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## To be or not to be: Has Mexico got what it takes to be an emerging power?

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Mexico has the material resources to be considered an emerging power, given the size of its economy, population, geography and other aspects. However, the country has displayed a limited capacity to project leadership, both at the international and at the regional level. Drawing on a number of comparisons with Brazil (the largest economy in Latin America) and other BRICS countries, this paper shows how Mexico has failed to use its existing resources to become more influential in multilateral institutions, particularly within the United Nations. This paper argues that not only Mexican diplomats but also the economic and political elites in the country have been reluctant for the country to act as an emerging power on the world stage. Unlike Brazil, with its strong international identity, Mexico is conditioned by its proximity to and economic dependence on the US. It has failed to position itself as a bridge between the South and the North and it has lacked a coherent long-term foreign policy. In addition, a weak Secretariat of Foreign Affairs and a poorly coordinated, decentralised diplomatic corps with insufficient personnel and resources have also undermined Mexico's international performance.

**Keywords:** Mexico; emerging powers; BRICS, MIKTA, Brazil

### Introduction

Mexico has sufficient resources to be considered an emerging power, given the size of its economy, population, geography and other aspects. Nevertheless, the country has displayed a limited capacity to project leadership, both at the international as well as at the regional level. Authors have argued, in particular, that Mexico is a candidate for inclusion within the group of middle powers, in spite of the fact that there is limited agreement in this regard.<sup>1</sup> However, little has been written on Mexico as an emerging power<sup>2</sup> and almost no study systematically examines whether Mexico meets the criteria to be considered an emerging power. This paper assesses the literature on emerging powers and draws on a number of comparisons between Mexico and the BRICS countries, with a special emphasis on Brazil – the largest economy in Latin America and a nation with material resources similar to those of Mexico. By looking at four elements used in the literature to characterise emerging powers – the capacity to influence the international order, a strong international identity, a revisionism that derives from their dissatisfaction with the existing world order and regional leadership – this article concludes that Mexico lacks some of the key elements that would seem necessary for membership in the emerging powers club, at least in the way in which this notion has been portrayed in academic literature.

This article will provide evidence on how Mexico has been unable to acquire emerging power status like the BRICS countries because, as the literature shows, its

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capacity to influence multilateral institutions is limited; its international identity as a 'bridge' country between the North and the South is problematic; its stance on the international order lacks a reformist orientation, particularly on economic issues; and it has little capacity to exercise regional leadership. To a great extent this is because Mexico's performance on the world stage is conditioned by its proximity to, and economic dependence on, the US. However, it is also because Mexican authorities have failed to promote a coherent, long-term state foreign policy. The Secretariat of Foreign Affairs lacks power within the government structure as well as sufficient human and material resources, factors that have severely undermined Mexico's international performance.

This paper argues that the capacity of any nation to become an emerging power depends not only on its material resources, but also on its capacity to exercise 'structural leadership',<sup>3</sup> understood as the ability to translate 'the possession of material resources into bargaining leverage cast in terms appropriate to the issues at stake in specific instances of institutional bargaining'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the capacity to exercise structural leadership needs to be maintained over the years in a consistent fashion, as part of a long-term project. As Nabers<sup>5</sup> points out, international leadership 'rests on continuity, stability, and repetition'. Particularly important, this author argues, is that the foreign policy community, as well as the most influential economic and political elites, share an internalised and explicit objective of international leadership and a common vision of the country's role in the international order.

The first section of this paper considers Mexico from the perspective of the four characteristics of emerging powers that are present in the literature. It should be noted that these characteristics are not necessarily shared by middle powers. The following section briefly examines Mexico's material resources and goes on to argue that Mexican elites have been unable to exercise structural leadership. Analysis starts by assessing the country's poor diplomatic resources before a look at the performance of Mexico in the UN, its absence from peacekeeping missions and its incapacity to use international development cooperation to project its interests in the international arena. Discussion then addresses the question of Mexican international identity and then the limited capacity of the country to be a leader in Latin America. Although this is not a systematic comparative study, analysis includes comparisons with Brazil (and sometimes other BRICS countries) that are useful to support many of the arguments.

### **Emerging powers**

The literature on emerging powers is still underdeveloped and relies extensively on the BRICS countries and on the specific country case studies focused on the founding members, Brazil, Russia, India and China.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a certain conceptual confusion exists between terms such as regional powers, emerging powers, emerging economies and the more common middle powers. Many scholars writing about the so-called emerging powers have been using middle-power theories based on the experience of countries such as Canada, Australia or Norway as an analytical framework. Certainly, emerging powers have several differences in terms of domestic political institutions, international agendas, economic structures, natural resources and levels of industrialisation.<sup>7</sup> However, there are some distinctive elements that give them certain coherence. This article relies heavily on the theoretical framework deployed by Huelsz<sup>8</sup> and other scholars, which identifies four elements common to emerging powers, which help to characterise them and distinguish their performance in international institutions. As I will show in this paper, Mexico has

difficulties in fulfilling these criteria. Despite this fact, Mexico is commonly included within groups of nations that might be seen to aspire to emerging power status, such as the MIST group (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey) or the more recently formed MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia), both of which are discussed fulsomely elsewhere in the literature.<sup>9</sup> This discussion will rather look more closely at the four elements common to emerging powers, in order to demonstrate whether Mexico might reasonably be considered to feature among them.

First, emerging powers have a capacity to influence the international order, either regionally or globally, based on their possession of material resources (usually the size of their economy, geography and population). What makes emerging powers relevant is the fact that they have acquired 'enough power to change the face of global politics and economics'.<sup>10</sup> Emerging powers are generally situated differently, in terms of structural contexts, relative to industrialised economies. However, their material resources provide them with a 'degree of influence in the global economy'<sup>11</sup> as well as in international politics. Not all emerging powers, particularly within the BRICS, have achieved similar growth rates. Nevertheless, the core argument in the business and financial literature as to why these countries are significant rests mainly upon their 'sheer economic size'.<sup>12</sup>

Second, *emerging powers have a strong international identity*, which is 'based on a clear view of world order and an understanding of the country's actual potential position within this order'.<sup>13</sup> In general, these countries share 'a belief in the entitlement to a more influential role in world affairs'.<sup>14</sup> India and China perceive themselves, for instance, as 'world civilizations'. In the Brazilian case, this belief is part of a 'faith in Brazil's potential as a world power'. As Huelsz<sup>15</sup> persuasively argues, a strong belief of Brazilian elites that their country 'could and should be granted influence in the world affairs' has been present throughout Brazilian history.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Brazil's strong international identity derives from the country's continental size, its position as an empire among republics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its diplomatic means for resolving any outstanding border disputes with its neighbours at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to remember, however, that 'aspiration alone ... is not sufficient', as Hurrell<sup>17</sup> notes, because 'power in international relations requires a purpose and a project'.

