

**The Contestation of Western-led Norms: BRICS and Military Space Governance in the
Global South**

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Abstract

Space governance and research have been primarily shaped by Western-led norms and frameworks, further making them standard for global governance. Although Global South states have competed with the West in the space sector as well as the global arena, their contributions have been understudied and less researched. This research explores how BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as a Global South collective, have engaged with Western-led norms and policies through replication, adaptation, and contestation within space governance. This study seeks to explain how BRICS challenges, adapts, or changes Western norms by utilising a constructivist framework with isomorphism as the core mechanism. An analysis of qualitative documentation of BRICS joint statements, space partnerships and proposals, and summit declarations will be used to identify patterns of replication, contestation, and adaptation. Due to the moderate research on Global South actors' contributions to the space sector and their individual contributions to space research and technological advancements, there is a general lack of scholarship on BRICS joint engagement in military space governance. This research will contribute to the study of BRICS space governance by exploring how BRICS utilises norm contestation, replication, and adaptation in military space governance. As well as the trickle effect created within the Global South through the action of BRICS member states and the shift in the balance of the global order, this may create.

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1. Introduction

As an internationally recognised strategically contested domain, outer space has been shaped by technological advancements, rapidly changing governing frameworks, and evolving geopolitical tensions. Although military space capabilities were once limited to a small number of influential states, they are now at the core of national security strategies for both emerging and established powers.

As states have continued to make technological advancements and progress their marine and land activities, the use of space for military purposes has increasingly become more prevalent in the affairs of the global order. For states that can afford the costs and resources, the space sector has become the perfect economic tool with its shift from being a public realm to being a private and commercialised domain for military uses. States have continued to deliberately compete with one

another to become pioneers in space governance while restricting the capabilities of countries with less authority in the global order. Thus, laws must be continuously developed to address the demand and change in order to keep up with the transition. Hoover (2023) writes, “Because these changes are happening so quickly, international laws that once governed activity in space are quickly becoming outdated.” The West primarily contributed to the creation and enforcement of treaties that govern activities within space due to its position as the hegemon of the global order. This subsequently meant that the power for the creation of treaties and policies that benefit Western interests while limiting those of less developed states, states that would predominantly be part of the Global South.

But as Global South states have continued to develop, the control of global governance by Western actors has lessened and become more shared. In the last half-century, Global South actors have advanced in the space sector through research and technology while also coordinating their efforts to advance collectively as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) on an international level. While China, India, and Russia possess the capabilities to engage in military space governance, they collaborate with Brazil and South Africa on space research and development and diplomatic partnerships. This is why it is important to analyse their joint space co-operation on frameworks, declarations, and policies, rather than observing their individual actions.

Despite BRICS advancements, space governance is primarily focused on Western states or the contribution of individual Global South actors. Less attention has been paid to how BRICS engage with Western-led norms and policies as a collective within the military space domain. This gap in scholarship leads to a lack of understanding of how BRICS engagement can influence and reshape governance, as well as challenge the normative authority in the global order.

1.2. Research Question

This research will therefore seek to answer the following question: “How do BRICS as a collective adapt, contest, or replicate Western-led governance frameworks and norms within the military space sector?”

1.3. Research Objectives

The first research objective is to examine how Western-led frameworks and norms shape standards within the military space governance domain. The second objective is to analyse BRICS' joint statements, space cooperation statements, and summit declarations to understand how they communicate their collective stance relative to Western norms. The third research objective is to identify if BRICS' joint positioning is reflective of patterns of contestation, adaptation, or replication with the use of thematic qualitative document analysis informed by isomorphism. The last objective is to determine how BRICS engage with military space governance norms as a collective, and how this may shape joint perceptions of authority and the dynamics of the global order. Together, these objectives enable the thesis to evaluate whether patterns of replication, adaptation, or contestation are reflected in the BRICS' joint involvement within military space governance.

1.4. Academic Relevance

Debates on space governance have been primarily focused on Western-led norms and institutions, while simultaneously sidelining the strategies and perspectives of emerging powers. Despite the United States and its allies' role in shaping rules that govern military space activities, there has been a growing involvement in BRICS' alternative interpretations of norms, security in outer space, and sovereignty. Whether through adaptation, replication or contestation, understanding how BRICS choose to collectively respond to Western-led governance can provide new insights into the evolving distribution of normative power. This makes the research matter because studying these dynamics will contribute to broader academic debates on institutional isomorphism within international politics and norm contestation and diffusion. This thesis makes an empirical contribution by providing a methodical examination of BRICS' collective stance on military space governance based on official joint documents. As well as making a conceptual contribution by demonstrating how Global South coalitions interact with current Western-led norms through a combination of adaptation, replication, and contestation.

