



Africa and BRICS+ in a Disrupted Global Order: Strategic Autonomy under Trump 2.0

By

Sulaiman Saidu Abubakar

Department of Political Science, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna

Abstract

The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2025 has deepened fractures in the post–World War II global governance system, creating profound uncertainties for the Global South. While BRICS+ has emerged as a pivotal coalition reshaping international economic and political relations, Africa’s positioning within this evolving landscape remains under-examined. The core problem this study addresses is how African states can pursue strategic autonomy and sustainable development when the established liberal order is in retreat and BRICS+ offers both opportunities and risks. The study analysed Africa’s engagement with BRICS+ in the context of US disruption of multilateral institutions under Trump 2.0, specifically examining the viability of BRICS+ as an alternative platform for African participation in global governance and the strategies African countries use to balance agency between competing powers to avoid dependency traps. Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative research design, combining discourse analysis of official communiqués and policy statements with case studies of Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia. These were evaluated using indicators such as trade alignment, institutional hedging, and policy autonomy, supported by secondary data on trade, FDI, and governance frameworks. The study found that while BRICS+ enhances Africa’s bargaining power and policy space, challenges of asymmetry, debt, and geopolitical rivalry undermine its potential benefits. It argues that Africa’s strategic autonomy depends on recalibrating engagement with both BRICS+ and Western institutions. Ultimately, this study contributes to debates on multipolarity, dependency theory, and African agency, offering insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners navigating an unstable global order.

Keywords: Africa, BRICS+, Trump 2.0, global governance, strategic autonomy.



1. Introduction

The return of Donald Trump to the United States (US) presidency in 2025 has intensified existing fractures in the post–World War II liberal international order. Renewed American unilateralism, scepticism toward multilateral institutions, and transactional approaches to trade and security have further weakened already strained systems of global governance. For the Global South, these shifts have heightened uncertainty, reduced the predictability of external partnerships, and narrowed the policy space available to developing states seeking sustainable development and political autonomy (IDOS, 2025). Within this disrupted environment, the rise of BRICS+ has acquired renewed significance as both a potential counterweight to Western dominance and a contested arena of power in its own right (Institute of Foreign Affairs [IFA], 2026).

A growing body of scholarship documents these parallel transformations. Analysts of global governance point to declining US leadership, institutional paralysis, and the erosion of rules-based multilateralism as defining features of the contemporary order (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung [KAS], 2025). At the same time, studies of BRICS and its expanded BRICS+ configuration emphasise its ambitions to reform international financial institutions, promote South–South cooperation, and advance a more multipolar distribution of power (African Union [AU], 2026). Yet despite Africa’s growing strategic importance within both Western and non-Western frameworks, its role in this evolving landscape remains under-examined. Existing literature often treats African states as peripheral actors, framing them either as passive recipients of external pressures or as undifferentiated beneficiaries of South–South solidarity (Stiglitz et al., 2025).

This paper argues that such representations obscure the agency, diversity, and strategic calculations of African states operating under conditions of global disruption. A central question, therefore, is how African countries can pursue strategic autonomy when the established liberal order is in retreat, and BRICS+ presents a dual reality of opportunity and risk. While research on Asia and Latin America has produced valuable insights into hedging strategies and forms of smart autonomy, there is a need for closer attention to African experiences, particularly those of states with sufficient economic, political, or institutional weight to shape, rather than merely absorb, external dynamics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs



[MFA], 2025).

Against this backdrop, the paper addresses two interrelated questions. First, to what extent can BRICS+ function as a viable alternative platform for African participation in global governance under Trump 2.0. Second, how can African states balance engagement among competing power centres in ways that expand policy space without reproducing new forms of dependency (IDOS, 2025). Rather than treating BRICS+ as a substitute for Western-led institutions, the analysis approaches it as one component within a broader constellation of global governance arrangements that African states must navigate simultaneously.

