Responsibilities in Transition: Emerging Powers in the Climate Change Negotiations

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The BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) play an increasingly prominent role in global climate negotiations. Climate governance spotlights burden-sharing arrangements, asking countries to take on potentially costly actions to resolve a global problem, even as the benefits are generally indivisible public goods. This article examines the BASIC countries’ own Joint Statements and their individual and collective submissions to multilateral climate negotiations to identify the rationalist and principled arguments they have made about the climate burden-sharing requirements that developed countries, developing countries, and they themselves should face in global climate governance. It argues that their expectations for their own role are particularly unclear, with greater national action than international commitments to do so. Keywords: climate change, emerging powers, power transition, burden sharing.

In the twenty-first century, there is little doubt that the emerging powers are transforming the institutions and habits of global governance. They are seeking and gaining new influence on global rule making in areas from trade to finance to poverty reduction. In contrast, they spent much of the 2000s trying to avoid notice in global climate change negotiations, even as other countries were looking to them to play a larger role. At the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009, however, the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) began to coordinate their positions and made their first promises to reduce at least the pace of the rise of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Their ministers have met quarterly since then to discuss their climate positions, even as the grouping has kept a low collective profile in the formal negotiations. We argue that examining the BASIC countries’ evolving positions after 2009 regarding their responsibilities and capacities in the climate regime provides important insights into the role of emerging powers in global governance, especially in burden-sharing regimes such as climate change.

The fact that climate governance spotlights burden-sharing arrangements is a key structural feature that provides a window into how the emerging powers will engage in the future provision of global public goods.
Most studies of the emerging powers have focused on economic arenas where burden sharing is balanced by significant power sharing.\textsuperscript{1} Power sharing usually results in tangible economic benefits for the participant, including influence in rule setting that may open new economic opportunities. In contrast, climate change negotiations often focus on the zero-sum task of distributing obligations to reduce emissions while benefits are generally indivisible collective goods. Thus, countries are asked to take on substantial upfront costs in exchange for much more diffuse benefits.

Climate change is also one of the first burden-sharing arenas that involves explicit demands by the North for a subset of actors in the South to share the costs of providing a global public good. Yet studies of climate politics are only beginning to direct attention to the emerging powers in these negotiations.\textsuperscript{2} In this article, we review the positions of the BASIC countries on governance issues requiring costly contributions to the provision of a global public good, climate stability. Rational interest calculations stress the incentives for national shirking in the global commons of the atmosphere.\textsuperscript{3} Yet the challenges go beyond that. A number of different burden-sharing arrangements could meet the material requirements of reducing GHG emissions sufficiently to reduce the rate of global warming. Behind rationalist debates on free riding and burden sharing thus lies another set of debates about how any burdens should be equitably distributed: what kinds of actors have what kinds of burdens and obligations to provide this global public good? What, if any, obligations do emerging powers have?

After exploring the features and implications of a burden-sharing problem context, we trace the climate positions of the BASIC members between 2009 and 2013 regarding the equitable division of responsibility for climate action. We consider how two distinct drivers appear to account both for their collective BASIC stances and for times when their national negotiation positions diverge: (1) rational-material considerations; and (2) identity-based expectations for different actors in global politics. These two drivers ground BASIC’s contributions to debates about whether they are “developed enough” to take on international commitments that they rejected a few years ago as growth limiting. This ongoing redefinition of the role and responsibilities of emerging powers in the climate regime shapes notions of fairness and equity, merging questions of capability to act (power) and responsibility to act.

We observe that cooperation and coordination among BASIC members peaked shortly after the group’s formation in 2009 and has been in decline since 2012. Having formed a new actor that has become the target of demands and expectations by other negotiation parties—both developed and developing countries—the BASIC members have been working hard to emphasize their character as developing countries rather than emerging powers. This dynamic indicates that, as a group, the BASIC countries are
not yet prepared to take on the role of global public goods providers in the
climate regime, although their economic power might enable them to do so.
We also observe significant differences in the attitudes of individual BASIC
members toward the idea of adopting a greater share of the global burden of
climate action as well as changes in these attitudes over a relatively short
period of time.

We argue that the observable changes in negotiation positions have
important implications not only for the global climate regime, but also for
the future of global governance more generally. The international system is
currently in a period of structural change, driven not only by a shift of
material power from North to South but also by the new expectations for
some emerging powers. Focusing on the role of emerging powers in the cli-
mate context, we discern movement away from a dichotomous global sys-
tem with a basic distinction between North and South toward a system with
at least three categories of states: the developed North, the developing
South, and the emerging powers somewhere in between. Eroding power in
the North and the potential for shirking responsibility among both declining
and emerging powers in a time of increasingly challenging global problems
raises an important question: who will pick up the tab for global gover-
nance in the future?

