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Rethinking Leadership in the Global South

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Author biography

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He has held various academic leadership posts, including Director of the Institute for International and Civil Security and Chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi, and Head of Air Power Studies at King's College London. He was also Director of the Royal Air Force's Centre for Air Power Studies.

Professor Hayward has given strategic advice to political and military leaders in several countries and was tutor to His Royal Highness Prince William, the Prince of Wales and Heir Apparent to the British throne. In 2011, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and in 2012 he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

In 2016, he was named as the 'Best Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences' at the Middle East Education Leadership Awards. He is the prize-winning author or editor of eighteen books and major monographs, over forty peer reviewed articles, and many book chapters and encyclopedia entries. These are mainly in the fields of leadership, international law, strategic studies, military history, and the Islamic ethics of war and conflict.

01. Introduction

Leadership in the so-called Global South has become a pivotal subject in contemporary political science, development studies, and international relations. As countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America navigate complex trajectories of democratization, globalization, and economic transformation, questions concerning the qualities, requirements, and challenges of leadership have taken on renewed urgency. Leadership in the Global North typically occurs within contexts of institutional stability, relative prosperity, and strong rule of law. Yet leadership in the Global South is often defined by fragility, volatility, and scarcity (Herbst, 2000, 17). Leaders in these settings must simultaneously address pressing material needs, build institutional legitimacy, and negotiate unequal relationships within the international system. This unique configuration of demands underscores the necessity of analyzing leadership requirements in the Global South as a distinct field of inquiry.

Replacing the ghastly phrase Third World, the term ***Global South*** is itself contested, encompassing a diverse set of countries that vary enormously in economic capacity, cultural traditions, and political systems. It broadly refers to regions historically marginalized in the global economy, particularly postcolonial states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and parts of the Middle East (Acharya, 2014, 31). While the Global South cannot be understood as a monolithic entity, the states associated with it do share common challenges: poverty, inequality, weak institutions, and vulnerability to external changes. Leadership in these contexts must therefore be adaptive, balancing domestic legitimacy with global engagement. Scholars such as Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that inclusive institutions are central to prosperity, while others emphasize the ethical and relational dimensions of leadership in fragile states (Ncube, 2010, 78). Both perspectives highlight the centrality of leadership as a mediating force between structure and agency in the Global South.

This paper will show that a key feature of leadership in the Global South is its developmental orientation. Leaders must possess not only the ability to maintain political order but also a capacity to deliver significant socioeconomic transformation. In societies where poverty and inequality are acute, leadership requires policies that foster growth, redistribute resources, and expand access to education, health, and infrastructure (Sen, 1999, 46). Leadership is thus inseparable from development, and the failure to deliver visible improvements often undermines legitimacy. For example, the success of Botswana in leveraging diamond revenues for national development highlights the importance of prudent, transparent leadership (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2003, 90). Conversely, the collapse of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro illustrates how mismanagement of resource wealth can destabilize institutions and deepen poverty (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, 66). These divergent trajectories underscore the decisive role of leadership in shaping developmental outcomes.

Ethical leadership is especially critical in the Global South, where corruption and clientelism are pervasive. Predatory leadership not only siphons resources but also delegitimizes state institutions, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and instability (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, 52). Ethical leadership, by contrast, builds accountability and mobilizes trust, creating the conditions for long-term development. The African philosophy of ***Ubuntu***, which emphasizes interconnectedness and communal responsibility, provides an indigenous model for ethical leadership that resonates with contemporary governance challenges (Ncube, 2010, 80). Similarly, Gandhian principles of nonviolence and truth in South Asia underscore the moral dimensions of leadership as service rather than control (Parekh, 1997, 106). These traditions remind us that ethical leadership is not an abstract principle but a reality that is deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts.

This paper will argue that leadership in the Global South also requires inclusivity, particularly with respect to women and youth. Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, yet evidence suggests that their participation often enhances policy priorities in areas such as health, education, and social justice (Goetz & Hassim, 2003, 93). Rwanda, with the world's highest proportion of female parliamentarians, demonstrates how institutional reforms can promote gender-inclusive leadership (Burnet, 2011, 305). Similarly, youth — who constitute the majority of populations in many Global South countries — represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Excluded youth may become a source of unrest, as seen during the Arab Spring (Lynch, 2013, 74), while engaged youth can contribute to innovation and democratic renewal. Leadership that prioritizes inclusivity not only fulfills ethical obligations but also enhances legitimacy and resilience.

Globalization and technological change further complicate leadership requirements. On the one hand, globalization opens access to trade, investment, and innovation. On the other hand, it increases vulnerability to global shocks and dependency (Stiglitz, 2010, 112). Leaders in the Global South must therefore cultivate strategic foresight, balancing integration with sovereignty. Technology, meanwhile, provides tools for inclusion and transparency, as demonstrated by Kenya's M-Pesa mobile banking revolution (Jack & Suri, 2011). Yet it also introduces challenges of inequality, misinformation, and surveillance (Tufekci, 2017, 110). Leadership in this digital age requires both technological competence and ethical responsibility, ensuring that digital transformations advance equity rather than deepen divides.

Finally, this paper will demonstrate that leadership in the Global South must be situated within the broader struggle for global justice. The international system remains asymmetrical, with Northern states dominating finance, technology, and security. Leaders in the Global South are therefore tasked with not only domestic governance but also advocacy for fairer global structures. Whether through climate diplomacy, South-South cooperation, or calls for debt relief, ethical leaders play critical roles in challenging systemic inequities (Okereke, 2010, 495). Leaders

such as Barbados' Mia Mottley have demonstrated how small states can exercise outsized influence by framing climate change as an existential issue of justice and survival. Such advocacy illustrates the expanding scope of leadership requirements, which increasingly transcend national borders.

Thus, leadership in the Global South is shaped by a unique confluence of challenges and opportunities. It requires developmental vision, ethical integrity, inclusivity, adaptability, and global engagement. While contexts differ across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, common themes emerge: the imperative of ethical leadership to build trust, the necessity of inclusivity to harness human capital, and the demand for visionary leadership to navigate globalization and technological transformation. The Global South's future will depend significantly on whether its leaders rise to these requirements, steering societies toward justice, resilience, and sustainable development. As such, the study of leadership in the Global South is not only an academic exercise but a pressing practical concern for global peace and prosperity.

02. Conceptual foundations

The study of leadership has historically been anchored in western frameworks, particularly from Europe and the United States, where research traditions have emphasized individual traits, rationalized bureaucracies, and organizational efficiency. Trait theories, emerging in the early twentieth century, sought to identify inherent personal qualities — such as intelligence, charisma, or decisiveness — that predisposed individuals to become leaders (Stogdill, 1948, 64). Subsequent behavioral approaches shifted attention to observable patterns, examining whether democratic, autocratic, or laissez-faire leadership styles were most effective (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939, 276). Later contingency and situational theories emphasized the alignment between a leader's style and contextual demands, articulated most notably by Fiedler (1967, 55). While valuable, these theories emerged from relatively stable political economies and organizational contexts and reflected western industrial modernity.

The global diffusion of these models has often obscured the extent to which leadership is culturally and historically contingent. Transformational and transactional leadership theories, advanced by Burns (1978, 20) and Bass (1990, 21), emphasized either inspirational motivation or pragmatic exchange. Yet both presume institutional stability, formalized hierarchies, and a degree of individual autonomy not always present in the Global South. For example, charismatic leadership in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be reduced to Western notions of vision and inspiration. It is often entwined with kinship obligations, spiritual authority, and traditional legitimacy (Mbigi, 1997, 65). Similarly, in Latin America, populist leadership has relied on clientelistic networks and moral appeals that blur distinctions between transactional and transformational categories (Laclau, 2005, 39). These cases demonstrate how theories that are only tangentially relevant risk mischaracterizing "Southern" realities when applied uncritically.

