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Lobbying and Advocacy Beyond the North: a bibliometric exploration of the International Scholarship on the Global South

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ABSTRACT: Research on lobbying and interest groups has traditionally focused on the Global North, leaving the Global South underexplored in comparative studies. This article addresses that gap by mapping English-language scholarship on interest representation in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Drawing on 162 publications indexed in Scopus (2012–2022), we combine bibliometric analysis with qualitative content review to identify thematic trends, conceptual usage, and authorship patterns. Our findings reveal a shift away from business-centric lobbying toward advocacy on diffuse collective interests such as human rights, gender, and climate governance. Despite this thematic diversification, knowledge production remains concentrated in Global North institutions, reinforcing linguistic and structural hierarchies in the international academic field. We discuss how terminological ambiguity—between “interest groups,” “advocacy,” and “lobbying”—complicates comparative research and argue for conceptual clarity grounded in established frameworks to avoid conceptual stretching. By mapping the intellectual and social structure of this niche, the study contributes to theory-building, highlights methodological strategies for analyzing scholarly networks, and reflects on the implications of linguistic dominance for decolonizing lobbying research.

KEYWORDS: Bibliometrics, Bibliometric analysis, comparative politics, Global South, interest groups, advocacy, lobbying.

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1 Introduction

Two recent phenomena have drastically influenced interest representation. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered how people communicate. Lockdown measures boosted the use of technology systems and decreased in-person activities (Cohen, 2020). This new reliance on digital platforms raises questions about interest group strategies and access to public decisions (Junk *et al.* 2022). For instance, will this transformation increase access to public institutions by minoritarian groups or create more obstacles for them? Second, we also see the re-emergence of hybrid regimes, i.e. systems combining characteristics from democracies and autocracies. This has raised other questions, such as how democratic backsliding affects interest groups? Will governments attacking liberal rights cause permanent changes to freedom of expression and contestation (*e.g.* Kamiński; Riedel, 2021)? Or is there even space for interest representation in hybrid regimes? In such contexts, the space for interest representation is uncertain and contested.

Against this backdrop, scholarship on interest groups in the Global South has gained momentum, offering insights that challenge assumptions rooted in Global North experiences (Rozbicka; Mahrenbach, 2023). These studies expand the geographical scope of lobbying research and interrogate how advocacy operates under conditions of regime hybridity, rapid institutional change, and uneven development (Madriaga, 2020). They not only expand the geographical scope of work by examining interest groups beyond North America and Western Europe but also push the boundaries of studying interest representation and understanding advocacy in general.

The qualitative analysis, predominant to date, examines the dominance of elites and the relationship between business groups and government authorities (Mahrenbach 2016; Marques; Utting 2010; Thomas; Hrebenar 2008). But, more recent research on the Global South suggests that “change is afoot”: studies on rapid and unexpected regime changes argue that they support the emergence of interest communities (Rozbicka *et al.* 2021) or prevent the same from happening (Dendere; Taodzera, 2023), neoliberal market reforms shift the balance of domestic economic power enough to create a new lobbying structures (Mancuso *et al.* 2016; Hopewell, 2014; Mancuso *et al.*, 2023), and digitalization has impacts on the lobbying channels (Rozbicka; Patel, 2023). The overarching takeaway is the need for more flexibility when seeking to apply analytical concepts developed in the traditional lobbying literature to countries of the Global South, regarding both the definition of interest groups and their activities (Rozbicka; Mahrenbach, 2023).

To further exemplify the emerging trends and development trajectory, this paper builds on these insights by systematically mapping the literature on lobbying and interest groups in the Global South, written in English. To illustrate emerging trends and development trajectories, we combine bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis of publications focusing on Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Our aim is twofold: (1) to identify the intellectual and social structure of this research niche, and (2) to examine how these patterns compare to mainstream literature on interest

representation in the Global North. By doing so, we seek to uncover not only what is being studied but also who is producing this knowledge and how conceptual frameworks travel across regions.

