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Aligning interests; how emerging powers within the Global South pick their allies

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Master Thesis



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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of cooperation and alliance formation in the post-Cold War era, with a focus on how emerging powers within the Global South pick their allies. The study centres on the alignment theory, which argues that internal state factors, specifically the personal interests of state leaders, are significant in alignment choices. This theory contrasts with traditional realist approaches that emphasize external threats and state security as primary motivators. Conducting a single case study of South Africa's ascension to the BRIC bloc in 2010 under president Jacob Zuma, this thesis employs theory-testing process tracing to examine the hypothesized causal mechanism where personal interests of Zuma eventually led to the ascension of South Africa to BRIC. The findings suggest that Zuma's personal motivations and corrupt practices significantly directed South Africa's foreign policy and alignment choices, resulting in its alignment with BRIC. This challenges the conventional notion that state strategies in Global South contexts are predominantly shaped by geopolitical, security related, or identity driven considerations.

Whether it be the Peloponnesian League of Greek city-states in Ancient Greece, or contemporary global coalitions such as the Group of Seven, the dynamics of alliance formation and cooperation have dominated modern human history. How ancient Greek city-states or modern sovereign states decide on who to cooperate with and why has been a subject of extensive discussion, and has greatly influenced literature on (international) power politics. Several theories have developed over the years for possible explanations on why states cooperate and in what forms, and how these cooperations and alliances have been evolving, especially in the post-Cold War era (Abbott & Faude, 2020; Benson & Clinton, 2016; Crescenzi et al., 2012; Jaffrelot, 2013; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Krause & Sprecher, 2004; Leeds, 2003a, 2003b; Leeds et al., 2009; Mattes, 2012; Powell, 2010; Smith, 1995; Tertrais, 2004; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020; Warren, 2010). They vary in their goals, levels of commitment, the level of institutionalization, and from only focusing on military capabilities, to a more multilevel of cooperation.

With new emerging powers seeking to establish their place within the post-Cold War world, there is a growing shift towards adopting more informal forms of alliances, instead of traditional formal alliances (Jaffrelot, 2013; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). Emerging powers are forming informal international alliances to ensure flexibility in a changing world, but at the same time ensuring cooperation with each other. This brings up the question, in an ever more multipolar world, especially compared to the bipolar order during the recent Cold War period, how do states, and especially emerging powers within the Global South (GS), decide with who to cooperate? Or more specifically, the research question for this paper is: how do emerging powers within the GS pick their allies? There have been several theoretical perspectives that have tried to shed light on decisive factors in the decision-making process of GS-states in forming cooperations of various degrees with other states. From the more general theories on alliance forming (Benson & Clinton, 2016; Duffield, 2009; Warren, 2010; Wilkins, 2012), to theories such as on South-South cooperation (SSC) (Gray & Gills, 2016; Mawdsley, 2019; Muhr, 2018).

The key focus of this analysis is on alignment theory, as it offers a more context-specific explanation for GS-state cooperation compared to traditional alliance theories and theories such as SSC. Alignment theory states that it is different compared to more classical alliance theories, that are mainly based on realist school of thought, as those theories assume that internal factors are less relevant on how states decide with whom to cooperate and achieve mutual security goals with (Chidley, 2014; David, 1991; Wilkins, 2012). Alignment

theory, rooted in the balance of power theory, counters this with stating that the realist view cannot fully explain GS-state alignment, as the state-centric view of classical realism cannot fully explain the way states in general, but especially those within the GS behave compared to the Global North (Chidley, 2014; David, 1991; Wilkins, 2012). Reason for this is the distinct challenges GS-states have to face compared to their Global North counterparts, due to varying levels of (economic) development, historical legacies of colonialism, differing security concerns (David, 1991; Nexon, 2009; Wilkins, 2012; Wohlforth et al., 2007; Prys, 2010; Nunn, 2007; Acharya, 2011; Krahmman, 2005; Diamond, 2008; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013; Rodney, 1972). SSC theories also don't fully explain 'the picture', as they approach GS-state cooperation from a developmental focus and/or focuses more on the role of identity (Gray & Gills, 2016; Mawdsley, 2019; Muhr, 2018). In contrast to these theories, alignment theory proposes a more context-driven perspective where personal interests of leaders are also one of many causes in GS-state alignment and cooperation behaviour (Chidley, 2014; David, 1991; Wilkins, 2012).

To shed a broader light on GS-state alliance dynamics¹, this paper hypothesizes a causal mechanism based on the alignment theory to further supplement alliance literature. It is proposed that the personal interests of a state leader might lead – in certain circumstances – to corrupt practices. Corruption again influences the policy agenda, and by extension the foreign policy agenda, of a state, which influences the considerations for a state to decide with whom to align itself. These considerations result in alignment choices, resulting in the formation of an alliance or alignment with (another) state(s). This is done by theory-testing process tracing the hypothesized causal mechanism, selecting a most likely case for the analysis. By tracing the hypothesized causal mechanism, this paper shows that the personal interests might be one of several factors leading to GS-state alignment. As the role of emerging powers is becoming more prevalent with more recent developments, such as the ascension of several new states to the BRICS, the results and implications of this paper can inform policy makers on the driving forces of GS alignment. The academic relevance is mainly to supplement alliance theory for GS-states, and adding new implementations of the alignment theory in literature.

In the next section, this paper will first further shed light on existing literature on alliance formation, and position itself within the literature in the theoretical framework. The

¹ But also alliance dynamics in general as alignment theory is not unique to GS-states.

theoretical framework also briefly delves into existing literature on alliance dynamics of GS-states and corruption, and hypothesizes the causal mechanism that will be analysed.

