RISING MIDDLE POWERS AND THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF TURKEY, BRAZIL, AND INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzed the relationship between rising middle powers and challenge they pose on liberal international order. The analysis involved the study of international organizations voting behavior, evolving alliance formations, and trade reorientation. The article used comparative historical analysis to provide findings concerning the phenomena in Brazil, India, and Turkey. Analytically case studies reflected different regional settings, level of institutional embeddedness, and strategic traditions. The central argument was that middle powers reject liberal order but at different degrees (selectively contest liberal order hierarchy, norms of governance, and distribution of authority). Despite contesting, these rising middle powers continuing to enjoy aspects of liberal international order. The article traced changes in foreign policy documents, trade, security alignments, leaders' speeches, and multilateral engagement patterns over time. Turkey was found to have more transactional and autonomous posture. Brazil was found to have oscillation between pragmatic engagement and multilateral revisionism. Finally, India had calibrated SA signaling a pattern challenge in the liberal international order. These challenges were found to be constrained by continuing utility of international rules, economic interdependence, and institutional costs. The paper was significant as it contributes towards knowledge concerning order transition. The article led to findings that informed the understanding of the rise of middle powers as revolutionary spoilers as opposed to being selective hedgers and reformers. The behavior of middle powers revealed tensions inside liberal internationalism, especially visibly seen in the study of South–South cooperation, voting coalitions, and regional diplomacy. The article concluded that liberal international order is challenged by both its margins and powers seeking a greater voice without completely abandoning the same system.

Keywords: Brazil, India, Turkey, liberal international order, Middle powers, multilateralism, strategic autonomy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Liberal international order is a set entailing institutions, practices, rules, and norms that emerged after World War II; consolidated through the United States' leadership. Liberal international order privileges include multilateral diplomacy, open markets, legal institutionalism, and normative commitment (direct or in principle) to peaceful dispute settlement, sovereignty, and cooperation. Liberal international order offers predictable pathways for international legitimacy, trade, and security cooperation. In the 21st Century, liberal international order has continuously been strained by growing assertiveness, great-power rivalry, institutional paralysis, and domestic populism from middle powers. Consequential developments as a result of these strains have included the transformation of middle powers as active challengers of core liberal assumptions; which transcends traditional status-seeking participants (Mearsheimer, 2019).

The challenge that rising middle powers pose are conceptualized in three interrelated variables namely, international organizations' voting patterns, alliance formations, and trade relationships. Voting behavior shows whether states repeatedly vote for alternative blocs, are aligned with established liberal coalitions, abstain from the consensus positions, or vote to sponsor competing resolutions. Trade relationships reflect whether rising middle powers diversify trade with options like South–South exchanges, or are dependent on traditional Western markets, or are supportive of regional markets, or are supportive of state-led trade arrangements. Alliance formations analysis leads to the identification of whether rising middle powers are reinforcing existing security structures, remaining non-aligned, or are building flexible partnerships, which results in resisting permanent bloc politics (Desrosiers & Cheeseman, 2026).

Rising middle powers refer to states characterized by material capabilities (shared regions characteristics) such as population, diplomatic reach, gross domestic product, and military capacity. Rising middle powers are also characterized by their pursue of foreign policy autonomy (often rejecting secondary roles within an alliance system). Rising middle powers are also defined based on seeking

recognition by chasing global governance agenda-setters in global arenas and forums like the United Nations, the Group of Twenty, and the World Trade Organization. Finally, rising middle powers are also defined as states that create a discourse of reform, fairness, and representativeness. They insist they are being underrepresent in existing institutions as Global South countries. From the provided definitions and characteristics of middle power states, Turkey, India and Brazil fall perfectly well, thus making a good case study for this article (Ukpong, 2026).

Globally, the rise of middle powers is linked to the balance of political and economic influences. The diffusion of finance, technology, and production has decreased Western monopolistic dominance. Institutions established during the postwar era are seen demanding for reform from countries that are boosting of contributing more and yet receive less. Because of rising middle powers, the Group of Twenty (G20) emerged as a premier economic forum, and thus the illustration of the shift toward the broader participation. Similarly, global crises like the financial crash that occurred in 2008, COVID-19, and the many geopolitical fragmentation also exposed how liberal institutions are unable to offer trusted universally public goods. The middle powers have time and again responded via hedging. Meaning, they have not necessarily abandon the international liberal order, and also not accepted to be put in a passive authority structures (Bakhtiyarova & Avcu, 2022).

Regionally, Turkey has continuously deployed assertive, energy diplomacy, transactional bargaining, and multi-vector foreign policy (blending military intervention) in its effort to retain the middle power status. On the other hand, Brazil has maintained its middle power status by alternating between inward-looking nationalism and multilateral activism which had drawn its visions of global leadership and domestic political cycle. Finally, India has retained its middle power status by deepening selected partnerships (with Japan, the United States, Russia, and Quad members) and advancing SA (Nicolescu, 2012).