**Burden Sharing in Global Climate Governance**
The 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
details the principles that should guide global climate governance. Principle
3.1 sets out a dual expectation of an effective and equitable resolution:
“The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present
and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accor-
dance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective
capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the
lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.” Climate
change is thus associated with burden-sharing arrangements in two related
ways.

On the one hand, climate change is to be effectively addressed. Mitiga-
ing global warming is commonly considered to be a global public good
that cannot be achieved by any single country and cannot be denied to
countries once achieved. Rational choice theorists argue that this creates a
typical set of challenges for effective climate governance and requires a
formal and monitored division of labor among states, which is tailored to
prevent shirking. On the other hand, political theorists have extensively
discussed norms and principles of burden sharing, many of which seek a
just rather than simply effective governance resolution. In this section, we
present the academic literature on the two approaches to burden-sharing
arrangements, along with citing some of the real-world negotiation blocs that have embodied them.

Conceiving of global climate politics as a collective action problem places the question of burden sharing in a “consequentialist” logic where foreign policy and political order are seen “as arising from negotiations among rational actors pursuing personal preferences or interests in circumstances in which there may be gains to coordinated action.” Rationality analyses point to a particularly difficult constellation of interests invoked by the burden-sharing features of climate change. Classifying climate change as an aggregate efforts problem (i.e., the more countries participate, the more of the public good can be supplied), Scott Barrett argues that “global climate change . . . is almost certainly the hardest [problem] for the world to address.” What makes aggregate efforts problems exceptionally difficult is the free-rider problem, a rational tendency to avoid obligations in burden-sharing agreements in the hope that others will take them on. In this view, institutionalized regimes that create credible commitments for others to act encourage international cooperation.

The rationalist approach to burden sharing, with its emphasis on calculating costs and benefits and distributing burdens with enough precision and oversight that free riding can be monitored, is not matched exactly by any part of the global climate regime. The closest match is in the European Union (EU), which steadily defends such an approach in international climate negotiations and has put it into practice at home. After the EU agreed to reduce the bloc’s emissions under the Kyoto Protocol, the Europeans then negotiated the 1997 Burden Sharing Agreement among themselves to redistribute their collective mitigation responsibility to individual states with targets and timetables. The EU also illustrated the logic of aggregate efforts as it prepared to negotiate burden sharing in the context of a second stage of Kyoto commitments. In 2007, it planned to offer a further 20 percent reduction in emissions, which could be raised to 30 percent if the rest of the developed countries and “economically more advanced developing countries” did too.

Other approaches to burden sharing see it as a domain for debating a much wider array of principles and norms than rational cost-benefit analysis. One notable concern is which, among the potential distributions of responsibilities and outcomes, are equitable or just? The field of climate ethics has provided many answers to this question. Marco Grasso captures much of the range, identifying four families of distributional constructs that can be translated into burden-sharing schemes. The egalitarian path “demands that justice be concerned with the equality of some currency of justice” such as equal per capita emissions allotments while the prioritarian path instead looks to assure “specific benefits to the least advantaged subjects.” A sufficitarian argument divides emissions into survival and luxury
emissions, allowing a basic level of emissions without obligation of reduction and then more stringently reducing emissions above that level. Finally, a *nonegalitarian* option simply accepts or grandfathers a distribution of emissions as it exists on a certain date.\textsuperscript{14} Needless to say, these different principles lead to quite different shares of any potential global emissions budget for particular countries.

The climate ethicists’ focus on distinguishing among principles of burden sharing supports constructivist international relations scholars who argue that states may be motivated in international relations by norms and ideals rather than simply by calculations of interests. This follows a “logic of appropriateness” where states behave in ways they and others consider appropriate for the kind of actor they are.\textsuperscript{15} Their self-conceptions and identities may lead them, for example, to express solidarity with others even when that results in agreements that are not rationally optimal for them.\textsuperscript{16} States may also, of course, promote principles that are compatible with their interests, bridging the two approaches we separate here.

In climate negotiations the Group of 77 plus China (G-77/China), with more than 130 developing countries, often takes the lead in debating abstract principles of burden sharing rather than moving on to set up targets and timetables. The G-77/China has generally taken this approach to environmental negotiations; it departs from its members’ shared conceptions of themselves as historically excluded from international negotiations that consequently do not meet their primary need for national development. The G-77/China collectively argues for broad principles like members’ rights to development and to financial assistance from the Global North. Their demands have largely remained at the level of broad principle in part because they actually have quite different and even opposing interests among themselves below these areas of agreement.\textsuperscript{17}

The BASIC countries have formally remained part of the G-77/China group—unlike earlier risers like Mexico and the Republic of Korea. They are also pulled into every discussion of more rationalist strategies to divide the cost burden of climate action, especially as their emissions rise. In the empirical sections below, we take stock of the BASIC group’s claims about how the responsibilities and capacities to address climate change are being or should be distributed, identifying areas of agreement but also silences that indicate disagreement, and how these changed over time.