Afterwards in the third section, the design of the research will be discussed, including the expected observations and data that will be used to conduct the analysis. The fourth section contains the analysis of the selected case and outcome, and with the fifth and final section the analysis is reflected upon, implications are considered, and suggestions are made for future research.

Theoretical framework

Before delving into how alliances have varied and transformed over the years towards the post-Cold War era, it is important to define what is meant with alliances in this paper. Various definitions are used throughout the literature when referring to alliances. As the subject of this paper is not specifically on military alliances but alliances in general, alliances here are defined as “*formal agreements made between two or more states to coordinate their actions*” (Crescenzi et al., 2012, p. 262).

Alliance evolution

Since the end of the Cold War period, states have seen a greater change and variety in alliances and cooperations that are formed in a non-bipolar world order (Abbott & Faude, 2020; Jaffrelot, 2013; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Krause & Sprecher, 2004; Powell, 2010; Tertrais, 2004; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). They choose more flexible ‘coalitions of the willing’, such as with the war on Iraq led by the United States (Tertrais, 2004). These kinds of alliances are becoming more of a rule than exception, and not only on military matters. This is also strengthened with the emergence of newer (regional) powers, who choose for more informal forms of cooperation compared to institutional forms of cooperation (Abbott & Faude, 2020; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). This increasing variation is also true for military alliances (Benson & Clinton, 2016; Crescenzi et al., 2012; Wilkins, 2012). States can vary their alliances in respect of their obligations, in the extent that they impose limitations on when primary goals apply, in degree of institutionalization, or even go further than only focusing on military aspects and tying such an agreement to cooperation on other issue areas. Not only do states carefully select the agreements that they are willing to make, they are even cautious on the language that is used to craft such treaties (Leeds, 2003).

There are various reasons why states vary in their forms of (military) cooperation. One main reason is reliability on commitment (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Leeds, 2003). Benefits of an alliance only follows if signatories uphold to the agreement. Not only is it necessary for a state to rely on another to fulfil on their commitments when needed, there is also a trade-off between increased security and the loss of some autonomy. This makes alliance formation a risky endeavour, as the ‘real’ intentions of other states can never be fully known. States might even mask their intentions, so other states will ally them and they will gain the benefits with little costs (Crescenzi et al., 2012). For those reasons, states choose for certain designs over

others, depending on the level of risk of breach and sensitivity to opportunism by other states (Mattes, 2012).

Emerging powers in the Global South

With power shifts caused by emerging Global South powers, incentives are increased to challenge the existing institutional equilibrium and states look at newer forms in this pursuit of challenge (Abbott & Faude, 2020; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). This is in contrast to current powers who preferably keep the status-quo, and are less open to institutional changes as they benefit from them. The consequence of this mismatch is that emerging powers try to seek ways to elevate their position, with low costs, and thus in practice without opting for a military conflict (Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). For this reason, emerging powers choose various ‘tactics’ to transform existing structures to reform them. Yet, reforming existing rules such as regarding membership, issue scope, or decision-making is difficult and time-consuming. This is further strengthened by the Wests unwillingness to adapt multilateral institutions (Jaffrelot, 2013).

An alternative that emerging powers – and even existing powers – opt for is creating informal intergovernmental organizations. By doing so, emerging powers can increase their foothold and voice within the international community, without directly challenging existing institutions (Abbott & Faude, 2020; Kahler, 2018; Kleine, 2013; Koremenos, 2001; Vabulas & Snidal, 2020). This opting out for the informal leads to newer forms of alliance formation, which are less formalized, and decrease several costs while increasing benefits. Less costs in the sense of transaction costs, domestic approval costs, operating costs, change costs, and exit costs (Abbott & Faude, 2020).

New perspectives

This brings us back to the general alliance discussion. As alliances transform, new theories and definitions might be more fitting to explain current events. Older theories such as the balance of power theory is primarily concerned with the distribution of power, leaning more towards a classic state-centric view of power competition (Benson & Clinton, 2016; Duffield, 2009; Warren, 2010).

Another potential explanation for how emerging powers within the GS decides with who to cooperate is the South-South cooperation (SSC) theory (Gray & Gills, 2016; Madwsley, 2019; Muhr, 2016). This theory starts with the Bandung conference as a prime example of how GS-states pick their allies. GS-states, with less power compared to the then

existing two superpowers, drew towards each other mainly due to a shared colonial background to achieve mutual goals, which resulted in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement through which lesser powers could voice their views. This way they wanted to challenge the global economic inequality compared to the Global North (and for most members their prior colonizer), and gain sovereignty over their natural resources and key industries (Gray & Gills, 2016). SSC has been ongoing and increasing in intensity throughout the years, with recent developments showing an increasing voice from emerging powers to cooperate with each other for more independence from the North, although this has not been as successful as was hoped with the 'Bandung-spirit' (Gray & Gills, 2016; Mawdsley, 2019; Muhr, 2016).

The theory that also might fit as an explanation, and which is the focus of this paper is the alignment theory. According to the theory, alignment is the occurrence where states bring their policies into closer cooperation with each other to gain mutual goals (Chidley, 2014; David, 1991; Wilkins, 2012). It's rooted in the balance of power theory, which as briefly mentioned is a classic state-centric view of power competition. Contenders of the alignment theory criticize the balance of power theory in that the theory expects alignment due to the structure of the international system, and specifically as a result of actual and potential external threats that a state face (David, 1991). Yet, this cannot e.g. explain why states with similar political systems but with no external threat decide to cooperate. What is also important to note is that the balance of power theory is mainly built on experiences with states within the Global North (David, 1991; Nexon, 2009; Wilkins, 2012; Wohlforth et al., 2007), and thus is according to critics not fitting to explain experiences in the GS.

