



The Effects of Economic Growth, Political Stability and Freedom of Expression on Tourism Development in BRICS Countries; An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the main determinants of tourism development in BRICS countries. Within the scope of the study, the effects of economic growth, political stability and freedom of expression variables on tourism development are analyzed using annual data for the period 2002-2020. Using the Driscoll-Kraay estimator, consistent results are obtained against heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation problems. Empirical findings show that economic growth and political stability positively affect tourism development, but there is no statistically significant relationship between freedom of expression and tourism development. In line with these results, the study offers policy recommendations to support the sustainable development of tourism in BRICS countries. Structural reforms to boost tourism development, measures to strengthen political stability, and strategies to promote the integration of local communities into tourism processes are among the prominent recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become not only a means of cultural and social interaction but also a driving force for the economic development of countries. According to 2024 data, the number of international tourists has increased by approximately 140 million compared to 2023, reaching over 1.4 billion, and this number has led to an increase of more than 10% in the gross domestic product of countries. Thanks to these contributions, tourism holds an important place in the economies of both developed and developing destinations. (UNTWO, 2025). Tourism has many positive effects on local economies, including income growth, job creation, and the reduction of trade deficits (Brida & Risso, 2009). At the same time, tourism directly and indirectly promotes other economic industries such as transportation, accommodation, and retail (Mayer & Vogt, 2016). Tourism also has the ability to drive technology and innovation. In this way, it develops the accumulation of physical and human capital. This situation is a factor that increases economic growth (Brida et al., 2020). Another positive effect of tourism development is that it increases productivity by enhancing competition between local firms and international tourism companies (Balaguer & Cantavella-Jordá, 2010). According to the World Tourism Organization's data, the tourism industry contributed approximately 10 trillion dollars to the global economy in 2023. Additionally, the travel and tourism workforce has increased by 27.4 million, reaching 330 million people. This figure corresponds to approximately 10% of global employment. So, one in ten people working in the world is employed in the tourism sector. Additionally, tourism accounts for 30% of the global economy and 7% of global exports (WTTC, 2025). These indicators reveal how intertwined tourism and the economy are and highlight the strong relationship between the two concepts.

This strong relationship between tourism and economic growth is bidirectional (Pulido-Fernández & Cárdenas-García, 2020). While tourism stimulates economic growth by providing foreign exchange earnings, increasing income, and creating a multiplier effect (Sun, et.al., 2025), economic growth also positively contributes to tourism by increasing tourism demand, developing infrastructures and destinations, and through technological advancements. Economic growth means an increase in public and private sector spending on infrastructure projects. This increase supports the development of essential tourism components such as transportation, accommodation, and energy (Seetanah, 2011). The increase in infrastructure investments positively affects the accessibility of destinations, and consequently, the decisions of visitors (OECD, 2021). The implementation of these investments in destinations far from city centers allows for the development of tourism in these areas and enables the local population to benefit from the income generated by tourism (UNTWO, 2021; WorldBank, 2022).

Another variable that affects tourism is governance. The ineffective use of governance can negatively impact the tourism sector, including safety and security, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, service delivery, and investment (Nunkoo, 2015; Khan, et. al, 2021). When viewed from the supply side, the quality of governance enhances the quality of tourism services while reducing costs. From the demand perspective, it enhances the attractiveness of destinations by facilitating their branding (Kim, et.al, 2018). There are many components of governance that are examined in terms of tourism. Variables such as political stability, government efficiency, regulatory quality, rule of law, military influence in politics, political and economic freedoms, voice and accountability are among the leading components of governance in tourism. (Gholipour, 2014; Tang, 2018; Gozgor et al., 2019)