We draw primarily on two documentary sources. First, we systematically evaluated the statements issued following the quarterly meetings among BASIC ministers to discuss their strategies and common positions on climate change. (Below, we label these Joint Statements. All Joint Statements are listed in the Appendix.) The first of these launched the BASIC coalition as a collective actor in the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations, and marked the beginning of their public recognition as a grouping. The BASIC
grouping has handled only climate issues, although its members coordinate their positions on other issues as the BRICS (BASIC plus Russia), IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa), and so on. We read the public statements issued at these meetings through the end of 2013 to identify shared positions on burden-sharing obligations they attributed to developed countries, developing countries, and themselves. For example, a typical statement on the obligations of developed and developing countries reads as follows:

11. Ministers were of the view that it will not be possible to deal with mitigation actions by developing countries, without also dealing with support for those actions and the two-fold commitments by developed countries to both provide finance for developing countries and reduce their own emissions, with consequences of non-fulfillment. In this regard, Ministers urged all Annex I countries to raise their level of ambition.

We take these Joint Statements to record the issues on which BASIC countries could find agreement among themselves, and they are correspondingly noteworthy for their silences as well.

We also examined a second set of documents, those submitted individually and collectively by the four BASIC countries to UNFCCC negotiations. Table 1 shows that the BASIC countries kept a low collective profile in their formal submissions, with a preponderance of the documents submitted individually, and not a single one on behalf of the BASIC group without other contributing countries. This already indicates the group’s hesitation to formalize its own role as a negotiating block, allowing them to use BASIC opportunistically while remaining part of the G-77/China. As discussed in more detail below, this raises the potential significance of the few times that they did file joint documents and helps track phenomena like the greater integration of China and India into the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) group in 2011 and 2012. These documents were also assessed for any stated positions on burden-sharing obligations by developed, developing, and BASIC states. Our analysis thus rests largely on textual analysis of these two sets of documents, but it is also supported by participant observation of the 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen, the 2011 meetings in Durban, the 2012 Bonn session, and the 2013 negotiations in Warsaw.

**Negotiating Climate Change: Responsibilities and Capacities for Climate Action**

The global governance of the emissions that cause climate change began with the UNFCCC in 1992. Five years later, the Kyoto Protocol to the convention asked developed countries (Annex 1) to take on modest binding commitments to reduce their GHG emissions below 1990 levels. Following
the UNFCCC principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBD&R&C), developing countries were not asked to make binding commitments, but they were to take voluntary actions to reduce emissions and to adapt to a changing climate, with assistance from developed countries. The world’s then largest emitter, the United States, refused to ratify the protocol because it believed that large developing emitters should also have to limit their emissions.  

Beginning in 2007, the UNFCCC parties began discussing a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, with separate tracks covering additional obligations for Annex I countries and new commitments for those countries not previously required to act. In this section, we analyze changes in the positioning of the BASIC countries on burden sharing in the climate change regime in this post-Kyoto Protocol stage. These changes were triggered by the growing pressure on them to accept larger responsibilities for climate mitigation, after a decade in which they grew both economically and in their total emissions,

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<th>Table 1 Individual and Coordinated Documents Presented by BASIC Countries to Conferences of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, 2009–2013</th>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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Source: Based on documents catalogued by country name or Africa Group at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, unfcc.int/documentation/documents/items/3595.php.

Note: UNFCCC is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. BASIC is Brazil, South Africa, India, and China.
with China responsible for much of the growth in global emissions after 2000.22 We argue that the BASIC countries do not have one consistent set of argumentative frameworks for the climate negotiations, but rather apply different patterns of thinking to different actor categories. Consequently, we divide our analysis of their arguments by the target actor—developed countries, developing countries as a whole, and themselves as emerging powers. For each actor category, the BASIC position offers a different combination of rationalist and normative arguments that are sometimes inconsistent with each other. The arguments have different temporal origins and different levels of sophistication; older narratives regarding the roles of developed and developing countries are much better established than more recent narratives regarding the BASIC group itself.

We show that the BASIC countries adopt these different logics for the respective actor categories. In their Joint Statements as well as documents submitted to the UNFCCC, they have strongly shared positions on their expectations for developed countries that are closely aligned with the position of the G-77/China. The BASIC stance is often articulated in rationalist terms, supported by the normative argument that developed countries have historical responsibility to lead climate action because of their past emissions. With respect to developing countries, norms clearly dominate the BASIC position. They favor the prioritarian principle, which argues that international burden-sharing arrangements should give developing countries priority in using the remaining carbon space for their development. Their low capacities for adaptation and mitigation mean any action to address climate will require assistance. The BASIC countries are most conflicted about their own responsibilities and capacities, often retreating to broad principles internationally and saving specific burden-sharing calculations for domestic politics. We elaborate below that their hybrid position between the developed and developing world creates major difficulties for developing a clear ethical narrative of their own rights and obligations. We also point out how these shared BASIC positions occasionally differ from the national positions that some of the BASIC members have taken during the same time period, especially their submissions with non-BASIC countries.

