

# The Voice of the Global South Summit: Exploring Opportunities and Future Challenges in India's Leadership

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**Abstract:** *The Voice of the Global South Summit (VOGSS) has been a recent entry in the large gamut of regional groupings in India's foreign policy framework. India has attracted several regional interactions with like-minded countries, surpassing the boundaries of South Asia and reaching out to the countries and regions of Southeast Asia, Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America. India is a prominent member of groupings such as the G77, the BRICS, and the G20, which represent the larger Global South and the developing and least developed countries. These partnerships are built on certain concrete similarities and common objectives to achieve. Voice of the Global South is such an interesting initiative from India that endeavours to represent the common concerns of the Global South countries and also showcase a joint solidarity of the states in highlighting their challenges, which are largely different from the Global North countries. The research paper addresses the nuances and explores the spectrum of India's national interests for introducing the regional grouping of VOGSS, and analyses the contributions and challenges that are posed for India's foreign policy in achieving the desired goals and its attempts at furthering the South-South Cooperations.*

**Keywords:** Voice of the Global South Summit, India's Foreign Policy, Global South, India's National Interests, South-South Cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION

“Global Action must match Global Ambition”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

International relations in the contemporary period are more intrigued by the complex networks of actions, interactions, and ambitions which focus on achieving their national interests through bilateral and multilateral collaborations. The foreign policy of every state thus focuses on delivering the actions which are based on their ambitions, and at the same time, there are certain common goals and objectives that certainly need a common approach and efforts which are aimed at the larger good. Voice of the Global South is such an interesting platform of the countries from the club of developing and the least developed sectors that focus on their common concerns. Voice of the Global South sets out to point to the formulation of renewed relations within the Global South.

India's engagement with the multilateral and regional partnerships highlights its interests in maintaining a global framework that runs on arule-based and cooperative world order (Dixit 2003, Malone 2014). The foreign policy of the country has travelled a long way from non-alignment to a multi-alignment nature (Pant 2016 and Pande 2020). The efforts to initiate and consecutively host such a grand summit for three years also highlight India's interests in such endeavours.

The very participation in the grouping also points to India's thrusts in assisting the larger development of the global south countries. This also highlights its major interest in pushing itself into the leadership role and representing the cause and common concerns of the larger region. The Global South is a big region comprising several countries that are at different developmental stages and have different political and economic requirements. Therefore, this region cannot be neglected or avoided anymore. India's lead in creating this grouping points to its interest in assisting the regional development and mutual cooperation. Thus, the research article focuses on two major questions: firstly, the nature of the grouping and India's major contributions to the grouping and secondly, the challenges that lie ahead in achieving the said objectives for India's foreign policy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The VOGSS is a relatively new grouping in the larger gamut of integration processes in India's foreign policy. There is no specific analytical research work undertaken on the grouping. Thus, the study relies on the primary literature that is derived from the government websites such as the Ministry of External Affairs, Press Information Bureau and United Nations South-South Cooperation (MEA 2023a, b, 2024, PIB 2025, UNOSSC

2025). These two websites highlight the press releases, speeches, and comments of the Heads of State and officers. The website, such as the DAKSHIN initiative, provides detailed information on India's efforts in revamping the South-South cooperation. This is a good platform to receive all the major inputs from the government of India in understanding its goals in creating a new global south discourse (DAKSHIN 2025). (Dyke 1972 and Morgenthau 1985) provides a foundational base to the theoretical understanding of national interests and South-South cooperation in international relations and its engagements in the foreign policies of a country. India's foreign policy and its interests in different regional processes are an extensively analysed topic. Scholars like Pant 2014, Malone 2014, and Dixit 2003) have highlighted the major foundations of India's foreign policy, its interests in south-south cooperation and its engagements in different regional and multilateral groupings, which are also based on its national interests. However, there is no specific research done in understanding India's engagements in the new groupings, such as the VOGSS, which is a new entry in its endeavour to achieve national interests and promote global south solidarity. Thus, this research aims to fill the gap and provide a discourse on India's engagement and challenges that are present in achieving its goals in new global south groupings such as the VOGSS.

