a foundational test of BRICS's capacity to absorb its internal disparities and manage the widening economic and political gaps between its members. It convened at a time when global institutions like the UN Security Council, IMF, and World Bank face a deep crisis of legitimacy, prompting countries of the Global South to explore alternative platforms. The summit's timing thus sent a political message that BRICS is positioning itself as a vehicle for reforming a global system misaligned with the current balance of power.

This positioning occurred amid rising East-West polarization. With the ongoing war in Ukraine and escalating tensions in East Asia, the Rio summit signaled BRICS's commitment to multipolarity and a pushback against Western efforts to

isolate some of its members. The timing also coincided with severe economic challenges facing many BRICS nations, including debt crises in Egypt and Ethiopia and economic slowdowns in Brazil and South Africa. This underscored a collective need to activate BRICS as a mechanism for mutual economic support, independent of Western-dominated financial institutions.

The summit also took place against a backdrop of renewed conflict in the Middle East and Africa, particularly the war in Gaza and intensifying violence in Sudan, the DRC, and Niger. The convergence of influential states like Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and Nigeria under the BRICS umbrella reflected a shared recognition that reliance on Western mediation is no longer sufficient to achieve regional stability. Furthermore, with Angola holding the 2025 presidency of the African Union, Africa's participation carried added symbolic weight, reinforcing the continent's pursuit of equitable partnerships rooted in investment and economic sovereignty rather than conditional aid.

The timing ultimately revealed a growing African awareness that the restructuring of the world order must include a strong African presence, making the Rio summit a strategic platform for renegotiating the terms of the continent's global integration.

3 Prakriti Gupta, "What Awaits the BRICS Group in the Era of Donald Trump?", Asharq Al-Awsat, <https://shorturl.at/vNV6l>

5 Priyal Singh, BRICS+ and the tricky business of balancing global geopolitics, iss africa, <https://issafrica.org/iss-to-day/brics-and-the-tricky-business-of-balancing-global-geopolitics>

4 Amid Divergences over Expansion, BRICS Countries Agree on Joint Declaration Ahead of Brazil Summit, Al Sharq, <https://shorturl.at/va3Ek>

6 Farouk Hussein Abo Deif, The Ripple Effect: How the Israeli-Iranian Escalation Impacts African Regional Security, African narratives, <https://africanarratives.org/the-ripple-effect-how-the-israeli-iranian-escalation-impacts-african-regional-security>

African Representation and Priorities at the Summit

The Rio summit was marked by a prominent African presence, reflecting the continent's growing ambition to shape the emerging global order. South Africa, as a founding member, played a central balancing role, while new members Egypt and Ethiopia sought to leverage BRICS for development and diplomatic positioning. Angola, as Chair of the African Union, represented the institutional voice of the continent, and Nigeria's participation as a partner signaled West Africa's growing engagement.

However, the summit revealed disparities in roles and priorities. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed delivered a prominent speech emphasizing a fairer global transformation, while the presidents of Egypt, the UAE, and Iran were absent, reflecting divergent expectations of what BRICS membership can deliver. Ethiopia positioned itself as a proactive player, strengthening its standing as a rising African voice within the bloc.

Despite this expanded presence, African states struggled to advance a common agenda. This was most evident on the issue of Security Council reform. While BRICS supported the candidacies of Brazil and India, the question of Africa's representation was left unresolved due to the failure of African states to reach a consensus on a candidate. This highlighted Africa's persistent lack of coordination in international forums, underscoring the reality that representation alone is insufficient without a cohesive front to convert presence into concrete results.

Africa's key priorities within BRICS centered on

reshaping its economic and financial relations on more equitable foundations. Chief among these were:

• Addressing Debt Burdens:

With many African countries allocating over 30% of their revenues to debt servicing, they look to BRICS and its New Development Bank (NDB) to provide alternative financing mechanisms that avoid the stringent conditionality of Western institutions.

• Financing Infrastructure:

Africa faces an annual infrastructure financing gap of around \$100 billion. The continent aims to leverage BRICS to fund strategic cross-border projects, such as economic corridors and energy grids, in alignment with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

• Strengthening Food Security:

Amid climate volatility and supply chain disruptions, African nations seek technology transfers and investment from BRICS partners like Brazil and China to boost agricultural productivity and support regional food reserves.

• Reforming Global Financial Architecture:

Africa remains underrepresented in institutions like the IMF and World Bank. Through BRICS, the continent seeks to advocate for a more balanced global financial system, including promoting the use of local currencies to reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar.

7 Mohamed Abdel Karim, "17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro Highlights Significant African Representation", Afro News24. <https://shorturl.at/S8S5h>

8 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro Highlights Significant African Representation, *ibid.*

9 Africa: Brics Bolsters Global South Influence in Rio De Janeiro, AllAfrica. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202507080446.html>



Challenges to the BRICS-Africa Partnership

While the BRICS-Africa partnership offers promise, it faces escalating structural and geopolitical challenges. Africa's engagement unfolds in a highly polarized environment, with mounting pressure from traditional powers like the United States, which perceives BRICS expansion as a threat. The prospect of renewed US protectionism, including tariffs and sanctions, creates a difficult balancing act for African nations trying to pursue South-South cooperation without jeopardizing vital relationships with Western partners.

