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ASSESSING NIGERIA'S PROSPECTIVE BRICS MEMBERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL UNITY

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Abstract

This study evaluates the potential implications of Nigeria's membership in BRICS on African development and regional unity, drawing on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy reports, and economic analyses. As Africa's largest economy, Nigeria's inclusion in BRICS could enhance trade opportunities, infrastructure financing, and geopolitical influence. The study explores how BRICS membership may impact Nigeria's economic growth, diplomatic leverage, and intra-African relations, particularly in comparison to South Africa's existing role. While BRICS presents an alternative to Western-dominated financial institutions, concerns regarding geopolitical alignments, policy harmonization, and economic dependencies remain significant. Findings indicate that Nigeria's ability to maximize BRICS benefits depends on strategic policy frameworks, institutional reforms, and diplomatic engagement. Additionally, the study highlights potential challenges, including governance inefficiencies, economic diversification constraints, and intra-African political dynamics. The research contributes to the broader discourse on Africa's engagement with emerging global powers and the prospects for collective continental development. It concludes that Nigeria's BRICS membership, if well-managed, could strengthen Africa's global standing, but requires a balanced approach to national and regional priorities.

Keywords: Nigeria, BRICS, African development, geopolitical influence, economic integration.

i. Introduction

Nigeria's potential membership in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has sparked scholarly debates regarding its implications for African development and regional unity. BRICS, established as a coalition of emerging economies, aims to challenge Western-dominated financial institutions and foster South-South cooperation (Armijo, 2007). Since South Africa joined in 2010, discussions on expanding BRICS to include more African states have intensified, with Nigeria often cited as a key candidate due to its economic strength and geopolitical influence (Onyekwena&Ekeruche, 2019).

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, plays a critical role in continental economic and political affairs (Adebajo, 2021). Proponents argue that joining BRICS could enhance Nigeria's access to alternative development financing, boost trade partnerships, and strengthen its diplomatic standing (Adetula, 2022). The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), which prioritizes infrastructure financing, presents an opportunity for Nigeria to reduce reliance on Western financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which have been criticized for imposing stringent loan conditions (Wade, 2013).

However, critics caution that Nigeria's membership could deepen geopolitical fragmentation within Africa, particularly concerning its role in the African Union (AU) and its relations with Western allies (Ogunnubi& Okeke-Uzodike, 2016). Additionally, concerns about China and Russia's growing influence in Africa raise questions about whether BRICS truly fosters

equitable partnerships or merely shifts dependency from Western nations to new global powers (Hope, 2020). Nigeria's structural economic challenges, including governance inefficiencies, corruption, and overreliance on oil exports, may also limit its ability to maximize BRICS membership benefits (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013).

This study evaluates Nigeria's possible inclusion in BRICS, assessing its economic, political, and developmental impacts on Africa. By examining trade relations, financial benefits, and geopolitical considerations, this research provides a nuanced understanding of whether BRICS membership would advance Nigeria's interests while promoting Africa's collective growth and unity.

ii. Research Questions

1. What are the potential economic, political, and social benefits of Nigeria's membership in BRICS for the country itself and for Africa as a whole?
2. How could Nigeria's inclusion in BRICS enhance African development, particularly in infrastructure, technology transfer, and trade?
3. What challenges could Nigeria face in aligning its priorities with those of BRICS, and how might these challenges affect Africa's unity and development agenda?
4. How would Nigeria's membership impact intra-African relations and the existing dynamic within BRICS, particularly in relation to South Africa?
5. What strategies can Nigeria adopt to maximize its contributions to and benefits from BRICS membership while advancing Africa's collective interests?

iii. Research Objectives

1. To assess the specific economic benefits and risks of Nigeria's BRICS membership, including trade expansion, investment inflows, and financial alternatives, in relation to African development and Nigeria's national economic goals.
2. To examine Nigeria's potential role within BRICS in shaping global governance reforms, particularly regarding Africa's bargaining power in international financial institutions, infrastructure development, and debt sustainability.
3. To analyze the geopolitical and strategic challenges Nigeria may encounter in aligning its foreign policy and economic interests with BRICS member states and their impact on African unity and regional integration.
4. To evaluate how Nigeria's membership would affect intra-African diplomatic relations, particularly in relation to South Africa's existing role in BRICS, and its implications for continental representation in global decision-making.
5. To develop policy recommendations for Nigeria to effectively navigate BRICS membership, maximizing its economic and diplomatic advantages while promoting Africa's collective development and strategic interests.

iv. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using secondary sources of data to assess Nigeria's prospective BRICS membership and its implications for African development and regional unity. Secondary data is collected from a wide range of scholarly literature, policy

documents, government reports, international organization publications, and media analyses. Academic journals, books, and working papers provide theoretical and empirical insights into Nigeria's economic, political, and diplomatic engagements within global institutions. Reports from organizations such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) offer data on economic trends, trade relations, and development financing.