We analyzed 162 scientific contributions on lobbying in the Global South identified through Scopus (Elsevier) as the primary bibliometric data source over the past 10 years. We mapped recent publications on the theme through bibliometric research, network analysis, and exploratory literature review. Bibliometric data permit the analysis of contributions at the level of keywords and concepts, authors and their academic institutions, and countries. Software – such as VOSviewer and the R function *biblioshiny* – allows for easily exploring this data via network maps and other graphic visuals. The social network analysis allows us to study the internationalization patterns of authorship, and the literature review helps with the identification of how authors frame emerging issues.

Our decision to analyze only English-language publications indexed in Scopus warrants explanation. English remains the lingua franca of academia, particularly in political science, and publications in this language are most likely to circulate internationally, influence theory-building, and appear in high-impact journals. By focusing on this layer of scholarship, we capture the segment of research that shapes global debates and comparative studies. This choice aligns with our objective: to understand how the internationalized academic community frames interest representation in the Global South. While research in native languages offers rich contextual insights (Pelinka 2007; Kapiszewski *et al.*, 2015; Wilkerson; Casas, 2017), it often remains siloed within national or regional academic circuits, limiting its visibility and integration into comparative frameworks.

This approach, however, introduces significant limitations. By excluding non-English publications, we risk reinforcing epistemic hierarchies that privilege Global North scholars and marginalize locally produced knowledge (Pelinka, 2007; Carammia, 2022). Our analysis reflects what is visible in international outlets, not the full spectrum of scholarly work on lobbying in the Global South. Moreover, focusing on Scopus-indexed journals means prioritizing publications that meet specific indexing criteria, which often favor established institutions and well-funded research networks. These structural biases shape what counts as “mainstream” knowledge and influence theoretical assumptions, methodological choices, and empirical findings.

Yet, acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the value of this paper’s contributions. On the contrary, it underscores the importance of critically examining the hierarchies embedded in global knowledge production. By mapping the internationally circulating literature, we provide a baseline for understanding which voices dominate the debate, which concepts travel across regions, and which themes gain prominence. This perspective is essential for advancing discussions on decolonizing political science and for identifying gaps where Global South scholarship remains underrepresented. Furthermore, English-language publications often serve as reference points for comparative studies, policy dialogues, and transnational advocacy networks. Understanding their content and structure is therefore crucial for both academic and practical purposes.

Despite its constraints, our methodology offers several benefits. First, it enables systematic analysis of a research niche that has grown but remains fragmented. Bibliometric techniques allow us to visualize intellectual and social networks, track thematic evolution, and identify emerging clusters of scholarship. We note that most of the authors' writing on the Global South countries and lobbying (in English) are still based in the Global North academic institutions. Therefore, this concentration is an obstacle to decolonizing scientific knowledge. Second, by combining quantitative mapping with qualitative content analysis, we move beyond descriptive indicators to explore how concepts such as "interest groups," "advocacy," and "lobbying" are framed in Global South contexts, with evidence that scholars working on those countries move away from using those terms. Thus, we argue that conceptual stretching can be avoided, allowing theories to be tested in diverse contexts and broader categories to be applied to different times and places to allow comparison (Sartori, 1970).

This dual lens reveals not only terminological shifts but also substantive differences in research agendas - the findings reveal that international scholars writing about Global South are primarily concerned with diffuse collective interests and lobbying activities (such as human rights, gender, sexuality, and climate governance). Third, our findings contribute to theory-building by highlighting the need for conceptual flexibility and caution against uncritical transfers of Global North frameworks to Global South realities. Finally, this study offers methodological insights for scholars seeking to integrate bibliometrics into political science research, demonstrating how tools like VOSviewer and *biblioshiny* can complement qualitative approaches.

