



Emerging powers, the G20, and reform of multilateral institutions

REPORT – 12 / 2024

Cristiana Maglia, Ole Jacob Sending, Morten Bøås, Cedric de Coning, Stein Sundstøl Eriksen, John Karlsrud, and Indra Øverland

Acknowledgements



Norwegian Institute
of International
Affairs

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs is a leading research institute. Established in 1959, we provide research and recommendations of relevance to Norwegian foreign policy, with a strong position in the field of conflict resolution and peace operations.

This report was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The authors bear sole responsibility for the content of the report. We thank employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for valuable comments on earlier drafts.

Photo credit: UN Mission of Norway/Pontus Höök CC BY-NC 2.0

Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
Copyright: © Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2024
Published under the CC-BY-NC-SA licence
ISSN: 999-999X

Visiting address: C.J. Hambros plass 2d

Address: PO box 7024 Post i Butikk Extra
Pilestredet Park 18
0176 Oslo

Internet: www.nupi.no
E-mail: post@nupi.no

Fax: [+ 47] 22 99 40 50
Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The text may not be printed in part or in full without the permission of the publisher.

Emerging powers, the G20, and reform of multilateral institutions

Cristiana Maglia, Ole Jacob Sending, Morten Bøås, Cedric de Coning, Stein Sundstøl Eriksen, John Karlsrud, and Indra Øverland

Contributors



Cristiana Maglia
Senior Research Fellow, NUPI



Ole Jacob Sending
Research Professor, NUPI



Morten Bøås
Research Professor, NUPI



Cedric de Coning
Research Professor, NUPI



Stein Sundstøl Eriksen
Research Professor, NUPI



John Karlsrud
Research Professor, NUPI



Indra Øverland
Research Professor, NUPI

Contents

- Executive Summary 6
- Introduction 8
- Country-specific analyses 10
 - Brazil 10
 - India 12
 - Indonesia 14
 - Nigeria 15
 - Summary 18
- Text-based analysis 19
 - National speeches 19
 - BRICS and regional organizations 23
 - Comparing reform talk at the UN, WB/IMF, and the G20 27
 - Evolution of the G20 Agenda 32
- Summary and key take-aways 36
- Annex: G20 Priorities 39

Executive Summary

Emerging powers are becoming increasingly important in the global economy, are being courted for support by both the US and China and make up a powerful bloc within informal governance institutions such as the G20. They also voice increasingly vocal calls for reform of the UN, the World Bank and the IMF. This report analyzes how Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa see key reform issues and how they prioritize among different foreign policy objectives in the context of the agenda of the G20.

We find that their foreign policy priorities indicate that there is: i) a shared focus on maximizing autonomy vis à vis great powers (with some variation), ii) a sustained criticism of the lack of representativeness and need for reform of the UNSC, the World Bank, and the IMF, iii) a focus on non-interference and an explicit preference for an alternative vision of global governance with more diverse voices; and iv) a claim to speak on behalf of the “Global South.”

Both the country-specific and text-based analyses indicate a shared focus and prioritization of reform of multilaterals. However, there are also distinct differences: both Indonesia and Nigeria appear to – tacitly – accept that they are not frontrunners for permanent seats at the UNSC. Meanwhile, the IBSA group – India, Brazil and South Africa – see themselves as *primus inter pares* within this group of emerging powers. Moreover, all these countries see the BRICS+ group as increasingly important as a venue for policy coordination and as an alternative to western-dominated international institutions.

The main priority for reform as reflected in key policy speeches by these countries, concerns representation and voice. We find that reform is much more associated with representation than with performance and effectiveness. This raises a more general question about the balance between so-called input and output legitimacy, which matters in how one approaches calls for reform of the UNSC, World Bank, and the IMF.

When examining their priorities, however, we also find that while these countries have a consistent mention of reform of the multilateral system, the references to e.g. trade and security are far more frequent. One possible interpretation of this is that progress on e.g. World Trade Organization reform and thus improved conditions for trade, matter more than representation and voice in other organizations.

Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Africa are all powerful states in their respective regions, and typically also claim to represent and speak on behalf of low- and middle-income countries in their respective region as well as globally both in multilateral settings and in the G20 (e.g. ‘global south’). From our analysis, the claim to speak on behalf of a broader category of developing countries is tenuous. Although Brazil, China, and India maintain a discourse of South-South solidarity, they advance their own interests at e.g. the WTO, at the expense of other developing countries.

In economic terms, the traditional Global North’s share of global GDP is diminishing, with a corresponding increase in the Global South’s share. This also partially shifts global economic

inequalities from North-South to also South-South, across a range of factors, including GDP per capita growth, diversification of the economy, and labor productivity growth.

Various forms of club governance are on the rise, in no small part because of the difficulties in forging a universal or near-universal consensus at the UN and other inclusive multilateral institutions. The G20 is a prime example of club governance, and we discuss the G20 's role as an "orchestrator" and hub for negotiating and prioritizing reform proposals of global governance institutions. The G20 is not based on a treaty among its members and does not have a permanent secretariat, but it is becoming a central node in the discussion of global challenges. While the G20 initially focused on financial regulation and development finance, its scope has gradually expanded to include e.g. climate change, energy, and health.

As one of eight guest countries of the G20 during Brazil's presidency in 2024, Norway has been able to observe first-hand how the G20 operates. A central question is how – given the increased importance of the G20 – Norway can continue to engage with and possibly influence reform processes and other key policy issues also from outside the G20 in the future.

Introduction

International politics is characterized by increased rivalry between great powers: China is more assertive and seeks greater influence globally, Russia's war against Ukraine has resulted in an enlarged NATO and a string of international sanctions, and the position of the United States as a global hegemon is weakened by increased external competition and internal political dynamics, and by a loss of international reputation as a result of the support to Israel in the context of the war in Gaza.

Emerging powers like Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa have, over time, become more integrated with the global economy and have increased their share of global GDP. The share of global GDP of emerging economies measured by purchasing power parity (PPP) is now at 60% and advanced economies are at 40%.¹ Emerging powers have also stepped up efforts to forge alternative visions for global governance, explicitly targeting western countries' dominance as a problem and calling for reform of the UN Security Council, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In the context of great power rivalry, calls for reform of multilaterals – and of other contested issues like trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) – take on new, geopolitical significance. For example, while the US has for a long time offered only lukewarm support for the principle of expanding membership of the UN Security Council, it is now taking these calls more seriously in an effort to forge stronger alliances with emerging powers.² China and Russia, meanwhile, are also courting emerging powers, both by building alliances within multilaterals and by investing in alternative governance arrangements, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS³ and the New Development Bank (NDB).⁴

The rising economic and political clout of emerging powers, combined with their courting by rivaling great powers, makes emerging powers' priorities and policy positions on the reform of multilaterals particularly important. In a context where several great powers seek the support of emerging powers, their relative autonomy and bargaining power may go up. This is even more so because emerging powers claim to speak on behalf of the so-called "Global South" and – specifically – the least developed countries (LDCs). These countries are also coordinating their policy positions in more systematic ways, such as through the IBSA Forum (India, Brazil, and South Africa), established in 2003.

-
- 1 International Monetary Fund. "GDP based on PPP, share of world." Available online: https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPSH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEO_WORLD.
 - 2 Jones, B. and Pita, A. (2023). "UN Reform and the Global South at the 2023 General Assembly." Brookings. Available online: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/un-reform-and-the-global-south-at-the-2023-general-assembly/>
 - 3 Originally including Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRIC) from 2006 and including South Africa (BRICS) from 2010. From 2024 also including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Argentina was also invited but pulled out.
 - 4 Sending, O. J. (2022). "The war in Ukraine and multilateralism as we know it." NUPI Report. Available online: <https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/the-war-in-ukraine-and-multilateralism-as-we-know-it>.

Taken together, the policy choices and priorities of emerging economies like Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Africa, will be important in shaping the future direction of global governance, as well as the fate of specific reform proposals of multilaterals. They can tip the scales in different directions, depending on the choices they make. Given the role of these countries in the G20,⁵ and because the IBSA countries now make up the troika of the G20, this report looks at the core foreign policy priorities of Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa. We focus specifically on how they view multilateral institutions and the G20, what reform proposals for multilaterals they are prioritizing, and discuss core features of the G20 itself as it evolves with enlarged membership (the African Union was included as a permanent member in 2023), and a broader - and self-authorized - mandate to serve as an “orchestrator” of global governance.⁶

The report is based on three pillars: i) Country-specific analyses of each country, detailing the historical and domestic political context for their respective foreign policy orientations and positions on reform of multilaterals; ii) text-based analysis of each country’s main foreign policy documents and speeches over time, focused on references to key organizations, policy issues, and reform positions, and; iii) analysis of the G20 communiqués to assess changes over time in the agenda of the G20.

The report is divided into three main sections. Part I provides a country-specific analysis of Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa, all written by researchers with country-specific expertise: Brazil (C. Maglia), India (S.S. Eriksen), Indonesia (I. Øverland), Nigeria (M. Bøås), and South Africa (C. de Coning). In Part II, we analyze an original corpus of speeches and policy documents delivered by representatives from the same countries in multilateral settings. The speeches were collected from foreign ministry websites, the UN General Assembly, the bi-annual sessions of the IMF Financial Committee, and the joint IMF/World Bank Development Committee. It also features an analysis of key G20 summit declarations and documents to identify the evolution of the G20 agenda. In Part III, we zoom out to broader themes of the evolving reform agenda of multilaterals and the role of emerging powers and what this may imply for Norway’s strategy going forward.

5 Onuah, F. (2023). Nigeria mulls G20 bloc membership, president to attend summit in India. Reuters. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigeria-mulls-g20-bloc-membership-2023-09-03/>

6 Downie, C. (2022). How do informal international organizations govern? The G20 and orchestration. *International Affairs*, 98(3), 953-972.

Country-specific analyses

Brazil

Brazil's foreign policy has traditionally emphasized *non-intervention, pacific resolution of conflicts, self-determination, regional integration in Latin America*, as well as human rights and international cooperation. These principles have been present over the past century, even though Brazilian foreign policy has experienced shifts of substantive issue-area priority and realignments over time.

Prior to World War II, Brazil sought to maintain a strategic balance between its alignments to European powers and the United States. After the war, following Brazilian military engagement allied with the US, there was an automatic realignment with the US, amidst the emerging Cold War. However, with the blossoming of the decolonization process in Africa and Asia, Brazilian foreign policy would start seeking a strategy of diversifying trade and political partners, including new African nations and countries from the socialist block. During most of the Cold War, Brazil oscillated between stances of alignment with the US and non-alignment in line with other countries in the then-called 'Third World'. Even during the military dictatorship (1964-1985), despite staunch anti-communist domestic repression, it had an openly pragmatic foreign policy, balancing strong cooperation with the US with being the first country to recognize newly independent Angola under a Marxist regime. This period was marked by a strategic flexibility that allowed Brazil to navigate the Cold War dynamics effectively.

Brazil has also historically recognized that multilateralism offered an opportunity for the country to wield influence in international affairs, given its limitations as a military power. Brazil was strongly engaged in the construction of both the League of Nations and the United Nations. It sought to legitimize its influence as a country that navigated across political lines, with a long-standing professional diplomatic service, and could represent both Latin America and the formerly colonized world. To a great extent, Brazil's strategy of non-alignment was seen as a way of securing its influence in multilateral arenas.

A key interest for Brazil has been economic development. Particularly, after a lost decade in economic terms in the 1980s and with the opening of the Brazilian economy in the 1990s, the country expanded its participation in multilateral forums. The alignment of the elected government to the neoliberal economic project of Bretton Woods institutions resulted in an emphasized relationship with financial institutions such as IMF and the World Bank. Relations with traditional partners, US and Europe, were prioritized, alongside regional efforts for economic integration in South America, with the creation of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) in 1991.

