



RESEARCH PAPER

Constructing Multipolarity: A Constructivist Analysis of Global Power Transformation, Identity Formation, and Emerging Alliances (2001–2025)

¹Muneeb Aurangzeb, ²Dr. Rizwana Jabeenand ³Dr. Syed Shuja Uddin

1. Research Scholar Department of International Relations, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology, Karachi, Sindh Pakistan, <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0580-3574>
2. Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology, Karachi, Sindh Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor Department of International Relations, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology, Karachi, Sindh Pakistan, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8359-9915>

Corresponding Author: muneeb.ir@fuuast.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the world has emerged into an even more complicated multipolar structure since 2001 compared to the post-Cold War unipolarity. Based on constructivist information, the paper argues that the new alliances like CRINK (China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea) are not just a matter of coordination, but the creation of new identities as sovereign, non-interfering, and non-Western hegemony. The paper also examines how the issue of fairness, recognition and normative legitimacy has assumed a centre stage in the reconstitution of power in the 21st century in both geopolitical orientations and institutional reform discourses. The study can determine the emergent trends of identity formation, legitimacy-seeking behaviour, and normative contestation by conducting thematic and comparative analysis of secondary sources, think-tank reports and policy documents. The results indicate that the future of the world order depends on the capacity of states to overcome pluralism, shared leadership, and ideational diversity.

KEYWORDS Multipolarity, Constructivism, Identity Formation, CRINK, Legitimacy, Global Governance, Indo-Pacific, Europe, Norms, 21st Century International Order

Introduction

Future of World Power Relations 2001-2025 the Rise of U.S., China, Russia, the EU and the Emerging Regions. At the turn of the 21st century, the international system has undergone a paradigm change, transforming the post-Cold War unipolarity into an increasingly sophisticated multipolar system. This has been caused by the concomitant emergence of China, the reappearance of Russia, the unremitting hegemony of the United States, the control and economic growth of the European Union, and the increased autonomy of the developing world (Yaseen, et. al., 2023; Shuja, 2025a).

The further invasion of Ukraine and further strategic alliance with China have elevated the level of co-operation between Russia and China beyond the pragmatic dealings to a formidable challenge to the Western hegemony and has directly threatened the security of Europe besides rearranging the power balance of the globe (Chatham House, 2024; Yaseen, et. al., 2022; Shahbaz, et. al., 2025). Meanwhile, the global economy is moving to Asia and China, India, and ASEAN have become significant players in the world trade and investment flows. This period is referred to by experts as complex multipolarity, as the rivalry between the U.S. and China persists, the destabilizing aggression of Russia, and the EU undergoing an attempt to balance its economic power

with the influence of geopolitics (Peters, 2023; Muzaffar, et. al., 2017). The dominance of the U.S. dollar is being challenged because other financial and political paradigms are finding their way into the emerging blocs (Shuja, 2025a).

The relevance of the Global South is underscored even further through such dynamics where regional forces are shifting towards increasing flexibility in their relationships, as well as strategic non-alignment, to maximize their autonomy in a polarized global environment. The emergence of CRINK (China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea) is an indication of how alliances are realigning in the world in a manner that weakens Western hegemony (Shuja, 2025b). This is best exemplified in the Indo-Pacific, which is the centre of economic and technological rivalry. Europe, in its turn, has a possibility to lose out on both dispersed strategies and short-term engagement, despite having a direct correspondence between the interests and the economic and security future of the region (EUISS, 2025). All these trends combine to point out that through the period of 2001-2025, the geopolitical, economic, and technological rivalry has led to the adoption of the multipolar international system. Specific knowledge of such processes, particularly the functions of the U.S., China, Russia, EU, and the developing world, is relevant in estimating possibilities and threats of the new international order.

Literature Review

The discussion on the changing model of the international system post 2001 has mostly been on the idea of whether the unipolar order after the Cold War is being disintegrated with a more fragmented and competitive multipolar system or not. The initial description of the international system, which emerged after the Cold War, defined it as a unipolar system where the United States was the leading power, that is, militarily, economically, and institutionally (Wohlforth, 1999). Nevertheless later studies claimed that unipolarity was not permanent and undisputed. Researchers started to notice the structural changes which took place on the background of the economical ascendancy of Asia, the re-ascent of Russia in strategies, and the dispersion of technological and monetary strength (Zakaria, 2008; Layne, 2012).

