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# GLOBAL SOUTH VERSUS GEOPOLITICAL SOUTH: A DEBATE ON THE ANALYTICAL RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPTS

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## Introduction

On April 13, 2023, Dilma Rousseff, former president of Brazil, was sworn in as president of the New Development Bank (NDB), also known as the BRICS Bank. During the swearing-in ceremony, when talking about the benefits of the bank for developing countries, she referred to two concepts that have gained enormous traction among experts and decision-makers in international relations in the post-Cold War era: South and the Global South. More precisely, the current president of the NDB said that the founding of the institution:

> Besides being a historic event, it was a demonstration of the importance of establishing a strategy and a partnership, sharing the needs of the countries of the South, of the Global South. In other words, the South, which is the South that wants to emerge, and which also includes countries from the North, and with multilateralism (ROUSSEFF, 2023 apud PODER 360, 2023, our translation).

Despite some of the press and social media profiles highlighting this speech, claiming that there was some kind of geographical gaffe, the speech reveals Dilma Rousseff's conscious use of a term with a strong connotative meaning which, in turn, refers to a rich debate among analysts of contemporary international relations.

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More than just a stylistic variation of the word South, the use of the adjective "Global" seeks to qualify the noun South and refer to a specific portion of this broader group. Politically, the use of this concept by decision-makers usually reflects the positions and preferences of countries or groups of states, expressed in their bilateral relations and in multilateral organizations, which are backed not only by academics but also by criticisms of its use and suggestions for alternatives.

Among the alternatives presented, this article focuses on the concept of the Geopolitical South, developed from discussions and research carried out within the framework of the Laboratory of World Political Analysis (LABMUNDO), a research group linked to the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (IESP-UERJ), on the shortcomings and gaps left by the concept of the Global South. More specifically, this work aims to debate the limitations and analytical possibilities offered by the concept of the Global South, compared to the concept of the Geopolitical South, for a more accurate understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of international relations in the first decades of the 21st century.

In structural terms, the article is divided into four parts, in addition to this introduction and a conclusion. The first section presents the origin of the concept of the Global South, as well as its definitions in the literature. The second section analyzes the main analytical limitations of the concept of the Global South. The third section presents the concept of the Geopolitical South and highlights its analytical advantages over the concept of the Global South. The final section aims to highlight the main shortcomings of the Geopolitical South concept and offer suggestions for its improvement.

## Building the concept of Global South

Unequivocally pinpointing the origin of the term Global South is an inglorious task. There is no classic work that marks its emergence, as is the case, for example, with the concept of soft power, coined by Joseph Nye. Nor is there a definition in International Relations academia that has become predominant over time, as has happened with the concept of international regimes and the circulation of norms. However, it is possible to search for its most famous first appearances. The term Global South has its founding myth in the article "Vietnamism has failed... The revolution can only be mauled, not defeated", by American writer and activist Carl Oglesby, published in 1969 in the liberal and Catholic periodical Commonweal, in a special issue on the Vietnam War. However, it is worth noting that Heike Pagel, Karen Ranke,

Fabian Hempel, and Jonas Köhler demonstrated in their 2014 article *The Use of the Concept Global South in Social Science & Humanities*, that the use of the expression Global South has become common sense in literature and has experienced significant growth in English-language academic publications only since 2004 (PAGEL; RANKE & HEMPEL, 2014).

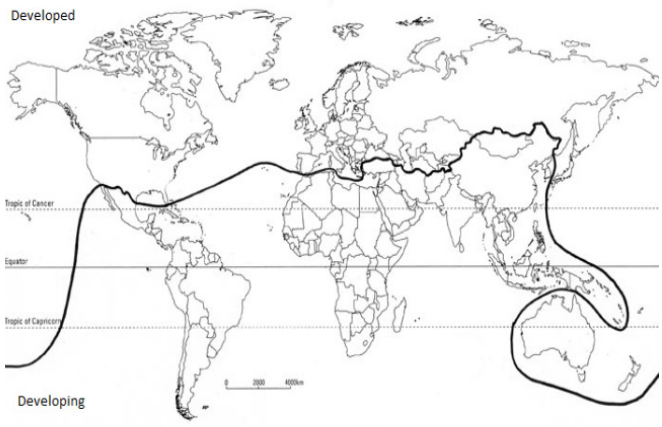
This article argues that the Global South is a derivation of the concept of the South. The latter, in turn, gained prominence in the literature at the end of the 1980s, based on reformulations of two other concepts that had been more prominent in previous decades: the Third World and developing countries. The Third World (*Tiers Monde*, in French) aimed to highlight that, at a time when the world was divided on international security issues by the ideological dispute between the capitalist bloc, led by the United States, and the socialist bloc, led by the Soviet Union, there were countries whose main concern was development issues. In other words, in addition to the "two worlds" of the East-West ideological dispute, there was a "third world", which had other priorities given the social and economic situation they faced. The concept of the Third World, coined by Alfred Sauvy in his 1952 article *Trois mondes, une planète* (SAUVY, 1952), has lost its prominence due to its anachronism for analyzing international relations in the post-Cold War period, although it is still used with a derogatory and segregationist content (ALBARET & DEVIN, 2016; DUFOUR, 2007). The term developing countries, in turn, preceded other concepts, which generally had origins more linked to economic criteria and a liberal reading of development. Developing countries thus came to represent a reformulation of other expressions, such as underdeveloped countries, less advanced countries, and non-industrialized countries. In common, these expressions carry the unmistakable evolutionist character of the developmentalist theses of the 1970s and modernization theory. Although they are still very common in newspaper articles, academic papers, and even in reports by international organizations, the use of these concepts has decreased due to the perception that they carried with them - and therefore spread - content with a hierarchical, ethnocentric, and Western connotation, which led to the frequent use of quotation marks, and their limitation to the economic dimension of development, without alluding to other dimensions, such as the social, human and environmental (ALBARET & DEVIN, 2016; DUFOUR, 2007).