What is agreed upon, and what contenders of the alignment theory propose, is that the balance of power theory is correct on that GS-leaders also align to help resist with threats they face. The difference is that within the GS, leaders will also try to appease secondary adversaries to be able to focus on primary adversaries (Chidley, 2014; David, 1991). These differences are argued to be a result of the distinct challenges GS-states supposedly face, due to varying levels of historical legacies, (economic) development, and differing security concerns (Prys, 2010; Nunn, 2007; Acharya, 2011; Krahmman, 2005; Diamond, 2008; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013; Rodney, 1972). It does not mean that alignment theory is necessarily only explanatory for GS-states or that only GS-leaders might have to appease secondary adversaries, but proponents argue that it is more fitting. Additionally, proponents argue that GS-leaders are sometimes more willing to protect themselves and stay in power at

the expense of the state interests (Agbo & Iwundu, 2015; David, 1991; Yadav, 2012). The assumption is that leaders are weak and illegitimate – due to earlier mentioned differences – and that domestic stakes are very high, and that this supposedly is more common in the GS compared to the North due to the South having a shorter history of either strong democratic institutions, or are ruled by an autocratic leader (or party). The strongest driver behind alignment would then be to ensure one's survival, and therefore the state leader should be used as the level of analysis, rather than the state itself (David, 1991; Wilkins, 2012).

Personal interests and leadership

As the state leader will be used as the level of analysis, and specifically their personal interest plays an important role, it is necessary to provide context for the analysis on the relationship between personal interests of a state leader and possible results of those interests.

As GS-leaders are driven by personal interests and the need to ensure their political survival, they find themselves often operating within environments with weak institutions and a lack of strong democratic traditions, which provide the right circumstances for corrupt practices (Agbo & Iwundu, 2015; Billon, 2003; Etzioni-Halevy, 2007; Leff, 2007; Mauro, 2007; Nye, 2007; Quah, 2022; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Werner, 2007; Yadav, 2012). When leaders accept bribes to fund their political activities, they lack the (political) will to address the corruption within their own ranks, as this would undermine their own sources of wealth (Quah, 2022). As a result, corruption becomes a means to transform the economy and state into a tool for personal enrichment (Quah, 2022). This dynamic between personal and political interests then fosters a culture, where corruption is not only prevalent, but also rationalized, leading to a general sense of impunity (Werner, 2007).

The results of corruption are far-reaching. Governmental capacity is undermined by diverting resources away from essential public services like healthcare and education, towards sectors that offer greater opportunities for illicit gains (Billon, 2003; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Public investments might be directed towards large infrastructure project or to defence sectors, not necessarily for the benefit of national development, but because it provides opportunities for corrupt official to siphon funds through cost-plus contracts and kickbacks (Nye, 2007; Mauro, 2007). This misallocation of funds and resources may lead to inefficient public spending and poorer quality infrastructure, which ultimately will hamper down economic growth (Leff, 2007; Mauro, 2007). Economic impact further includes negative budgetary consequences and a decline in private (foreign) investment, further

stifling economic development (Mauro, 2007). Finally, this corruption further erodes public trust in institutions, weakening the rule of law and democratic governance (Yadav, 2012).

Not only does corruption influence domestic policies and governance, it also significantly influences the foreign policy decisions. Leaders who engage in corrupt practices often shape their foreign policy agendas to align with their interests, which can lead to alliance considerations that provide personal financial benefits or bolster their domestic political position (Etzioni-Halevy, 2007). Investments might be channelled into sectors like construction, not for economic viability, but because they offer opportunities to hide corrupt fees through cost-plus contracts (Nye, 2007). Other ways corruption might manifest in foreign policy choices is through granting favourable trade deals, strategic partnerships, and (military) alliances that serve the interests of the leader. They might engage in quid-pro-quo arrangements where foreign aid, loans, and investments are exchanged for support or kickbacks (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2007).

The mechanism

To test the alignment theory, and thus see if personal interests of a state leader is influential in alignment decisions and that the state leader level of analysis is more fitting, a causal mechanism is hypothesized. The hypothesized mechanism follows three steps, starting from the cause, and ending with a result. Following the personal interest driven alignment of emerging GS-states, state leaders are driven by their personal interests, which are intertwined with their political survival (*cause*). These personal interests might lead to corrupt practices by the leader and/or political elite (*step 1*) (Billon, 2003; Etzioni-Halevy, 2007; Lambert-Porter et al., 2021; Leff, 2007; Mauro, 2007; Nye, 2007; Quah, 2022; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Werner, 2007; Yadav, 2012). Afterwards, corruption, especially at high levels of government, influences the general policy agenda, and in extension the foreign policy agenda. This includes prioritizing policies and alignments that allow for personal enrichment and consolidating power, often at the expense of public services and broader national interests (*step 2*) (Billon, 2003; Etzioni-Halevy, 2007; Lambert-Porter et al., 2021; Leff, 2007; Mauro, 2007; Nye, 2007; Quah, 2022; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Werner, 2007; Yadav, 2012). As a result of the foreign policy agenda, the policy strategy of that country is shaped, including identifying potential allies that can help achieve the policy goals. Various factors are taken in when considering potential allies, such as reliability or shared values and beliefs, to determine which candidates align best with personal and national objectives (*step 3*) (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Duffield, 2009; Leeds, 2003; Leeds & Anac, 2005; Leeds et al., 2000;

Powell, 2010; Tertrais, 2004; Warren, 2010). Which leads to a country’s alignment choice and considerations with potential allies. Finally, these considerations are in some sense more explicitly formed, either in the formation of a formal institution e.g. an IGO, or in some form officially declared (*result*). The hypothesized causal mechanism as proposed is illustrated in figure 1.