The BASIC Countries’ Approach to the Developed States
The strongest area of agreement among the BASIC countries, as expressed in all of their Joint Statements and most of their submissions to the UNFCCC and Kyoto negotiation processes, is a shared rejection of a non-egalitarian solution to burden sharing, especially in the area of mitigation. The rare 2011 joint submission by Brazil, China, and India to the Durban negotiations used classic language by Brazil, China, and India to the Durban negotiations used classic language to make the point of developed countries’ ongoing greater obligation for climate action: “Acknowledging that the largest share of historical global emissions of greenhouse gases origi-
nated in Annex 1 Parties [developed countries] and that, owing to this historical responsibility in terms of their contribution to the average global temperature increase, Annex 1 parties must take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.”23 In particular, they reject any consideration of grandfathering past GHG emissions of current developed states, whether that argument is made directly or implicitly through proposals that consider only current levels of emissions or set a recent baseline like 1990 as the starting point for emissions reductions. Instead, they address developed countries in terms familiar to the rationalist arguments, calling them shirkers and insisting on ever closer accounting of their climate action. This section shows how they have developed those arguments.

Consistent with their national positions taken prior to 2009, the BASIC countries have consistently emphasized the principle of historical responsibility of developed states in each of their Joint Statements. These include either specific references to the idea of historical responsibility,24 which is not part of the convention language, the convention principle of common but differentiated responsibilities,25 or the need for a strong second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.26 The egalitarian interpretation of this norm turns historical emissions into the “currency of justice,”27 which results in a distribution of obligations that is economically costly for the developed countries only. However, the egalitarian principle is open to multiple solutions, focusing on different things to be distributed equally among different types of units. For example, one can distribute “carbon space”—a benefit—among human beings or financial responsibility—a burden—for emissions among states. In its national capacity, India has advocated a version of the egalitarian principle that is based on “equal entitlement to atmospheric space for each human being.”27 BASIC as a group has not specified such a strict position. Instead, the BASIC countries have partially different measures of historical responsibility, with Brazil beginning its calculation of the starting point in 1850 while the others start in 1970. Brazil and China do not consider land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF) as part of the historical accounting while India and South Africa measure emissions with and without LULUCF.28

Even without agreement on the exact calculation of historical responsibility, the BASIC countries agree on the rationalist arguments that the developed states have strong capacities of various kinds that they are underplaying with their commitments. As a consequence, the top priority for the BASIC countries in the first years of their coalition was a new round of commitments for all of the Annex 1 countries of the Kyoto Protocol, including the United States. China laid out its views in a February 2009 statement, which moved quickly from a stated concern with addressing climate change to the “principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and equity” to a demand that all Annex 1 countries commit to reducing
their emissions “by at least 25–40% below 1990 levels by 2020.”29 The other BASIC countries and thirty-three additional developing countries later joined China, filing a formal amendment proposal to the Kyoto Protocol in June 2009 that translated those requirements into a chart with the targeted reduction aims for each developed country.30 This position was reiterated again by Brazil, China, and India in the 2011 submission to the UNFCCC cited above.31

While the Joint Statements continued to call for a 25–40 percent emission reduction even in 2013,32 Brazil, China, and India have occasionally joined members of the Like-Minded Developing Countries group to demand 40–50 percent emission reductions below the 1990 baseline by developed countries in shared submissions to the UNFCCC in 201133 and 2012.34 Since 2012, only India and China have continued to make this demand for “enhanced mitigation” as part of the LMDC.

Since they joined together as BASIC, the countries have articulated an additional framing of the developed countries as shirkers and free riders who not only are not living up to their hegemonic responsibilities but are not even doing as much as developing countries do. The BASIC stance is the rationalist one that developed countries must be prodded, formally monitored, and shamed to live up to the obligatory commitments they have made and should make in mitigation, finance, and technology transfer. Even so, the BASIC countries never praise the EU for its comparatively greater willingness to take on climate obligations. They do sometimes call out developed countries for special chiding, however. Canada, for example, was singled out by name for withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol and reminded that “any attempts by developed countries to casually set aside their existing legal commitments while calling for a new legally binding agreement seriously questions their credibility and sincerity in responding to the climate crisis.”35 All the Annex 1 nonsignatories to the second Kyoto Protocol round were told that they had “demonstrate[d] an unwillingness to substantively cut their greenhouse gas emissions,”36 presumably including their BRICS ally Russia.