The critique of epistemological dominance in leadership studies reflects broader calls to decolonize knowledge production. Scholars such as Connell (2007, 212) and Nkomo (2011, 370) argue that the universalization of western theories constitutes a form of epistemic colonialism, marginalizing the actual experiences and intellectual contributions of the Global South. Decolonizing leadership studies requires recognizing not only that structural inequalities may shape knowledge flows but also that there are alternative epistemologies embedded in indigenous traditions. In Africa, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* emphasizes that human flourishing is inseparable from community bonds, rendering leadership a collective responsibility rather than an individual prerogative (Mbiti, 1990, 108; Ncube, 2010, 80). While perhaps reducing western models to a caricature, this perspective reframes authority not as a control framework but as relational stewardship, where leaders succeed by nurturing solidarity and harmony.

Comparable frameworks exist elsewhere. In Latin America, the Andean concept of *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay* in Quechua) frames leadership as the pursuit of holistic well-being, balance with nature, and resistance to extractivist development models

(Gudynas, 2011, 445). Leaders guided by *buen vivir* prioritize ecological sustainability, cultural integrity, and community autonomy, challenging the growth-centric paradigms of neoliberal globalization. In Asia, Confucian traditions stress moral cultivation, hierarchy tempered by benevolence, and the leader's duty to embody virtue for the sake of social harmony (Tu, 1998, 32). Similarly, in South Asia, Gandhian philosophy emphasizes nonviolence, humility, and ethical consistency as leadership imperatives (Parekh, 1997, 102). These frameworks illustrate the plurality of leadership epistemologies that exist alongside those from the West and the option of incorporating them, where relevant, into global theoretical debates.

The resilience of indigenous traditions in the Global South is evident in the persistence of chieftaincies, councils of elders, and village assemblies. In many African societies, traditional leaders coexist with modern state officials, wielding moral and cultural authority that formal institutions may envisage differently (Logan, 2009, 101). Their legitimacy derives not from bureaucratic procedure but from perceived moral rectitude, custodianship of land, and intergenerational accountability (Gyekye, 1997, 87). In the Andes, indigenous community assemblies continue to function as arenas of deliberation and collective decision-making, where leadership rotates and responsibility is distributed (Albó, 2018, 25). These examples demonstrate how communal traditions provide resources for contemporary leadership that are both culturally resonant and ethically grounded.

At the same time, indigenous traditions often integrate spiritual dimensions into leadership. Leaders are not only seen as political figures but as custodians of a higher order and mediators between human and spiritual realms (Wiredu, 1996, 57). This holistic conception contrasts sharply with what their advocates see as the compartmentalized focus of Western theories, which tend to separate political, economic, and religious spheres. Recognizing the spiritual dimensions of leadership may expands conceptual foundations and invite cross-cultural reflection on the ethical responsibilities of leaders in contexts of vulnerability and interdependence.

Ethical foundations occupy a central place in Global South traditions of leadership. While western leadership ethics have frequently been framed through Kantian duty, utilitarian calculation, or Aristotelian virtue (MacIntyre, 2007, 124), many non-western philosophies emphasize communal accountability, restorative justice, and service. Ubuntu, for instance, stresses compassion, reciprocity, and forgiveness, framing leadership as a moral duty to the community (Ncube, 2010, 82). In Islamic contexts, leadership is guided by principles of human dignity (*karāmah*), justice (*'adālah*), goodwill (*husn al-niyyah*), and accountability before God. This means that leaders must be both competent managers and moral paradigms (Beekun & Badawi, 1999, 136). In South Asia, the dharmic tradition conceives leadership as adherence to cosmic order and righteousness, requiring consistency between personal conduct and public duty (Sen, 2009, 54). Without wishing to oversimplify or stereotype western

models, it is clear these ethical traditions challenge some of the reductionist models that treat leadership as outcome-centric and value-neutral, instead highlighting the inseparability of power and morality.

Importantly, ethical leadership in the Global South is not merely normative but instrumental to legitimacy in contexts where formal institutions are fragile or contested. When states lack robust bureaucratic systems, citizens often evaluate leaders by their moral integrity, cultural authenticity, and service orientation (Ellis & ter Haar, 2007, 211). In such contexts, ethical failure erodes not only trust but also state capacity, as seen in the corrosive effects of corruption and predation in parts of Africa and Latin America (Bayart, 2009, 67). Conversely, ethical exemplarity can enhance legitimacy and mobilize collective action, even under resource constraints. Leaders like Nelson Mandela, whose moral authority resonated globally, illustrate how ethical integrity can compensate for institutional weakness, providing a model of leadership rooted in both cultural resonance and universal appeal (Sampson, 2011, 84).

Leadership in the Global South is also characterized by hybridity, blending indigenous practices with modern state structures. In Ghana, traditional chieftaincies remain influential within democratic politics and significantly shapes land allocation and conflict resolution (Ray, 1997, 121). In Bolivia, indigenous leaders simultaneously engage state institutions and local community assemblies, thus producing hybrid governance forms that combine electoral legitimacy with customary authority (Yashar, 2005, 72). Hybridity routinely reflects adaptive pragmatism rather than cultural incoherence and enables leadership to resonate with diverse constituencies and shifting contexts. Yet it can also generate tensions, particularly when traditional norms, such as patriarchal authority, clash with modern commitments to gender equality or democratic participation (Logan, 2009, 103). Thus, the hybrid nature of some non-western leadership models must be understood as both a resource and a challenge.

The syncretic blending of leadership traditions illustrates how the Global South contributes to the evolution of global leadership theory. Rather than passive recipients of other models, non-western contexts generate innovative practices and insights. Theories of servant leadership, emphasizing humility and service, have drawn inspiration from non-western contexts such as Gandhian philosophy and Christian communal traditions in Africa (Greenleaf, 1977, 19; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, 57). Participatory governance models have likewise been shaped by indigenous assemblies in Latin America, thus providing alternatives to what some might see as elitist or technocratic decision-making (Van Cott, 2008, 144). Feminist theories of leadership have been enriched by the activism of women in the Global South, whose struggles against authoritarian regimes and neoliberal austerity have highlighted the intersection of gender, class, and global inequality (Mama, 1995, 62; Tripp et al., 2009, 118). Youth movements in Africa and the Middle East, often leaderless and digitally networked, have also challenged conventional hierarchical notions of

leadership, thereby underscoring the importance of fluid and decentralized models (Howard & Hussain, 2013, 44; Tufekci, 2017, 104).

In addition to enriching theory, the Global South has shaped global leadership practice through South-South cooperation and solidarity. Initiatives such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the more recent BRICS bloc illustrate collective attempts to redefine leadership on the world stage, challenging what many see as western dominance in global governance institutions (Acharya, 2014, 28). These efforts reflect not only geopolitical interests but also normative visions of multipolarity, equity, and alternative modernities. Leadership in these initiatives often requires negotiating diverse ideological orientations and national interests and highlighting the diplomatic and visionary skills required to sustain South-South solidarity (Sidiropoulos, 2019, 66). The conceptual foundations of leadership in the Global South are thus inseparable from broader struggles over knowledge, power, and global order.

Leadership is also a site of resistance and transformation. Postcolonial theorists argue that subaltern voices, which they claim were long silenced in global discourses, must be centered in rethinking leadership (Spivak, 1999, 72). Grassroots movements led by peasants, workers, and indigenous communities often produce forms of collective leadership that resist elite capture and embody alternative visions of democracy (Escobar, 2018, 93). For example, the Zapatista movement in Mexico has articulated a philosophy of "leading by obeying," where leaders act as servants of the community and decision-making is radically decentralized (Stahler-Sholk, 2007, 54). Such practices disrupt hierarchical paradigms and provide conceptual resources for reimagining leadership as horizontal, relational, and accountable.

