

## INTRODUCTION

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Where and what is the Global South? If you ask people on the street, many would probably not have the faintest idea. In everyday parlance and mass media, Global South has hardly become a household term. In academic and (global) policy circles, though, the term is used with much more gusto. Politicians refer to it. The United Nations organize their statistical data in accordance with the term. Academics write books about it - or, as in our case, explicitly include the term in the name of a research center: *Global South Studies Center* (GSSC).

But what does the term entail? Who uses it and why? And what are the implications of marking distinctions between the Global South and the Global North? We thought it relevant to address these questions in more detail – after all, we work for a recently established research institute featuring the term in its name. Accordingly, we asked a number of academics, journals and academic institutions to reflect on the term. In this online issue, we share their various perspectives and critical reflections on the notion of the Global South – see also a short discussion on a number of YouTube videos we have included.

The emergence of the term Global South in its historical context constitutes an interesting process, which illustrates how the term has been charged with various shades of meaning. Some of the contributions touch on the historical genesis of the term and narrate how they experienced this process. Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Jonathan Rigg, among others, reflect on the emergence of the notion, with particular regard to the historical trajectory of defining different (poor and rich) parts of the world. Rigg explains, for example, why he used the term Global South in the title of a book. He acknowledges that the term is not perfect, yet he considers it more favorable than its predecessors, “Third World” or “Developing World”.

The urge to come up with a new term highlights not only the uncomfortable reality of previous terms, but also the political connotations of the Global South concept. It is not just a term; it also has political weight – for better or for worse. Leigh Anne Duck, who reflects on the Global South as co-editor of the journal *The Global South*, highlights the positive impact of the term. In comparison with “Third World” and “Developing World”, she considers the term Global South to carry more weight in resisting hegemonic forces. Alvaro Mendez, as co-founder of the London School of Economics and Political Science’s Global South Unit, equally highlights the empowering aspect the term has – and the unprecedented upward trajectory of its usage. In theory, indeed, it appears to be a less hierarchical – or evolutionary – term than the other two. Barbara Potthast, the speaker of our research center, highlights how this in the case of Latin America may actually lead to a reconsidering of its relationships with other parts of the world.

However, Boike Rehbein states that those choosing this terminology are mainly members of the upper classes in the Global South who profit from the political and economic reality – through expanding south-south relations, for example. Which term is used barely matters for the large majority of the inhabitants of the so-called Global South. Indeed, Felix Lamech Mogambi Ming’ate illustrates that it means little to most Kenyans – who live in a country considered to be part of the Global South.

The question remains as to the geographical boundaries of the region referred to as the Global South. It readily conjures the notion of a division between the northern and southern hemispheres of the globe. A country like Kenya would then belong to both categories. But, as Rigg also highlights, the term should not be taken too literally, with the equator dividing the world in two. Instead, it should be understood in the wider context of globalization – or global capitalism, in the case of Arif Dirlik’s reflection. In most cases it then becomes related to an economic division between rich(er) and poor(er) countries, with most people in the so-called Global South actually living in the northern hem-

isphere (for example, in India and China). Moreover, as Tobias Schwarz illustrates in his critical reflection on UN categorizations, it also spills over into other domains, such as migration.

What is evident is that it is difficult to escape the political use and consequences of the term. Dirlik and Rehbein, for example, are very adamant about the close correlation Global South has with geopolitics. As a result, it is not a static concept. With geopolitical shifts, the definition of the Global South may also change; not only with regard to the meaning of the term, but also, as Dirlik shows, with regard to which countries are considered to be part of the Global South and which are not. This implies that there is not necessarily agreement about who is part of the Global South and who is not, or about whether it is actually useful to apply the term in the first place. Rodolfo Magallanes is particularly critical of the idea of grouping together a large variety of countries and regions into one category. This, he argues, tends to obscure specific (historical) relationships between different countries and/or regions, especially when it comes to unequal power balances. Or, as Eriksen argues, it may obscure wealth differences within countries – and, therefore, similarities between the wealthy in the Global South and Global North, as well as the dire situation the poor may face all around the world.

With this set of contributions we hope to provide an interesting snapshot of opinions about the term Global South. They show that there are different opinions with regard to various aspects of the term and that it evokes different meanings for different people; meanings, moreover, that may shift over time. After all, the Global South is contextual, as most contributions highlight. In times of geopolitical uncertainty, it is hard to predict how the term will develop and/or change accordingly. One open question is whether it will actually become an obstacle to a more equal distribution of the world's gains and power or whether it might actually empower parts of the world that have a long history of disadvantage. Following this, it would imply that the mere use of the term might have implications, for better or for worse. But the increasing usage of this concept might also simply reflect changing realities, as Manuela Boatcă argues: the terms that seem convenient to describe the reality of specific historical moments are closely related to the respective socioeconomic and political structures. In reflecting on the contributions, this is up to you, the reader, to decide.