Thus, in comparison with the concepts available in International Relations, the South was presented, at least at that time, as a less committed option (politically and ethically), but one that served the purpose of indicating the shift from the East-West divide in international relations at the end of the Cold War to the North-South axis, without being limited to econometric

criteria (ALBARET & DEVIN, 2016). Consequently, the South emerged as the preferred term in the literature from the 1980s onwards, especially for those who sought to affirm that geopolitical disputes continued to be an important element of interstate relations after the end of the Cold War.

More precisely, the diffusion of the concept of the South and the notion of a North-South divide in the literature to refer to the stratification of states in the international system was marked by the publication of the report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, known as the Brandt Report, by the World Bank in 1980, the aim of which was to present recommendations on ways to break the political deadlock that existed in multilateral negotiations on the development agenda in the 1970s and 1980s (BRUN, 2022). The definition of the South presented in the document was, on the one hand, borrowed from civil society organizations, which defined it as not belonging to the Western world and, on the other hand, based on differences in terms of development or socio-economic indicators between national states, i.e. socio-economic performance. In turn, their argument was that the deepening inequalities between states along the North-South axis was the main social challenge of that period. It is also worth noting that, based on the Brandt Line presented in this report for a cartographic representation of the world based on the North-South division, the South would include countries in the northern hemisphere, including countries whose geographical location goes beyond the Tropic of Cancer, while excluding Australia and New Zealand, which are geographically south of the Equator.

**Figure 1 - Brandt's line**
Source: Banco Mundial 1980



The geographical imprecision of the South presented in Brandt's Line, however, generated important questions and improvements in the definition of this concept in academic literature. Firstly, several authors began to debate which indicators would be most accurate to contemplate the socio-economic criteria that would define the South from a particular position on the issue of economic development (SANTANDER CAMPOS, 2016). The second type of questioning and improvement came from the inclusion of a shared political condition at the international level as an essential dimension for defining the South (ALBARET & DEVIN, 2016; BRUN, 2018; DADOS & CONNEL, 2012). Finally, some authors have come to include immaterial elements, such as the multi-ethnic character of the societies of the South (BRAVEBOY-WAGNER, 1986; 2016), the national construction dilemmas faced by their states (ALDEN, MORPHET & VIEIRA, 2010), and a positive identification based on sharing common challenges and solutions (SANTANDER CAMPOS, 2016). In the absence of a general agreement on the indicators that would be essential for a state to be included in the concept of the South, these authors did, however, share a reference to "developing" status in their different definitions of the South (BRUN, 2022).

If the South, as we have seen, was presented as a reformulation of the concepts of the Third World and developing countries, the term Global South, in turn, became widespread from the beginning of the new millennium, as a reformulation of the concept of the South, although it brings little new in its content. We now turn to an analysis of the ontological debate about the Global South in the literature, with the aim of presenting a systematization of the main definitions found. However, as mentioned, it is difficult to pinpoint its origin, as there is no classic work that inaugurated the term or a definition that has become widely accepted. On the contrary, academic references or greater conceptual detail rarely accompany the use of the term Global South. This weakness can also be seen in academic works, which are more often applied to case studies.

For this reason, for the purposes of this article, it is understood that the best way to understand the way in which the literature conceives the concept of the Global South is by questioning the reasons that led to the reformulation of the concept of the South, which from the beginning of the 21st century gained the adjective Global, which should qualify the existing noun. In other words, we will try to understand the different definitions of the Global South through an analysis of the reasons why international organizations, national governments, academics and experts, the media and civil society organizations

have come to prefer the Global South to the South.