Finally, leadership in the Global South cannot be understood in isolation from global inequalities. The asymmetries of trade, finance, and security shape the options available to leaders and the strategies they pursue (Rodrik, 2007, 98). Structural adjustment programs imposed by international financial institutions in the 1980s and 1990s curtailed domestic policy space, constrained leadership visions, and exacerbating social inequalities (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999, 112). The contemporary global order seems to privilege western powers and force leaders elsewhere to navigate dependency while asserting agency. The capacity to innovate within constraints, to exercise agency in the face of structural domination, is therefore a defining requirement of leadership in the Global South. Conceptually, this highlights the need for theories that attend to structural inequalities while encouraging creativity and resilience as necessary features of leadership.

One of the enduring conceptual challenges is reconciling universal aspirations of leadership with contextual specificity. Leadership theories often aspire to generalizability and seek to identify principles that will be applicable across very different contexts. Yet the Global South demonstrates that leadership is always situated and embedded in cultural traditions, historical trajectories, and material conditions (Nkomo, 2011, 372). A decolonized conceptual foundation acknowledges this tension, avoiding both relativism and universalism by recognizing that leadership involves negotiation between the local and the global, the traditional and the modern, and the particular and the universal. For instance, the African Union's principle of "African solutions to African problems" encapsulates the aspiration for indigenous frameworks of leadership that resonate locally while engaging global norms of human rights and democracy (Murithi, 2005, 52).

Central to these conceptual foundations is the recognition that leadership is relational rather than merely positional. Leadership is not simply the property of individuals but emerges from interactions between leaders and followers within specific socio-political and cultural contexts (Uhl-Bien, 2006, 654). This relational view seems to resonate with those Global South traditions that emphasize collective decision-making, consensus-building, and the community's accountability. It also highlights the importance of trust, legitimacy, and moral credibility as prerequisites for leadership effectiveness. In fragile contexts where coercive authority is often unsustainable, relational legitimacy becomes a critical foundation of leadership. Leaders succeed not by imposing authority but by embodying communal values, mediating conflicts, and facilitating collective action (Logan, 2009, 104).

Conceptualizing leadership in the Global South also requires attention to intergenerational dimensions. Many societies emphasize respect for elders and intergenerational continuity, which in turn shapes expectations of authority and wisdom (Gyekye, 1997, 89). Yet demographic pressures and youth mobilization demand adaptation, as younger generations increasingly challenge gerontocratic leadership structures (Honwana, 2012, 13). The conceptual foundations of leadership must therefore grapple with tensions between tradition and change, seniority and innovation, and continuity and transformation. Successful leadership often involves intergenerational dialogue, where elders provide historical memory and moral grounding while the youth — who make up the vast majority of people in the Global South — contribute energy, creativity, and technological fluency. This synthesis reflects what some commentators see as the broader hybridity of leadership in the Global South.

Another crucial conceptual dimension is the role of narrative and symbolism. Perhaps more than elsewhere, leaders in the Global South frequently deploy historical memories, cultural symbols, and national myths to mobilize support and forge collective identities (Bayart, 2009, 72). Such narratives can inspire unity and resilience, as seen in anti-colonial struggles where leaders invoked shared histories of resistance and liberation (Young, 2012, 93). Less helpfully, they can also be manipulated for exclusionary or authoritarian ends, as when leaders exploit ethnic or religious identities to consolidate power (Horowitz, 1985, 119). Conceptually, this underscores that leadership is not only about institutional design or policy competence but also about meaning-making, the ability to frame collective

experience and inspire shared purpose. Leaders in the Global South thus require an ability to create narratives that resonate across diverse constituencies and connect local struggles to global aspirations.

The conceptual foundations of leadership must also account for the material constraints under which leaders operate. In contexts of poverty, inequality, and external dependency, leadership is often a practice of improvisation and resilience. Leaders must mobilize scarce resources, negotiate asymmetric relationships, and sustain fragile coalitions (Mkandawire, 2001, 295). This situational pragmatism challenges normative theories that assume stable resource bases and institutional continuity. It also highlights the creativity and agency of leaders who navigate structural constraints without succumbing to fatalism. Conceptually, leadership in the Global South is as much about adaptation to adversity as it is about visionary planning.

Finally, the conceptual foundations must integrate ethics, culture, and power. Leadership in the Global South cannot be understood apart from questions of justice, equity, and emancipation. Theories that reduce leadership to charisma, inspirational traits and outcomes may underemphasize leadership's profound ethical and political dimensions. A decolonized conceptual foundation therefore tend to emphasize questions such as: leadership for whom, toward what ends, and accountability for which communities? (Connell, 2007, 215). By reflecting on these questions, leadership studies can move beyond the managerialist or technocratic paradigms that critics say dominate in the West to embrace a vision of leadership as collective stewardship in pursuit of dignity, justice, and sustainability.

"Leadership in the Global South is as much about adaptation to adversity as it is about visionary planning. The conceptual foundations must integrate ethics, culture, and power."

03. Socioeconomic and political contexts

Leadership requirements within the Global South cannot be understood apart from the socioeconomic and political contexts in which they emerge. Unlike many Global North countries characterized by consolidated institutions and stable social contracts, states in the Global South often operate under conditions of fragility, volatility, and external dependency (Herbst, 2000, 15). These structural conditions profoundly shape leadership imperatives and demand resilience, adaptability, and innovative strategies to mediate between domestic pressures and global constraints. Leaders in these settings face the dual challenge of responding to immediate material needs while simultaneously engaging in long-term state-building and institutional consolidation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012, 186).

One defining feature of the Global South is persistent poverty and inequality. There has been notable progress in some regions, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council states, and some ASEAN countries (including Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand) have been more successful than many other Global South peers in combining industrialization, trade openness, and improvements in living standards. Yet vast populations elsewhere continue to live below the poverty line. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounts for a disproportionate share of the world's extreme poor (World Bank, 2020, 7). Latin America, while wealthier in per capita terms, remains the most unequal region globally, with entrenched disparities along lines of class, race, and geography (ECLAC, 2019, 18). South Asia, despite impressive growth, continues to grapple with rural poverty, gender inequality, and underemployment (Sen, 1999, 42). These socioeconomic realities mean that leadership in the Global South is inevitably developmental in character, oriented toward poverty alleviation, social inclusion, and redistribution. Leaders are required to address not only economic growth but also equitable access to opportunities and services, which would help to ensure that development reaches marginalized groups.

The prevalence of informality in the economies of the Global South further complicates leadership requirements. Informal labor accounts for more than 60 percent of total employment in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and nearly 50 percent in Latin America (ILO, 2018, 21). Informality provides livelihoods for millions but also limits access to social protection, reduces tax revenues, and perpetuates precariousness. Leaders must therefore navigate the paradox of informality: it sustains survival but undermines long-term structural transformation. Policy approaches require sensitivity to the realities of informal economies while gradually formalizing labor markets and expanding social protections (Chen, 2012, 43). Leadership in this context demands inclusivity and the balancing of economic modernization with livelihood security for vulnerable populations.

Global South leaders also face immense challenges in providing public goods. Weak fiscal capacity, limited infrastructure, and insufficient service delivery characterize many states (Fukuyama, 2014, 89). The COVID-19 pandemic starkly revealed these deficiencies. Fragile health systems

struggled to cope with surging cases and limited access to vaccines (OECD, 2021, 12). Education systems, often underfunded, leave millions of children out of school or provide substandard learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2019, 55). Infrastructure deficits — particularly in electricity, transportation, and digital connectivity — hamper economic growth and exacerbate inequalities (Sachs, 2015, 123). Leadership in such problematic contexts requires the capacity to mobilize resources, prioritize effectively, and sustain public trust even when material capacities are constrained. Leaders must also creatively engage with international partnerships and development assistance while safeguarding national priorities and sovereignty.

