
Exploring Africa's Growth and Development Through Engagement with BRICS and EU

Dirk Hansohm

Doctor of Philosophy, Associate Researcher,
Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, Germany
E-mail: dirk@hansohm.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3586-6453>

Inna Koblianska

Candidate of Economic Sciences, Docent,
Associate Professor of Economics, Entrepreneurship,
and Business Administration Department,
Sumy State University, Ukraine
E-mail: i.koblianska@biem.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7844-9786>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2707-8019/2025-1-12>

Abstract. *The European Union has historically been the primary trade partner for African countries, functioning as a pivotal market for African exports and a substantial source of foreign investment. It is evident that, over the course of several decades, this longstanding economic relationship has exerted a significant influence on the trade and development trajectory of the African continent. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a marked decline in the relative role of the European Union in Africa's trade landscape. The global economic power balance has undergone a shift, with new and emerging economies acquiring increasing significance in Africa's economic relations. Notably, the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have become significant external actors, creating new dynamics in Africa's trade partnerships. This paper presents and discusses the scale of increasing trade with these new external actors in Africa, its impact on African countries and the likely future size and structure of this trade, as well as its impact on Africa–Europe relations. The research employs a mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative analysis of international trade statistics with a comparative regional assessment, to examine the changing roles of the BRIC countries and the European Union in Africa's economic landscape. A particular emphasis is placed on the consideration of the size of the countries in question, in addition to their geographic location and the quality of their institutions and governance. The findings indicate that the trade relations between Africa and the European Union, as well as the BRIC countries, are characterised by a structural imbalance. While the continent continues to export primarily to the EU, there is an increasing reliance on imports from BRIC economies. This trend underscores Africa's mounting significance as a consumer market for emerging powers, notably BRIC nations. In contrast, the EU's role remains predominantly that of a resource supplier. Exports from Africa have been demonstrated to contribute to employment and income generation, while imports have been shown to facilitate technological advancement and support domestic development. The paper concludes with the presentation of recommendations to African and EU governments. It is recommended that African governments consider ways to expand intra-African trade, accelerate the implementation of mutual agreements, and coordinate trade policies to enhance collective agency in global negotiations. The enhancement of research capacity, the diversification of trade structures, and the identification of supply constraints are pivotal to the enhancement of competitiveness and economic resilience.*

Keywords: international trade, economic growth, global partnership, regional integration, trade relations.

JEL Classification: F15, O55, P45

1 Introduction

The European Union has been the dominant trade partner and key foreign investment source for African countries. While it remains a substantial economic partner, its role is in decline. Concurrently, other actors have gained importance, notably the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and Arab countries. The emergence of new actors in the field naturally precipitated a relative decline in the role of Western countries. Consequently, they experienced a decline in their former dominance. It is noteworthy that China and India are regarded as re-establishing the relative importance they previously held in relation to the growth of Western economies during the 20th century. This momentous change also profoundly impacts the relationship between Africa and Europe.

This also affects the international institutional system of governance that was established after 1945. It is widely anticipated that countries along the Silk Road will grow in significance, with major decisions increasingly being made in Beijing, Delhi and Moscow (Frankopan, 2019). Many experts argue that the current global governance structures are inadequate for tackling the scale and complexity of 21st-century issues such as food insecurity, water scarcity and the ongoing impact of the global pandemic. The future is therefore likely to be characterised by increased regionalisation.

The contemporary epoch is characterised by a perilous phase of transition, characterised by the potential for military crises on a global scale and the escalating tensions among ambitious and emerging states. The transition of the global economic centre of gravity from the West to the East remains tenuous and is accompanied by a significant degree of uncertainty. It has been posited by certain observers that the formation of new alliances and the revitalisation of former relationships may result in the West facing increasing marginalisation (Frankopan, 2019).

While the principal emerging actors are based in Asia, Africa is also experiencing a rise in prominence, with 12 of the world's 20 fastest-growing economies located on the continent. However, this growth is tempered by inflation, mounting debt and debt servicing obligations, an uncertain political landscape, rising interest rates, and limited access to finance.

Emerging powers, including those in Africa, are offering credible alternatives to the European Union's traditional dominance. What is important here is that they give African leaders more chance to show independence by pushing for what is important in their region, and what they think is right (an aim that the EU often talks about when

negotiating, but which it has not yet managed to achieve) (Haastrup, 2022).

African states are increasingly pursuing independent foreign policies, sometimes diverging from the positions of major global powers. This is evident in their selective, case-by-case approach to voting in international forums. Many do not wish to be categorised as pro-Western, pro-Chinese or pro-Russian (Schwikowski, 2023).

In light of these developments, this paper examines the extent to which new external actors are increasing their trade and investment in Africa. It also considers the implications of this for African countries, as well as potential future scenarios regarding the size and structure of this investment, and its effects on Africa–Europe relations.

2 Data and Methods

The present research employs a mixed-methods design, integrating a quantitative examination of international trade statistics with a comparative regional assessment, with a view to exploring the evolving roles of BRIC countries and the European Union in Africa's economic landscape.

The primary dataset utilised in this research comprises international trade statistics derived from the UN Comtrade Database (UNCTAD, 2024), the World Bank's Open Data (WBOD, 2024b, 2024a), and other credible open-access repositories. The data sets under consideration focus on African countries' exports and imports from 2016 to 2021, disaggregated by country of origin and destination. Specifically, trade flows between African nations and BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) were compared with trade flows between Africa and the European Union.

The cleaning and processing of data was conducted in R, with the “tidyverse” package suite being utilised for this purpose. The African countries were grouped into six regional blocs (Northern, Eastern, Western, Middle, Southern, and the African continent) in order to detect region-specific trends. The analytical methods employed encompassed the calculation of total trade values by region and partner country, the utilisation of time-series visualisation to illustrate trade volumes, and the identification of the predominant trade partners in various periods and regions.

The utilisation of graphical representations served to elucidate trends in GDP and per capita income, thereby contextualising Africa's economic performance in relation to the BRIC and EU. Furthermore, trade intensity metrics and growth rates were calculated in order to quantify shifts in trade dominance and diversification.

The qualitative element of the research utilises secondary sources, encompassing academic publications and policy reports, to interpret the observed trends in the context of geopolitical shifts, institutional governance, and development strategies. This holistic approach facilitates the assessment of economic patterns and the broader implications for Africa's agency in international relations and its evolving economic partnerships.

3 Results

The following graph (Fig. 1) shows how the economic size of the BRICS countries has changed compared to the EU, Japan, the US and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

As demonstrated in Figure 1, there are several key trends that are evident in the global economy. Since 2020, the size of the Chinese economy has exceeded that of the European Union, accounting for 18.5% of the global economy in 2023, compared to the EU's 16.5%. Notwithstanding this shift, it is projected that the European Union, the United States, and Japan collectively will account for 45% of the global economy in 2023, representing a notable decrease from 62.2% in 1990. Despite a decline in China's growth rate in 2023, the European Union has also undergone a slowdown in its economic growth. The combined share of the

BRIC countries has increased significantly, from 9.9% in 1990 to 25.7% in 2023. Conversely, the economic development of Sub-Saharan Africa has exhibited only a marginal increase, with a rise from 1.8% to 2.1% over the same period, indicating a paucity of substantial economic catch-up.