In sum, this paper addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive map of English-language scholarship on lobbying and interest groups in the Global South. It situates this research within broader debates on linguistic dominance, epistemic hierarchies, and conceptual stretching, while offering empirical evidence on thematic trends, authorship patterns, and institutional networks. By doing so, we aim to foster a more inclusive and reflexive understanding of interest representation—one that recognizes regional diversity and challenges the implicit universalism of Global North-centric theories.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework, clarifying key concepts such as interest groups, lobbying, and advocacy, and situating them within broader debates on conceptual stretching and comparative research. We then present the data and research strategies, detailing the bibliometric approach, network analysis, and qualitative content analysis. The findings section follows, offering descriptive indicators of thematic trends, conceptual usage, and geographical focus, complemented by visualizations of collaboration networks and keyword clusters. Finally, we conclude by reflecting on the implications of these patterns for theory-building, methodological innovation, and the decolonization of lobbying research, while identifying avenues for future studies.

2 Theoretical frameworks

This research draws on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1993) concept of field, understood as a social space in which interactions take place and positions are defined in relation to one another. In this sense, a field reflects the hierarchical relationships that structure a given domain. By mapping the research literature published in English, it becomes possible to identify which studies gain visibility within the international academic community and, consequently, to examine the hierarchies and social structures that shape the production and circulation of scientific knowledge. The paper focuses on research on lobbying and interest groups, which is still a niche in political science compared to other mainstream themes (e.g. political parties).

Although often treated as part of the same broader phenomenon—pressure politics—the concepts of interest groups, pressure groups, and lobbying are not consistently defined within the social sciences. Authors vary considerably: some employ narrow definitions, while others favor broader, more inclusive categories (Gozetto; Mancuso, 2011). The field is largely shaped by North American theoretical traditions. In his seminal work, David B. Truman (1971 [1951]) defined interest groups as any group whose members share attitudes and perspectives that lead them to make claims upon other groups. Within this framework, pressure groups constitute a subset of interest groups that seek to influence public decisions by directly engaging with public authorities—a strategy commonly referred to as lobbying (Truman, 1971 [1951]).

Diego Delgadillo (2017) argues this definition is too broad, which makes it difficult to distinguish interest groups from other organizations, such as social movements and political parties. The author uses three criteria to identify interest groups. According to Delgadillo (2017), these are organizations which: (1) have certain level of stability, (2) try to persuade the government by non-violent means, and (3) do not seek to fulfil governmental responsibilities. By adopting these criteria, the author does not differentiate interest groups from pressure organizations. Delgadillo (2017) argues social movements are more spontaneous whereas interest groups have a higher level of stability. In the research literature, the most common shared characteristic of pressure groups refers to direct persuasion.

Further, research literature underlines the relevance of elucidating differences between pressure groups and other political actors. Luis Alberto dos Santos (2007) considers pressure groups as a specific type of interest groups which try to influence public policies by persuading the government. In this sense, he highlights not all interest groups are politically mobilized. Nevertheless, he uses the word “lobby” in reference to certain types of pressure groups mixing “actors” and their “actions”. Wagner Mancuso and Andrea Gozetto (2018) adopted an even broader definition of lobbying, since they describe it as any action related to advocacy. In addition, Oliveira (2004) divides lobbying activities into four types:

- i. Private lobbying: refers to lobbying activities of private institutions which provide this type of service to enterprises and other organizations.
- ii. Institutional lobbying: refers to lobbying activities of enterprises or other institutions by their employees.
- iii. Public lobbying: refers to lobbying activities of public bodies, such as ministries and national secretariats.
- iv. Classist lobbying: refers to lobbying activities of organizations representing specific social classes or professional categories.

Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney (2004) propose to differentiate interest groups from other policy-influencing actors through a more precise conceptual vocabulary. They argue that the term “interest group” should be reserved for multi-member, organized bodies whose primary purpose is to influence public policy, typically facing collective action challenges and issues of internal governance. In contrast, they introduce the broader category of “pressure participants” to encompass all actors seeking to exert influence, and within it, the subcategory of “policy participants” for organizations—such as corporations, universities, or agencies—that act politically on their own account but lack the membership-based structure, central to interest group theory. This distinction matters because conflating these categories obscures the organizational dynamics and representational functions that underpin interest group behavior. By applying these conceptual boundaries, our analysis avoids the pitfalls of functional definitions that label any policy-influencing body as an interest group and instead focuses on the collective dimension that is critical for understanding mobilization, representation, and advocacy in comparative perspective.