1.5. Structure of Thesis

This thesis will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 will review literature on Western hegemony within space governance, the role of the Global South in space governance, and BRICS' involvement in military space governance and activities, and lastly, identify the research gap. Chapter 3 will present the theoretical framework through constructivism and isomorphism, as well

as present the hypothesis and theoretical expectations. Chapter 4 includes the research design, data sources, and the coding strategy. Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of BRICS' documentation to identify patterns of adaptation, replication and contestation. Chapter 6 will be a discussion of the empirical and theoretical implications of the findings. And Chapter 7 will conclude with a summary of results, any limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Western Hegemony within Space Governance

The legal and institutional framework for space governance has been largely shaped by Western actors, according to the literature on space governance. Scholars' interpretations of this hegemony vary; some highlight legal-institutional power, while others focus on political authority, agenda-setting, and norm distribution. Well into the Cold War, the launch of the Soviet Union's Sputnik I satellite began the space race with the United States. With competition between the West and East becoming more heightened, treaties and regulations needed to be drafted and ratified to prevent the privatisation and weaponisation of space. The United States, along with its allies, created treaties such as the Outer Space Treaty (OST) in 1967 and the Moon Agreement in 1979, as argued by Byers and Boley (2023), which in turn contributed to key international frameworks used for the governance of space and were later adopted by the United Nations.

Although these treaties have been ratified by many countries, this does not negate that they reflect the norms, ideas, and interests of the states drafting them. These legal frameworks have since become the standards that guide state behaviour within space governance, despite being shaped by Western norms. Manoli (2024) shows that initiatives such as the Artemis Accords enable powerful Western actors and their allies to shape global space governance outside traditional UN frameworks, thus creating new centres of authority and reinforcing their agenda-setting power within space. Byers characterises this process as "one of the tried-and-tested strategies of hegemonic law-making," in which talks are delayed until "rules and practices can be shaped by a small group of like-minded states." (Byers & Boley, 2023, p.175) However, despite possessing influence, there is only so much power Western actors can enact without being perceived as unjust. Although the West creates these norms and frameworks, it is held accountable to the same expectations. Any deviance from these expectations can threaten the legitimacy of authority, as well as the balance of power. This is reflective of a broader constructivist theory that argues norms

embedded by governing actors become expectations of appropriate behaviour despite primarily reflecting the interests of the actors, rather than a universal consensus.

Recent initiatives like the Artemis Accords, which were established in 2020 by the United States and its allies, are indicative of the need for transparency, peaceful space exploration, and cooperation in space activities. As Byer and Boley (2023) noted “The United States and US companies are uniquely positioned to influence the development of customary international law concerning the conduct of space mining, including through actual mining and safety zones.”. Manoli (2024) argues the Artemis Accords utilise “sustainable space exploration” as a tool of global interests and to justify the “authority of exclusive use over lunar and celestial land” therefore entwining Western norms within cooperative governance frameworks. This has led to Western norms being defined as appropriate state behaviour and conduct; therefore, states engaged in the space sector must act according to these frameworks and norms (Rabitz, 2023), whether it’s done through change, alignment, or alternative methods. The United States has been embedding its own approach by using the Artemis Accords, a document that “diverges from existing international space law in important respects, creating legal ambiguities and potential inconsistencies.” (Rabitz, 2023) In spite of space governance being encouraged to be neutral and peaceful, it is the opposite and is seen as a political arena for states to achieve their interests. This leads to Western-led initiatives contributing to a normative environment, where non-Western states and actors must continually assess whether to adapt, replicate, or contest with alternative frameworks to Western standards.

2.2. Global South and Space Governance

Scholars debate on how to describe the Global South's role in space governance, which is a topic of contention in the literature. While some argue that non-Western actors are still disadvantaged by systemic disparities, others put an emphasis on emerging space powers' expanding institutional and technological capabilities. Scholars debate whether space is truly a global common domain, with some arguing that the commercialisation of space has created an inequality of power and influence. An executive order signed by President Trump of the United States in 2020 had stated that “Outer space is a legally and physically unique domain of human activity, and the United States does not view it as a global commons.” (The White House, 2020). Although the United States, along with its allies, were responsible for the drafting of the Outer Space Treaty, which

prevented the privatisation of space, half a century later, it fails to honour its own standards, while simultaneously expecting less developed states to continue following. In spite of the growing Western influence on space, the Global South has continued to make advancements and developments within the space sector. Whether through research or innovation, the Global South has increasingly grown to be a significant player in global military space affairs. “States such as the United States, China, Russia, and India have professional space forces that engage in operations of satellite reconnaissance to anti-satellite (ASAT) missile testing.” (Palit et al, 2025, p. 3). Scholars like Patit et al may acknowledge China, Russia, and India’s military space capabilities, but they fail to discuss South Africa and Brazil’s contributions through space research and technological advancements.