Figure 2 shows how per capita incomes developed across the different groups during the same period. These trends differ markedly due to variations in population growth rates. By 2023, India had overtaken China, whose population was in decline, to become the most populous country. Russia and Japan are also experiencing population decline, while the population of the European Union is growing modestly, largely due to immigration. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region exhibiting significant population growth and is approaching the population size of both China and India.

Key insights reveal significant disparities in per capita income growth. In 1990, China's per capita income was only 27% of that of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), but by 2023 it had risen to 2.8 times SSA's level. In a similar fashion, China's per capita income increased substantially relative to the European Union. It grew from 4% of the EU's per capita income in 1990 to 35.6% in 2023. This indicates a notable catch-up, although a considerable gap remains. Conversely, SSA demonstrated a less pronounced

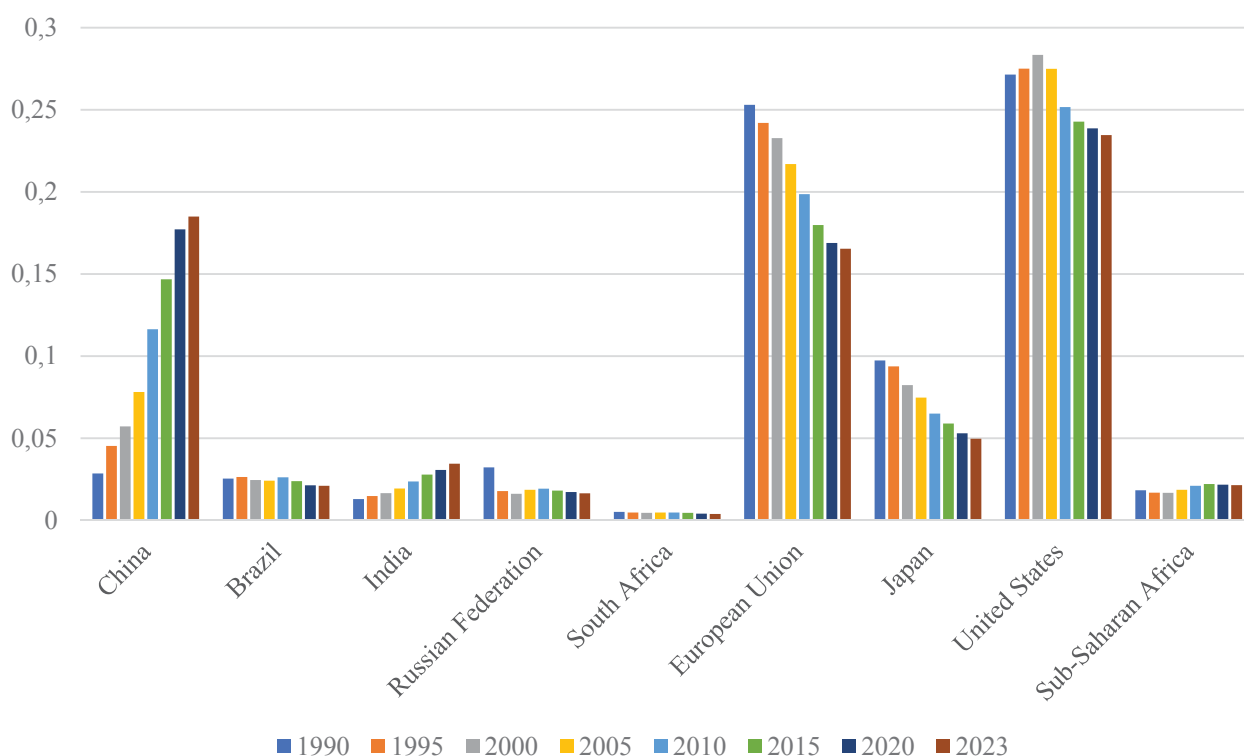


Figure 1 GDP (constant 2015 USD), share of world economy, 1990–2023

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (WBOD, 2024a)

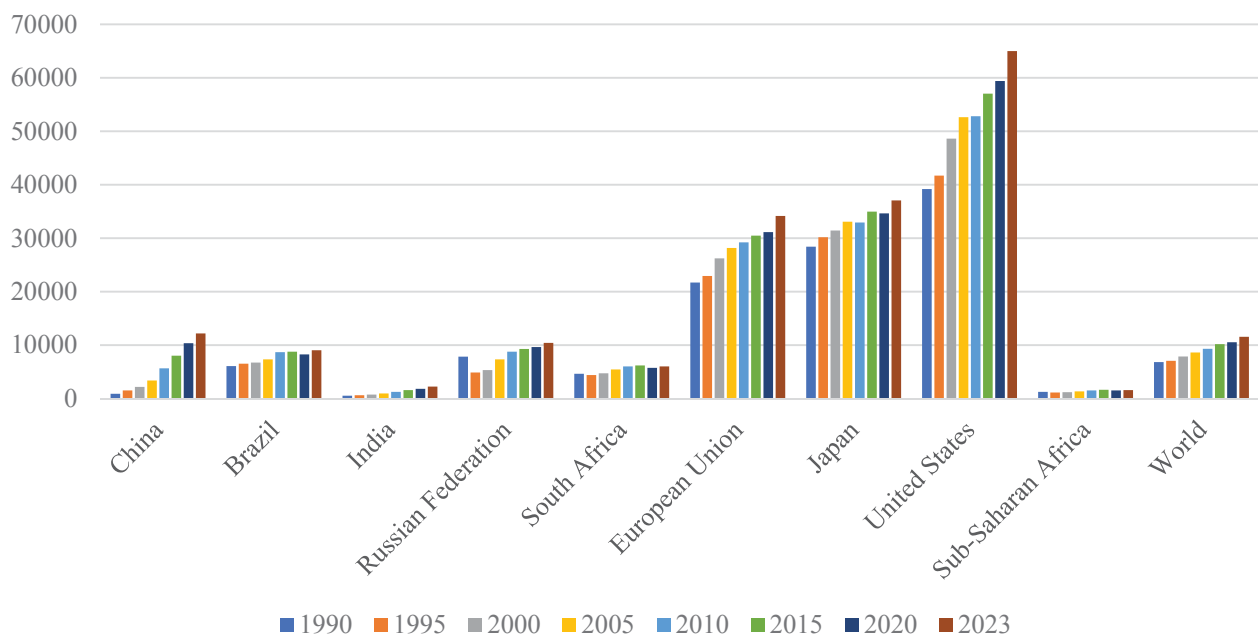


Figure 2 GDP per capita (constant 2015 USD), 1990–2023

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (WBOD, 2024b)

progression in comparison to the global average; its per capita income exhibited a decline from 18.6% of the global average in 1990 to 13.7% in 2023. When compared to the EU, SSA's per capita income also decreased, from 5.8% to 4.6% over the same period.

Despite favourable conditions over the past few decades, including a prolonged period of globalisation, substantial international investment and enhanced knowledge exchange facilitated by the internet, the disappointing outcomes can be attributed to the reduced effectiveness of two key drivers of convergence: diminishing returns on capital and the diffusion of technology. Technological advancements in the Global North have resulted in increased returns to capital and an expanded technology frontier, leaving the Global South struggling not only to keep pace but also to achieve meaningful catch-up (Ciuriak, 2023).

