

Introduction: BRICS in Search of Governance Models

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The establishment of the BRICS partnership, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, formalized in 2009, brought together five countries which make up roughly 40% of the world's population and which account for more than 20% of the gross world product. Although still in formation, in its broad conception the establishment of the partnership holds the potential to identify and promote new paths of global collaboration, hitherto not possible in an international framework dominated by the West, and to create a new world order which will encompass the interests of the majority of the world's population. The extent to which it is able to fulfil this objective will be contingent on multiple factors at play in the geo-political order and in the global economy. Given the considerable variances in their size and constitution, it will also be shaped by relations between and within the five BRICS partnering states as these will determine the degree to which greater cohesion might

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be forged between them at the levels of both state and civil society. In pursuit of this objective it has been suggested, from an academic perspective at least, that the development of a deeper knowledge of the governance systems of the partner states is an essential precursor to this process, since it will assist in establishing clearer understandings of how their respective societies are ordered and how they might interact with one another in pursuit of a more just global order. The focus of this special issue of the CPSR, consequently, is on governance systems in the BRICS states and on ongoing administrative reforms within them.

The papers included in this special issue were prepared for the First International Symposium on Development and Governance in the BRICS, which was held in Shanghai in September 2016. From the deliberations of the symposium it was evident that whilst a considerable amount has been written about the geo-political and economic dimensions of BRICS, relatively little comparative research has been undertaken on the respective state building and governance regimes of its member states and on how these might influence the closer integration of their activities in the future. Furthermore, as the BRICS partnership aspires to become more influential in world affairs, the internal governance systems of its member states will be of fundamental importance in shaping their activities elsewhere, whether individually or collectively. Of equal importance will be the extent to which their respective public administrations serve as examples of efficiency, meritocracy, transparency and accountability. In attempting to address this lacuna, the first five papers in the volume present an overview of the historical factors which have shaped the form of the state and influenced the trajectory of the governance systems in each member state, the nature of prior and current public sector reforms, the role of the state in the market, together with an analysis of the challenges which they continue to face in building efficient state institutions, in stimulating economic growth, and in uplifting the welfare of their citizens.

The papers reveal both similarities and differences in the public sectors of the respective states. All five states are currently undergoing periods of economic and administrative reforms, albeit driven by different social, political and economic forces. In three of the BRICS states administrative reform has been as much about addressing the legacy of previous administrative regimes as it has been about modernizing the machinery of the state. In Brazil this process was revamped with the end of military rule and the advent of democracy in 1985, in Russia it followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and in South Africa it followed the defeat of Apartheid in 1994. Although India attained independence from Britain in 1947, it, too, continues to struggle to overcome the legacy of a deeply entrenched colonial administration. China launched its reform and opening up in 1978 and introduced both economic and political reforms in an incremental and somewhat coordinated way.

The process of reform implemented in China since the late 1970s is mapped out in Jing's article which charts the progressive shift from a centrally planned to an increasingly market oriented economy, integrated into global markets and driven by private entrepreneurship. There has been a shift from state ownership of the economy to one of state regulation, accompanied by a set of administrative reforms intended to modernize the public sector. The measures introduced have included a

stronger emphasis on meritocracy in the appointment of public officials, and the introduction of performance measurement, reinforced by a system of rewards and sanctions. A process of decentralization has led to the devolution of a considerably greater degree of administrative decision making to lower echelons of the state and to local government in particular. Although the reforms introduced have not been uniformly successful, Jing argues that what he has termed ‘creative incrementalism’ was key to the development of a more modern state bureaucracy. This gradual introduction of reforms over time permitted experimentation in the introduction of new approaches, as well as the adaptation of administrative systems and approaches adopted from the West. Importantly, it has also helped to preserve the social stability necessary to promote changes in such a large and diverse society.

In his paper Puppim de Oliveira provides an overview of the development of the Brazilian state from its days as a Portuguese colony in the early nineteenth century through various phases, including many autocratic and military rulers, and ultimately to the onset of democracy in 1985. Following the advent of democracy a number of public sector reforms have been introduced. These have been heavily influenced by neoliberal principles based on deregulation and privatization leading to managerialism, tighter fiscal control, and the opening up of the economy. There was also a focus on enhanced governance, particularly in respect to greater accountability and transparency in the public sector, as well as the participation of civil society in state decisions. Whilst there have been improvements in regulating public expenditure and in controlling state corruption, and pockets of managerial efficiency are also evident, he argues that as a legacy prolonged authoritarian rule (capped by two decades of military government), the Brazilian public sector remains bureaucratic and patrimonial in nature. Despite this endemic patrimonialism, however, the paper discusses the ways in which civil society has mobilized to hold the state to account in the democratic era. Taking as a case study the functioning of environmental agencies, it describes how different social organizations have pressured the state (at all levels of the governing hierarchy) to assume greater responsibility for the protection of the natural environment and to adhere to the international treaties it has signed up for.

The paper by Barabashev and Klimenko describes the different phases of administrative reforms which have been implemented in Russia in the post-Soviet era. During this period the government’s top priority was to preserve the integrity of the nation and to avoid the prospect of political and economic collapse. The authors argue that the period immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union was a particularly challenging one in that it entailed a transition from a command-and-control economy to a free-market one together with the dismantling of old state institutions and the establishment of new ones. The focus was on improving regulatory frameworks, on modernizing information systems, and on the introduction of results-based management. Interestingly, the fact that whilst certain corporate interests opposed the strengthening of regulation and oversight, small and medium sized enterprises generally supported the new approach. Importantly, albeit for different reasons, public officials supported the reforms, viewing them as necessary for the development of a professional civil service and for the strengthening of democratic values.