Shared data from both Brazil and South Africa is valuable for their participation in China’s International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) program. While the United States has led the space sector through agencies like the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Global South actors have still managed to steadily advance. China, Russia, and India may be more physically involved in military space governance through projects and initiatives such as the ILRS; other Global South states contribute through knowledge for a joint advancement. It can therefore be argued that Global South states have a symbiotic relationship with space governance; states contribute as they can for the good of all and the achievement of joint interests. However, scholarship tends to overlook Global South actors’ institutional participation, their contribution to norm diffusion and alternative governance narratives, and instead treats them as simply reactive. This constant underrepresentation limits the understanding of how collectives like BRICS can influence or reinterpret space governance norms.

2.3. BRICS and Military Space Governance

Member states within BRICS are in agreement on the continued use of space for peaceful purposes. Statements from the organisation echo language used by the United Nations when discussing the topic of the prevention of a space arms race, while promoting sharing data and research, and partnerships. While proposals for additional international institutions like BRICS appear in public discussion, they do not advance further than the proposal stage.

The shared collaboration in space research and joint programs is used to encourage co-operation between the states and reduce competition, which would subsequently reduce costs. BRICS

member states collectively are communicative of cooperative space activities, and implementation of these activities has been done so through bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as international coordination among members. Existing literature primarily focuses on the BRICS' contribution as an economic bloc and its diplomatic capabilities while paying less attention to how BRICS position themselves relative to Western-led norms on military space governance or examines bilateral agreements between partners like the Sino-Russian one (He & Ye, 2021), more than paying attention to the co-operation of BRICS states. This consequently creates a research gap. Whether BRICS function simply as a platform for technical cooperation or whether discourse reveals there are shared positions on Western governance norms has remained underexplored. Consequently, an analysis of BRICS' documents, such as agreements and statements, may provide an answer to whether members collectively align with, quietly contest, or selectively adapt to existing Western-led norms and frameworks. Therefore, it is still unclear if BRICS serve as a forum for technological collaboration or as a collective actor with a common normative stance in space governance.

2.4. Research Gap

There is a lack of research on BRICS and their contribution to military space governance, and existing studies concerning the Global South mainly examine BRICS member states individually instead of considering them jointly. Research and existing literature are primarily focused on the West and its governance frameworks. Within present research on the Global South's contribution to space governance, literary examinations often focus on the competition between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, rather than on how Global South coalitions have advanced within space governance. Nonetheless, Global South states have made separate contributions to the space sector, whether through research or technological developments; there has been more of an emphasis on BRICS' economic initiatives rather than their engagement within space governance. Scholarship further enforces the absence of research on military space governance and how the field of study has developed. "This paper contributes to the nascent field of global space governance by applying an innovative MLG framework to the space system." (Viterale, 2024). Combined with a lack of joint contribution to space governance, this has resulted in a research gap on the understanding of how BRICS states collectively position themselves in relation to present space governance norms. This lack of study of Global South actors' joint contributions can thus make it difficult to predict how BRICS would coordinate their joint

positions in space governance despite differing political and economic interests and diverse backgrounds. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address the gap in the literature through an examination of BRICS as a collective actor in military space governance and by focusing on how discourse is reflective of adaptation, contestation, or replication of Western-led frameworks and norms. This approach helps clarify whether BRICS are operating as an alternative norm developer or continue to be constrained by the existing governance frameworks. This thesis will directly address the gap by focusing on discourse in official BRICS documentation.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Constructivism

This research will mainly utilise the constructivist international relations theory, which demonstrates how state behaviour is shaped by norms, ideas, and identities. When observing military space governance, Western-led governance norms and frameworks have been primarily the standard for state behaviour. The constructivist theory will be used to analyse how BRICS may collectively engage with these Western-led norms and frameworks within a military space governance domain. This theory will assist in examining how BRICS may challenge, respond to, or reinterpret Western-led norms, while respecting shared interests and identities.

Constructivist theory also emphasises how collective state behaviour is influenced and shaped by shared norms, ideas, and identities. Despite Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa having differing national interests and military space capabilities, participation in BRICS provides the platform for member states to communicate and possibly coordinate shared positions as a response to Western-led governance norms. This theory assists in examining the possibility of governance norms being replicated, challenged, or adapted to better fit a collective identity. “They are important to constructivists as they argue that identities constitute interests and actions. For example, the identity of a small state implies a set of interests that are different from those implied by the identity of a large state.” (Theys, 2018).