The three countries, Turkey, Brazil, and India have also illustrated their middle power stats by influencing Africa as a competition with powerful countries. Similar to powerful countries, these middle power countries have continued to use Africa as a site of multilateralism contestation. These middle power countries have sought development diplomacy and voting coalitions to limit liberal universality. These middle power countries have also employed extra-regional partnerships and regional organizations to increase interactions with African countries through peacekeeping, trade, infrastructure, and normative alignments. Because of middle power influence, it is illustrated that African perspective appeals to middle-power diplomacy. This appeal has seen Turkey expand its security and humanitarian ties with Africa. The appeal has also seen Brazil adopt a South–South developmental and agricultural ties with African countries. The appeal has also led to India expanding digital and trade cooperation with Africa. These ties are a a broader struggles over legitimate order-building (Bayram, 2020).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly debates concerning liberal international order is categorized into three traditions, namely, realist, liberal institutionalist, critical and postcolonial, approaches. Liberal institutionalists supports international institutions' resilience. It argues that regimes and rules decrease uncertainty, make order durable despite conditions of power transition, and facilitate cooperation. The argument supports the study. In terms of its application, middle powers can stabilize institutions by ways of norm entrepreneurship and coalition-building. Realist scholars on the other hand see liberal order as a thin cover on top of power politics. Realists argue that rising powers stands to challenge existing order by seeking greater influence past that which is permitted by existing institution. With the shift in relative power, liberal institutions turn into competitors instead of neutral rule governance. Finally, critical and postcolonial scholars argue that liberal order is defined by historically hierarchical, characterized as deeply shaped by traditional colonial legacies, and practice exclusion. In its application, critical and postcolonial means that middle-powers challenge a response to the systems that are structural inequity embedded (Benabdallah, 2024).

Most literature characterize middle powers as being "good international citizens". According to these literatures, middle powers support rule-based cooperation, multilateralism, and conflict mediation. This comes out strongly when analyzing Australia, Canada, and the Nordic states. These studies also term middle powers as being stabilizers instead of challengers. Middle powers are also treated as bridge-builders translating between smaller states and great powers. Despite these positive analyses, these attributes have continued to be challenged by the rise of assertive middle powers (with less normatively restrained behaviors). Thus, old verses new perspective have emerged, with the older consensus standing for middle powers being characterized as status quo actors that lack adequate capacity to revise international liberal order unilaterally, and the new consensus standing for rising middle powers being able to exert meaningful influence via norm contestation, agenda-setting, selective obstruction, and coalition formation (Cooper, 2013).

Recent scholars have prioritized studying "rising" or "emerging" middle powers. Such literature covers countries such as Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Turkey, and Brazil. According to these studies, these countries occupation of intermediate positions is guided by diplomatic ambition, regional influence, and economic growth. These countries continue to seek recognition in terms of responsible stakeholders, while simultaneously challenging external constraints. These middle powers prefer issue-based alignments, multipolarity, and SA over rigid alliances and commitments. The behavior of these middle powers have complicated older distinctions between revisionist actors and status quo actors. The rising middle powers are in one hand supporting openness in trade, while on the other hand contesting Western dominance on several matters especially security governance. The middle powers on one hand cooperate in matters climate change, while on the other hand resist interventionist norms. Middle power states on one hand endorse multilateral institutions, while on the other hand demand reform capable of diluting established powers' authority (Jordaan, 2017).

Literature on Turkey has often highlighted how foreign policy has transitioned from Westernization towards assertive, ideological, and autonomous diplomacy. Turkey's

conduct has been studied and interpreted through the neo-Ottomanism, regional leadership, strategic depth, and transactional opportunism frameworks. These literature have highlighted Turkey's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and other parts of Africa such as Libya. Several studies have also highlighted Turkey's oscillation between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commitments and its more independent postures. The debate that stands out currently is whether Turkey is merely pushing for a better bargaining leverage or fundamentally revising liberal order in NATO. Different literature have posted arguments supporting Turkey's activism as a dissatisfaction and frustration with liberal conditionality that has excluded it from European institutions. Others literature agreed on Turkey's action as a pragmatic regional influence and state survival strategy instead of being anti-liberal (Sula, 2021).

Extensive scholarly attention on Brazil's middle power status has received a strong tradition multilateral engagement characteristic. Brazil's foreign policy is seen as being of commitment towards peaceful dispute resolution, South–South cooperation leadership, and supporting global governance reform. Under different regimes, Brazil has always sought greater inclusion in international institutions such as the UN Security Council, climate negotiations, and the World Trade Organization. Despite its push for international inclusion, Brazil has also been identified by its tension between international status-seeking and domestic political volatility. Brazil's international status seeking can be illustrated by its championing for universalism and coalition diplomacy. Brazil's domestic political volatility has been characterized by the adoption of inward ideologically polarization in many issues. The outlined due has made Brazil a good case study on middle-power's conditional nature, with Brazil challenging international liberal order as a reformist instead of an outright rejectionist (Rizwan, et al. 2024).

