## Challengers, Responsible Stakeholders and Free Riders: Explaining Rising Powers’ Divergent Approaches to the Established International Order

## How do rising powers respond to shifts in the balance of power in the international system? Do they use their growing power to transform or overthrow the established international political, economic and institutional order? Or will they work through the established order, using it to achieve their national goals and interests, and ultimately contribute to its maintenance and survival? As we enter a period of profound change in world politics, with the rise of the large states of the developing world (Brazil, Russia, India, and first and foremost China) and the relative decline of established powers (the US, EU) this is becoming one of the central questions in academic and policy debates.

International Relations theory is fundamentally split on this issue. Many realists and power transitions theories believe that as their power grows, rising states will begin to chaff under the established order and will use their growing power to push for fundamental change.[[1]](#footnote-1) While they acknowledge that rising powers have tried to challenge the established order in the past, liberals are more optimistic about the survival of the current international order. They point out that today’s international order is much more institutionalized than past orders. Moreover these institutions are based on a set of universal liberal principles that rising powers will find attractive and that will be able to accommodate their interests. Rather than challenging the order rising powers will become status- quo powers and responsible stake holders that work to uphold the existing order as established leaders begin to decline.[[2]](#footnote-2) More recently some theorists have begun to question the “challenger” vs “status-quo” dichotomy. They argue that, because they benefit most from the current order (they are rising relative to established powers) rising power will have no incentive to challenge it. But nor will they take on the responsibilities of burdens of its maintenance, as this may hinder their rise. As a result “shirking” or “free riding” will be their dominant strategies.[[3]](#footnote-3)

We are only at the beginning of a larger historical process of power transition that may take decades to fully play itself out. However, we can already begin to test the theories outlined above by observing the policies that rising states have adopted vis-a-vs the established order as well as the strategies they are begging to articulate domestically and internationally. The results confound existing theories in that they reveal a good deal of variation in the approaches rising powers are taking. While some have adopted an increasingly adversarial stance towards the order (Russia, but also increasingly China) others (Brazil and India) have bene more willing to play along with the established rules of the game. And while some have sought to evade responsibilities (most famously in China’s rejection of US proposals to form a G2) others have embrace leadership on global issues (Brazil on aid to the developing world) though they have promoted agendas that often diverge from those of the West.

The article will look to explain this variation by looking at different factors that have shaped their behavior: structural, economic and cultural/ideological. It ultimately settles on a structural explanation for the divergent set of behaviors. While economic and ideological factors (particularly a country’s experience of great power politics), have shaped these responses, structural factors, specifically the trajectory of the individual power’s rise, has been the decisive factor in determining the approach they have taken in dealing with the established order. The current international order is more favorable to the rise of some powers (China, India) than others (Russia). For Russia the current order is not conducive to its continued rise and it must change it in order to assure its future relevance and status as a great power. Some powers are only beginning their rise (India, Brazil). Unlike Russia and China they have no historical tradition of great power politics. Moreover, they are still focused on the problems of their internal development and are content to work through the existing order. However, as they begin to adjust to their growing power and develop a great power identity of their own this very well may change.

## Divergent Approaches to the Established Order

The article will look at three dimensions on which today’s rising powers differ in their apprioach to the established order. 1) Their degree of dissatisfaction with the current order. 2) The tactics and strategies they use to challenge the order. 3) Their vision of what a future world order should look like. This last question is the trickiest to answer as in many cases a clear consensus has yet to emerge on what kind of future world order elites in these countries would like to see.

