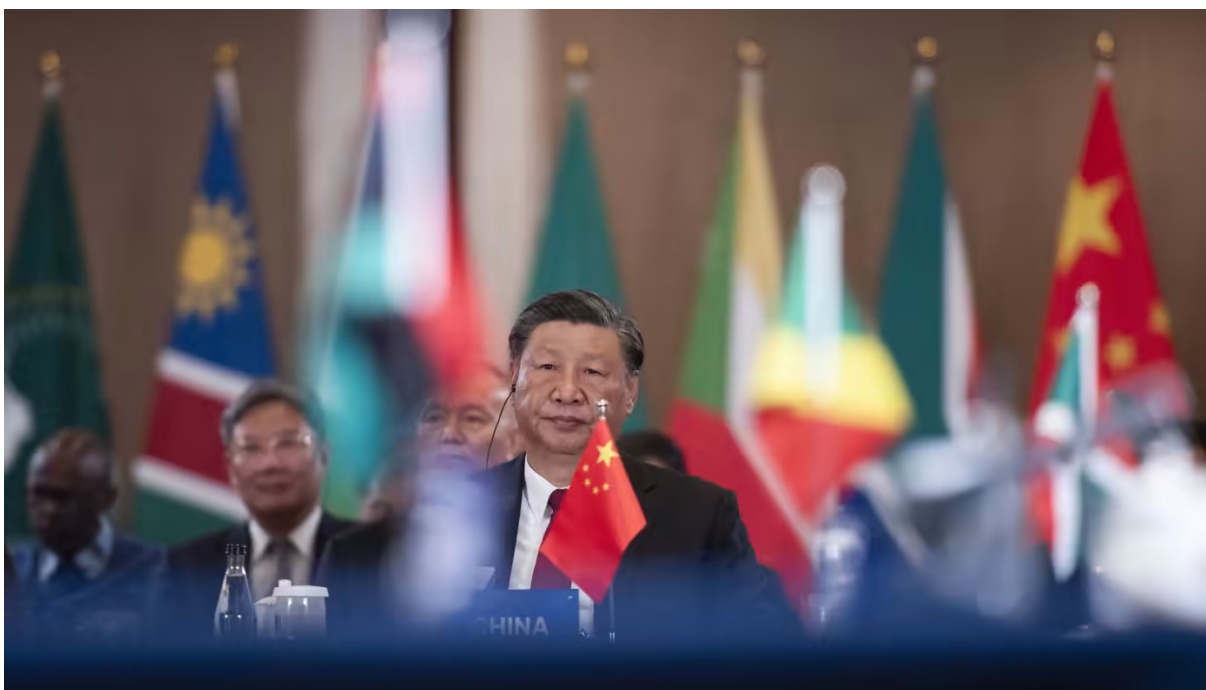


Opinion **Global Insight**

China hopes expanded Brics will turn world upside down

The size of proposed 11-country grouping would put G7 in the shade

JAMES KYNGE



China's president Xi Jinping at the Brics summit in South Africa this week. An expanded grouping would give Beijing the heft it wants to reform the way the world works © ALET PRETORIUS/POOL/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

James Kynge in London YESTERDAY

For China, a decision on Thursday to expand the Brics bloc of developing economies by adding six new countries is all about trying to right the perceived wrongs of a global system that favours the US-led west.

The [move to add](#) Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to the five existing members of Brics — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — creates a grouping of impressive size and influence.

After decades of the western world dominating global institutions, China is attempting to build a club that, by some measures of economic power, would turn the world upside down.

“Beijing’s focus is on creating a counterweight to the G7,” said Moritz Rudolf, research fellow at Yale Law School’s Paul Tsai China Center in the US. “Strengthening the Brics grouping is a valuable tool in the pursuit for Chinese leadership.”

The size of the new 11-country grouping puts the G7 — which consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, US and EU — into the shade.

Excluding the EU — which is classified as a G7 “non-enumerated” member — the group of advanced democracies accounts for just 0.8 per cent of the world’s