## METHODOLOGY

The research is carried out through referring to and evaluating the qualitative data, primary sources such as the speeches of the authorities and MEA press release, and articles and news reports as secondary sources. The theoretical framework of National Interest and South-South cooperation is adopted to analyse the significance of the Voice of the Global South in India's foreign policy. In this regard, the paper puts forward the hypothesis that India's growing interest in nuanced regional interactions such as the VOGSS is aimed at achieving the larger cooperations and enhanced partnerships with the countries from the global south, and secondly, to achieve these goals, India has to also address various challenges to make the grouping a success.

### India's Foreign Policy and the VOGSS: Enhanced National Interest?

The VOGSS grouping suggests a clear indication for achieving India's national goals. Attaining the national interests remains a priority for every country. According to Vernon V. Dyke national interests can be defined as the claims, objectives, and goals which a nation always tries to preserve, defend, and secure in relations with other nations (Dyke 1972). National interest remains a vital component for every sovereign state. It aims to protect the survival and also to achieve the unique identity of the state (Morgenthau 1985). These identities can be used to prevent the physical, political and cultural aspects that are considered the primary national interests of the country. The VOGSS can be a classic example of achieving both the cultural and political identities of India. This grouping promotes the cultural and historical values of India. The national interests that are clubbed as secondary interests include preserving the prestige, promoting ideology, peace, justice, and increasing the soft as well as the hard power of the country.

India's leadership in the VOGSS grouping certainly points to achieving these interests, which also correlates with other countries' interests that can be generalised aims such as maintaining peace, achieving progress, development and security.

### A Renewed South-South Initiative

The emergence of the grouping of VOGSS also points to renewed partnerships and orientation of the South-South cooperation among the countries from the Global South. The VOGSS highlights India's firm support for the principles of South-South cooperation that aim to connect with the countries from the global south. The cooperative initiatives have been encouraged to focus on the developmental goals and build multi-stakeholder partnerships that involve government, private sector and civil society groups. These engagements also focus on multiple sector areas involving exchange of knowledge and cooperation on various common concerns and development aspirations such as digital innovation, climate solutions, empowerment of youth and women. These South-South interactions complement the North-South cooperation.

The south-south cooperation highlights adherence to the principles of solidarity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, which stresses horizontal partnership that aims to avoid hierarchical interactions, focusing on mutual benefits (UNOSSC 2025). The VOGS grouping is a reflection of these ideas of south-south cooperation that aims to bring the countries from the larger global south together and achieve larger coordination in developmental efforts. The thematic initiatives discussed through the summits can deliberate on these priorities among the members of the grouping.

### Summits:

India has consistently hosted three annual VOGSS in a virtual mode. All three summits have witnessed participation of more than a hundred countries, where the heads of state and governments, ministers and representatives of crucial ministries attended and contributed to the deliberations of the summits.

The first VOGSS summit was held from 12-13 January 2023, it had ten sessions where leaders and ministers from a total 125 countries leaders and ministers from the global south region participated in the meetings. The second summit took place from 17 November 2023, and the third summit was held on 14 August 2024.

The opening and closing sessions of the summits were presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All three summits had detailed interaction concerning issues and important concerns of the global south countries, which was highlighted through a special summit theme as follows:

1. First Summit Theme- 'Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose'.
2. Second Summit Theme- 'Together for everyone's Growth, with Everyone's Trust'.
3. Third Summit Theme- 'An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future'.

All three themes focus on India's basic interest in promoting a South-South solidarity and also point to the extension of Indian philosophy and values, suggesting 'Vasudev Kutumbhakam'. All the summits had 8 to 10

sessions, at different ministerial levels sessions focusing on specific themes in the respective areas.