A content analysis of these sources helps to identify recurring themes, debates, and patterns regarding Nigeria's potential benefits and challenges within BRICS. Comparative analysis is also used to examine South Africa's experience as the only African BRICS member, providing a basis for evaluating Nigeria's potential role. The study critically assesses the geopolitical and economic implications of BRICS membership, focusing on trade, investment, governance, and regional diplomacy. By relying on existing data, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's strategic positioning within BRICS and its broader impact on African development and unity.

v. Conceptual Framework

In the context of **"Assessing Nigeria's Prospective BRICS Membership: Implications for African Development and Regional Unity,"** the following key concepts are essential:

1. **BRICS** – BRICS refers to an intergovernmental organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, aimed at fostering economic cooperation, political dialogue, and development financing among emerging economies (Armijo, 2007). BRICS seeks to challenge Western-dominated financial institutions and promote South-South collaboration in global governance (Hope, 2020).

2. **African Development** – African development encompasses the economic, political, and social progress of African nations, often measured through indicators such as GDP growth, infrastructure expansion, poverty reduction, and governance improvements (Todaro & Smith, 2015). It includes efforts by national governments, regional organizations, and international partnerships to foster sustainable economic growth and human development across the continent (Mkandawire, 2010).

3. **Regional Unity** – Regional unity refers to the political, economic, and social cohesion among states within a specific geographical area, aimed at fostering collective development and stability (Adetula, 2016). In Africa, regional unity is often pursued through institutions like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which advocate for economic integration, conflict resolution, and diplomatic solidarity (Adebajo, 2021).

4. **Geopolitical Influence** – Geopolitical influence refers to a nation's ability to shape international policies, economic agreements, and security dynamics through diplomatic, economic, and military means (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the African context, geopolitical influence is determined by a country's strategic positioning, resource endowment, and engagement in multilateral organizations (Ogunnubi& Okeke-Uzodike, 2016).

vi. Empirical Literature

Relevance of BRICS in the 21st Century

Despite these challenges, BRICS continues to play a vital role in providing a voice for the Global South. The group's emphasis on promoting inclusivity in global governance resonates

with many developing nations, making it a critical player in fostering south-south cooperation (Vieira & Alden, 2011).

BRICS retains substantial relevance in the 21st century, particularly in addressing global inequalities and fostering a multipolar world order. Its role as a platform for representing the interests of the Global South and challenging Western-dominated global governance structures has made it an indispensable coalition for emerging economies.

BRICS has consistently advocated for reforming international financial and political institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank, to reflect the growing influence of developing nations. This advocacy aligns with its core objective of fostering a more inclusive global order where decision-making power is equitably distributed. The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) underscores BRICS's commitment to offering alternative financial mechanisms that address the needs of emerging economies (Abdenur& Folly, 2015).

BRICS emphasizes south-south cooperation by strengthening trade, investment, and development initiatives among member states and other developing countries. Through initiatives like the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and joint development projects, BRICS has provided a framework for mutual support and economic resilience. This focus on collaborative growth positions BRICS as a vital instrument for countering economic dependence on Western powers (Pant, 2022).

In the 21st century, BRICS has sought to address shared challenges such as climate change, public health crises, and digital transformation. The bloc's engagement in forums like COP26 and its efforts to provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight its potential to influence global policy beyond economic cooperation (Stuenkel, 2020).

While BRICS's ambitions are commendable, internal divisions, such as geopolitical tensions between India and China, and disparities in economic power among member states, undermine its cohesiveness. Additionally, critics argue that BRICS lacks a unified vision and institutional capacity to implement its strategic goals effectively (Vieira & Alden, 2011). Nonetheless, its ability to adapt and remain a focal point for the Global South reflects its enduring relevance.

BRICS continues to serve as a critical forum for fostering global inclusivity and advocating for the interests of emerging economies. Its role in promoting south-south cooperation and reforming global governance structures makes it a cornerstone of 21st-century international relations. However, its relevance will depend on its ability to overcome internal challenges and maintain unity in the face of evolving global dynamics.

vii. Nigeria's Engagement with BRICS Under President Ahmed Tinubu: History and Impact

President Ahmed Bola Tinubu's tenure marks a pivotal phase in Nigeria's foreign policy, characterized by a strategic focus on emerging economies through heightened engagement with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Although Nigeria remains an observer and not a formal member of the coalition, Tinubu's administration has invigorated dialogue on Nigeria's potential inclusion.