India as a middle power has been frequently analyzed based on SA, postcolonial statecraft, and non-alignment. India's foreign policy tradition has been characterized by prioritizing bloc politics related independence. However, in recent years, India has combined selective partnership with autonomy. Many scholars note that there us increased role of India in the G20, BRICS, Indo-Pacific security arrangements, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In addition, many other studies have linked India's rise as a middle power to a strong discourse on sovereignty, multipolarity, and civilizational identity. The current debates are whether India is becoming a part of the liberal order because of its deeper security cooperation and economic integration with Western powers, or it is redefining liberal order's engagement terms by resisting Western normative hierarchy. Most literature suggests India is not anti-order, but still it is unwilling to accept liberal prescriptions capable of constraining its domestic policy or promote interventionist norms (Ghosh, 2025).

A huge amount of literature has studied the voting behaviors of middle powers in international organizations. It was found that in general, middle powers and other categories of states have prioritized the use of multilateral arenas instead of bilateral diplomacy. Voting behaviors have been exposed through the study of alignment, co-sponsorship, and abstention patterns towards supporting or not supporting Western consensus, issue-specific pragmatism or South–South solidarity. Research conducted on UN voting has established a uniform trend that middle powers have no fixed camps, instead, they shift votes according to issue arising, expected costs of defection, and domestic political context. On human rights issues, most rising middle powers illustrated skepticism toward liberal universalism, mostly on selectively applied cases. On trade and development, rising middle powers have shown trends that often support reformist multilateralism because it promises gains distribution fairly.

Economic and trade interdependence is also seen as forming a major literature stream. Liberal order is not only based on institutions, but also by dense exchanges that establish vested interests. Middle powers prefer diversifying trade ties so as to decrease their vulnerability to Western markets. Expanding the South–South trade, alternative financial forums, and regional trade agreements has created room for middle powers to maneuver. The China relationship with Brazil, TD by India, and regional-commercial repositioning by Turkey are a reflection of the broader trend surrounding trade and economic interdependence. Literature regarding these economic and trade interdependencies are yet to address whether they strengthen or weaken liberal order; with a fraction of scholars stating that it pluralizes globalization; while another section of scholars state that it fragments universalism and liberalism.

Alliance formation literature has majorly established that states are used to binding themselves to stronger partners in the event of a strong threat. Similarly, middle powers prefer minilateral formats, hedging strategies, and flexible coalitions in order to preserve their autonomy. India's has for years practiced participation in non-Western and Western-oriented groupings to comply with this character. Brazil prefers diplomatic alliances instead of military alliances so as to comply with this character. Finally, Turkey has been characterized by bargaining between independent regional action and NATO membership so as to comply with this character. Literature on hedging illustrates that middle powers simultaneously cooperate and resist Western/major powers. This ambiguity leads to it being more difficult to categorize middle powers as liberal-revisionist binaries.

Despite extensive literature existing, there are three gaps that remain unfilled. First, most studies are focused on single cases. The lack of systematically comparing several middle powers from different regions and institutional made this study useful in filling the gap. It was also found that most literature privileges rhetoric and ideology as opposed to observable behavior (such as voting, alliance formation, and trade). This study addressed the issue by analyzing voting, alliance formation, and trade. In general, the article addressed the outlined gaps through combining systematic examination and comparative historical analysis of multilateral engagement patterns, foreign policy documents, and speeches.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used comparative historical analysis. This approach allowed the study to trace Turkey, India, and Brazil in terms of their engagements with the liberal international order over a period of time. Comparative historical analysis researched question concerns the long-term changes, causal sequencing, and institutional continuity as opposed to a single

context. The method allowed the study to connect external threats, diplomatic rhetoric, domestic political shifts, and economic reorientation. The case selection was based on widely recognized middle powers and their differences in region, institutional, regime type, and strategic culture alignments. These variations strengthens comparison and at the same time preserved analytical relevance. Empirical analysis combined three evidence namely, voting patterns within international organizations, alliance formations, and trade relationships. Voting data identified divergence from or alignment with dominant liberal coalitions such as the United Nations (UN) among other multilateral forums. The examination of trade patterns was done through direction, diversification, and composition of commercial ties. The assessment of alliance formations was done through issue-based security cooperation, treaty commitments, and multilateral partnerships. The data that was found was then supplemented by conduct a systematic analysis of leaders' speeches, official communiqués, and foreign policy documents to cover the framing of foreign policy. The study depended on secondary datasets, historical policy documents, and public diplomatic records through international repositories and official archives. The analytical strategy improved the process of tracing pattern through comparison. Each case was examined to determine rhetorical contestation, strategic adjustment, and institutional engagement related evidence. The method was intended to identify recurring mechanisms middle powers applied to challenge liberal order. To ensure consistency, issue categories and same time horizons across cases was adopted. Data was then interpreted using defined actions seeking greater autonomy, resisting liberal interventionist norms, the common framework contestation, and revised institutional hierarchies.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Middle powers' by use of multilateral voting behaviors to challenge liberal international order