This is in accordance with a structural realist approach where the redistribution of relative material capabilities among the leading powers results in multipolarity (Mearsheimer, 2001). The most read between the lines has been the rapid economic growth of China and the modernization of the Chinese military strength (Allison, 2017). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China and its growing naval power in the Indo-Pacific is not only about economic ambition but also geopolitical ambition (Rolland, 2017). At the same time, the revival of Russia, especially since the 2008 conflict with Georgia and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, indicated that the Western-dominated order was not satisfied (Trenin, 2016). The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 aggravated the discussions on revisionism and balance-of-power politics in Europe (Chatham House, 2024).

Whereas realist theories focus on the material power shifts, constructivist theoreticians state that the alteration of international order is also based on identity formation and normative contestation (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism emphasizes the way that states identify themselves and others in a reciprocal definition in the form of shared meanings. In this regard, the convergence between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, commonly referred to as CRINK, can not be seen merely as a coordination of their strategy. Instead, it is a manifestation of the unification of a collective identity based on the sovereignty, opposition to Western interventionism and opposition to liberal

normative hegemony (Shuja, 2025b). This realization based on identity highlights the influence of ideational aspects on alliance behavior in the 21st century.

According to the scholars who have studied the Sino-Russian alliance, its development has surpassed the pragmatic balancing to a more profound strategic alignment based on shared discontents with the U.S. hegemony (Lo, 2022). In the same style, Iran and North Korea shape their foreign policy based on a discourse of resistance and survival of the regime, which strengthens the alternative discourse of sovereignty and non-interference (Juneau, 2015).

A system with several institutions, overlapping coalitions, and regional dynamics, along with numerous great powers but not only that, has become common, which has triggered the concept of complex multipolarity (Peters, 2023). Unlike in the classical multipolarity, the contemporary order is entrenched within thick webs of global governance institutions. An example of this is the European Union (EU) which is a special pole that integrates both economic integration and normative power (Manners, 2002). Even though EU does not have the combined military power, it has leverage by the regulatory standards, trade agreements, and institutional diplomacy. However, the Russian war in Ukraine revealed divisions inside the European sphere and limitations in its strategy (EUISS, 2025).

The geopolitical and technological competition has taken the stage of Indo-Pacific. The U.S. policy of strengthening alliances, including the Quad and AUKUS, expresses the efforts to balance the rise of China and maintain the rules-based order (Ikenberry, 2018). According to scholars, the Indo-Pacific demonstrates the principles of multipolarity not in the form of blocs but in minilateral organizations (Acharya, 2014). The centrality of ASEAN is another evidence of how middle powers can play between the major actors without strategic dependence; as such, hedging and non-alignment are the tools to remain autonomous.

The other aspect of the literature is the economic governance and U.S. dollar future. American structural power has been traditionally based on the dominance of the dollar (Strange, 1998). Other recent academic literature however indicates that there are attempts by the emerging economies to diversify in financial arrangements such as the local currency trade settlement arrangements and use of alternative payment systems (Eichengreen, 2011). Even though the dollar is still at the center, de-dollarization discussions are indicative of widespread discontent with the asymmetries of financial governance in the world (Shuja, 2025a). The rise of BRICS and formation of parallel development institutions reflect the gradual changes that are being directed to pluralistic economic governance.

The issue of normative legitimacy has become a major theme in the current international relations literature. Ikenberry (2011) argues that the liberal international order was strong because it had an openness to institutions as well as normative attractiveness. However, critics claim that its credibility has been compromised by perceived two-sidedness especially in intervention measures and economic sanction (Hurrell, 2007). Newcomers insist to be better represented in international institutions like the United Nations Security Council and the international financial institutions, where reform is viewed as the issue of justice and acknowledgment. According to constructivist researchers, these demands are not distributed resources, but struggles of the status and identity (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010).

The Global South is playing an even more important role in this changing order. Instead of being strongly aligned to either the Western or revisionist blocs, most states follow the path of strategic non-alignment to achieve maximum autonomy (Acharya, 2014). India is another example of foreign policy that combines the strategy of involvement into the initiatives of the Western community with maintaining the relations with Russia and China. These are not isolated strategies or trends but rather an indication of a larger trend where regional actors are trying to be flexible amid systemic contention.

The modern multipolarity is also influenced by technological rivalry. The competition of the semiconductor supply chains, artificial intelligence and the digital governance demonstrates the integration of economic and security spheres. According to scholars, technological standards are now a tool of geopolitical influence that enhances the formation of blocs in cyber space and digital infrastructure (Farrell and Newman, 2019). Relativity of power in the 21st century is increasingly characterized by controlling of vital technologies.

