



NIGERIA'S BRICS PARTNERSHIP AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF ITS MIDDLE-POWER DIPLOMACY, 2025–2027

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Article history:		Abstract:
Received:	20 th June, 2026	The paper explores Nigeria's admission into the BRICS as a partner country in January 2025 and how this impacts its policy of reconfiguring middle-power diplomacy between 2025 and 2027. Given the prospective nature of 2027 at the time of writing, the empirical assessment is based on actual developments through August 2026, with 2027 viewed as a policy horizon instead of as actual evidence. The study employs qualitative documentary approach using official documents of BRICS nations, Nigeria's foreign policy documents, World Trade Organisation (WTO), and United Nations Comtrade statistics, multilateral reports and peer reviewed literature. The analysis is drawn from Middle Power Theory and the notion of strategic autonomy. The analysis is based on three propositions: BRICS partnership extends Nigeria's diplomacy platform and Global South brokerage capabilities; the economic value of BRICS hinges on transforming asymmetric trade relations into investment, technology and development finance; and BRICS engagement is not a replacement for Nigeria's multi-aligned diplomacy. The results reveal that Nigeria has access to BRICS summits, foreign-ministers' meetings, and some deliberations due to its partner status, and also has comprehensive partnerships with the West. The evidence also shows a structural limitation of China: it accounted for 23.3 per cent of Nigeria's merchandise imports in 2024 but only 3.9 per cent of exports. The paper concludes that BRICS can enhance Nigeria's middle powers status only if diplomatic visibility is converted into coalitions around issues, productive investments, export diversification and institutional capacity.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's formal induction as a BRICS partner country in January 2025 took place at a time of fast-changing international power dynamics. Since 2023, the original BRICS group has significantly grown, and the partner-country group established at the Kazan Summit 2024 has also been expanded, but it does not provide full membership. The partner countries can be invited to BRICS summits and foreign-ministers' meetings and can also be given the opportunity to participate in other sessions based on consensus and approve certain final documents [BRICS Brazil, 2025a]. The FMINO (2025) report identified strategic autonomy as the context for Nigeria's Federal Government's acceptance, and areas of planned cooperation include trade, investment, energy security, infrastructure, technology and climate action. It thus was more than a mere association; it was the establishment of a new diplomatic platform for Nigeria to pursue national interest in the expanded Global South alliance.

The significance lies in the fact that Nigeria has hitherto exhibited attributes of middle-power diplomacy. It has the material and institutional resources of its population, economy, military strength and diplomatic activities in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union and United Nations, which are more than those of many African states, but do not grant it great-power influence. Coalition-building, mediation, multilateral activism and claims to representing Africa have therefore been key strategies on which Nigerian influence has relied. Magdin (2025) believes that Nigeria today is grappling with the challenge of regional leadership and enhanced international cooperation and build relations that are productive with Western states and BRICS powers. The balancing issue has gained further significance as geopolitical competition between the United States, China, Russia and other big powers shifts into the areas of trade, technology, security and development finance.

This is the interpretation that is supported by the current foreign-policy doctrine of Nigeria. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has increasingly referred to strategic autonomy as a defining principle when it comes to external engagement and introduced the 4D framework—Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, 2026). Strategic autonomy translates into policy terms: no bloc alignment and partnerships based on issues based on national interest. This is the reason why BRICS partnership is analytically relevant: Nigeria can engage in a

forum that calls for the reform of the global governance system without necessarily severing its strong ties with the other Western partners such as the European Union, United States and the United Kingdom. President Bola Tinubu, during the 2025 BRICS Summit, advocated for fairer representation in global governance, finance, and health systems, echoing the historic calls to action by the Global South for institutional reforms (State House, 2025).

However, access does not necessarily bring middle power influence. Nigeria is institutionally less than a member institution of the New Development Bank (NDB) and its economic ties with key BRICS members are still structurally asymmetric. According to the data from World Trade Organization (WTO), Nigeria reported that it imported 23.3 per cent of its merchandise from China, while only 3.9 per cent of Nigeria's merchandise was exported to China, in 2024, with crude petroleum accounting for 71.4 per cent of Nigeria's total exports. UN Trade and Development (2026) also cautions that there are entrenched trends in the trade of BRICS members, with selected economies exporting primary commodities and importing higher technology manufactures. Thus, for Nigeria, greater South–South interaction will only be an exercise in dependency if it is not tied to industrial upgrading, export diversification and technology transfer. The challenge is therefore between repositioning diplomatically and changing on the ground. Increased access to a network of emerging powers does not necessarily translate to increased Nigeria's middle-power status, however, unless they have the ability to mobilize such access to influence outcomes, build coalitions and achieve developmental benefits. While Bangura (2025) doubts whether the partner status is adequate to convey necessary diplomatic ambitions, Ogele (2025) believes that the move is a chance to diversify the economy and increase global influence, which must be moderated by domestic institutional changes. From these divergent readings, an unanswered question remains: does BRICS partnership boost Nigeria's 'Middle Power' diplomacy or simply provide one more forum to a vast and also patchy multilateral portfolio?