The aim of the study was to investigate middle powers' use of multilateral voting behaviors to challenge liberal international order. The results were then presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Middle powers' by use of multilateral voting behaviors to challenge liberal international order

States	Humanitarian intervention stance	Sanctions stance	Non-intervention/Sovereignty stance	Western powers aligned their voting stance
Brazil	Cautious	Selective	High support for sovereignty	Moderate
India	Cautious	Selective	Strong non-alignment	Moderate
Turkey	Skeptical	Restrictive	High resistance	Low to moderate

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 1, the study established that Turkey, as a middle power, practiced a skeptical humanitarian intervention stance, restrictive sanctions stance, had high resistance to non-intervention (high sovereignty stance), and a low to moderate Western powers aligned voting stance. On the other hand, Brazil practiced cautious humanitarian intervention stance, selective sanctions stance, high supportive of sovereignty stance, and moderate Western powers aligned their voting stance. Finally, India practiced cautious humanitarian intervention stance, selective sanctions stance, strong sovereignty stance, and moderate Western powers aligned their voting stance. Based on the findings provided, the results could be interpreted to mean that Turkey is characterized by the sharpest divergence from international liberal order (Western coalitions), especially on matters sovereignty/non-intervention. It was also interpreted to mean that Brazil and India are more institutionally engaged. Overall, all the three countries were characterized as moderately to highly challenging the international liberal order.

4.2 Middle power SA and alliance posture

The aim of the study was to determine Middle power SA and alliance posture. The results were presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Middle power by SA and alliance posture

States	Regional autonomy	Formal alliance embeddedness	Partnership flexibility	Overall alliance challenge
Brazil	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate
India	High	Low	Very high	Strong
Turkey	High	High	High	Strong

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 2, Turkey was found to have high regional autonomy, formal alliance embeddedness, and partnership flexibility. Overall, Turkey posed a strong challenge on international liberal order. Brazil displayed moderate regional autonomy, low formal alliance embeddedness, and high partnership flexibility. Overall, Brazil posed a moderate challenge on international liberal order. India presented high regional autonomy, low formal alliance embeddedness, and a very high partnership flexibility. Overall, India posed a strong challenge to the international liberal order. In terms of interpretations, the results meant that Turkey's challenge of international liberal order was majorly seen from inside NATO. On the other hand, India challenged the international liberal order via flexible multi-alignment. Finally, Brazil challenged the international liberal order using fewer alliance drivers, with a resistant diplomatic posture that fixed bloc discipline.

4.3 Middle powers by trade leverage strategy and diversification

The study analyzed middle powers by trade leverage strategy and diversification and presented the findings in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Middle powers by trade leverage strategy and diversification

States	Trade leverage	Degree of Western markets dependency	Regional partners diversification	Global South diversification

Brazil	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	High
India	Strong	Low to moderate	High	Moderate
Turkey	Strong	Moderate	High	High

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 3, it was established that Turkey has a strong trade leverage, moderate degree of Western markets dependency, high regional partners diversification, and high global South diversification. It was also established that Brazil has a strong trade leverage, moderate degree of Western markets dependency, moderate regional partners' diversification, and high global South diversification. Finally, it was revealed that India has a strong trade leverage, low to moderate degree of Western markets dependency, high regional partners diversification, and moderate global South diversification. On average, Turkey was more challenging towards international liberal order, followed by Brazil, and finally, India. The findings imply that TD formed a central part in challenging international liberal order. It was also interpreted to mean Turkey and Brazil were the highest beneficiaries of TD, thus, the least dependent on Western markets. Finally, it was also interpreted to mean that India depended on broader spread of partnerships as a strategy for preserving strategic flexibility.

4.4 Middle powers by order contestation and foreign policy discourse

The findings on middle powers by order contestation and foreign policy discourse were presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Middle powers by order contestation and foreign policy discourse

States/Rhetoric	Civilizational identity	Multipolarity	Sovereignty	Reform
Brazil	Low	Moderate	High	High
India	High	High	High	Moderate
Turkey	High	High	High	Moderate

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 4, Brazil recorded low civilizational identity, moderate multipolarity, high sovereignty, and high reform rhetoric. On the other hand, India recorded high civilizational identity, high multipolarity, high sovereignty, and moderate reform rhetoric. Finally, Turkey recorded high civilizational identity, high multipolarity, high sovereignty, and moderate reform rhetoric. These findings imply that the three states' foreign policies use language set to reframe contestation as correction instead of rupture. It was also interpreted to mean that India and Turkey strongly prioritize civilizational identity. Finally, it was also interpreted that Brazil's approach is based on being an explicit reformist and development-oriented.