Methodologically, the literature depends a lot on the qualitative analysis of documents on policy, reports of the think-tanks, and comparative studies in the regions. Thematic analysis has been used to identify the trend of identity formation and normative discourse especially in the analysis of the justification of foreign policies by the states.

Altogether, available literature indicates that the 2001-2025 period is a shift to a more complicated type of multipolarity, which is based on material redistribution, identity-based alignment and normative contention. Realist studies focus on balancing of powers between the United States, China, Russia, and the EU whereas constructivist views bring to light the need of identity and legitimacy in building alliances like CRINK.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism is a better way of comprehending the new multipolar world as ideas, identities and social interaction are used to explain and analyze international relations in the global governance. The constructivist Theory initially developed by theorists such as Alexander Wendt states that the international politics world is not simply constituted by material power of states, but by common understandings and identity - both collective identity - through which states interact and recognize others. The change of unipolarity into multipolarity, in fact, is more aptly seen as a more comprehensive change, which involves an identity shift, at the scale of the global community in its relationship to general perception of power, legitimacy and collaboration. As Dr. Shuja Uddin (2025a) proposes, and to suit the concept of a rebuilding of the world based on the unipolar world into a multipolar world, the international order was changed, or rebuilt, into an age of multiplexity due to the implication of 9/11.

The multiplexity concepts imply: the emerging powers, in particular China and Russia and to a lesser degree, India, and regional blocs, including BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), are not merely considering the old ways of political, economic and military alliances in reaction to Western hegemony, but are instead re-thinking them with reference to shifting identity and ideational transformation. His discourse demonstrates that such new alliances, world power rearrangement and alliances are not merely a geopolitical realignment and restructuring of power in an effort to balance the Western hegemony but it is founded on a shift in identity and ideological adjustments that are currently underway in the reconstitution of power and legitimacy

structures at all levels within the global governance (Ain, et. al., 2024). This claim is similar to one of the fundamental concepts of Constructivism that states that the social structures within world politics are a social construction that is formed through the social process. In line with this assumption, Chatham House (2024) and Peters (2023) believe that the 21st-century realignment of power cannot be considered through the pure realist prism.

To the extent, to certain extent, changes in world power dependency are founded on concepts of equity, acknowledgment and validity, which may be considered as belonging to the constructivist thought. Similarly, the EUISS (2025) report of the Indo-Pacific states that regional players are remaking their foreign policy choices not on the basis of rigid alliances, but on the basis of the past, culture as well as the source regional norms. In this sense, constructivism forms a suitable theoretical framework on which the rise of multipolarity can be considered. It embodies the manner in which changing perceptions, identities, and social discourse of actors, global and regional will keep collaborating to enable the restructuring of international order to proceed as it always does. In a constructivist approach, we observe that this is not merely a redistribution of power, but the redirection of the conceptualization of the role of states in the world which is growingly pluralistic.

Material and Methods

The qualitative research design of the study is built on the interpretivist paradigm because it aims to explore ideational and normative aspects of international politics.

The method is grounded on:

Data Collection

The secondary sources, which we will check, include books, academic journals, reports issued by think tanks (including Chatham House and EUISS), and documents published by the government. The impact of ideational factors on multipolarity formation is demonstrated with the help of case studies (CRINK creation, Indo-Pacific policies, and European Foreign Policy modification).

Technique of Analysis

In order to determine recurrent themes, legitimacy, recognition, identity formation and normative change, a thematic analysis exploits. The comparative research indicates the difference between the Western and non-Western countries in terms of views on the world system. Through this strategy, it is given a profound and interpretive understanding of multipolarity as the result of a social production and not the outcome of the material capabilities.

Results and Discussion

Change beyond Material Power:

Even the shift between unipolar and multipolar could not be viewed solely through the prism of the realist theory. Instead, it is the actions of states that are mostly shaped by perceptions, identities, and claims of legitimacy, which, in their turn, provide power with a new meaning.

Emerging of Collective Bodies

The emergence of CRINK is an obvious example of how portions opposite to the West have been brought together as workers into a collective identity manifested by planned-up tactics in the fields of diplomacy and economy. .

Legitimacy as an Engine of Order

Justice and Recognition Perceptions are becoming stronger determinants of power in the world. It is not just that countries place themselves in such a way that they are able to enjoy economic benefits but they are also able to have legitimacy, respect and status in the international community. .