The past two decades have been pivotal for South-South relations, marked by increasing resource flows, the establishment of institutions, the emergence of alternative development narratives and models, and the formation of new geographies of cooperation. Since the Bandung Conference in 1955, when the objectives of Africa–Asia economic and cultural cooperation were initially articulated, there have been numerous false starts. However, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has gained renewed momentum.

The term "BRIC" was originally coined by consultants to identify four emerging economies

with significant growth potential; it did not initially refer to a formal group of countries. Nevertheless, the BRIC group evolved into a cohesive entity, holding regular meetings, including sessions in South Africa. The expanded bloc, BRICS, accounts for 26% of the global land area, 40% of the world's population, and 25% of global production. It is evident that there has been a shift in the role of the entity in question from one of recipient to one of donor over time.

The acronym BRIC is characterised by considerable differences in size, wealth, governance, development trajectories, and policy orientations. The extent to which the group will evolve into an effective economic actor is uncertain.

Furthermore, the extent to which BRIC countries will be able to sustain their growth rates is uncertain, as they confront the typical challenges associated with the middle-income trap. According to the World Bank, the average per capita income in middle-income countries has remained consistently below 10% of that in the United States since 1970 (Gill, 2024). Only 34 economies have transitioned from middle- to high-income status since 1990, with more than one-third of these benefiting from either integration into the European Union or the discovery of significant oil reserves. It is projected that, should current trends persist, China will require a further 11 years to reach a per capita income equivalent to one quarter of that of the United States. By contrast, India is estimated to require approximately 75 years (Gill, 2024).

Following the surge in South–South relations during the 2000s, which was driven by the commodity boom, progress has slowed due to waning euphoria and the disruption caused by the pandemic. While China has consolidated its position, Brazil's growth has cooled and India has yet to realise its anticipated rise.

The economic growth of emerging Asian economies has had a substantial impact on Africa's economic development, consequently strengthening the continent's global standing. Conversely, the emergence of developing economies, notably the BRICS nations, has been instrumental in fortifying Africa's economic position and enhancing its global standing.

It is noteworthy that in Africa, rising powers that are both resource-demanding and geographically ambitious, such as China, India and Brazil, have engaged under the broader narrative of an 'Africa rising' sentiment (Hönke et al., 2024). Since 2017, Asia has emerged as Africa's primary trading partner, followed by Europe. In 2021, Asia accounted for 43.7% of Africa's total goods trade with the rest of the world, with China responsible for over 40% of trade between Asia and Africa. Consequently, China has steadily emerged as the leading trading partner for many African countries (UNECA, 2023).

Despite the initial scepticism surrounding the prospect of BRICS evolving into a cohesive trading bloc, recent evidence suggests that member countries are increasingly aligning their

trade policies. A report by BCG reveals that these nations have experienced a progression in their economic integration over time, with intra-BRICS trade in goods demonstrating a substantial increase in comparison to trade between BRICS and G7 countries. This has resulted in a notable escalation in the intensity of intra-BRICS trade (Yieke, 2024).

Concurrently, intra-African trade is expanding and now accounts for approximately 15% of Africa's total global trade. However, this figure remains significantly lower than the averages observed in Europe (68%) and Asia (58%). Within the context of Africa's eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the preponderance of intra-African trade occurs within individual RECs, with only negligible volumes extending beyond these regions. This intra-REC trade has become increasingly consolidated, yet it remains concentrated in a limited range of regional products and key players (Taku, 2023).

Over the past 25 years, there have been substantial shifts in Africa's international trade partnerships, with the growing significance of the African continent, in addition to China and India, becoming apparent. This rise has corresponded with a relative decline in the share held by Western countries, predominantly Europe and the United States (Chen et al., 2024).

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the relative shares of BRIC and EU in Africa's imports and exports over recent years (2016–2021). It is evident that while the relative imports of the EU have decreased, those

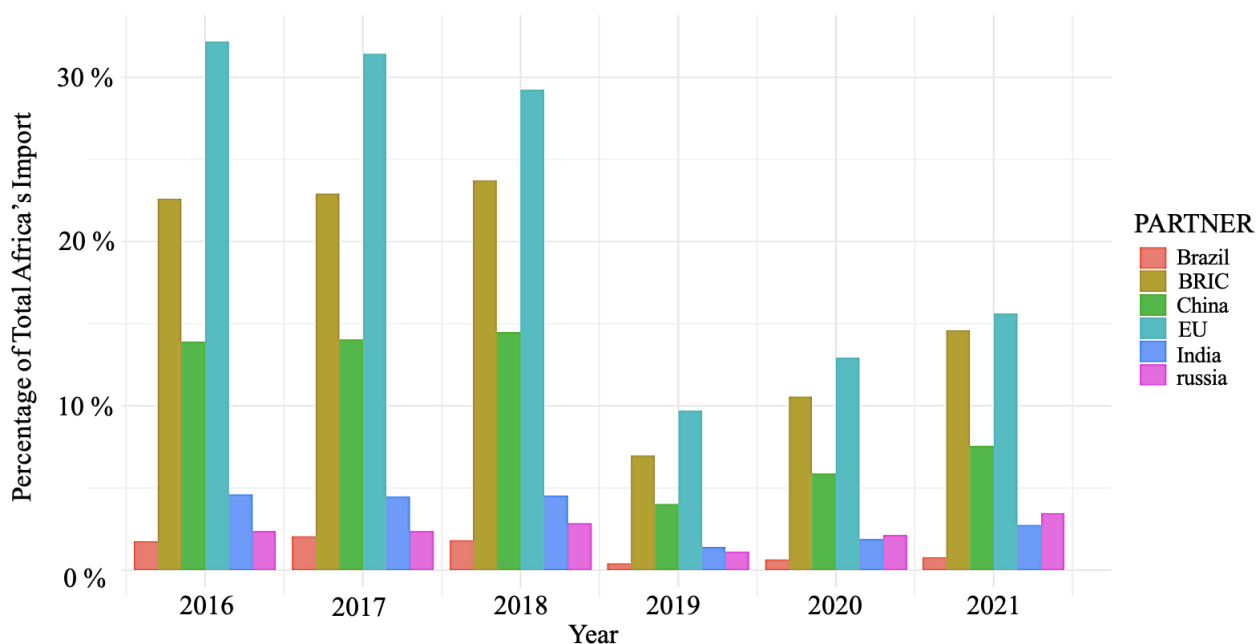


Figure 3 Shares of BRIC and EU in total Africa's imports (2016–2021, %)