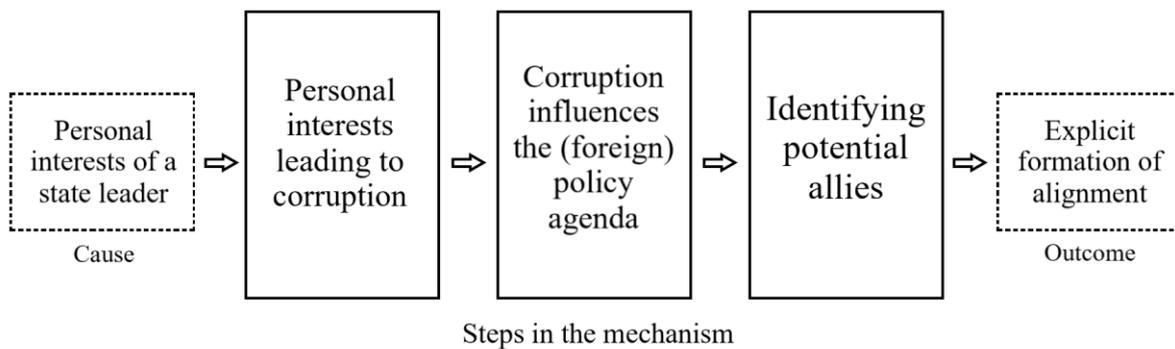


Figure 1: Hypothesized causal mechanism.

To sum it up, in this thesis it is proposed that, the personal interests of a state leader might lead to corruption. Corruption again influences the policy agenda, and by extend the foreign policy agenda, of a state, which influences the considerations for a state to decide with whom to align itself. These considerations result in alignment choices, ending with the formation of an alliance or alignment with (another) state(s). The theory and causal mechanism results in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Personal interests of a state leader are a deciding factor in the state alignment of states within the Global South.

Research design

To see whether or not personal interests of a state leader are a deciding factor in the state alignment of states within the Global South, theory-testing process tracing is employed for the analysis. With theory-testing process tracing, an in-depth examination of the hypothesized causal mechanism within a single case is made possible, which can reveal whether and how personal interests of a state leader influence GS-state alignment (Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

Case selection

A most likely single case is studied for this analysis. The reason for this is that it provides a clear and robust test of the hypothesized mechanism in a context where it is most expected to operate, strengthening the plausibility of the theory (George & Bennet, 2005). While theory testing with a single case has its limitations in terms of generalizability, process tracing offers the analytical tools to examine within-case findings. Instead of controlling for alternative causal mechanisms in a variance-based sense, the idea is to see whether or not the observed findings are consistent with the hypothesized mechanism, and to distinguish it from potential alternative explanations (Beach and Pedersen, 2018, 2019). This approach allows for a more subtle understanding of the causal processes at work, even if it doesn't resolve the issue of generalizability. Still, the insights gained from in-depth analysis can also expand our understanding of similar cases and contributes to the broader theoretical framework.

For this thesis, as most likely case, former South African (SA) president Jacob Zuma and SA's ascension to the BRIC is chosen as an appropriate case. There are various reasons for why this case is chosen for this analysis. First, one of the prominent parts of the hypothesized causal mechanism is personal interests of a leader leading to corrupt practices. Corrupt elite are less likely to declare that they are corrupt, as it might hinder their goals and could pose a major political risk (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). For that reason, it is essential to select cases with leaders where corruption is already evident. Otherwise, the discussion would not be on whether or not the observations can be explained with the hypothesized mechanism, but whether or not the selected case leader is really corrupt or not. As Zuma's corruption is well known and even determined by the judiciary (Allsop, 2018; AmaShabalala, 2020; Bassett & Clarke, 2008; Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Brosig, 2024; Chothia, 2021; Harding, 2017; Lambert-Porter et al., 2021; Lannegren & Ito, 2017; Msimang, 2018; Nkuna & Shai, 2020; Pauw, 2017; Weiss & Rumer, 2019), Zuma as state leader is a useful case for the purposes of this thesis. Second, what is also very useful for the purpose of this thesis is a

clear declaration of alignment in the form of joining the existing strategic partnership between Brazil, Russia, India and China. This way, the cause (interests of a personal leader) can more directly follow to a concrete outcome (alignment with BRIC). Third, is that SA is an emerging power within the GS, with a growing role within the international community.

South Africa is not the only most likely case that might be of interest to test the hypothesized causal mechanism. Other emerging GS-states with leaders with higher personal interests and an outcome to follow the causal mechanism would be Egypt (with Sisi as leader and recently joining BRICS under his leadership) or Iran (with Ali Khamenei as leader and recently joining BRICS under his leadership). But as stated earlier, corruption is an important part in the hypothesized causal mechanism, and there is no clear evidence (yet) of these leaders being corrupt. It is also possible to test the mechanism on leaders within the Global North, such as with Tony Blair who is linked to corruption with the Panama Papers and the alignment of the UK with the coalition of the willing. However, as stated earlier, the interest of this paper is on emerging GS-states, within the context of an increasingly multipolar world where GS-states are taking in a more prominent role. For all of those reasons, SA is chosen as a more fitting case for the purposes and scope of this thesis.