The concept of the Global South has gained traction in the specialist literature, to the detriment of the South, primarily due to the valorization of an approach centered on the deterritorialization of the negative effects of capitalist accumulation on spaces and peoples on a global scale within the framework of globalization theory. In other words, it was disseminated by authors who aimed to demonstrate how contemporary global capitalism produced new socio-spatial configurations that could not be effectively described based on purely territorial models of the division between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, but which were still fundamentally socio-spatial in nature because they generated a division between a developed North and a developing South within the same state, as in the Italian case, or between states in the same region, without taking into account circles of latitude, such as the Equator. (BRENNER, 2011)

Secondly, the adjective Global began to be affixed to the South due to dissatisfaction with the preservation of a Third-Worldist and non-aligned character in the concept of the South by a portion of the literature, to think about the dynamics of international cooperation in the era of globalization. While the South necessarily referred to the opposite of the North, highlighting asymmetries and hierarchies implicit in the international order, as well as an interrelationship between the development of the North and the underdevelopment of the South, the Global South was not used as an opposite to the Global North, which, in turn, was and continues to be mentioned infrequently. This part of the literature sought to emphasize in the concept of the Global South the building of strong, interactive networks of cooperation as a fundamental element of government policy and practice to contribute to the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals established by the UN in 2000 so that the vulnerabilities and challenges common to these countries could be tackled jointly by the countries of the South, and so that the gross imbalance between developed and developing countries could be remedied by absorbing the positive dividends of economic globalization (DIRLIK, 2007). The main expression of this approach was the publication of the United Nations Development Program's Forging a Global South report in 2003. This is a perspective inspired by liberal thinking, which defends the positive impacts of globalization in these countries' quest to overcome their social and economic challenges. Therefore, the adjective "global" indicates states that have embraced the globalization project as an appropriate means of development. The expression indirectly diminishes the visibility of the asymmetries caused or deepened by globalization itself.

Finally, the Global South was preferred by the literature, as it does

not necessarily reflect the state-centric character that the notion of the South carried with it. The Global South has been recurrently mobilized in reference to civil society organizations that have gained more and more space in multilateral international organizations (DEVIN, 2011) and that build their identities and networks of political activism from the mutual recognition of their conditions on the margins of the neoliberal world of globalization and the shared experience of the negative effects of neoliberal globalization (LÓPEZ 2007; POLET 2007; PRASHAD, 2012). With this, the Global South would also encompass movements, networks and actors that do not have territory as one of their constitutive elements - as is the case with the state in the Weberian conception. Although territory is still a fundamental element for understanding the dynamics of international relations - after all, non-state actors have headquarters, activities, flows and individuals that are inevitably located in territories - the concept of the Global South, from this perspective, gives the impression that more types of actors are covered by the definition.

In summary, we can conclude that the concept of the Global South does not have an objective, agreed definition, either in the scientific literature or in reports by states and other international actors. Its emergence is justified based on the need for a new, more de-territorialized, less state-centric approach, which does not place so much emphasis on the inherent contradictions of international relations, to the terminologies previously mobilized by academic literature and political documents from states and international organizations: South, third world, underdeveloped countries, developing countries, emerging countries, backward countries, non-industrialized countries, poor countries. Therefore, the origins and trajectory explored in this first section reveal a history of searching for a denser, more precise, and less ethnocentric concept. However, there are other versions of this history, which will be explored in the next section.

## The insufficiency of the concept of the Global South

The previous section showed the trajectory of the term Global South and other related concepts since practically the beginning of the scientific field of International Relations. Despite its widespread use, the definition of the Global South has flaws that result in analytical shortcomings. This section aims to analyze these shortcomings, such as semantic imprecision, conceptual vagueness, the absence of a counter-concept and ethnocentrism. Based on this critique of the concept of the Global South, the third section will be dedicated to the conceptual construction of an alternative.

Throughout this section, as the fragility of the explanatory power of the term Global South becomes clear, it is worth reflecting on why it has become so popular, despite its shortcomings. As mentioned, there is no academic work that defends the reform of this concept and that has become such a classic in the literature as to be a turning point and explain such a change. However, one should not make the mistake of inferring that the absence of "founding parents" of a concept can represent a natural or disinterested process. Change in this regard is part of political, economic, social, and cultural movements, which reflect hierarchical power relations and at the same time feed them. Although many who use the term Global South don't do so consciously, there are messages inherent in this concept that are disseminated and crystallized, which is not a disinterested movement. And these motivations are rarely included in the explanations developed in the last section of this article. Furthermore, it is not possible to argue that the adjective "global" only has the purpose of indicating that the countries that belong to this group are located on the globe since at the time of writing there is no nation outside the Earth.