The BRICS coalition was established to amplify the influence of major emerging economies in global governance, with South Africa joining in 2010 to represent Africa (Stuenkel, 2020). Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, has long been considered a

potential member. However, previous administrations maintained a cautious engagement, focusing instead on traditional partnerships with Western powers.

President Tinubu has shifted this approach, emphasizing diversification of Nigeria's alliances to include emerging powers. His administration views BRICS as a platform for achieving equitable global economic reforms, reducing Western dependency, and enhancing south-south cooperation (Akinyemi, 2023).

Under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's leadership, Nigeria's engagement with BRICS has been driven by a strategic pursuit of economic diversification, enhanced geopolitical influence, and regional integration. At the 2023 BRICS Summit in South Africa, Tinubu emphasized Nigeria's readiness to collaborate on infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and global financial reforms, reflecting an intent to align with BRICS' objectives of fostering inclusivity in global governance (Ajayi, 2023).

Economically, Tinubu's engagement with BRICS, particularly China and India, seeks to attract investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and technology, aligning with Nigeria's efforts to reduce oil dependency and expand its economic base (Onyeiwu, 2020). Additionally, BRICS membership could provide Nigeria access to alternative financial mechanisms such as the New Development Bank, offering new avenues for development financing.

Geopolitically, Tinubu has leveraged Nigeria's BRICS engagement to strengthen its leadership role in Africa, working alongside South Africa to amplify Africa's voice in global governance reforms (Vieira & Alden, 2011). Furthermore, BRICS' emphasis on South-South cooperation complements Nigeria's commitment to regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), fostering intra-African trade and investment.

However, Nigeria faces structural challenges in fully leveraging BRICS membership, including trade imbalances, weak governance, and infrastructure deficits (Adetula, 2015). Addressing these constraints is crucial for maximizing the benefits of BRICS engagement and advancing Nigeria's broader foreign policy and development objectives.

viii. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for evaluating Nigeria's potential membership in BRICS is grounded in the theoretical foundations of South-South Cooperation, Regional Integration, and Global Power Transition. These theories collectively provide a structured lens for analyzing Nigeria's engagement with BRICS and its implications for African development and unity.

Theoretical Foundations

1. **South-South Cooperation Theory**
   This theory emphasizes collaboration among developing nations to foster economic growth, trade, and political influence. As a coalition of emerging economies, BRICS embodies the principles of South-South Cooperation by advocating for equitable global governance and collective development efforts.
   - **Proposition**: Nigeria's alignment with BRICS could strengthen its role in promoting African development and unity through shared economic and political objectives.
   - **Basic Assumption**: Cooperation among developing nations can effectively address global inequalities and promote sustainable development.

- **Strengths**: This theory provides insights into Nigeria's potential to leverage BRICS membership for economic growth and enhanced global bargaining power.
- **Weaknesses**: South-South Cooperation often faces challenges related to power imbalances, with dominant economies such as China potentially influencing decision-making disproportionately (Vieira & Alden, 2011).
- **Relevance**: It highlights BRICS as a strategic platform through which Nigeria can enhance regional development and economic integration.

2. **Regional Integration Theory**
Regional integration theory underscores the economic and political benefits of cooperation among geographically or strategically aligned states. Nigeria's potential inclusion in BRICS could serve as a bridge between Africa and other emerging economies, fostering greater cohesion within the Global South.
   - **Proposition**: BRICS can function as a vehicle for deeper African regional integration, with Nigeria playing a leadership role in representing the continent's interests.
   - **Basic Assumption**: Regional integration fosters economic interdependence and collective security among member states.
   - **Strengths**: This theory explains Nigeria's strategic significance in advancing Africa's interests within BRICS.
   - **Weaknesses**: Diverging national priorities and infrastructural challenges may undermine the effectiveness of regional integration efforts (Adetula, 2014).
   - **Relevance**: Nigeria's engagement with BRICS aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which prioritizes continental economic and political integration.

3. **Global Power Transition Theory**
This theory examines shifts in global power dynamics, particularly the rise of emerging economies as challengers to established powers. BRICS embodies this transition, positioning itself as a counterbalance to Western-led financial and political institutions.
   - **Proposition**: Nigeria's participation in BRICS would enhance its ability to influence global governance reforms and advocate for Africa's developmental priorities.
   - **Basic Assumption**: Emerging economies can reshape the global power structure through strategic alliances and collective action.
   - **Strengths**: This theory provides a strategic perspective on how Nigeria can enhance its global standing through BRICS membership.
   - **Weaknesses**: Power transitions are often met with resistance from dominant states, creating challenges for emerging coalitions (Organski& Kugler, 1980).
   - **Relevance**: The theory underscores BRICS' potential role in amplifying Nigeria's influence on global policy decisions.