By situating African agency at the centre of analysis, this paper contributes to debates on multipolarity, dependency, and strategic autonomy in the Global South. It demonstrates that while BRICS+ can enhance Africa's bargaining power and expand diplomatic and economic options, its benefits are neither automatic nor uniform. Strategic autonomy, the chapter contends, emerges not from bloc alignment alone, but from the capacity to manage asymmetries, leverage overlapping institutions, and align external engagement with domestic and regional priorities (AU, 2026). In doing so, the study offers grounded insights for scholars and policymakers seeking to understand Africa's evolving role in an increasingly unstable global order.

1.2 The BRICS+ Paradox: Ontological Realism vs. China's Contradictory Dominance

A central debate in the literature concerns the ontological nature of the BRICS+ coalition, specifically whether it serves as a reformist "adjunct" or a revisionist "alternative." Chakraborty (2018) and Kashyap and Pal (2025) represent the transformative school, arguing that the Russia-India-China (RIC) Troika provides a "roadmap for a multipolar world". They contend that BRICS rebalances global power from the North to the South by offering regional powers a platform outside Western hegemony and increasing their leverage within international financial institutions. This transformative view is supported by Freddy and Thomas (2023), who characterise the expansion of the grouping as a form of 'status competition' where rising powers seek to convert their material economic surge into genuine institutional influence within global governance. Prat (2025) deepens this argument by introducing "Ontological



Realism," a framework that rejects the scarcity axiom of Western realism. Prat (2025) hypothesises that BRICS represents a shift towards an "equitable world order" based on "ontological peace," freedom from disturbance, and bottom-up representation, citing measurable equity gains in IMF quota shifts and local-currency trade post-2023.

This optimism is sharply contested by Andal and Muratshina (2022) and Beeson and Zeng (2018). Utilising critical discourse analysis, Andal and Muratshina (2022) argue that BRICS remains an "adjunct," trapped within the very Western-centric political imaginaries it claims to challenge. They find "considerable heterogeneity" in member perceptions, suggesting that the group lacks a unified political imaginary to offer a full-fledged alternative to the West. Beeson and Zeng (2018) go further, highlighting "China's contradictory role" within the bloc. They argue that China's illiberal, nationally driven priorities create an "asymmetric interdependence" that may replicate old power dynamics, potentially undermining the coalition's ability to act as a genuine alternative. This structural critique is expanded by Williams (2025), who identifies "contradictions" within BRICS decolonial aspirations. Through a feminist economic lens, Williams (2025) notes that the coalition's reliance on China's economic weight risks marginalising smaller states and replicating patriarchal hierarchies in development financing.

1.3 The Tactical Spectrum of Middle Powers: Hedging and "Smart Autonomy"

For states caught in the crossfire of the U.S.–China rivalry, the literature explores a variety of tactical frameworks. Kara (2025) identifies "strategic hedging" as India's guiding principle, using "return-maximising" and "risk-contingency" measures to mitigate the harm of great-power competition while extracting commercial concessions from all sides. This is supported by Lee et al. (2025), who apply a realist perspective to Indonesia's 2025 accession to BRICS+, arguing it is a "realist calculation" to hedge against Western volatility and reduce reliance on Western-centric institutions. However, Lee et al. (2025) also note that Indonesia's engagement remains "deliberately shallow," tapping into BRICS where payoffs are high while keeping exit options open to avoid over-dependence on any single power.

In the Latin American context, Neves (2025) proposes the "Smart Autonomy" approach for Brazil. This approach combines traditional "Universalism," maintaining broad international relations regardless of ideology, with tactical "minilateral" partnerships to bypass fractured multilateral institutions. Conversely, the viability of these strategies for the broader Global



South is questioned by Duggan et al. (2022), who conclude that the economic surge has not yet translated into a coherent political voice, leaving many states vulnerable to "institutional paralysis" as the post-Western world fragments. De et al. (2025) use simulation models to show that while India might maintain positive welfare gains during a global trade war by leveraging its domestic market, smaller economies face significant welfare losses and GDP reductions under Trump's tariff escalation.