The semantic imprecision of the word "global" is one of the possible criticisms of the concept. The semantic function of adjectives is to qualify nouns, either by attributing characteristics, restricting, or clarifying their nature. Therefore, in the expression Global South, the adjective "global" is intended to modify the meaning of the noun "south". However, it is worth asking what informative value the word "global" adds. As has already been argued, it does not refer to the fact that everyone in this group is located on the globe, because this characteristic does not differentiate the new concept of the Global South from its predecessors: Third World, developing countries, South, etc. This case differs, for example, from the term "human security". The adjective "human", when qualifying the noun "security", has the function of making a distinction from the security that is traditionally analyzed in International Relations: that relating to States. Therefore, in addition to its semantic function, the word "human" has a relevant explanatory function for the field of International Relations, highlighting a fundamental difference in the type of security that is dealt with, as well as the main victims of this insecurity: individuals. It could be argued that the adjective "global" seeks to indicate inclusion in the process of globalization, which accelerated and deepened throughout the 20th century. On the other hand, all actors in international relations, albeit asymmetrically and with different results, have been affected by the globalization process. As a result, the choice of adjective remains, at best, questionable as to its relevance.

Semantic imprecision can be considered a cause or symptom of another criticism of the Global South: its vagueness. When using the concept,

it is not clear what the main nature of the group is that is being defined. The origin can be political, economic, social, cultural, behavioral, material, geographical or even a mixture of all the factors mentioned above. There are no clearly defined criteria as to the main characteristics and their weight, for inclusion or exclusion of members who can be classified in this concept. Although in the social sciences, it is not uncommon for concepts to have elastic boundaries in their definitions, in the case of the Global South, these boundaries are practically unknown. While some states are often classified as part of the Global South (e.g. Brazil, Mexico, India, and Nigeria), other countries are not automatically associated with the definition (e.g. North Korea, Iran, South Sudan, China, Cyprus, Panama and the Maldives). If these countries are not considered members of the Global South, it is also unclear what classification would apply to them, as there is no understanding of what a non-Global South would be.

As the definition of the Global South is vague, as are its criteria, various explanatory hypotheses can be put forward to understand the differentiated treatment: position in international politics, economic relevance, human development index, domestic political regime and even subjective reasons stemming from worldviews. This vagueness may reflect the real objective of the concept of the Global South, which remains hidden between the lines of its use: to name everything that is considered to be "the rest", just as the title of Alice Amsden's work (2003) denounces.

This perception that the Global South seeks to include within a single concept a myriad of actors that are part of the "rest" generates two main difficulties. Firstly, any concept that seeks to place very heterogeneous units under the same umbrella ends up losing its explanatory capacity. Excessive generalization creates platitudes, making the concept not very useful for analyzing the complexity of the group's members, as well as intra- and inter-group relations. The Global South aims to embrace countries with a large territorial extension, such as Brazil, and others that are at risk of disappearing due to the effects of climate change, such as Tuvalu; nuclear powers, such as India, to countries such as Costa Rica, which has decided not to have armed forces; economically robust states, such as China, to fragile countries, such as Yemen; liberal democracies, such as Taiwan, to authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia; as well as countries aligned in international politics with the traditional powers of the North, such as Mexico, to revisionists, such as Iran. While the inclusion and exclusion criteria are unclear, the attempt to cover so many units under the same concept gives the impression of a profound lack of knowledge about the characteristics of this group. As well as highlighting the weakness of the concept's explanatory power, this finding reinforces the

hypothesis that the Global South's main objective is to give a name to the "rest". In other words, regardless of the characteristics of the cases, everything that doesn't belong to an idea of the North is defined as the Global South.

Curiously, although the Global South is coined from an idea of opposition to an established group (i.e. "the other"), there is no inherent counter-concept in scientific literature. In geographical terms, the South is the opposition to the North, which also includes explanations in physics, given the planet's magnetic field. The same is not true of the Global South, since the South is treated as Global, but the North is not always. Academic concepts require clear scientific criteria that are applied impartially to all cases (GOERTZ, 2006). In this case, one wonders whether the reasons that led to the need to insert the adjective "global", even though the choice of the word can be semantically criticized, to describe the South were also observed for the North. Furthermore, even if the expression "Global North" were more common, this concept would inherit the same difficulties and inaccuracies that weaken the definition of the Global South.