Data and expected observations

To test the hypothesized causal mechanism, the following observations are expected. To see if personal interests have led to corruption in South Africa, the expectation is that through all data referring to corrupt practices, the self-interest of Zuma is either stated explicitly or made apparent to some degree. Implicit suggestion that Zuma was involved in corrupt practices would be sufficient to some degree, but to really follow the causal mechanism explicit self-interest would be more fruitful. Afterwards, it is expected that through various policy preferences, such as major public investments, budget allocations to policy fields that fund Zuma's interests, and overall direct influence on policy formation, the argument that corruption influences the (general) policy agenda can be supported. Here, secondary sources such as literature on corruption and policy agenda formation can also be used to support this argument.

As foreign policy is a part of the general policy agenda, it is argued that, if corruption influences the general policy agenda, that by extension the foreign policy agenda could also have been affected. As stated earlier in the theoretical framework, corrupt leaders' self-interests shape their foreign policy agendas to align with their interests (Etzioni-Halevy,

2007; Hiedenheimer & Johnston, 2007; Nye, 2007; Rose-Ackerman, 1999), and thus Zuma’s self-interests might shape his decision to align with e.g. the BRIC as it strengthens or secures his position. Thus, if Zuma’s alleged corrupt practices influenced the policy agenda, it is expected that his own interests also influenced the foreign policy agenda and ascension to BRIC. What is expected to be observed afterwards is the more explicit cooperation considerations as a result of the foreign policy agenda. It is possible that through these various steps, for some parts more direct links are possible. E.g., it is possible that Zuma’s corruption can, for some parts, be more directly linked to the reasons for SA joining the BRIC, through self-interest practices that channel fund and investments into sectors where he can hide corrupt fees through cost-plus contracts (Nye, 2007). In Table 1, the expected observations are summed up, including what type of data sources are going to be used to conduct the analysis.

Step in causal mechanism	Expected observation	Data
Personal interests leading to corruption	Observations of self-interests leading to corrupt practices by elite leaders (such as statements, actions, documented corruption cases)	Articles by NGOs controlling for corruption, news articles, official reports, investigative journalism, court documents, academic studies
Corruption influences the (foreign) policy agenda	Policy decisions favouring personal or elite interests, diversion of funds to projects with high corruption potential	Articles by NGOs controlling for corruption, news articles, official reports, investigative journalism, academic studies, speeches, policy documents
Identifying potential allies	Records of foreign policy decisions aligning with personal interests, statements on foreign policy goals, strategic plans showing alignment with self-interests	Academic literature, speeches (at international events), primary sources on foreign policy, (reports by) international NGOs, strategic partnership agreements

Table 1. The individual steps in the hypothesized causal mechanism, and the corresponding expected observations and data sources.

Analysis

In this section, the hypothesized causal mechanism will be put to test using the case of South Africa's ascension to the BRIC under Jacob Zuma. To examine this mechanism, the structure of the analysis will follow the corresponding steps as provided earlier, using the observable implications as formulated.

From personal interest to corruption

South Africa under Zuma was marred in numerous instances where his personal interests and gains significantly influenced corruption within the South African government. The role that personal interests played with Zuma's reign in SA, and the resulting corruption scandals in the previous decade goes back to even before his presidency (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Lannegren & Ito, 2017; Pauw, 2017). Prior to his presidency, there were allegations linking him with the multi-billion-rand military acquisition project popularly named as the 'arms deal'. According to the accusations, Zuma had direct financial interests in the deal as mentioned during the Schabir Shaik arms deal trial in 2004, and was later charged with money laundering, racketeering, and fraud in 2008, which supports the argument that his personal interests influenced his decision-making (Bassett & Clarke, 2008; Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Chothia, 2021; Corruption Watch, 2013a, 2014; Lannegren & Ito, 2017; Pauw, 2017). The charges were dropped by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) in 2009, reinstated after resigning from his presidency, and is still ongoing (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Corruption Watch, 2013a, 2014; Harding, 2017; Pauw, 2017). New revelations claim that Zuma tried to keep information hidden, and had received a cash gift from French company Thomson CSF, visited Paris in 2007 for the Rugby World Cup semifinal, and could stay at a five-star hotel and wear designer clothes paid by the company (Corruption Watch, 2017; Open Secrets, 2020).

Zuma's presidency was riddled with corruption scandals supporting the relationship between his personal interests and corruption, such as the case around his Nkandla homestead, direct interference with key positions in government institutions to secure his personal goals, and the Gupta-Zuma investigations showcasing Zuma's financial gains in return for securing lucrative contracts and influencing government decisions (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Chothia, 2021; Corruption Watch, 2013b, 2013c; Harding, 2017; Lannegren & Ito, 2017; Office of the Public Protector, 2014; Open Secrets, 2020; Pauw, 2017). In all instances, the role Zuma personally had, and how it was influenced from his personal

interests is evident. With the Nkandla homestead, Zuma invested more than R246-million (22.69 million USD) into this compound to upgrade the homestead using public money (Chothia, 2021; Corruption Watch, 2013b, 2013c; Office of the Public Protector, 2014). The investment was necessary according to Zuma due to security concerns, but the various upgrades such as the addition of a luxury swimming pool ‘in case of fire’, the architects having no security clearance nor expertise, shortcuts taken to meet deadlines, subsidies shifted from other government programmes to accommodate the spending, were all enough evidence for the Public Protector to report on the homestead (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Corruption Watch, 2013b, 2013c; Office of the Public Protector, 2014; Pauw, 2017). Later, the SA Constitutional Court ruled the report binding and Zuma later had to repay R7.8-million (585,586 USD) and apologized for using public money.