The key focus of the VOGSS summit is highlighted as:

- To share the outcomes and progress achieved in the priorities of the Global South during the G20 Presidency.
- To amplify the VOGSS and deliberate on the way forward to achieve the common objectives of the countries from the global south.
- To sustain the momentum of exchange and sharing of ideas and best practices between global south countries, generated towards the common aspirations of a more inclusive, representative and progressive world order (2<sup>nd</sup> VOGSS 2023).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> VOGSS focused on the following sessions held at the ministerial level; the theme for this summit highlighted “An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future”. There were 10 ministerial sessions primarily focusing on:

1. Foreign Ministers Session: on charting a unique Paradigm for the Global South.
2. Health Ministers Session: One World One Health.
3. Youth Ministers Sessions: Youth Engagement for a Better Future.
4. Commerce and Trade Ministers Session: Trade for Development- Perspectives from the Global South.
5. Information and Technology Ministers Session: DPIs for Development – A Global South Approach.
6. Finance Ministers Session: People-centric approach to Global Finance.
7. 2<sup>nd</sup> Foreign Ministers Session: Global South- Global Governance.
8. Energy Ministers Session: Sustainable Energy Solutions for a Sustainable Future.
9. Education Ministers Session: Prioritising Human Resource Development: A Global South Perspective.
10. Environment Ministers Session: Partnership for Progress- A Global South Perspective on Mitigating Climate Change (MEA 2024).

These sessions highlight the consistency and focus of the VOGSS on discussing the primary issues concerning the global south. The summits have been stressing the importance of including these discussions at the Track-I level between the ministers and policymakers, thus chalking out a common consensus and initiatives that will address the common causes and provide mutual partnership in approaching them.

### **India's Contributions to VOGSS**

#### ***DAKSHIN Initiative:***

*Formation of Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative (Dakshin)* - this particular platform highlights India's interest in promoting development and knowledge sharing initiatives. The Dakshin aims to set up a global South Centre of excellence that can benefit all the countries in the region.

#### *Global South Young Diplomats Forum*

Through this platform, India has also initiated the

formation of a young diplomats forum for creating a synergy of diplomatic voice that will connect young officers of foreign ministries.

#### *Global South Science and Technology Initiative*

India has emerged as a major science and technology giant in the global south. India's capabilities in digital advancement, renewable energy space missions, and infrastructure can be a greater benefit to the region of the global south.

#### *Arogya Maitri*

Health Friendships' project has led India to become a pharmacy of the world and a major contributor in providing basic health care assistance to the countries that are most in need. From providing COVID vaccines to assistance in disaster management and humanitarian crises, India has been at the forefront.

#### *Global South Scholarships*

India has also initiated the creation of a hub of higher education and research in the Global South region. This platform can attract students from many countries from the developing and least developed world (DAKSHIN 2023).

#### *Digital Public Infrastructure*

India remains one of the leading countries in digital public infrastructures. It has remained committed to sharing its digital facilities and technologies with the countries in the global south region. It primarily focuses on public service delivery and adopts a human-centric approach, thus benefiting the maximum population in the region. India has been a pioneer in digital transactions in the region with a developed Unified Payment Interface (UPI), which has been used by over 80 percent of the population in the country. This is also attributed to the 5G revolution in the country, with the introduction of UPI and JAM Trinity facilities. The UPI facility provides immediate payment services in BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money), UPI 123 Pay, UPI Lite, Card (RuPay, Debit Cards) (IMPS), and Aadhar-enabled Payment Services (AePS).

These online payment transactions have enabled easy, cashless transactions and guaranteed speedy business and accessibility of internet facilities in the country. This can be encouraged in other countries in other developing and LDCs to encourage the 5Is, such as Integrity, Inclusion, Innovation, Institutions, and Internationalisation. India can lead in assisting in improving digital literacy, training on fraud awareness, improving advanced technology (Internet of Things), and reviewing and developing legal institutions' infrastructure for payments and data protection. India also leads in JAM Trinity services, that is, Jan Dhan Accounts that provide a biometric identification number, and possession of mobile phones due to a significant drop in data costs has led to linking of banks to mobile services. This provides convenience, broader participation with regard to tax collection, innovations by entrepreneurs encouraging more startups, encouraging cashless transactions, and also helping in controlling corruption and licit funding. These services are already popularised in countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, France, UAE, Singapore and can be made more accessible in other Global South countries to reduce the digital divide (PIB 2025).