The concept of the Global South was born in academic circles, but has had a degree of acceptance, albeit timid, in speeches, reports and other documents from states and international organizations. Despite this, few actors, state or otherwise, bother to define themselves as Global South in their official documents, speeches, and reports. This is not the case with other concepts, as occurred, for example, in the Non-Aligned Movement, in which states sought to mark a political position, emphasizing the North-South divide beyond the East-West divide of the Cold War (MILANI et al., 2014). Today, we can cite the cases of China and Brazil in the political field of International Development Cooperation, which reinforce their characteristics as developing countries to legitimize their international actions vis-à-vis their partners and in opposition to the Official Development Assistance of traditional donors (DUARTE, 2019b). Due to the rules agreed in the World Trade Organization and other international institutions, which provide for differentiated treatment for countries at different levels of industrialization, several states are concerned with reinforcing their characteristics as countries with lower relative development (MILANI et al., 2014). However, the Global South does not reflect any identity that the actors recognize, nor does it have a political impact or produce legal or commercial consequences. The fact that it is primarily an academic concept is not a problem in itself, as analytical frameworks are created to facilitate the process of analyzing and interpreting the phenomena studied, although decision-makers rarely make decisions based on scientific concepts. However, the virtual non-existence of a Global South in the empirics is noteworthy and, added to the weaknesses already

explored, reinforces the criticism that the Global South has little explanatory power.

It is possible to infer that one of the main motivations behind the concept of the Global South, even if it is hidden, is the Northern powers' view of everything they consider exogenous. It is therefore a concept based on an ethnocentric, paternalistic, and inevitably superficial reading of the international system and the actors within it. In this sense, the Global South also carries with it a need for validation and recognition by the powers, which would explain the need for the adjective "global" to qualify the South. Actors who are not part of the North (i.e. belong to "the rest"), but are considered close by the powers, are considered global. Countries in the South that are seen as pariahs generally do not appear as part of the Global South (i.e. the unspoken definition of the non-Global South). As Milani and Kraychete (2022, p.10) argue, "(...) the term 'Global South' would imply that analysts accept a concept of the social (the international) that removes even more agency from the countries of the geopolitical South." For its part, the North does not need to be classified as global, because the analysis of the aspects necessary to be considered as such takes as its starting point this group, which, according to this perspective, are naturally already worthy of being considered global. The asymmetry of power crystallized in the power structure of knowledge (DUARTE, 2019a) has made it possible for this fragile and ethnocentric concept to gain ground and consolidate itself in the academic sphere, including in countries that are considered the "rest". For these reasons, this article argues that the idea of the Global South, as well as being analytically unhelpful, should not be used by academics from the South. In the next section, a conceptual alternative will be presented.

## Geopolitical South: a contribution to the debate

As announced in the introduction, this section presents the concept of the Geopolitical South as an alternative to the use of the term Global South. It is not argued, however, that this new concept ends the debate in the literature on how to classify the South, given its plural characteristics, or that it is exempt from criticism. On the contrary, it is recognized that, despite the advantages that will be developed in the following paragraphs, there are still shortcomings and points that need further reflection, which will be analyzed in the next section. It is understood, however, that the establishment and use of the concept of the Geopolitical South encourages and rescues an important debate in the academic sphere, denaturalizing and tensioning concepts loaded with biases from the North in order to analyze other actors in the world.

Therefore, despite being subject to criticism, it is hoped that theorizing about the Geopolitical South will make a contribution to academia by encouraging reflection and debate.

In pointing out the shortcomings of the Global South, the previous section listed some weaknesses, such as semantic imprecision, conceptual vagueness, the absence of a counter-concept and ethnocentrism. These points will also be important for analyzing the concept that will be presented in this section, but first it is necessary to define it. The definition of the Geopolitical South is based on actors who construct their political and identity positions on a systemic level, politicizing their (unfavorable) positions in the international hierarchy, based on a historical reading of asymmetries, which are perpetuated and crystallized in power structures. It is not, therefore, a concept created from the world powers' vision of other actors. The concept of the Geopolitical South seeks to reinforce the agency of actors from the South, insofar as it brings a self-constructed image, based on their readings of international relations and their insertions.

In contrast to the concept of the Global South, the definition described above already has an immediate advantage in terms of substance and meaning. The adjective "geopolitical" has informative value, since it brings meaning and qualifies the noun "South". While the Global South, both because of its semantic choice and because it is a vague concept, obfuscates and softens the existence of power relations, the concept presented seeks to place these disputes and tensions at the center of the analysis, inviting a historical reading of asymmetries, relations of domination, exploitation, and humiliation as constitutive factors of international relations (BADIE, 2014). What most characterizes the dynamics between actors (state and non-state) is not the fact that they take place on the globe (and are therefore global), but their strongly hierarchical dimension that shapes the anarchic system.