Third, *emerging powers tend to be revisionist states*, because many of them are dissatisfied with the world order. Their strategies in international politics have a reforming character and seek to increase the bargaining power of the developing world within international multilateral organisations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and/or the G20. These countries are revisionist in the sense that, while they try to integrate into the global economic system, at the same time they seek to revise at least some of its basic aspects.<sup>18</sup> Unlike traditional middle powers, such as Canada, Norway and Australia, emerging powers are not 'closely integrated in an alliance system with the United States', and have all 'historically espoused conceptions of international order that challenged those of the liberal developed West'.<sup>19</sup> Emerging powers also take a reformist approach on international economic issues. Writing on the foreign economic policies of India, Brazil and South Africa, Nel and Mathew<sup>20</sup> argue that these nations, 'encouraged by the growth of their economic clout and disillusioned by the way in which the industrialized countries of the North have not lived up to the promises made on behalf of neo-liberal globalism, [have] set out to achieve a revision of global economic norms and rules'.

Fourth, *emerging powers tend to be regional powers*. Even if they are not hegemonic in their own regions, and such hegemony may be contested, they exercise a strong political and economic influence.<sup>21</sup> All five BRICS countries, for instance, are

preponderant in population and economic size in their own regions. It is not always easy to conceptually distinguish between regional powers and emerging powers. Not all regional powers are necessarily emerging powers, but emerging powers tend to be regional powers.<sup>22</sup> As Hurrell<sup>23</sup> explains, ‘regional preponderance should represent an important element of any claim to major power status’. It is worth mentioning that the status of a regional power, like the status of an emerging power, does not only depend on material resources, but also on perception and recognition by third actors.<sup>24</sup> Leadership is a relational concept: one does not claim to be a leader, in the same way that a nation does not demand a leadership role. A nation gets certain recognition by other countries when it displays leadership qualities and fulfils the role in reality. Leadership is both relational and ‘dependent on the willing followership’.<sup>25</sup> As Flemes and Nolte<sup>26</sup> point out, you may claim power status, but eventually such a status is a ‘social category that depends on recognition by others’.

While it is not the aim of this paper to look at the conceptual differences between emerging powers and middle powers (among which Mexico has been numbered), it is worth mentioning that one of the differences identified in the literature is that ‘emerging powers do not necessarily emphasize the involvement in issue areas that require a sense of ethically or morally infused responsibility towards the international community’.<sup>27</sup> Mexico, as an international role player that has shown commitment to non-proliferation of nuclear arms and the rule of law in international relations, also ‘stands up well in comparative terms to other middle powers, championing humanitarian issues like migration’, according to Cooper.<sup>28</sup>

### **Limited structural leadership**

There is little doubt that Mexico has enough resources to be considered an emerging power. It is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world according to gross domestic product (GDP) figures,<sup>29</sup> while Russia and Brazil are seventh and eighth, respectively, and South Africa is 31<sup>st</sup>. However, Mexico’s per capita GDP is higher than that of Brazil (\$17,900 against \$15,200). Additionally, Mexico is the 14<sup>th</sup> largest country by area and the 12<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world.<sup>30</sup> Given these indicators, authors have argued that Mexico has the ‘capabilities and resources’ to practice ‘middle power roles’:<sup>31</sup> the same might be said about Mexico as a potential emerging power. However, the Mexican government, along with the country’s most influential elites and its foreign policy community, has been unable to exercise structural leadership in the international arena. Examples can be seen in a study of Mexico’s diplomatic resources, its role in the United Nations, its international military engagement and the approach of Mexico towards international development cooperation.

### ***Diplomatic resources***

An effective way to grasp Mexico’s capacity to exercise international influence is to examine its ranking within the Elcano Index of Global Presence. The Elcano Presence Index, defined as ‘the effective positioning of countries outside their own borders’,<sup>32</sup> is an index that takes into account a broad array of economic, military and soft dimensions (some of which are not necessarily of interest, such as the number of tourists they attract or their success in international sports competitions).<sup>33</sup> As [Figure 1](#) shows, Mexico ranks in 23<sup>rd</sup> place, below all BRICS countries except for South Africa.

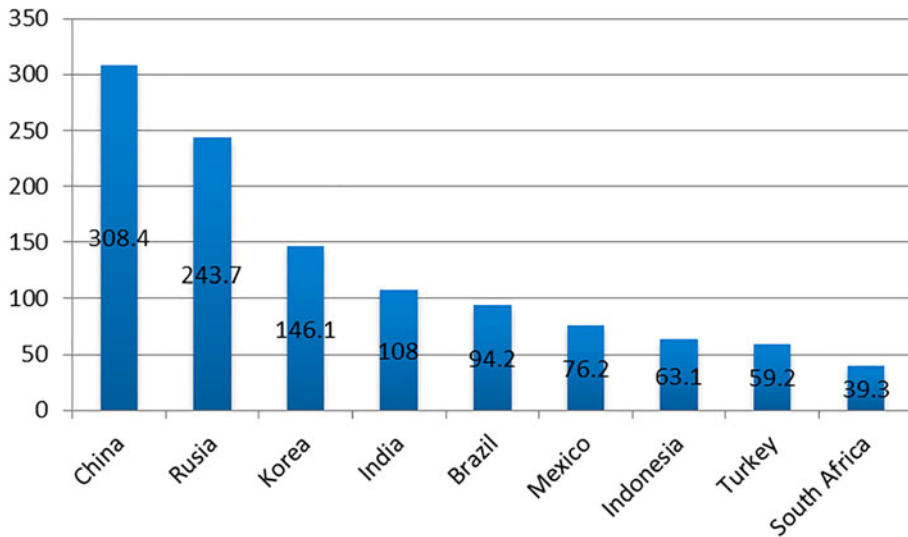


Figure 1. Elcano Global Presence Index.

