

## THE VOICE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

by  
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'What is the Global South?' Joseph Nye raises this critical question in a recent [article](#) where he argues that the phrase is more geographic than political, and that there are too many conflicts among states in the Global South for the countries to have a unified voice. A Carnegie [paper](#) takes this point further, stating that the use of the term 'Global South' has exploded. It argues for the term to be retired, claiming it to be a 'convenient shorthand'.

Whether there is acceptance of the term or not, there is enough [evidence](#) to suggest that the term is here to stay. The question, however, remains, who speaks for the Global South?

While the term Global South may have existed since the 1970s, it has become more fashionable in the recent past and serious engagement can be traced back to the initiation of the G20 by the G7, which was followed by creation of other multilateral groupings such as BRICS, SCO and so forth.

### Stepping out of the Shadow

Prior to 2022, multilateral institutions and forums have had a very clear Global North political shadow, with the Global South countries playing the role of supporting characters, at best. The G20, which has equal representation from the Global North and South, was the first multilateral grouping to experience the clash between these two binaries when the Russia-Ukraine conflict, in early 2022, put members of the Global South in a fix. Unlike the Global North, which took a strong stand against Russia, most Global South countries did not [expressly](#) call on Russia in a manner that was similar to the G7 countries and its allies.

The political shadow of the Global North was not limited to multilateral institutions but also in access to healthcare. Apart from the Russia- Ukraine

conflict, a significant impact for the Global South was from the aftereffects of the pandemic. Global South states [realized](#) the difference between talking about assistance and providing it. When the COVID-19 vaccine was announced, Global North states preferred to ensure their entire population was vaccinated before the more vulnerable populace of the Global South received assistance. While realization of the distinction between the Global North and South was clear for both the groupings, action or any reaction from the Global South against the discrimination by the Global North, was missing.

### Uniting on Common Concerns

Post pandemic, Global North's actions regarding vaccinations along with its demand from the Global South to call on Russia has led to new and distinct voices emerging from the region's countries. Last year, during its chair-ship of the United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP 28, the [UAE](#) chose to unite the Global South on common issues of concern vis-a-vis the Global North. Furthermore in 2023, there were significant developments in the call for peace and just action from leaders of the Global South. In 2023, [Mexico](#) and [Brazil](#) sought positive intervention in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with the [Russian](#) Federation even stating that it was studying the Brazilian proposal to end the conflict.

Even though homogeneity may not be a strong point of the region, the Global South countries' heads of state are beginning to show signs of leadership to portray their viewpoint. Taking over the role of BRICS Presidency in 2023, South Africa [launched](#) a virtual emergency meeting to address the Israel-Hamas conflict. At the BRICS, it released a Chair's Summary on behalf of all [BRICS](#) countries, calling for "an immediate, durable, and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities." Reacting to an international conflict as a collective and releasing a Chair's Summary on the issue shifted the gears of BRICS into a political entity engaging with world conflicts. This is pertaining as the members primarily consist of Global South states.

Neither Israel nor Palestine are BRICS members, nor

have they been inclined to join the multilateral forum. Why, then, do the BRICS nations need to release a 12-point document addressing a conflict that has no direct bearing on its member-states or the specific role designated for the forum? Who amongst the BRICS countries is vying for the role of Global South leader?

### Leading the Global South?

Through the actions of their leaders, numerous countries are attempting to be in the pole position vying for the role of Global South leader. A number of articles discuss the leadership for this geographical and/or political body. There are [calls](#) for paying closer attention to the Global South, in order to make international institutions more effective. While some [scholarship](#) focuses on how [countries](#) from the Global North such as France or the United States of America can claim a leadership position, most hedge their bets on India and China as top contenders for the [position](#). This could primarily be as both the Asian states are economic and political giants that are also Global South countries. Leadership from a state of the region finds more justification as a Global North country may discriminate on issues such as healthcare, something previously experienced by the Global South countries.

However, each country is in the process of strategizing their own unique way to address this bloc of nations. India's Global South [Summits](#) aimed at taking inputs from the Global South states and bringing them to the fore during India's G20 Presidency. China's [outreach](#) to the Global South has been via the supposed incentives with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While India garnered attention for its diplomatic engagement and for partaking in consultative processes, there have been questions on the actual economic benefits of BRI for the Global South.

However, if South Africa's BRICS meeting is any indication, the Global South is not waiting on leadership from outside or from bigger states in the region. Countries are using institutions and forums to air their political views and participate in international conflict resolution processes in a far more decisive manner than before. [Turkiye](#) was critical in ensuring the success of the Black Sea Grain

Initiative; and South Africa recently [called](#) on Israel for war crimes in the Gaza Strip. In what could be considered Brazil President Lula's entry into the leadership race for the Global South, he questioned the current economic structures that are favored towards the Global North and [stated](#) that "Who decided that the dollar should be all powerful".

### A Collective Effort

In 2024, with the transfer of the G20 Presidency from India to Brazil, there may be new impetus to this process. Global South countries in positions of leadership at multilateral institutions such as India in 2023 or Brazil in 2024 at the G20 provide continuity in Global South leadership. Overall, the Global South countries have become far more vocal and engaged in world affairs than ever before. Leadership need not necessarily come from one quarter, and there is collective effort amongst nations for providing a platform for all states that constitute this 'Global South'.

The Global South may be about countries south of the equator but the region is not topographically the same. There are multiple historical conflicts that influence the decision-making processes of states, and institutions in the region are not functioning at the optimal ability. However, in what may seem like a loose pack of states that are not coherent in their actions and have many conflicts with each other, the Global South is slowly and surely finding its voice.

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