Application to the Study
The conceptual framework integrates these theories to analyze Nigeria's potential BRICS membership across three key dimensions:

1. **Economic Dimension**: South-South Cooperation explains Nigeria's potential to attract investment and improve trade relations with BRICS nations.
2. **Political Dimension**: Regional Integration Theory contextualizes Nigeria's role in promoting African unity within BRICS.
3. **Global Influence**: Power Transition Theory highlights how Nigeria could leverage BRICS membership to challenge existing global power hierarchies and advocate for African interests.

Relevance to the Study
This conceptual framework is essential for understanding Nigeria's prospective engagement with BRICS as it:

1. **Clarifies Nigeria's Role**: It situates Nigeria as a strategic bridge between Africa and the BRICS coalition.
2. **Highlights Potential Benefits**: It demonstrates how Nigeria can influence global governance and foster regional development.
3. **Identifies Challenges**: It acknowledges constraints such as power asymmetry within BRICS and conflicting national interests, providing a nuanced analysis of Nigeria's prospective engagement.

Critical Evaluation of the Framework

Strengths
- Provides a holistic approach by integrating economic, political, and global dimensions.
- Offers a structured theoretical basis for assessing Nigeria's engagement with BRICS.
- Highlights theoretical intersections crucial for understanding Nigeria's role.

Weaknesses
- Over-reliance on theoretical assumptions may not fully capture the practical challenges of Nigeria's BRICS engagement.
- Power imbalances within BRICS could limit Nigeria's influence.
- The lack of empirical data on Nigeria's specific contributions to BRICS poses challenges for robust validation.

This conceptual framework provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing Nigeria's potential BRICS membership. By synthesizing South-South Cooperation, Regional Integration, and Global Power Transition theories, it offers a multidimensional approach to evaluating the implications for African development and unity. While the framework underscores significant opportunities for Nigeria, it also recognizes the inherent challenges, ensuring a balanced assessment of the country's prospective role in BRICS.

ix. Identification and Discussion of Findings

1. Economic Implications of Nigeria's BRICS Membership

Scholars widely agree that BRICS membership could offer Nigeria significant economic opportunities, including enhanced trade relations, access to development financing, and economic diversification. According to Oyejide and Adewuyi (2020), BRICS members, particularly China and India, have emerged as major trading partners for African nations. Nigeria, with its vast oil and gas reserves, stands to gain from increased exports and infrastructural investments. However, there are concerns about the trade imbalance, where Nigeria primarily exports raw materials while importing manufactured goods, reinforcing dependency structures (Adetula, 2014).

Key Findings:

- Nigeria's BRICS membership could improve trade opportunities and foreign direct investment (FDI).
- Increased access to BRICS-led financial institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB) could support infrastructural development (Vieira & Alden, 2011).
- The risk of reinforcing Nigeria's dependency on commodity exports remains a challenge.

2. Political Influence and Regional Leadership

Scholars debate whether Nigeria's BRICS membership would enhance its geopolitical standing or weaken its regional leadership in Africa. According to Bach (2016), Nigeria has historically positioned itself as a leading advocate for African unity within regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS. Joining BRICS could amplify Nigeria's global influence, enabling it to advocate for Africa's interests on the world stage.

However, some scholars argue that BRICS itself lacks internal cohesion, and Nigeria's role may be overshadowed by dominant players such as China and Russia (Organski& Kugler, 1980). Furthermore, Eze (2019) notes that Nigeria's domestic political instability and governance challenges might limit its ability to fully capitalize on BRICS membership.

Key Findings:

- BRICS membership could elevate Nigeria's global diplomatic influence.
- Nigeria may face difficulties asserting leadership within BRICS due to power imbalances.
- Internal political and governance issues could hinder effective participation in BRICS decision-making.

3. Impact on African Development and Regional Integration

The role of Nigeria in fostering African unity through BRICS remains a critical issue. South-South cooperation, as emphasized by Fawole and Ukeje (2016), suggests that BRICS could serve as a platform for Nigeria to push African development agendas. BRICS initiatives, such as the NDB and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), could provide alternative financial mechanisms that reduce Africa's reliance on Western financial institutions.

On the contrary, scholars such as Adetula (2014) caution that regional integration efforts within Africa may suffer if Nigeria prioritizes BRICS engagements over existing African frameworks. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is seen as a more immediate priority for

regional economic integration, and Nigeria's commitment to it may be diluted by BRICS participation.