1.4. Africa at the Tipping Point: "Fiscal Cliffs" vs. Multi-aligned Agency

The literature on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) reveals a distinct level of vulnerability to the dual shocks of American disengagement and BRICS+ expansion. Kohnert (2025) warns that the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID will have dire effects, deepening humanitarian crises in countries like Sudan and Kenya. Furthermore, Kohnert (2025) argues that Trump's support for African autocracies through "resource-for-security" deals will dismantle democratic transitions in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, as transactional military support replaces the long-term goal of institutional reform. Igbatayo (2025) documents the specific nature of this vulnerability in Nigeria, noting that the U.S. agenda for domestic drilling and low gasoline prices poses a direct threat to Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and overall economic stability, potentially leading to a "fiscal cliff" for the Nigerian state.

In contrast to these pessimistic views, Eseyin (2025) and Kane (2025) suggest that the Global South-North dichotomy has reached a "tipping point" where African states can demand structural and systemic changes to the international order. Kane (2025) specifically frames the Global South as a geostrategic identity that gives collective voice to nations opposing unilateralism and the use of coercion in the international arena. This perspective is supported by the foundational work of Jayan (2012), who emphasises that organisations such as BRICS can play a meaningful role in global governance only if they "tune to the member countries' regional and political frameworks" rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all model.

This potential for agency is increasingly explored through the lens of digital and regional institutionalism. Adejumo and Junfeng (2025) shift the focus from commodity dependence to the necessity of structural diversification, arguing that current global disruptions serve as a catalyst for African states to diversify away from US-centric platforms, digital infrastructures, and ecosystems. They contend that the rise of BRICS+ provides African regionalism the



leverage needed to challenge Western dominance. This view is bolstered by Xu Jian (2025), who characterises the Western monopoly over core algorithms and standard barriers as "digital hegemony" that excludes developing countries from global AI governance. Xu Jian (2025) and Adejumo and Junfeng (2025) collectively argue that by strengthening regional blocs such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and forging South-South digital alliances, African states can bridge the "intelligence divide" and establish a distributed, multi-node innovation model that bypasses Western technological dominance. Ultimately, Apampa (2025) concludes that to avoid becoming "collateralised resource hubs," African regional institutions must defend their sovereignty through a strategic "Multi-aligned Strategic Autonomy" that leverages competing power blocs without succumbing to any single external agenda.

1.5 Reimagining Dependency Theory in the BRICS+ Era

Dependency theory remains a vital starting point for understanding Africa's peripheral role in the global political economy. Historically, the "core-periphery" model highlighted how African development was structurally subordinated to Western industrial needs (Prebisch, 1950; Wallerstein, 1974). However, the rise of the BRICS+ coalition and the "Trump 2.0" shock necessitate a refinement of this lens. In the current era, the risk is no longer just Western extraction but a "diversified dependency" or "neo-dependency" (Klingebiel & Sumner, 2025).

As Bond (2017) and Taylor (2023) suggest, interaction with emerging powers can replicate asymmetric patterns where Africa remains a primary resource supplier while importing high-value finished goods and technology (Bond, 2017; Taylor, 2023). This study utilises this refined dependency lens to evaluate the "dependency traps"—such as unsustainable debt and "resource-for-security" deals—that potentially undermine African agency as states transition from Western-centric to multipolar networks.

1.6. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the strategic alignment of African middle powers within a shifting global governance framework. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this inquiry as they allow for a nuanced interpretation of the specific strategic choices and policy shifts made by these states that broader statistical trends may overlook (Yin, 2018). By focusing on the quality of diplomatic engagement and the strategic



intent behind policy shifts, this approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how African states navigate the specific disruptions of the "Trump 2.0" era.