The election of the left-wing Workers' Party and their "active and proud foreign policy" intensified the pursuit of international influence on multilateral governance, particularly in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and in the Bretton Woods system. Brazilian foreign policy has thus emphasized reform of multilateral organizations. Brazil, together with Germany, Japan, India, and other countries, have

advocated for the expansion of the UNSC.⁷ Of particular interest here is how Brazil has sought to position itself as a representative and leader of the so-called Global South and of Latin America in particular. The government took advantage of the pink tide of left-wing leaders being elected to promote an expansion of regional cooperation, strengthening Mercosur and creating the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2008. Globally, Brazil sought to increase South-South cooperation and commercial relations, beyond its traditional Western partners, with the goal of not only diversifying partnerships but also strengthening ties with countries it saw as potentially aligned with the multilateral reforms that Brazil aimed for.

In parallel, and particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, Brazil also engaged in building alternative coalitions and organizations. Groupings such as the IBSA (with South Africa and India), the G20, and, most importantly, the BRICS have emerged as key channels for Brazil to influence global governance in ways not possible through formal multilateral institutions due to the dominance of great powers and western countries in particular. Yet, despite denouncing the “outdated governance structure” of established multilateral institutions, particularly under Workers’ Party governments, Brazil has maintained a strategy of multilateral engagement, advocated for the relevance of formal institutions, and called for broader and more inclusive membership in e.g. the UNSC, and of reform of the IMF and the World Bank. Brazil, which holds 2.32% of the IMF quotas, claims for a more proportional allocation that better reflects the size and significance of its economy.

A key exception was the Bolsonaro government, which construed itself as the opposite of previous governments’ “globalism”, reversing Brazil’s multilateral engagement. Bolsonaro instead opted for bilateral relations oriented around ideological alignment and business opportunities, particularly for the agriculture and extractive sectors. Yet, with the exception of a few issue areas, such as environmental governance, the government lacked an articulated international agenda, which allowed the diplomatic bureaucracy to retain some level of independence in carrying out low-salience agendas.

The return of Lula to a third term meant resuming Brazil’s ambitions for a prominent role in international affairs in general and in multilateral governance in particular. The president’s international rhetoric has sought to mark Brazil as a re-engaged actor and committed to multilateral reforms. However, Brazil now faces a much different geopolitical landscape with growing animosity and rivalry among great powers. For instance, the Brazilian strategy of alignment with non-western regional powers to promote multilateral reform gains different contours amidst Russia’s war against Ukraine, where Brazil struggles to portray an equidistant position from both sides.

Nevertheless, Brazil has regained a voice in some key issue areas. One such area is the environmental regimes, where the country has become a strong advocate for the necessity of novel and better-funded financial mechanisms to address multiple crises, attuned to social justice issues. It has sought to promote new funding for protecting tropical forests’ biodiversity and ecosystemic services, decoupling it from climate mitigation accounting. Brazil has also renewed its longstanding engagement with issues of food security and poverty alleviation. These issues, along with the question of cooperation to avoid tax base erosion, have been key agendas that Brazil has sought to

7 UN Security Council reform: draft resolution (6 July 2005). Available online: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/552665?v=pdf>.

contribute positively and were reflected as a priority for its presidency of the G20. This is reflected in the three priority axes of the temporary presidency in 2024: food security, sustainable development, and global governance reform.

In sum:

- Traditional emphasis on non-intervention, pacific conflict resolution, self-determination, and regional integration.
- Oscillation between US alignment and non-alignment with the Third World.
- Emphasis on economic development in multilateral forums.
- Push for reform of international organizations, especially under left-wing governments: claims for a more proportional allocation of IMF quotas that better reflects the importance of its economy; traditional position for the expansion of the UNSC.
- Increased South-South cooperation and claims leadership in the Global South.
- Participation in alternative coalitions (IBSA, BRICS).
- Brief departure from multilateralism under Bolsonaro (2019-2022), renewed international engagement under Lula's third term.

India

The main pillars of Indian foreign policy since independence have been *strategic and economic autonomy and regional dominance*. During the Cold War, the key elements were membership in the Non-aligned movement, close ties to the Soviet Union and a strategy of economic development based on self-reliance, import substitution and state-led industrialisation. It also pursued a policy of supporting national struggles against colonialism and *sought to present itself as a leader of the Global South*.

Since the end of the Cold War and the introduction of economic liberalisation, the key objectives of regional dominance and strategic and economic autonomy have remained in place, *but the means by which these objectives are sought realised have changed*. First, the Non-aligned movement has become less significant. Instead, India has become a key new member of the BRICS group. Second, it has moved closer to the West and the US, especially in economic terms. This, in turn, has led to a more active role in the management of the global economy, clearly seen in the active role taken by the country in international trade negotiations and in international organisations such as the UN. A key objective for India is to have better representation in multilateral institutions and have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. These changes reflect India's growing political and economic role, which gives it a strong negotiating position in its relations with other great powers (China, Russia and the US), who all have an interest in its support.

India's foreign policy is first and foremost driven by what is seen as its national interests. Thus, while retaining its ideological commitment to the principles of non-alignment and South-South solidarity, it has also become increasingly conscious of its growing need to exploit new export markets and attract foreign capital and technological know-how.

Relations between India and Russia have traditionally been good. Russia continues to be India's main supplier of arms, although the country has diversified its supplies in recent years. Since the war in Ukraine began, India has significantly increased its import of Russian oil. At the same time, it has

been reported that Indian ammunition has been sold to Ukraine via Italy and the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, India has abstained from voting in the UN, and refused to impose sanctions on Russia. India and Russia have complementary economic interests, since Russia is a large exporter of energy, raw materials and agricultural products, while India is a large importer of these commodities. Moreover, India is becoming increasingly important as an exporter of comparatively cheap technology and industrial products. Politically, the two countries also cooperate in the BRICS group and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Cooperation between India and Russia is likely to continue.

India's relations with China have been conflictual, especially because of unresolved borders disputes in the Himalayas. In addition, China's growing cooperation with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar is causing concern. Nevertheless, economic cooperation between the two countries has increased in recent years, and China is India's largest trading partner. The two countries also have common interests in seeking to counter US hegemony, as seen in the BRICS partnership and in their recent responses to the Ukraine war.

Historically, India has had little cooperation with the US. The country's neutral stance in the Cold War, its leadership of the Non-aligned movement and its economic strategy of self-reliance and import-substitution all contributed to this. However, economic liberalisation, globalisation and high growth rates have meant that the country has become much more integrated in the global economy and developed closer economic ties to the US. As a result, trade between the countries and US investment India has increased. Moreover, in the context of growing US-China rivalry, the US sees India as an important partner. Perhaps most importantly, India is now part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) agreement, with the US, Japan and Australia. It seems likely that India will continue to deepen its relationship with the US, without becoming a formal ally.

Since the end of the Cold War, India has adapted its foreign policy approach while maintaining its core objectives of strategic autonomy and regional influence. Here are some key developments and recent initiatives in India's global governance engagement:

In sum:

- India continues to assert its role as a leader of the Global South.
- Pushing for reforms of the UN Security Council to gain permanent membership.
- Taking on leadership roles in international organizations like the World Health Organization and WTO.
- Advocating for a larger voice for developing countries in institutions like the IMF and World Bank.
- Founding member of BRICS, which recently expanded to include six new members.
- Key player in the New Development Bank (BRICS Bank) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.
- Active in forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and IBSA Dialogue Forum.
- Advocating for "climate justice" and greater responsibility from developed nations.
- Promoting its model of "sustainable development" as an alternative to Western approaches.
- Taking a more assertive stance in WTO negotiations to protect its interests.
- Pursuing strategic trade and investment partnerships, especially in its neighborhood and Africa.
- Promoting its digital public infrastructure models globally.
- Offering development assistance and capacity building to African and Asian partners.

- Has called for reform of the World Bank and the IMF, giving more voice to countries in the Global South and more emphasis on the need for climate finance.

While pursuing these initiatives, India maintains strategic autonomy by balancing relations with major powers and advocating for a multipolar world order. Its approach combines pragmatism in economic matters with continued emphasis on South-South cooperation and reform of global governance structures.

Indonesia

Indonesian foreign policy has been remarkably *stable over time and most of its elements can be traced back to the “bebas aktif” [independent active] foreign policy doctrine*. These constants in Indonesian foreign policy include *bloc independence*, staying out of conflicts among and within other countries, strong emphasis on Indonesia’s own economic interests, a desire to play a constructive role in global international relations, an *ambition to represent the developing world, anti-imperialism, staunch support for the Palestinians, and promotion of global justice*.

If there are any changes in the long lines in Indonesian foreign policy, they might be growing emphasis on democracy as Indonesia’s own democracy has matured, even greater emphasis on economic interests, and a gravitation towards the Muslim world as stricter Islamic practices have gained ground within Indonesia.

The slogan of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) was “a thousand friends, zero enemies”, resulting in an outward-oriented presidency.⁸ By contrast, the Jokowi administration (2014-2024) has been more focused on the development of the Indonesian economy and infrastructure, and thus more inward-looking. Jokowi skipped many multilateral events, including three opportunities to speak at the UN General Assembly. When he engaged in foreign policy, the emphasis was on Indonesia’s economic interests, such as attracting foreign companies to build infrastructure in Indonesia.⁹

Indonesia is the only G20 member in Southeast Asia and hosted the G20 summit on Bali in 2022. This has been referred to as “the most difficult G20 ever”, as Indonesia doggedly maintained what it calls a neutral stance on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and tried to hold back criticism and measures against Russia from the Western G20 countries.¹⁰ A central part of Indonesia’s strategy was to emphasize G20 as an economic rather than a political forum.

The election of Prabowo Subianto as the next President of Indonesia, sworn in in October 2024, is not expected to lead to major changes in Indonesian foreign policy. Although he was elected on a populist, resource nationalist platform and made some negative statements about the West during his campaign, several factors point towards continuity: he is no newcomer but a lifelong member

8 ASEAN Studies Center (2017). “Indonesian Foreign Policy under three years of Jokowi’s administration.” Available online: <https://asc.fisipol.ugm.ac.id/2017/12/06/indonesian-foreign-policy-three-years-jokowis-administration/>.

9 Ibid.

10 Chaturvedi, S. (2023). Indonesian and Indian G20 presidencies in perspective. East Asia Forum. Available online: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/10/19/indonesian-and-indian-g20-presidencies-in-perspective/>.

of Indonesia's upper elite, he has been Minister of Defense under Jokowi, and Jokowi's son Gibran Rakabuming will be Vice President under Prabowo.

A possible future flashpoint between Indonesia and Western countries in multilateral fora is climate policy. *Indonesia has shown little interest in climate policy and is an energy transition laggard.* Some reasons for this include Indonesia's long history as a petrostate and proud former member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), its status as the world's third largest coal producer, entrenched oligarchic interests in the coal sector, and the need for yet more coal to fuel the most successful economic legacy of the Jokowi-years: the nickel industry. If the global climate regime continues its current trajectory, Indonesia may find that it can no longer alternate between contradicting, ignoring, and paying lip service to climate policy and will need to either start reducing its emissions in earnest or get into a confrontation with the G7 countries.