### Russia

Off all the rising powers Russia is most dissatisfied with the current order. And with current events it has come to be regarded as a “spoiler” and the most dangerous threat to the current order in the eyes of many Western observers.[[4]](#footnote-4) Though its latest action in Crimea and Ukraine have grabbed the headlines, they are really only just continuation of a concerted policy to transform the current order that Russia has pursued for years now. Russian elites are united in the opinion that the existing order is in crisis and that it is increasingly unable to hand major global problems. Russia has been most vocal in its criticism of the order and most open in its calls for a transition to a multipolar order. Russia has also worked hardest to engineer change in the order and has employed the full range of tactics to work towards the order transformation. Russia has been the most active soft-balancer against US hegemony, forging soft-balancing partnership with China, Iran, Syria and Venezuela. It has been one of the most active practitioners of selective compliance. It has also sponsored major proposals to change the world financial architecture and to establish a new security treaty in Europe (though these have been politely ignored by the leading Western states). Behind the scenes it has actively looked to undermine existing institutions such as NATO, the EU and OSCE. Russia has also been the driving force behind the two main rising powers institutions, the SCO and BRICS forum. In the early 1990s Russian leaders saw the future of their country as one of the main pillars of the established liberal order. But it has grown increasingly frustrated by the West’s unwillingness to give Russia the proper place at the table it felt it deserved. Russia has begun to call for a transition to a multipolar global order where world politics would be governed by great power concert. The world’s largest and most powerful countries should decide the major questions, accommodating each other’s interests in a friendly, but competitive manner. Great powers would refrain from intervening in each other’s domestic politics and respect each states right to their own path of economic and political development.

### China

China has benefited tremendously from its participation in the open world economy. As a result, China has focused on internal economic growth and development and has been cautious about antagonizing the US and other regional countries and provoking a backlash against rising Chinese power. Deng Xiaoping famously advised his comrades to “hide the light and bide the time”; i.e., to hide China's true capabilities from the outside world while building national power patiently.[[5]](#footnote-5) China has been careful to portray its rise as peaceful and non-threatening to other states. Chinese officials have stopped using the term “peaceful rise” to describe China’s foreign policy and instead use the term “peaceful development” because the Chinese leadership has deemed the term “rise” to be too provocative. Though it has been content to benefit from the current order, this does not mean that China is on the path to becoming a “responsible stakeholder” in the order. Chinese leaders have rejected the concept of G-2—a group of two advocated by US strategic thinkers like Zbigniew Brzezinski that would elevate China to the status of co-managing partner with the US on major global economic and security issues.[[6]](#footnote-6) Chinese elites believe that decades are needed before China can attain the level of development and capabilities to be a true great power. As such they are willing to play along with the current order and bide their time until China is powerful enough to transform the system to its advantage.

Nevertheless, China’s dissatisfaction with the established order is growing. Chinese leaders believe that the 2008 financial crisis exposed the weaknesses of American economic leadership and the continued reliance on the US as the engine for world economic growth. China continues to be suspicious of Western democracy and human rights promotion efforts and alarmed by the wave of revolutionary regime change that is currently spreading through the Middle East. In the military sphere China is also troubled by American efforts to balance Chinese power in Asia and suspects that America’s true intention is to contain its rise.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Compared to Russia, China has been much more passive in the tactics and strategies it has used to challenge the established order. It often teams up with Russia to criticize US policies or block efforts to impose liberal hegemony at the UN. But it lets Russia take the lead and do most of the heavy lifting and is content to stay in the background.[[8]](#footnote-8) It has also engaged in institution building, most notably as a member of the BRICS, SCO and the ASEAN plus one Free Trade Agreement. Unsurprisingly considering its predilection towards shirking international responsibilities and obligations, China has been an active practitioner of selective compliance. China’s manipulation of its currency and its neomercantilist industrial and high tech policies have garnered much criticism in the West (see my previous chapter in this volume).