The research utilises a purposive sampling strategy, selecting Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia as representative cases of African middle powers with distinct roles in the BRICS+ ecosystem. South Africa is included as a founding African member of the BRICS coalition, offering a baseline for long-term institutional engagement. Ethiopia represents a newly admitted BRICS+ member, providing insights into the motivations of states transitioning toward multipolar networks. Nigeria, as West Africa's largest economy, serves as a crucial case for examining the "fiscal cliff" and the challenges of maintaining policy independence while managing significant trade dependencies.

The study relies primarily on secondary data collected from a diverse range of official and academic sources, including government communiqués, policy statements, and international treaty documents, alongside secondary datasets on trade and FDI. To ensure a rigorous evaluation, the research employs documentary discourse analysis. This method focuses on uncovering the strategic logic and policy priorities embedded in official communication to understand how power relations are negotiated with both Western and BRICS+ actors.

To examine patterns of strategic autonomy, the three case studies are analysed using a set of guiding analytical dimensions rather than rigid indicators. Trade alignment is explored through observed shifts in trade discourse, diversification strategies, and efforts to reduce exposure to Western trade volatility, including increased emphasis on intra-African cooperation and engagement with BRICS+ partners. Institutional hedging is assessed by examining the extent and character of diplomatic and financial engagement with alternative platforms, such as BRICS+ and the New Development Bank, alongside continued interaction with Bretton Woods institutions. Policy autonomy is examined through qualitative instances in which these states articulate and sustain sovereign diplomatic or economic positions that navigate competing power centres without exclusive alignment.

Finally, the analytical strategy incorporates a cross-case comparison to identify common themes and divergent pathways across the three cases. By synthesising insights from discourse analysis with observed patterns in trade orientation and institutional engagement, the chapter draws broader conclusions about the contours and limits of African agency under conditions



of global disruption. This comparative approach helps ensure that the subsequent case study analysis remains grounded in official records and relevant secondary scholarship, while remaining attentive to variation across national contexts.

1.7 Case Study Analysis: Nigeria

This case study examines Nigeria as a lens through which the chapter's two central research questions are explored. It considers whether BRICS+ can function as a meaningful alternative platform for African participation in global governance under Trump 2.0, and how African states might pursue strategic autonomy by balancing engagement among competing power centres without falling into new forms of dependency.

Nigeria is a particularly salient case due to its position as Africa's largest economy, its demographic and energy significance, and its central role in West African regional governance. Unlike South Africa, Nigeria is not a formal member of BRICS+, yet it remains deeply embedded in global markets and highly exposed to shifts in US and Chinese economic policy. This positionality allows the Nigerian case to illuminate the constraints and possibilities of strategic autonomy for African states operating outside formal alternative blocs, while still engaging intensively with both Western and non-Western power centres.

At the domestic level, Nigeria's engagement with a disrupted global order is shaped by persistent fiscal pressures, debt sustainability challenges, exchange rate volatility, and the ongoing imperative of macroeconomic and structural reform. Externally, these vulnerabilities are compounded by the protectionist and unilateral orientation of US foreign and economic policy under Trump 2.0, which has narrowed traditional avenues of trade preference and development finance while increasing uncertainty in Nigeria's external economic relations.

Taken together, Nigeria's experience provides a critical lens through which to examine the limits and possibilities of multi-aligned agency in a fragmented global order. The case highlights how internal economic constraints interact with shifting global power dynamics to shape African agency, revealing both the opportunities and risks associated with engaging BRICS+ alongside continued participation in Western-led institutions without the institutional insulation afforded by formal bloc membership.



The Fiscal Cliff and the Imperative of Trade Diversification

Nigeria's strategic autonomy is fundamentally constrained by a 'fiscal cliff' characterised by a staggering misalignment between revenue and debt obligations (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2025). In January 2025, the CBN (2025) reported that debt-servicing requirements reached ₦696.27 billion, effectively consuming approximately 144% of the month's retained revenue. This structural vulnerability, further exacerbated by crude oil prices fluctuating below the budgeted benchmark of \$75 per barrel, has forced the Nigerian state to seek "economic oxygen" beyond traditional Western-centric frameworks (News Central TV, 2025; Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research [NISER], 2025).