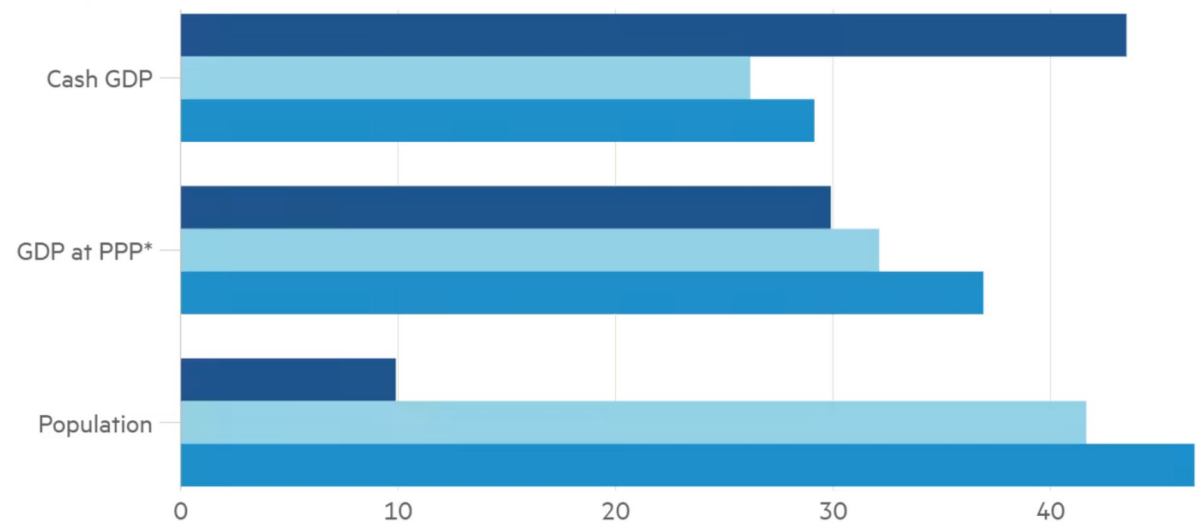
group of advanced democracies accounts for just 9.8 per cent of the world's population and 29.8 per cent of global gross domestic product, calculated by purchasing power parity (PPP).

The new Brics group, by contrast, will account for 47 per cent of the world's population and 37 per cent of its GDP by PPP.

The expanded Brics group has almost half the world's population and will produce a third of GDP

Share of global total, 2023 (%)

■ G7 ■ Existing Brics (5 countries) ■ New 'Brics' bloc (11 countries)



* purchasing power parity
Source: IMF
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The new grouping also possesses the lion's share of the world's oil and gas reserves, as well as a huge endowment of other natural resources.

All this, China hopes, will give it the heft that Beijing has long sought to reform the way the world works. Indeed, China cherishes many ambitions, some of which were discernible through a heavy loam of diplomatic language in the 26-page declaration after the Brics summit this week.

“Beijing seems to have been particularly successful at shaping the agenda and the Brics discussion this year,” said Helena Legarda, lead analyst at Merics, a Berlin-based think-tank on China. “Much of the language in the leaders’ declaration reflects Chinese positions.”

A repeated call in the declaration was for the reform of international institutions to give more power to developing countries.

One of these demands was for an overhaul of the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the IMF. Currently, the operations of both institutions are dominated by the US, Japan and other western democracies.

The call for reform included an explicit demand for “a greater role for emerging markets and developing countries, including in leadership positions”, the declaration said. Traditionally, the World Bank’s president has been an American citizen, while the IMF’s managing director has been European.

The declaration also urged “comprehensive reform” of the UN, which Beijing regards as central to global governance. One reform demanded was to the Security Council, the UN’s most powerful body, which should “increase the representation of developing countries”, the declaration said.

The Security Council currently consists of five permanent members — two of which are China and Russia — and 10 non-permanent members. Both Brazil and India, as well as other developing nations, are seeking elevated powers at the top of the UN.

This suite of reforms, if achieved, would have to come largely at the expense of some developed countries’ influence in the World Bank, IMF and in the UN. For this reason, such demands have aroused considerable resistance from G7 countries and others in the developed world.

The new Brics bloc also faces other challenges. Not all members — particularly India and Brazil — are comfortable with the overtly anti-western tone espoused by China and Russia in meetings, said one official from a Brics country, who declined to be further identified.

[Geopolitical unity is also elusive](#) on some other key issues, including the war in Ukraine, analysts said. Amid a long list of calls for political solutions to prevail in crises in Sudan, Haiti, the Palestinian territories and elsewhere, the wording on Ukraine was notably awkward.

“We recall our national positions concerning the conflict in and around Ukraine,” the declaration said. There was no mention of Russia’s invasion and subsequent aggression.

“It will be difficult for Beijing to create a parallel structure to the G7,” said Rudolf, adding that levels of political mistrust between some Brics members were high.

Nevertheless, the expanded grouping represents the most influential bloc the

developing world has ever produced. There is a sense that after decades of accepting the west's rules, the era of the "global south" is dawning. That feeling may be enough to give it traction.

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