In addition to these institutional variables, there are also democratic variables such as freedom of expression and human rights, which are linked to economic growth and high levels of welfare, and contribute to a country's perception as a safe and desirable destination by tourists (Asongu et al., 2023). The concept of freedom affects tourism both as a country that receives tourists and as a country that sends tourists. This perspective argues that countries with a high index of political and individual freedoms will attract more tourists, or that tourists living in free countries will prefer to vacation in countries sensitive to freedom (Gholipour, et.al, 2014). Another perspective is that tourists living in countries that are not sensitive to freedoms tend to prefer traveling to countries with a high freedom index (Saha, et.al, 2017). Freedom of expression, on the other hand, is a fundamental democratic right that allows individuals to freely express their thoughts and not only enhances social welfare but also significantly shapes a country's international perception. Freedom of expression is an important factor that alleviates tourists' concerns about their preferred countries and has an indirect but strong impact on the development of the tourism sector (Tang, 2018). Countries with a high level of freedom of expression are generally perceived as more open, tolerant, and democratic societies, which makes these destinations more attractive to tourists (Asongu et al., 2023).

Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism; measures perceptions of the likelihood of the government being destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent methods, including politically motivated violence and terrorism (World Governance Indicators, 2022). Terrorism, on the other hand, refers to actions, movements, or behaviors that are carried out to make people do things through fear (Zenginkuzucu, 2021). Political stability and security are prerequisites for tourism. The possibility of events such as internal unrest and terrorism can even negatively affect tourists' decisions to visit a destination (Haddad, Nasr, & Ghida, 2015). The concept of freedom, on the other hand, affects tourism both as a country that receives tourists and as a country that sends tourists. This perspective argues that countries with a high index of political and individual freedoms will attract more tourists, or that tourists living in free countries will prefer to vacation in countries sensitive to freedom (Gholipour, Tajaddini, & Al-mulali, 2014). Another perspective is that tourists living in countries that are not sensitive to freedoms tend to prefer traveling to countries with a high freedom index (Saha, Su, & Campbell, 2017).

In 2009, a community called BRIC emerged as a result of Brazil, Russia, India, and China coming together to develop and promote their development and sustainability. In 2011, with the joining of South Africa, the community was named BRICS. On January 1, 2024, Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia also joined BRICS. As of 2024, the total population of BRICS countries has reached approximately 3.25 billion people. This figure corresponds to 45.58% of the world's total population. BRICS countries produce 44% of the oil produced worldwide. The total size of the economies of these countries is 29.89 trillion dollars, which corresponds to 27.29% of the world's total economies (IMF, 2025). BRICS countries hold a significant position in the global tourism industry as both sending and receiving markets for tourists. In 2024, the number of tourists visiting the founding members of BRICS and South Africa is approximately 85.5 million (UNTWO, 2025). Russian tourists traveled 17.35 million times during the same period, while the number of people traveling within Russia for domestic tourism reached 82 million. The number of Chinese traveling abroad was 130 million (BRICS, 2025). Although new members joined BRICS in 2024, the scope of this study is limited to the founding members. The main reason for this is that these countries have a long-standing history of economic cooperation, provide a high level of consistency and continuity in their data sets, and form a homogeneous group in terms of common political-economic development dynamics. Additionally, due to the new members not yet being fully integrated into the community and lacking long-term

consistent data sets, the study focused on the relationships among the founding members to maintain scientific integrity, and the analyses were limited to the founding members.

Considering the reciprocal relationship between the tourism industry and economic growth, identifying the factors affecting international tourism demand is of great importance for researchers (Yazdi & Khanalizadeh, 2017). When examining the economic sizes and tourism data of BRICS countries, it is observed that robust and comprehensive data are available to analyze the relationship between economic growth and tourism development. Additionally, the limited number of similar studies on BRICS countries in the literature enhances the unique value of this research. In addition, identifying the factors affecting tourism demand is of critical importance for understanding past trends and predicting future tourism demand (Peng, Song, Crouch, & Witt, 2015). A correct understanding of the factors affecting tourism demand will enable policymakers to develop tourism strategies more effectively. In this context, the aim of the study is to empirically analyze the effects of key variables such as economic growth, political stability, and freedom of expression on tourism development in the founding members of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—and to reveal the determining roles of these elements on tourism demand. In line with this purpose, the study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent does economic growth affect tourism development in BRICS countries?
- What role does political stability play in shaping tourism demand?
- Do democratic indicators such as freedom of expression have an impact on tourism development?