3.2. Norms and Identity

Within the constructivist theory, norms hold a central role because they define appropriate behaviours for actors in an international system. The way states and actors interpret norms is shaped by identity, which leads to variations in how rules are resisted or internalised. The

formation of a collective identity in BRICS can influence whether member states seek to be aligned with Western-led norms, adapt them, or create alternative interpretations. Although BRICS consist of differing national priorities, member states may still hold shared understandings of non-Western governance preferences, strategic autonomy, and sovereignty. This helps to explain how strategic positions in military space governance are built on a foundation of collective identity.

3.3. Isomorphism

Isomorphism as an organisational theory will be used to explain how BRICS may collectively engage with Western-led governance norms. Bennet (2024) refers to it as the process by which organisations in similar fields adopt similar structures and practices. There are three variations of isomorphism in international organisations: coercive isomorphism, normative isomorphism, and, lastly, mimetic isomorphism. Within this research, normative isomorphism refers to the adoption of structures and norms due to the influence of shared ideas and norms. Coercive isomorphism would be a conformity with Western-led ideas and values due to external pressures. Lastly, mimetic isomorphism would be the imitation of norms due to the legitimacy of actors being mimicked. The application of the three types of isomorphism allows the research to explore whether BRICS' joint actions reflect coercion, imitation, or adaptation, instead of outright contestation. By observing the language used in space cooperation statements, joint declarations, and summit declarations, patterns of normative or coercive alignment with Western-led standards can be identified.

3.4. Hypothesis

With consideration of the constructivist theory and isomorphism, this thesis hypothesises that:

H1: BRICS, as a collective, replicates and selectively adapts Western-led norms on military space governance, while contesting norms and frameworks that conflict with the coalition's shared preferences and identities.

This hypothesis reflects the expectation that BRICS neither fully internalise nor fully reject Western-led norms but will instead engage in a mixed pattern that is shaped by coercive, normative and mimetic pressures.

3.5. Theoretical Expectations

Based on constructivism and isomorphism, this thesis develops three theoretical expectations as follows:

1. Adaptation: BRICS modifies Western norms and frameworks by incorporating non-Western priorities and preferences that prioritise autonomy or sovereignty, while largely complying with established treaty language, such as the principles of the Outer Space Treaty.
2. Replication: BRICS adopts Western-led terminology such as “peaceful uses of outer space”, “transparency” or “responsible behaviour”, without significant reinterpretation.
3. Contestation: In addition to advocating for alternatives to Western-led initiatives or existing governance frameworks, BRICS explicitly criticises dominance and unilateralism in space governance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This research will examine how BRICS jointly negotiate their position in the military space sector by employing a qualitative documentary analysis. A thematic qualitative document analysis will be utilised to examine how BRICS express joint positioning in relation to Western norms and frameworks.

4.2. Case Selection

Summit declarations, space co-operation agreements, and joint statements will be used because they reflect a collective positioning through negotiated statements instead of an individualistic one taken on by individual member states nationally.

4.3. Data Sources

Primary sources used will include summit declarations spanning from 2010 to 2025, joint statements from BRICS on space cooperation, and both binding and non-binding space agreements. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967, the Artemis Accords launched in 2020, and the Moon Agreement of 1979 will act as references for a Western-led governance framework.

4.4. Coding Framework

A coding framework is utilised to identify patterns of adaptation, replication, and contestation within BRICS discourse. This is derived from a constructivist and isomorphism theory. The coding

framework is applied at the sentence and paragraph level across joint statements, summit declarations, and space cooperation documentation.

Contestation is operationalised as a direct challenge to Western frameworks, the rejection of norms, and the proposal of alternative rules. Adaptation refers to the reinterpretation and selective modification of existing principles. Whereas replication refers to the adoption of unmodified Western norms, frameworks, and language. These patterns allow an alignment with Western frameworks and norms to be interpreted as a result of imitation, coercion, or shared norms.

Each category directly responds to one of the theoretical expectations that have been outlined in section 3.5 and serves to operationalise the hypothesis.

4.5. Pre-registered Expectations

With regards to the theoretical framework, there are preregistered expectations of how adaptation, contestation and replication must appear within BRICS' documentation. If BRICS' member states adapt, elements of Western-led norms should remain in the discourse, while changing their meaning to reflect the collective identity of BRICS, as well as its strategic interests and alternative priorities. BRICS, combining normative language, such as "non-weaponisation" or "peaceful uses", with an emphasis on multipolarity, technological autonomy, or sovereignty, would be indicative of adaptation.

If BRICS member states collectively replicate Western-led norms and frameworks, this must be clear and indicated in documentation. This should include language that directly mirrors governance frameworks such as the Artemis Accords or the Outer Space Treaty. A repeated emphasis on responsible behaviour, transparency, or peaceful uses of outer space can indicate replication of Western-led norms.