At the Copenhagen conference, the BASIC countries had received strong pressures to measure, report, and verify (MRV) their climate actions, which they subsequently turned on developed states. Meeting just after Copenhagen, in April 2010, the BASIC countries demanded a common reporting format for developed countries’ finance offerings so they could be tracked.37 At their July meeting, BASIC ministers “noted the distinction between MRV of emission reduction commitments by developed countries, which is related to compliance and comparability, and MRV of nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAS) by developing countries, which is related to transparency.”38 In line with the long-standing position of the G-77/China, the BASIC group considers the developed countries to be
responsible for providing financial resources, technology transfer, and capacity-building support to developing countries. At the same time, China and India have formulated somewhat different and more detailed demands than the BASIC group on climate finance jointly with the LMG. These positions concern the accountability of the Green Climate Fund\(^{59}\) and monitoring of fast-start finance as well as particulars of long-term finance.\(^{40}\)

**The BASIC Countries’ Approach to the Developing Countries**

As a group, the BASIC countries approach the burden-sharing responsibilities of developing countries primarily through the normative lens of prioritarian principles, emphasizing the rights and needs of developing countries to receive support in the form of financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity building for any climate action they are expected to take—what one could call creating the enabling conditions. They sometimes seem to include themselves as equally “prior” (see the next subsection), but they also have acknowledged multiple times in the past few years that there is a smaller set of least advantaged countries whose needs with respect to climate change are an even higher priority than their own. For developing countries and especially the least developed ones, BASIC countries stressed the need for “equitable space for development” more than any obligation to reduce emissions.\(^{41}\) This section details the BASIC countries’ consistent positions on developing countries’ low share of climate burdens.

The BASIC countries’ positions on developing countries are in many ways a simple reverse of their concerns with the historical responsibility of developed countries. They engage in extensive principled discussion of carbon space and express worries that the historical and current behavior of developed countries is not leaving developing countries with the same options. While they do not adopt a straightforward definition of equity, they define it in practice in the Third Joint Statement:

> The implications of this [global carbon] budget for individual countries require careful analysis, and must be based on a multilateral agreement about equitable burden-sharing, including historical responsibility for climate change, the need to allow developing countries equitable space for development, and adequate finance, technology and capacity-building support provided by developed countries for all developing countries.\(^{42}\)

The BASIC countries have also prodded developed countries to provide climate finance, assist developing countries with capacity development, and help them gain access to the technology they need for low-carbon development.\(^{43}\) The technology demand includes the sticky issue of freer intellectual property rights (IPR) that would quicken dissemination of new technologies. India has been pushing hard to place intellectual property rights on the negotiation agenda\(^{44}\) and, while the others agree it is impor-
tant, they have never formally joined that call, not even when South Africa hosted the Durban round. India and China have found more support for their position on IPR among members of the LMDC and, with them, have continued to make such demands in their joint submissions on shared vision.\textsuperscript{45}

There is little in the BASIC statements to suggest any kinds of obligations for the developing countries. Nationally appropriate mitigation actions are perceived to be voluntary and of a very different character than the obligations of the developed countries: “Ministers noted the significant distinction between the emission reduction commitments by developed countries and nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing countries both in terms of their nature and content.”\textsuperscript{46} The BASIC countries accepted international monitoring and verification of developing countries’ national climate actions if they had received financial support for them; domestically financed action should be domestically monitored and verified.\textsuperscript{47} In speaking of developing countries, the BASIC coalition even put equity above the effectiveness also demanded in the UNFCCC. “Ministers also underscored their support for the aspirational objective of keeping global temperature increase below 2°C with regard to pre-industrial levels, bearing in mind that social and economic development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of developing countries.”\textsuperscript{48} BASIC’s view of a global atmospheric commons is one that allows developing countries to continue to consume a larger share of the carbon budget, not one where all are obliged to accept a mitigation burden.

Even while joining with BASIC on these consensual positions, South Africa has increasingly struck out on its own with the Africa Group in ways that diverge from this vision for developing countries. Its government has become convinced that the severe climate effects on the African continent pose a potential threat to South Africa through future migration and economic spillovers.\textsuperscript{49} In that context, South Africa has led its region to proactively take the action it can in order to try to move the negotiations forward. In the Africa Group’s many joint submissions to the UNFCCC in 2011 and 2012 (see Table 1), it repeated the principles that BASIC shares, but also made much more substantial and specific contributions to the multilateral negotiations, suggesting language and outlining its own potential mitigation actions such as in agriculture.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{The BASIC Countries’ Approach to Themselves}

The BASIC countries hold fairly consensual and straightforward positions on the burden-sharing obligations of developed and developing states. Their understandings of their own responsibilities and capacities are a bit more complex, and vary over time as well as across and even within individual BASIC members. Here, we find inconsistency in their collective statements—some-
times stressing principles and identities that rank BASIC with the other developing countries and sometimes acknowledging differences.