Çalışmanın en önemli katkılarından biri de, ifade özgürlüğü ile turizm gelişimi arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen ilk çalışmalardan biri olmasıdır. İfade özgürlüğü kavramının turizm literatürüne kazandırılması ve bu kavramın, dünya genelinde turistlerin seyahat davranışlarını açıklamada kullanılması çalışmanın literatüre sunacağı temel katkıdır.

Literature

Tourism development is a multidimensional process shaped contextually. Especially in a group of states with different political and economic structures, such as the BRICS countries, the effects of institutional variables like economic growth, political stability, and freedom of expression on the tourism sector have been revealed by various empirical studies with differing results. The study that pioneered the research on the relationship between tourism and economic growth, which has been extensively examined in the literature, and laid the groundwork for subsequent studies, was conducted by Ghali (1976). The focus of the studies conducted on this subject is on the positive effects of tourism, such as promoting economic development, creating employment opportunities, and providing foreign exchange earnings (Calero and Turner, 2020). While some studies in the literature argue that economic growth directly supports tourism development, others have shown that this relationship is only valid under certain conditions. For example, Brida, Cortes-Jimenez, and Pulina (2016) noted that there is a reciprocal interaction between tourism and economic growth in high-income economies; however, in low and middle-income countries, this relationship is limited due to the external dependency of tourism (Brida et al., 2016). Similarly, Tang and Abosedra (2014) found a positive causality between tourism and growth, but showed that in the case of India, this relationship was weak and unstable (Tang & Abosedra, 2014). However, there are very few studies in the literature examining the effects of economic growth on tourism development. According to Dwyer et al. (2004), one of the pioneering studies on this subject, the increase in national income and economic expansion lead to an increase in tourism demand. Dwyer et al. (2004) interpret this effect from the supply side, suggesting that economic growth can directly influence

tourist preferences by providing resources that enhance infrastructure investments and service quality. In the demand-side interpretations, it has been concluded that economic expansion has an impact on increasing people's participation rates in tourism (Wu and Wu, 2020).

As studies examining the relationship between tourism and the economy have matured, researchers have begun to combine these two concepts with governance variables, and in these studies, it has been concluded that the relationship between tourism and economic growth is proportional to the quality of governance (Telfer and Sharpley, 2014; Du et al., 2016). Some researchers have noted that, in addition to political instability (Neumayer, 2004; Basu and Marg, 2010; Mushtaq and Zaman, 2014), politically motivated violence and terrorist incidents (Llorca-Vivero, 2008; Araña and León, 2008) also negatively affect tourism development and tourist loyalty. Some studies emphasize that political stability directly affects the sector, while others have shown that this effect is less pronounced in non-democratic regimes. For example, Saha and Yap (2014) stated that political stability has a strong impact on tourism demand, and this effect is felt more in countries with low levels of political violence (Saha & Yap, 2014). Additionally, Gössling and Hall (2021) noted that in authoritarian regimes like Russia and China, political stability does not always support tourism development, as political image and perceptions of human rights also influence tourist decisions (Gössling & Hall, 2021).

However, apart from a few studies examining press freedom and tourism development in the literature, no study has directly examined the relationship between freedom of expression and tourism development. This study is valuable in addressing this gap. In Table 1, the studies examining the relationships between economic growth, political stability, and freedom of expression, as reviewed in the literature, are detailed.

Table 1. Literature review

Author(s)	Period of Analysis-Sample	Method	Findings
<i>Summary Of Current Economic Growth Literature</i>			
(Pulido-Fernández & Cárdenas-García, 2021)	1993-2017 143 Countries	Confirmation Factor Analysis	While tourism is a driver for economic growth, high levels of economic growth are also a driver for tourism.
(Mete, 2022)	2006-2019 Mediterranean countries	DH Causality Test	It confirmed the tourism-led growth hypothesis by supporting the positive relationship between tourism revenues and economic growth.
(Wijesekara, at al., 2022)	2003-2020 105 Countries	Granger causality and wavelet coherence	The findings show that tourism contributes significantly to economic growth and economic growth contributes to tourism.
(Nwaeze, at al. 2023)	1995-2018 Top 12 tourist countries in EU	PARDL	It positively impacts economic growth, tourism, energy use and emissions.
(Cárdenas-García, Brida, & Segarra, 2024)	1995-2019 123 Countries	DH Causality Test	There is a causal relationship between tourism and economic growth in countries that do not specialize in tourism and are underdeveloped, and a causal relationship between economic development and tourism in countries with high levels of development and tourism specialization.