In sum:

- Indonesia's foreign policy has remained largely consistent over time, rooted in the "bebas aktif" [independent active]. Key elements of this policy include:
- Bloc independence, non-interference and prioritization of economic interests
- Claim to anti-imperialism and to represent developing countries
- Gravitation towards the Muslim world
- Emphasis on G20 as an economic rather than a political forum
- Emphasis on better representation of Africa and Asia in the UNSC. Resistance to expanding the number of permanent members of the UNSC (which would likely be Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan but not Indonesia), and instead participation in Uniting for Consensus group, which promotes the introduction of semi-permanent seats or a larger number of temporary seats.¹¹
- Indonesia has called for reform of the Bretton Woods institutions and has sometimes argued that developed countries are subjecting emerging economies to unfair practices and that developed countries need to step up climate financing for developing countries.¹²
- Indonesia declined to join BRICS in 2023 – which would have been a possible move away from Western-dominated multilateral institutions.
- Indonesia became an OECD accession candidate country in 2024. Should it become a member, this might mark a departure from its historical identity as a developing country.
- Potential future discord with Western countries due to Indonesia's reluctance to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Nigeria

Nigeria, once the dominant force in West Africa, has seen its regional influence decline significantly in recent years. Historically, Nigeria played a crucial role in regional stability and was often seen as a leader within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). However, the recent crisis in ECOWAS, particularly the coup in Niger, has underscored Nigeria's diminishing power. President Bola Tinubu's attempt to lead a military intervention through ECOWAS to restore the ousted President Bazoum was unsuccessful. Despite initiating sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the junta remains

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2024). "Indonesia and the UN Security Council Reform". Available online: https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/105/halaman_list_lainnya/indonesia-and-the-un-security-council-reform.

12 Tanamal, Y. and Ibnu Aqil, A. M. (2023). "Indonesia reiterates call to reform global financial system." Asia News Network. Available online: <https://asianews.network/indonesia-reiterates-call-to-reform-global-financial-system/>.

in power, and Bazoum is still under arrest, Nigeria and President Tinubu has given up all sanctions against Niger after Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso formally withdrew from ECOWAS to form their own regional organisation, the Alliance of Sahel States. Thus, while Tinubu entered the situation as the headman of the region, it ended in his humiliation. This situation represents a significant setback for Nigeria's regional leadership and highlights its reduced capacity to influence outcomes in West Africa. Nigeria still pretends to be the leader in the West African region, but it is not a leadership that inspires or even is taken seriously. The youth, including Nigerian youth looks elsewhere for leadership and inspiration, and Dakar under Faye and Sonko is definitively on their radar.

Domestically, Nigeria faces severe challenges that further complicate its ability to project power internationally. The economy is struggling with near hyperinflation, and the Naira's value against the US dollar has reached historic lows. Security issues persist, with jihadi insurgencies gaining strength in the north and rampant banditry threatening several federal states. In Borno State, Governor Zulum has decided to close over 100 IDP camps, declaring the war is over despite ongoing instability. This has created a political crisis with the international humanitarian community. Meanwhile, in the National Assembly, President Tinubu has secured loyalty through lavish spending, creating a harmonious but compromised legislative body. This internal focus on political patronage and economic challenges limits Nigeria's ability to engage effectively on the international stage.

Regarding international engagement, Nigeria's participation in the G20 is largely symbolic. President Tinubu views G20 meetings as opportunities to attract investments, but Nigeria's campaign for permanent membership remains unfulfilled. The fact that South Africa holds a G20 seat while Nigeria does not is a point of contention for Abuja. Historically, Nigeria has been a strong advocate for multilateralism and regional stability, often playing a significant role in African and global affairs. However, the current economic and political climate casts doubt on its ability to reclaim its former status. The pervasive godfatherism in politics and the ongoing economic turmoil hinder Nigeria's aspirations as a global power, making it unlikely for the country to act decisively in its foreign policy as the hegemon of West Africa in the near term.

In sum:

- Nigeria tends to take the same general position as other African countries on the issue of WTO negotiations. It is, however, worth noting that its economic interests in oil and gas determine its interests and positions on environment and climate issues.
- Nigeria supports the general African view on multilateral reform, but it is no longer able to take the lead or even be looked upon by African peers to take the lead. It is mainly rhetoric and little capacity or even real political interests.
- Nigeria's regional influence has diminished, as evidenced by the recent ECOWAS crisis.
- Domestically, Nigeria faces economic challenges, including near hyperinflation and a weakened Naira.
- Security issues persist with growing jihadi insurgencies and rampant banditry.
- Nigeria's participation in the G20 is largely symbolic, with aspirations for permanent membership unmet.
- The contrast with South Africa's G20 membership is a source of discontent for Nigeria.
- Internal political dynamics and economic turmoil hinder Nigeria's global ambitions.
- Historically, Nigeria has been a proponent of multilateralism and regional stability.
- Current conditions cast doubt on Nigeria's ability to reclaim its status as West Africa's hegemon.

South Africa

South Africa's foreign policy has evolved significantly since the end of apartheid in 1994. Initially, the country's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its desire to reintegrate into the global community and to promote human rights, democracy, and economic development. Over the years, South Africa has positioned itself as a key player in multilateral organizations, advocating for a rules-based international order and greater equity in global governance structures.

South Africa positions itself as a bridge-builder and seeks to reform those aspects of the liberal international order that disadvantage developing nations, while defending multilateralism and a rules-based global order. The country claims to represent key features of the Global South and to act as a moral leader in the transition to a new global order, leveraging its position as a bridge-builder between regions. South Africa is also a member of BRICS.

South Africa prioritizes African issues and regional stability in its foreign policy. It has been a key player in regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and has taken initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to promote economic development and good governance across the continent. In the G20, South Africa is likely to closely cooperate with the AU to promote African interest and common positions on key policy issues. South Africa maintains a non-aligned stance, seeking to balance relations with major global powers like the United States, China, and Russia. This approach is rooted in its historical ties and its desire to promote a multipolar world order.

South Africa places a strong emphasis on multilateralism and reforming global governance structures. It explicitly advocates for a "rules-based" international order, often pushing for reforms in institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization to better serve developing countries. At the same time, South Africa views the G20 as a strategic platform to address global issues such as poverty, inequality, and insecurity. *It regards the G20 as a vehicle for building consensus among major powers, rather than a replacement for formal global governance institutions like the UN.*

The G20's agenda has expanded beyond economic and financial issues to include peace and security, global governance, terrorism, the environment, and refugees. South Africa insists that the G20 should not replace the UN system and should focus on international economic cooperation and development. It calls for urgent reforms in the global governance system, particularly the global financial architecture (including the World Bank and IMF), to support sustainable development in developing countries. South Africa highlights the inequalities in the current system, where overall there is a net outflow of funds from the Global South to the North, amongst others because several developing countries spend more on debt servicing than on health, education and other basic services. It urges the G20 to reform the World Trade Organization to create a rules-based, inclusive, and transparent trading system and calls on the Bretton Woods institutions and other multilateral development banks to make the reforms necessary for them to be able to better meet the needs of developing economies for sustainable development and climate resilience.

South Africa seeks to reform aspects of the liberal order that benefit developed nations while defending a rule-based global order and multilateralism. It uses international law to protest breaches of this order, as exemplified by its actions at the International Court of Justice on the Israeli-Gaza conflict.

In sum:

- South Africa will host the G20 in 2025, and is likely to emphasize its role in addressing global challenges like poverty and inequality.
- South Africa advocates for a rules-based multilateral system and urgent reforms in global financial architecture to support sustainable development.
- Identifies trade tensions, debt burdens, and efforts to curb illicit financial flows and promote fair international taxation.
- Seeks equal political and economic influence in global governance through BRICS and established multilateral organizations.
- Bridge-Builder Role: Acts as a mediator between global blocs, promoting a rule-based order and multilateralism with the UN at its center.
- Has called for reform of the World Bank and the IMF, giving more voice to countries in the Global South and more emphasis on the need for climate finance.

Summary

These summaries of the respective countries' foreign policy priorities indicate that there is: i) a shared focus on maximizing autonomy vis à vis great powers (with some variation), ii) focus on non-interference and an explicit preference for an alternative vision of global governance with more diverse voices; iii) a claim to speak on behalf of the "Global South"; and iv) sustained criticism of the lack of representativeness and need for reform of the UNSC, the World Bank, and the IMF. In part II, to which we now turn, we shift focus somewhat to offer more of a birds-eye view, tracing evolution over time and variation between different multilateral organizations, as well as some reflections on how calls for reform are prioritized relative to other issues.

Text-based analysis

In this section, we analyze an original corpus of 653 speeches given by heads of state, ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of finance and governors of Central Banks, and other representatives of Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa. The speeches have been collected from national foreign ministry websites, the UN General Assembly, and the bi-annual sessions of the IMF Financial Committee meetings and the joint IMF/World Bank Development Committee. In the analysis, we divided the corpus of texts by considering the three different forums on which they were delivered: national speeches, the UN General Assembly, and the multilateral financial institutions.

We use quantitative tools in order to examine a large volume of texts. We focus on the word frequency of specific keywords, especially “reform”, to identify patterns and trends in word usage across texts and over time. This allows us to gain insights into the changes over time in themes and topics that are emphasized by different states in the past decade. While word frequency analysis provides valuable information on how terms are used in political discourse, it is a method that also have potential pitfalls. A key challenge is accounting for the varying lengths of texts, as some speakers may be more prolific than others. This disparity can distort the frequency of absolute words. To mitigate this, we employ relative word frequencies, normalizing the data by considering the proportion of each word occurrence in relation to the total number of words in a text and allowing a more accurate comparison of word usage.

A second important aspect is the need for contextualizing word frequencies, by comparing them with baseline terms. Relying only on the frequency of a single keyword, such as “reform” here, may not provide sufficient insight about its specific meaning. Speakers may refer to reforms outside the multilateral fora, for example, or they might be using different terminology to capture the same concept we investigate. We use different approaches to overcome this challenge, focusing on comparing “reform” to other related terms, such as “multilateralism,” “voice,” and “evolution” to better understand whether these terms are part of a broader discussion about institutional reform. Additionally, we compare “reform” with terms such as “development,” “trade,” and “security” to try to assess the relative importance of these distinct topics within the speeches. This approach offers a more comprehensive view of thematic emphasis within the corpus and ensure conclusions from this analysis are nuanced at the same time as methodologically robust.

National speeches

Our first corpus of speeches was collected from national websites,¹³ focusing on those delivered by presidents/prime ministers and foreign ministers in three specific years – 2013, 2018, and 2023 – in an international setting. The texts are either from multilateral settings or from bilateral meetings with

13 For Brazil, the websites of the Presidency (<http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/>, <https://www.gov.br/planalto/>) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.gov.br/mre/>). For India, the websites of the Prime Minister (<https://www.pmindia.gov.in/>) and the Ministry for External Affairs (<https://www.mea.gov.in/>). For Indonesia, the websites of the Presidency (<https://www.presidenri.go.id/>), the Cabinet Secretariat (<https://setkab.go.id/>), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://kemlu.go.id/>). For Nigeria, few speeches were available on the State House website (<http://statehouse.gov.ng/>). For South Africa, the websites of the government (<https://www.gov.za/news/>), the Presidency (<https://www.presidency.gov.za/>), and the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (<https://www.dirco.gov.za/>).

established major powers, such as the United States, China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany.¹⁴

Brazil and India appear as the states most vocal about reform. Brazilian representatives addressed the issue in 28 out of 70 speeches related to the international agenda. President Lula da Silva's emphasized Brazil's priorities for G20 on a visit to Germany in 2023, noting: "Germany is the first G20 country I visit after taking on the group's presidency. I reaffirmed the priorities of the Brazilian presidency in combating inequality, poverty, hunger, climate change—and in discussing the reform of global governance structures."¹⁵ Similarly, Manmohan Singh already in 2013 during the 5th BRICS Summit, stated that "Finally, we should work for a reform of global institutions of political and economic governance that reflects contemporary realities and equips them more effectively to deal with emerging challenges. In particular, reform of the United Nations Security Council and the IMF are urgently needed."¹⁶

South Africa also mentions "reform" on many occasions. In 2018, during Chinese President Xi Jinping visit to South Africa, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa stated: "President Xi and I have agreed to continue supporting each other in international fora, including the United Nations (...). South Africa and China will continue to work together in full accord over the need for the reform of the structures and modalities of the work of the UN."¹⁷ The outlier here is Indonesia. Out of 61 speeches, Indonesian representatives only addressed "reform" in six of them. One of these mentions occurred in 2013, in which President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono discussed the matter at the World Trade Conference: "We have agreed to carry reforms that will help open up markets for least developed countries. We have also prepared the ground for far-reaching agreements that will bring new hope for the Doha Development Agenda."¹⁸

Figure 1 illustrates the relative frequency of the term "reform" in these texts for each country on each of the three years analyzed, as a comparison among these countries. In this Figure, we also compared "reform" with other keywords, such as development, trade, security, and democracy, to gauge the relative importance of reform of multilaterals in these states' foreign policies.¹⁹ Figure 1 shows that *development, trade, democracy and security is significantly more important – as judged by relative frequency in speeches – than reform of multilaterals.*

14 This corpus comprises 367 speeches, with South African representatives contributing a maximum of 102 speeches and Nigerian representatives providing as few as two.