European comparative projects such as INTEREURO and INTEARENA have played a pivotal role in standardizing the categorization of interest groups in European research. Both initiatives emphasize typologies that distinguish organizations by their membership base and advocacy focus, enabling systematic cross-country comparisons. INTEREURO, for example, classifies interest organizations into broad categories such as business associations, professional groups, labor unions, cause groups, and identity-based organizations, while also recognizing hybrid forms like coalitions and networks (Baroni *et al.*, 2014). This approach reflects the pluralist nature of lobbying systems and acknowledges that advocacy is not confined to economic actors but extends to civil society organizations and NGOs. Similarly, INTEARENA adopts a functional perspective, grouping actors according to their strategies and policy engagement, which helps identify patterns of influence across policy domains. These classifications are particularly relevant for studies of the Global South, where terminological ambiguity persists and where organizations often blur the boundaries between advocacy, service provision, and interest representation. By drawing on these frameworks, our analysis aligns with established comparative standards while remaining sensitive to regional specificities, thus

avoiding conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970) and ensuring that categories retain analytical clarity across diverse contexts.

Another term frequently mixed with lobbying is advocacy. According to Nadia Urbinati (2000), advocacy presupposes both a passionate link to the cause and the representative's autonomy of judgment. In the case of lobbying activities, pressure groups act as advocates for the interests they represent. There are many ways to promote advocacy. Not surprisingly, the expression "advocacy coalitions" became a frequently cited term in the discipline of public policy. Nonetheless, there are some gaps in the research literature concerning the differences and frontiers between certain terms, such as "pressure groups", "interest groups" and "advocacy coalitions".

Advocacy coalitions are understood as large groups of persons sharing common beliefs and coordinated activities during a period (Souza, 2006; Sabatier; Weible, 2007). Although this definition is very similar to the concept of interest groups, its reach is larger as coalitions are usually alliances between different groups. Moreover, interest groups are more stable (Delgadillo, 2017) and not necessarily mobilized in contrast with pressure groups and advocacy coalitions, which presuppose coordinated actions. In this sense, we distinguish pressure groups from advocacy coalitions by three elements: their scope, their repertoire of strategies, and level of stability.

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Pressure groups are frequently pushing public authorities through lobbying activities for achieving their goals. They have a more continuous action towards politics than interest groups and advocacy coalitions. Their members have more dense relations and share more stable core and secondary beliefs. In contrast, interest groups may share just general beliefs without expressing them or acting for approving or rejecting measures. Indeed, "interest groups" is the broader category here as it merely refers to people sharing common interests towards general political themes. Similarly, members of advocacy coalitions have less dense relations as they may share just general beliefs, but they presuppose coordinated actions. The main differences between advocacy coalitions and pressure groups refers to the density of the relations between their members and their level of stability. Nevertheless, "interest groups", "pressure groups", and "advocacy" are frequently employed interchangeably by the research literature.

In sum, this theoretical discussion serves two key purposes. First, by reviewing competing definitions of interest groups, lobbying, and advocacy—and highlighting classification systems such as INTEREURO and INTEARENA—we establish conceptual clarity in a field marked by terminological ambiguity. This is essential for avoiding the pitfalls of conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970), which can undermine comparative research. Second, grounding our analysis in these frameworks provides a consistent lens for interpreting the bibliometric and qualitative findings that follow. Understanding how scholars define and categorize interest groups allows us to assess whether and how these concepts travel to studies of the Global South, and to identify patterns of convergence or divergence from Global North traditions. Ultimately, this conceptual foundation enables us to

interpret the intellectual structure of the literature with precision and to evaluate its implications for theory-building and comparative lobbying research.