4.5 Middle powers conditions intensification

The study presented findings on Middle powers conditions intensification in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Middle powers by conditions intensification

Condition	Brazil	India	Turkey
Domestic political confidence	Strong effect	Moderate effect	Strong effect
RL	Moderate effect	Strong effect	Strong effect
IF	Strong effect	Strong effect	Strong effect

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 5, the study found that Brazil's domestic political confidence had a strong effect, RL had a moderate effect, and finally, IF had a strong effect on liberal order. India's domestic political confidence had a moderate effect, RL had a strong effect, and finally, IF had a strong effect on liberal order. Finally, Turkey, domestic political confidence had a strong effect, RL had a strong effect, and finally, IF had a strong effect on liberal order. The findings were interpreted to mean that the challenge towards liberal order is more visible when the mentioned countries feel regionally influential and domestically secure.

4.6 Middle powers by African diplomacy perspective

The findings by the study on middle powers by African diplomacy perspective was presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Middle powers by African diplomacy perspective

States	African engagement style	Perceived appeal	Perceived risk	challenge to liberal order
Brazil	Development diplomacy and South–South	High	Limited follow-through issues	Moderate
India	Trade, security, and digital cooperation	High	Competition with alternative powers	Moderate-strong
Turkey	Political, security, and aid outreach	High (in a number of states)	Strategic penetration issues	Moderate-strong

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 6, it was established that Brazil's African engagement style was characterized by development diplomacy and South–South relations. Brazil's perceived appeal by African nations was high. Brazil as a perceived risk in Africa was caused by limited follow-through issues. In general, Brazil's challenge to liberal order in Africa was moderate. On the other hand, India's engagement style with Africa was characterized by trade, security, and digital cooperation. India's perceived appeal by African nations was high. India's perceived risk in Africa was caused by competition from alternative middle powers. In general, India's challenge to liberal order in Africa was moderate to strong. Finally, Turkey's engagement style with African was characterized by political, security, and aid outreach. Turkey's perceived appeal by African nations was high in some countries. Turkey's perceived risk in Africa was caused by strategic penetration issues. In general, India's challenge to liberal order in Africa was moderate to strong. In terms of interpretations, the findings meant that African states value partnership as a language in foreign policies of rising middle power countries which attracted their perception and acceptance of these countries over their liberal order alternative powers. It was also interpreted to mean that African countries, though ready to work with rising middle

power countries, did not fail to recognize rising power countries' strategic self-interests driving their presence in Africa.

4.7 Comparative profiling of challenges rising middle countries posed on liberal international order

The results on the comparative profiling of challenges rising middle countries posed on liberal international order were presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Comparative profiling of Brazil, India and Turkey across the challenges they posed on liberal international order

Indicators	Voting challenge	Alliance challenge	TD	Reformist institutional critique	SA	Multi-alignment	Normative resistance	Average
Brazil	7	4	8	10	7	6	8	8.3
India	7	8	8	6	10	10	9	8.6
Turkey	10	10	7	6	8	7	9	8.1

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 7, Turkey had the highest voting challenge against liberal order, while India and Brazil had a tie with similar strengths. Turkey had the highest alliance challenge against liberal order, followed by India and finally Brazil. India and Brazil reported the highest TD, closely followed by Turkey. Brazil had the highest reformist institutional critique followed by India and Turkey with a tie. India had the highest SA challenge against liberal order, followed by Turkey and Brazil respectively. India also had the highest multi-alignment challenge to liberal order, followed by Turkey and Brazil respectively. Finally, Turkey and India recorded the highest normative resistance to liberal order, followed by Brazil. On average, India had the most challenge to liberal order, followed by Brazil and Turkey respectively. The findings were interpreted to mean that together, the three rising middle powers showed different pathways towards the same broader contestation which challenged liberal order.