Yet a rough pattern emerges: in international negotiations, they are more likely to engage in debates on the principles relevant to their participation where they assert a mix of claims about the appropriate roles of themselves as emerging powers. They continue to draw a sharp line between the historical and leadership responsibilities of developed states and whatever their own obligations may be, even as they variously accept and erase the line that separates themselves from other developing countries. The BASIC countries do take a more rationalist stance as well, assessing costs and benefits of their possible climate action, and evincing concern with deadlines, oversight, and shirkers. The place where they do that is at home, however, in the realm of domestic politics and policy and not in the context of international negotiations.51

Concerning international mitigation obligations, other actors have begun to make increasingly pointed statements about the responsibilities and capacities of the BASIC countries in the climate regime. For example, when the European Council adopted its commitment for climate financing, it added a note encouraging “emerging economies to contribute to the financing of adaptation to and mitigation of climate change in line with their respective capabilities.”52 For the BASIC countries, this logic is a nonstarter for thinking about their share of the global mitigation burden—that is not the principle by which they assess circumstances. Any discussion of current annual emissions, in their view, effectively and unacceptably grandfathers past emissions and does not account for the stock of past emissions. This stance was clear in the document China prepared in advance of Copenhagen, to which the other BASIC countries signed on.53 Thus, the principle of historical responsibility continues to indicate a lower level of burden sharing for themselves, even though their economies and emissions are growing rapidly now.

But if their obligations will always be less, exactly what will they be? The G-77/China had long insisted that there should be no differentiation among the non-Annex 1 countries despite their manifestly different material interests.54 In the joint BASIC statements, this is neither affirmed nor denied, it just is not mentioned. In practice, beginning with the voluntary Copenhagen Accord, BASIC countries have agreed that they can take on a share of the mitigation burden as long as they themselves are the ones who determine what that share is and can amend their commitments if they turn out to be economically harmful.

The Copenhagen solution did not resolve the issue for the BASIC coalition, however, and the question of binding mitigation obligations resurfaced in Durban as it will again in Paris in 2015. In Durban, a rift opened up between two camps within the BASIC group over the accept-
ability of mitigation obligations—Brazil and South Africa on one side, and
China and India on the other. In a move that demonstrated growing con-
cerns over their global image as responsible actors, Brazil and South Africa
began to argue that being a developing country does not mean that you have
no responsibilities.55 As already noted, South Africa grounded this position
in its African context while Brazil flagged its substantial achievements in
already reducing deforestation in the Amazon.56 This shift in positions
opened up the possibility of considering the emerging powers as a genu-
imely new third category with associated rights and obligations, and not
merely a subcategory within the developing world. However, India and
China did not embrace this shift, although the China-US climate action
agreement in late 2014 shows China is also changing its stance. India con-
tinues to express strong disagreement with the idea that it ought to take on
additional responsibilities while the developed countries continue to evade
said obligations.57

Whatever their future obligations, all four of the partners were able to
agree that they are, if anything, doing far more than their share in the con-
text of a developed world that is nowhere close to meeting its obligations.
In their Ninth Joint Statement just before the Durban meeting, they pointed
out that “the BASIC countries have pledged ambitious actions to reduce
emissions at substantial costs to their economies.” As a result, these and
other developing “countries have become the active leaders of the global
effort against climate change,” even though the UNFCCC gave the leader-
ship role to the developed countries.58 The view that “developing countries,
including the BASIC countries have done much to raise the global ambิ-
tion” is repeated in their Thirteenth Joint Statement (2013)59 and appears
again in the Fourteenth Joint Statement: “Ministers noted with consterna-
tion that the mitigation contributions by developing country Parties is much
greater than that by developed country Parties who should take the lead in
combating climate change.”60

In the previous sections, we underlined the BASIC stance that de-
veloped countries should be required to provide climate financial assistance
for developing countries. Their own positioning within that category has
changed rapidly in the past few years. Brazil and China have both said
since the Copenhagen meetings that they can pay for their own domestic
mitigation and adaptation while India and South Africa have said that they
need climate finance to adjust to a low-carbon world and the inevitable
coming global warming.61 However, they all agreed that there might be dif-
ferentiated criteria for access to funding, with the most vulnerable getting
priority, like the small-island developing states (SIDS), Least Developed
Countries (LDCs), and Africa.62 Two of the BASIC countries have taken
the next step of becoming climate donors themselves. At the 2012 Rio+20
conference, Brazil promised US$10 million for climate assistance to LDCs,
SIDS, and Africa while China promised $32 million along with technical assistance. China prefaced its pledge with an announcement that “China is a major developing country which is ready to live up to its responsibilities,” and Brazil said that “Brazil, as an emerging power, will do its part.” Both specifically referenced the failure of developed countries to step up to their obligations.