Table 1. Literature review (cont.)

(Elgin & Elveren, 2024)	1995-2019 160 Countries	Cross-sectional OLS	It is concluded that there is a positive relationship between tourism and sustainable development and that this relationship differs between developed and developing countries and that development affects tourism in developed countries.
(Sekreter, Mert, & Cetin, 2025)	1990-2023 109 Countries	Hatemi-J asymmetric causality test	It has shown that an increase in tourism revenues provides resilience to the economy by reducing contraction during economic downturns.
(Kumar, Stauvermann, & Dau, 2025)	1986-220 115 Countries	ARDL	The relationship between tourism and economic growth is bidirectional and positive.
Summary of Current Political Stability Literature			
(Reeves, 2019)	1997-2018 MENA	Panel Data	Political instability in countries has a negative impact on tourism revenues. It has been observed that tourism demand reacts negatively to political violence and instability.
(Bayar & Yener, 2019)	2002-2015 18 Countries From Mediterranean Region	Panel Cointegration And Causality Analysis	The results show that there is a positive and bidirectional relationship between the political stability variable and tourism development and that political stability positively affects tourism development in the long run.
(Asongu, Rahman, & Nnanna, 2022)	2002-2018 47 Countries In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)	Generalized Method of Moments	The results show that there is a reciprocal relationship between tourism and economic growth, while political stability has positive effects on tourism.
(Gaberli, Gaberli, & Güler, 2022)	2005-2018 137 Countries	Panel Co-Integration Analysis	There is a positive relationship between political stability and tourism development. Political stability should be the main focus of long-term tourism policies.
(Sharma, 2024)	1995-2018 122 Countries	Dynamic Panel Data	The results show that tourism-led growth depends on institutional factors, political instability, violence and terrorism reduce the effects of tourism on economic growth, and political instability and terrorism hinder tourism development, especially in low-income economies.
(Hikam, Wau, Wibowo, & Muhdi, 2024)	2006-2020 28 OIC Countries	Generalized Method of Moments.	Political stability can increase the benefits that countries derive from tourism. Political stability positively affects tourism and other variables, including foreign investment.
Summary of Current Freedom of Expression Literature			
(Gholipour, Tajaddini, & el-mulali, 2014)	1999-2011 80 Countries	Generalized Method of Moments	The results show that when personal freedoms decrease in a country, the demand for foreign tourism increases. This is particularly common in developing countries.
(Demir & Gozgor, 2018)	1995-2016 160 Countries	Fixed-Effects, The Hausman–Taylor, And The Dynamic Panel Data	The results show that high levels of press freedom encourage inbound tourism.
(Kwabi, Ezeani, Owusu, Wonu, & Hu, 2023)	1996- 2020 88 Countries	Generalized Method of Moments.	It is concluded that the relationship between tourism development and income inequality is sensitive to press freedom, and that voice and accountability improve press freedom, which in turn affects tourism development.

In summary, the literature reveals that the development of tourism in BRICS countries is too multifaceted and sensitive to institutional frameworks to be explained solely by economic growth. While the literature generally accepts that economic growth supports tourism, the level and continuity of this relationship are directly linked to democratic indicators such as the establishment of political stability and freedom of expression. Especially, it is observed that political stability plays a central role in sustainable tourism investments and destination safety, while freedom of expression is becoming increasingly decisive in shaping the country's image and destination preferences. However, the impact of these variables shows heterogeneity specifically within BRICS countries; even in authoritarian regimes where economic growth is strong, the lack of freedom of expression and international

political perception can limit tourism development. Therefore, the literature clearly indicates that in order to understand tourism development in BRICS countries, not only economic but also political and institutional factors should be analyzed in a holistic and comparative manner.