4.8 Pathways rising middle powers use to challenge liberal international order

The findings on pathways rising middle powers (India, Brazil, and Turkey) use to challenge liberal international order were presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Pathways rising middle powers use to challenge the liberal international order

States	Driving condition	Immediate behavioral expression	Resulting challenge mechanism
Brazil	DC	VD	NC
	DC	TD	RD
	DC	FAB	SA
	RL	VD	NC
	RL	TD	RD
	RL	FAB	SA
	IF	VD	NC
	IF	TD	RD
	IF	FAB	SA
India	DC	VD	NC
	DC	TD	RD
	DC	FAB	SA
	RL	VD	NC
	RL	TD	RD
	RL	FAB	SA
	IF	VD	NC
	IF	TD	RD
	IF	FAB	SA
Turkey	DC	VD	NC
	DC	TD	RD
	DC	FAB	SA
	RL	VD	NC
	RL	TD	RD
	RL	FAB	SA
	IF	VD	NC
	IF	TD	RD
	IF	FAB	SA

Key: DC-Domestic confidence, IF-Institutional frustration, RL-Regional leverage, VD- Voting divergence, FAB-Flexible alliance behavior, TD-Trade diversification, NC-Normative contestation, RD- Reduced dependence, SA-Strategic autonomy.

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 8, it was established that despite the three rising middle powers (Turkey, Brazil, and India) follow the same wide causal logic, the expression and intensity of their logic differ by case. All the rising middle powers translate their DC, IF, and RL into VD, FAB, and TD, which together resulted to normative contestation.

The study further analyzed the results in Table 8 in a correlation coefficient analysis approach. The correlation results were then presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9 Correlation Coefficient results

Variable	Driving Condition	Behavioral Expression	Challenge Mechanism
Driving Condition	1.000	0.624	0.587
Behavioral Expression		1.000	0.713
Challenge Mechanism			1.000

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 9, it was established that driving conditions had a 0.624 correlation with behavioral expression, and 0.587 correlation with challenge mechanism. The results were interpreted to mean that there was a significant challenge posed by all the three rising middle powers on liberal order.

The study further analyzed the results in Table 8 using multiple regression analysis approach. The results were then presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10 Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	.713	.508	.489	.522

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	12.842	2	6.421	18.554	0.000
Residual	12.109	35	.346		
Total	24.951	37			

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.845	0.284		2.975	.005
Driving Condition	0.412	0.102	.438	4.039	.000
Behavioral Expression	0.531	0.118	.489	4.500	.000

Source: Author (2026)

In Table 10, the study established that R-square was found to be 0.508. This meant that 50.8% of the independent variable predicted the dependent variable. This was considered sufficient to proceed with data analysis. The study further established that F=18.554 at p=0.000. This meant that the study expected to find most of the outcomes in the regression section being significant. Finally, the study revealed that driving conditions had a beta of 0.438 ($p<0.05$), while behavioral expression had a beta of 0.489 ($p<0.05$). The results implied to mean that both driving conditions and behavioral expression had a positive and significant impact on the challenges facing liberal order.

4.9 Brazil: Reformist challenge against liberal order through multilateral engagement

The findings on Brazil's reformist challenge again liberal order through multilateral engagement was presented in Figure 1 below.

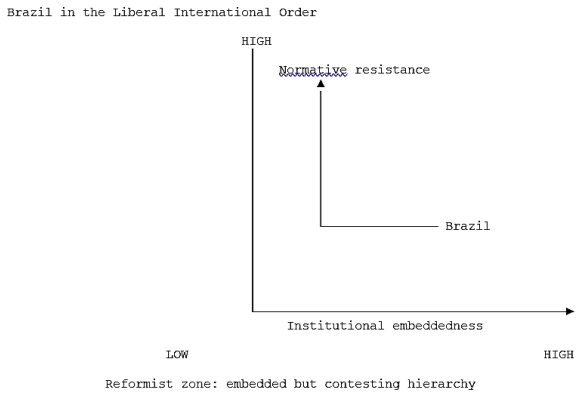


Figure 1. Brazil's reformist challenge against liberal order through multilateral engagement
Source: Author (2026)

In Figure 1, it was established that Brazil has no rejection towards liberal institutions. However, the finding also shows that Brazil seeks to reform liberal order. Brazil has shown a strong challenge against global governance appearing unequal and those that ignore its development concern.

4.10 India's issue-based and strategic autonomy (SA) alignment

The findings on India's issue-based and strategic autonomy (SA) alignment were presented in Figure 2 below.

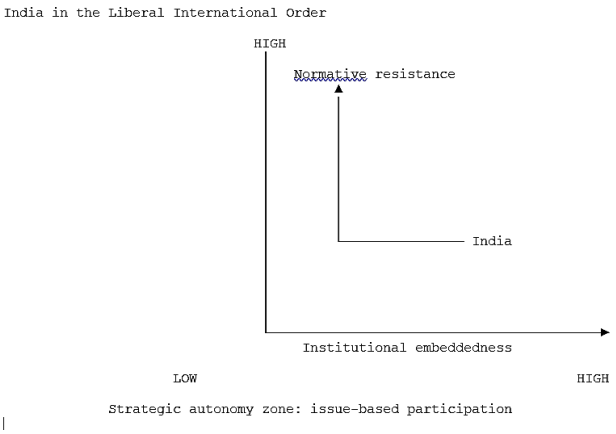


Figure 2: India's issue-based and strategic autonomy (SA) alignment
Source: Author (2026)

In Figure 2, the findings showed that India avoids permanent commitment towards a bloc. It also shows that India participates across several international forums. These strategies allow India to cooperate without the risk of surrendering its autonomy, which acts as the main challenge against liberal order.