As the BASIC countries address their own role in climate burden sharing, they do not do so only in the language of principles and norms. The consequentialist perspective uses cost-benefit analysis, contrasting expected costs and gains from cooperation, potential side payments, and avoided punishment. In the international negotiations, all the BASIC countries signed on to a UNFCCC document rejecting the EU’s aviation carbon taxes while China and India joined with the LMG to resist “response measures,” that is, measures imposed on other countries to achieve climate stabilization. Yet at the domestic level, all of the BASIC countries have some actors that favor proactive climate action as a means of avoiding border tariffs, preserving market access, and opening potential new areas of comparative advantage.

Economic and political elites sometimes speak of possible benefits of climate action, including inside the Brazilian national development bank—although these often are not unanimous positions. In India, for example, the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry take opposite sides on the desirability of climate action. Not surprisingly, South Africa’s wind and solar energy associations see a great deal more potential in moving away from coal-fired generation than South Africa’s parastatal Eskom—which has built an electricity system that is 95 percent coal based—does. In China, elites are looking for “no regrets” options that lower emissions in ways that are not prejudicial to their long-term development. The BASIC countries want to decide themselves which of such initiatives they take up, rather than being forced internationally to make low-carbon choices when they might be more costly. Development space is as important to them as carbon space, and they believe that only those with historical responsibility and greater wealth should be forced to take action that will knowingly cause economic pain.

Finally, the language used in the Joint Statements to describe the nature of the BASIC group and their relationship to the G-77/China changed markedly between 2010 and 2013. The first half of this time period was characterized by a clear distinction between the BASIC group and the G-77/China, requiring the establishment of communicative and collaborative activities between them; for example, “[The Ministers] also highlighted the role of BASIC as part of the Group of 77 and China and the importance that the BASIC countries maintain their full participation in the discussions and activities of the Group.” In this early phase, the ministers occasionally
voiced their shared intention to create shared institutions and pursue joint activities outside the UNFCCC: “A proposal was made to consider the possibility of creating a fund between BASIC countries to stimulate research providing evidence on climate change issues.” In 2012 and 2013 however, the BASIC countries turned to heavily emphasizing their status as developing countries that are part of the G-77/China: “Ministers reiterated that the BASIC countries, as part of the Group of 77 and China, will continue to strengthen the unity and the voice of developing countries in the UNFCCC and other multilateral negotiating processes on climate change.” There are no longer any proposals for joint specific climate-related activities outside the UNFCCC.

This discussion confirms our claim that the BASIC countries have been struggling to articulate a common set of expectations for themselves and their position in the climate regime. In both their principles and their calculations of costs and benefits of climate action, they oscillate between categorizing themselves as developing countries with a historical and current right to focus on development and recognizing that their development success has potentially begun to place them in another category of state with different obligations. So far, they are managing this tension with considerably more action at home to reduce emissions than they are willing to commit internationally to do.

Conclusion

In this article, we analyzed how the BASIC countries have been responding to growing demands that they share the burden of addressing global climate change. Most analyses of the emerging powers to date have focused on issue areas that include considerable power sharing with any burden sharing, so the climate arena is a unique one for considering their contribution to global public goods even when those contributions are more costly than beneficial to them individually. We integrated both rationalist and normative analytical angles while accounting for their stances in their Joint Statements and the documents they submitted to the UNFCCC together and individually.

Our analysis shows that the BASIC coalition applied different logics (combinations of rational and normative arguments) to different actor categories: developed countries are seen mainly through a rationalist lens and developing countries through a normative lens, but their own position remains unclear. This confusion was to be expected—they fall in the middle of the development spectrum without a clear cognitive pattern to use. History connects them with the developing countries and they still share a sense of enormous development needs at home, but at the same time their material development has pushed them closer to the developed world. The challenge of the BASIC group is their special economic-political status at
this point in history, which makes them a part of both worlds—their high emissions mean they will face economic damage from mitigation efforts along with the developed countries while they also have to deal with the human suffering, poverty, and social disruption caused by climate impacts like many developing countries. Given the hybrid social-economic reality of the emerging powers, bridging the rational-normative divide is hard. Not only are the BASIC countries on uncharted normative territory, each of them also occupies a different spot along the spectrum between developed and developing countries while their domestic development proceeds in spurts and slumps.

The BASIC coalition emerged onto the negotiation stage in 2009 with a forceful and united position opposing binding mitigation obligations, but has since struggled to formulate a shared position on their own role in a burden-sharing arrangement. They have retreated as a negotiating coalition, emphasizing their membership in the community of developing countries. The Doha and Warsaw negotiation rounds in 2012 and 2013 marked additional steps on this retreat, which saw limited interventions by the BASIC countries as a group. While the trajectory of the coalition is uncertain, it currently seems to be in decline and might dissolve with China and India joining the LMDC and South Africa joining the Africa Group. Nevertheless, the emergence of the BASIC group signaled a change to the structure of the international system and the potential future dynamics of global climate governance. Replacement of the North-South divide with a system with at least three categories of countries—developed, developing, and emerging—could create more flexibility for possible burden-sharing arrangements in the climate regime. So far, the BASIC countries have been most inclined to take on a share of the global climate burden through voluntary actions at home, focusing on initiatives that they have individually chosen as part of their national development plans. At the same time, they have remained an active part of the global multilateral negotiations, and show no signs of setting up alternative governance institutions—in contrast to global economic governance.