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

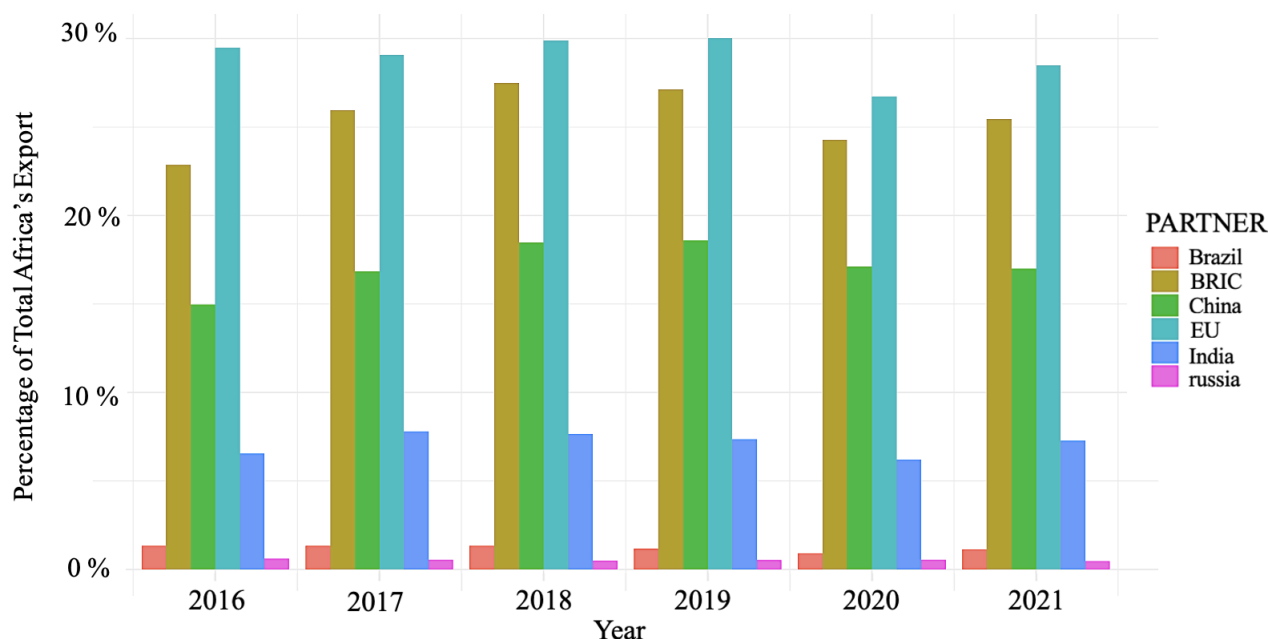


Figure 4 Shares of BRIC and EU in total African exports (2016–2021)

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

of the BRIC nations have increased. Nevertheless, in 2021 the EU still outperformed the BRIC group. Concurrently, BRIC and EU experienced a substantial decline in comparison to other African exporters in 2019. The export figure demonstrates analogous tendencies.

Undoubtedly, China represents the most significant actor within the BRIC group. This assertion likewise pertains to the economic relations with the African continent. Consequently, the extant literature on China-Africa economic relations is significantly more extensive than that pertaining to other BRIC members and the EU.

China's relationship with Africa began in the mid-1950s, alongside the continent's wave of independence. Initially, China focused on sponsoring infrastructure projects, such as bridges, conference halls and railways. China also supported the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which became the African Union (AU) in 2002. Although modest in scale, this aid was provided to African governments unconditionally, reflecting a spirit of solidarity.

China's engagement in trade and investment has accelerated significantly since the turn of the millennium. The establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 marked the beginning of a new era in bilateral relations between China and Africa. Since then, FOCAC has served as a platform for open dialogue and a vital means of fostering practical

collaboration between China and African countries (Tsega, 2019, p. 48).

Over the past two decades, China has become Sub-Saharan Africa's most significant bilateral trading partner. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), around 20% of the region's exports are destined for China, and around 16% of Africa's imports originate from there. In 2023, the total value of trade between the two reached a record 282 billion USD. The bulk of Africa's exports to China consist of commodities such as oil, gas and minerals (Tsega, 2019, p. 50).

The nature of Africa's commodity exports to China has attracted criticism, with some interpreting it as indicative of China's primary interest in securing access to natural resources. This critique is further emphasised by the concentration of exports in a limited number of resource-rich countries. Between 2000 and 2010, nations abundant in oil, gas and minerals such as Angola (34.25%), South Africa (19.55%), Sudan (11.05%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7.52%) and Equatorial Guinea (4.5%) accounted for over 80% of Africa's exports to China. In contrast, countries with fewer natural resources had limited commodities to trade. Despite the rapid growth in African exports, China remains only the third-largest destination for African goods, following the European Union and the United States (Tsega, 2019, pp. 50–51).

Nevertheless, Africa's trade relations with China share several characteristics with those it

maintains with other major global partners, such as the United States and the European Union. The majority of African countries are heavily reliant on the exploitation of natural resources for the generation of revenue and the sustainability of government operations. Consequently, the African continent's trade is primarily driven by the export of commodities, with a focus on oil, gas, and minerals, irrespective of the trading partner involved, including China.

However, Africa's global trade landscape is distinguished by features that are distinct from those of China. China is the continent's largest bilateral trade partner, with trade volumes consistently increasing, reaching a record 282 billion USD in 2023. Despite this, Africa accounts for only 4.7% of China's total global trade (Tsega, 2019).

The increasing volume of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), notably from China to Africa, signifies a substantial and evolving dynamic in China–Africa relations. Conventionally, Chinese FDI has been concentrated in extractive industries; however, there is a discernible shift towards diversifying investments, especially in the manufacturing sector. The increased investment in textiles, apparel, automobiles, and building materials is fostering higher-value-added activities across the continent.

India is the second most significant BRIC trading partner for the African continent. Since 2003, India–Africa trade has grown at an annual rate of 18%, reaching 103 billion USD in 2023. This positions India as Africa's third-largest trading partner after the European Union and China. Furthermore, India is positioned as one of the top five investors in Africa.

Between 2002 and 2012, Brazil's trade with Africa increased fourfold, reaching 20.6 billion USD. This growth was largely driven by the exploitation of commodities, with African countries increasingly leveraging Brazilian expertise in mining, oil exploration and tropical agriculture.

In January 2024, the BRICS group expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Together, these ten countries are responsible for around 40% of global crude oil production and exports. They also contribute around a quarter of global GDP, a fifth of international trade in goods, and nearly half of the world's population. If a further dozen nations, including emerging markets such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, were to be admitted, the group's share of global GDP could rise to one third.

In order to achieve a more profound comprehension of the regional "spheres of influence", an examination of import trends across various African regions is

necessitated. As demonstrated in Figure 5, Northern Africa is predominantly pro-European, with total imports from the EU consistently 1.8 times higher than imports from BRIC throughout the period under review. However, in 2021, BRIC imports to Northern Africa exhibited significant growth, primarily attributable to heightened trade relations with Russia. It is important to note that Northern Africa is the largest importing region in Africa, with imports being 4.4 times higher than those of Eastern Africa, 2.8 times higher than those of Western Africa, almost ten times higher than those of Middle Africa, and 52.6 times higher than those of Southern Africa.

Furthermore, Southern Africa can also be considered a pro-European region. In contrast to other African regions, Southern Africa has witnessed a consistent increase in imports from the EU since 2019, with EU imports remaining higher than those from other BRIC countries.

Eastern Africa has consistently been within the sphere of influence of the BRIC countries, with China being the main supplier of imports.