Though they are content to work within the current order for the time being, many Chinese elites support the eventual transition to a multipolar world and the establishment of a great power concert along the lines proposed by Russia.[[9]](#footnote-9) They see this kind of system as the best option for safeguarding its sovereignty and freedom of action in domestic affairs, so that China can respond to the challenges that continued modernization will pose without having to worry about outside interference. But there are also indications that as China’s power grows, it is becoming less inward looking and more ambitious about its potential to shape world politics. Chinese experts are beginning to explore the possibility of a future Chinese-led order in Asia based on traditional Chinese principles of order. This order would be based on the Chinese theory of *Tianxia (“all under heaven”*), which, conceives of hierarchical relationships as being defined by the duties and responsibilities of rulers to those they rule over (as well as the duty to obey rulers) and is similar to the relationship between fathers and sons in the Confucian family. According to its Chinese advocates this is a more holistic, inclusive and harmonious concept of order than the Western Westphalian (or even liberal order), which is based on managing the conflicts that come from what is conceived to be a natural tendency of states to have divergent interests.[[10]](#footnote-10) Nevertheless, though this kind of system of order claims to be benign it is clearly based on Chinese hegemony. As Allen Carlson notes, “Within such a system it is clear that it is China that is to occupy the paramount position, while those along its margins are expected to accept such dominance and show fealty to the center.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

### India

Of all the rising powers India has been the most sympathetic to the existing international order. Like China it has benefited tremendously from the economic openness that the order provides. It sees the established order, at least for the time being, as providing the best environment for its continued economic development. India has serious concerns about regional security (Pakistan, Afghanistan) and is troubled by growing Chinese power. As a result it welcomes the American presence in Asia and has looked to establish closer security ties with the US.

Nevertheless, India is dissatisfied with certain aspects of the order. It has joined the other BRICS in criticizing the erosion of sovereignty and non-intervention. With the 2008 financial crisis India has also lost confidence in US economic leadership and supports Russian and Chinese calls for reform to the world financial system. Despite its preference for a security partnership with the US, it has grown increasingly dissatisfied with the way that the US has prosecuted the war in Afghanistan and believes that the US has also mismanaged its relationship with Pakistan. Like China and the other BRICs, India has pursued a policy of selective compliance in trade and economic policy. India has been at its most assertive vis-à-vis the established order in pushing for reforms to its main institutions. It has been a leading voice for UN reform and for reforming world financial institutions to make them more representative of developing countries. Of all the BRICs India has been least active as far as institution building. It is an active participant in multilateral forums such as BRICS and IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa). However, unlike Brazil, Russia, and China it has not made a concerted effort to advance the process of regional integration in its home region, as it sees its home region, South Asia, as more of a drain on its political and economic growth, instead of an asset it can use to increase its wealth and global standing.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Nor has India has India articulated a coherent vision of what a future order would look like. Many Indian scholars advocate India’s integration into the existing liberal order as a full-fledged member of the “West”.[[13]](#footnote-13) However this is far from a dominant view. Proponents of the traditional Indian foreign policy of nonalignment continue to have a strong influence in India’s foreign policy establishment. They tend to support the establishment of multipolarity and great power concert as the preferred method of managing global politics.[[14]](#footnote-14)

### Brazil

Like India, Brazil is generally supportive of the current order, though it does share some of the other BRIC’s grievances about US economic leadership and the erosion of norms of sovereignty and non-interference. Brazil has also joined India in calling for reform of major international institutions. The two support each other’s candidacy for permanent UN Security Council membership and have also collaborated in calling for developing countries to have greater representation in world financial institutions. Brazil has also made substantial efforts toward regional integration through Mercosur, Unasur (Union of South American Nations) and the South American Defense pact. Brazil has tried to exclude the US from the process of South American integration as it views the US as its major competitor for power and influence in the continent. Brazil opposes the US project of establishing a Free Trade Area of the Americas that would include both North and South America.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Like India, Brazil is also ambivalent about what kind of world order it wants. Brazil has historically pursued close partnership with the US and integration into the West. Some Brazilian observers believe that Brazil should work to become a stakeholder in the existing international order and use its influence to reform the order from within.[[16]](#footnote-16) Others, however believe that Brazil’s regional ambitions will eventually lead to competition with the US and that a balance of power system will begin to emerge as the distribution of power in the international system continues to shift in favor of Brazil and other rising states.[[17]](#footnote-17)

## Explaining Variation in Rising Powers’ Approach to the Established Order

How can we explain this variation between the BRICs in their approach to the established order? In the following section we will look at three sets of explanations: 1) structural explanations (the distribution of power between states in the international system), 2) constructivist explanations (historical identities and world views), and 3) economic explanations (the state’s level of economic development and their place in the world economy). I do not present this as a comprehensive analysis of these three sets of explanations. Rather this can be considered as a first cut at the problem with the goal of identifying promising areas of future research.