Regional Reconfigurations

Countries in the Indo-Pacific region are not depending on bloc politics as they are trying to make alliances and partnerships on the basis of past experiences and cultures. The change in the foreign policy within Europe shows how difficult it is to find the right balance between transatlantic relations and multipolarity increasing.

Redefining Global Order

Multipolarity is not only the redistribution of power, but also the reconstitution of norms, roles and responsibilities. The fact that the international system is slowly transforming to a more pluralistic and ideationally diverse one is a clear indication. Analysis (Answer to the Question) Transforming unipolarity into multipolarity is an extremely complex process in the global order that is predetermined by the changing ideas, shared identities, and material power. In this research, the author examines how the perceptions, norms, and values that existed in states have been transformed and how this has affected the behavior of states internationally in the period between 2001 and 2025 using the constructivist theory. The constructivist theory views multipolarity as a rearrangement of worldwide definitions and validity rather than the mere displacement of power.

Finding

According to Shuja (2025a), the post-9/11 world system shifted to the level of multiplex where the new powers attempted to create alternative spheres of interest. The physical transformation has been accompanied by an ideological one, the emergence of regional alliances such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the newly formed CRINK is a sign that the perception of being marginalized and unjustly governed has made the nations in question develop a sense of solidarity and collaboration. The same developments are postulated by constructivist theories that international structures are social structures and brought into existence by shared beliefs and perceptions (Wendt, 1999). Dr. Shuja Uddin (2025b) discusses the problem in more detail by declaring that CRINK was born as a new collective identity that refused the intervention of the West and liberalism.

The strategic connection of both China and Russia, which is increased because of the battles of Ukraine, and the disdain of the U.S. and the West to the entry of both Iran and North Korea in this informal union are quite similar in the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. This kind of thinking and military or economic dependency is what keeps their co-operation alive. The same line of thinking will apply to India and Indonesia, the two rising powers, that, despite having strategic autonomy, they are in touch with both the Western and non-Western institutions (EUISS, 2025). In this light,

therefore, multipolarity is a socially constructed order where power does not exist in the possession of a single hegemon, rather power resides in the possession of many.

According to Chatham House (2024), the power balance in favor of the U.S. has progressively been due not just to the material ascendancy of the opponents but equally to a shift of the ground under which they are so viewed by the international community. The Iraq war plus human rights offenses as well as the haphazard implementation of sanctions have all weakened the liberal order as a place of moral superiority. Local forces have reacted by extending the scope of their discussion with the West to cover such exigent areas as sovereignty, mutual respect and balanced growth all of them derived from the constructivist tradition. Similarly, Peters (2023) asserts that the notion of complex multipolarity is perpetuated by new types of equality and fairness narratives that render the changes in the distribution of power in global governance institutions acceptable.

The report issued by the EUISS (2025) continues to highlight that Indo-Pacific is the primary contention location where multipolarity manifests itself most evidently. The economic and strategic relationships between the states in the region have led them to establish more or less a similar type of connections with each other as ideological alliances which in most cases are founded on the same principle of pragmatism. Examples of countries that are at the same time good relations with China and the United States are Vietnam, Indonesia and Japan and this is consistent with the theory that constructivist approach results into identity-based and situational alignments in international arena.

The fact that the European Union made quite unsuccessful attempts to enter the world of Indo-Pacific interactions, however, indicates that it has realized the shifting world where soft power is more significant than hard power, which is the capacity to impact the perceptions of others, their partnerships and the establishment of mutual objectives. Taken collectively, these relationships affirm the notion that the emerging multipolar world order is not just a change of the geopolitical order but a change of thought and norms. Constructivism can be used as a tool to explain the reason why forces such as China, Russia, and the EU hold divergent views on their place in the 21st century. They demand recognition, fair treatment, and legitimacy and this has transformed the nature of power itself in international relations. The outcomeant system is plurality-based, i.e., characterized by plurality of identities, regional issues and normative structures. In this way, multipolarity may be regarded as the consequence of evolving ideas and shared perceptions that also slowly dismantle the foundations of world order (Dr. Shuja, 2025a; Wendt, 1999).

Conclusion

To conclude, the 21st century peace and cooperation cannot be sustained without understanding that material power is not as powerful as ideas, identities, and common norms. Constructivist-based policymaking can help states to negotiate the realities of a multipolar world in a manner that is legitimate, inclusive and has a common purpose. The global transformation in the unipolar to multipolar system is one of the greatest changes in the modern international relations.