Lastly, if BRICS demonstrate contestation, documentation will implicitly or explicitly challenge Western frameworks. This can be seen through the criticism of Western initiatives such as the Artemis Accords, proposals for alternative governance frameworks that will shift power away from Western institutions and actors or calls for the reform of existing Western governance structures.

These three pre-registered expectations will be a guiding coding process to enable a theory-driven and transparent interpretation of how BRICS are relative to Western-led military space governance norms and frameworks.

Patterns of replication, adaptation, or rejection will be understood using isomorphism as a core mechanism to identify if alignment stems from shared norms, coercive pressure, or imitation. In the event that alignment with norms is instead due to other factors such as constraints or financial limitations, they will be considered and examined as well. However, alignment will only be considered isomorphic when examining sources that explicitly define BRICS' position and choices by shared norms, rather than necessity.

5. Data & Analysis

5.1 Description of Documentation

Eleven official BRICS documents from 2009 to 2023 are examined in this research. Summit declarations, sectoral communiq  s, and statements from foreign ministers are included in this compilation. The data spans the early establishment of BRICS to its institutional development and subsequent growth. The texts are an ideal source for evaluating BRICS' collective positioning, as they reflect jointly negotiated language.

A compiled list of the analysed documentation is provided in Appendix A.

These publications are essential because they reflect the shared identity, collaborative discourse, and changing governance objective of BRICS. The PPWT proposal, Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), sustainable space initiatives, peaceful uses of space, and BRICS space cooperation mechanisms implemented after 2022 are all explicitly mentioned. These documents demonstrate processes of contestation, replication, and adaptation throughout the corpus, often in overlapping or combined forms, but not every single document exhibits all three patterns.

5.2. Evidence of Replication

Replication indicators will include the reaffirmation of the Outer Space Treaty principles as well as the use of United Nations language such as “long-term sustainability”, “peaceful uses of outer space”, and “avoidance of weaponisation”. The consistent emphasis on multilateralism, as well as an echoing of UN COPUOS norms and values, will be an indicator of replication by BRICS. The

need and support for transparency and confidence-building measures, which are central to Western space norm literature, will be indicative of replication by BRICS in military space governance.

The Xiamen Declaration of 2017 will indicate an alignment with Western-led norms, with calls for PAROS: “We reaffirm that outer space shall be used for peaceful purposes” (BRICS, 2017, p. 6), and a reflection of United Nations-led normative language. Evidence of outer space being framed as a peaceful and sustainable domain, which mirrors language used in the Outer Space Treaty, will indicate alignment with Western-led norms. “We reaffirm our commitment to the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space” (BRICS, 2021, n.p.). The New Delhi Declaration in 2021 was directly referencing processes from the United Nations and the Outer Space Treaty, including an affirmation of core Western-led governance frameworks, which points to alignment.

“We reassert our support for ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities” (BRICS, 2023, p. 18). The 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration, including phrases such as “long-term sustainability of outer space activities, is indicative of alignment. The support for transparency and confidence-building measures will directly align with Western transparency standards, which will indicate an alignment with United Nations norms and Western-led legal frameworks. All declarations mentioned above with language included within can be interpreted as BRICS accepting Western core space norms to maintain legitimacy, which would demonstrate mimetic and normative isomorphism, indicative of adopting globally legitimate norms.

5.3. Evidence of Adaptation

Indicators of BRICS modifying norms to fit its identity include linking space norms to development, technology transfer, and capacity building. The lack of Global South framing in Western documents would point to an emphasis on equitable access. A reframing of language, such as “peaceful uses” to include the need for Earth observation for development, resilience, and climate, would be indicative of adaptation for their own governance and interests.

The Beijing Declaration in 2022, which contains evidence of the creation of a BRICS remote sensing satellite constellation, would indicate an institutionalisation of alternative cooperation mechanisms. “We welcome the establishment of the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation” (BRICS, 2022, p. 15). The use of language to frame space as a tool for climate, development, and resource monitoring would indicate evidence of adaptation by BRICS.

Incorporating Western-led norms but including BRICS' development priorities would point to BRICS' modifying norms to fit its own identity. The Xiamen 2017 Declaration, stating that "priority should be given to long-term sustainability" (BRICS, 2017, p. 6), is evidence of the adaptation of sustainability discourse through a Global South lens. BRICS' adaptation would include space security being linked to the reform of multilateral governance, which would show their interpretation of norms to fit BRICS' identity. Not only would it adopt Western-led norms, but it would also reshape and reinterpret them to reflect its separate Global South identity, its desire for multipolar governance, and the collective development of needs.