Model and Data Description, Empirical Findings

This study investigates the determinants of tourism development in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa). Due to data limitations, the analysis period of the study consists of 2002-2020 annual data. In this context, economic growth, political stability and freedom of expression are determined as independent variables. Details about the variables used in the model are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Details of Variables Used in the Model

Variables and Representations	Identification and Measurement	Database
Tourism Development (<i>LogTG</i>)	International tourist arrivals (Thousands)	WDI
Economic Growth (<i>LogEB</i>)	Per Capita Economic Growth (Constant 2015 US\$)	WDI
Political Stability (<i>LogPI</i>)	Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (ranges from about -2.5 to 2.5, giving the country's score on the total indicator)	WGI
Freedom of Expression (<i>LogİÖ</i>)	Accountability (Accountability is an index that measures the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in the process of electing their government, as well as perceptions of freedom of expression, freedom of association and free media - ranging from about -2.5 to 2.5, giving the country's score on the overall indicator)	WGI

The model estimated in the study is based on Kwabi et al. (2023), Hikam et al. (2024) and Sharma (2024) and is as follows;

Tourism Development= f(Economic Growth, Political Stability, Freedom of Expression)

$$LogTG_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LogGDPpc_{i,t} + \beta_2 LogPI_{i,t} + \beta_3 LogİÖ_{i,t} + u_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

The natural logarithmic forms of all the variables used are used.

There is a strong and reciprocal relationship between economic growth and tourism; growth favours tourism and tourism favours growth. Therefore, economic growth is included as a control variable in the model. Since socio-economic structure, political stability and security conditions are determinant in attracting tourists, political stability is included as an independent variable. In addition, the level of freedom of expression and democratic governance are important for tourism development. The freedom of expression and accountability index used in this context measures whether fundamental rights are secured or not and affects the attractiveness of the destination. In countries with high freedom of expression, transparency, service quality and international reputation increase; therefore, tourism demand is expected to increase. Therefore, the inclusion of these variables in the model enables a comprehensive analysis of the effects of political and institutional structures on tourism in BRICS countries.

Table 3. Summary Statistics

Variables	Obs.	Average	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
LogTG	95	7.209579	0.5155635	6.377306	8.210955
LogEB	95	3.695342	0.3239114	2.89961	4.015283
LogPI	95	0.2390569	0.1147681	-0.075228	0.428677
LogİÖ	95	0.3702316	0.1877341	0	0.5396665

Table 3 shows the summary statistics of the variables. The number of observations is 95. This number is sufficient for short panel analysis. Table 4 shows the statistics required to decide on the model to be estimated.

Table 4. Deciding on the Model to be Used

Model	F-Test		Hausman Test		Decision
	Statistic	p-val.	Statistic	p-val.	
(Dep. Var. LogTG)	16.77	0.000***	13.89	0.003***	Fix Effect Model

Notes: *** and ** are used to denote 1% and 5% significance level, respectively.

The F test is used to test the classical method (Pooled Least Squares) against the fixed effects method (SE). According to the probability value, the fixed effects model is the appropriate model. The Hausman test is used to determine which of the fixed effects and random effects model is effective. According to the probability value of the Hausman test, if the hypothesis H_0 is rejected, the fixed effects method is appropriate, and if it is not rejected, the random effects method is appropriate. In this context, it is decided that the statistically appropriate model in the table is the fixed effects model.

It is important to determine whether the estimated models contain the problem of varying variance or not. Under conditions where this situation is ignored, the estimates may be inaccurate. Wald statistic is used to test this problem. This test tests the hypothesis that $\sigma^2(i) = \sigma^2$ for $i=1, N_g$ (N_g is used to represent the number of cross-sectional units) (Yaquib et al., 2015).

Investigating the presence of autocorrelation problem is also necessary as in the case of varying variance problem. In this study, the test developed by Wooldridge (2002) was used to determine the presence of autocorrelation. Drukker (2003) has developed this test to be used in reasonable sample sizes. In the presence of serial correlation, standard errors are biased and the results may be inconsistent (Drukker, 2003).