Source: Olivé I, M Gracia & C García-Calvo, *Elcano Global Presence Report 2014*. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2014,

The Elcano Index, however, measures global presence and not power or leadership. Mexico ranks higher than other emerging powers, such as Turkey and Indonesia, most likely because of its open trade and its flow of exports, which are mainly manufactured goods and energy sources. Indeed, Mexico's liberalisation process in the last three decades has placed the country among the most open economies in the world. Between 1975 and 2012, Mexico's foreign trade increased from 28% of its GDP to 67%, far above Brazil's at 21%,<sup>34</sup> while it has also signed free trade agreements with 54 countries. However, it should be noted that Mexican trade is mainly concentrated in the US, while it is minimal in Latin America, almost non-existent in Asia and virtually absent in Africa, none of which is conveyed by the Elcano Index.

One of the first reasons why Mexico has been incapable of projecting structural leadership is because of its poor diplomatic resources. In spite of its growing foreign trade, there has been only a modest increase in the budget, the staff and the number of Mexican embassies abroad.<sup>35</sup> At the time of writing, as Figure 2 shows, Mexico has only 74 embassies, far fewer than any of the emerging powers.

While Mexico has only eight embassies on the African continent to cover 54 countries, Brazil has 35. In Asia, Mexico has 18 embassies for 48 countries, and it has not one embassy in Central Asia, a strategic region for energy resources. Authors have argued that this is explained, to a great extent, by the fact that Mexican diplomacy is largely driven by the demands of its enormous diaspora.<sup>36</sup> While less than 1.5 million Brazilians (0.7% of its total population) live abroad, more than 12 million Mexicans (10.7% of its total population) live outside of their country, mainly in the US. As a result of this, Mexico has almost as many consulates in the US as embassies abroad (66 consulates of which 55 are in the US).

A quick comparison between the human and financial resources spent by Mexico and Brazil shows the extent to which Mexican leaders have failed to prioritise foreign policy. In spite of the fact that Mexico is more dependent on foreign trade than Brazil, it is

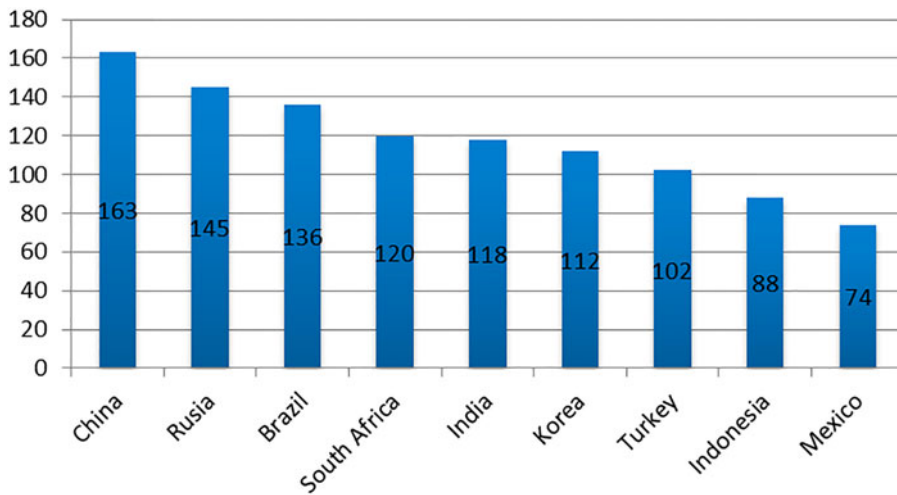


Figure 2. Number of embassies abroad.

Source: *The Europa Year Book*, 2012 in González G, 'La política exterior de México: entre la retórica y la realidad', presented at the seminar *Construyendo el Nuevo orden mundial desde América Latina*, División de Estudios Internacionales. Ciudad de México, CIDE, 2014; Figueroa B & J Schiavon, 'Brasil y México: Inversión y Capacidades en Política Exterior', *Foreign Policy Edición Mexicana*, 4.15, 2014, pp. 12–15.

striking that between 2005 and 2012 the total approved budget of the Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretariat, the *Cancillería*, was 25% that of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry (the *Itamaraty*) for the years 2005–2012.<sup>37</sup> Compared with Brazil's Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretariat and its diplomatic service are weaker and less influential within the government structure. The Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry controls diplomatic affairs only, as it no longer directs policy on foreign trade and international economic affairs (now in the hands of the Ministry of Economy), nor security issues and intelligence. Within these areas different actors and agencies act in an uncoordinated fashion and with no clear sense of direction.<sup>38</sup>

The Mexican Foreign Service is also smaller in its number of staff members than any of the BRICS; Brazil has 174% more career diplomats than Mexico.<sup>39</sup> The *Itamaraty*'s higher number of diplomats makes it a more influential institution compared with the Mexican *Cancillería*, if not also a stronger interest group domestically.<sup>40</sup> Between 1985 and 2003, the head of the *Itamaraty* was a career diplomat with no party affiliation 70% of the time, and 96.8% of the 557 ambassadors appointed were also career diplomats. In contrast, between 1982 and 2006 no minister of foreign affairs in Mexico came from the diplomatic service, except for a short period of 11 months, while about 40% of the ambassadors were political appointees.<sup>41</sup>

One of the greatest limitations of Mexican diplomacy is the poor engagement it has achieved with BRICS countries. Mexico has diplomatic relations with all of them but its relationships are mainly issue-driven. In the Chinese case, for example, bilateral trade dominates the agenda, with Mexico accusing China of dumping a variety of goods on its domestic markets, increasing the trade deficit. With South Africa, Mexican relations are extremely narrow in scope. Although both countries are strong supporters of multilateralism and could share agendas in a number of areas, little has been done in this regard. Mexico does have an embassy in South Africa, but it is also responsible for five

other countries in the region, given the limited number of embassies that Mexico has in the entire African continent. Trade and investment between the two countries is almost non-existent.

**Activism in the multilateral organisations**

If measured by the size of its financial contributions to the UN system, Mexico exhibits a high level of international commitment. In 2012, it contributed \$56 million to the UN, ranking it among the 15 largest contributors to the UN regular budget, even more than Brazil, and also more than other emerging or middle powers such as Russia, Australia, the Netherlands or South Korea (see Figure 3).