Political contexts compound these socioeconomic challenges. Many states in the Global South experience fragile or contested legitimacy, stemming from colonial borders that lumped diverse ethnic and linguistic groups into single polities (Young, 2012, 91). Ethnic fractionalization, when combined with weak institutions, can heighten risks of conflict and instability (Horowitz, 1985, 118). Leadership in these contexts requires inclusive nation-building strategies that transcend ethnic divisions and foster shared citizenship. For instance, Julius Nyerere's efforts in Tanzania to promote Kiswahili as a national language and *Ujamaa* socialism as an integrative ideology helped to mitigate ethnic tensions and foster cohesion (Pratt, 1999, 105). Conversely, leaders who exploit ethnic cleavages for short-term political gain often exacerbate polarization and undermine state stability, as seen in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Straus, 2006, 45). Thus, leadership in plural societies must be attentive to identity politics, emphasizing inclusion and reconciliation.

The political economy of the Global South is further shaped by dependency on global markets and international financial institutions. Many countries rely heavily on the export of commodities — such as oil in Nigeria, copper in Zambia, or soybeans in Brazil — leaving them vulnerable to price volatility and global demand fluctuations (Auty, 1993, 47). The "resource curse" thesis posits that dependence on natural resources often fosters rent-seeking, corruption, and authoritarianism which undermines long-term development (Ross, 2012, 17). Leadership in such contexts requires not only technical economic expertise but also political will to diversify economies, manage resource revenues transparently, and invest in human capital. The case of Botswana demonstrates how visionary leadership, through prudent management of diamond revenues and investment in education and health, can avert the pitfalls of resource dependency (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2003, 89). In contrast, countries like Venezuela illustrate how mismanagement of resource wealth can entrench authoritarianism and economic collapse (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, 66).

International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have also significantly shaped the contexts in which Global South leaders operate. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed in the 1980s and 1990s often required austerity measures, privatization, and liberalization,

which weakened state capacity and exacerbated inequality (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999, 113). Leaders were forced to navigate between compliance with donor conditionalities and domestic demands for social protection. While some countries successfully adapted — such as Uganda in the 1990s, where Yoweri Museveni leveraged reforms to secure donor support while retaining some redistributive programs — others experienced delegitimization and social unrest (van de Walle, 2001, 42). Contemporary leaders must still grapple with similar tensions and balance integration into the global economy with demands for autonomy and equity.

The persistence of authoritarianism and hybrid regimes further complicates leadership dynamics. Despite waves of democratization, many Global South states remain governed by authoritarian leaders who use patronage, repression, and manipulated elections to maintain power (Levitsky & Way, 2010, 15). In such contexts, leadership requirements are often shaped not by institutional accountability but by personal networks, security apparatuses, and the control of resources. Nevertheless, authoritarian settings also reveal alternative forms of leadership, particularly at the grassroots level, where civil society actors, social movements, and local leaders mobilize to demand accountability and justice (Branch & Mampilly, 2015, 78). For instance, in Sudan, local professional associations played a critical leadership role in mobilizing protests that ultimately toppled Omar al-Bashir in 2019 (De Waal, 2019, 112).

These examples demonstrate that leadership in the Global South is not confined to formal political office but also includes bottom-up mobilization and social movement leadership.

Conflict and insecurity are pervasive in many Global South contexts and shape the requirements of leadership in profound ways. Civil wars, insurgencies, and criminal violence not only devastate communities but also fragment authority and legitimacy (Kaldor, 2012, 26). Leaders in conflict-affected states must prioritize peacebuilding, reconciliation, and the reconstruction of institutions. Post-genocide Rwanda provides a controversial case, where Paul Kagame's leadership has been credited with restoring order and promoting economic growth, though often at the expense of political freedoms (Reyntjens, 2013, 91). In Colombia, peace negotiations with the FARC illustrate how leadership requires patience, negotiation skills, and a willingness to make politically costly compromises (Arnson & Tickner, 2016, 54). Leadership in conflict contexts is thus defined by the ability to mediate, reconcile, and rebuild, even under conditions of trauma and mistrust.

Migration pressures also shape the political and socioeconomic landscape. Outmigration, whether driven by conflict, poverty, or environmental stress, drains countries of skilled labor but also generates remittances that sustain households and communities (Kapur, 2010, 82). For instance, remittances account for more than 20 percent of GDP in countries such as Nepal and Haiti, making them critical to economic survival (World Bank, 2020, 19). Leaders must therefore manage migration both as a challenge and an opportunity; thus addressing its root causes while

harnessing diasporic resources for national development. Policies that engage diasporas constructively, such as India's outreach to its global professionals or the Philippines' labor export program, highlight leadership strategies that transform migration into a developmental asset (Levitt, 2001, 63).

In addition, urbanization presents major governance challenges. Cities in the Global South are expanding rapidly, often in unplanned ways that strain infrastructure, housing, and public services (UN-Habitat, 2016, 27). Megacities such as Lagos, Mumbai, and São Paulo epitomize both opportunity and crisis, concentrating economic activity but also inequality, congestion, and environmental stress (Davis, 2006, 95). Leadership in these urban contexts requires vision, coordination, and inclusivity, balancing growth with sustainability and equity. Participatory urban governance experiments, such as participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, demonstrate how leadership can mobilize citizen engagement to improve accountability and service delivery (Wampler, 2012, 41). Yet such successes remain fragile and context-dependent and highlight the complexity of establishing effective leadership in rapidly urbanizing societies.

Environmental pressures are an increasingly salient feature of the contexts in which Global South leaders operate. Climate change disproportionately affects these regions, where adaptive capacities are limited and populations are highly vulnerable (IPCC, 2014, 23). The likelihood of rising sea levels will threaten small island states in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, while desertification and erratic rainfall jeopardize livelihoods across the Sahel (Barnett & Campbell, 2010, 34). Extreme weather events such as cyclones in Mozambique or floods in Bangladesh reveal the complex relationship between environmental vulnerability and governance capacity. Leadership in these contexts requires integrating sustainability into development planning, mobilizing global support for climate justice, and fostering resilience at the community level. The advocacy of leaders from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in global climate negotiations reveals how Global South leadership often extends beyond domestic governance into international diplomacy (Betzold, 2010, 137).

Health crises also expose the relationship between leadership and vulnerability. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014-2016) revealed the costs of weak health systems and poor coordination, but also demonstrated how effective leadership at community and national levels could contain epidemics (Wilkinson & Leach, 2015, 12). The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored disparities in global vaccine distribution, with many Global South countries experiencing prolonged access delays (OECD, 2021, 13). Leaders were required to navigate not only domestic public health crises but also the inequities of global health governance and to advocate for initiatives such as the COVAX facility. These experiences highlight the necessity of leadership that is both locally responsive and globally engaged, able to address immediate crises while contesting structural inequities in international systems.

Education represents another critical domain of leadership. Access to quality education remains highly uneven, with rural, poor, and marginalized populations often excluded (UNESCO, 2019, 57). Education is not only a developmental goal but also a means of cultivating informed citizenship and leadership capacity in future generations (Sen, 1999, 46). Leaders in the Global South face the task of expanding access while also improving quality, relevance, and inclusivity. Innovative programs — such as conditional cash transfers in Brazil and Mexico — have demonstrated how creative leaders can align social policy with educational access (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, 89). Yet persistent challenges of funding, teacher training, and infrastructure continue to hinder progress. Effective leadership in education requires both vision and pragmatism and the prioritization of long-term investments in human capital despite fiscal constraints.

Security governance presents additional complexities. Many Global South states struggle to exercise a monopoly over violence, which is considered to be an essential attribute of a functional modern state. They face threats from insurgents, criminal gangs, or transnational networks (Kaldor, 2012, 27). Leadership in such contexts requires rebuilding security institutions while addressing the socio-economic conditions that fuel violence. In Mexico and Central America, leaders must confront drug cartels that undermine state authority and generate pervasive insecurity (Lessing, 2017, 102). In parts of Africa, leaders contend with jihadist insurgencies that exploit local grievances and weak governance (Thurston, 2020, 81). Successful leadership in security governance demands both coercive capacity and functional and moral legitimacy, thus emphasizing not only force but also inclusive governance, economic opportunity, and respect for human rights. When leaders rely excessively on repression without addressing root causes, violence often persists or escalates.