Key Findings:

- Nigeria can leverage BRICS to advance Africa's economic development.
- BRICS financial structures provide alternative funding for African infrastructure projects.
- There is a potential risk of Nigeria shifting focus away from regional integration initiatives like AfCFTA.

4. Strategic Challenges and Policy Considerations

Several scholars argue that Nigeria must strategically navigate potential challenges associated with BRICS membership. According to Vieira & Alden (2011), one major issue is the asymmetrical power distribution within BRICS, where China and Russia hold dominant positions. Nigeria must ensure that its engagement with BRICS aligns with its national interests and does not compromise its sovereignty.

Moreover, Usman (2022) highlights the necessity of institutional and economic reforms within Nigeria before it can fully benefit from BRICS. Addressing issues such as corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and economic diversification is essential for Nigeria to maximize its gains from BRICS membership.

Key Findings:

- Nigeria must carefully manage power asymmetry within BRICS to avoid marginalization.
- Institutional and governance reforms are necessary for Nigeria to fully benefit from BRICS.
- Clear policy strategies should be developed to ensure that BRICS membership aligns with national and regional development priorities.

The findings indicate that Nigeria's potential BRICS membership presents both opportunities and challenges. Economically, it could enhance trade, investment, and access to alternative financial institutions. Politically, it offers Nigeria an avenue to amplify African interests in global governance. However, concerns regarding power asymmetry, regional integration trade-offs, and governance limitations must be addressed. Ultimately, Nigeria's engagement with BRICS should be carefully strategized to maximize benefits while safeguarding national and regional interests.

x. Conclusion

Under President Ahmed Bola Tinubu's leadership, Nigeria's engagement with BRICS is framed as a strategic initiative to bolster its role in regional and global governance. Although not yet a formal member, Nigeria's alignment with BRICS reflects its commitment to south-south cooperation, economic diversification, and a multipolar global order. Tinubu's administration has emphasized the potential benefits of BRICS membership, including improved access to development financing, expanded trade and investment opportunities, and a stronger voice in global policymaking.

For Africa, Nigeria's inclusion in BRICS could reinforce regional unity by advancing shared economic and political objectives within the bloc, aligning with the African Union's Agenda 2063. However, challenges remain, including governance weaknesses, potential power

imbalances within BRICS, and the need to reconcile national interests with broader African priorities. Addressing these concerns requires robust policy reforms to enhance Nigeria's economic competitiveness, strengthen governance structures, and deepen regional integration efforts.

In sum, Tinubu's proactive engagement with BRICS presents a strategic opportunity to reposition Nigeria as a major player in the Global South. If effectively managed, Nigeria's BRICS participation could drive both national development and Africa's collective aspirations in an increasingly multipolar world.

xi. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation of Nigeria's potential membership in BRICS under President Ahmed Bola Tinubu's administration, the following recommendations are proposed:

Short-Term Recommendations

1. **Enhancing Economic Engagement with BRICS**
   - Strengthen partnerships with the New Development Bank (NDB) to secure funding for key infrastructure and sustainable development projects.
   - Expand trade and investment ties with emerging BRICS economies, such as India and Brazil, to reduce dependency on China.
2. **Promoting African Unity in Global Governance**
   - Advocate for Africa-centric reforms in institutions like the UN and World Bank through BRICS.
   - Lead discussions on equitable trade policies, climate justice, and debt relief for African nations.
3. **Strengthening Regional Diplomacy**
   - Foster dialogue with South Africa and other African nations to ensure collaborative leadership within BRICS.
   - Address domestic governance challenges, including corruption and insecurity, to enhance Nigeria's credibility in global engagements.
4. **Boosting Multilateral Engagement**
   - Actively participate in BRICS forums and working groups to shape policies on global financial stability and South-South cooperation.

Long-Term Recommendations

1. **Sustaining Economic Diversification and Stability**
   - Develop long-term strategies to balance economic engagements across BRICS while maintaining a diversified economic portfolio.
   - Strengthen trade agreements within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to reduce external dependency.
2. **Institutionalizing Pan-Africanism within BRICS**
   - Ensure that BRICS initiatives align with the African Union's Agenda 2063, promoting an African-centered development model.
   - Strengthen Nigeria's role as a bridge between BRICS and the African continent.

3. **Balancing Power Dynamics within BRICS**
    - Engage in sustained multilateral diplomacy to ensure Nigeria has an influential role in decision-making and is not overshadowed by larger economies.
    - Advocate for fair representation in BRICS initiatives to prevent economic and political marginalization.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can maximize its potential within BRICS while ensuring that its membership serves both national interests and broader African development objectives.

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