In this paper, this question is answered by considering three aspects of reconfiguration: first, the dimension of diplomacy in a more multipolar Global South; second, the dimension of economic diplomacy and how to transform BRICS relations into development gains; and third, the dimension of strategic autonomy in BRICS relations versus longstanding ones with the West. The time frame 2025–2027 serves as an analytical window, and no events after the current date are considered to be facts. The evidence base is comprised of verified developments through August 2026 and the 2027 horizon is the near-term horizon for which the sustainability of emerging trends is being assessed. This temporal border is crucial to prevent turning policy expectations into conjured evidence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Middle-Power Diplomacy

Material factors are the usual way of thinking about the middle powers but also diplomatic behaviour. They prefer multilateral institutions, coalition formation, mediation and rules that limit unilateral domination. Jordaan (2003) makes a distinction between "traditional" middle powers and "emerging" middle powers, many of which have a regional influence and developmental issues and reformist stances on global governance. This category is relevant for Nigeria as it has more influence than material power to act unilaterally in the world. Historically, Nigeria has looked for leadership, solidarity against colonialism, peacekeeping and reform of international institutions in Africa. But converting demographic and economic weight into constant diplomatic efforts is the key to contemporary middle-power effectiveness. BRICS partnership may thus be read as a further institutional space for middle power entrepreneurship and not as a sign of great-power transition.

2.2 BRICS, Multipolarity and the Global South

BRICS is no longer just an informal group of large emerging economies, but a growing forum of countries with an interest in development cooperation, global-governance reform and South–South coordination. The 2025 Rio Declaration reiterated the importance of a more representative and equitable multilateral system, including Nigeria as one of the partner countries (BRICS, 2025). The expansion introduces the group to new geographic exposure, and it also diversifies the group. Stuenkel (2015) understands the BRICS institutions as a new order which is parallel to, and not necessarily in opposition to, existing global institutions. This is shown in the NDB's financing of infrastructure and sustainable development and declaring itself as complementary to existing multilateral development banks (New Development Bank, 2026). Thus, BRICS offers Nigeria a political forum through which to advocate for reform, as well as an economic network, albeit not necessarily direct access to all the BRICS institutions.

2.3 Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Strategic Autonomy

The post-independence diplomacy of Nigeria has been through Afrocentrism, non-alignment, economic diplomacy, concentric-circle formulations, and contemporary 4D diplomacy. External engagement is clearly associated with the present doctrine to development, demography, diaspora and democracy and the focus on strategic autonomy is ever growing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025b). Magdin (2025) believes that Nigeria can be stronger with the BRICS without giving up Western partnership by ensuring policy is interest-driven and not ideological. However, according to critics, the benefits that can be derived from diplomatic diversification are constrained by weak domestic productive capacity (Nigerian Journal of Business and Social Sciences, 2025). Thus strategic autonomy is not a slogan, but a capacity to have multiple credible partners, to have domestic economic strength and adequate institutional skills to negotiate between competing offers.

2.4 Empirical Review

There are conflicting views about Nigeria's BRICS partnership in the recent empirical and policy literature. Qualitative analysis of Nigeria's domestic, regional and international standing by Magdin (2025) suggests that with the evolving dynamics in the global arena, Abuja has an opportunity to align the existing ties with the Western world with more robust involvement of the BRICS countries. The study is of greater value because it does not take the binary algebra of alignment and does not set up the Nigeria dilemma as a choice between regional leadership and international influence. Its shortcoming is that it is time-bound: it was published in February 2025 and was unable to assess the implementation of the partner status over an extended period of time in Nigeria. However, its balancing thesis offers a valuable framework for the evaluation of strategic autonomy.

According to Ogele (2025), Nigeria has transitioned from being an observer to a member of the BRICS, and offers avenues for trade diversification, investment and diplomatic influence. It also highlights infrastructure gaps, corruption and inefficiency of the bureaucracy as limitations for reaching benefits. Onyetube (2025) thus suggests that to ensure economic benefits, symbolical prestige needs to be translated to deliberate policy coordination and improved bilateral relations with the BRICS members, as well, in the context of South–South cooperation and neoclassical realism. Both studies thus shift the discussion from the question of the desirability of partnership to the question of the domestic conditions when it can become consequential. Both have their common weakness: the discussion on the economic opportunities is more detailed than measurable results of the bargaining in BRICS institutions.

Magaji (2025) also attends more closely to the political and diplomatic implications and argues that the involvement of Nigeria in BRICS can boost Nigeria's international profile and offer alternative options in the evolving international landscape. In contrast, Bangura (2025) provides a sceptical reading and asks himself whether being accepted as a partner is enough to signify Nigeria's historical diplomatic standing. It is useful analytically that this disagreement exists. It demonstrates that the same institutional development can be viewed as a broadening of access or as proof of relative decline, depending on whether one looks at Nigeria's past aspirations or its immediate opportunities. This study, therefore, does not attempt to make the label "partner" an outcome, but rather assess Nigeria's capacities with the institutional access it affords.