4.11 Turkey: Insider-outsider position as a challenge against liberal order

The findings on Turkey's insider-outsider position as a challenge against liberal order was presented in Figure 3 below.

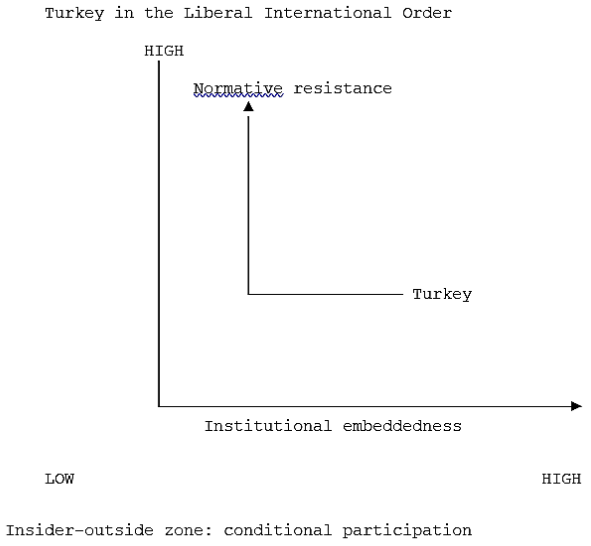


Figure 3: Turkey's insider-outsider position as a challenge against liberal order
Source: Author (2026)

In Figure 3, the study established that Turkey remains institutionally embedded via its membership in NATO and other global markets. However, Turkey high normative resistance positions it in a conditional participation as opposed to full compliance.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are supported by Desrosiers and Cheeseman (2026) who revealed that rising middle powers

like Turkey, Brazil, and India apply a selective challengers approach against liberal international order instead of being outright anti-systemic. According to the general findings, challenges posed by rising middle powers have been framed as contestation (decline, replacement, and backlash) of the liberal order. Evidence from the three rising middle powers have shown that these countries pursue a twin strategy, whereby they contest normative authority and the political hierarchy; while simultaneously exploit institutional and economic benefits all presented by the liberal order. This leads to a sophisticated hedging. Thus, these middle powers are not dismantling the liberal order from outside; but rather reshaping it from inside and around the margins.

The study of Turkey highlights existing tension between strategic autonomy and institutional membership. Turkey's role in Western security structures is not an automatic alignment with liberal order norms. Turkey's behavior speaks volume of how embeddedness coexist with defiance; thus the wider implications for the alliance theory. Its study also showed that membership within a formal institution is not a guaranteed characteristic of liberal socialized country given Turkey's leadership incentives favor transactional and nationalist diplomacy. Turkey behavior demonstrates liberal order is prone to weakening by formal actors behaving as though membership is negotiable and conditional (Aydin-Düzgit, et al., 2025).

The study of Brazil illustrates that the reformist rising middle-power pathway has led Brazil not to embrace a confrontational posture. However, Brazil argues against liberal order, claiming it lacks legitimacy and unequal representation. This kind of challenge affects the survival of liberal order institutions since they depend on compliance and perceived fairness. Brazil's critique is seen as damaging liberal order principles far more than bluntly rejecting it. Brazil as a reformist challenger continues to expose the liberal order's contradictions at the same time insisting on liberal order's usefulness. In the event Brazil's criticism spreads in the Global South, liberal institutions' legitimacy risk being challenged and eroded without direct defection (Lehmann, 2024).

The study of India reflects a semi-model of the other two middle power countries' approach. Its adoption of strategic autonomy is characterized as neither soft multilateralism with older middle-power nor open revisionism with most emerging powers. India's use of cooperation preserves a room for maneuver multiple alignments (flexibility over loyalty). The behavior leads to liberal order becoming increasingly populated with actors seeking access without meeting the stated or desired discipline. The implications are actors regarded as middle powers end up voicing their concerns without hierarchy, and exploiting cooperation minus commitment to permanent subordination (Pandey & Yadav, 2025).

The comparative study of the three rising middle powers has clarified why alliance and trade diversification matter. Liberal order came to be as a result of historical stabilization of predictable alliance structures and dense economic interdependence. However, in the current years, rising middle powers are exploiting globalization to widen their options. Their behavior has decreased the ability of central liberal order institutions to impose discipline. Diversification has not only achieved equality, but has also enhanced bargaining leverage during diplomatic disputes (Hover et al., 2025).