In addition, the presence of horizontal cross-sectional dependence of the estimated model is investigated. CD test is an important diagnostic test in determining the coefficient to be used. The time dimension (T) and horizontal cross-section (N) that make up the panel are important for the tests that investigate the presence of CD. Test statistics are taken into account according to the time dimension and the number of horizontal cross-sections. In case of $T > N$, the Breuch-Pagan LM (1980) test is used, otherwise the CD test statistic is used. In the light of the explanations, the LM test statistic is used to determine the presence of CD. The equivalence of the LM test statistic is as follows;

$$LM = \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^N T_{ij} \hat{\rho}_{ij}^2 \rightarrow X^2 \frac{N(N-1)}{2} \quad (2)$$

N represents the horizontal cross-section. T represents time. $\hat{\rho}_{ij}^2$ is the correlation coefficient obtained from the residuals of the econometric model.

Table 5 shows the diagnostic test results for the estimated model before proceeding to coefficient estimation.

Table 5. Diagnostic Test Results

Model	Autocorrelation Test		Variance Test		CD Test		
	Wooldridge Test		Modifiye Wald Test		Test	Stat.	P-val.
Dep. Var. (LogTG)	F(1,4)		$\chi^2(5)$		LM	45.67	0.000***
			187.62		LMadj	16.15	0.000***
	p-değ>F		p-değ<χ^2		LMcd	3.362	0.000**

Notes: *** and ** are used to denote 1% and 5% significance level, respectively.

According to the autocorrelation test, since the probability value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis that there is AR1 type autocorrelation is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that there is an autocorrelation problem in the estimated model. According to the Wald test in the second part of the table, since the probability value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that the model has a varying variance problem. Finally, in the CD test results, all test statistics are less than 0.05. Since $N < T$ in the study, the LM Test statistic is taken into consideration. In this context, the null hypothesis that there is no horizontal cross-section dependence is rejected. This finding indicates that the model contains horizontal cross-section dependence. In line with these results, the Driscoll-Kraay estimator, which is effective in the presence of these problems, is used as a control estimator.

According to the results in Table 5, it is concluded that the model estimated in the study has horizontal cross-section dependence, autocorrelation and changing variance problems. In this context, it was decided to use the Driscoll-Kraay estimator, which provides robust estimation in the presence of these conditions. Moreover, the Driscoll-Kraay (D-K) estimator is particularly advantageous in terms of its ability to address common problems in panel data analysis. It is particularly suitable for cases where $N < T$ (i.e. the number of units is less than the time dimension). Another advantage of this estimator is that it generates robust White-type standard errors against problems such as heteroskedasticity, serial correlation (autocorrelation) and cross-sectional dependence. This makes statistical inferences more reliable. While methods such as FGLS may introduce bias in small samples, D-K provides more reliable estimates in this sense. Driscoll-Kraay (1998) have shown that more consistent standard errors are obtained even in the presence of cross-sectional dependence, autocorrelation and changing variance (Driscoll and Kraay, 1998: 2-3). This estimator performs calculations by making an approximate Newey-West type correction to the ordering of cross-sectional means of moment conditions. The standard error estimates calculated in the D-K estimator are done in this way, which enables it to produce consistent and efficient results regardless of the cross-section size (N) (for $N \rightarrow \infty$) (Hoechle, 2007: 284-287). The equation used for the D-K estimator is as follows;

$$y_{it} = x'_{it}\theta + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad i = 1, \dots, N, \quad t = 1, \dots, T \quad (3)$$

y_{it} in the equation is a scalar. x_{it} represents a $(K + 1) \times 1$ vector of independent variables with 1 as the first element. θ is used instead of $(K + 1) \times 1$ vector to represent unknown coefficients. i represents cross-sections and t represents time.

Table 6 shows the statistics obtained from the Fixed Effects model and the robust estimator Driscoll-Kraay estimator.