A second empirical constraint is the incorporation of the trade evidence. According to the WTO (2026) data, Nigeria imported 23.3 per cent from China, 10.2 per cent from India, 3.7 per cent from UAE, 2.5 per cent from Saudi Arabia, 2.2 per cent from Brazil and 1.7 per cent from Russia in 2024. On the export side, India took in 7.5 per cent, China 3.9 per cent, South Africa 3.7 per cent and Brazil 1.7 per cent. The Intra-BRICS trade has been growing significantly, but the trade in primary products remains a barrier to structural change in some of the economies involved, according to UN Trade and Development (2026). The evidence here indicates that Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the BRICS are already cemented with existing and significant commercial ties, and the nature and imbalances of those ties are as important as their level of sophistication.

The literature thus presents three broad conclusions: BRICS partnership provides Nigeria with an extended range of choices within its diplomatic policy; the benefits of the partnership are constrained by Nigeria's domestic institutional and productive capabilities; and Nigeria's strategic autonomy is more feasible than exclusive bloc alignment. Notably overlooked is the interplay between these dimensions that reconfigures Nigeria particularly as an emerging middle power. Often opportunities in BRICS, foreign-policy balancing or economic gains are discussed separately from existing studies. This study helps fill this gap by analysing all three of the above dimensions as part of a proposition based assessment, while differentiating between what has been achieved as at August 2026 and what can be achieved in the 2027 horizon.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Middle Power Theory and Strategic Autonomy

The study is based on Middle Power Theory and strategy of autonomy. Jordaan (2003) regards emerging middle powers as important states in their respective regions that adopt a multilateralist and coalition-building approach, and are often pursuing reform of unequal international arrangements to make up for their less developed unilateral capabilities. Nigeria is a country that exemplifies this behavioral logic as its diplomacy has always relied on African leadership, peacekeeping, mediation and multilateral activism. Strategic autonomy introduces a new mechanism: instead of aligning itself permanently with a certain geopolitical bloc, a State aims for enough policy space to cooperate with various powers, on various issues. The whole framework creates a crystal clear expectation. BRICS partnership will only enhance Nigeria's middle-power diplomacy to the extent that it provides more options for bargaining, capacity to form coalitions, and better developmental outcomes without introducing new sets of dominant partners.

3. RESEARCH GAP AND PROPOSITIONS

3.1 Research Gap

While there are important existing studies on South–South cooperation, foreign-policy balancing and Nigeria's accession to the BRICS, three gaps are left. First, some tests look at participation as an indication of influence rather than at institutional access versus agenda-setting ability. Secondly, it is worthy of note that economic debates tend to focus on future trade and investment opportunities rather than questioning the imbalanced nature of Nigeria's current trade with the major BRICS' countries. Third, the link between BRICS involvement and Nigeria's broader middle-power vision is underdeveloped: enhanced engagement from the Global South may not replace engagement with the West and Africa, but could complement it. In this paper, these gaps are filled by testing out diplomatic access, economic conversion and strategic autonomy as distinct yet intertwined aspects of middle-power reconfiguration.

3.2 Propositions

Proposition 1: Nigeria's BRICS partnership amplifies its middle-power diplomatic agency by providing access to various platforms and tools for Global South coalition-building and global-governance reform.

Proposition 2: The developmental potential of Nigeria's BRICS cooperation hinges on its capacity to transform its asymmetric commercial ties into diversified export, productive investment, technology transfer and development finance.

Proposition 3: BRICS partnership is a strategic multi-alignment of Nigeria's middle power diplomacy and not a replacement of its existing diplomatic ties with Africa and the West.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Approach

The study opted for qualitative research approach to address the question of how Nigeria's middle power diplomacy is being redefined under its BRICS partnership. The approach was suitable as it was a study of diplomatic behaviour, policy orientation, institutional opportunities and strategic choices as opposed to testing causal relationships at an individual level.

4.2 Sources of Data: This study was purely secondary study. Evidence was gathered from official BRICS documents, government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements from Nigeria, World Trade Organization and UN Comtrade statistics, publications from the New Development Bank and peer-reviewed academic works. The materials were selected purposefully based upon relevance, credibility and direct connection to the 2025-2026 evidence period.

4.3 Pictorial Evidence: Verified institutional and trade statistics were used to produce pictorial evidence. Bar and horizontal-bar graphs were directly included in Results and Discussions under the corresponding proposition that they clarify. Every figure was labeled, where it came from, and what it meant in context of the argument, instead of being used as proof of causation on its own.

4.4 Analytical Procedure: Content analysis and thematic analysis were used in the study. The documentary evidence was first looked at to identify any recurring claims related to issues of diplomatic access, economic relations, strategic autonomy, and middle power behaviour. Next, the evidence was grouped according to the three propositions and contrasted among the documents from official, statistical and scholarly sources to look for convergence, divergences and limitations for explanation.