15 Lula da Silva, L. I. (2023). Statement by President Lula during Visit to Germany – 6 December 2023. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Brazil. Available online: <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/content-centers/speeches-articles-and-interviews/president-of-the-federative-republic-of-brazil/speeches/statement-by-president-lula-during-visit-to-germany>.

16 Singh, M. (2013). PM's statement at the Plenary Session of the 5th BRICS Summit – 27 March 2013. Prime Minister's Office, Government of India. Available online: <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=1296>.

17 Ramaphosa, C. (2018). Media Briefing Remarks by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa during the People's Republic of China State Visit by His Excellency President Xi Jinping – 24 July 2018. Presidency of South Africa. Available online: <https://www.presidency.gov.za/media-briefing-remarks-his-excellency-president-cyril-ramaphosa-during-peoples-republic-china-state>.

18 Yudhoyono, S. B. (2013). Speech at the 9th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Conference – 03 December 2013. Presidency of Indonesia. Available online: <http://www.presidenri.go.id/index.php/pidato/2013/12/03/2217.html>.

19 The total relative frequency of reform is similar in 2018 and 2023, with mentions of "reform" in 0.05% of words. The peak is 29 mentions in a year, specifically in South Africa in 2023, a noticeable increase. India and Brazil have made a high relative frequency of contributions to the use of "reform" in their speeches, peaking also in 2023, with 23 and 25 mentions each. Indonesian representatives mentioned "reform" six times in 2023, compared to no mentions in 2018 and one mention in 2013.

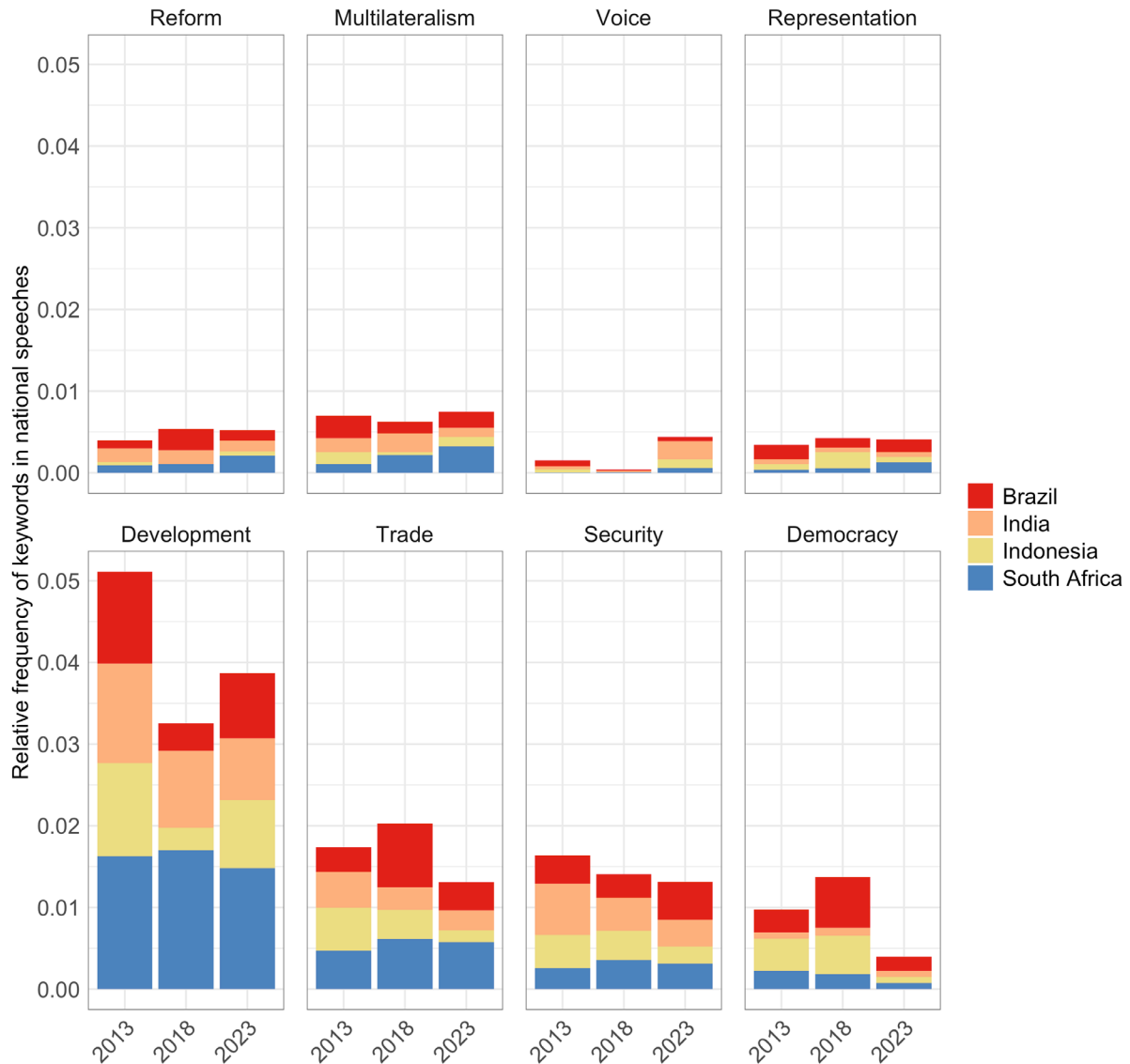


Figure 1 – Relative frequency of keywords in national speeches

Granted, the term “development” is intimately linked to a much broader agenda than terms like “reform” and “multilateral”. Indeed, part of the reason for the much higher frequency of the term “development” is that it is also linked to reform-issues. However, if we compare the relative frequency of “reform” with those of “trade” and “security” we see that these are mentioned three times more often than “reform.”

To further probe the meaning attached to the term “reform” we examined it as a “keyword in context,” focusing on its surrounding text. Figure 2 thus seeks to capture what is meant by reform in these speeches. This is important because it gives us more specificity of meaning, and allow us to capture variation over time, and across countries.

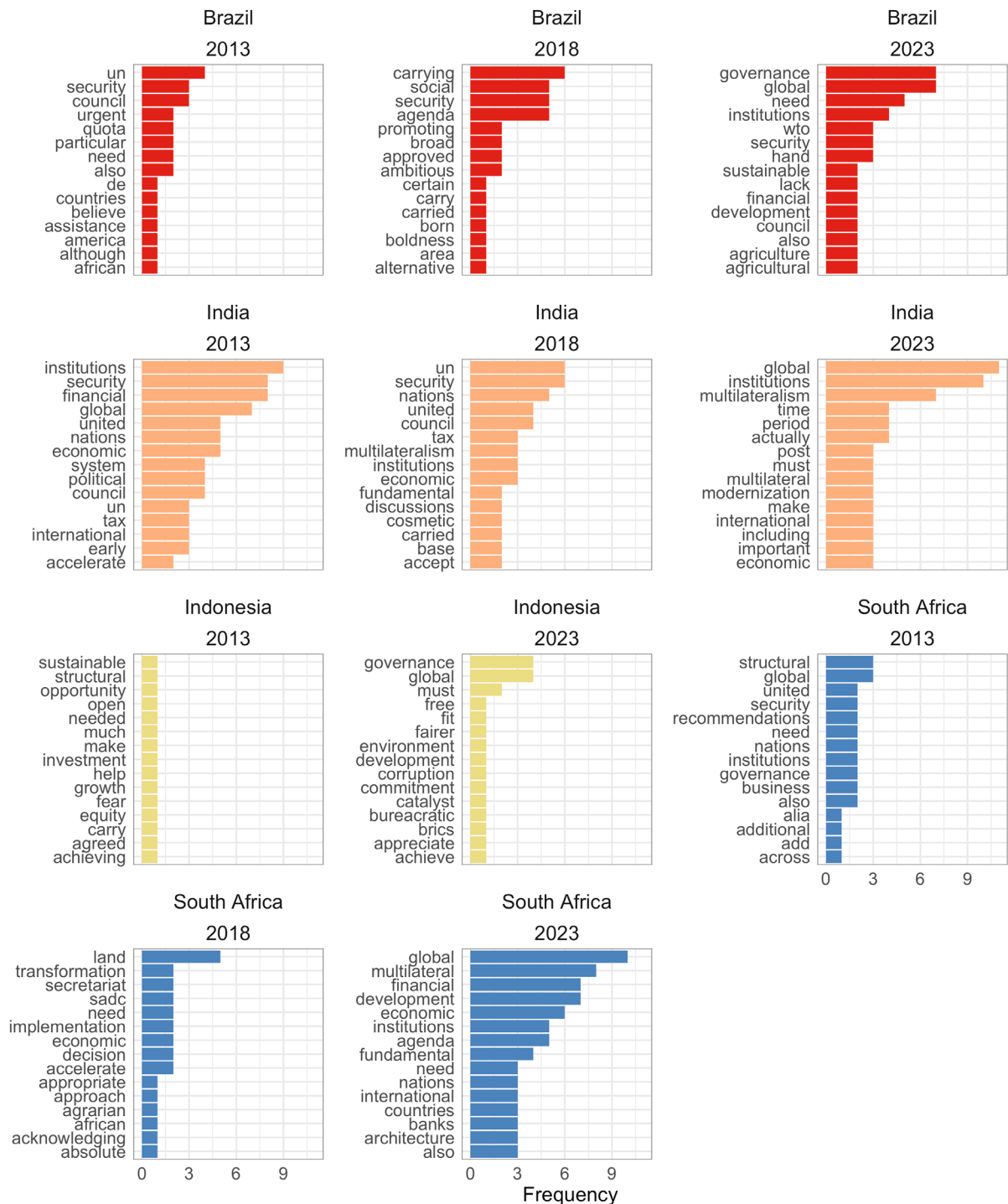


Figure 2 – Keyword context ‘reform’ by year and state

As we can see in Fig. 2 “reform” is indeed associated with discussions about representation and voice in multilateral institutions. There is nonetheless a small yet significant variation: *There is more emphasis on reform of the UN Security Council than on the World Bank and the IMF.* In our interpretation, this reflects the higher degree of politicization – and longer time spans – of debates

about the reform of the UNSC compared to the World Bank (WB) and the IMF. We also note that Indonesia is here an outlier as it does *not* refer to reform of these institutions with the same frequency as Brazil, India and South Africa.