The emerging powers are likely to unsettle global governance more broadly for some time. Their hybrid nature—exhibiting characteristics of both developing and developed countries—means both academics and their negotiating partners will need to spend some time identifying the facts, behaviors, and ideas associated with this new actor category. What norms and principles for interstate behavior will they promote? Will their mixed character become a source of creativity or instability in global governance? The unfolding of recent climate negotiations suggests that their approach to burden-sharing arrangements is different—more hesitant—than their engagement in power-sharing arrangements. After a short foray into a new role of responsible power holder and potential provider of global public
goods, the coalition has quickly crumbled under the pressure to accept a larger share of the collective burden related to creating climate stability. It remains to be seen whether this phase of experimenting with an emerging power identity will lead to more sustained changes in the negotiation structure and dynamics.

Appendix


Notes

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11. Vogler, “Climate Change and EU Foreign Policy,” p. 484.


19. The foreign ministries of host countries post the reports of meetings in their own countries, so there is no single location of all the reports. Appendix I lists them in full. There was no report for the first meeting in November 2009.

20. BASIC, Joint Statement 3, par. 11.


24. BASIC, Joint Statement 3, par. 7; Joint Statement 5, par. 13; Joint Statement 9, par. 4; Joint Statement 10, par. 7; Joint Statement 11, pars. 4, 8; Joint Statement 13, pars. 5, 13.
25. BASIC, Joint Statement 3, par. 4a; Joint Statement 7, pars. 3, 6; Joint Statement 8, par. 2; Joint Statement 9, pars. 2, 4, 7; Joint Statement 10, pars. 5, 7; Joint Statement 11, pars. 7, 8; Joint Statement 13, pars. 3, 11.
26. BASIC, Joint Statement 2, par. 3; Joint Statement 3, pars. 3, 8; Joint Statement 4, par. 2; Joint Statement 5, par. 9; Joint Statement 6, par. 7; Joint Statement 7, pars. 3, 5; Joint Statement 8, pars. 2, 3; Joint Statement 9, pars. 2, 3; Joint Statement 10, pars. 3, 4; Joint Statement 11, pars. 3, 4; Joint Statement 12, pars. 3, 6, 7; Joint Statement 13, pars. 3, 5, 6.
27. FCCC/CP/2011/INF.2/Add.1, 7 October 2011.
32. BASIC, Joint Statement 14, par. 4.
34. FCCC/AWGLCA/2012/CRP.5, 27 November 2012.
35. BASIC, Joint Statement 10, par. 4.
36. BASIC, Joint Statement 12, par. 7.
37. BASIC, Joint Statement 3, par. 5.
38. BASIC, Joint Statement 4, par. 5.
39. FCCC/CP/2012/CRP.1, 29 November 2012.
41. BASIC, Joint Statement 3, par. 7.
42. Ibid.
43. For example, BASIC, Joint Statement 2, par. 7; Joint Statement 5, par. 10.
44. FCCC/CP/2011/INF.2/Add.1, 7 October 2011.
45. FCCC/AWGLCA/2012/CRP.11, 29 November 2012.
46. BASIC, Joint Statement 5, par. 9.
47. BASIC, Joint Statement 4, par. 5.
48. BASIC, Joint Statement 5, par. 12.
49. Interview with official of the South African Department of Environmental Affairs, Johannesburg, 5 May 2014.


57. Dubash, *Handbook of Climate Change and India*.

58. BASIC, Joint Statement 9, par. 4.

59. BASIC, Joint Statement 13, par. 7.

60. BASIC, Joint Statement 14, par. 9.


62. BASIC, Joint Statement 2, par. 7.


64. FCCC/AWGLCA/2012/CRP.4, 27 November 2012.


67. Official in the Brazilian National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES), interviewed by the authors, Rio de Janeiro, 4 July 2011.

68. Dubash, *Handbook of Climate Change and India*, p. 9.

69. Official in the South African Photovoltaic Industry Association, interviewed by the authors, Johannesburg, 23 April 2014; official in the South African Wind Energy Association, interviewed by the authors, Johannesburg, 25 April 2014; official in Eskom, interviewed by the author, Johannesburg, 5 May 2014.


71. BASIC, Joint Statement 4, par. 8.

72. BASIC, Joint Statement 7, par. 7.

73. BASIC, Joint Statement 17, par. 17.