As already mentioned, Mexican foreign policy has traditionally been active in issues such as international jurisprudence and nuclear non-proliferation,<sup>42</sup> while its diplomacy has consistently defended the rule of law in international relations. However, as Pellicer clearly expresses, this has been more ‘a policy of principles [rather] than one of greater practical influence’.<sup>43</sup> In any case, an emphasis on ethically or morally infused responsibilities has characterised the global agendas typically promoted by traditional middle powers, but they are not distinctive elements of emerging powers. Beyond non-proliferation issues, Mexico has been reluctant to engage in international security issues and it has had a rather limited participation in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Unlike Brazil, which has persistently sought a permanent seat on the UNSC since 1946, and has participated with a rotary seat nine times, more than any other non-permanent state-member with the exception of Japan, Mexico has only occupied such a position during four periods.

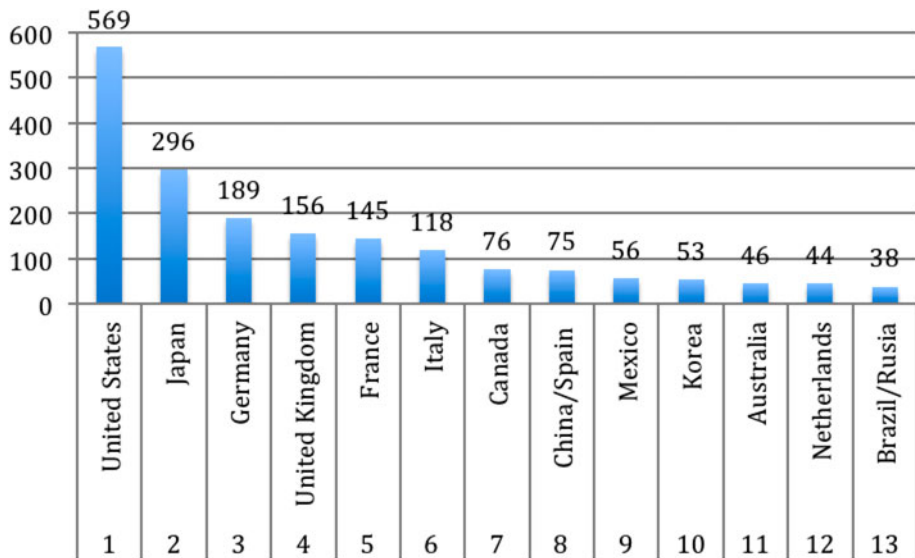


Figure 3. Fifteen largest contributors to the UN 2012 (sums in US\$ millions, rounded to the nearest million). Note: these figures are for the regular budget of the UN only. Source: United Nations, ‘2012 Status of contributions to the regular budget, international tribunals, peacekeeping operations and capital master plan’, [https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/Regular\\_Budget\\_Payments\\_of\\_Largest\\_Payers2012.pdf](https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/Regular_Budget_Payments_of_Largest_Payers2012.pdf)



This behaviour, as Sotomayor<sup>44</sup> explains, mainly results from the strong dependence of Mexico on the US. Mexico depends on its northern neighbour for trade and investment flows, and millions of Mexican citizens live there. Participating in the UNSC, many believed, would lead the country to a diplomatic confrontation with Washington,<sup>45</sup> which could only harm Mexico's interests.<sup>46</sup> Alternately, to side with the US would cause tensions in Mexico's bilateral relations in other regions of the world. During the Cold War era, in particular, Mexico avoided participating in the UNSC altogether in order to abstain from making a pro-US alliance explicit.

Thus Mexico's strong dependence on the US puts the former in a complex situation. Mario Ojeda, one of the most classic authors in this regard, summarised this dilemma with a thesis that eventually came to be known as the 'Ojeda thesis'. In a nutshell, the argument is that 'the US recognises and accepts Mexico's need to dissent from US policy in everything that is fundamental for Mexico, even if it is important but not fundamental for the US. In exchange, Mexico cooperates in everything that is fundamental or merely important for the US, though not for Mexico'.<sup>47</sup> As Smith<sup>48</sup> explains, 'the hegemonic power of the US' has severely restricted Mexico's foreign policy in multilateral fora. This is particularly the case, he explains, because 'those places where Mexico might exert the most impact are also well within the US sphere of influence'.<sup>49</sup>

After Mexico's democratic transition in 2000, Mexican authorities started to change these attitudes and came to play a more active role in the UN. The most important decision was to overcome their reluctance to participate in the UNSC. In spite of this important change, Mexico does not seem to have a very clear agenda when participating in this area and, in fact, recent participations in the UNSC did not leave any particular mark. What Mexican diplomats mainly did in the UNSC between 2009 and 2010 was to emphasise their traditional issues, such as peaceful resolution of existing conflicts, respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians in armed conflicts (in particular children) and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Beyond defending these principles it is still not clear what Mexico's specific interests are in this body. For some critics, it seems that Mexican diplomats lack a compelling reason for participation in multilateral organisations such as the UNSC.<sup>50</sup>

### *International military engagement*

Mexico's international military engagement is also below its potential. Unlike emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil, Mexico has rarely used its military might to serve international purposes. Externally, the armed forces have never had 'the appetite to project power abroad, in part because, since World War II, the Mexican military have not dealt with any concrete military enemies'.<sup>51</sup> Until very recently, Mexico has been reluctant to participate with military elements in peacekeeping missions. This is contrasted with Brazil, which has deployed a significant number of blue helmets abroad, participating in 33 operations with over 27,000 troops. Furthermore, Brazil currently has the military command of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, with the largest contingent in that country.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, Mexico lacks the military resources of the BRICS. As Figure 4 shows, Mexico's military expenditure is four times less than that of Brazil in gross numbers, and it is lower than all BRICS countries as a percentage of GDP.