### Structural (i.e., Power) Explanations

Power differentials between the BRICs and the US, as well as their power trajectories, go a long way towards explaining the approaches they have taken vis a vis the established order. Table 1 provides compares the BRICs and the US along eight common measures of national power:

##### Table 1 Comparison of Rising Powers and US for Eight Indicators of National Power

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **GDP (Nominal) USD 2012**  **Billions USD** | **GDP Per Capita (PPP)**  **2012**  **USD** | **GDP (Nominal)**  **Forecast**  **2030**  **Billions USD** | **Percentage**  **Population living under $2 USD (PPP) a day** | **Population**  **2011** | **Population Forecast 2030** | **Military Spending** | **Number of Deployed Nuclear Warheads** |
| **Brazil** | 2,518 | 11,769 | 3,720 | 10% | 192 | 220 | 35.4 | N/A |
| **Russia** | 1,791 | 16,736 | 4,265 | .1% | 143 | 136 | 71.9 | 1,800 |
| **India** | 1,843 | 3,694 | 6,885 | 54% | 1,210 | 1,523 | 46.8 | 80-100 |
| **China** | 6,989 | 8,382 | 25,610 | 29% | 1,347 | 1,393 | 143.0 | 240 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **USA** | 15,094 | 48,387 | 22,817 | N/A | 314 | 364 | 711 | 1,950 |

**Notes:**

GDP measured in billions US dollars Per Capita GDP measured in USD dollars. Source: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2012, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/weodata/weorept> Accessed: July 6, 2012.

2030 GDP Forecast Source: Goldman Sachs, *BRICS and Beyond: A study of BRIC and N11 nations*, November 23, 2007, http://www2.goldmansachs.com/ideas/brics/book/BRIC-Full.pdf, Accessed: June 8, 2011.

Poverty Rate Source: World Bank, *Poverty headcount ratio at $2 a day*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.2DAY>, Accessed, July 6, 2012.

Population Figures in hundreds of millions. Source: United Nations, *World Population 2300 Forecast*, <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/longrange2/WorldPop2300final.pdf>, Accessed: June 30, 2012

Military Spending figures for 2011, Measured in Billions Nominal USD. Source: SIPRI, The 15 major spender countries in 2011, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/milex_15>, Accessed: July 6, 2012.

Number of Deployed Nuclear Weapons for year 2012. Source: Federation of American Scientists, *Status of World Nuclear Forces,* <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html>, Accessed July 6, 2012.

While long term indicators predict US decline relative to the BRICs, at present the US still holds overwhelming advantages in power over its potential peer competitors. Though China is set to overtake the US in terms of overall GDP (measured in terms of purchasing power parity) in the next few years, it will be decades before China (or any of the other BRICS) even begin to approach the per capita GDP of the US. Joe Nye argues that in a world where the primary areas of competition will be in the realm of soft power per capita GDP more accurately reflects a countries true economic power as it reflects the wellbeing and productivity of the population and the country’s ability to attract and serve as a model for others.[[18]](#footnote-18) America still enjoys an overwhelming advantage in terms of its hard (i.e. military). America’s military budget is nearly five times larger than China’s and is more than the next twenty largest military spenders combined. The United States and its close allies are responsible for two-thirds of the world's total military spending. These continued power disparities explain why (thus far) rising powers have hesitated to directly challenge American hegemony or established institutions. America still has the ability to punish rising powers that challenge the order or to provide them with incentives for participating in the order. This will change as power begins to shift more decisively in favor of rising powers.