Table 6. Fixed Effects and Driscoll-Kraay Estimation Results

	Fix Effect Model			Driscoll-Kraay Estimator		
	Katsay ₁	Stn. Hata	p-değeri	Katsay ₁	Drisc/Kraay Stn. Hata	
LogEB	0.655	0.167	0.000***	0.655	0.177	0.002***
LogPI	0.460	0.327	0.163	0.460	0.172	0.016**
LogİÖ	0.370	0.682	0.589	0.370	0.652	0.578
sabit	4.539	0.708	0.000***	4.539	0.713	0.000***
Model Statistics	<i>F statistics: 7.52</i> <i>F P-val: 0.000***</i> <i>R²:0.20</i>			<i>F statistics: 9.09</i> <i>F P-val.: 0.000***</i> <i>R²:0.20</i>		

Notes: *** and ** are used to denote 1% and 5% significance level, respectively.

R² (Coefficient of Determination) indicates how much of the change in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables in the model. R² = 0.20 indicates that the independent variables in the model explain only 20% of the total change in the dependent variable. This indicates that the explanatory power of the model is low. However, this is not unusual in the context of the D-K estimator. This is because the D-K estimator focuses on producing robust standard errors against problems such as autocorrelation, heteroskedasticity and cross-sectional dependence, and does not aim to maximize R². Moreover, this ratio may increase when variables directly related to tourism are included in the model. Since this study focuses more on the quality of governance, the ratio may be lower than expected.

The results obtained from the Fixed Effects and Driscoll-Kraay estimators in the table are largely in line. F statistics show that the models are significant. Since the study is based on the results of the Driscoll-Kraay estimator, it is observed that the LogEB variable does not have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable according to the probability values. A 1% increase in economic growth (LogEB) increases tourism development by 0.655%. A 1% increase in political stability (LogPI) leads to a 0.460% increase in tourism development. The freedom of expression (logEF) variable is not statistically significant. This may be due to the fact that democratization indicators such as freedom of expression generally have indirect effects on tourism. Therefore, their direct relationship with the tourism variable may be weak or statistically insignificant. Moreover, the freedom of expression indicator used (e.g. Voice & Accountability Index) covers a large number of sub-dimensions (freedom of elections, freedom of the press, freedom of NGOs). However, tourists may not be directly interested in each of these elements. In this context, the observed effect is in the expected direction.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study aims to analyze the main determinants of tourism development in BRICS countries and examine the impact of factors such as economic growth, political stability and freedom of expression on the sector. Using annual data for the period 2002-2020, the analysis employs the Driscoll-Kraay estimator to understand the complex dynamics of the tourism sector. The empirical findings show that economic growth and political stability increase tourism development. However, no significant relationship was found between the freedom of expression variable and the dependent variable.

According to the results of the analysis, a 1% increase in economic growth (LogEB) increases tourism development by 0.655%. This result shows that economic growth supports tourism development in BRICS countries and this result is consistent with existing studies in the literature (Balaguer & Cantavella, 2002; Parrilla, Font, & Nadal, 2007; Lee & Chang 2008; Brida & Risso, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante, 2010; Ivanov & Webster, 2012; Tang &

Tan, 2015; Wu, et al., 2016; Gwenhure & Odhiambo, 2017; Erdenetuul, et al., 2024). According to this finding, in order to make the impact of growth on tourism more pronounced, investments in the development of infrastructure facilities that will make tourism attractive in tourism regions should be emphasized. The presence of these investments and the quality of the infrastructure can support tourism development by influencing tourists' preference for the region at the preference stage and their satisfaction at the experience stage. In addition, policies should be developed and incentivized to support tourism-related sub-sectors (agriculture, handicrafts, service sector). In this way, economic returns from tourism should be diversified and increased. In addition, promoting the attractions of destinations with appropriate promotional tools will affect the development of destinations in terms of tourism.