BRICS and regional organizations

Global governance goes beyond the role and functioning of big multilateral organizations like the UN, WB, and IMF. It also includes – and quite prominently so – regional organizations and new “club” arrangements like the BRICS and its New Development Bank. Figure 3 captures the importance attached to these regional and club-like governance arrangements by Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa. As we can see, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is frequently referenced by Indonesia, as expected. When Indonesia hosted the 42nd ASEAN Summit in 2023, President Joko Widodo referenced Indonesia’s success during its G20 Presidency, and emphasized how important ASEAN is to manage global crises: “This year Indonesia assumes ASEAN chairmanship in the midst of a tough global situation with multiple crises, including economic crisis, energy crisis, food crisis, and the ongoing war. I believe ASEAN remains important and relevant for the people, the region, and the world. ASEAN will continue contributing to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and maintaining economic growth. ASEAN matters and it is the epicentrum of growth.”²⁰

ASEAN also feature prominently in speeches by Indian representatives. At the ASEAN India Commemorative Summit in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the importance of the organization, specifically identifying ASEAN as key to India’s regional strategy: “It is a privilege for India to host all the ASEAN Leaders for the second time in five years (...) It highlights the importance of our Strategic Partnership, placing ASEAN at the centre of India’s Act East Policy.”²¹

Similarly, Mercosur and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are predominantly mentioned by Brazil and South Africa, respectively, aligning with their regional affiliations. President Michel Temer mentioned the Mercosur in 2018 during the World Economic Forum in Davos, highlighting the prospect of concluding “a Mercosur-European Union agreement – an agreement that we want to be comprehensive and balanced.”²² And President Jacob Zuma in 2013 emphasizing how South Africa’s Development Bank is investing in SADC to support “infrastructure projects, particularly in key areas of electricity supply and improving road infrastructure in the region.”²³ The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Common Market for Eastern

20 Widodo, J. (2023). Remarks of President of the Republic of Indonesia at the Kickoff Ceremony of Indonesia 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship, Jakarta – 29 January 2023. Cabinet Secretariat of The Republic of Indonesia. Available online: <https://setkab.go.id/en/remarks-of-president-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-at-the-kickoff-ceremony-of-indonesia-2023-asean-chairmanship-jakarta-january-29-2023/>.

21 Modi, N. (2018). Opening remarks by the PM at the Plenary Session of the INDIA- ASEAN Commemorative Summit – 26 January 2018. Ministry of External Affairs. Available online: https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29390/Opening_remarks_by_the_PM_at_the_Plenary_Session_of_the_INDIA_ASEAN_Commemorative_Summit_January_25_2018.

22 Temer, M. (2018). Speech by the President of the Republic, Michel Temer, during the Plenary Session of the World Economic Forum 2018 - Davos/Switzerland – 24 January 2018. Presidency. Available online: <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/publicacoes/discursos-artigos-e-entrevistas/presidente-da-republica/presidente-da-republica-federativa-do-brasil-discursos/discurso-do-presidente-da-republica-michel-temer-durante-sessao-plenaria-do-forum-economico-mundial-2018-davos-suica-24-de-janeiro-de-2018>.

23 Zuma, J. (2013). Address by President Jacob Zuma on the Occasion of the First Meeting of the BRICS Business Council, Johannesburg – 30 August 2013. Presidency. Available online: <https://www.presidency.gov.za/node/5840>.

and Southern Africa (COMESA) appear to be much less important, with very limited references by India and South Africa, respectively.

Interestingly, BRICS, is prominently mentioned across several countries, with South Africa leading (484 mentions), followed by India (185) and Brazil (113). In contrast, the NDB is mentioned only seven times. Traditional financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, have been mentioned more than the NDB in the past decade. A comparison of references to BRICS and the UN System (including the UNSC, FAO, UNCTAD, and UNFCCC)²⁴ suggests that these countries, particularly South Africa, have increasingly *referenced BRICS in the context of addressing global challenges, and more so than the UN and Bretton Woods institutions*. This is not the case in Indonesia, which emphasizes the importance of ASEAN and, to some extent, the UN, while also discussing the possibility of joining BRICS. *The upshot of this is that the BRICS is clearly emerging as a much more important actor in global governance, as seen by these emerging powers.*

24 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

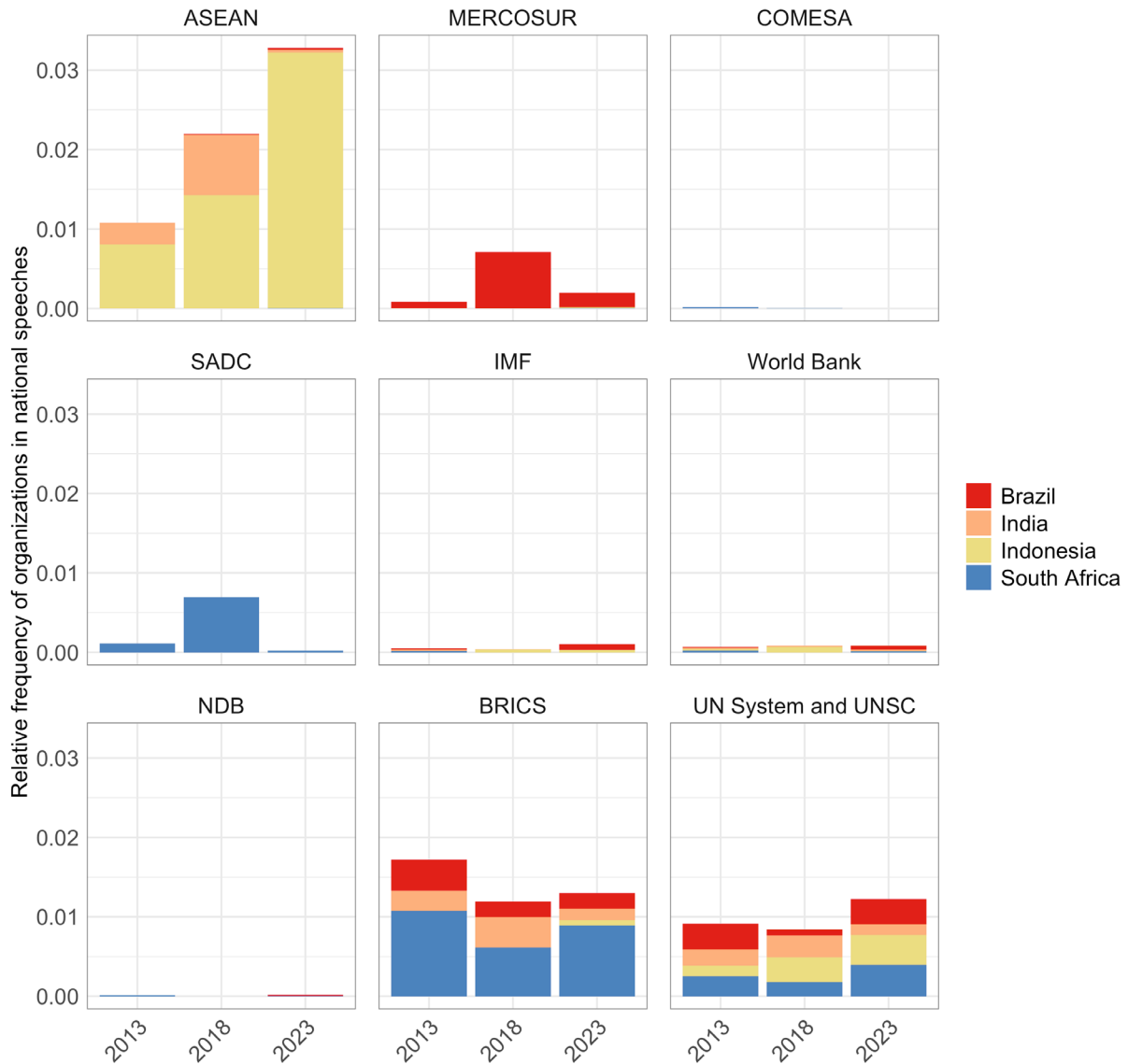


Figure 3 – Relative frequency of mentions of regional organizations and BRICS

A similar pattern is found when we assess “keyness”²⁵ of terms in speeches over time by the same countries in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Figure 4 shows that reform of multilaterals does not appear to be central when compared to other issues. Not surprisingly, each country mainly focuses on particular regional challenges and issues, such as Pakistan and terrorism for India, indigenous groups and the Amazon for Brazil, the African content for South Africa, ASEAN and the Pacific for Indonesia, and Lake Chad and Boko Haram for Nigeria.

25 Keyness is a metric in text analysis that determines how distinctive a term is for a particular subset of texts. Each bar represents a term’s keyness score for the states for which the term is distinctive. The longer the bar, the more distinctive the term is for that state.

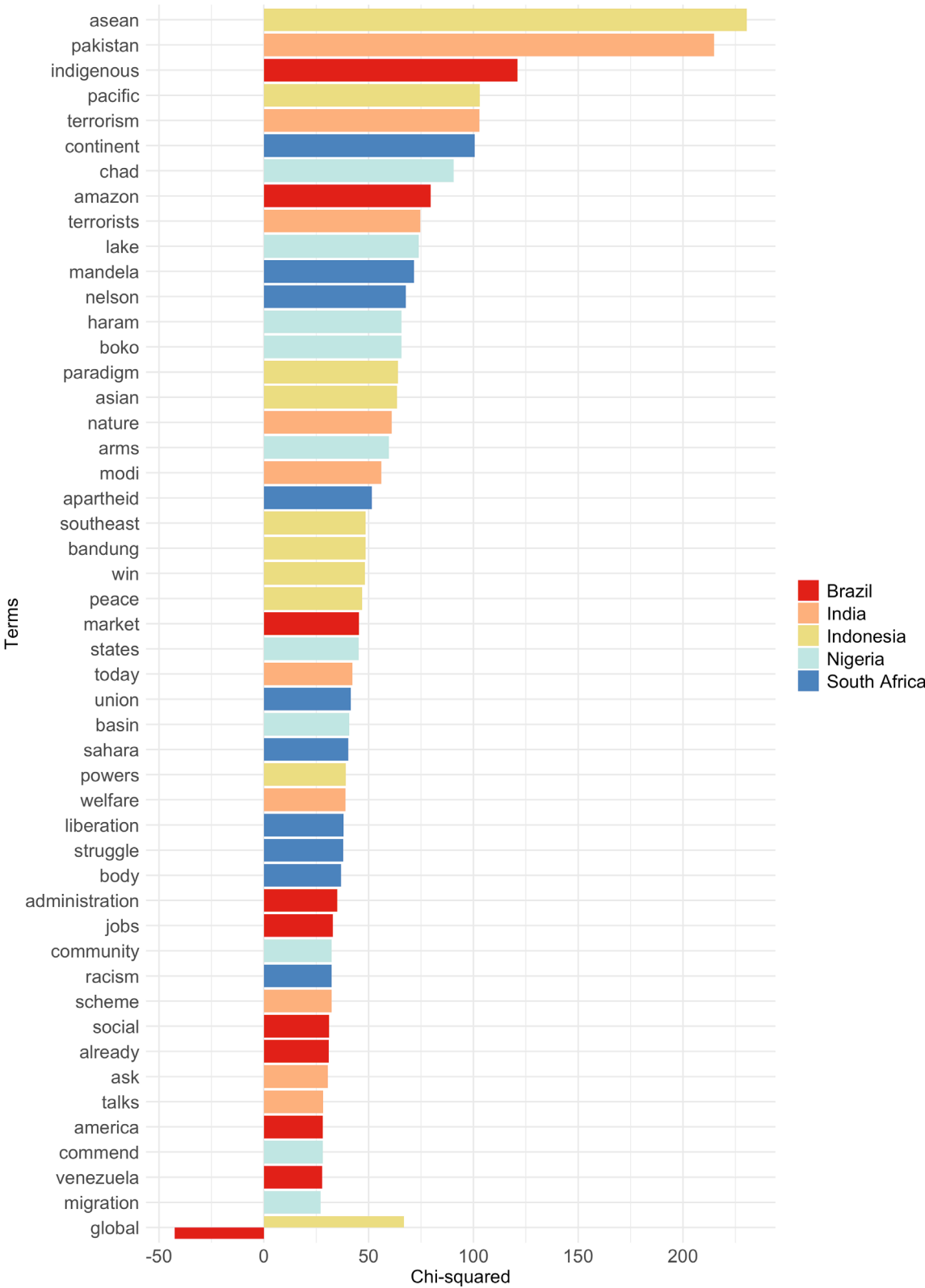


Figure 4: Keyness of term by state in UNGA speeches over time

Comparing reform talk at the UN, WB/IMF, and the G20

We also compared references to “reform” in three different contexts, namely the UN, WB/IMF, and the G20. Figure 5, below, shows that reform is a consistent issue over time for these states at the UN, with some variation: Brazil, India and South Africa are more consistently referring to reform and do so more frequently than Nigeria and Indonesia, which is not surprising given that Brazil, India and South Africa are considered front-runners in debates about expansion of the UNSC.