There also seems to be direct interference of Zuma with key positions in government positions. His presidency coincided with various vacancies to fill, and these vacancies were filled with close allies of Zuma from his covert role in ANC operations in the 90s (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Pauw, 2017). Moe Shaik was appointed as head of the SA Secret Service, Mac Maharaj was appointed as Zuma’s spokesperson, Sipiwe Nyanda was appointed as communications minister, Nathi Mthethwa as minister of police, and Sally Shake as army chief; all close friends and allies of Zuma. Moe Shaik is known for various instances where he backed Zuma, when during the case against Schabir Shaik he accused the prosecutor Bulelani Ngcuka as an apartheid spy (Harding, 2017; Open Secrets, 2020; Pauw, 2017). Zuma also unlawfully appointed directors of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), such as with Menzi Simelane in 2009 (Corruption Watch, 2015), removed Mxolisi Nxasana after his investigations into Zuma and his allies (Corruption Watch, 2019), and appointed Shaun Abrahams who was later declared unconstitutional and a ‘show of abuse of power by Zuma’ (Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Corruption Watch, 2018, 2019; Pauw, 2017). Institutions that were meant to be a check on intelligence services was run by Faith Radebe between 2010 and 2015, who didn’t showcase any work, and was once even called by Zuma to stop her investigation into the police crime intelligence unit, which again was run by close Zuma ally Richard Mdluli (Barron, 2018; Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Pauw, 2017).

In summary, the examples given support the notion that the personal interests of Zuma have led to widespread corruption; not only himself, but several institutions headed by his allies seems to have worked along to uphold corrupt practices. It is possible that the result was coincidence, and that every other newly installed president would preferably seat their

allies in key positions. The difference here supporting the notion though, is that the allegations of personal interests with those alliances have judicial backing and proven and tried to some extent.

Corrupt policy-agendas

As hypothesized in the causal mechanism, corruption influences the policy agenda of a state (Billon, 2003; Etzioni-Halevy, 2007; Lambert-Porter et al., 2021; Leff, 2007; Mauro, 2007; Nye, 2007; Quah, 2022; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Werner, 2007; Yadav, 2012). It specifically influences budget-allocation and encouraging certain foreign investments over others (Werner, 2007), but in general it concerns the formation of all policies (Etzioni-Halevy, 2007). As corruption influences the general policy agenda, it also – by extension – influences the foreign policy choices of a country. One way this could happen is similar to corrupt rulers favouring capital-intensive projects that have little value in promoting development but mainly focus on showcasing and prestige (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Reason behind this rationale is that if it is easier to obtain kickbacks from capital investments and input purchases, then regardless of the economic justifications, corrupt elite will prefer capital-intensive projects (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Another is that prestigious projects might ‘hide’ their corrupt practices, and showcase that they are doing something good for their nation (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). In extension of that logic, it is plausible to assume that corrupt rulers might opt for foreign policy choices that are also ‘big’ or ‘prestigious’, for similar reasons.

This is not much different for Zuma. One of the most significant ways corruption has influenced the policy agenda in SA is through state capture; a specific type of political corruption where private interests greatly influence the decision-making processes within a state for their own benefit (African Investigative Publishing Collective, Africa Uncensored & ZAM, 2017; Citizen Reporter, 2017; DM; Msimang, 2018; Office of the Public Protector, 2016). The Zondo commission set up in 2018 interviewed almost 300 witnesses and collected thousands of pages of data as evidence for state capture under Zuma (AmaShabalala, 2020). For example, a businessman named Robert Huang was alleged to have deep connections in particular with the Zuma family, leading to structural changes in the SA Revenue Service presided by old babysitter for Zuma’s children Tom Moyane, resulting in more than a billion rand of taxes missing just that Huang had to pay (AIPC et al., 2017; Basson & Du Toit, 2017; Pauw, 2017). The total cost of the state capture is estimated to be around R1.5-trillion (113.29 billion USD) over the second term of Zuma (Merten, 2019).

One particular family of businessman that has been connected with Zuma and the changes in the policy agenda through state capture is the Gupta family (Allsop, 2018; Basson & Du Toit, 2017; BBC, 2018; Corruption Watch, 2018, 2019b, 2019c, 2021; Lambert-Porter et al., 2021; Msimang, 2018; Office of the Public Protector, 2016; Pauw, 2017). The Guptas were active in SA since the end of apartheid, and were under the radar for many years. It was with a family wedding organised at an air force base that the Guptas became a more prominent name in SA with the so-called Gupta Leaks (Allsop, 2018; BBC, 2018; Corruption Watch, 2021; Msimang, 2018). The Guptas were relevant in various policy agendas that would financially benefit them, mainly in the infrastructure, energy, and raw material sectors. The full chain of winning and exporting diamonds was under the control of state-owned mining company Alexkor, which was manipulated by the Gupta's for their own profit (Corruption Watch, 2021). According to the report by the Public Protector on state capture, the Gupta's were also involved when Eskom (a South African public utility company) contracted a multi-million deal to a coal mining company that was owned by the Gupta's and Zuma's son Duduzane (Office of the Public Protector, 2016). Another instance is known with Foskor, a phosphate company with a major share held by the South African state's Industrial Development Corporation. Gupta owned Coromandel is a shareowner of Foskor, which should run annual reports into millions of USD according to the international trade statistics of the UN, but reported no more than 131.971 USD in the same year (AIPC et al., 2017). In another instance, Dudu Myeni, the executive director of the Zuma Foundation, interfered with arms deal which increased the costs of that deal with R603-million (41.73 million USD) prepayments to a middleman (Merten, 2019).