Another central issue is corruption, which erodes trust, siphons resources, and undermines state legitimacy (Transparency International, 2020, 6). In many Global South contexts, corruption is not merely an aberration but a systemic feature of political economies reliant on patronage and clientelism (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, 49). Therefore, leadership must confront corruption not only through technical reforms but also through moral exemplarity and cultural change. Successful anti-corruption campaigns, such as those in Botswana or Georgia, illustrate how leadership can reshape norms and institutions, though these cases remain exceptions (Hope, 2017, 95). In most contexts, entrenched interests resist reform and make integrity in leadership both rare and indispensable. Leaders who embody ethical responsibility can generate momentum for change, while those who perpetuate corruption deepen cycles of mistrust and dysfunction.

Finally, the international positioning of the Global South frames leadership requirements. The global system remains hierarchically structured, with Northern states dominating finance, technology, and security. Yet Global South leaders increasingly assert agency through collective initiatives

such as BRICS, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the G77 (Acharya, 2014, 30). These platforms enable leaders to challenge asymmetries, advocate for fairer trade regimes, and demand climate and development justice. Effective leadership in this international arena requires diplomatic skill, coalition-building, and the ability to link domestic development goals with global structural reform. Leaders who succeed in articulating common Southern positions — such as India's role in climate negotiations or Brazil's leadership in South-South cooperation — demonstrate the transformative potential of international leadership grounded in solidarity and equity.

To conclude this section, the socioeconomic and political contexts of the Global South create distinctive requirements and responsibilities for leadership. Poverty, inequality, informality, fragile institutions, resource dependency, authoritarian legacies, conflict, urbanization, health crises, corruption, and global asymmetries all define the context in which leaders operate. These conditions demand leadership that is adaptive, inclusive, ethically grounded, and globally engaged. Leaders must navigate scarcity and vulnerability while simultaneously mobilizing collective resilience and asserting agency in the international system. The requirements of leadership in the Global South are therefore inseparable from the contexts of constraint and possibility that define these societies.

"Leaders must navigate scarcity and vulnerability while simultaneously mobilizing collective resilience and asserting agency in the international system."

04. Ethical leadership

Ethical leadership represents both a normative imperative and a pragmatic necessity in the Global South. In contexts marked by historical injustice, socioeconomic inequality, and fragile institutions, the ethical conduct of leaders directly affects legitimacy, trust, and the effectiveness of governance (Brown & Treviño, 2006, 595). While ethical leadership is a universal concern, it takes on heightened salience in the Global South, where leadership failures are frequently associated with corruption, authoritarianism, or predation (Bayart, 2009, 67). Ethical leadership thus functions not only as a moral standard but as a structural requirement for stabilizing states, building inclusive societies, and negotiating global inequities.

Theoretical approaches to ethical leadership often draw on western frameworks of virtue ethics, deontology, or consequentialism. However, in the Global South, indigenous traditions and cultural philosophies provide alternative ethical foundations. The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* emphasizes relationality, compassion, mutual respect, and the conception of ethical leadership as service to community and the cultivation of harmony (Ncube, 2010, 82). In South Asia, Gandhian principles of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and truthfulness (*satyagraha*) have long highlighted humility, sacrifice, and moral consistency as essential qualities of leadership (Parekh, 1997, 104). In Islamic traditions prevalent across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, leadership is framed as a trust and stewardship, which require justice, accountability, and the welfare of the governed (Beekun & Badawi, 1999, 136). These ethical systems, while diverse, converge in making leadership a moral responsibility embedded in communal values and transcendent accountability.

Ethical leadership in the Global South is also shaped by the legacies of colonialism and postcolonial struggles. Colonial governance was often exploitative, arbitrary, and corrupt. In some cases, it left behind institutions that lacked legitimacy and were poorly aligned with indigenous traditions (Young, 2012, 92). Postcolonial leaders inherited states characterized by weak accountability mechanisms, fragile bureaucracies, and widespread poverty. In such contexts, the ethical behavior of leaders became pivotal in either perpetuating or challenging colonial legacies. Leaders like Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and Nelson Mandela in South Africa embodied ethical leadership by emphasizing humility, integrity, and the prioritization of collective welfare (Pratt, 1999, 106; Sampson, 2011, 85). Conversely, leaders who embraced predatory or kleptocratic practices reinforced institutional weakness and entrenched distrust, as illustrated by Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in Zaire (Wrong, 2000, 77).

Substantial corruption represents perhaps the most immediate ethical challenge confronting leaders throughout the Global South. It distorts resource allocation, undermines public trust, and entrenches inequality (Transparency International, 2020, 6). In many cases, corruption has been normalized through patronage systems that equate leadership with personal enrichment and clientelistic distribution (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, 49). Overcoming such systemic corruption requires leaders not only to establish institutional safeguards but also

to embody personal integrity and moral courage. Paul Kagame's anti-corruption campaigns in Rwanda, while controversial for their authoritarian tendencies, nonetheless illustrate the ways in which focused and determined leadership can shift norms and practices around integrity (Reyntjens, 2013, 93). Similarly, Botswana's relatively clean record of governance reflects the legacy of leadership committed to transparency and accountability (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2003, 91). These cases suggest that, even in resource-constrained environments, ethical leadership can create virtuous cycles of trust and development.

The ethical responsibilities of leadership extend beyond corruption to encompass distributive justice and equity. In deeply unequal societies, leaders face the moral challenge of addressing disparities in wealth, education, health, and political representation. Ethical leadership in such contexts demands redistributive policies that prioritize marginalized groups, whether through land reform, affirmative action, or targeted social programs (Sen, 1999, 47). For instance, Brazil's *Bolsa Família* program, pioneered under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, provided conditional cash transfers to millions of poor families, dramatically reducing poverty and inequality (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, 91). While Lula's administration was not free of ethical controversies, such initiatives illustrate how ethical leadership can be operationalized through policy choices that enhance justice and inclusion.

Ethical leadership in the Global South must also be understood in relation to reconciliation and peacebuilding. In societies scarred by civil war, genocide, or authoritarian repression, ethical leadership is required to address historical injustices, restore social trust, and foster national healing (Lederach, 1997, 25). The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, represents one of the most prominent examples of ethical leadership institutionalized through restorative justice. By emphasizing confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation, the TRC sought to break cycles of vengeance and legitimize the post-apartheid order (Tutu, 1999, 37). Although the process has been criticized for insufficiently addressing material inequalities, it nonetheless highlights the central role of ethical leadership in transitioning societies. Comparable processes in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Guatemala further reveal how leaders who frame justice in restorative rather than punitive terms can foster reconciliation and long-term peace (Hayner, 2011, 88).

Beyond post-conflict contexts, ethical leadership is essential in navigating religious and cultural pluralism. The Global South is characterized by profound diversity, which denotes multiple religions, ethnicities, and cultural traditions coexisting within single national boundaries. Ethical leadership in such contexts requires the balancing of pluralism and unity, whilst ensuring that both diversity and a shared sense of belonging are the norm. In Nigeria, where religious and ethnic divisions frequently fuel conflict, ethical leadership demands impartiality, tolerance, and inclusive

representation (Suberu, 2001, 94). In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, leaders are tasked with balancing Islamic traditions with secular constitutional principles. This requires careful and ethical navigation of religious sensitivities (Aspinall, 2010, 22). Failures in ethical leadership — such as favoritism or sectarian bias — can exacerbate tensions, while inclusive and tolerant leadership can mitigate conflict and enhance cohesion.