However, the main reasons for resistance to exercise greater military engagement are not necessarily financial. As authors have observed, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs is institutionally weak, and the military is mainly guided by domestic priorities, which do not include UN peace operations.<sup>53</sup> In spite of their stated subordination to the

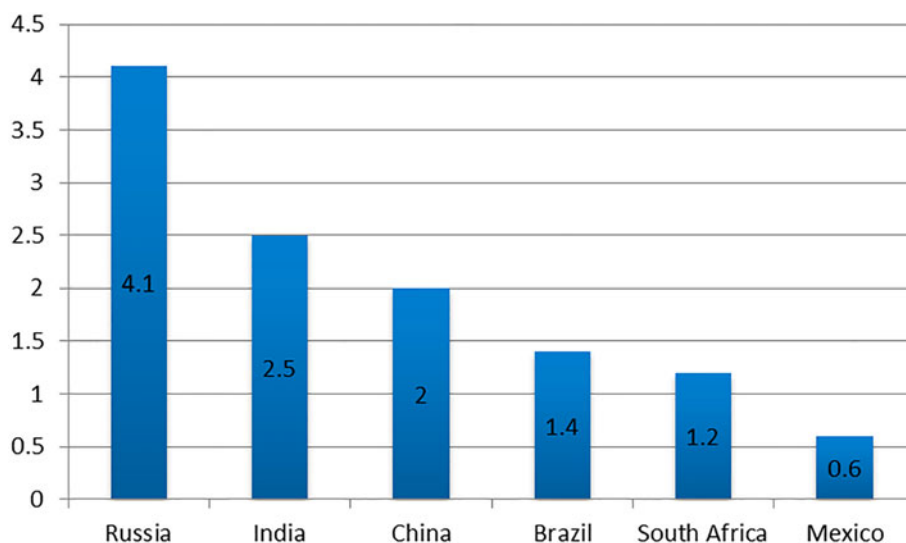


Figure 4. Military expenditure by country as percentage of GDP.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013, [http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex\\_database/milex\\_database](http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database/milex_database) (accessed 10 October 2014).

national executive, the armed forces in Mexico have historically enjoyed institutional autonomy to make certain decisions, such as whether or not to engage in military operations. Brazil, in contrast, has centralised the management of its foreign policy within the *Itamaraty*, a very powerful institution relatively isolated from domestic interest groups.<sup>54</sup> Hence, unlike Mexico's armed forces, the Brazilian Army tends to behave as a disciplined corps that follows *Itamaraty*'s international leadership, while decisions regarding peacekeeping operations are exposed to a low degree of negotiation between bureaucracies.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Brazil's strong international identity (a matter discussed further below) is also highly influential among the armed forces. As Child<sup>56</sup> suggests, 'ever since the early 1920s, and in a sense ever since the first Portuguese arrived, Brazil has ... embarked on a Latin American version of Manifest Destiny'. Certainly, a key element of the Brazilian Army's doctrine has been the projection of power abroad.<sup>57</sup>

Since the democratic transition in 2000, however, Mexican elite attitudes towards involvement in peacekeeping operations have changed. In 2004 only 35% of Mexican leaders believed that the country should take part in these operations, but by 2012 such support had reached 52%.<sup>58</sup> In September 2014, after long debates between members of the *Cancillería*, the Ministry of Defence and other agencies, the Mexican Congress finally passed a constitutional reform that allows the participation of Mexico in peacekeeping operations. However, it is still not clear if such operations will involve Mexican troops, and under what conditions that involvement would take place.

### ***International development cooperation***

While Mexico has provided resources for international development cooperation (IDC) for quite some time, it does not give it high priority. Helping to improve the standard of living in less-developed countries ranked 13<sup>th</sup> on a list of 16 foreign policy goals perceived to be very important by Mexican leaders. Brazilian elites, in comparison, give

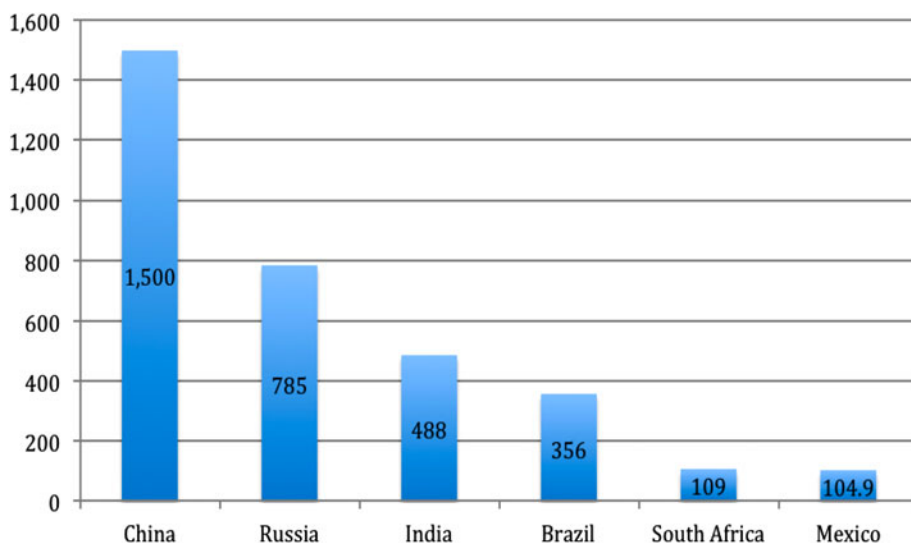


Figure 5. Expenditure on international development cooperation in US\$ million, 2009.

Source: Graph was developed by the Center for Global Development in 2001 and appears in Prado JP, 'La Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo en la Política Exterior del presidente Calderón', in Garza H, J Schiavon & R Velázquez, (eds) *Balanza y Perspectivas de la Política Exterior de México 2006–2012*. Ciudad de México: Colmex, CIDE, 2014, p. 423.

it a considerably greater emphasis. While in 2010/2011, 92% of Brazilian leaders thought that it was 'very important' to help improve the standard of living in less-developed countries, among Mexican elites this percentage was 58%.<sup>59</sup>

Although IDC is not adequately quantified in Mexico, existing data presented in Figure 5 shows that the country spends less on IDC than any of the BRICS countries. As a percentage of GDP, in 2009 Mexico spent 0.01% of its GDP on IDC, far below China's 0.71, India's 0.71, Brazil's 0.30 and South Africa's 0.17.

Unlike most emerging powers that are making a transition from recipient to donor of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), Mexico has received significantly increased ODA from 2007, mainly linked to security- and violence-related projects. In 2011, around 70% of all development projects managed by the Mexican government (a total of 374) were externally funded, while only 30% were sponsored by Mexico.<sup>60</sup>

In the last few years, the Mexican government has launched a set of initiatives to strengthen IDC. The government created a development cooperation agency, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID), and passed new legislation to regulate initiatives in this area. Mexico has also increased the amount of resources it allocates to IDC, which reached \$277 million in 2012.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the fact that the last two administrations seem more committed to strengthening initiatives in this area – and apparently also to reverting a decline in IDC projects in Central America – the achievements remain insufficient in view of Mexico's resources and its ranking as the 11th largest world economy.