In short, the argument that (elite) corruption influences the policy agenda can be supported to some extent by literature, as well as by examples during the Zuma administration where self-interests were leading in agenda-setting. As foreign policy is in extension a part of the general policy agenda, it is plausible to assume that Zuma's corruption has in some parts influenced the foreign policy agenda as well in favour of his own interests. As corrupt leaders favour more prestigious projects that they can claim as a success over structural investments and projects that are less obvious (Rose-Ackerman, 1999), it is plausible that joining BRIC could be one of many prestigious projects as a result of Zuma's foreign policy.

Identifying potential allies

The third step in the causal mechanism is that foreign policy is a deciding factor in a

countries alignment choices and potential allies. The formulation of foreign policy by a state might show the reasons behind the rationale of cooperation. If the foreign policy agenda for example emphasizes the need for cooperation, they will choose allies because they think cooperation will result in successfully gaining goals (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Leeds, 2003; Leeds & Anac, 2005; Leeds et al., 2000). If the agenda emphasizes shared values and/or beliefs, then a state will choose who to cooperate with based on those shared values and/or beliefs (Duffield, 2009; Powell, 2010; Tertrais, 2004; Warren, 2010).

This is also evident with the SA case. During his first state of the nation address after becoming president, Zuma made clear what the foreign policy goals for SA were for the duration of his presidency. The focus was put on the African identity and cooperation on the world stage, strengthening relations with other countries in the Global South, and keeping up strategic relations with ‘the developed North’ (Zuma, 2009a). Shared beliefs and values are hereby for example emphasized with the focus on the African unity through the African identity. The result of this is that SA either strengthens existing cooperations, seeks out newer forms of cooperation and allies, or challenges existing cooperations for an increased say. One example of challenging is Zuma’s focus on transforming the global financial system. Zuma has had several speeches at various international meetings where he emphasized on reconstructing financial systems such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, or creating a more ‘equal’ footing in the UN Security Council (Zuma, 2009b, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f; Zuma, 2010). Another example is how SA focuses on African unity and its leadership therein by referring to the ANC as Africa’s ‘oldest liberation movement’ during the 13th session of the African Union (Zuma, 2009c).

Another way SA states who they rather cooperate with is through joint sessions with other emerging powers, as it believes that these cooperations will successfully lead to their foreign policy goals. During the fourth IBSA, Zuma emphasized the need to work together on a newer form of collective international governance (Zuma, 2010). Zuma sees the summit with India and Brazil also as an example for the rest of the GS, to show how through cooperation an influential platform is created to voice the needs and concerns of the GS (Zuma, 2010). Although this supports the general notion proposed in the causal mechanism that foreign policy agenda influences the considerations for selecting allies, it might also be the result of other theories, such as SSC. Strengthening ties with other states within the GS on the basis of shared ideas and values fits into the SSC-narrative, and might potentially stand apart from the proposed chain in the causal mechanism. Nevertheless, the mechanism doesn’t

state that this relationship is inherent to the mechanism itself, so it could be true for both (or other) theories.

Proclaiming your allies

South Africa under Zuma joined the BRIC in 2010. This ascension follows from several steps of the mechanism. His presidency was marked by numerous corruption scandals, reflecting his personal interests leading to corruption. His corruption afterwards influenced various policy decisions and priorities, with foreign investments and large infrastructure projects that favoured personal or elite interests such as with the Gupta family. Within these foreign policy choices, Zuma emphasized strengthening relations with states, such as the BRIC, which can be seen as an effort to gain prestige and international influence, enhancing his global standing and his personal political survival. With major achievements internationally, Zuma might have appeased domestic groups that again would secure the continuation of his corrupt practices.

Specifically for BRIC, one way Zuma's foreign policy goals is reflected through challenging existing cooperations for a stronger say in the international community. The partnership formed the New Development Bank in 2015, in opposition to the Bretton Woods Institutions 'a new and unique financing initiative' (New Development Bank, n.d.; Smith, 2013; Zuma, 2014). Through newer forms of international cooperation, as stated in his first state of the nation speech, Zuma clearly tries to strengthen the bond with other emerging powers in the GS while also trying to institutionalize its own voice within the international community. SA also continuous to claim the continental leadership as a member of BRICS (Zuma, 2011, 2014). Ascension to BRIC is also a continuation and strengthening of existing cooperations. It furthers the cooperation of SA enlarging in some sense the IBSA partnership, formalizing the increasing bilateral relations with China (Bodomo, 2009; Nkuna & Shai, 2019; Shelton, 2005), and strengthening the already existing formal relations with Russia (Amusan, 2018; Brosig, 2023; Geldenhuys, 2020; Nkuna & Shai, 2019; Weiss & Rumer, 2019).