3 Data and research strategies

The above theoretical and literature overview informed the bibliometric analysis. To identify emerging themes on above-described activities by the Global South stakeholders, we undertook bibliometric research and qualitative content analysis using VOSviewer, R Studio, and NVivo. VOSviewer and the R app biblioshiny allowed us to map the international scientific field. Both tools are easy to use and do not require programming. VOSviewer gives the possibility of building different network maps, especially related to co-occurrence of words and co-authorship. The biblioshiny app is still more complete as it provides information on affiliation, trending topics, and collaborations between countries in addition to the network maps. Although none provides a full description of the texts' content, they help to map the intellectual production by identifying connections between words (including in titles and abstracts), authors' affiliations, collaborations between authors and institutions, and co-citation, among others.

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Scoping reviews contribute to quickly mapping key themes and sources, which is important to identify gaps and future research agendas (Danaeefard *et al.*, 2025). Combining VOSviewer and biblioshiny is efficient in mapping the intellectual and social structure of a topic. Scopus provides a list of publication in the file format required by both tools. However, this approach also has limitations: Scopus only allows downloading a limited number of entries per time and VOSviewer and biblioshiny are not compatible with all types of files (the metadata must be organized in a CSV file or other format explicitly accepted by the tools). A qualitative analysis is helpful to explore the concepts deeper as bibliometrics is a quantitative technique (based on the number of keywords, co-occurrence levels, etc). In the future, artificial intelligence (AI) tools might be integrated to this approach. There are already some tests with GPT and similar platforms in terms of analyzing qualitative texts or publications (Sampaio *et al.*, 2024), as well as specific platforms dedicated to literature reviews (e.g., Elicit). However, the ethical concerns implied in this use must not be ignored. The fact is that AI will have a significant impact on academic research—if it is not already doing so.

We chose Scopus as the primary bibliometric data source due to its coverage, relevance, and precise indexing criteria (Codato *et al.* 2020). The search terms were “interest groups”, “lobbying”, “advocacy”, “pressure groups”, “interest organizations”, “lobbyists”, “organized interests” (with the Boolean operator “OR”), and “Global South”. The time bracket deployed was 2012-2022. Initially, we tried to search for publications employing each country of the Global South as a search term with the operator “OR”. However, the term “Global South” proved to be the most appropriate, as it yielded a substantially higher number of results (162 documents), whereas using the names of individual countries as keywords returned only a limited number of entries. The search was originally conducted

using title, abstract, and keyword lists. However, the analysis of titles and abstracts did not reveal much, as the most cited terms consisted of expressions employed in research activities, such as “article”, “paper”, “author”, and “literature”. It showed how the terms “South” and “North” are related, as the words “South” and “Global North” had the strongest link (link strength = 29). Not surprisingly, the same search conducted with “Global North” replacing “Global South” resulted in a similar pattern in terms of keywords.

The search employing “Global North” instead of “Global South” returned only 74 documents. Therefore, the evidence indicates that the expression “Global North” is employed by authors in reference to its contrast to what is understood by “Global South”. Nonetheless, the search employing the terms related to interest groups without specifying any location returned 46,359 documents. As Scopus allows exporting only the first 20,000 documents and does not make all bibliometric data available, we could not proceed with a more elaborate analysis of this sample.

Data was exported directly from Scopus in a CSV format. We used the package “bibliometrix” in R studio to visualize and analyze publications in this field. The function “biblioshiny” allowed us access to organized information on authors, institutions, and the conceptual structure of the publications. Authorship and affiliations are relevant data to understand the field and the intellectual structure of research on this theme. Additionally, the conceptual structure refers to the frequency of words and trending topics, allowing us to identify the main issues explored while studying interest groups in the Global South.

Next, we proceeded with network analysis through VOSviewer. In bibliometric research, word relations are a common strategy to verify the connections between publications. The more words are shared in titles, abstracts, texts or keywords, the more related publications should be (van Eck & Waltman, 2021). Our maps analyze the connections between research topics and co-authorships. The map identifies how often a word is cited in titles, keywords, and abstracts and visualizes the connections between the authors. The overlay visualization also includes information on publication years (van Eck; Waltman 2021).