Globalization adds another dimension to ethical leadership in the Global South. Leaders must negotiate relationships with multinational corporations, international donors, and global governance institutions while safeguarding national sovereignty and community well-being. Ethical dilemmas abound in areas such as resource extraction, trade agreements, and foreign investment. For example, the exploitation of oil in Nigeria's Niger Delta has generated immense revenues but also led to environmental devastation and community disempowerment (Watts, 2004, 51). Ethical leadership in such contexts requires the balancing of economic imperatives, environmental stewardship, and community rights, and also requires leaders to resist the temptations of elite capture and rent-seeking. Similarly, in Latin America, indigenous mobilizations against mining projects have highlighted the ethical responsibility of leaders to respect the rights of marginalized groups and the ecological integrity of their territories (Bebbington, 2009, 85). Leaders who prioritize short-term gains at the expense of long-term sustainability betray ethical obligations to both present and future generations.

Gender equity is another arena in which ethical leadership is crucial. Patriarchal norms remain pervasive throughout much of the Global South and limit women's access to leadership positions while constraining their participation in other forms of decision-making. Ethical leadership thus requires the dismantling of these barriers and the promotion of inclusive structures that recognize women's rights and contributions (Tripp, 2000, 29). Female leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia and Michelle Bachelet in Chile in the Global South-North nexus illustrate how women's leadership often brings greater emphasis on social justice, welfare, and participatory governance (Goetz & Hassim, 2003, 93). However, ethical leadership in this domain must extend beyond symbolic representation to structural transformation in order to ensure that women's voices shape institutions and policies at every level. This entails addressing systemic gender-based violence, economic inequality, and cultural stereotypes that inhibit women's leadership potential (Cornwall & Sardenberg, 2014, 62).

Ethical leadership also intersects with youth inclusion. With the Global South's demographic profile skewed heavily toward children, leaders face the ethical responsibility of integrating their young people into political, economic, and social life (Honwana, 2012, 14). Exclusion breeds disillusionment, radicalization, or emigration, while inclusion fosters innovation and dynamism. Reformist movements such as the Arab Spring highlighted the power of youth mobilization, both in challenging authoritarian regimes and in demanding ethical governance (Lynch, 2013, 72). Ethical leadership in

this context involves not only creating opportunities for youth participation but also listening to their voices, respecting their agency, and ensuring intergenerational justice. Policies that prioritize education, employment, and civic engagement are therefore ethical imperatives, not optional luxuries.

As a priority, ethical leadership in the Global South must grapple with global inequities. The international system remains marked by structural inequalities in trade, finance, and security that place disproportionate burdens on Global South leaders. Advocacy for a fairer global order, whether through climate negotiations, trade reform, or calls for debt relief, constitutes an ethical responsibility to protect vulnerable populations from systemic exploitation (Stiglitz, 2002, 102). Leaders who use their platforms to challenge global inequities and advocate for justice — such as Mia Mottley of Barbados in her climate diplomacy — demonstrate how ethical leadership extends beyond national borders to encompass global responsibilities (Mottley, 2021, 4). Conversely, leaders who collude with exploitative global arrangements or prioritize elite interests betray ethical obligations to their citizens.

Ethical leadership in the Global South must also be understood as a dynamic process rather than a static attribute. Leaders continually face shifting dilemmas — between tradition and modernity, local accountability and global engagement, short-term survival and long-term sustainability. Ethical leadership is therefore less about adhering to fixed doctrines than about cultivating the moral capacity to deliberate, adapt, and act with integrity in changing contexts (Ciulla, 2004, 17). This deliberative capacity involves transparency, responsiveness, and humility; that is, the recognition that leaders are fallible and accountable to those they serve. Where leaders exhibit arrogance or impunity, ethical legitimacy collapses, fueling cycles of resistance and instability. Conversely, leaders who embody humility and openness foster trust, resilience, and collective problem-solving.

Education and leadership training play crucial roles in cultivating ethical leadership. Across the Global South, leadership development programs have often focused on technical skills or managerial efficiency and neglected crucial ethical considerations (Nkomo, 2011, 374). Yet building ethical leadership requires intentional investment in values education, civic engagement, and ethical reflection. Universities, religious institutions, and civil society organizations can play pivotal roles in shaping the moral horizons of future leaders. For instance, civic education initiatives in Kenya and Ghana have sought to instill democratic values and ethical responsibility in young citizens (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, 112). International partnerships can also contribute, though they must avoid imposing external models and instead support contextually grounded ethical frameworks.

The role of civil society in promoting ethical leadership is equally vital. Grassroots movements, professional associations, and media organizations act as watchdogs, holding leaders accountable to ethical standards (Diamond, 1999, 218). Civil society's influence is evident in anti-corruption campaigns across Africa and Latin America, where public mobilization has forced leaders to resign or reform (Johnston, 2005, 96). Ethical leadership thus cannot be the responsibility of individuals alone, but must be embedded in broader social ecosystems that demand accountability and nurture integrity. Leaders who engage constructively with civil society, rather than repress it, enhance their own ethical legitimacy and strengthen democratic governance.

Technology has introduced new opportunities and challenges for ethical leadership. Social media platforms provide unprecedented tools for transparency, enabling citizens to expose corruption, mobilize protests, and demand accountability (Tufekci, 2017, 105). However, they also amplify misinformation, hate speech, and surveillance, which complicates ethical responsibilities. Leaders must therefore use technology ethically, promoting openness while safeguarding against manipulation and abuse. The use of digital tools in participatory budgeting, e-governance, and open data initiatives demonstrates how technology can support ethical leadership by fostering transparency and citizen engagement (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010, 267). Yet authoritarian leaders' exploitation of technology for censorship and repression underscores the fragility of ethical standards in the digital age.

Ethical leadership in the Global South is inseparable from global solidarity. The legacies of colonial exploitation, structural adjustment, and global inequities cannot be addressed by individual leaders alone. Ethical leadership must therefore engage in transnational advocacy, building coalitions to demand debt relief, climate justice, and equitable trade regimes (Sen, 1999, 51; Sachs, 2015, 127). Such solidarity extends ethical responsibility beyond national borders, recognizing the interconnectedness of humanity in an age of global crises. Leaders such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, who denounced global debt as a new form of colonialism, embodied this ethic of global justice (Harsch, 2014, 72). While Sankara's leadership was cut short, his legacy illustrates how ethical leadership can inspire broader movements for emancipation and equality.

To conclude this section, it is clear that ethical leadership in the Global South is not a peripheral concern but a central requirement for legitimacy, governance effectiveness, and global justice. It encompasses integrity, accountability, distributive justice, reconciliation, gender and youth inclusion, environmental stewardship, and transnational solidarity. If rooted in indigenous traditions and adapted to contemporary challenges, ethical leadership will offer a vision of power as stewardship rather than domination, service rather than exploitation. The transformative potential of ethical leadership lies in its ability to inspire trust, mobilize communities, and challenge structural inequalities at both local and global levels. As the Global South continues to navigate complex challenges of development, governance, and globalization, ethical leadership stands as both a moral compass and a strategic necessity.

05. Gender, youth, and inclusion

Leadership requirements in the Global South cannot be fully understood without careful attention to the dynamics of gender, youth, and inclusion. These dimensions are critical because they address the structural exclusions that continue to undermine governance, economic development, and social cohesion. Leadership that ignores or marginalizes women and young people perpetuates inequalities, wastes human capital, and risks social instability (Cornwall & Sardenberg, 2014, 61). By contrast, leadership that prioritizes inclusivity generates legitimacy, fosters innovation, and enhances resilience in the face of multiple challenges.

Women's participation in leadership remains highly uneven across the Global South. Although notable progress has been made — with women assuming presidential or prime ministerial roles in Liberia, Chile, India, Bangladesh and other countries — systemic barriers to the wellbeing and progress of women remain entrenched (Tripp, 2015, 19). Patriarchal norms, discriminatory institutions, and cultural stereotypes often limit women's opportunities for leadership at both national and local levels. Ethical leadership requires dismantling these barriers and promoting structures that enable women to participate fully in decision-making processes. The Rwandan case, where women constitute more than sixty percent of parliamentarians, demonstrates how deliberate policies can transform gender representation and redefine leadership norms (Burnet, 2011, 303). However, even in Rwanda, critics question whether descriptive representation has actually translated into substantial and genuine empowerment. This reveals the importance of evaluating not just numbers but also outcomes.