Consequently, Nigeria has accelerated its Trade Diversification strategy, pivoting towards the RIC Troika to secure alternative markets and investment. By the first quarter of 2025, India emerged as Nigeria's largest export destination, receiving ₦2.84 trillion in goods (primarily crude oil), whilst China solidified its position as the primary import source, supplying ₦4.66 trillion in manufactured goods and machinery (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2025). This "South-South" pivot is a calculated attempt to convert material economic necessity into institutional influence, ensuring that Nigeria's energy exports remain insulated from the volatility of American trade protectionism.

Institutional Participation: The BRICS+ Partnership as a Strategic Hedge

Nigeria's approach to global governance has evolved from passive observation to active institutional hedging. On 17 January 2025, Nigeria officially achieved Partner Country status within the BRICS+ bloc (MFA, 2025). Whilst the administration has not yet secured full political membership, a status currently held by Ethiopia and Egypt, this partnership serves as a crucial "Plan B" against the "New Washington Dissensus". This status enables the Nigerian state to participate in thematic meetings and special summits, thereby institutionalising its "multi-aligned" agency without necessitating a total diplomatic rupture with Western allies.

This institutional hedging is most visible in Nigeria's dual-track approach to infrastructure: while it maintains deep bilateral ties with China for legacy projects, it is simultaneously intensifying engagement with the New Development Bank (NDB). For instance, although the Ibadan–Abuja–Kaduna–Kano railway network remains primarily supported by Chinese



capital—evidenced by the China Development Bank’s (CDB) \$254.76 million loan approved in January 2025—Nigeria’s pursuit of NDB membership serves as a strategic move to secure a separate, multilateral avenue for future projects without the stringent political conditionalities of Bretton Woods institutions (China Development Bank [CDB], 2025; Tunji, 2025). By maintaining "Partner" status, Nigeria preserves its flexibility; it can benefit from BRICS+ developmental capital whilst avoiding a total diplomatic rupture with the West, thereby operationalising a "multi-aligned" stance that maximises bargaining power in both spheres.

Policy Independence and Security Agency in a Multiplex World

In the realm of security, Nigeria’s "Multi-aligned Agency" is expressed through the rejection of binary alliances. Despite a history of counter-terrorism cooperation with the US, Nigeria has significantly diversified its security partnerships to include both China and Russia. In September 2024, the relationship with China was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, encompassing joint efforts in defence, clean energy, and nuclear technology (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China [FMPRC], 2024; The State House, 2024).

This diversification allows Nigeria to maintain Policy Independence even as the U.S. shifts toward an "America Alone" security doctrine. By acquiring military hardware and satellite technology from BRICS+ partners, Nigeria ensures that its national security priorities, specifically the stabilisation of the Sahel and the protection of oil infrastructure, are not "collateralised" to the geopolitical whims of the West. This "principled non-alignment" reflects a pragmatic realisation: in a "multiplex" world order, security is best achieved through a mosaic of partnerships rather than a single umbrella.

Digital Sovereignty and Infrastructure: Negotiating the Technological Gap

A critical but often overlooked dimension of Nigeria's strategy is the pursuit of Digital Sovereignty. Under the 2025 "Budget of Restoration", the Nigerian state has prioritised broadband expansion and 5G deployment as drivers of non-oil growth (NBS, 2025; NISER, 2025). This focus on domestic digital control aims to reduce reliance on foreign technological hegemonies while positioning the digital economy as a central pillar of Nigeria’s "multi-aligned" developmental path. Recognising the risks of Western "strategic annexation" of the



digital sphere, where platform dominance often precedes regulatory capture, Nigeria has increasingly looked to Chinese firms for the infrastructure required to bridge its domestic gap (Balogun, 2025; Tian, 2026).