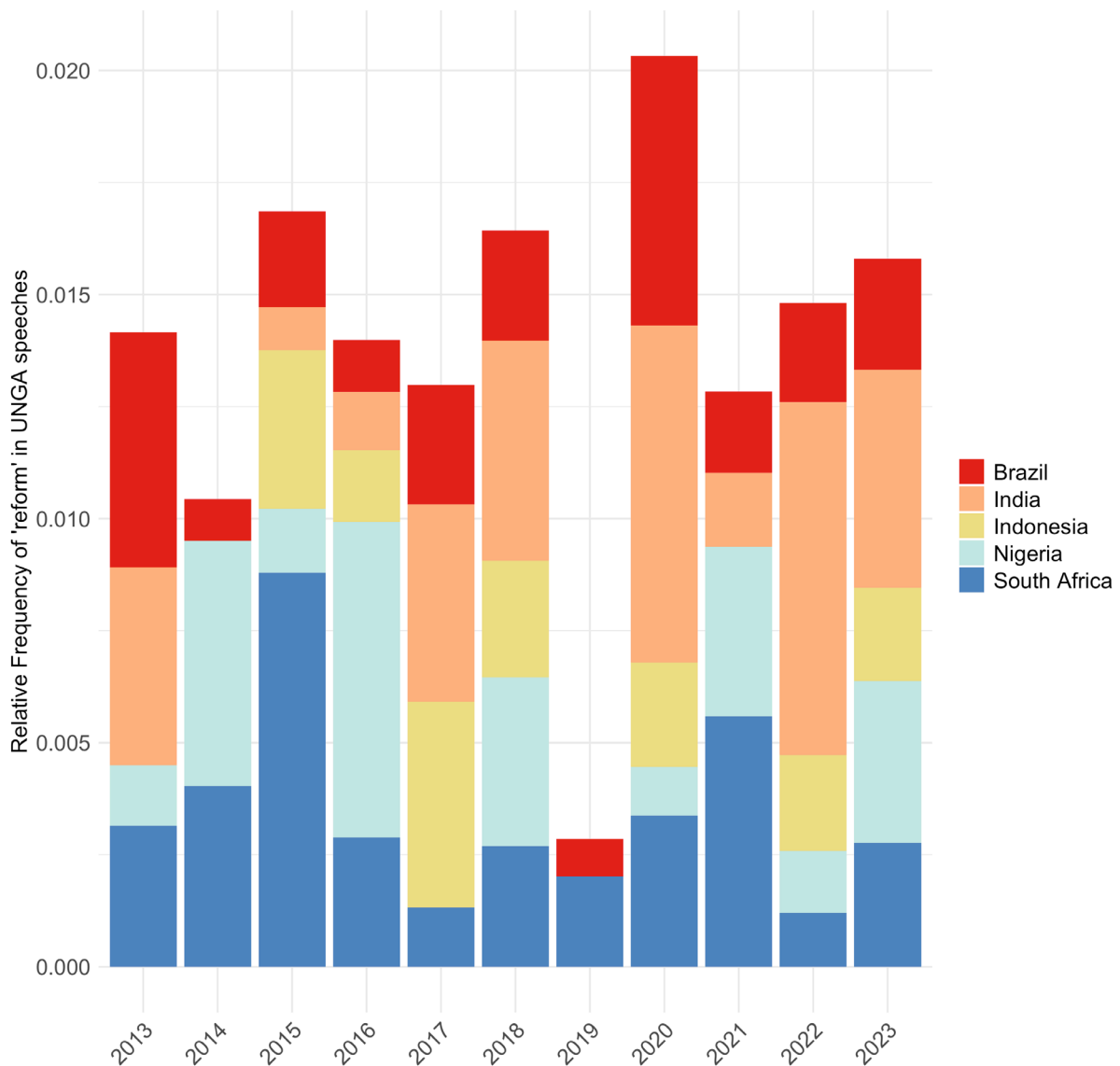


Figure 5 – Relative frequency of the term “reform” at the UNGA

Comparing the development over time of references to reform at the UN, on the one hand (as in Figure 5, above), with those at the IMF and the World Bank, on the other,²⁶ reveal a similar picture of a constant focus on reform. Figure 6 shows that there is a downward trend until 2022, after which we see a significant uptick in light of the discussions of “evolution”/”reform.”

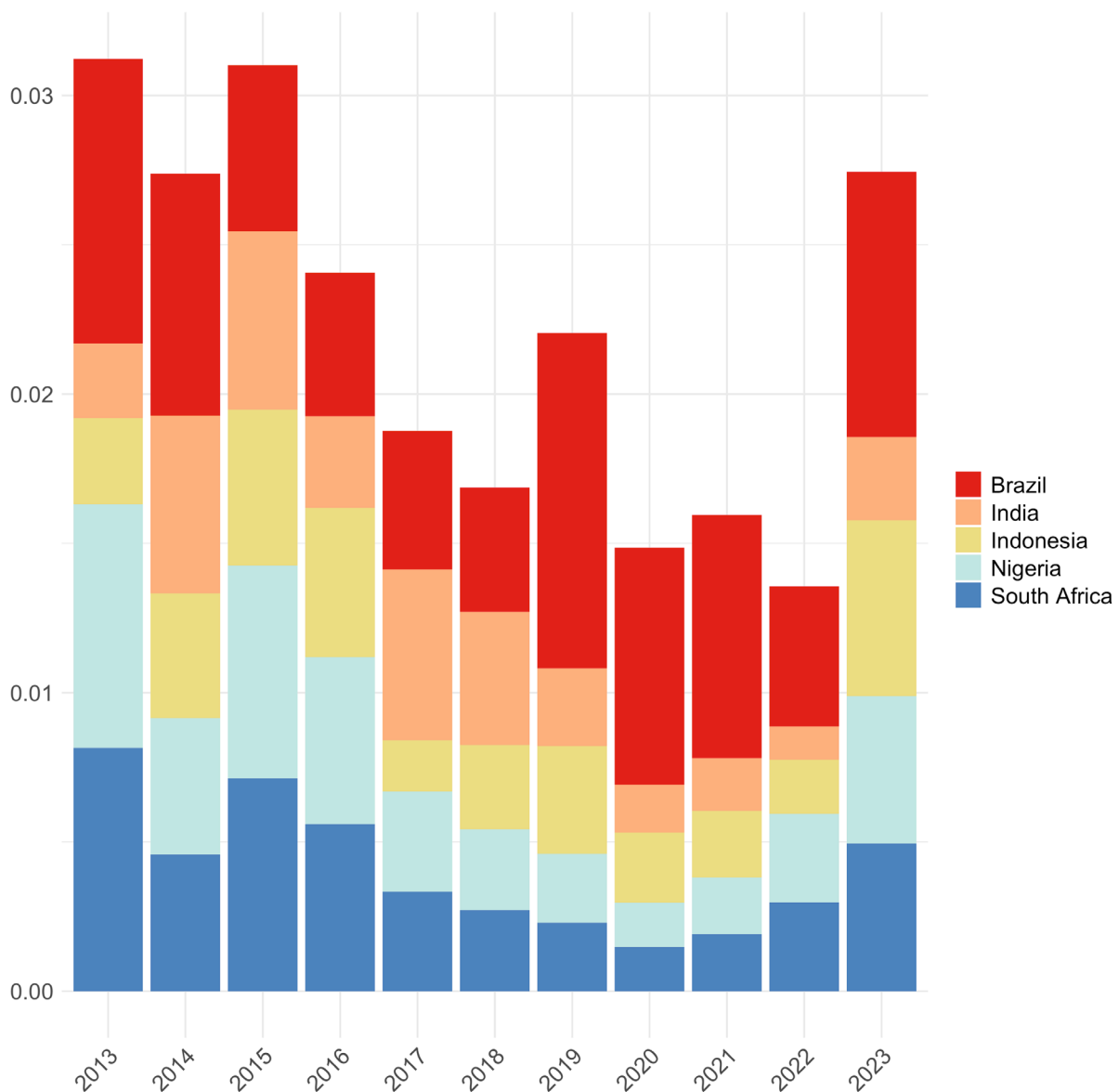


Figure 6 – Relative frequency of term “reform”/”evolution” at the IMF/WB

26 This corpus of speeches comprises 224 speeches delivered by representatives of the countries in two key forums: the bi-annual IMF Financial Committee meetings and the bi-annual Development Committee joint IMF/World Bank sessions, from 2013 to 2023. It is important to note that there are instances where a single minister speaks on behalf of a group of countries. As a result, Nigeria and South Africa have shared the same text in the analysis in certain years, and the same applies to India and Indonesia.

If we then move to compare the references to “reform” within these established multilaterals, on the one hand, with that of the G20, however, we can see a counter-intuitive development: *The references to reform in G20 documents over time has gone down significantly* (see Figure 7).