China’s power has benefited tremendously from the liberal international order established and maintained by the US and its rise seems to be on a steady upward trajectory. According to some estimates China will overtake the US as the largest economy in the world by 2030 and China’s GDP will be nearly twice that of the US by 2050.[[19]](#footnote-19) China can achieve this kind of growth largely through its own internal efforts at economic development and technological modernization. This makes China conservative in the near and medium term. It is less likely to rock the boat and jeopardize its continued success. Nevertheless, over time, it may begin to chaff against the restrictions imposed by the current order. This should be true as it begins to approach the limits of its internal balancing strategy and begins to seek hegemony in Asia more actively, or as other states begin to take steps to balance against rising Chinese power. Moreover, its incredible power potential may give rise to larger hegemonic ambitions further down the line.

Up until only relatively recently Russia’s power was in dramatic decline. Though Russia has been able to reverse this decline and experience robust economic growth, it is doubtful that Russian will ever again attain even a fraction of the power it held only 20 years ago. The rate of growth of its natural resource based economy lags behind the other BRICS. It still faces a serious demographic crisis and the prospects of dramatic population decline. Russian leaders and experts continue to be relatively sanguine about Russia’s ability to overcome these pressing problems and pessimistic about Russia’s ability to reveres these negative trends. They believe it has to challenge and restructure the order now, while it still has the capability to do so, and before it fall even farther behind China and the US.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Brazil and India are still much weaker in terms of their overall power than the other two rising powers. India lags behind the other BRICs in terms of its economic development and faces major economic challenges. While Brazil is a growing economic powerhouse, it has very limited capability to project its power militarily or diplomatically. Like China both countries feel that the present order allows them the opportunity to concentrate on internal development. They are thus more content to free-ride on the current order rather than challenge it and jeopardize the gains that can be attained from participating in it. In India’s case, it also faces major regional security threats from an unstable and hostile Pakistan and a rising China. These threats drive it towards security partnership with the US. Brazil enjoys a relatively benign security environment in South America, where it has no major regional rival besides the US. Nevertheless, its ambitions towards regional hegemony in South America are beginning to cause strains in its relations with the US, which has traditionally regarded the Western Hemisphere as its sphere of influence.[[21]](#footnote-21) Though India and Brazil may be content with the international order now, their huge power potential (India) or regional rivalry with the US (Brazil) may eventually lead them to challenge the order in the future.

### Cultural Factors and Historical Legacies of Great Power Politics

Cultural factors and historical legacies of great power politics can also help to explain variation in rising powers’ response to the established order. Of all the rising powers Russia has the longest tradition of great power politics. It was one of two super power only decades ago and Russia has historically been an integral part of the European state system. Russians are used to thinking of their country as a great power. Maintaining Russian prestige and influence is integral to the identity of Russian elites and to the legitimacy of the regime.[[22]](#footnote-22) From this perspective it is not surprising that Russia is extremely dissatisfied with its diminished status in today’s international order and that, of all the rising powers, it has made the greatest efforts to change the existing order.