The concept of the Geopolitical South seeks to reduce the problem of semantic imprecision, since its construction makes it clear what is the main nature of the group it seeks to define. Consequently, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of the states that are part of this concept become clearer. Like other concepts in the social sciences, these criteria have a subjective content, which requires interpretative work when applying their definition to empirical cases. Some constitutive elements of the Geopolitical South (such as identity, social, political and cultural issues) cannot be precisely determined by means of mathematical formulas or purely technical factors. As argued in the previous section, the elasticity of concepts in the Social Sciences, due to different interpretations of the phenomenon being analyzed, represents a weakness, but does not invalidate their explanatory power. In this sense,

it is worth pointing out that the boundaries drawn by the definition of the Geopolitical South are clear, although there is still a degree of subjectivity.

Defining these boundaries also helps to reduce (although it does not eliminate) a negative effect that is inherent in processes that establish analytical classes: the creation of platitudes within a class, forging a false homogeneity. It is still possible to classify actors with very diverse characteristics under the definition of the Geopolitical South (for example: military capacity, economic weight, political representativeness, social challenges they face, geographical position, domestic political regime, culture, etc.). The factor that unites this myriad of actors in the light of the concept of the Geopolitical South is their political positioning in the international power game (MILANI & KRAYCHETE, 2022). The Geopolitical South was not constructed on the basis of a stereotyped and superficial view that actors have of everything they consider exogenous. On the contrary, it is a concept developed by actors from the South, to highlight the reading they have of themselves, although they may have different motivations for having developed this self-perception. The Geopolitical South, therefore, is a definition that covers fewer cases than the Global South, as not all actors from the South will be part of it. Despite the problem of creating unwanted generalizations within the analytical class, the concept is designed to highlight the identity of these actors, which is reflected in their behaviour, their worldviews, the construction of their international norms and their readings of national interest, despite being heterogeneous in material and ideational terms.

There are no cases of actors officially declaring themselves to be part of the Geopolitical South, unlike the term Global South. This is a concept that was born in academia and is intended to have an analytical function. The existence of groups, networks and political movements provides empirical evidence of the Geopolitical South. This is the case, for example, with variable geometry groups that aim to challenge the concentration of global decision-making power. Perhaps the most eloquent example is the BRICS (VIEIRA, 2016), but we can also mention the G-20 trade group within the World Trade Organization, the New International Economic Order, the World Social Forum, Via Campesina, as well as the narratives that accompany South-South cooperation policies (BRAGA & DUARTE, 2022).

It is important to note that belonging to the geopolitical South is not linear. As mentioned, the concept is based on historical, identity, cultural and material peculiarities, which are reflected in the reading and behavior of actors in international politics. Since these factors can vary over time, the relevance of being classified as part of the Geopolitical South also fluctuates, although the material criteria of the actors that place them in a low or intermediate

position in the hierarchy of world power remains stable. In other words, there are actors who can be considered part of the South (according to economic, social and military criteria), but decide not to engage in political behavior that would allow them to be classified as part of the Geopolitical South. This is the case, for example, with Mexico, especially after signing the North American Free Trade Agreement, or Brazil, which under Jair Bolsonaro has adopted a stance of automatic alignment with Donald Trump's government (ALVES & FARIAS, 2020). Dissatisfaction with the status quo, which is manifested mainly in the defense of greater participation in the decision-making mechanisms of international regimes, is a requirement of the Geopolitical South (BRAGA & DUARTE, 2022).

It can therefore be seen that the concept of the Global South and that of the Geopolitical South do not cancel each other out, as they do not have exactly the same purpose. The alternative presented in this section, however, has clear comparative advantages, especially for research on states and other actors in the South. A reading based on self-perception removes the ethnocentrism rooted in the concept of the Global South, interrupting the spread of stereotyped readings that relegate entire societies to the definition of the "rest". There are weaknesses, however, that should be noted, as will be further explored in the next section.

## The insufficiency of the Geopolitical South

The concept of the Geopolitical South, which was presented in the last section, makes a significant contribution to overcoming some of the limitations of using the term Global South. In particular, it creates a definition that takes greater account of the agency of the countries of the South, as well as highlighting the existence of asymmetries and inequalities in the North-South divide, rather than hiding them. To this end, the new concept breaks with the exogenous character that serves as the basis for the construction of its analytical criteria, while seeking to increase precision and transparency. However, the concept of the Geopolitical South and its empirical application open up new analytical possibilities that still need to be worked on. As argued by Goertz (2006), clearly defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria inherent in scientific concepts also defines the universe of possibilities that concept can be applied to. The Geopolitical South brings with it two basic categories of analysis.