The significance of women's leadership is not merely symbolic. Studies indicate that women leaders often prioritize social justice, health, education, and welfare policies, thereby advancing inclusive development (Goetz & Hassim, 2003, 97). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's presidency in Liberia highlighted how women's leadership can contribute to peacebuilding, democratic consolidation, and international credibility (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012, 436). Yet women leaders frequently face heightened scrutiny, double standards, and gendered attacks that undermine or delegitimize their authority. Leadership requirements in the Global South therefore include not only increasing women's representation but also transforming cultural attitudes and institutional practices that sustain gender inequality.

The demographic profile of the Global South is heavily skewed toward young populations. In sub-Saharan Africa, the median age is under 20, and more than 60 percent of the population is under 25 (Honwana, 2012, 14). This "youth bulge" presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, young people represent energy, creativity, and potential for innovation. On the other hand, their exclusion from political and economic life risks the growth of frustration, alienation, and radicalization. Leadership in such contexts requires proactive strategies to engage youth meaningfully, ensuring that young people are not merely demographic statistics but active participants in shaping societies.

The Arab Spring of 2011 highlighted the power of youth mobilization, where young people leveraged social media and grassroots networks to challenge authoritarian regimes (Lynch, 2013, 74). While these uprisings underscored youth agency, the aftermath revealed the fragility of movements that lacked effective and sustainable leadership structures. The ethical leadership of young people therefore involves not only recognizing their voices, but also creating institutional pathways for their sustained participation, whether through youth parliaments, entrepreneurship programs, or education reforms. Leadership in the Global South must navigate the tension between youth as a disruptive force and youth as a transformative resource and must embed them within governance structures to enhance legitimacy and resilience.

Leadership in the Global South must also grapple with the intersectionality of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and disability. Marginalization is rarely one-dimensional; women and youth from poor, rural, or minority backgrounds face compounded barriers to participation (Crenshaw, 1991, 1244). For instance, indigenous women in Latin America often contend not only with patriarchal structures but also with systemic racism and exclusion from state institutions (Sieder & Sierra, 2010, 11). Ethical and inclusive leadership requires recognizing these overlapping vulnerabilities and designing policies that address them holistically. Affirmative action, targeted scholarships, and inclusive governance mechanisms can mitigate such exclusions, but leadership commitment is crucial for ensuring that such measures are implemented effectively rather than symbolically.

In many Global South countries, disability inclusion remains an underdeveloped domain of leadership. People with disabilities often experience exclusion from education, employment, and political life, despite international frameworks including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Leaders who prioritize accessibility, representation, and social protections not only uphold ethical principles but also harness the potential of citizens who might otherwise be sidelined (Grech & Soldatic, 2016, 67). Thus, inclusion extends beyond gender and youth to embrace all marginalized communities as integral contributors to national development.

Institutional innovations have demonstrated how leadership can embed inclusivity into governance structures. Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is a celebrated example of how citizens, including women and youth, can be actively engaged in resource allocation decisions (Wampler, 2012, 45). In India, constitutional amendments mandating quotas for women in local governance (panchayats) have increased female political participation and shifted policy priorities toward health, water, and education (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004, 1409). Similarly, youth parliaments and councils in Uganda, Kenya and other countries have provided platforms for young people to influence national agendas (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, 117). These mechanisms illustrate how leadership can institutionalize inclusion and move beyond rhetoric to structural transformation.

However, institutional reforms often face resistance from entrenched elites who perceive inclusivity as a threat to their power. Leadership in the Global South must therefore exhibit both vision and courage and challenge vested interests while cultivating broad-based coalitions to support inclusive reforms. Without sustained commitment, institutional innovations risk becoming tokenistic or co-opted, causing them to lose their transformative potential. The durability of inclusive practices depends on the ethical commitment of leaders to prioritize equity over expedience.

Inclusive leadership holds transformative potential for addressing the structural challenges of the Global South. By integrating women, youth, and marginalized groups into governance, leaders can expand the pool of ideas, perspectives, and capacities available for problem-solving. This inclusivity enhances resilience in the face of crises, as diverse societies are better equipped to adapt and innovate (Putnam, 2007, 144). Moreover, inclusive leadership strengthens legitimacy, as citizens are more likely to trust and support governments that reflect their diversity and respect their rights. Conversely, exclusion breeds resentment, resistance, and instability, undermining the very foundations of governance.

The examples of Rwanda's gender-inclusive parliament, Brazil's participatory budgeting, and India's local governance quotas demonstrate that inclusive leadership is not only desirable but feasible. Yet these successes also emphasize the importance of context-specific adaptation. What works in one setting may not be replicable in another without careful consideration of cultural, political, and institutional factors. Leadership in the Global South must therefore approach inclusion as a continuous process of negotiation, adaptation, and innovation.

Thus, gender, youth, and inclusion represent core dimensions of leadership requirements in the Global South. Leaders who neglect these dimensions risk perpetuating inequality and instability, while those who prioritize them can unlock transformative potential for development and governance. Inclusive leadership is both an ethical imperative and a strategic necessity, ensuring that the vast human capital of women, youth, and marginalized groups is harnessed for collective progress. As the Global South continues to navigate complex challenges, leadership grounded in inclusivity offers pathways toward more just, resilient, and sustainable societies.

06. Globalization, technology, and future leadership challenges

Globalization and technological change have become defining features of the contemporary era, reshaping leadership paradigms throughout the Global South. Leaders today must navigate an interconnected world characterized by transnational flows of capital, goods, ideas, and people, all the while grappling with rapid advances in digital technologies. These forces create opportunities for development and inclusion but also exacerbate vulnerabilities and inequalities, which place complex demands on leadership capacity (Castells, 2010, 23). Leadership in the Global South thus requires both global awareness and technological competence, alongside ethical and inclusive frameworks to mitigate risks.

Globalization has intensified the integration of Global South economies into global markets, which creates new opportunities for trade, investment, and innovation. Countries including Vietnam and Ethiopia have leveraged global value chains to achieve rapid economic growth, creating jobs and diversifying exports (Gereffi, 2018, 45). Leaders in these contexts are required to cultivate open, competitive environments while safeguarding national interests and mitigating risks of dependency. This balancing act is not easy, as globalization also exposes economies to external shocks, such as the 2008 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted developing economies (Stiglitz, 2010, 108). Leadership in the Global South must therefore involve the designing of strategies to maximize benefits of globalization while building resilience against volatility.

Globalization also exerts cultural and political pressures. The diffusion of democratic ideals, human rights discourses, and consumer cultures challenges traditional authority structures and governance practices (Held & McGrew, 2007, 55). Leaders must navigate tensions between global norms and local traditions, ensuring that integration into global systems does not erode cultural identity or sovereignty. In Africa and Asia, for example, debates over LGBTQ+ rights reveal how leaders face competing pressures from global advocacy networks and domestic constituencies rooted in conservative traditions (Nyang, 2014, 19). Ethical leadership in such contexts requires sensitivity to local values while resisting the instrumentalization of culture as a pretext for exclusion or repression.

The digital revolution is transforming leadership requirements across the Global South. Access to mobile phones, internet connectivity, and digital platforms has expanded dramatically, reshaping communication, governance, and economic opportunity. Mobile banking innovations such as M-Pesa in Kenya illustrate how technological leadership can leapfrog infrastructure deficits, enhancing financial inclusion and empowering marginalized populations (Jack & Suri, 2011, 113). Similarly, e-governance initiatives in India have streamlined service delivery and improved transparency and demonstrated how leaders can harness technology to strengthen legitimacy (Bhatnagar, 2014, 92).