4.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

Triangulation of sources was used to increase trustworthiness. Official Nigerian claims were contrasted with independent trade statistics and scholarly interpretations with BRICS documents. Numerical evidence was taken from clearly identified data sets and contested interpretations were set up as arguments, not facts. Observed evidence was not used to represent any event from after August 2026.

4.6 Limitations of the Method

The major drawback is that Nigeria is still a BRICS partner country with only a short time over which the long-term impacts can be assessed. This is also part of the diplomatic involvement of partner countries, which is not easy to quantify. The 2027 component is, therefore, a prospective one. The study is an assessment of emerging trends, not a statement of outcomes for a future timeframe.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Proposition 1: BRICS Partnership Expands Nigeria's Middle-Power Diplomatic Agency

The first option is agreed upon, yet it is not institutional access but influence. Nigeria's admission puts it in the first group of the BRICS partner countries established following the Kazan Summit. According to BRICS official rules, partners can attend summits and foreign-ministers' meetings, but only attend certain sessions by consensus and can only associate themselves with the final declarations (BRICS Brazil, 2025a). This provides Nigeria with continued access to a diplomatic network which has grown beyond the initial five states. This type of access is more relevant to middle-power diplomacy, as middle-power states do not often act unilaterally with material power, but rather try to exert influence through coalitions in which their preferences can be combined with other countries (Jordaan, 2003).

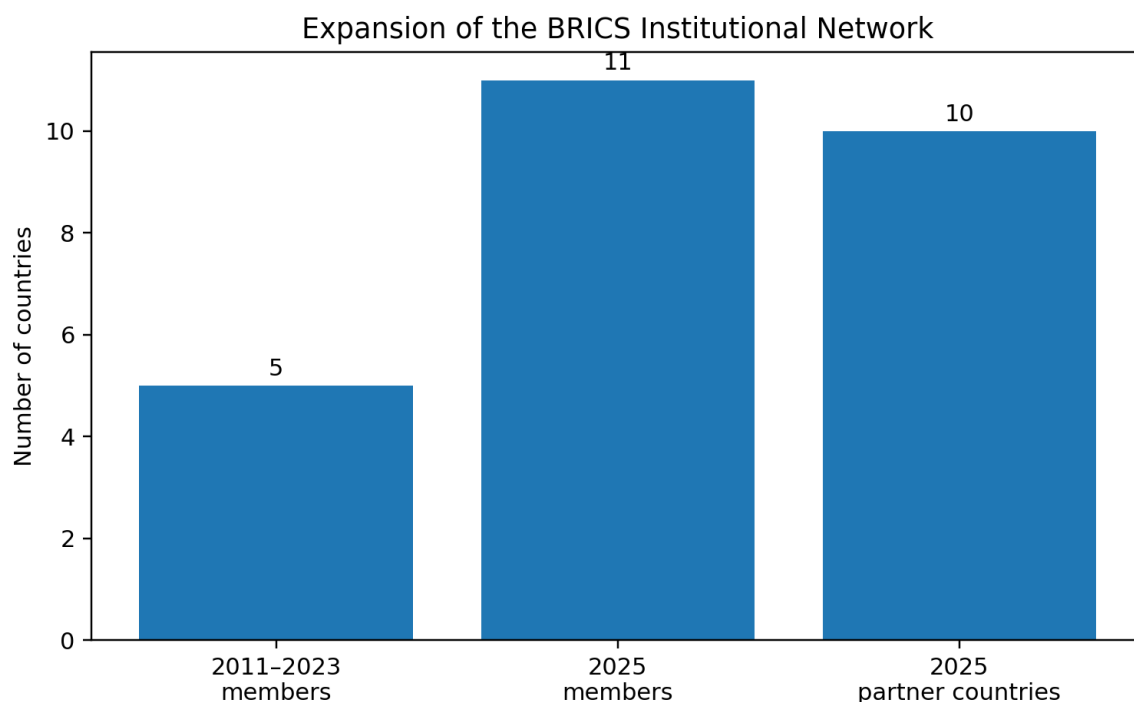


Figure 1. Expansion of the BRICS Institutional Network

Source: Author's visualisation based on official BRICS Brazil information (2025). The 2025 network comprised eleven members and ten partner countries after Vietnam joined as the tenth partner.

The institutional growth in which Nigeria's partnership functions is illustrated in Figure 1. The number of members in BRICS increased to five from the moment South Africa joined in 2011 and at present, the official Brazilian presidency included 10 partner countries and 11 members, after Vietnam has been admitted. That's not a measure of influence, but a gauge of the size of the diplomatic network now at Nigeria's disposal. For an emerging middle power, that's the benefit of brokerage – Nigeria can organize the African and developing country stand point in a forum that has major Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Latin American economies. Enlargement also produces a constraint: larger the enlargement, the more preferences will diverge and the more competition will arise for attention on the agenda.