Specialists on Mexican IDC argue that the country still lacks a strategic vision on development cooperation as an instrument of foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> Only in isolated cases has the country deployed IDC in order to advance foreign policy goals.<sup>63</sup> Unlike other BRICS countries, which deploy IDC for specific purposes such as securing energy resources – as in the case of Chinese IDC in Africa – it is not entirely clear to what end

Mexico is employing IDC. Studies on the drivers of Brazilian IDC show, for instance, how specific interest groups such as agribusiness, or elements within the elite such as the Ministry of Defence, have influenced resource allocation in areas such as agricultural cooperation or military training. These interventions by Brazil are aimed at creating demand for a product (in the latter case in order to raise the number of military staff from developing countries trained in Brazil as an instrument to promote arms sales) or doctrinal harmonisation.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, there is little or no evidence of specific Mexican interest groups or elites seeking to advance their interests through IDC. In the one example of the use of IDC by Mexico in pursuit of a foreign policy goal, AMEXCID has prioritised Central America and the Caribbean, probably to contain socio-political instability in its most immediate neighbourhood. However, little has been done to publicise these and other initiatives, and it would seem there is no overall strategy to project Mexican leadership broadly.

### **Lack of explicit objectives and a long-term vision**

This article has argued that one of the criteria for a country to acquire emerging power status is that its elites and foreign policy community perceive their own nation as an emerging power and, more importantly, that they pursue this in a more or less explicit fashion. Survey studies show that foreign policy communities in both Mexico and Brazil are strongly supportive of a greater involvement in world affairs (94% in the case of Mexico and 99% in the case of Brazil).<sup>65</sup> However, there is no hard data confirming that influential groups in Mexico perceive their nation as an emerging power or seek to acquire emerging power status.

There does seem to be change, however, since Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto assumed office in December 2012; his government has adopted a new discourse in which 'consolidating Mexico's global presence' is explicitly stated as a foreign policy goal.<sup>66</sup> The National Development Plan (2013–2018) even mentions that 'Mexico may consolidate itself as an emerging power',<sup>67</sup> although such an objective is not made explicit in policy. However, at the regional level surveys show that 52% of Mexican leaders consider that their country should play a leadership role in Latin America and the Caribbean. This may be surprising given the lack of interest that Mexico has historically displayed in the region, as will be detailed below.

The lack of a strategic diplomatic vision and a long-term state foreign policy is, arguably, a major reason why Mexico has been unable to exercise emerging power roles. Historical comparative analyses have shown that, unlike Brazil, which has displayed a basic continuity in its foreign policy goals, Mexican foreign policy has been characterised by major changes.<sup>68</sup> The greatest change took place after the 1990s, when Mexican elites decided to prioritise the relationship with the US among all other countries, opting to side with the world power in most international issues and to oppose it in very few areas (although this policy was never performed in a consistent fashion). In contrast, Brazilian foreign policy has been characterised by greater continuity.<sup>69</sup> In spite of the fact that foreign policy projects and strategies have changed from one administration to another, the objective of promoting Brazil's international projection has remained over time.<sup>70</sup> During the past 20 years such an objective has become even stronger.

### International identity

In stark contrast to Brazil, which is the largest and most populated country in the South American region, Mexico's foreign policy is highly conditioned by the fact that it is geographically placed within the area of influence of the US, the world power with which it shares a large border. Yet historically, Mexico had also developed an international identity different from that of Brazil. The literature portrays Mexico as a nationalist country, inward-oriented and wary of a number of external threats, which included attacks, invasions and occupations of all sorts, perpetrated by the Spanish, the French and the Americans. The latter took more than half of Mexico's territory during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With this background, the Mexican government, instead of developing a more active and self-confident foreign policy, historically opted for promoting a foreign policy mainly aimed at 'strengthening a sense of national identity at home and stressing the country's independence abroad'.<sup>71</sup>

Brazil has been different in this sense. Its international identity has been stronger owing to the particular circumstances under which the Brazilian state was constructed and later evolved. Considered a 'geopolitically satisfied country', the nation managed to secure territorial integrity and national unity at a very early stage.<sup>72</sup> According to Sotomayor,<sup>73</sup> 'Brazil's identity is outward-oriented because of its size and relative isolation from the front line of international tensions' and because 'its territory was never subject to international invasions, even though it is surrounded by nine neighbors'.

Authors have argued that Brazil's and Mexico's behaviour in multilateral institutions such as the UN is strongly related to their distinct national identities. Hakim, for instance, argues that Brazilian leaders, and even the population at large, have long believed that the Brazilian nation should be counted 'among the most important states'. Since independence, Brazilian elites have been conscious of their country's size and have governed the nation in a way that seeks to project the power of Brazil outside of the country. Mexican elites, in contrast, have been historically more concerned about their relations with the US than with their place in the world.<sup>74</sup> Mexico's geographical location, spread between North and Central America, is also a source of confusion for its leaders, who are still not comfortable with a specific regional identity. Is Mexico a North American country? Is it a Latin American country? Or, rather, is it a bridge country between the North and the South? Since 1994, when the government signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexican elites have mainly gazed north, seeking alliances with the US (and Canada to a lesser extent). However, Mexico and the US, in spite of their strong linkages, are not political allies. As Pellicer<sup>75</sup> explains, 'despite the intense economic relationship, Mexico is not a preferential ally of the United States' and Mexico does not have a 'special relationship' with the US, such as the one enjoyed by the UK. 'Mexico is but a commercial partner, and occasionally [an] uncomfortable neighbor'.<sup>76</sup>

Mexican leaders increasingly think that the country should play a leadership role in the region. A survey study shows that, while 23% of Mexican leaders considered that Mexico should be the leader of Latin America in 2005, this percentage reached 52% in 2013.<sup>77</sup> Yet trade with Latin America is still insignificant. In 2003, the proportion of Mexican exports to the region was only around 2% of Mexico's total exports, as compared with 78.8% that went to the United States in 2013.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, Mexico cannot be situated within one single region. The country is often presented by its leaders and scholars as a 'hinge', a 'bridge country' and a 'nation of double regional membership' or even of 'multiple belongings'; others portray Mexico as 'an example of a "bi-regional nation" ... whose role within the global community can only be conceived in terms of

duality'.<sup>79</sup> Mexican diplomats regard this as a 'privileged, independent position' and like to think of their country as 'a mediator between industrialized and developing countries'.<sup>80</sup> As part of this approach, they have sought to position Mexico as a bridge between the South and the North, through membership in organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and NAFTA. At the UN, for example, Mexico forms part of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), but unlike all other GRULAC members, it no longer belongs to the G77, a group it abandoned in 1994 when it joined the OECD.