To triangulate the methods and provide further context for our analysis, we have further conducted a qualitative text analysis of 27 texts published in 2022. We employed a deductive approach for content analysis (Mayring 2000) focused on the following sets of questions:

- (1) Actors and terminology - Which types of stakeholders or policy participants are analyzed in texts on the Global South countries? To what extent do concepts develop in Global North “travel” (Sartori, 1970) to the literature on the Global South? The yardstick categorization of interest organizations was taken from the INTERARENA and INTEREURO projects (Baroni *et al.* 2014);
- (2) Themes: what policy domains and topics do scholars investigate?
- (3) Countries – On which countries do the analyses focus? Which other countries are indicated?¹.

¹ The codes used for the qualitative analysis are available in the Appendix.

4 Findings

4.1 Actors, themes and countries: What are scholars focusing on while analyzing interest groups in the Global South?

To provide an overview of the main themes discussed by scholars in the identified publications, we start with the keyword's analysis. Of the 55 keywords with a minimum of two occurrences, 52 related to another keyword. This generated 8 clusters using the standard parameters in VOSviewer (Table 1)². The most cited keywords, in decreasing order, were: "Global South", "civil society", "gender", "Africa", "India", and "human rights". The strongest links between two keywords were the pairs "Global South-gender" and "Global South-Brazil" according to the link strength (=3), which is measured by the number of publications the keywords appear together (van Eck; Waltman 2010).

Table 1 - Keywords by cluster and occurrence frequencies

Cluster	Keywords (especially prominent words)
1	Africa (6) , disability (3), gender (7) , Global North (2), India (5) , international health (2), intersectionality (3), sexual violence (2), sexuality (2), transgender (2).
2	Cities (2), civil society (7) , climate change (4) , food sovereignty (2), human rights (5) , NGOs (3), Nicaragua (2), racism (2), representation (3), South Africa (2).
3	Activism (2), gender equality (3) , health (3) , health policy (2), hiv/aids (4) , migration (3) , slums (2), social change (2), women (2).
4	Asia (2), climate justice (2), corporate social responsibility (2), data collection (2), development (5) , Myanmar (2), partnership (2).
5	Advocacy (5) , data sovereignty (2), decolonization (2), global health (4) , policy (2), social media (2).
6	Advocates (2), Brazil (4) , education (3), teenage intimate partner violence (2).
7	Global South (7) , Guatemala (2), intellectual property (2), transnational advocacy network (2).
8	Community networks (2), exclusion (2).

Source: Authors (analysis via VOSviewer).

Several remarks stand out in this initial glimpse. First, "lobbying" does not appear on the list, as it is not connected with other words. This implies that publications in English on these topics in the Global South use terminology different from that which we are accustomed to in studies of the Global North (Rozbicka; Mahrenbach, 2023). Table 1 provides initial evidence to support this suggestion. "Advocacy", "civil society", and "community network" appear, while "lobbying" and "interest groups" do not, even though these were used as keywords in the search.

The qualitative content analysis provided additional information on the publications. Indeed, most papers employ terms such as "civil society" and "advocacy" but rarely use "interest groups",

² We chose fractionalisation as the normalisation method, as it allows better visualisation of clusters.