Nigeria's performance at the 17th BRICS Summit is a case in point. President Tinubu took a platform at the Rio meeting in July 2025 to call for reforms of the global governance, financial institutions and healthcare arrangements and to stress equitable treatment of low income and emerging economies (State House, 2025). This aligns well with the Rio Declaration, which calls for a more representative, legitimate and democratic multilateral system (BRICS, 2025). The example is important because it illustrates Nigeria's use of partner status to promote a well-known middle power role, the raising of national and African issues to become multilateral reform agendas. It's more evidence of the reconfiguring of diplomacy than the admission announcement, as it means they are actually involved in agenda talk.

The text confirms this reading with the appropriate qualifications. Magdin (2025) believes that BRICS provides Nigeria more voice in decisions that impact them and the region, and Ogele (2025) states that partnership can increase global influence. Magaji (2025) also relates BRICS involvement to heightened diplomatic visibility in a multipolar system. But Bangura (2025) is wondering if partner is in line with Nigeria's past aspirations. This critique is pertinent because, middle power is a relational position; Nigeria has to compete with great powers, but also with other aspiring Global South powers. Nigeria is a partner, South Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia are full members of the BRICS. Thus the idea that admission is an elevation of the diplomatic level is curtailed by the institutional hierarchy.

One can argue far more defensibly that BRICS is an opportunity structure expanded for Nigeria. While in the case of Abuja, this translates to further avenues to coalition build on Security Council reform, climate finance, development finance, global health and digital governance, turning access into influence will need sustained issue leadership. While Nigeria's demographic size can be a talking point for representation of Africa, that is not a replacement for policy preparation, diplomatic appointments or coalition entrepreneurship. Within the 4D framework (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself calls demography "diplomatic capital". However, if Nigeria is going to use that capital to become middle-power influence, it must come to BRICS meetings with concrete proposals that could generate co-sponsors.

Thus, Proposition 1 is accepted as qualified. Giving Nigeria a room to exercise middle-power diplomacy, BRICS partnership has already given an institutional platform through which global-governance advocacy can be done. It has not necessarily strengthened Nigeria's decision making power. 2027 should therefore be assessed in terms of tangible outcomes in diplomatic practice, such as Nigeria's ability to chair working groups, obtain a place for African issues in BRICS resolutions, and facilitate or steer reform or take action based on the participation. Middle power reconfiguration is most suitable to be gauged in the diplomatic arena not by association's prestige.

5.2 Proposition 2: Economic Value Depends on Converting Asymmetry into Productive Capacity

Trade evidence is strong for the second proposition. The country also joined BRICS with a wide range of business relationship with some of the members such as China and India. According to statistics from the WTO (2026), Nigeria imported 23.3 per cent from China, 10.2 per cent from India, and 11.2 per cent from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Russia, among others. As these numbers show, BRICS involvement is not taking place in a vacuum on the economic side. But when imports are used, import dependence can be achieved without any gain in bargaining power. Middle-power diplomacy should involve a focus on enhancing domestic productive forces, not just diversifying imports.