The reforms introduced were extensive and many were derived from the principles and approaches of New Public Management (NPM). At a practical level, Barabashev and Klimenko maintain, the reforms have led to improvements in the administrative performance of the state in its delivery of public services. There is less consensus, however, on whether the reforms have led to improved governance. The lack of consensus reflects the divergent view of those who have been positively or adversely affected by the reforms and, particularly, by concerns as to whether the costs of increased regulation inhibit Russian competitiveness and, hence, retard economic growth. This uncertainty is reflected in national opinion polls which in 2015–2016 suggested that less than 50% of the population rate the performance of the state favourably.

In their discussion of administrative reform in India Mathur and Mathur highlight the enduring legacy of British colonial rule, which was embodied in the traditions and practices of the Indian Civil Service which subsequently became the Indian Administrative Service. In the decades immediately after independence in 1947 the civil service underwent a series of administrative reforms most of which were strongly influenced by normative Western models of the public sector. The authors argue that these reforms had little positive impact in large part due to the fact that the civil service, reflecting its colonial roots, continued to adhere to a Weberian model of administration and to Taylorian work norms. In the 1980s, as was the case in many developing states at the time, a further series of reforms were introduced based on the tenets of neo-liberalism; this entailed adoption of the familiar package of interventions including downsizing of the state, out-sourcing of public services, and privatization amongst others. These interventions, it is maintained, did little to improve the performance of the public service and even less to curb widespread corruption. In a pushback against weak governance systems, citizens' organization have since mobilized to hold the state to greater account, most notably through the "right-to-know" campaign which has compelled greater disclosure of the expenditure of public funds. In the final analysis, however, Mathur and Mathur claim that "civil service reform in India has neither enhanced efficiency nor the accountability of the civil service in any meaningful manner. As far as the common citizen is concerned, it has not been effective".

In a similar vein, Tapscott, looks at the process of state reform undertaken in South Africa since the ending of Apartheid rule in 1994. He claims that in the last two decades considerable headway has been made in reforming the state infrastructure, in drafting new legislation, and in formulating policies aimed at building a more egalitarian social and political order. Notwithstanding these gains, however, he argues that a failure to have a consistent economic growth path has meant that inequality and poverty remain serious challenges to the social order. This shortcoming is partially attributed, in his analysis, to the neoliberal policies adopted by the government. He further suggests that the failure of the state oversight institutions to effectively control powerful political interest groups has led to corruption and to power struggles within the ruling alliance, both of which have served to weaken governance of the public sector.

These papers make evident that reforms in the BRICS states have been subjected to the influence of normative Western models, such as the neoliberal ideals

embodied in the thinking of New Public Management (NPM). Some of the reforms implemented under the NPM rubric have, as in the case of Russia and China, led to greater efficiencies in the public sector in some instances. However, some reforms introduced as ‘best practices’ from the West in countries, such as Brazil, India, and South Africa, have not substantively improved either efficiency or effectiveness and, in many instances, have led to corruption, economic instability and the elite capture of the state. The dangers inherent in the reform processes are aptly summed up in the article by Mathur and Mathur: “global advocates of reform have assumed that one size fits all and any government could be improved by the magic of market, privatization, participation and efficiency”.

The other three papers included in this special issue examine several dimensions of the BRICS partnership and what future implications these might hold. Svetlicini and Zhang present a comparative overview of the competition law institutions in the BRICS. They maintain that all five states have reformed their competition regimes during the past two decades as a necessary precondition for closer economic collaboration between economic partners. However, despite the signing of a memorandum of understanding for further development of inter-institutional cooperation in the enforcement of competition laws, it is still too soon to determine whether this measure is sufficient to increase inter-BRICS trade and investment.

In their paper, Thompson and de Wet ask what the idea of a BRICS community might mean to citizens in each of the member states. They maintain that despite a BRICS’ commitment to build “responsive, inclusive collective solutions to core themes”, the focus of interaction, hitherto, has been at the level of inter-state collaboration with little consideration of how the partnership might influence the lives of ordinary people. Based on a qualitative case study of selected poor communities in Cape Town, South Africa, the paper found that respondents either had limited knowledge of BRICS’ initiatives or alternatively associated them with an influx of Chinese business into the city. With regard to the latter, responses were mixed, whilst some believed that Chinese investment led to more affordable goods, and hence benefitted the poor, others viewed the establishment of these enterprises negatively as a new form of neocolonialism. The authors argue that the idea of building a “BRICS from below”, where citizens both comprehend and support the objectives of the partnership, could counter balance the state-centric approach currently adopted and, in so doing, could also serve to hold national political leadership more accountable.

The last paper by Dali Yang is a comparative review of the development of Chinese regulatory institutions against the history of the development of the regulatory state in the West. Section one discusses the rise of the regulatory state in western democracies in an age of concern about state expansion. It notes that, generally speaking, the regulatory state in a liberal democratic setting has become accepted as enabling liberal democracies to combine democratic legitimacy with the independence and professionalism of unelected regulatory bodies. Section two offers a quick overview of the establishment and proliferation of regulatory institutions in China in the context of continued single-Party rule and strong state dominance. Section three delineates the politics of changes to the regulatory regime from the perspective of political risk and points to dynamics that are animating

regulatory state building with Chinese characteristics. Section four concludes with discussions on a regulatory state with Chinese characteristics with the continuing dominance of the Communist Party, a strong preoccupation with stability maintenance, weak rule of law and legal institutions, and special emphasis on political command and administrative control in governance models.

In assembling these papers together in this special issue, we attempt to make an early effort to build a foundation for further comparative studies in general as well as particular areas of development and governance in the BRICS. We take this opportunity to announce the 2nd International Symposium on Development and Governance in the BRICS, which is to be held at Fudan University in Shanghai in September 2017 with the theme of “International Development Aid in the BRICS”.

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