However, this strategy introduces a paradox: while it bypasses Western 'de-risking' barriers, it risks a 'neo-dependency' on Eastern technological standards. To mitigate this, Nigeria has pursued local currency swap agreements, renewed for three years in September 2024, to facilitate trade and technological acquisition in Naira and Renminbi, thereby reducing its vulnerability to U.S. dollar-based sanctions (FMPRC, 2024; NBS, 2025). This focus on financial and digital infrastructure is central to Nigeria's attempt to build a 'smart autonomy' that is resilient to external global shocks (Balogun, 2025; Tian, 2026).

Regional Hegemony and the AU Dimension

Nigeria leverages its regional hegemony within the AU to frame its individual 'Multi-aligned Agency' as a template for the continent. As the sole West African partner within BRICS+ in 2025, Nigeria advocates for a collective African position that ensures South-South cooperation supports, rather than undermines, regional integration projects like the AfCFTA, (Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment [FMITI], 2025; MFA, 2025). This positioning allows Nigeria to act as a 'diplomatic hinge,' ensuring that its global partnerships serve the broader objective of continental economic sovereignty.

Through the AU, Nigeria advocates for consensus on African representation within global bodies like the UN Security Council, using its BRICS+ partnership as a platform to lobby for structural reforms (MFA, 2025; The State House, 2025). By positioning itself as the 'continental voice' within these new poles of power, Nigeria ensures that its strategic hedging is perceived not as a departure from the West, but as a leadership role in the construction of a more equitable, multipolar global governance architecture (Tian, 2026; The Nation, 2025).

1.8. Cross-Case Synthesis: Strategic Autonomy, BRICS+, and African Agency in a Disrupted Global Order

Collectively, the cases of South Africa, Nigeria, and Ethiopia provide a comparative basis for evaluating the chapter's two central research questions: the extent to which BRICS+ can function as a viable alternative platform for African participation in global governance under



Trump 2.0, and how African states can pursue strategic autonomy while avoiding the reproduction of new forms of dependency in a fragmented international system. The cross-case analysis demonstrates that BRICS+ expands Africa's bargaining space, but its effectiveness is conditional, uneven, and deeply shaped by domestic capacity, institutional positioning, and the ability to combine, rather than substitute, engagement across competing power centres (AU, 2026).

Fiscal Agency and the Debt–Sovereignty Nexus

A core point of convergence across the three cases is the challenge of fiscal agency within a global financial system characterised by high borrowing costs, asymmetric conditionalities, and vulnerability to external shocks. Nigeria's exposure to fiscal stress and market volatility, South Africa's sustained critique of structural biases in global capital markets, and Ethiopia's experience with debt restructuring collectively illustrate the limits of Western-dominated multilateral finance as a sole anchor for development strategy (DIRCO, 2025).

The synthesis suggests that BRICS+ does not replace institutions such as the IMF or World Bank, but functions instead as a strategic hedge that can marginally improve African bargaining power. South Africa leverages its institutional multiplicity to advocate reforms from within, as evidenced by the 2025 G20 Leaders' Declaration, which called for a recalibration of development finance (G20 Research Group, 2025). Ethiopia uses BRICS+ membership to diversify sources of finance, evidenced by its \$261 million IMF disbursement in January 2026 being supported by a broader debt-rebalancing narrative (IMF, 2026). Nigeria seeks partnership-based engagement to reduce overreliance on traditional channels, having formally accepted BRICS+ Partner Country status in January 2025 to advance infrastructure and technology cooperation (MFA, 2025). In each case, fiscal sovereignty is not achieved through exit, but through diversification and negotiated engagement, underscoring the contingent nature of strategic autonomy.