When analysing the regional distribution of African export flows (Fig. 6), it is essential to note that Northern Africa is the largest exporter to the EU, with exports to the EU more than three times higher than those to BRIC countries. In contrast to the concentration of import flows, African exports demonstrate a less pronounced concentration. For instance, while Northern Africa leads in exports to the EU and BRIC, it exports only twice as much as Middle and Southern Africa, and almost three times as much as Western Africa. The value of exports from Northern Africa is approximately six times greater than that from Eastern Africa.

In Western Africa, exports to the EU remain dominant. However, BRIC countries have managed to narrow the gap in the most recent year, with exports to the BRIC countries almost reaching the level of exports to the EU. Nevertheless, exports to the BRIC countries dominate much of Africa, particularly the eastern, middle and southern regions. Notably, exports to the EU are growing in these regions, contrary to import trends, and in line with the overall increase in exports across the continent.

Finally, with regard to regional influence, China is the leading BRIC partner in Eastern, Middle, and Southern Africa, while India plays a more prominent role in Western Africa. While Brazil and Russia are relatively insignificant in terms of export volume across most regions, they play a more notable role in Northern Africa.

In order to illustrate the role of the EU and BRIC in individual African countries, key importers from each region have been selected: The countries under discussion are Ethiopia (Eastern Africa),

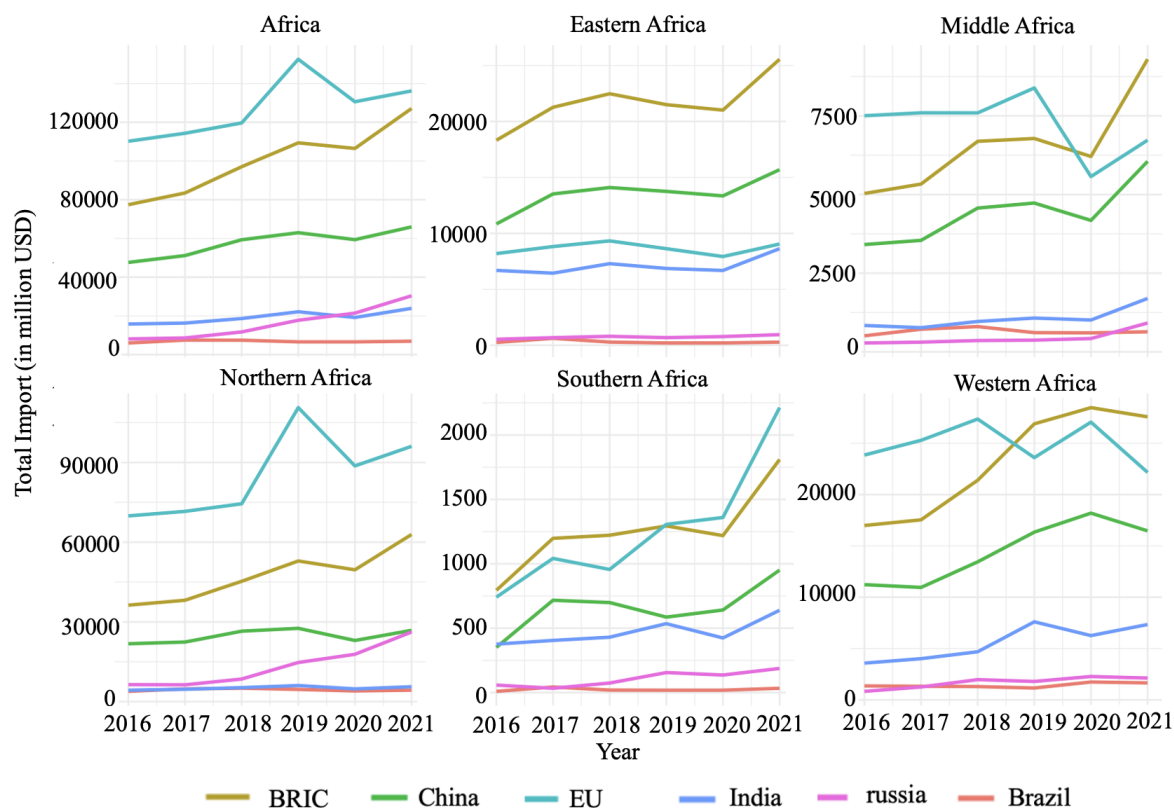


Figure 5 Imports of African regions from BRIC and EU (2016–2021)

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

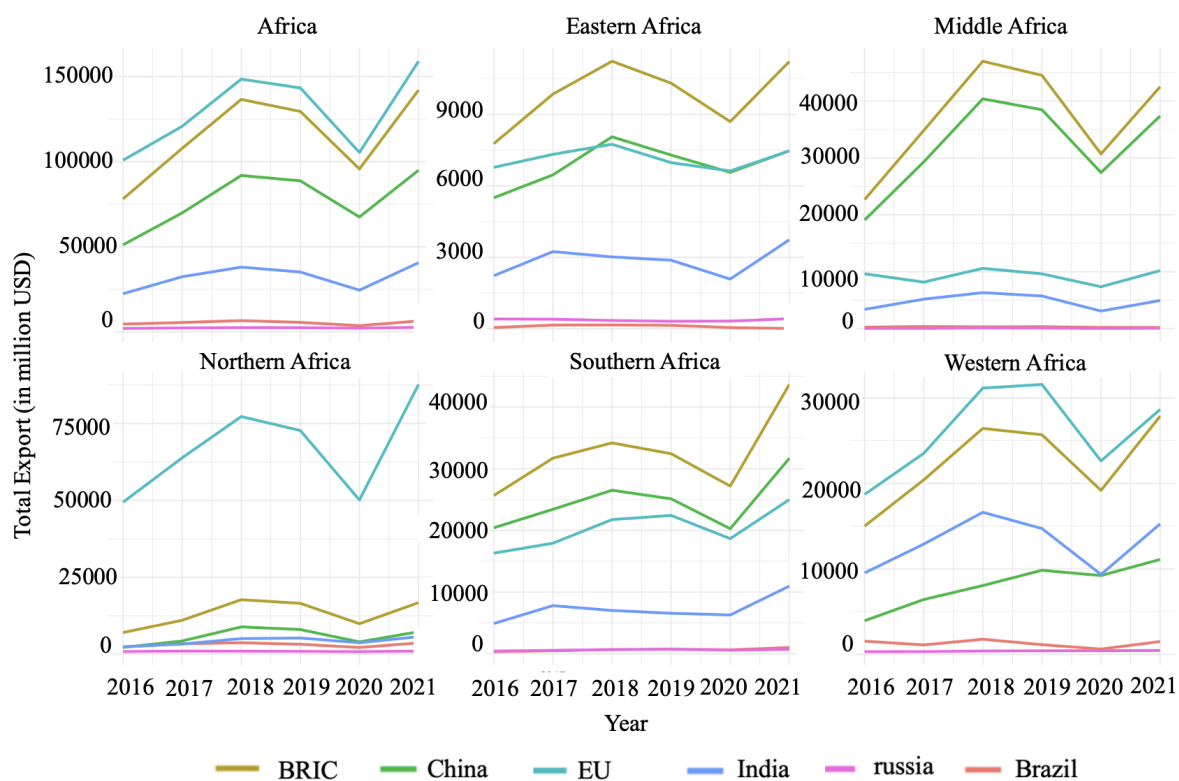


Figure 6 Exports by African regions to BRIC and EU (2016–2021)

Source: authors' calculations based on data from UNCTAD (2024)

Angola (Middle Africa), Algeria (Northern Africa), Namibia (Southern Africa), and Nigeria (Western Africa).