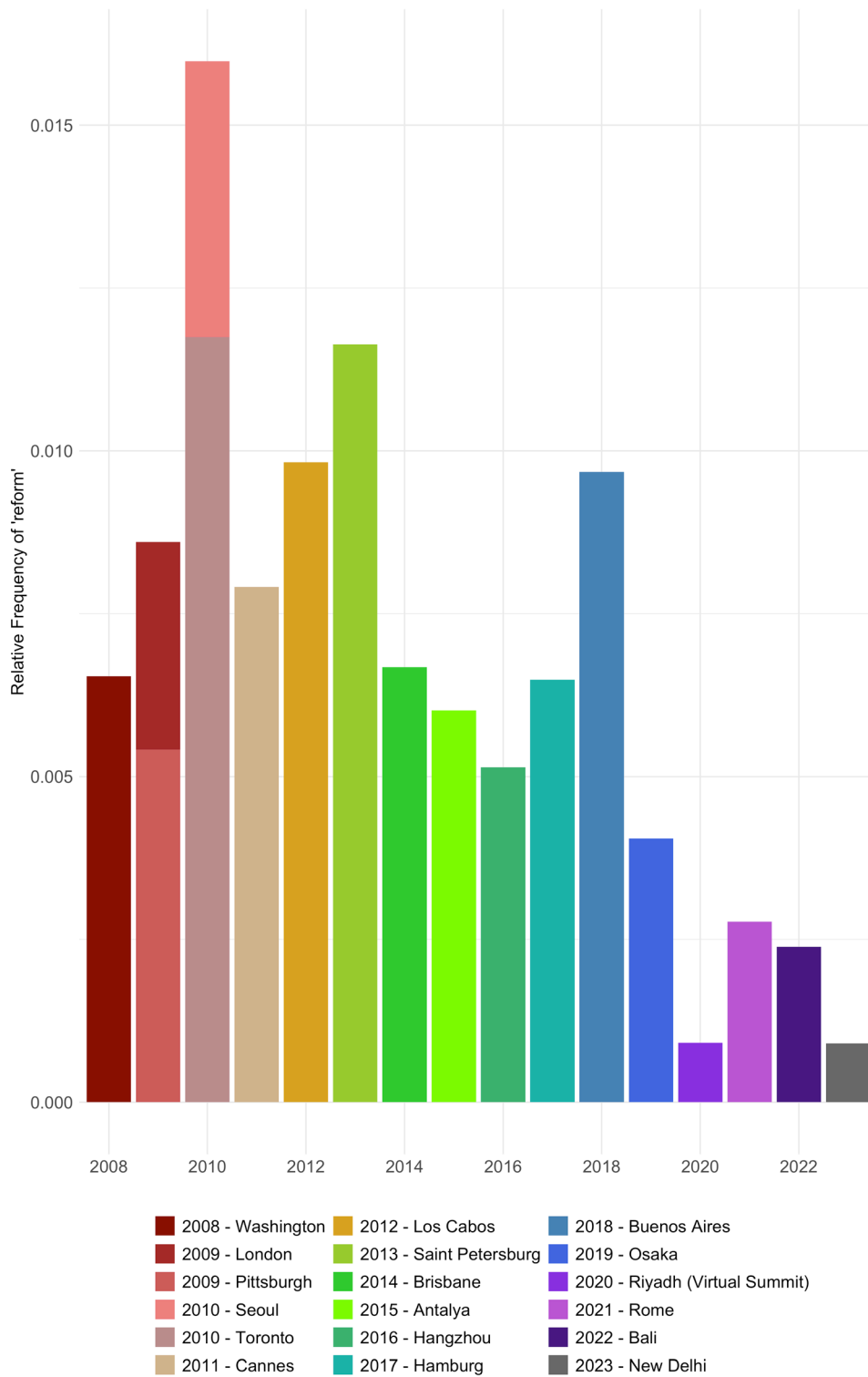


Figure 7 – Relative frequency of term “reform” – G20 documents

Not surprisingly, the initial discussions were focused on *reform of financial systems* in response to the financial crisis of 2008, but already from the beginning, we see that broader reform issues, particularly pertaining to voice and representation, are mentioned. The Declaration from the initial summit in Washington in 2008 stressed that “We are determined to enhance our cooperation and work together to restore global growth and *achieve needed reforms in the world’s financial systems.*”²⁷ But it also notes that “We are committed to advancing the *reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions* so that they can more adequately reflect changing economic weights in the world economy in order to increase their legitimacy and effectiveness.” This is reiterated in the 2010 Declaration from Toronto in 2010, where a similar focus on reform and strengthening of financial systems is coupled with the need for reform of international financial institutions: “Ongoing governance and management reforms, which must be completed, will also enhance the effectiveness and relevance of these institutions.”²⁸

Over time, however, the references to reform of international financial institutions have become *more specific and tangible*. In 2020, the Declaration from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, notes that “We remain committed to revisiting the adequacy of quotas and will continue the process of IMF governance reform under the 16th general review of quotas, including a new quota formula as a guide, by 15 December 2023.”²⁹ In 2023, the Declaration from New Delhi frames reform questions more broadly, and also expands focus to UN reform: “The global order has undergone dramatic changes since the Second World War due to economic growth and prosperity, decolonization, demographic dividends, technological achievements, emergence of new economic powers and deeper international cooperation.”³⁰ Against this backdrop, the Declaration moves on to stress the “need for revitalized multilateralism to adequately address contemporary global challenges of the 21st Century, and to make global governance more representative, effective, transparent and accountable.”

However, *since 2020, “reform” is less frequently referenced than “trade” and “security”*. Granted, the context for and the process of producing a G20 communiqué, declarations, and action plans is very different from those where national governments state their national positions. It is a negotiated text. But the downward development of references to reform nonetheless indicates that in negotiations within the G20, reform-issues seems to have become less, not more, important over time. We can, however, expect that the documents from the G20 in 2024, with Brazil holding the Presidency of the G20, which has emphasized reform of multilaterals, will go up.

27 G20. (2008). Declaration of the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy – Washington, 15 November 2008. Available online:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240212213703/http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2008/2008declaration1115.html>.

28 G20. (2010). The G20 Toronto Summit Declaration – Toronto, 27 June 2010. Available online:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240118214612/http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2010/to-communication.html>.

29 G20. (2020). Leaders’ Declaration – Riyadh (Virtual Summit), 22 November 2020. Available online:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240123055613/http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2020/2020-g20-leaders-declaration-1121.html>.

30 G20. (2023). G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration – New Delhi, 09 September 2023. Available online:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240201131952/http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2023/230909-declaration.html>.

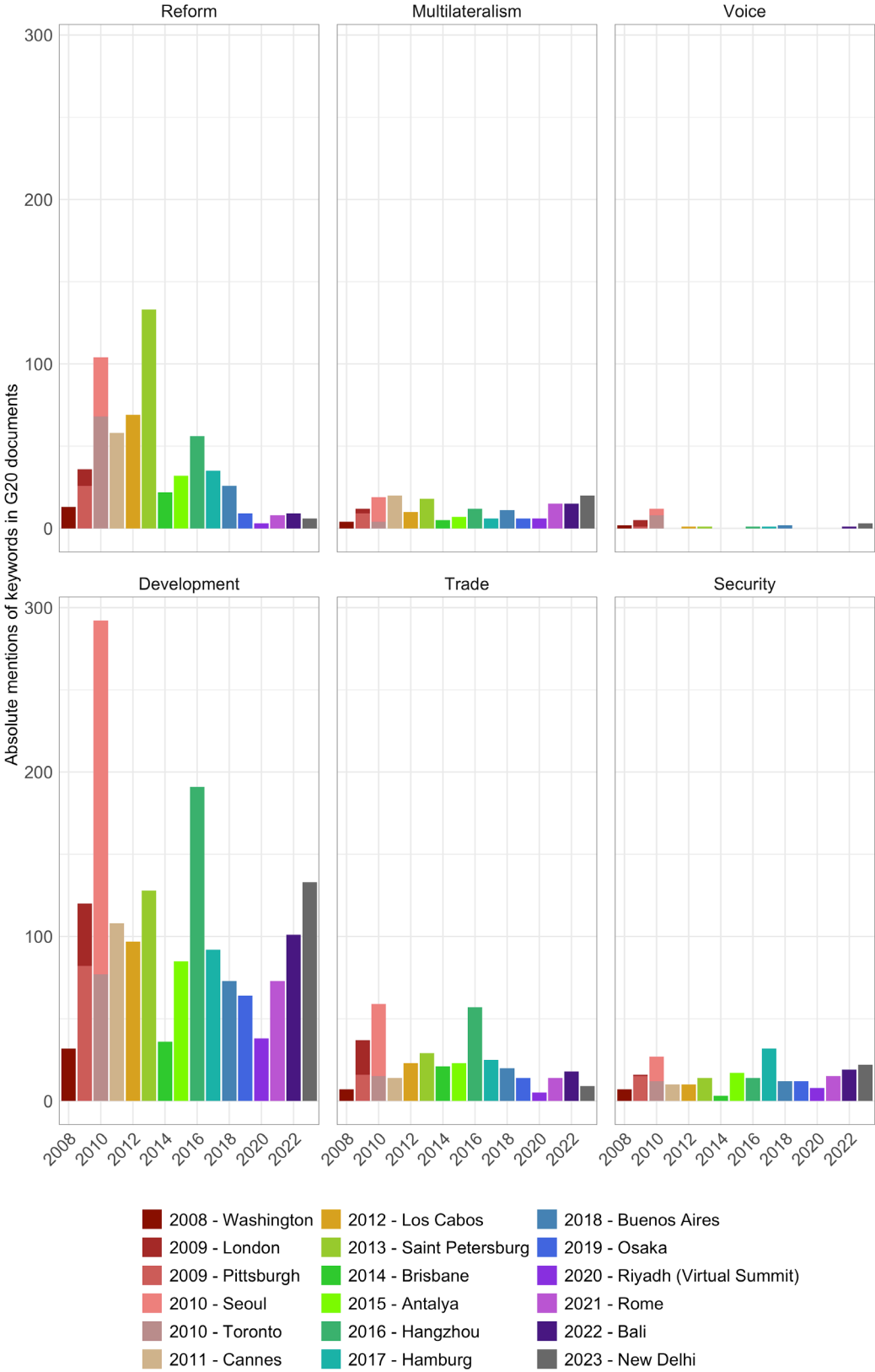


Figure 8 – Absolute mentions of keywords – G20 documents

Evolution of the G20 Agenda

The degree to which the G20s policy agenda has expanded and evolved over time is of interest. This is so because an expansion of the agenda suggests that the G20 is becoming more important in several issue-areas, and that G20 members are authorizing themselves to make decisions on behalf of larger groups of states. This is of interest because it tells us something about the direction of travel of multilateral agenda-setting, and what the G20 may imply for the role and functioning of the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and other multilateral organizations.

When analyzing the documents, we classified each sentence into twelve policy domains based on a predefined set of relevant keywords. Additionally, we categorized the priorities associated with each G20 presidency according to these areas. These categories encompass a wide range of topics, associated with specific terms that indicate subject matters. As one can see in Fig 9, below, “finance and economics” is – as expected – the primary policy area on the agenda of the G20 over time, with approximately 50% of sentences classified under this category, as shown by the relative size of its circle. The primary policy domains in G20 documents were associated with words such as “financial,” “monetary,” “investment,” “banking,” “market,” “fiscal,” “debt,” “capital,” “currency” and so on. This topic is consistently reflected across all priorities over time, as detailed in the annex, with Figure 9 also using a red frame to highlight instances where the topic is prioritized in specific years. “Trade” and “tax,” as highly connected to the first policy domain, are also displayed in Figure 9 as the core cluster of economic discussions that are in the documents. “Reform” appears as a topic that has been highlighted as a priority in seven different years.

The “health” domain becomes particularly notable for its surge in relevance in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also heightened as a priority in 2021 and 2022. “Climate and environment” and “energy” have been consistently discussed since 2008, in all years analyzed, and increasing in importance over the last few years. “International security and terrorism” appear in the documents, often linked with the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT), on which, see below in Fig 10.



Figure 9 – Policy Domains and Priorities over time: Proportion of sentences categorized by Policy Domains, with Priorities highlighted in red

Figure 10 presents the most mentioned international organizations in the documents. Since 2008, the IMF, the Financial Stability Board (FSB), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, FATF, Multilateral Development Banks, and the WTO have been the most mentioned organizations. *We take this to indicate that the G20 is increasingly emerging as an “orchestrator” in global governance, not instructing but “tasking” and suggesting areas of priority for established, multilateral organizations and their programs.*³¹

³¹ Downey, 2022.



Figure 10 – Multilateral institutions mentioned in G20 documents

Summary and key take-aways

Trade and security matter more than reform

All states have a hierarchy of foreign policy interests, and the states being analyzed here are no different. As a point of departure, states' core interests can be assumed to revolve around security and economic welfare, but scholars also point to the importance of international recognition and concerns with status.³² In this context, a central question regards how an interest in and calls for reform of different multilaterals are prioritized relative to *other* interests, such as trade and economic development. As noted above, while these countries have a consistent mention of reform issues, the *references to e.g. trade and security are far more frequent*. One possible implication of this is that progress on e.g. WTO reform, which affects the economic conditions directly, may matter more than representation and voice. This raises a more general point about the balance between so-called input and output legitimacy which matters also for how one approaches calls for reform of the UNSC, World Bank, and the IMF, as discussed below.

Input and output legitimacy, membership and performance

Reform proposals of all multilaterals can broadly be divided into *membership* and *performance*, which reflect the difference between input and output legitimacy, respectively.