At the same time, technological change generates new challenges. The digital divide remains decidedly unhelpful, with rural populations, women, and

the poor often excluded from digital benefits (World Bank, 2016, 64). Leaders must therefore prioritize equitable access to technology, investing in infrastructure, education, and digital literacy in order to avoid exacerbating inequalities. Moreover, the proliferation of social media introduces governance dilemmas. While platforms such as Twitter and Facebook enable citizen mobilization and accountability, as witnessed during the Arab Spring of 2011, they also amplify misinformation, hate speech, and polarization (Tufekci, 2017, 108). Leadership in the Global South must develop regulatory and ethical frameworks that harness the benefits of digital technologies while mitigating their harms.

Cybersecurity and surveillance further complicate the technological landscape. Many Global South states lack adequate capacity to protect against cyber threats, leaving critical infrastructure and personal data vulnerable (Deibert, 2013, 72). Meanwhile, authoritarian leaders have exploited digital tools for surveillance and repression. This raises profound ethical concerns that must be addressed with some urgency (Howard & Hussain, 2013, 88). Leadership in this domain requires balancing security with rights, ensuring that technological governance strengthens rather than undermines democracy and human dignity.

The global order is shifting toward multipolarity, with rising powers such as China, India, and Brazil reshaping international dynamics. For leaders in the Global South, this presents both opportunities and dilemmas. On the one hand, multipolarity creates space for South-South cooperation, reducing dependence on Western institutions and enabling more diversified partnerships (Acharya, 2014, 31). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for example, has provided infrastructure investment opportunities across Africa and Asia, though often accompanied by concerns over debt sustainability and sovereignty (Brautigam, 2020, 54). On the other hand, the competition between major powers risks drawing smaller Global South states into geopolitical rivalries, as seen in debates over Huawei's 5G networks or naval access in the Indian Ocean (Pantucci & Petersen, 2021, 77). Leadership in this environment requires diplomatic agility, strategic foresight, and the capacity to navigate between competing powers without compromising national autonomy.

Another defining challenge of future leadership is climate change. The Global South faces disproportionate vulnerability to rising temperatures, extreme weather, and resource scarcity, despite contributing relatively little to global emissions (IPCC, 2014, 23). Leadership in these contexts must integrate sustainability into development strategies, pursuing renewable energy, climate adaptation, and ecological resilience. Ethiopia's investments in hydroelectric power and Costa Rica's emphasis on renewable energy provide instructive examples of leadership committed to sustainable development (Bodansky, 2010, 45). Yet the global asymmetry in climate governance means that leaders must also act as advocates for climate justice, demanding financial and technological support from the Global North. The moral authority of Global South leaders in climate negotiations derives not only from their vulnerability but also from their ethical insistence on fairness and intergenerational responsibility (Okereke, 2010, 62).

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the interconnectedness of global health and leadership. Leaders in the Global South confronted not only domestic crises but also systemic inequities in global vaccine distribution (OECD, 2021, 14). The failure of equitable access underscored the need for Global South leaders to advocate collectively for reforms in global health governance, while simultaneously strengthening national health systems. Future leadership must prepare for pandemics as recurrent rather than exceptional events, investing in health infrastructure, surveillance, and public trust. Ethical leadership in this arena entails prioritizing the most vulnerable, ensuring transparency, and resisting the politicization of health crises (Kickbusch et al., 2020, 218).

Leadership in the Global South must also focus on cultivating innovation and human capital to thrive in a knowledge-based global economy. Investments in education, research, and technology are essential for avoiding dependence on extractive industries or low-value labor (Sen, 1999, 51). Countries such as India, with its expanding technology sector, or Kenya, with its innovation hubs like "Silicon Savannah," demonstrate how leadership can foster environments that encourage entrepreneurship and creativity (Ndemo & Weiss, 2017, 32). However, innovation must be inclusive, ensuring that technological growth benefits marginalized populations rather than reinforcing inequality. Leadership requirements therefore encompass both the vision to nurture innovation ecosystems and the ethical commitment to democratize their benefits.

Globalization and technological change present complex, intersecting challenges for leadership in the Global South. Leaders must navigate global markets, cultural pressures, digital transformations, multipolar geopolitics, climate change, global health, and innovation imperatives. These challenges require adaptive, ethical, and visionary leadership that balances global engagement with local accountability, technological adoption with equity, and sustainability with growth. The future of the Global South will depend significantly on leaders' capacity to transform globalization and technology from vectors of vulnerability into platforms for inclusive and sustainable development.

07. Conclusion

The preceding analysis has shown that leadership in the Global South is an inherently complex and multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by historical legacies, structural constraints, and emerging global transformations. Unlike leadership paradigms in other regions, where relatively stable institutions and prosperous economies seem better able to provide leaders with broad room to maneuver, leaders in the Global South operate under the constraining conditions of scarcity, fragility, and heightened vulnerability. These contextual realities demand leadership that is at once adaptive, ethical, inclusive, and globally engaged. The requirements of leadership in the Global South cannot be reduced to technical competence alone. They encompass moral integrity, cultural sensitivity, political acumen, and the ability to navigate contradictory demands across local and global scales.

One of the central insights of this study is that leadership in the Global South must remain grounded in contextual realities rather than imported models. Theories of leadership developed in western settings, for example, often assume institutional stability, strong accountability mechanisms, and homogeneous social contracts. By contrast, the Global South is characterized by contested legitimacy, ethnic and religious pluralism, and fragile bureaucratic capacity (Herbst, 2000, 17). Effective leadership in such contexts cannot rely solely on managerial efficiency or technocratic expertise; it must engage in nation-building, reconciliation, and inclusion. Leaders must mobilize collective identities, foster trust across divided communities, and embody integrity in contexts where corruption and authoritarian tendencies persist. This contextualization of leadership theory is essential for advancing both scholarly understanding and practical strategies.

Ethical leadership emerges as a consistent theme across all political and cultural areas, which highlights the inseparability of morality and effectiveness in fragile contexts. Corruption, predation, and clientelism not only undermine governance but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, 53). Ethical leadership, by contrast, embodies transparency, accountability, and stewardship, creating virtuous cycles of trust and development. The Global South's indigenous traditions — whether *Ubuntu* in Africa, *satyagraha* in South Asia, or Islamic concepts of stewardship — offer rich reservoirs of ethical thought that can inform leadership practices (Ncube, 2010, 85). The convergence of these traditions with contemporary governance imperatives underscores the potential of ethical leadership to inspire trust, mobilize communities, and resist global inequities. Leaders who embody ethical principles are not only morally commendable but are likely to be strategically far more effective in fostering stability and legitimacy.

Inclusion also emerges as a foundational requirement. With women and youth comprising the majority of populations in the Global South, leadership that excludes these groups will only undermine legitimacy and waste human capital. The integration of women into political decision-making — as in Rwanda's gender-

inclusive parliament — demonstrates the transformative potential of inclusive leadership (Burnet, 2011, 308). Similarly, the engagement of youth, whether through mobilization or institutionalized participation, reflects the serious ethical responsibility of leaders to prepare future generations for meaningful citizenship (Honwana, 2012, 19). Inclusion is not merely an ethical preference but a strategic necessity. Societies that incorporate diverse voices are more resilient, innovative, and capable of addressing complex challenges.

Finally, the future trajectories of the Global South will be shaped profoundly by globalization and technological change. Leaders must balance opportunities for integration into global markets with the risks of dependency and vulnerability. They must embrace digital innovations while ensuring equitable access and guarding against authoritarian misuse. They must advocate for climate justice and equitable global health governance while simultaneously building domestic resilience. Leadership in the Global South therefore requires global vision without losing local grounding, technological competence without neglecting equity, and diplomatic agility without sacrificing sovereignty. The convergence of global and local challenges renders leadership requirements more demanding but also more consequential.

“The future trajectories of the Global South will be shaped profoundly by globalization and technological change. Leaders must balance opportunities for integration into global markets with the risks of dependency and vulnerability.”

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