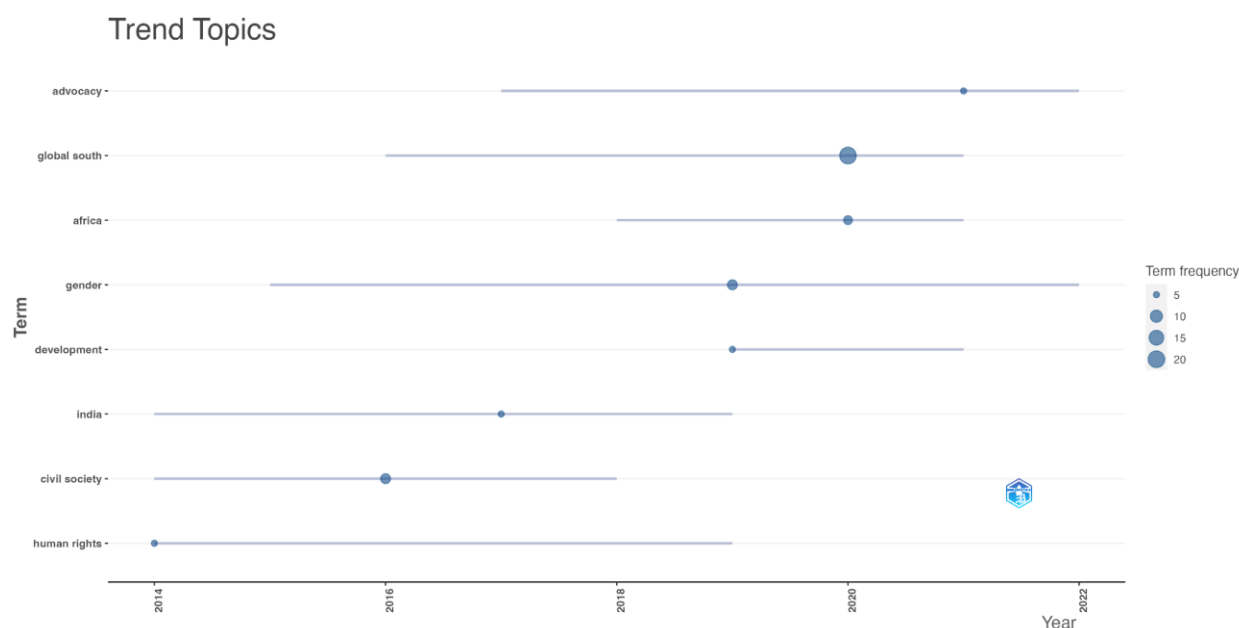
“interest organizations” or “lobbying”. Rather, scholars discuss “civil society organizations” or “advocacy networks”. Although most studies, avoid using the words “interest groups” and “interest organizations”, scholars consider non-governmental organizations and non-profit institutions as interest groups. That classification is similar to the one present in the EU-based INTERARENA or INTERURO Projects (Baroni *et al.*, 2014). It also highlights the frequent interchangeability of these terms and the persistent lack of conceptual clarity surrounding them.

However, it has been present in the literature on a much broader scale, either explicitly linking “advocacy” with non-governmental and civil society organizations (Budabin; Hudson 2022) while leaving “lobbying” to business groups or considering NGOs as organized interest groups directly (Larawasti *et al.*, 2022; Vassiliades *et al.*, 2022: p. 5). This is a relevant debate in studies on lobbying and interest organizations. Historically, lobbying and interest groups were linked to “special” or “particular” interests. Accordingly, this vocabulary was employed in reference to firms, business groups or organizations defending certain sectors.

Why might this be characteristic of the Global South studies published in English? Pre-existing literature has indicated that lobbyism is often associated with corruption or other unethical practices in some parts of the Global South (Carbone 2020; Dendere; Taodzera 2023). This could encourage a reframing of these activities - in real life and in the literature - to make them more politically palatable. However, the qualitative analysis suggests another reason: lobbying and business groups are simply underexplored in these publications. Most texts analyzed focus on other interest organizations rather than traditional business groups. They address the role of non-governmental organizations or other transnational institutions (Camminga, 2022; Choi, 2022; Fuentes, 2022; Budabin; Hudson 2022; Laraswati *et al.*, 2022). In addition, scholars are more concerned with diffuse collective interests, such as human rights, gender (Bastia *et al.* 2022), sexuality (Miller; Tohme, 2022), and climate governance (Boasson *et al.* 2022), which explains the predominant focus on nongovernmental organizations and civil society activism.

Recent studies on the Global South focus on diffuse rights instead of particular interests usually associated with lobbying and pressure groups. Not surprisingly, the trending topics displayed in Figure 1 encompass issues such as “gender”, “development”, and “human rights”. Likewise, the 2022s publications focused on human rights and sustainability topics. The most cited topics in recent publications (2022) were gender or sexuality and decolonization. Most analyzed initiatives to address problems related to gender inequality or climate change. In this sense, they focus on government policies or NGO initiatives.