Algeria is the continent's largest importer from the EU and BRIC, accounting for 20.5% of Africa's total EU-BRIC imports from 2016 to 2021 and 35% of EU-BRIC imports from the Northern Africa region. Angola, which represents 2.8% of Africa's total EU-BRIC imports during the same period, is the leading importer in Middle Africa, with a share of 46.3% of the region's total EU-BRIC imports. Furthermore, Ethiopia also imports 2.9% of Africa's total EU-BRIC imports, and its share of Eastern Africa's imports is 22%. Nigeria, another significant African importer, accounts for 10.4% of the continent's total EU-BRIC imports and is the largest importer in Western Africa, with a share of 49.5%. In view of the paucity of data available for South Africa, Namibia has been selected as a representative country for the Southern African region. From 2016 to 2021, Namibia imported 0.5% of the total EU-BRIC imports, and 45.48% of Southern Africa's imports.

The following figure illustrates this point (Fig. 7). Evidence suggests that in the majority of these countries, the influence of BRIC has increased at the expense of the EU. This phenomenon is evident even in countries where the EU's imports have historically been predominant, such as Algeria, Angola, and

Namibia. A discernible trend of increasing imports from BRIC countries is observed.

Figure 8 shows the influence of individual BRIC members in certain African countries. China and India play a particularly prominent role in Nigeria, Namibia and Ethiopia. Since 2019, Russia's influence in Algeria has grown significantly, primarily at the expense of the EU, while imports from China have remained relatively stable. Furthermore, India and Russia's growing presence in Angola highlights a shift in the country's trade and political dynamics.

When commenting on the dynamics of export flows to the EU and BRIC countries from selected African countries (see Fig. 9), it is important to note the significant dominance of exports bound for the EU in four out of the five countries, alongside a noticeable upward trend in exports to the EU. The exception is Angola, where exports to the BRIC countries dominate. According to the most recent data, Angola's exports to the BRIC countries are five times higher than those to the EU and continue to increase, whereas exports to the EU have been declining.

Within the context of the BRIC countries (see Fig. 10), a select number of African countries primarily export their goods to China (Angola, Namibia, Ethiopia), India (Nigeria), and Brazil (Algeria).