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the article examined how rising middle powers challenge the liberal international order through comparative historical analysis of Turkey, Brazil, and India. The findings showed that these three rising middle power states do not entirely reject liberal order. However, they seek greater autonomy (voting behavior, trade strategy, and alliance formation), contest its hierarchy, and selectively resist normative claims presented to them by the liberal order. In particular, Turkey shows transactional and assertive diplomacy. Brazil shows reformist multilateralism. Finally, India shows strategic autonomy.

Comparative historical analysis of Brazil, India, and Turkey showed that these three countries distinctively challenge liberal international order. The application of multilateral voting behavior by the three middle powers has periodically diverged Brazil, India, and Turkey from Western coalitions (raising concerns about sovereignty, punitive international measures, and humanitarian intervention). Turkey's diplomatic signaling and voting have become increasingly assertive and decreasingly predictable; thus reflecting SA prioritized foreign policy. Brazil on the other hand is known for historically supporting multilateralism. Brazil's voting and coalition behavior express a selective approach (willingness to backup global rules that reinforce development, redistribution, and sovereignty; while being hesitant towards liberal norms that appear interventionist and asymmetrically enforced. Finally, India illustrates issue-based alignment, mainly where Western preferences are in friction with India's domestic policy priorities and overstayed non-alignment tradition.

Turkey's challenge against liberal order was found to be the most visible in the study of tension between its membership in NATO and its regional independence posture. Although Turkey remains theoretically embedded in Western security architecture, it has repeatedly sought policies known to complicate the alliance's coherence. Evidence of its conduct in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Syria, and Libya illustrates a preference for RL and hard bargaining as opposed to following rule and subordination. Turkey's behavior seen in reinforced policy documents and speeches frames it as a sovereign center of power and not a junior to Western partner. Turkish leaders has frequently emphasized on national independence, resistance to external dictation, and civilizational identity; which has led to diplomacy characterized by open rejection of multilateralism, replacing it with conditionality and instrumentality. Turkey continues to act as an insider-outsider in liberal order characterized by being institutionally present, strategically unpredictable, and normatively resistant.

In terms of trade relationship, Turkey continues to be seen as deepened commercializing engagement with several partners, and simultaneously reducing its reliance on Western economic ties. Its investment and trade diplomacy reflects regional diversification toward Africa, the Middle East, selected Asian markets. Though the diversification is inequivalent to autarky; it is a used as leverage. The broadening of economic options used by Turkey has

enhanced bargaining position and weakened the disciplines set by any single bloc. Turkey's trade patterns have complemented its diplomatic posture.

Brazil's foreign policy is mainly anchored in peaceful dispute settlement, development, and multilateralism diplomacy. Its foreign policy makes it less overtly confrontational when compared to Turkey. Brazil has persistently shown dissatisfaction with global governance led by liberal order. Brazil has continuously called out international institutions to reform on matters such as the underrepresentation structures of decision-making denying the Global South proper opportunities and participation. In terms of voting behavior, Brazil continues to repeatedly align with non-intervention and principles of sovereignty. Most of its votes favor collective action supporting development, trade equity, and climate. Brazil is also seen resisting liberal norms framed as universal yet applied unevenly.

Brazil's multilateral engagement trends show oscillation and continuity. In some cases, Brazil has sought active coalition-building via the G20, the WTO, and the South–South groupings. In other instances, Brazil's leadership change and domestic polarization have weakened international consistency. Thus, the impact has been that Brazil's challenging of the liberal order is increasingly affected by internal political cycles. Even at its highest level of cooperativeness, Brazil's foreign policy depicts reformist impulse with a good level of questioning liberal hierarchy. It pursues inclusion on condition of fairer terms. Its trade relations reveal diversification with China and the broader emerging markets, thus decreasing dependence on Western market.

India's challenge on liberal order has been regarded as doctrinal and strategic. It has historically pursued SA and non-alignment to liberal order traditions. India actively participates in multilateral institutions. However, it continues to resist the order's norms that constrain privilege intervention and sovereign discretion. India's voting behavior frequently illustrates careful balancing between Global South solidarities, domestic political imperatives, and Western partners. In policy documents and speeches, Indian leaders presents the country as an independent civilizational power, instead of a subordinate component of the blocs it is member to. This language signals pluralism as opposed to liberal hegemony.

India's alliance formations is characterized as being hedging and not bandwagoning. The country has deepened its participation in security and economic ties with Indo-Pacific partners and the U.S.A. it has simultaneously preserved relationships with other non-Western actors such as Russia. This has allowed India to increase its strategic flexibility. India also participates in groupings (like the G20 and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), and focuses on issue-based partnerships instead of binding alliances seeking to eliminate autonomy. India's pattern indicates it has accepted cooperation and resisted absorption into liberal blocs, thus refusing to treat liberal order alignments as binary choice.

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