This research is based on the constructivist approach and thus believes that material power is not capable of explaining the dynamics of world politics in full. Rather, the actions of states and the creation of new alliances can be explained by the development of ideas, identities and common perceptions.

According to Wendt (1999), constructivism emphasizes the way world structures are constructed by the social interaction and mutual understanding- this insight will especially be applicable in examining the international environment after 9/11. The analyses of Dr. Shuja Uddin (2025a; 2025b) support this meaning and prove that the non-Western countries have started reinventing the norms and legitimacy of the international system. His idea of a multiplex world order describes those changes in politics and ideology that have promoted the emergence of alliances like CRINK, where adversity to Western hegemony and a common sense has led to the emergence of new partnerships. These changes tell us that multipolarity is a distributive re-location as well as a re-definitive re-location of meaning and validity in the international politics.

The results of EUISS (2025), Peters (2023) and Chatham House (2024) also stress that multipolarity represents continuity and change, continuity in power rivalry, but change in the basis of legitimacy and cooperation. In the present day, states are entering into loose, brain-based relationships that are concerned with recognition and egalitarianism as well as material benefit. The Indo-Pacific region, especially, exemplifies such pluralistic process, as the centre of the cultural identity, strategic autonomy, and economic integration.

Finally, constructivist approach shows that multipolar world emergence cannot be perceived as a problem to stability but as a possibility of redesigning global governance in more comprehensive and fairer conditions. When policymakers start to value the need of shared norms and collective identities, cooperation based on legitimacy and mutual respect instead of dominance may be fostered. The research paper can be concluded that the stability of the future will be based on the ability to adopt the principles of pluralism, shared leadership, and justice by international and regional players. The 21st century, therefore, is the era of the emergence of a truly multipolar and socially constructed international system a new global order not only in the redistribution of power but the definition of global meaning as well.

Future Suggestions

The constructivist formalization is a fruitful field where additional studies can be done in relation to the emerging new multipolar world order, especially. Current study reveals that interaction of ideas, identities and shared perceptions are significant determinants of transformation of power in the globe. Nevertheless, the complexity of these processes can be discussed as reasons to conduct more empirical and theoretical studies.

Firstly, the research continuation should examine the way in which the regional and transregional identities are being defined by the global challenges such as digitalization, climate change and energy security among others. Dr. In his argument, Shuja Uddin (2025a) maintains that the emergence of such alliances as BRICS and CRINK marks the fact that the world is not under constant rules and principles anymore but evolves under constantly shifting rules and principles. The next step of the research might be concerned with the progressive establishment of their ideational unity and the effect it has on the international collaboration of the two technological and economic spheres.

The second argument is that comparative studies between regions are much needed to clarify how various societies are different in building their identities as regards foreign policy. According to the report of the EUISS (2025), the Indo-Pacific is the key zone of strategic change, but it may be that numerous ideational changes are being

experienced in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The way the local cultural and historical discourses interplay with the global discourse of justice, sovereignty, and legitimacy in these regions is one of the ways that the future research can be developed thus adding even more dimensions to the constructivist concept of multipolarity..

The third one is the synthesis of the constructivist notions with quantitative and policy-oriented approaches to evaluating the impact of perceptions of legitimacy on the institutional reforms. The United Nations (voting) pattern, BRICS initiatives or regional trade schemes which are studied through the identity and norm diffusion framework may provide a quantifiable insight about the ideational change as an action (Wendt, 1999).

Fourthly, the researchers can consider investigating the mechanism of digital diplomacy and that of the information narratives shaping the personalities of the states in a multipolar environment. As far as it is the communication technologies that bear the most significant impact on the way in which states project and challenge the legitimacy, further delving into the social construction of the narratives in the cyberspace may render the constructivism even more pertinent to the context of modern global politics (Peters, 2023).

Finally, the problem of global governance and cooperation should be scoped out in the future research according to the policy implications. The study might focus on how the transformation of power and legitimacy definitions will affect the future of the multilateral institutions in the United Nations, ASEAN, and the European Union in the future, based on the results of the Chatham House (2024) and Dr. Shuja Uddin (2025b) studies. The work would therefore help the policymakers to transform the existing governance systems to reflect the characteristics of plurality, ideal diversity, and the social construction of the international order.

In conclusion, the new research on multipolarity must not simply take the material power present but the social, cultural and normative dimensions on which the global changes are founded. This will not only give a deeper foundation to the constructivist theory but also give a better insight of how the world order in the twenty first century is being re-constructed to both policymakers and academics.

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