The first is the "South", which refers to the material dimension and the reflection of this asymmetry in the trajectory of international actors. The formation of the South is therefore a historical process marked by a common

unfavorable condition in the stratification of the international system. In their diversity, the actors of the South find their unity factor in their history of domination or subjugation, whether through the system of colonialism, protectorate or unequal treaties, in their relative position in the international division of labour, in their socio-economic conditions and in their conditions as countries excluded or underrepresented in their ability to participate in the decision-making processes of international organizations (DEVIN & ALBARET, 2016).

The second is "Geopolitics", which, as Milton Santos (2021) disciplines, deals with the relations of power and space that occur simultaneously on various global, regional, and local boards. The word "Geopolitical" should be seen as a new analytical category. Therefore, the concept of the Geopolitical South combines criteria from two dimensions which, although related, are distinct. This makes it difficult to clearly identify a single counter-concept for the Geopolitical South. The definition presented makes room for at least three other categories that derive from the combination of criteria that make up the concept. This is different, for example, from what has been argued for the Global South, where there is no clear counter-concept.

The Geopolitical South is materially, historically, and politically opposed to the actors who come from the traditional zones of power (which, with rare exceptions, are the same as those of colonialism and imperialism) and who defend the status quo because they benefit directly from it. The discourses present in international development cooperation make this counterpoint even clearer. In order to legitimize and strengthen their international cooperation policies, countries like China, Brazil, India and South Africa strive to create a symbolic regime in opposition to the Official Development Assistance provided by traditional donors from the North (MILANI, 2018). Often, the official discourse of these countries highlights the common past of colonialism and exploitation in order to present themselves as a partner more concerned about the other (DUARTE, 2019b). These countries use their pasts of exploitation, domination, and humiliation, as well as their socio-economic contradictions, to reaffirm their identities and legitimize their international insertion (CONDE, 2022). This example richly illustrates a political instrument used by the countries of the Geopolitical South for their international insertion, while denouncing the perversity of historical power relations in the world.

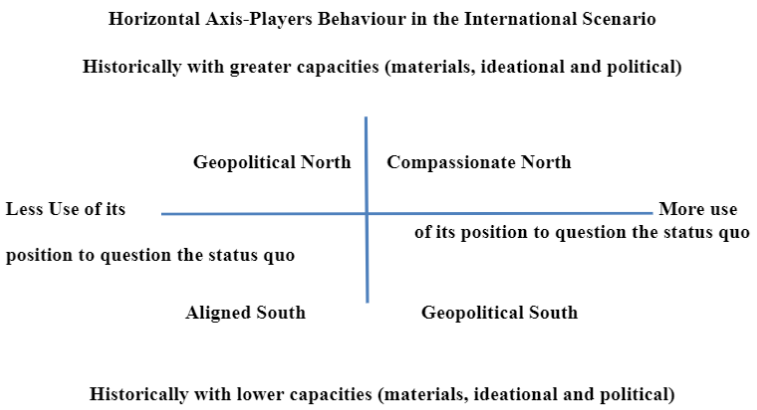
However, there are other possibilities beyond these opposing poles. The first point to note is the existence of actors who are in the South by historical and material criteria, but decide not to use these factors to denounce the negative impacts of international asymmetries. This is the case of actors who

believe that they can be rewarded by more powerful others by not denouncing the status quo (and therefore distance themselves from the worldview and political behaviour that characterize belonging to the Geopolitical South). This behavior on the part of states in the international system receives different classifications, such as "alignment" or "bandwagon", depending on the theoretical lens used. Although considerably known empirically and theoretically, the literature that has created or adopted the concept of the Geopolitical South (including this article) has not looked into how to classify this group in terms of the analytical criteria suggested.

Just as there are actors from the South who are not part of the geopolitical South, there is also the analytical possibility of countries from the North that are not part of the geopolitical North. The theoretical existence of this group of actors as ideal types, however, does not imply their empirical existence. There are few actors who are in a privileged position in the hierarchy of world power and who altruistically renounce part of their privileges in solidarity with actors from the South. It should be recognized that an analytical category that is empty indicates a clear weakness in the explanatory potential of this concept, as it is not capable of distinguishing between empirical cases, which calls for its revision. On the other hand, it would be an interesting intellectual exercise to discuss Russia's international position in the light of this conceptual debate. Classifying this country as a Global South would be difficult, as although its stance of challenging the status quo gives it credentials for the Geopolitical South, historical and material criteria lead us to believe that it would be an actor from the North.

**Figure 2 - Ideal types of states: a proposal to deepen the concept of the Geopolitical South**

**Classification Diagram- Presentation of Cases Accordingly to the Players Material-Historical Dimensions and Behaviour**




Source: Made by the authors.