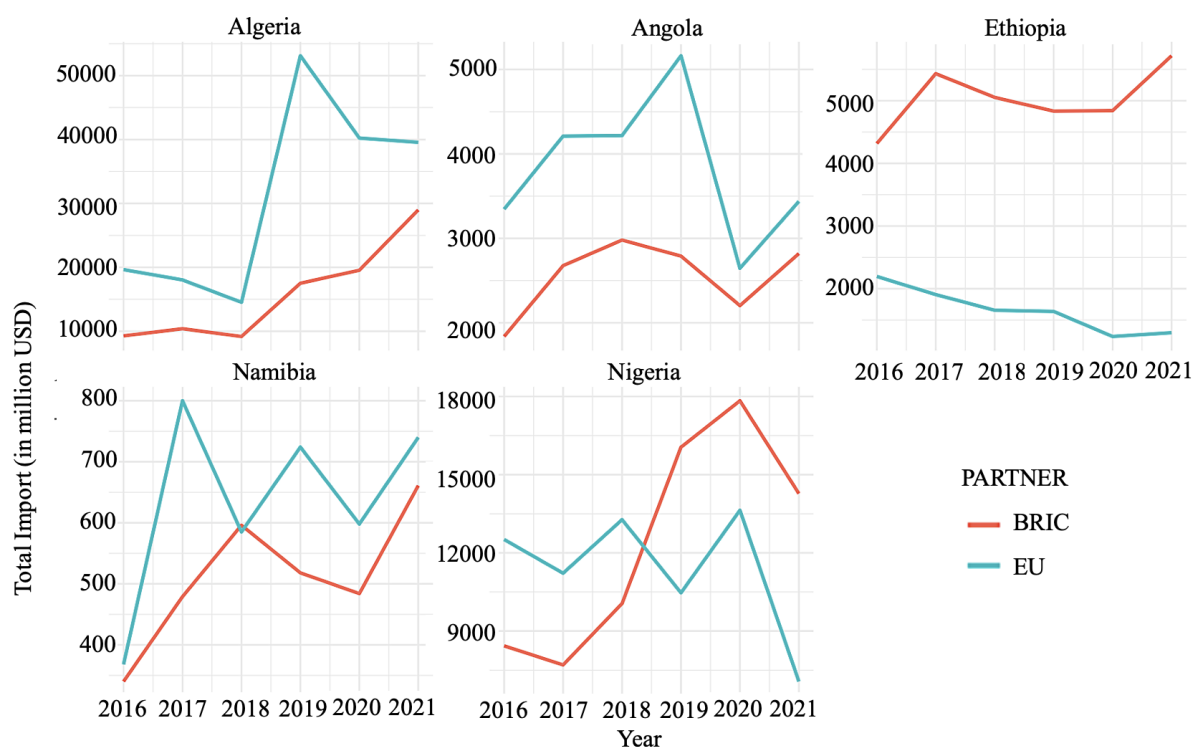


Figure 7 Import trends of selected African countries from BRIC and EU

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

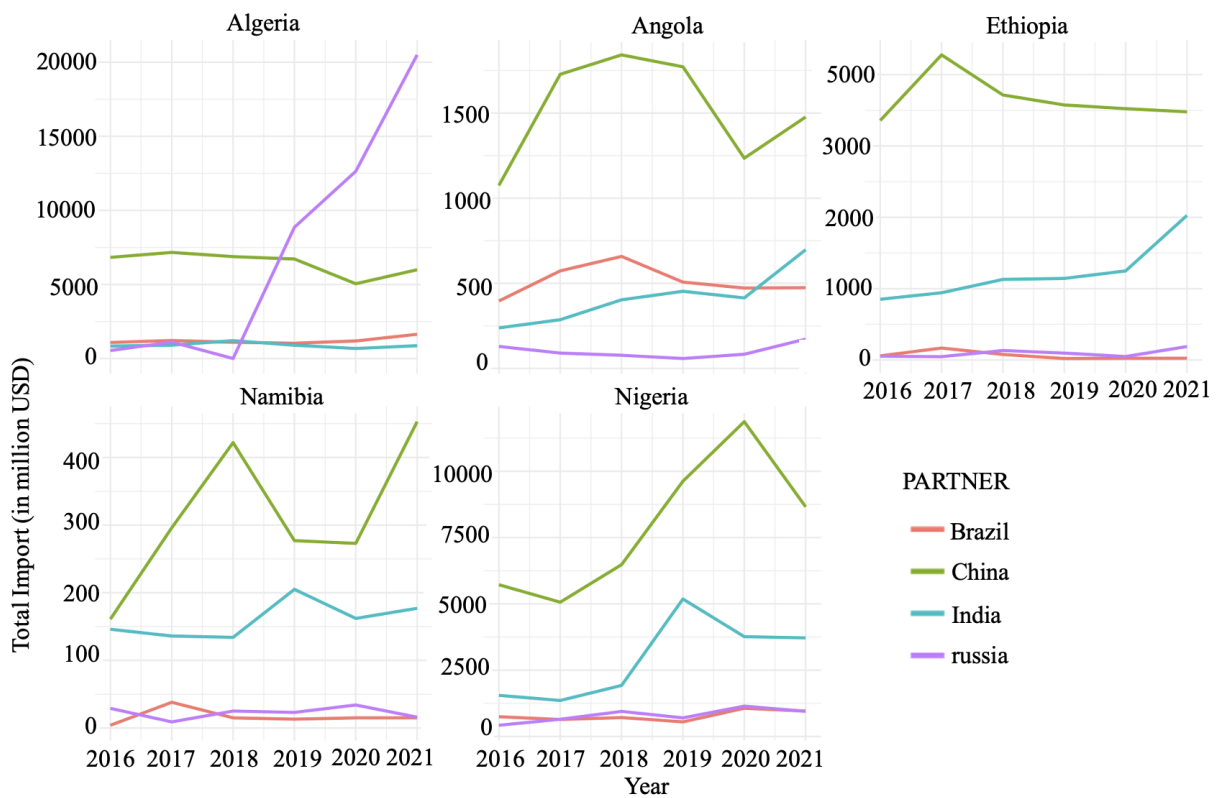


Figure 8 Import trends of selected African countries from each BRIC country

Source: authors' calculations based on data from UNCTAD (2024)

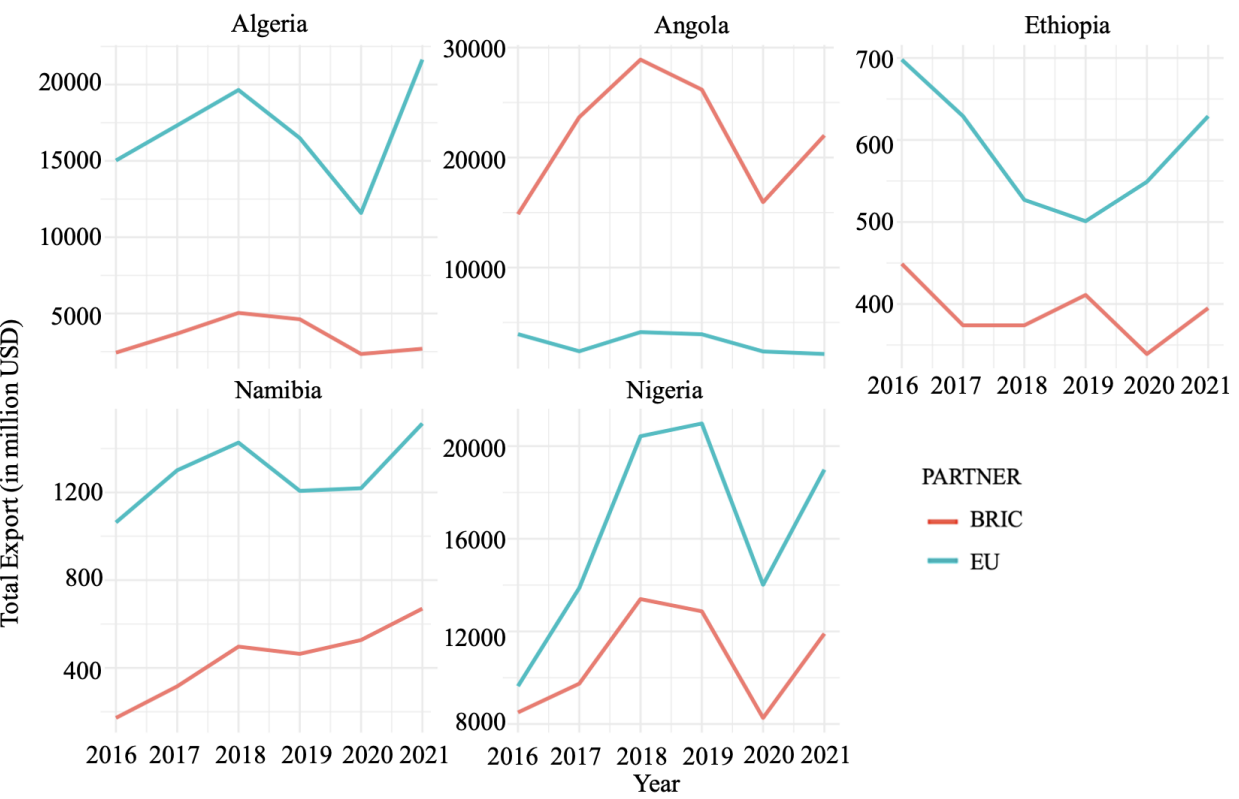


Figure 9 Export trends of selected African countries to BRIC and EU

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

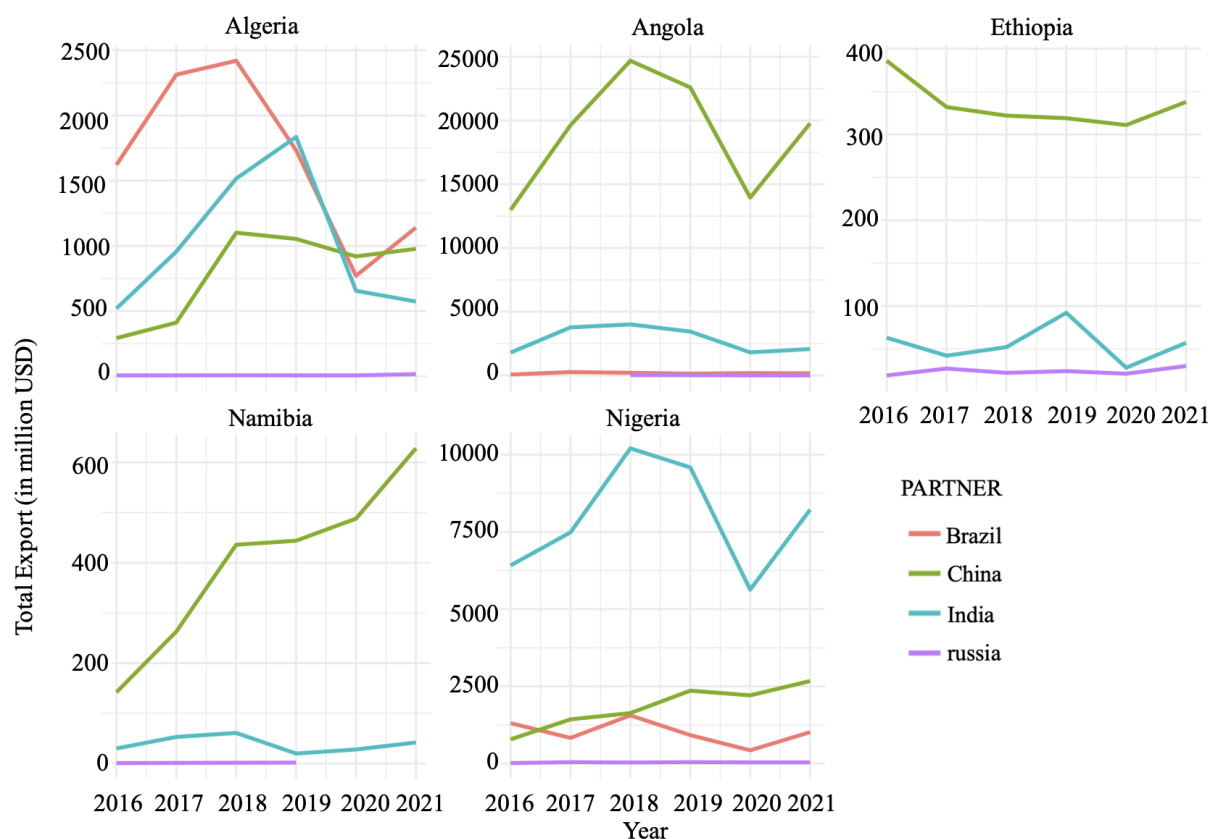


Figure 10 Export trends of selected African countries to each BRIC country

Source: authors' calculations based on data from (UNCTAD, 2024)