Nevertheless, Mexico's duality has not been assumed in a coherent fashion within its foreign policy community and it is problematic in practice. Furthermore, Mexico's self-image as a bridge country appears to be 'merely aspirational' because 'the country has not been perceived as such by Latin America or any other developing nation'. With the possible exception of Central America, Mexico has failed to be perceived as capable of playing the role of a bridge country. On the contrary, in recent years Mexico has been excluded from recent political projects, such as the South American Community of Nations. Since Mexico joined NAFTA, for instance, Brazilian diplomats have been arguing that Mexico 'belongs to the North', not only in terms of geographic location, but also in terms of its foreign relations. The role of Mexico as a bridge country is not necessarily a misconception. However, as Pellicer<sup>81</sup> persuasively argues, 'for such a role to acquire meaning and momentum an understanding with both the North and the South' would be necessary in order to gain acceptance by both parties as a 'bridge that connects the most powerful nation on the planet with the under-developed world'.

### **Mexico as *status quo* power**

Emerging powers (particularly the BRICS, less so the MIST or MIKTA countries) tend to assume positions in the international economic system that are clearly distinct from the group of more industrialised nations. Mexico, which arguably has not used its power and material resources to promote significant reform in world affairs, seems to be aligning its interests with those of the US, at least, and perhaps more broadly with the OECD nations. Despite its increasing integration in the global economy the country 'has not shown the kind of strong international activism associated with the paradigmatic model of emerging powers', as Sotomayor<sup>82</sup> clearly puts it. Unlike BRICS countries, which have promoted alternative international structures such as the New Development Bank, Mexico has behaved as a 'system cooperative actor' or a 'status quo middle power'.<sup>83</sup> Mexico is a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IBD) and, since the 1990s, has joined the WTO, the OECD, and the group for Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

As Sotomayor<sup>84</sup> also argues, Mexico 'does not promote a radical reform of the international order, nor does it actively engage in changing the rules of the game'. Since the 1990s, successive Mexican administrations have taken enormous pride in having a respected financial bureaucracy that has largely (and uncritically) adhered to macro-economic orthodoxy. In contrast to their limited presence within the UN, some Mexicans have occupied top positions in international financial institutions such as the IDB and the IMF, as well as in the OECD, currently led by Jose Ángel Gurría, formerly the Mexican foreign minister.

Mexico was one of the founding members of the G77 and led it twice, first in the mid 1970s and again in the early 1980s. However, in 1994, when Mexico joined the OECD and signed on to NAFTA, President Salinas decided that being in the G77 was

incompatible with belonging to these new regimes. Since then, a significant number of Mexican elites have considered that membership in the OECD and NAFTA puts the country in a better position than most Latin American nations and developing countries. It is not the purpose of this paper to assess this view. Suffice to mention that Mexico's economic dependence on the US makes it unlikely that its government could support international or regional initiatives that question mainstream economic policies or seek to drive the US out of the region.

As in a number of areas analysed in this paper, Mexico's dependence on the US also conditions the way in which the country behaves in multilateral financial institutions such as the WTO. If in the 1970s, 57% of Mexican exports went to the US, in 2013, as previously mentioned, 78.8% went to that country.<sup>85</sup> Within such a scenario, it is understandable that Mexico is more worried about NAFTA than about negotiations in the WTO. Although the country is not necessarily indifferent towards the WTO, what takes place there is considerably less important for Mexico than for countries such as Brazil or India, for which opening agricultural markets and eliminating subsidies is essential.<sup>86</sup> This is another reason why Mexico has not displayed the same kind of international activism that is so characteristic of emerging powers, despite its increasing integration in the international economy.

### **Mexico as a regional power**

Mexico has historically lacked a consistent foreign policy towards Latin America, oscillating from periods in which it promoted vigorous diplomatic activity in the region to others in which it has been almost completely indifferent.<sup>87</sup> Rather than regarding Latin America as a region in which Mexico could exercise influence, the dominant view in foreign policy traditionally was to perceive the relationship with Latin America as part of a strategy to balance its relationship with the US. In particular, this was the case during the Cold War years, when Mexican diplomats used this relationship as a counterweight against US hegemony. However, during the 1970s and 1980s Mexico did display a modest strategy to exercise regional leadership, mainly in Central America and the Caribbean. It is interesting to note that, even during this period, Mexican authorities explicitly denied any leadership objective. Various Mexican presidents, including Luis Echeverría, characterised by his strong activism in Latin America, have denied any Mexican attempt to exercise a leadership role in the region.<sup>88</sup>

The relationship with Latin America has always been stronger in the discourse than in day-to-day political endeavours. Such a relationship is even less relevant in terms of trade. As mentioned earlier, Mexican exports to the region are only 2% of its total exports, compared with the enormous percentage that goes to the US. As one of the most respected Mexican intellectuals, Daniel Cosío Villegas, has said, Mexican interests in the region have been mainly 'sentimental', owing to the lack of material or strategic interests in the area, while 'the international realpolitik is what counts the least'.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, as González<sup>90</sup> argues, Mexican foreign policy towards Latin America has always been performed in relationship to the US, which has been a 'basic reference point' for its various moves in the region. Even when the authorities have emphasised a Latin American vocation, the relationships with countries in the region occupied a secondary role. With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of trade liberalisation processes, the distance between Mexico and Latin America increased. Mexico concentrated its attention on North America and gave less priority to Latin America.