The division into the historical-material and geopolitical axis, which generates the analytical classification of cases, as shown in figure 2, reflects the time of the analysis. However, the world is constantly changing, as is the behavior and characteristics of the agents analyzed. The concept of the Geopolitical South still lacks work that incorporates ways of contemplating the transition of cases between categories. As mentioned above, this article assumes that international insertion is the result of a domestic power play, which takes into account systemic factors, but is not determined by them. Therefore, changes in the agency axis are easily explained by changes in the agents' behavior and worldviews.

Based on this typology, it would be possible to understand different degrees of (geo)politicization of a state's status as South or North at the systemic level over time, as a result of government changes at the level of its domestic policy, as well as cases of occasional politicization for convenience and pragmatism by the same government to ensure greater efficiency, legitimacy and representativeness for its international actions in different thematic agendas and political arenas of international relations. Similarly, it would help us to understand the processes of upward and even downward mobility of states in the hierarchy of the international system over time, due to structural transformations in their material capacities and the achievement of greater representation in power structures.

However, changes on the vertical axis, which relate to historical-material factors, require greater care, as they reflect limitations inherent in the classification of South and North. Even if an actor gains power and moves

up the global hierarchy, the historical trajectory of oppression, humiliation and domination remains. This would be the case, for example, with China. Similarly, a decaying imperialist power may experience a new situation of marginalization in world politics, but its historical position is reversed.

Another factor that limits the concept of the Geopolitical South compared to other concepts such as the Third World, Developing Countries, the South, and the Global South, is its exclusively academic nature to date. As has been shown, it is a concept that was born in academia and proposes to have an exclusively analytical function, like several others with which it dialogues, but which, unlike these, has not yet gained traction with state actors from the South and North, international organizations, and civil society organizations, to become a native concept in international relations.

## Final thoughts

When we investigated the origin of the concept of the Global South and its main definitions, we concluded that it gained traction in the 2000s as a reformulation of the concept of the South, due to the appreciation, by analysts and decision-makers, of an approach centered on the deterritorialization of the negative effects of capitalist accumulation on spaces and peoples on a global scale within the framework of globalization theory, dissatisfaction with the preservation of a third-world and non-aligned character in the concept of the South and the lack of a state-centric character that the notion of the South carried with it. However, we also came to the conclusion that this concept does not find an objective and consensual definition in academic literature or political documents.

The analysis of the concept of the Geopolitical South, developed by researchers from the World Political Analysis Laboratory, linked to IESP-UERJ, allowed us to conclude that it reinforces the agency of actors from the South. Likewise, the concept places these disputes and tensions at the center of the analysis, inviting a historical reading of asymmetries, relations of domination, exploitation, and humiliation as constitutive factors of international relations. However, we found that this concept is still limited in terms of addressing other limitations present in the concept of the Global South, in particular its inability to simultaneously account for the unity of the South, as a counterpoint to the North, and its diversity, as an ontological phenomenon, and to contemplate the possibilities of changes in terms of a state's affiliation to the Geopolitical South over time.

Therefore, by comparatively analyzing the analytical performance

of the concepts of the Global South and the Geopolitical South for a more accurate understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of international relations in the first decades of the 21st century, we conclude that the concept of the Geopolitical South has advantages over the Global South. However, we also conclude that the Geopolitical South needs improvement and, for this reason, should not be used uncritically by scholars of Southern states. As possibilities for future research, the fourth section of this article points out weaknesses and opportunities for deepening the concept. The conceptual proposal of the Geopolitical South aims to contribute to the theoretical discussion that overcomes concepts that seem to be of little use analytically, such as the Global South. It is recognized, however, that the proposal presented here requires further reflection.

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the limitations and analytical possibilities offered by the concepts of the Global South and the Geopolitical South, for a more accurate understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of international relations in the first decades of the 21st century. In methodological terms, the article is based on an analysis of the history of the concept of the Global South, a critical reflection on the main shortcomings of its definition, a presentation of the concept of the Geopolitical South, and, finally, a recognition of its main limitations, to indicate suggestions for improvement. In its conclusion, the article argues that the concept of the Geopolitical South generates greater analytical yield compared to the Global South due to its valorization of the agency of the countries of the South, the greater precision of its inclusion and exclusion criteria, and its denunciation of the asymmetries and inequalities present in the North-South divide in international relations. However, we also argue that the Geopolitical South needs to be improved so that it is capable of simultaneously contemplating the dimension of the unity of the South, as a counterpoint to the North, the dimension of the diversity of the South, as an ontological phenomenon, and the dimension of change in terms of a state's affiliation to the Geopolitical South over time.

## KEYWORDS

Global South; Geopolitical South; South; North-South divide.

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