5.4. Evidence of Contestation

Contestation indicators for the challenge of Western frameworks and behaviours by BRICS would include a criticism of militarisation, unilateralism, and sanctions, which often implicitly target Western states. Any support for the Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT) would indicate a form of contestation, because the treaty received opposition from the United States. Calls for the reform of global governance structures such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which directly extend to space through analogy, would be evidence of contestation. An emphasis on phrasing from BRICS' declarations, such as "no country should enhance its security at the expense of others", would be a direct challenge to Western behaviours and legal frameworks. In the Xiamen Declaration of 2017, "We oppose unilateral military interventions, economic sanctions... that violate international law" (BRICS, 2017, p. 2). Any strong condemnation of unilateral military actions would be a form of contestation, as well as the refusal to accept any security frameworks that are dominated by Western states.

In the New Delhi Declaration in 2021, evidence of contestation would be the public expression of disappointment in the failures of the Western-led institutions through actions such as a call for the reform of the IMF quota: "We express our disappointment at the lack of progress on IMF quota reform" (BRICS, 2021, n.p.). Evidence of contestation in the Johannesburg II 2023 Declaration would be any support for PPWT, because the US directly rejects this treaty, and this would indicate a form of direct contestation. Any reference to the "prevention of deployment of weapons in outer space" or "non weaponisation" would directly counter any United States or Western space positioning. Evidence of contestation appears to be indirect but consistent in the declarations

mentioned above. BRICS challenge the Western authority but not the outer space treaty framework itself, because BRICS reflect a desire for a multipolar norm-setting environment through its contestation.

5.5. Interpretation Relative to Hypothesis

Findings support the hypothesis that BRICS neither fully rejects nor fully internalises Western-led norms and frameworks in military space governance. Instead, it engages in a mixed process of adaptation, contestation and replication. Replication is the most common across the examined documents, particularly when it comes to ongoing compliance with established Western-led legal frameworks and United Nations language. This suggests that in order to maintain legitimacy and recognition inside the international space governance framework, BRICS still depends on existing international norms.

Simultaneously, a continuous process of adaptation is demonstrated by the frequent modification of these norms to include principles like equity, development, technological sovereignty, and multipolarity. This adaptation reflects a constructivist perspective in which BRICS reinterpret established norms rather than simply accepting them as they are, thereby shaping a shared identity and collective self-awareness. In this way, the actions of the BRICS might be interpreted as an active process of norm translation that is aligned with the objectives of the Global South rather than as passive norm-following.

Notably in the 2017 and 2023 declarations, where BRICS more openly confronts Western authority, unilateralism, and the existing inequality of power in space governance, contestation occurs more selectively and is concentrated in particular cases. This suggests that contestation is not BRICS' preferred method; it is instead used when current frameworks are thought to be substantially in conflict with the collective's normative or strategic desires.

These trends suggest a distinct logic of alignment when viewed through the perspective of isomorphism. replication mostly reflects mimetic isomorphism since BRICS uses established norms and terminology to indicate legitimacy and conformity to established governance norms. Normative isomorphism, whereby shared identities and values among BRICS influence how these norms are reframed and reinterpreted, is reflected in adaptation. Contestation as resistance to coercive isomorphism: when BRICS openly opposes Western-led frameworks, it responds to perceived external normative pressure rather than complying with it.

Results confirmed that BRICS engagement within Western-led space governance norms and frameworks is characterised best as a process of selective alignment, open challenge, and reinterpretation. The hypothesis is supported by this mixed pattern, which also demonstrates how isomorphic pressures and constructivist dynamics work together to shape BRICS' normative standing in military space governance.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This thesis demonstrates that the constructivist theory is a strong lens to interpret BRICS engagement with Western-led frameworks and norms in military space governance. State behaviour is not singular nor driven by power and influence. Instead, results establish that shared identities, normative commitments, and joint understanding shape BRICS' positioning.

A shared identity centred around values associated with the Global South, such as equal access to technology, peaceful uses of space, and multipolarity, is reflected in the frequent use of common terms across BRICS publications. These similar references show that BRICS functions as a political collective that expresses common objectives and normative priorities in the discourse surrounding space governance, rather than just as an informal coordination forum.

However, the results show that BRICS does not simply replicate existing norms and frameworks in an unmodified way. Although recognised UN space governance principles that pertain to peaceful usage, sustainability, and non-weaponisation, tend to be aligned with BRICS, these standards are frequently reinterpreted through a perspective that promotes development, inclusion, and sovereign autonomy. This supports constructivist claims that social interactions, which in turn constantly change norms.