• **Trump's Threats and Escalating U.S. Deterrence:** President Donald Trump's renewed public threats against BRICS members—including African states, whether full

members or partners—have revived the specter of economic warfare. He warned of imposing tariffs and sanctions on countries aligning with what he called “anti-American BRICS policies.” This cannot be separated from Washington's broader strategy to contain the bloc's rise, signaling a dual deterrence approach aimed at discouraging traditional allies, particularly in Africa, from deepening ties with BRICS. For African nations, this creates a difficult balancing act: pursuing the benefits of BRICS engagement without jeopardizing their vital relationships with Western partners, who remain key sources of aid and investment. Such pressure risks constraining African decision-making autonomy and undermining the continent's ability to pursue alternative strategic alliances.

10 BRICS+ and the tricky business of balancing global geopolitics, *ibid.*

11 Donald Trump threatens BRICS nations with 100pc tariffs if they seek to dethrone US dollar, ABC NEWS. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-12-02/trump-threatens-brics-nations-with-100pc-tariffs/104671668>

- **Lack of Balance and Diverging Interests Within BRICS:**

Despite the inclusion of African countries like Egypt and Ethiopia, BRICS remains heavily dominated by major powers such as China, India, and Russia. This raises concerns about whether Africa's priorities are truly reflected in the group's decision-making processes. The absence of mechanisms for proportional representation or influence-sharing within BRICS institutions—such as the New Development Bank—makes it difficult for African states to have meaningful input into financial policies and funding agendas. Diverging interests between emerging and established economies within the bloc may marginalize African concerns, reducing the partnership to a hierarchical dynamic rather than a model of equitable cooperation. This structural imbalance weakens BRICS's potential as a genuine alternative to the existing global financial system, especially for African countries.

- **Lack of a Unified African Vision Within the Bloc:**

Africa currently lacks a coherent, collective strategy in its engagement with BRICS, which hampers its ability to negotiate effectively or advocate for shared developmental priorities. The continent's BRICS members—such as Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa—differ significantly in their political and economic outlooks. The lack of coordination among them undermines the continent's collective bargaining power. In contrast, countries like China and India often present a more aligned and coordinated front. This organizational gap weakens the effectiveness of Africa's involvement in the bloc; fragmented national approaches dilute the potential for strategic gains and allow African demands to be reframed as individual concerns that are easier to sideline.

- **African Economic Fragility in the Face of Major Blocs:**

The structural weakness of African economies poses a major challenge to the effectiveness of the BRICS partnership. Most African countries suffer from low levels of industrialization, dependency on raw material exports, and persistent trade deficits. These vulnerabilities make them susceptible to shocks from shifts in the global monetary system or fluctuations in interest and exchange rates—particularly as BRICS moves toward de-dollarization. Overreliance on external financing—whether from the West or BRICS—further entrenches structural dependence, leaving African nations orbiting between global power poles without the capacity to leverage partnerships for independent development. Without resilient economic foundations, Africa may struggle to turn BRICS into a genuinely transformative platform.

- **Western Backlash Against 'Decoupling' and Its Repercussions for Africa:**

Africa's growing engagement with BRICS is likely to trigger political and economic pushback from Western powers. The United States, in particular, may resort to financial pressure tactics such as aid cuts, sanctions, or restrictions on institutions engaging with the NDB or using non-dollar currencies. These measures aim not only to curb BRICS expansion but also to deter African countries from realigning strategically. Such moves place African governments in a double bind: attempting to benefit from South-South cooperation without forfeiting Western funding or trade privileges. These external pressures could also fuel internal divisions within Africa regarding BRICS, weakening political consensus and undermining efforts to build a multipolar global order that serves the continent's interests.



Overall Assessment and Conclusion

Despite the significant momentum surrounding the Rio de Janeiro summit, its overall performance revealed a stark contradiction between the alliance's declared ambitions and its tangible outcomes. The final communiqué emphasized multilateralism and financial reform, yet the absence of key leaders and the lack of binding decisions highlighted the bloc's loose institutional structure.

From an African perspective, the summit did not translate symbolic momentum into concrete initiatives. Promises of new investment guarantees remained proposals without clear timelines, and the NDB has yet to finance a single project on the continent. Africa continues to be treated more as an observer or a sphere of influence than as an active partner shaping the group's strategic direction. This was further evidenced by Africa's exclusion from the institutional benefits of over 180 new cooperation mechanisms announced in key areas like global health, AI, and climate change.

Nonetheless, the summit did produce some promising signals regarding African mineral processing and curbing raw material exports—a critical step toward industrialization. However, such commitments require credible investment and implementation plans, which were not articulated.

In conclusion, the BRICS Summit in Rio may represent a pivotal moment, but its ultimate value for Africa remains contingent on a fundamental shift in approach. The continent must move beyond symbolic participation to become a strategic actor with a unified agenda and robust negotiating tools. The path toward a more equitable world order is not guaranteed, but it is achievable if African nations can coordinate their positions and demand accountability. In this sense, the Rio summit serves as both an early test for Africa's future in a post-Western global order and a valuable opportunity to reshape international engagement around the interests of its peoples, not the dominance of external powers.