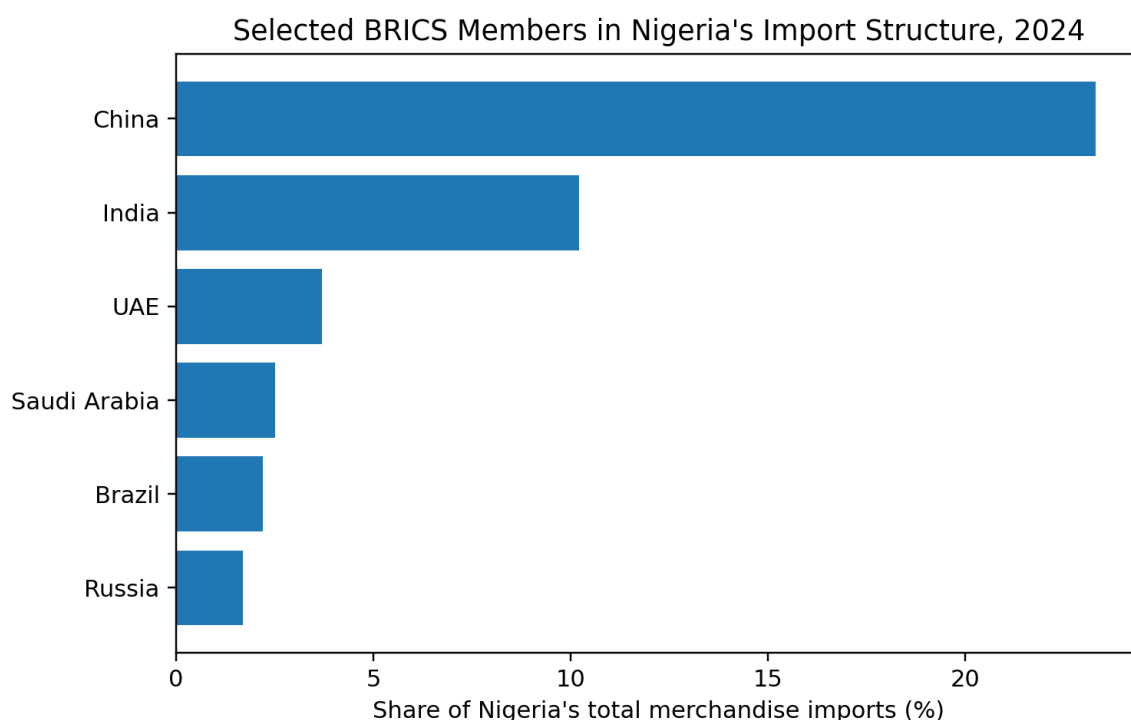


Figure 2. Selected BRICS Members in Nigeria's Import Structure, 2024

Source: Author's visualisation based on WTO Tariff & Trade Data for Nigeria, using UN Comtrade partner data (2024). The concentration of Nigeria's imports to selected BRICS members is as shown in Figure 2. Almost one-quarter of merchandise imports came from China and over one-tenth came from India. The graph provides opportunities and vulnerability. The opportunity is that Nigeria has already got a very dense commercial relationship which diplomacy can be strengthened to investment and industrial cooperation. The vulnerability lies in the possibility that closer political ties without export upgrading will further increase reliance on imported manufactures, machinery and consumer goods. Thus, the partnership between BRICS can only be developmentally significant if trade is connected to domestic value creation.

The Nigeria – China relationship is a good example of the structural problem. According to WTO data obtained from UN Comtrade (WTO, 2026) Nigeria imports about US\$9.57 billion in goods from China while exports about US\$2.03 billion to China in 2024. Taking the case of Nigeria, China is essential to Nigerian infrastructure, to the supply and manufacturing of equipment; but the lack of reciprocity implies that proximity does not in itself lead to productive integration. UN Trade and Development (2026) cautions that increased BRICS trade may continue a trend of primary commodities being traded for more valuable manufactured goods. Nigeria is particularly vulnerable as crude petroleum shares 71.4 per cent of total merchandise exports in 2024.

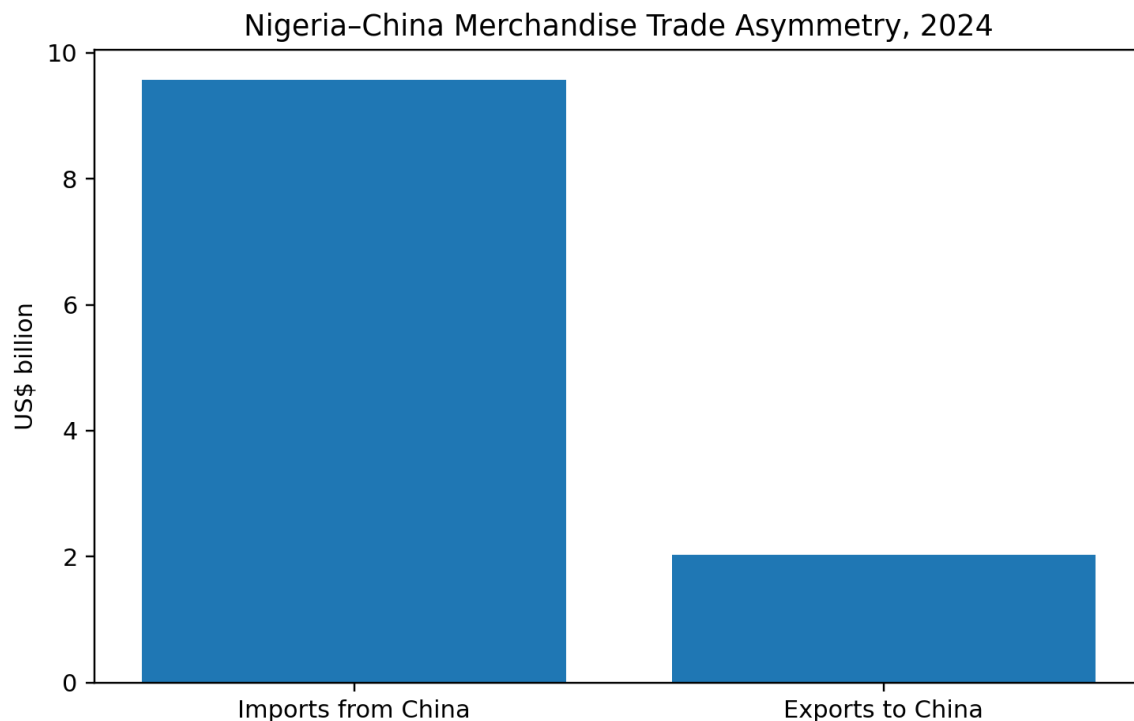


Figure 3. Nigeria–China Merchandise Trade Asymmetry, 2024

Source: Author’s visualisation based on WTO Tariff & Trade Data for Nigeria, sourced from UN Comtrade (2024).