· *Spillover Effects of Other Interregional Groupings*

India's membership in other prominent interregional groupings, such as the G20 and the BRICS, adds to the larger impact and validates the grouping of VOGSS. India contributed to promoting the feedback that was received from the developing countries in the G20 New Delhi summit hosted in 2023. The shared membership of various interregional and multilateral platforms can be an added advantage for successful engagements in the VOGSS meetings.

### Challenges and suggestions to emphasise the relevance of the VOGSS

The grouping of VOGSS as perceived from India's foreign policy and national interest perspective is a significant entity that engages in several crucial discourses focusing on the concerns of the global south. The grouping is very much relevant in contemporary times as the larger global south is undergoing tumultuous changes; there is higher polarisation observed in several countries, increased assertions, and humanitarian and governance crises in countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Middle Eastern Countries, the African region and Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, etc. There are several growing challenges faced by the countries from the global south with major power rivalries from the Global North; there is a greater need for South-South-oriented grouping. Countries from the Global South have larger priorities to address economic growth, political stability and good governance.

There are multiple challenges for India to achieve the said primary goals and make the VOGSS a successful endeavour in its foreign policy and a major contribution to contemporary global politics.

1. The grouping is a vast territory of countries comprising the whole of the Global South states, including the developing and the least developed states. That accounts for a difficulty in addressing the concerns of the member countries that are at different stages of development.
2. The three meetings held so far by India are conducted through virtual methods, which weaken the seriousness of the initiative and thus require physical formal meetings of the leaders and important stakeholders.
3. India should ensure that the funding and representation of all the concerns of the grouping are also consistent.
4. The countries from the global north should not perceive the grouping as anti-global north interests.
5. India should insist on more focus on achieving more concrete goals by the grouping than just providing the common concerns faced by the states.
6. India has to address its own development priorities. There are several challenges that India faces at the domestic level, from health, education, addressing poverty, food and water crisis, to major issues like employment, infrastructure and other livelihood challenges. India, to remain a significant player in the global south region, will certainly have to showcase its progress in all these spheres that will enable it to contribute at the larger level.
7. Should not be another addition to a grouping and an annual event. The VOGSS remains a unique introduction

of a grouping that highlights concerns and common aspirations of the countries from the global south. However, this should not be another grouping from the region that will only design the objectives and meet annually, but ensure that some concrete results are achieved.

8. There have to be serious efforts made to formally institutionalise the grouping to maintain the serious commitment from the member countries. There have been several such introductions of groupings at the regional and sub-regional level, which are introduced for a period and eventually die out because of non-serious commitments from the member countries. Thus, a formalisation of this grouping with vast membership will not only showcase the seriousness of the grouping but also highlight the grouping as one of the prominent players and make its voice count in larger multilateral platforms.

These challenges highlight the complications in creating a formative voice of the Global South through the VOGSS. However, one cannot neglect and deny the impact of this grouping that has already been created with the consecutive three summits that were participated in by over 100 countries from the global south region. This also showcases India's prominence in leading the discourse of the region that demands equality, inclusivity, balance, and a common voice in a much-divided and unequal world order (MEA, 2023). India's contribution to raising major demands of redesigning the global political and financial governance, placing in setting the global agenda, stressing adherence to the rule of law, peaceful resolution of conflicts and crises and emphasising sustainable solutions showcases its efforts and willingness to prioritise the concerns and voice of the global south region. Thus, this proves the hypothesis that India's engagement in the VOGSS will create a stronger partnership among the global south countries, for which it has to address the mentioned challenges to make a grouping and the interaction a greater success and make this grouping a platform for India to reinstate the south-south partnership and reshape the discourse with the global north.

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