

Conference track «20.12 BRICS self-identification: national interests and a common strategy  
in 2026»

**Self-Identity in the Digital Age: Divergence of Interests, Strategic Coordination,  
and Pathway Construction in BRICS AI Governance**

**Academic supervisor – Shi Xiaoxue**

*Shi Xiaoxue*

*Postgraduate*

Московский государственный институт международных отношений, Факультет  
управления и политики, Moscow, Россия  
*E-mail: sxiaoxue0920@gmail.com*

The expanded BRICS grouping faces a defining strategic challenge in 2026: constructing a coherent collective self-identity in the digital domain while managing profound internal divergences in national interests, technological capabilities, and governance philosophies. This paper argues that partial digital sovereignty — meaningful autonomy in selected domains combined with managed interdependence — is the most achievable and institutionally sustainable outcome for BRICS collectively.

A common external stimulus exists: Western-aligned actors exercise concentrated dominance across the critical layers of the global AI stack. At the hardware layer, advanced chip manufacturing remains concentrated in TSMC and Samsung, while US export controls systematically deny BRICS members access to frontier computing hardware [Queiroz and Direito, 2025]. At the platform layer, dominant cloud infrastructure and submarine cable networks reinforce digital dependency [Ignatov, 2025]. At the governance layer, the EU AI Act, OECD AI Principles, and G7 Hiroshima Process were developed without substantive Global South input, embedding Western interests into emerging international AI norms [BRICS, 2025].

This common stimulus does not translate into unified internal preferences. Three cleavage lines fragment the bloc. The cyber-sovereignty cleavage separates Russia and China — which pursue state-centric control over digital infrastructure — from Brazil and India, which favour multi-stakeholder frameworks [Jiang and Belli, 2024]. China fully implements all five components of digital state sovereignty; South Africa implements none [Ignatov, 2025]. The geopolitical assertiveness cleavage divides members who conceptualise BRICS as an anti-Western coalition from those, led by India, who prefer multi-alignment. The technological capability cleavage is most structurally consequential: China accounts for over 86% of BRICS generative AI economic impact potential, while all newer members combined represent less than 2% [BRICS Council, 2025].

Despite these divergences, 2025 produced significant institutional outputs. The BRICS Leaders' Statement on the Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence, adopted at Rio de Janeiro on 6 July 2025, constitutes the most consequential multilateral AI governance document produced outside Western-dominated frameworks. It affirms digital sovereignty and the development right as core principles, advocates equitable technology access, positions the United Nations as the central governance forum, and endorses open-source foundational model development [BRICS, 2025]. The accompanying BRICS Data Economy Governance Understanding institutionalises digital coded sovereignty: embedding sovereignty rules into cooperative legal mechanisms rather than imposing blunt data localisation. The New Development Bank's \$5 billion Digital Sovereignty Fund finances AI research parks, distributed data centres, and mature-node semiconductor manufacturing across member states [Malashenko, 2025].

The paper proposes a three-pathway framework for viable digital self-identity. Pathway One concentrates resources on sectors where BRICS+ possesses structural advantages: energy and

critical minerals, agriculture, and digital public infrastructure, where indigenous AI solutions are economically justified and politically feasible. Pathway Two pursues layer-stratified sovereignty: application-layer sovereignty through open-source small language models is already substantially achievable; cloud-layer sovereignty is partially achievable through the Digital Sovereignty Fund; semiconductor sovereignty requires supply chain diversification rather than self-sufficiency. Pathway Three employs selective bilateralism within a multilateral architecture — bilateral arrangements operationalise cooperation while the BRICS framework provides normative legitimacy, following the model of the India-UAE UPI-IPP payment corridor [Moundekar and Sharma, 2025; Reuters, 2026].

India's 2026 BRICS presidency represents a critical window. India's positioning — technically credible, democratically legitimate, strategically non-aligned — makes it best placed to bridge internal cleavages and translate the 2025 normative architecture into operational outcomes through CBDC interoperability pilots and digital public infrastructure knowledge transfer.

BRICS digital self-identity is neither a utopian project of comprehensive technological independence nor a mere rhetorical claim. It is an ongoing institutional construction whose success depends on concentrating ambition where structural advantages are real, calibrating sovereignty claims to technological feasibility, and using bilateral momentum to generate the demonstrated outcomes on which multilateral legitimacy must ultimately rest.

### Источники и литература

- 1) BRICS. 2025. BRICS Leaders' Statement on the Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence. Rio de Janeiro, 6 July. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/250706-ai.html>
- 2) BRICS Council Russia. 2025. Joint BRICS projects in artificial intelligence. <https://bricscouncil.ru/en/analytics/sovместnye-proekty-stran-briks-v-oblasti-iskusstvennogo-intellekta>
- 3) Ignatov A. 2025. Comparative study of policies for implementing state digital sovereignty by BRICS members. International Organisations Research Journal, vol. 20, no. 3. <http://doi.org/10.17323/1996-7845-2025-03-04>
- 4) Jiang M. and Belli L. (eds). 2024. Digital sovereignty in the BRICS countries. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009531085>
- 5) Malashenko T.I. 2025. The concept of digital sovereignty of BRICS as a factor in the creation of a full-cycle oil and gas ecosystem. Interacao. <https://doi.org/10.5902/2357797593405>
- 6) Moundekar B.R. and Sharma G.S. 2025. Administrative sovereignty in the age of algorithmic governance. RUDN Journal of Public Administration, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 502-508. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2025-12-4-502-508>
- 7) Queiroz S. and Direito D. 2025. Discussion Paper 3132. IPEA. <https://doi.org/10.38116/td3132-eng>
- 8) Reuters. 2026. India central bank proposes linking BRICS digital currencies. 19 January. <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-central-bank-proposes-linking-brics-digital-currencies-sources-say-2026-01-19/>