In sum, as González<sup>91</sup> also argues, Mexico's foreign policy objectives in the region have not pursued the projection of power, either economic or political; neither have they sought to promote, with the exception of specific periods, an area of influence within the region. Not only does Mexico lack a leadership role in the region, but (as already mentioned) it has also been excluded from some of the international institutions created during the last decade such as the South American Community of Nations. In order to reverse this exclusion, President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) sponsored the creation of a new international institution, the Latin American and Caribbean Community of States, in which Mexico and Central America were also included. With this initiative underway, Mexico is seeking to recover its relationships with Latin America. In any case, and notwithstanding the efforts to reproach the region, Mexico's capacity to play a major role in the region is limited. The nation has almost no allies with whom it could promote common goals in multilateral spaces; its alliances with Latin American countries are mainly episodic.<sup>92</sup>

Among Mexican leaders there is still no overwhelming support for exercising leadership within the region. Figure 6 shows the result of a survey study conducted among 535 Mexican leaders in the private and public sector, including union leaders, journalists and representatives from civil society organisations. It is clear that, in spite of the fact that interest in Mexican leadership in Latin America increased significantly between 2006 and 2012, 45% of all interviewees still consider that Mexico should participate with other countries in the region without pretending to be the leader.

Leadership, as noted earlier, is a relational term that requires recognition by others. As Pellicer<sup>93</sup> argues, the region itself has shown 'little enthusiasm' for a potential Mexican leadership. Brazil, and not Mexico, is more likely to be perceived as the regional leader in Latin America. In a survey study conducted in five Latin American countries, Brazil appears as the most influential country in the region, also perceived as such by Brazilian

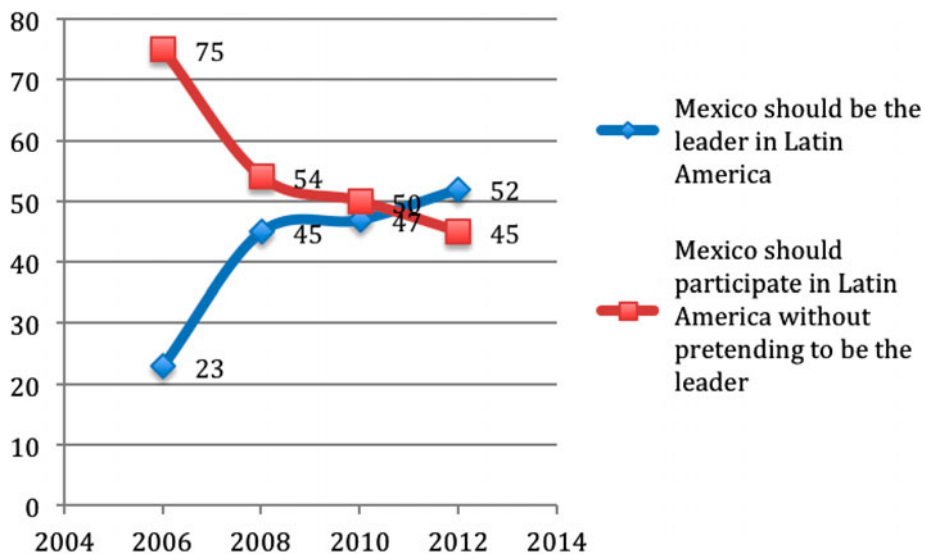


Figure 6. Mexican leadership in Latin America (in percentages).

Source: González G, J Schiavon, G Maldonado, R Morales & D Crow, *México, las Américas y el Mundo 2012-2013, Política Exterior: Opinión pública y líderes*. Ciudad de México: CIDE, 2013, p. 76.



people. The study shows that there is clear recognition that Brazil has been and will be the regional leader in the past and next decade.<sup>94</sup>

Unlike Mexico, Brazil has emphasised its relationship with Latin America, and there are more elements to claim that it does exercise a leadership role, if not in the entire region then at least in South America. Within this region not only does Brazil comprise half the territory, population and wealth, but its military spending also far surpasses that of its neighbours.<sup>95</sup> Brazil is also the major institution builder in the region and the major force behind MERCOSUR, the most developed regional integration mechanism in South America. MERCOSUR, through which Brazil trades most of its manufactured exports, includes Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela – all strong Brazilian allies – as full members. MERCOSUR also includes as associated members Colombia, Peru, Chile, Ecuador and Bolivia.

In addition, Brazil has displayed an activist regional policy, mainly as a political mediator in episodes of political crisis, coups d'état or territorial disputes in countries such as Paraguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Haiti. Brazil's attempts to project power have been explicit, at least rhetorically, since the military government in the late 1960s crafted the term 'Brazil regional power', which also included plans to build an atomic bomb and reject the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that, in spite of its material resources, Mexico has failed to display the requisite structural leadership to be deemed an emerging power. This included an examination of four elements used in the literature to characterise emerging powers. Namely, these were the capacity to influence the international order, a strong international identity, a revisionism that derives from a dissatisfaction with the existing world order and leadership at the regional level. It is clear, from the foregoing, that Mexico has difficulty in fulfilling all of these four elements. Indeed, Mexico has been unable to acquire emerging power status like the BRICS because its capacity to influence multilateral institutions is limited; its international identity as a 'bridge' country between the North and the South is problematic; its stance on the international order lacks a reformist orientation, particularly on economic issues; and the country has little capacity to exercise regional leadership.

The literature points out that Mexico's poor performance on the international stage is largely due to the constraints that the country suffers from its proximity to the US, the enormous Mexican diaspora based in the US, and the implications of being within the sphere of influence of the ranking world power. Mexico's relationship with the US has certainly affected the concentration of its diplomatic resources in one single country and the lack of influence in the UN, particularly within the Security Council. It has shaped Mexico's profile as a status quo power in international institutions (particularly on economic issues) and largely explains the lack of a more active participation in multilateral organisations such as the WTO. Even the country's relationship with Latin America has been historically affected by the relationship with the US. However, it is clear that Mexican elites also bear responsibility. On the one hand this is so because they have failed to become less dependent on the US, diversify trade and expand diplomatic relations with other countries and regions in the world, most notably the BRICS countries. On the other hand, they bear responsibility because they have been unable to promote a coherent state foreign policy and promote vigorous diplomacy with sufficient human and material resources.

This article has examined some of the key elements that characterise emerging powers, mainly drawn from the examples of the BRICS literature. One may ask whether the literature on emerging powers adequately captures a wide enough range of nations, adequately taking into account others such as Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey or Australia, grouped around the MIST and the MIKTA. Do these latter countries meet the four criteria addressed in this paper? Further research is needed to expand understanding in this area.

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### Notes

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