Bringing in the earlier steps in the causal mechanism, the relevance of Zuma's personal interest and corruption especially gets clearer when looking at the relationship with Russia. Zuma's history with Russia goes back to before his presidency, as the Soviet Union trained the political and economic leaders of the ANC (Amusan, 2018; Brosig, 2023; Nkuna & Shai, 2019; Weiss & Rumer, 2019). Zuma spent three months in 1978 for military training,

creating earlier ties and strengthening his relations within Russia (Weiss & Rumer, 2019). These ties helped when Zuma became president in 2009, when relations with Russia quickly warmed up. Zuma pushed the ascension to BRIC, and was specifically backed by Russia in this request (Weiss & Rumer, 2019), although many had doubts why South Africa was included compared to more prospective members such as Indonesia or Mexico (Weiss & Rumer, 2019). Further during Zuma's term, economic cooperation increased especially in the natural resource sector (Nkuna & Shai, 2019; Weiss & Rumer, 2019). During the 2013 BRICS Durban Summit, Russia and SA signed the cooperation of the Platinum Group Metals (PGM), formalizing the cooperation on resource winning with Russian companies such as the Renova Group of Companies, Norilsk Nickel, and OAO Severstal. As shown in earlier in this analysis, the natural resource sector was one where corrupt interest by Zuma and his allies (mainly the Guptas) was far reaching, which suggests that his personal interests did play a role in his relationship with Russia. This was also evident with the nuclear deal between Russia and SA, where Zuma pushed for the multi-billion-dollar project, and even fired and replaced his finance minister with someone who would not oppose the project (Amusan, 2018; Nkuna & Shai, 2019; Weiss & Rumer, 2019). Although it could be argued that SA would have been seen as a potential ally without Zuma being its president, as the BRIC was seeking a partner in the African continent, it is still otherwise hard to explain why not other emerging powers in Africa that were economically strong enough ascended to the BRIC over SA.

Lastly, another point that is of interest is the proclamation made by the BRICS as well as between Russia and South Africa in earlier cooperation. The BRICS made clear that they wouldn't infringe upon the sovereignty of each other and would not interfere with domestic interests (Brosig, 2023; Geldenhuys, 2020; Weiss & Rumer, 2019). This is e.g. in contrast with other international cooperations such as the by Zuma criticized IMF or World Bank, where in return for cooperation tackling of certain domestic issues such as corruption are expected. By aligning himself with other states that fulfil his foreign policy goals, but also secure his personal interests, Zuma is ensured of non-interference with his corrupt practices, while being able to claim a major foreign policy achievement such as joining BRIC. His interest in showcasing prestigious projects and favouring capital-intensive projects (Rose-Ackerman, 1999) was also evident with the earlier mentioned nuclear deal that would have been – in the words of former finance minister Nhlanelo Nene – “the largest public investment program in South African history” (Weiss & Rumer, 2019).

Conclusion

Several theories have developed over the years over the dynamics of state alliance, on why states cooperate, and in what forms. Especially in the post-Cold War era, cooperations and alliance formation has been evolving in its shapes and forms. With emerging powers within the Global South seeking to establish their place within the international community, it is becoming more important for political scientists to figure out how these states decide to cooperate, and if and to what level their cooperation varies from tradition alliance dynamics. The focus of this thesis was therefore to shed more light on these new dynamics, and to try to explain how emerging GS-states decide with who to cooperate.

To this end, a causal mechanism is hypothesized based on the emerging alignment theory that places a more prominent role for state leaders in alignment decisions. Using former South African president Jacob Zuma and SA's ascension to the BRIC in 2010, theory-testing process tracing is conducted to test the causal mechanism, and see whether or not Zuma's own personal interests was a factor in SA's ascension to BRIC. By analysing presidential speeches, official reports, journalistic works, papers written by NGOs, and existing academic literature, the hypothesized causal mechanism is followed. The result is that personal interests of Zuma were definitely a significant factor in SA's ascension to BRIC. His personal interests manifesting in widespread corruption at various levels of government, that corruption influencing the states foreign policy agenda, and through that seeking alliances based on those formulations resulted in SA declaring its alignment with the BRIC-bloc. Although there is no direct link and the evidence might be deemed circumstantial, the findings provide enough support to argue that Zuma's personal connections might have ensured the necessary support to be able to become a BRIC member, over other (economically) stronger emerging powers.

The implications of the results of this paper are academically significant as well as for policymakers. For policymakers, especially those in the Global North, understanding that cooperation by GS-states might be driven by the personal interests of state leaders, rather than merely being the result of state strategy, could inform them for more effective approaches to international diplomacy and negotiations when seeking to align GS-states with their own states. Recognizing the role corruption and personal gain has played in these decisions, can also guide efforts for more transparent and accountable governance structures within the GS, to promote more favourable alignment choices (for the Global North). The

academic implications are that it is important to recognize the relevance of personal interests in GS-state alliance dynamics, and in broader sense that it is important to look outside of the usual causes seen in traditional alliance dynamics within the Global North.

One of the main limitations of this study is its reliance on a single case study. It is therefore not generalizable to every other emerging power within the GS. Different contexts, such as differences in political, cultural, and economic environments, could influence the results in various ways. Even so, the detailed examination of the ascension of South Africa to BRIC under Zuma does provide important insights for a key player within the GS. Another limitation is that, as also mentioned earlier, with corruption taking such an important role in the hypothesized causal mechanism, the study relies more on secondary sources over primary sources. Data might be speculative or biased, and data such as a personal diary of Zuma or his mobile phone that could really put the mechanism to test isn't available for research. Yet, there are various judicial reports and research that support Zuma's corruption and strengthens other sources in their trueness. Finally, personal interests are just one of many factors influencing SA's ascension to BRIC in 2010. One could wonder if SA would have joined BRIC if Zuma wasn't president, as the BRIC itself was also seeking a partner on the African continent, although SA was not the only option in Africa to take up that role.

A suggestion for future research is to conduct a comparative analysis of different leaders within the GS to explore similar patterns and see if personal interests-driven alignments is also evident for other states and contexts. Seeing if the hypothesized causal mechanism also holds true across different political systems and background could provide deeper insights and more universality for the mechanism. Another suggestion for future research would be to conduct single case studies with the ascension of newer members to the BRICS, such as Egypt or UAE, or to follow the procedure in real time for candidate-members to gain more insights on GS-state alignment dynamics.

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