This is further refined by isomorphism, which makes the mechanisms alignment clearer. As BRICS adopts widely established norms and language to preserve legitimacy within the international system, replication of Western-led norms mostly reflects mimetic isomorphism. Normative isomorphism is reflected in adaptation, which is shaped by the common identity and principles of the BRICS member states. In situations where Western-led frameworks are seen as maintaining unequal power relations or excluding non-Western actors, contestation signifies resistance to coercive isomorphic forces when it occurs.

Together, these findings suggest that BRICS engagement within space governance is best understood when constructivism and isomorphism are jointly utilised. Constructivism and isomorphism are utilised together to explain how BRICS negotiates legitimacy, identity, and power; this results in a pattern of selective replication, reinterpretation, and intermittent contestation.

6.2. Scholarship Contribution

This thesis addresses and contributes to an underdeveloped section of academic research. Despite there being a steadily growing body of literature discussing BRICS and its diplomatic and economic capabilities, there has been little work done to examine how BRICS positions itself as a collective in issues regarding military space governance. Present research has often focused on member states' individual capabilities and contributions rather than the states' collective involvement. This has led to BRICS' joint communication and its negotiated shared priorities being overlooked.

An analysis of documentation ranging from 2009 to 2023 has provided a systematic examination of the ways BRICS engage with global norms that are related to outer space security. BRICS has been shown to have developed a pattern of consistent discourse, forming its own identity and collective intentions for global governance. This analysis has supplemented the present academic discussion on the emerging power structures in the international system, as well as the challenged assumptions of Western states dominating norm-setting in space governance.

Methodologically, the thesis contributes by applying a qualitative documentary analysis on political declarations. This has shown that official texts can be used as data to analyse norm dynamics. Despite being diplomatic and attempting to be neutral through vagueness, declarations contained meaningful signals about shared identities, values and norms to create patterns of cooperation.

6.3 Implications for Global Space Governance

The results of this thesis demonstrate that the framework of global space governance is founded on a multilayered pattern of negotiated norm interpretation rather than a conflict between Western norm-setters and non-Western challengers. Among developing and non-Western states, the core normative framework of the existing order is still widely recognised, which is demonstrated by

BRICS's continuous affirmation of norms like "non-weaponisation" and the "peaceful use of space". This supports the constructivist understanding of space governance as an order characterised by the common expectations of appropriate behaviour, instead of by power alone.

Similarly, the ways BRICS adapts to these norms by linking space governance to technological autonomy and development, and capacity-building, indicate the gradual diversification of the core principles interpreted, prioritised, and operationalised. This implies that new partnerships with differing political agendas and historical backgrounds are reinterpreting the established norms, rather than norms and frameworks themselves collapsing, to make global space governance more diversified. This demonstrates a process whereby legitimacy remains a goal within the existing framework, but on terms that continue to reflect non-Western interests, based on an isomorphic perspective.

The occurrence of selective contestation furthermore suggests that geopolitical conflict over institutional authority, agenda-setting, and the interpretation of present norms is more prevalent in geopolitical competition in outer space than outright norm rejection. This has significant implications for future global discussions, as it suggests that disagreements over space governance will likely focus more on institutional design, interpretation, and implementation rather than on openly rejecting the existing legal framework.

The emphasis placed on development, equity, and access by BRICS is indicative that debate over space governance is combined with concerns over representation in the global order and global inequality. Pressures are anticipated to rise as space technology becomes increasingly important for environmental governance, economic growth, and security. According to the findings, the future development of space governance would consequently depend more on ongoing debates over whose interests and interpretations these norms and frameworks should serve than on the replacement of existing norms.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary of Findings

The purpose of this thesis was to answer how BRICS, as a collective, engaged with Western-led norms and frameworks within military space governance. As opposed to following passively or behaving as a challenger to the existing world order, this analysis finds that BRICS adopts a more

nuanced and strategic approach. BRICS engagement with space governance frameworks and norms is better understood when observed as a negotiated process, where existing rules are reinterpreted, in some cases challenged, or selectively reproduced.

Findings demonstrate that BRICS doesn't seek to overturn the foundational legal design of space governance. Rather, BRICS reflect an ongoing commitment to the legitimacy of the existing normative framework by largely accepting the core principles of the current system, such as "non-weaponisation" and the "peaceful use of space". Simultaneously, it consistently reframes these rules through the discourse of development, technological autonomy, equity, and multipolarity. This reflects that conflict over how BRICS norms and frameworks should be interpreted and applied is more important than the rejection of Western hegemony.

Selective contestation further proves that BRICS' challenge to Western control primarily functions at the level of agenda-setting, institutional influence, and authority, as opposed to outright norm rejection. BRICS emerges as a coalition that seeks to reform the political direction and meaning of the existing governance systems from within. Together, these findings confirm the hypothesis of this thesis: BRICS' engagement within military space governance is characterised by a combination of replication, contestation, and adaptation that is reflective of a desire for political and normative authority and legitimacy. The analysis broadly shows that the order of space governance is simply not dominated by the West but is a normative environment that continuously evolves with emerging powers that seek to reframe the terms of authority.