Institutional Hedging under Trump 2.0

The return of Trump-style unilateralism has acted as an accelerant rather than a rupture in African foreign policy behaviour. Across all three cases, reduced predictability in US trade, aid, and diplomatic engagement has reinforced the logic of institutional hedging. South



Africa's G20 Presidency demonstrates how African middle powers can preserve the functioning of multilateral governance even amid great power disengagement, exemplified by Pretoria securing a consensus declaration in November 2025 despite a formal US boycott. Ethiopia's BRICS+ accession offers a degree of geopolitical insurance against external pressure, particularly after the expiration of AGOA in September 2025 and the subsequent imposition of a universal 10 per cent US tariff (IFA, 2026; IDOS, 2025).

Nigeria's non-membership, however, highlights both the flexibility and vulnerability of operating outside formal alternative blocs, with its exports to the US dropping by 17 per cent following the trade policy shifts of 2025 (KAS, 2025). Rather than converging on a single model, the cases reveal differentiated strategies of multi-aligned agency. BRICS+ serves as one node within a wider institutional ecosystem that includes the G20, the African Union, regional economic communities, and Western-led institutions. Strategic autonomy, in this context, emerges from the capacity to navigate overlapping and sometimes competing governance frameworks.

Digital Sovereignty and Emerging Forms of Dependency

Another area of convergence lies in growing concern over technological dependence and digital governance. Across the three cases, strategic autonomy is increasingly framed not only in terms of finance or diplomacy, but also in relation to data governance, critical minerals, and technological standards. South Africa's emphasis on normative leadership is manifest in its proposal for an International Panel on Inequality (IPI), designed to monitor digital wealth disparities (Stiglitz et al., 2025). Nigeria's focus on regional digital trade frameworks saw it ratified as the AfCFTA Digital Trade Champion in early 2025, becoming the first state to ratify the protocol in November 2025 (The State House, 2025; Guardian Nigeria, 2026).

Ethiopia's selective engagement with non-Western technology partners, particularly through the Sino-Ethiopian tech nexus, reflects a distinct pathway towards mitigating new forms of dependency (Plataforma Media, 2026). However, the synthesis also reveals that digital sovereignty remains highly constrained. Engagement with alternative partners may reduce exposure to Western dominance, but it does not eliminate asymmetry, particularly where



technological ecosystems are controlled by major powers.

Regional Anchoring and African Institutional Linkages

A final cross-cutting insight concerns the importance of regional and continental anchoring. In all three cases, strategic autonomy is strengthened when global engagement is linked to African institutional frameworks. South Africa's alignment of global initiatives with continental priorities, Ethiopia's diplomatic centrality as host of the African Union, and Nigeria's leadership role within West Africa all demonstrate that African agency is most effective when exercised through coordinated, multi-level strategies. This is evidenced by the push for de-dollarisation and the integration of BRICS+ payment systems with the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) ahead of the 39th AU Summit in February 2026 (AU, 2026; IFA, 2026).

This finding reinforces a central argument of the chapter: Africa's engagement with BRICS+ is most productive when embedded within broader regional and continental projects, rather than pursued as a standalone alternative to Western institutions. The key indicators of this differentiated strategic autonomy across the three case studies are synthesised in Table 1. Strategic autonomy under Trump 2.0 is therefore best understood as a process of multi-aligned engagement, in which African states selectively leverage competing power centres while remaining attentive to the risks of dependency, fragmentation, and institutional imbalance.



Indicator	Nigeria	South Africa	Ethiopia
Fiscal Strategy	Trade and Financing Diversification	Reform of Capital Cost Structures	Debt Restructuring and Liquidity Hedging
BRICS+ Role	Partner Country	Full Member and Institutional Mediator	Full Member and Strategic Hedge
Primary Institutional Forums	AfCFTA and BRICS+	G20 and BRICS+	African Union and BRICS+
Digital Governance Priority	Regional Digital Trade Leadership	Normative Leadership in Data Governance	Digital Infrastructure and Technological Autonomy

Table 1: Comparative Indicators of Strategic Autonomy

1.9. Concluding Remarks

This chapter set out to examine Africa’s engagement with BRICS+ in a disrupted global order shaped by the return of United States unilateralism under Trump 2.0. It asked, first, to what extent BRICS+ can function as a viable alternative platform for African participation in global governance, and second, how African states can pursue strategic autonomy while avoiding the reproduction of dependency in an increasingly fragmented international system. Through a comparative analysis of South Africa, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, the chapter has shown that BRICS+ expands Africa’s bargaining space, but does not constitute a substitute for strategic agency or for engagement with established global institutions.