The size of the Nigeria–China merchandise imbalance is shown in figure 3. Imports were more than four times exports in the WTO dataset. This isn't an indictment of China or BRICS, it's proof that Nigeria's middle-power economic diplomacy should be about the condition and conditionality of exchange. The imbalance may be part of an industrial transition, if there is an inflow of manufacturing investment, processing capacity, technology transfer and access for Nigerian non-oil exports through partnership. Diplomatic diversification may be compatible with ongoing structural dependence when it is just an increase in import capacity.

The NDB establishes yet another potential channel, while also illustrating the importance of institutional differences. The Bank was established to mobilise funds for infrastructure and for sustainable development and has grown beyond the original founders of the BRICS (New Development Bank, 2026). The 2025 Rio Declaration rallied for a greater expansion of NDB membership (New Development Bank, 2025). Nigeria's membership of the BRICS, however, does not guarantee the country's membership of the NDB. Potential access should therefore not be posited as financing in policy analysis. A proper Nigerian approach should be to review the membership of NDB on economic feasibility and broker bilateral BRICS energy, transportation, digital and climate change project pipelines.

Ogele (2025) and Onyetube (2025) agree that economic benefits rely on the readiness of internal institutions, and the significant literature about the 4D doctrine reveals that there is still a gap between diplomatic ambition and productive capacity (2025, Nigerian Journal of Business and Social Sciences). This convergence is important. The external partnership is no substitute for electricity, logistics, regulatory predictability, industrial policy and export competitiveness. Nigeria's leverage is greatest in the area where it has a large market to negotiate local production, skills development and technology transfer instead of market access for its own sake.

So, Proposition 2 is accepted. BRICS is a great economic opportunity with conversion being the variable. Success will be determined by tangible improvements in productive investment, non-oil exports, infrastructure financing and technological capability by 2027. Middle-power diplomacy will be enhanced if the economic dimension also expands domestic autonomy, and it will be undermined if the new linkages continue to be the same type of commodity dependence and import asymmetries that were experienced in previous external relations.

5.3 Proposition 3: BRICS Reconfigures Nigeria towards Strategic Multi-Alignment

The third proposition is strongly supported by Nigeria's diplomatic behaviour. According to official Nigerian policy, BRICS are not an anti-Western alliance. The Federal Government's statement in January 2025 clearly placed partnership in the context of strategic autonomy, and later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (2025b) definition of contemporary foreign policy as a policy that avoids entangling alliances and focuses on the relationship between countries based on issues of shared interest. This is in line with middle power strategy. States with restricted unilateral powers maximize autonomy by keeping several relationships and minimize their reliance on any one patron and increase their bargaining power.

Nigeria is a good example because at the same time it strengthened its ties with Germany, it is a member of the BRICS. Under the framework of the Bi-National Commission, Nigeria and Germany agreed in November 2025 to further cooperate in the areas of power, security, trade, migration, and culture; in 2024, bilateral trade between Nigeria and Germany amounted to around €3 billion according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025c). It is not just a commercial significance, it is an analytical one. If BRICS partnership was geopolitical realignment against the West then one would have thought that there would be systematic downgrade of such relationship. Rather, Nigeria has sought to engage with the BRICS as well as to cement a key partnership with Europe. The "best of both worlds" Nigeria can achieve is thus given observable support as argued by Magdin (2025).

By being multi-aligned, Nigeria also helps to deal with contradictions in BRICS. Included in the grouping are democracies and authoritarian systems, energy exporters and importers, geopolitical rivals and different relations with Western institutions. Partner status thus does not give Nigeria a coherent bloc of ideology into which it can readily merge. As such, BRICS institutions are not just a replacement for western institutions, but rather, as Stuenkel (2015) suggests, parts of a more plural order. Nigeria's concerns also span the blocs, such as its desire for Western investment and security cooperation, Chinese infrastructure and trade, Indian markets and technology, Gulf capital, and African regional leadership and reform of global governance.

This balancing approach is expressed in a domestic policy language in the 4D doctrine. Development should facilitate economic diplomacy between competing centres of capital; demography should be viewed as leverage in engagements with Nigeria's population; diaspora policy should engage with countries in the West with high concentrations of Nigerians; and democracy should be a basis for normative relations with constitutional partners and strategic autonomy should be used to engage with other countries operating different forms of government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a). The framework is thus neither pro-BRICS, nor pro-Western. Its effectiveness will rely on the ability of Nigeria to keep policies consistent when pressure from great-power disputes arises to align.