7.2. Limitations

This thesis has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study relied primarily upon public documentation; however, several of the documents referenced in the official BRICS archives are no longer available online or inaccessible and therefore were not included. Secondly, findings reflected political signalling rather than operational behaviour because the analysis was focused on discourse instead of military or technological capabilities. Thirdly, declarations included diplomatic and legally vague language that made interpretation difficult, while several BRICS documents linked to key summit milestones in the institutional development of BRICS were unavailable and could not be included.

7.3 Future Research Directions

This thesis provides several new research opportunities. First, by investigating how BRICS' normative positioning is mirrored in current policy practices, technological collaboration, or military space capabilities, future research could expand the examination beyond official discourse. This would allow a more thorough evaluation of the connection between material behaviour and rhetorical positioning.

Secondly, in order to place BRICS within a larger context of emerging normative actors in space governance, comparative research could examine whether similar patterns of replication, adaptation, and contestation can be seen in other Global South partnerships or regional organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or ASEAN.

Third, future studies must examine how BRICS' positioning evolves gradually, particularly with regard to its response to new geopolitical conflicts, technological advancements, and institutional initiatives, as space governance continues to develop rapidly. It would be interesting to evaluate whether BRICS' existing hybrid policy is a stable long-term approach or a temporary stage in the evolution of global space governance with the use of a longitudinal study.

8. Abbreviations

ASAT – Anti Satellite

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

ILRS – International Lunar Research Station

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NASA – Nasa Aeronautics and Space Administration

OST – Outer Space Treaty

PAROS – Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space

PPWT – Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space

UN – United Nations

UN COPOUS – United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

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10. Appendices

10.1. Appendix A: Corpus Overview Table

Title	Year	Meeting/ body	Issuing	Document type	Relevance
Joint statement of BRICS' nations leaders (Yekaterinburg)	2009	BRICS Summit, Yekaterinburg	Summit Declaration		First articulation of collective identity; core discourse.
Sanya Declaration	2011	BRICS Summit, Sanya	Summit Declaration		First declaration in the formal Brexit era; space governance discourse.
eThekwini Declaration	2013	BRICS Summit, Durban	Summit Declaration		Strengthening Global South multilateralism and identity.
Fortaleza Declaration	2014	BRICS Summit, Fortaleza	Summit Declaration		Focus on multipolarity and governance reshaping.
Press release on meeting on BRICS Foreign Ministers (New York)	2014	BRICS Foreign Ministers Meeting, New York	Ministerial Communiqué		Multilateral reforms and governance discourse.
Xiamen Declaration	2017	BRICS Summit, Xiamen	Summit Declaration		“Peaceful use” language, and explicit PAROS.

BRICS meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs	2018	BRICS Minister Meeting, Pretoria	Foreign Ministerial Communiqué	Represents sovereignty framing as well as collective positioning
New Delhi Declaration	2021	BRICS Summit, New Delhi	Summit Declaration	Reaffirms Outer Space Treaty norms and frameworks
Beijing Declaration	2022	BRICS Summit, Beijing	Summit Declaration	Explicit mention of BRICS' Space Corporation and remote sensing constellation
Johannesburg II Declaration	2023	BRICS Summit, Johannesburg	Summit Declaration	Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space support.
Selected BRICS sectoral Ministerial Communiqué	Various	BRICS ministerial meeting	Ministerial Communiqué	Evidence of discourse alignment, and norm coordination.

10.2. Appendix B: Coding Framework

Category	Definition	Indicator	Example from corpus	Source
Replication	The adoption of existing western lead norms or UN	The use of terms such as long-term sustainability,	“We reaffirm our commitment to	BRICS New Delhi

	space governance frameworks without reinterpretation.	peaceful uses of outer space, reaffirmation of outer space treaty, alignment with UN COPUOS language.	the treaty and principles governing activities of States and the exploration and use of outer space...”	Declaration, 2021
Contestation	The implicit or explicit challenge to western LED norms and frameworks.	The support for PWT, calls for governance reform, criticism of unilateralism, and the rejection of weaponisation.	“We Reaffirm the importance of the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space...”	BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration, 2023
Adaptation	The modification of existing norms and frameworks by integrating BRICS’ priorities such as sovereignty, capacity building, and development.	The linking of space governance to climate monitoring, development, technological contribution, specific BRICS cooperation mechanisms.	“We welcome the establishment of the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation.”	BRICS Beijing Declaration, 2022