Across the three cases, BRICS+ emerges less as an alternative order than as a complementary arena within a broader strategy of multi-aligned engagement. South Africa’s experience demonstrates how institutional multiplicity enhances leverage, allowing African middle



powers to hedge against the retreat of Western multilateralism while remaining embedded within global governance structures such as the G20. Ethiopia's accession to BRICS+ highlights both the opportunities afforded by institutional inclusion and the enduring constraints imposed by structural asymmetries, debt exposure, and limited agenda-setting power within the bloc. Nigeria's position outside formal BRICS+ membership underscores that strategic autonomy is not contingent on bloc inclusion alone, but is instead shaped by domestic capacity, fiscal resilience, and the ability to navigate shifting global power relations.

The findings suggest that strategic autonomy in the current global context is neither absolute nor ideological. Rather, it is exercised pragmatically through calibrated participation across overlapping institutions and partnerships. In this sense, African agency is best understood not as non-alignment or bloc substitution, but as continuous negotiation within a multiplex order characterised by competing centres of power, finance, and norm-setting. While BRICS+ offers African states additional leverage, access, and diplomatic visibility, it also carries risks of asymmetry, particularly in relation to finance, technology, and agenda control. Without deliberate strategies to manage these risks, alternative platforms may reproduce, rather than resolve, hierarchical dependencies.

A further contribution of this chapter lies in highlighting the centrality of regional and continental anchoring to the pursuit of strategic autonomy. The cases show that African agency is most effective when global engagement is linked to regional frameworks such as the African Union, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and Agenda 2063. By embedding BRICS+ participation within continental priorities, African states can better translate external engagement into developmental outcomes while mitigating exposure to external shocks and geopolitical volatility.

The case studies further demonstrate that strategic autonomy is a dynamic, navigational process rather than a fixed outcome. Nigeria's partner status illustrates how states can de-risk against external shocks while leveraging regional frameworks, South Africa exemplifies the role of middle powers as normative anchors capable of shaping global agendas, and Ethiopia shows how BRICS+ membership can act as "geopolitical insurance" for developmental and debt management objectives. Collectively, these findings reinforce that strategic autonomy is strengthened when national agency is linked to continental integration, and that African states



must continuously balance diversification, institutional leverage, and domestic capacity within a fragmented and competitive global order.

Furthermore, the chapter contributes to debates on multipolarity, dependency theory, and global governance by challenging binary narratives that frame BRICS+ as either a panacea or a threat. Instead, it advances a more nuanced understanding of Africa's positioning in a disrupted world order, one in which agency is contingent, negotiated, and unevenly distributed. Under Trump 2.0, the erosion of liberal multilateralism has not eliminated African options, but it has raised the stakes of strategic choice. The future of Africa's engagement with BRICS+ will therefore depend less on bloc membership itself than on the capacity of African states to balance diversification with discipline, autonomy with interdependence, and opportunity with risk in an increasingly unstable global system.

This finding reinforces a central argument of the chapter: Africa's engagement with BRICS+ is most productive when embedded within broader regional and continental projects, rather than pursued as a standalone alternative to Western institutions. The key indicators of this differentiated strategic autonomy across the three case studies are synthesised in Table 1. Strategic autonomy under Trump 2.0 is therefore best understood as a process of multi-aligned engagement, in which African states selectively leverage competing power centres while remaining attentive to the risks of dependency, fragmentation, and institutional imbalance.

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