There are, however, risks to multi-alignment. Strategic autonomy may be transformed into diplomatic ambiguity if Nigeria is not clear about its priorities. Second, several partnerships can result in diffuse commitments in the absence of action. Third, domestic weaknesses in both fiscal and security terms can make larger partners able to set terms. Good governance is essential for developing a coherent foreign policy, as warned by Bangura (2025); otherwise, there is a danger of a transactional foreign policy. Likewise, the critical assessment of 4D doctrine in Nigerian Journal of Business and Social Sciences (2025) shows that weak state capacity may lead to a disconnect between aspiration and results. These criticisms indicate that partner diversification does not equal autonomy; autonomy must also include the ability to turn down an unfavorable offer.

With regional leadership comes another test. Nigeria's diplomacy has always been rooted in West Africa and its Africa-centredness has been a key factor in establishing the country's middle-power status. BRICS involvement, therefore, must be complementary and not supplantive of ECOWAS or African Union (AU) responsibilities. Magdin (2025) particularly describes the challenge of being an international player and a regional leader. Nigeria can benefit more from BRICS if it can bring African issues to the table and come out with something that can reinforce the development of the region, such as resources or changes to institutions. Reorientation, but not necessarily successful middle-power reconfiguration, would occur if a diplomacy became globally visible, but lost regional credibility.

Proposition 3 is accepted. There is evidence of strategic multi-alignment as opposed to bloc substitution until August 2026. Nigeria has participated in the BRICS partner network, pushed for a reform agenda from the Global South and had strong Western diplomatic and economic ties. What will be the key question in 2027 is whether this equilibrium can be made institutional, with a clear hierarchy of national interests. Strategic autonomy will be convincing when Nigeria can manage competing partnerships to make better bargains and maintain their freedom of choice. Thus, BRICS partnership needs to be understood as an added dimension to the Nigerian diplomacy and not as an alternate architecture.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Nigeria's BRICS collaboration is a big and yet nascent reconfiguration of its middle-power diplomacy. The study concludes that by having a partner, Nigeria's access to coalition building in the Global South is enlarged and that Abuja has another forum through which it can promote the reform of global governance. But its diplomatic relevance does not hinge on symbolism of membership, but on the ability to set the agenda, and to lead a coalition. Diplomatically, the partnership has very strong foundations, and economic ties are not symmetrical, which means that the economic diversification will not lead to automatic structural diversification. Nigeria needs to transform market ties to become productive investments, technology, infrastructure, and diversified exports. Last, the evidence suggests that there are strategic multi-alignments rather than a geopolitical pivot away from the West. Nigeria is at the same time building up BRICS, African and Western ties in its quest for strategic autonomy. Therefore, the 2027 horizon should be evaluated based on outcomes: Larger policy influence, better economic bargaining, and proof of ability to sustain independent decision making between competing partners. While BRICS can enhance Nigeria's middle-power status, this must be where the opportunity is offered through its own diplomacy but not beyond its own institutional capacities.

6.2 Research Limitations

The study looks at a recent partnership whose long term impact is not yet evident. It is not based on elites but on documentary evidence and trade evidence, and you can't assess the influence of diplomacy based on public statements. Furthermore, at the time of writing, 2027 is still a possibility. The paper thus does not presume to know what will happen in the future, but instead identifies trends and policy experiments.

6.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Study

Research in the future should be done on Nigeria's voting and coalition behaviour in other multilateral fora such as BRICS, African Union, African Union and the United Nations. Trade composition, investment and development financing could be quantified in terms of changes following 2025. Global ambition and West African leadership, strategic autonomy and the understanding of partner status by elite actors in Nigeria should also be subjects of elite interviews.

6.4 Acknowledgement

The author gratefully thanks the institutions and scholars whose official documents, statistical databases and academic analyses provided the secondary evidence for this study, especially the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BRICS Brazil, World Trade Organization, UN Trade and Development and the New Development Bank. They provided materials for the systematic checking of contemporary developments, which are published and available for the public.

6.5 Recommendations

1. 2. Nigeria should develop a specific BRICS agenda in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that filters out and prioritises a few areas in which Nigeria can assume a coalition leadership, such as climate finance, health equity, digital development and global-governance reform. The success of Nigeria's diplomacy needs to be measured by Nigerian initiatives that are adopted and coalitions that are led as well as tangible results in the institutional arena and not by attendance at high-level meetings.
2. Nigeria must put productive transformation at the fulcrum of BRICS economic diplomacy. Local manufacturing, technology transfer, skills development, value-added exports and infrastructure should be the focus of investment negotiations with China, India, Brazil, South Africa, the Gulf countries and other partners. The government should also carry out a cost benefit analysis to consider the potential of membership of the NDB, transparently, and not to presume that NDB financing is a given as a result of having partners in BRICS.
3. Nigeria should strive to maintain strategic multi-alignment; it is imperative to strengthen BRICS engagement while not compromising the membership of ECOWAS, African Union, European, United States and other existing memberships. A strategic-autonomy framework, which should be published, should outline Nigeria's core interests and decision making parameters with regards to competing partnerships. This transparency would help to minimize transactionalism in dealings and enable Nigerian foreign policy to benefit from the diplomacy of diversification to enhance the country's bargaining power without losing its foreign policy options.

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