China also has a strong tradition of great power politics. But unlike Russia, this experience has primarily come as the regional hegemon in Asia. For centuries China was at the center of a closed imperial state system. Surrounding countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam were regarded as vassals of China that were required to offer tribute to the Emperor of China. Areas outside China’s political influence were regarded to be uncivilized or barbarian lands. China stood at the center of this system, ruled by the dynasty that had gained the Mandate of Heaven. Distinguished by its Confucian codes of morality and propriety, China regarded itself as the only true civilization in the world and its Emperor stood above all other sovereign leaders. This sinocentric world view persisted until the 19th Century, when China’s defeat at the hands of European powers in the Opium wars began what in China has been termed as the “Century of Humiliation”. China never aspired to be a member of the traditional European state system nor was it accepted as an equal by European states. Rather it became a victim of European imperialism. This narrative of victimhood continues to play a strong role in foreign policy thinking and makes China particularly sensitive to issues that threaten its sovereignty. Many scholars believe that this tradition of sinocentric thinking has a profound influence on Chinese foreign policy thinking.[[23]](#footnote-23) It may help explain why China has focused on its internal development and on establishing hegemony in Asia. However, this kind of outcome is also consistent with realist predictions that rising powers will first seek to establish hegemony in their home regions.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Neither India nor Brazil has a similar tradition of great power politics. India has historically seen itself as a poor and developing country and victim of colonialism and imperialism. Throughout most of its post-colonial history India has rejected great power politics and has instead focused on securing foreign economic aid and on building solidarity with other poor and developing states. Brazil’s huge economic potential, its commanding position in South America, and its strong sense of national exceptionalism have inspired a belief on the part of Brazilian elites that the country belongs among the world’s great powers. Until recently, however, Brazil has not had the ability to realize its lofty ambitions. Political and economic instability have absorbed the attention of the country’s elites and sapped the country’s strategic potential. Brazil’s rivalry with Argentina and its condescending attitude toward the rest of Latin America has also hampered Brazil’s effort to establish itself as the leading state on the continent. As a result the default position has been to grudgingly accept American hegemony in the hemisphere, while concentrating on its own internal problems.[[25]](#footnote-25) Indian and Brazilian elites have primarily been preoccupied with internal challenges as poor and developing states. Unlike Russian and Chinese elites they do have extensive experience in thinking of their country in great power terms. As a result both countries have struggled to articulate a vision for what a post-US hegemonic order may look like. Nor have they come up with a grand strategy to help Brazil adjust to the changes currently under way in global politics.

The fact that India and Brazil are democracies may also explain why they have been more sympathetic to the established order, which is rooted in liberal rules and principles, than either China or Russia. As democracies they may be more willing to accept the hegemony of other democratic states (the US and core Western countries) because they have a natural sympathy and affinity towards them and are thus less lively to see them as threats. They may also be more willing to become integrated in a rule based institutional order because of the experience they have with their own domestic political institutions. As autocracies China and Russia do not have similar affinities or preferences for building institutions, and they are also suspicious about the democratic hegemon’s pursuit of democracy and human rights promotion.

### Economic Factors

Economic factors can also be used to explain variation in the BRICs attitudes towards the established order. Though it has experienced steady growth since the 2000s Russian elites are deeply dissatisfied with the country’s position in the world economy as a source of natural resources for the more advanced economies of the West, and they see this dependency as a major threat to national security. Russian leaders are trying to diversify the Russian economy away from this natural resource dependency and to capture more lucrative sectors of the world economy, such as high tech research and development and high end manufacturing. They are willing to use statist and neomercantilist means to achieve this goal and this could cause them to come into conflict with the established order and its institutions.

The Chinese economy has benefited tremendously from participation in the global economic system. This has been a major reason why China has abstained from disrupting the current order. However, it is rapidly reaching the point where its current model of economic growth, based on export and external consumption, is exhausting itself. Chinese leaders are troubled by their country’s over-reliance on Western markets, particularly as the West enters a period of economic decline.[[26]](#footnote-26) China wants to renegotiate the terms of the World Financial system away from the US dollar and to pursue new market opportunities in Asia and Africa. China will thus have to focus more on increasing its external capabilities in order to pursue these changes and possibilities. The end of the dollar’s hegemony may force it to pursue regional integration. The pursuit of new markets in Asia may also require China to increase its military power so that it can protect its interest and prevent actions by the US to disrupt its economic growth (i.e., by disrupting maritime traffic in the South China Sea).

Both Brazil and India’s more passive attitude towards the current order can, in part, be explained by their economic vulnerabilities. India is the poorest and least developed of all the rising powers. Its per capita GDP (even when measured for Purchasing Power Parity) is only half of China’s, one-third of Brazil’s, and one-fifth of Russia’s.[[27]](#footnote-27) 54 percent of Indians live below the international poverty line (set at $2 USD measured in PPP) – more than twice the rate than in China (29 percent).[[28]](#footnote-28) It has therefore concentrated it its efforts on using the established order to promote much-needed economic growth and development, while at the same time shirking responsibilities to contribute to the maintenance of that order. Like China in the 1990s and early 2000s, it follows a policy of biding its time. However, as its economy develops and the model of growth based on export led growth to Western markets begins to exhaust itself, it will be forced to look for new opportunities to continue its economic development. It will also be tempted to use its newfound power to renegotiate the terms of existing trade and financial arrangements and to expand into new external markets.