4 Conclusions

Despite the limited availability of comprehensive data, this study highlights several key insights. Firstly, Africa's trade with external partners is expanding and evolving rapidly, significantly influencing its economies. Notably, trade relations with the European Union and the BRIC countries remain imbalanced. Africa is importing more from BRIC nations, while primarily exporting to the EU. This pattern suggests that Africa is becoming an attractive market for BRIC countries, whereas for the EU, Africa primarily remains a supplier of goods. While the export sector is conducive to the creation of employment and the generation of income within the African continent, the import sector facilitates technological renewal and broader economic development. Indeed, the EU's indirect stimulation of production in BRIC countries through the importation of goods from Africa has the effect of creating demand for imports in Africa, thereby strengthening the economic capacity of the BRIC bloc.

The emergence of BRIC and other developing economies presents a valuable opportunity for African countries to diversify their economies and

reduce their historically one-sided dependence on European trade partners. This shift enhances the agency of African governments in shaping their economic futures.

It is important to note that, in contrast to the commonly held views on the matter, this development should not be regarded as harmful or threatening. The enhancement of African economies through increased trade and investment is also advantageous for Europe; an improvement in African welfare enhances trade potential and employment opportunities, thereby reducing emigration pressures.

Nevertheless, the future trajectory of BRIC's economic rise and its trade and investment relations with Africa remain uncertain. It appears that Brazil, China and India are encountering difficulties in overcoming the middle-income trap, while Russia is witnessing a decline in its economic growth.

Nevertheless, it is evident that China's trade policies present notable challenges for African economic development. It is evident that the primary concern for China is the protection of its domestic markets, a strategy that invariably results in a limitation of export opportunities for African

economies. Secondly, the influx of Chinese products into African markets has been demonstrated to have a deleterious effect on local industries by curtailing demand for domestic producers. Thirdly, China's sustained production of subsidised, inexpensive, low-value exports hinders the conventional route of export-led growth based on comparative advantage in low labour costs.

In this context, the EU represents a potential market for African products, since they tend not to compete directly with European production. Furthermore, recent EU tariffs on subsidised Chinese goods could create more opportunities for African exports.

In light of the findings, a series of recommendations are put forward for consideration by African and EU governments. It is imperative that African governments prioritise the expansion of intra-African trade as a foundational strategy to enhance collective agency within the global economic system. It is imperative to expedite the establishment of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to enhance regional integration and consolidate bargaining power. The formulation of coordinated trade policy among African nations would serve to strengthen their position in international negotiations. Moreover, the enhancement of research capacity on a continental scale is imperative to facilitate the development of evidence-based policy. Diversifying trade structures and addressing internal supply constraints will broaden the production base, improve competitiveness, and render African economies more resilient and dynamic.

It is equally imperative that the EU and its member states intensify their support for

African governments in diversifying production and advancing value-added industries. The enhancement of the developmental components of trade agreements, particularly through the means of stronger aid mechanisms, has the potential to engender more equitable negotiation outcomes and capacity-building in the sphere of African trade policymaking. The promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation is facilitated by the facilitation of collaborative research initiatives between African and European institutions. In conclusion, it is recommended that the EU proactively promotes the merits of democratic governance as an integral component of its comprehensive engagement strategy, underscoring its significance for fostering inclusive development and ensuring stable trade relations.

Acknowledgments. The paper was developed under the AfrikuEurope project (101127755—AFRIQUEUROPE—ERASMUS-JMO-2023-NETWORKS) and presented and benefited from the comments made at the conference 'The European Union and Africa's reliance on external actors' in Cape Town, 25–27 November 2024, financed by the AfrikuEurope project. Inna Koblianska's contribution is made within the framework of Jean Monnet Chair "Strengthening EU Leadership and Capacity in Science and Innovation" (101175767—EU_STRENGTHS—ERASMUS-JMO-2024-HEITCH-RSCH). Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

References

- Chen, W., Fornino, M., & Rawlings, H. (2024). Navigating the Evolving Landscape of China and Africa's Economic Engagements. *IMF WORKING PAPERS*.
- Ciuriak, D. (2023). The BRICS as an Alternative Anchor for Global Economic Governance: A Comment. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4492261>
- Frankopan, P. (2019). *The new silk roads: The present and future of the world* (First edition). Alfred A. Knopf.
- Gill, I. (2024, August 12). Indermit Gill on what China and India must do to join the rich club. *The Economist*. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2024/08/12/indermit-gill-on-what-china-and-india-must-do-to-join-the-rich-club>
- Haastrup, T. (2022, February 25). *How the EU-AU Summit failed Africa again*. IPS. Available at: <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/how-the-eu-au-summit-failed-africa-again-5741/>
- Hönke, J., Cezne, E., & Yang, Y. (2024). Infrastructure Globalities: Emerging Practices at the African Frontier. In J. Honke, E. Cezne, & Y. Yang (Eds.), *Africa's Global Infrastructures* (1st ed., pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197775363.003.0001>
- Schwikowski, M. (2023). *African countries assert their role in global politics*. Dw.Com. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/african-countries-assert-their-role-in-global-politics/a-67812170>
- Taku, F. (2023). *Africa's Trade Liberalisation and Intra-Africa Trade Performance: 10-year Review*. Tralac trade law centre. Available at: <https://www.tralac.org/publications/article/16250-africa-s-trade-liberalisation-and-intra-africa-trade-performance-10-year-review.html>
- Tsega, C. F. (2019). *China-Africa Trade and Investment Relations: Development Partnership or New Colonialism?* Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4328393>

UNCTAD. (2024). *Trade-and-Transport Dataset, annual, 2016 onward (analytical)* [Dataset]. Available at: <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.TransportCosts>

UNECA. (2023, December). *Assessment of progress on regional integration in Africa*. UN. ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Addis Ababa. Available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/50085>

WBOD. (2024a). *GDP (constant 2015 US\$)*. World Bank Open Data. World Bank Open Data. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

WBOD. (2024b). *GDP per capita (constant 2015 US\$)*. World Bank Open Data. World Bank Open Data. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

Yieke, L. (2024, June 18). *BRICS expansion offers opportunity to boost African trade, say experts*. African Business. Available at: <https://african.business/2024/06/trade-investment/brics-expansion-offers-opportunity-to-boost-african-trade-say-experts>