For understandable reasons, the most persistent calls for reform concerns membership, where emerging powers demand a seat at the table at the UNSC, and larger voting shares in the World Bank and the IMF. These calls for reform are typically based on claims that these institutions would have to *expand membership to be legitimate and reflect the contemporary distribution of power in international politics*. This applies to both the UNSC and the IMF.

This is distinct, however, from calls for reform that concern these institutions' *performance*. Expanding the membership of the UNSC, for example, *would not enhance its performance as a body to prevent and manage international security crises*. Indeed, the conditions for reaching a consensus and avoiding a veto, in the UNSC is likely to be more, not less, difficult with expanded membership. This fact in no way undermines the legitimate demands of emerging powers to be included as members of the UNSC. But it raises the more fundamental question of what should be the core focus in debates about reform.

Indeed, it is in many ways remarkable that there is so much focus on UNSC membership and so little on its performance, given that its track record in preventing and managing crises is so poor. As one commentator has noted, discussions of UNSC reform should focus on its performance "as a body where opposing great powers could meet and chart pathways to de-escalation. Reviving this function

32 Wohlforth, W., De Carvalho, B., Leira, H., & Neumann, I. (2018). Moral authority and status in International Relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking. *Review of International Studies*, 44(3), 526-546. <http://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0260210517000560>; Beaumont, P. (2024). *The Grammar of Status Competition: International Hierarchies and Domestic Politics*. Oxford University Press.

of the council, as a tool for de-escalation, is *more important than membership reform*.³³ In this context, there is a significant difference between organizations: in contrast to the UNSC, the IMF has in fact been able to prevent and address major international crises that falls within its mandate, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2010 Euro-area crisis. In both cases, the role of the IMF was of critical importance in safeguarding financial stability, acting together with key central banks and the G20.

Club governance on the rise

More frequent mentions of BRICS relative to UN/UNSC and WB and IMF suggest that this is taken seriously and is likely to grow more important in the future, with expanded membership. This suggests that coordination between BRICS and other clubs like the G7 will become increasingly important as a pathway to forge agreement on how to define and act on global challenges. The G20 may very well emerge as the de facto coordinator and “orchestrator” between such competing clubs, where de facto decisions on tasks and resources may migrate away from formal multilaterals. The trend towards an expansion of the agenda of the G20 also points in this direction, and further suggests a subtle yet significant shift towards a stronger focus on both input and output legitimacy (on the assumption that it is easier for clubs to agree and coordinate on behalf of larger groups of countries). Moreover, the trend in G20 documents, where references to reform go down over time, not up, suggests a particular “group dynamic” within the G20, where the intensity of pushing for reform is tempered by the fact of being on the inside of an increasingly powerful club.

Variation between emerging powers

Both the country-specific and text-based analyses indicate a shared focus and prioritization of reform of multilaterals. But there are also distinct differences: both Indonesia and Nigeria appear to – tacitly – accept that they are not frontrunners for permanent seats at the UNSC. Meanwhile the IBSA group – *India, Brazil and South Africa* – see themselves as *primus inter pares* within this group of emerging powers. There is also a distinct – and important – regional dimension, in that some emerging powers appear to foreground regional governance arrangements more than others. ASEAN features prominently in documents from Indonesia in particular, but also from India, while SADC and MERCOSUR appear in the discourse of South Africa and Brazil, respectively.

Claims to represent the “Global South”

While not reflected per se in the textual analysis, the country-specific analyses clearly point to the importance that emerging powers attach to claims to represent low-income and least developed countries. This claim to representation flies in the face of the more general argument about voice and representation and “democratization” of multilaterals that emerging powers are advancing. This tension is arguably more pronounced in the case of WTO negotiations, where the economic interests of emerging powers are often at loggerheads with LDCs.³⁴ Amid increasing paralysis

33 Jones, B. (2024). “Instrument of order: Does the UN Security Council matter in an era of Global South diplomacy and major power transitions?” Brookings. Available online: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/instrument-of-order/>. Granted, the UNSC has been able to establish mandates for UN peace operations, but this has reached a standstill, with no new peace operations since 2014.

34 Azmeh, S. (2024). Developing Countries and Joint Statement Initiatives at the WTO: Damned if You Join, Damned if You Don't?. Development and Change.

caused by the US and China, India and Indonesia have also obstructed trade negotiations in the WTO to protect their subsidies and key economic sectors.³⁵ From our analysis, the claim to speak on behalf of LDCs is tenuous. Although Brazil, China and India maintain a discourse of south-south solidarity, they advance their own interests at e.g. the WTO at the expense of other developing countries.³⁶ In economic terms, the traditional global north's share of global GDP is diminishing, with a correspondent increase in the global south's share. This also gradually shifts the onus of global economic inequalities from north-south to south-south, across a range of factors, including GDP per capita growth, diversification of the economy, and labor productivity growth. As the global south's share is project to increase from 57% in 2020, to 72% in 2050, "The elephant in the room grows bigger", and the North-South economic divergence debate is about to be replaced with a South-South divergence debate.³⁷

35 Hopewell, K. (2024). The World Is Abandoning the WTO: And America and China are leading the way. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/world-abandoning-wto-china-leading-way-kristen-hopewell>.

36 Hopewell, K. (2021). Heroes of the developing world? Emerging powers in WTO agriculture negotiations and dispute settlement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49(3), 561–584. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1873292>; Weinhardt, C., & Schöfer, T. (2021). Differential treatment for developing countries in the WTO: the unmaking of the North–South distinction in a multipolar world. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(1), 74–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1992271>.

37 Frankema, E. (2024). From the Great Divergence to South–South Divergence: New comparative horizons in global economic history. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Early View. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12609>: 8.

Annex: G20 Priorities

2008 – Washington, United States

Dealing with the financial crisis; Strengthening economic growth; Principles for reform of financial systems to help to avoid similar crises in the future

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation, Reform of multilaterals

2009 – London, United Kingdom

Global economic challenges; Financial stability; Growth and jobs, Reform international financial institutions

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation, Employment, Reform of multilaterals

2009 – Pittsburgh, United States

Balanced and sustainable economic growth

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation

2010 – Toronto, Canada

Continue the implementation of previous G20 agreements including the framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth; introduce new issues including global financial safety nets; strengthen ties with non-G20 countries in order to reflect their interests in the G20 process

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation

2010 – Seoul, South Korea

Continue the implementation of previous G20 agreements including the framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth; introduce new issues including global financial safety nets; strengthen ties with non-G20 countries in order to reflect their interests in the G20 process

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation

2011 – Cannes, France

Reform of the International Monetary System (IMS); Strengthening Financial Regulation; Addressing the Volatility of Commodity Prices; Supporting Employment and Strengthening the Social Dimension of Globalization; Financing and Development

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation, Employment, Reform of multilaterals, Development

2012 – Los Cabos, Mexico

Economic stabilization and structural reforms as foundations for growth and employment; Strengthening the financial system and fostering financial inclusion to promote economic growth; Improving the international financial architecture in an interconnected world; Enhancing food security and addressing commodity price volatility; Promoting sustainable development, green growth and the fight against climate change.

Macroeconomy policy, Financial regulation, Trade, Food Security, Development, Climate and environment

2013 – St. Petersburg, Russia

Growth through quality jobs and investment (Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced growth; Financing for Investment; Development for All); Growth through trust and transparency (International Financial Architecture Reform; Fighting Corruption); Growth through effective regulation (Strengthening Financial Regulation; Enhancing Multilateral Trade; Energy Sustainability)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Financial regulation, Good governance, Corruption, Trade, Energy, Development, Reform of multilaterals

2014 – Brisbane, Australia

Promoting stronger economic growth and employment outcomes (Attracting private infrastructure investment; Removing obstacles to trade; Creating jobs and lifting participation; Empowering development); Making the global economy more resilient to deal with future shocks (Reforming the global financial system; Strengthening tax systems; Reforming global institutions; Strengthening energy market resilience; Fighting corruption)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Trade, Financial regulation, Development, Reform of multilaterals, Taxation, Energy, Crime and corruption

2015 – Antalya, Turkey

Strengthening the Global Recovery and Lifting the Potential (Macro Policy Cooperation; Investment; Employment; Trade); Enhancing Resilience (Financial Regulation; International Financial Architecture; International Tax; Anti-Corruption); Buttressing Sustainability (Development; Energy Sustainability; Climate Change Finance)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Trade, Financial regulation, Development, Taxation, Energy, Crime and corruption

2016 – Hangzhou, China

Breaking a new path for growth; More effective and efficient global economic and financial governance (Improving International Financial Architecture to Meet Future Challenges; Continuing Financial Sector Reforms; Developing Green Finance; Improving International Tax Regime; Implementing Consensus on Anti-Corruption); Robust International trade and investment (Reinforcing Trade and Investment Cooperation Mechanism; Supporting the Multilateral Trade System; Promoting Global Trade Growth; Promoting Inclusive and Integrated Global Value Chains; Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination on Global Investment Policy); Inclusive and Interconnected Development (Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Optimizing G20 Development Cooperation Agenda; Building Infrastructure and Connectivity; Promoting Accessible, Affordable and Sustainable Energy Supply; Increasing Employment; Improving Food Security and Nutrition; Mobilizing Climate Finance; Eradicating Poverty; Supporting Industrialization in Africa and Other Developing Countries)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Trade, Financial regulation, Development, Taxation, Energy, Crime and corruption, Food Security, Climate and environment, Reform of multilaterals

2017 – Hamburg, Germany

Building resilience (Strengthening economic resilience; Strengthening the international financial architecture; Further developing financial markets; Making taxation fair and reliable internationally; Deepening cooperation on trade and investment; Enhancing and improving employment); Improving sustainability (Protecting the climate and advancing sustainable energy supply; Making progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; Seizing the opportunities of digital technology; Promoting health; Empowering women); Assuming responsibility (Addressing displacement and migration; Intensifying the partnership with Africa; Combating terrorist financing and money laundering; Fighting corruption; Improving food security)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Trade, Financial regulation, Development, Taxation, Energy, Crime and corruption, Migration, Climate and environment, Gender, Health, International Security and Terrorism, Food Security

2018 – Buenos Aires, Argentina

Future of work; Infrastructure for development; Sustainable food security

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Development, Food Security

2019 – Osaka, Japan

Global Economy; Trade and Investment; Innovation; Environment and Energy; Employment; Women’s Empowerment; Development; Health

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Trade, Development, Energy, Climate and environment, Gender, Health

2020 – Riyadh (Virtual Summit), Saudi Arabia

Empowering People (Create conditions in which all people, especially women and youth, can live, work, and thrive, financial inclusion); Safeguarding the Planet (Foster collective efforts to protect our commons, sustainable energy systems, reforestation, water management), Shaping New Frontiers (Adopt long-term and bold strategies to utilize and share benefits of innovation, technology in infrastructure, global solution to tax)

Macroeconomy policy, Employment, Development, Gender, Financial regulation, Energy, Climate and environment, Taxation

2021 – Rome, Italy

Recovery from the pandemic and global health governance; Economic recovery and resilience; Climate Change; Sustainable Development and Food Security

Macroeconomy policy, Health, Employment, Development, Climate and environment, Food Security

2022 – Bali, Indonesia

Global Health Architecture; Digital-based Economic Transformation; Sustainable Energy Transitions

Macroeconomy policy, Health, Development, Climate and environment, Energy

2023 – New Delhi, India

Green Development, Climate Finance & Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE); Accelerated, Inclusive & Resilient Growth; Accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Technological Transformation & Digital Public Infrastructure; Multilateral Institutions for the 21st century; Women-led development

Macroeconomy policy, Development, Climate and environment, Energy, Reform of multilaterals, Gender

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

C.J. Hambros plass 2d
PO box 7024 Post i Butikk Extra
Pilestredet Park 18
0176 Oslo

post@nupi.no

nupi.no