Throughout most of its modern history the US has been Brazil’s most important trading partner. According to Teixeira, Brazil’s economic dependence on the US was a major factor behind Brazil’s willingness to accept American global leadership and its support for the American led international order.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, this is beginning to change as Brazil diversifies its trade partnerships in Europe, South America and Asia. The US’ share of Brazil’s exports fell from 25 percent in 2001 to 15 percent in 2008. Over the same period of time China displaced the US as Brazil’s largest trading partner, with China-Brazil trade growing 12-fold since 2001.[[30]](#footnote-30) Brazil has been able to diversify its trade relations and break out of the relationship of asymmetrical interdependence with the US. According to Teixeira, Brazil’s decreased economic dependence on the US will have larger geo-political repercussions as it allows Brazil to take a more assertive approach towards the US-led international order. As evidence, he points out that Brazil’s efforts at regional integration at South America have markedly intensified since 2008.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**Conclusion**

How do these different sets of explanations stack up against one another? Ideological explanations that focus on identity and great power traditions (or the lack thereof) give us some insights into world views of elites in the rising powers. They provide a convincing argument for why some rising powers have appeared to be more inward looking and passive in their approach to the existing order. But, they have trouble explaining some of the changes we are seeing, as rising powers begin to embrace more assertive behavior that challenges the order. If this trend continues and rising powers expand their foreign policy behavior beyond traditional parameters then cultural explanations will lose some of their explanatory power. It may also prompt researchers to pay closer attention to the ways in which geopolitical world-views are shaped by material factors. Future research may examine the ways in which states’ growing capabilities and new opportunities to exercise power change elite thinking about international order and grand strategy.

Economic explanations also offer important insights. However, as was discussed in Chapter XXX of this volume, it is difficult to separate economic considerations from considerations of power. All too often the pursuit of power and wealth is viewed as a tradeoff. But the relationship is much more complicated. Power is a means to economic wealth and economic wealth is a means to power. In choosing to pursue a policy of internal economic development and modernization through participation in the order, China is pursuing both wealth and power objectives. Any future shift toward a more assertive foreign policy that pursues hegemony in Asia will not only increase China’s political influence, it will also open up new opportunities for economic expansion and stimulate the development of sectors of the Chinese economy, such as banking and finance, that still lag behind the developed countries of the West.

In the end, power considerations seem to offer the most convincing and nuanced explanations for the observed variation in rising states’ approach to the international order. Russia feels pressure to challenge the order right away because it feels that the present trajectory does not favor it in the long-term. China feels it can bide its time and build its power more slowly, while looking to assert itself further on down the line. Brazil and India are still too weak to challenge the order in the foreseeable future. India also faces immediate problems, such as poverty and regional security threats, that it first needs to address before it can assert its great power status more forcefully. Power considerations also explain some of the changing behavior we are witnessing. Rising powers that have been more reluctant to challenge the established order in the past are gaining confidence and adopting more assertive policies as their power and capabilities grow and new opportunities present themselves.

Studying the variations in rising powers’ response to the current order is a promising area of future research. It poses some questions that are of particular interest to IR scholars: Will rising powers adopt more aggressive policies as their power and influence grows (as many believe to be the case with China’s growing assertiveness in the South China Sea)? How successful will rising powers’ efforts at regional integration be and what effect will they have on the overall world economy? Will rising powers begin to articulate “great power” world views and alternative ideologies as their power grows? Will new non-Western institutions play a more prominent role in the future? Will they be able to take over some of the functions currently fulfilled by the established liberal order? The above discussion provides a rough first-cut at addressing these questions. It is difficult to provide definitive answers at the present time because many of these processes have just begun and need time to develop. Scholars should keep a close eye on these developments as they will provide useful opportunities to test the major IR perspectives against an important set of comparative cases.

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