The study found that a 1% increase in political stability (LogPI) leads to a 0.460% increase in tourism development. This result reveals that political stability has a positive effect on tourism development in BRICS countries. This result is consistent with the findings of Alper (2018), who examined the relationship between political stability and tourism in BRICS countries. In addition, this result is consistent with the studies in the literature that emphasize the positive impact of political stability on tourism (Basu and Marg, 2012, Ingram et al. 2012; Saha and Yap; 2014; Mushtaq and Zaman, 2014; Bayar and Yener, 2019) and with the studies that conclude that political terrorism and violence negatively affect tourists' travel preferences (Neumayer; 2004). Taking measures to ensure political stability and reducing political violence and terrorism should be policies that positively affect tourism activities in countries. Such measures can increase the attractiveness of countries as tourism destinations. Fighting corruption and improving the quality of governance are critical for attracting investment in the tourism sector in the long run. Political stability can stabilize tourism revenues by reducing the fragility of the tourism sector. Risk management policies and diplomatic relations should be strengthened to increase confidence in the international tourism market and to ensure the success of long-term tourism policies. This will increase the global credibility of the country and have a positive impact on tourists' preferences.

Finally, no statistically significant relationship was found between freedom of expression and tourism development. In the literature, there are no studies that directly examine the relationship between freedom of expression and tourism. Our study is valuable in this respect despite the lack of a significant relationship. However, there are some studies on the relationship between democratic indicators and human rights and tourism (Liu and Pratt, 2016). In addition, although there is no direct relationship between freedom of expression and tourism development, it is known that the existence of rights that are indicators of development such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of travel, etc. in a country positively affects tourists' preferences and accelerates tourism development in destinations (Demir & Gozgor, 2018; Kwabi, et al., 2023). Therefore, following policies that will ensure that personal rights and freedoms are emphasized in marketing activities will positively affect tourism development. According to the press freedom index published in 2024, among the BRICS countries, Iran ranks 176th out of 180 countries, China 172nd, Russia 162nd, Brazil 82nd, and South Africa 38th. When the index is analyzed, two of the 8 countries with the worst scores in terms of press freedom (Iran, China) are BRICS member countries. Russia is also one of the countries on the red list. The only country with an adequate score in the field of press freedom is South Africa (www.rfs.org.en, 2025). When the 2024 Human Freedom Index is analyzed, Iran ranks third from the last among 165 countries, i.e. 163rd, China 150th, Russia 139th, South Africa 73rd and Brazil 70th (www.datawrapper.dwcdn.net, 2025).

An analysis of the findings specific to BRICS countries reveals that, although economic growth and partly political stability have supportive effects on tourism development, structural limitations at the level of freedom of expression and fundamental rights hinder the sustainable development of tourism. In particular, restrictions on freedom of the press, access to information and digital mobility negatively affect both the destination choice of international tourists and weaken intra-BRICS tourism mobility. In addition, given the strong interaction of freedom of expression with other democratic rights, positive steps in this area would not only improve outbound tourism but also increase international demand by strengthening the country's image. Considering such reforms not only as normative but also as a sectoral necessity will provide a more rational and functional basis for tourism-oriented public policies in BRICS countries.

Moreover, strengthening regional co-operation mechanisms may contribute to a more integrated tourism strategy among BRICS countries. Facilitating visa facilitation between countries, creating tourism-specific economic zones, supporting infrastructure investments and accelerating digitalisation will increase the efficiency of tourism supply and make regional tourism integration possible. Providing special incentives for tourism investments, especially in underdeveloped BRICS regions, can serve both economic and social development in these regions. All these suggestions require that the development of tourism in BRICS countries should be considered not only from the perspective of economic growth and infrastructure investments, but also from the perspective of freedom of expression, quality of governance and international integration. In this framework, the development of inclusive and sustainable public policies in line with the multidimensional nature of tourism will make the BRICS geography more effective and competitive in the global tourism system.

Thus, tourism development can be supported. Although the study analyzes the factors affecting tourism development in BRICS countries, it has some limitations. First, the variables used in the study focus on a specific period (2002-2020). Future research designed to cover a wider time period would provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the results. Moreover, the inclusion of socio-economic factors such as infrastructure investments, tourism promotion policies, natural disasters, etc. that affect tourism development in the analysis would allow for more holistic results. In addition, in future studies, it is suggested that economic, political and freedom-based variables affecting tourism development in BRICS countries should be analysed at sub-national level and supported by qualitative methods. In addition, it would be useful to use structural break tests and periodic comparisons to analyse the transformation of these relationships over time.

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