Figure 1 - The most trending topics in the analyzed sample



Source: general sample (N = 162), generated with the Bibliometrix R package.

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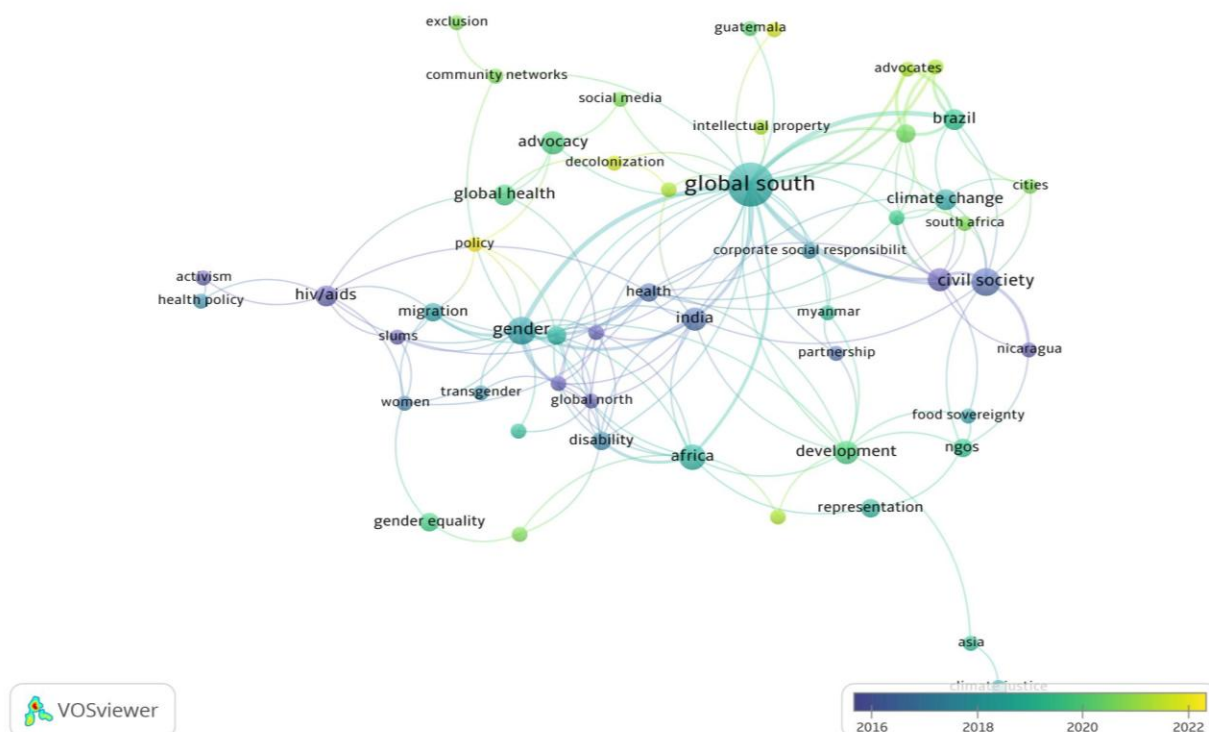
The analysis of the frequency of use of certain keywords over time further strengthens the conclusion of moving away from purely business-like topics. “Global South”, “civil society”, and “gender” are terms with the highest frequencies in the most recent period. The evidence contradicts previous expectations regarding the main stakeholders in policymaking. For instance, past studies on lobbying in Brazil focused on business interest groups (Coli, 2021). Even in the most recent Special Issue of Interest Groups and Advocacy on Interest Groups in the Global South (2023), the papers on Mexico, Brazil, and Vietnam addressed the political actions of business interest groups or businessmen, but it seems they are in the minority within publications in English.

Examining the data from a chronological perspective adds further insights. The number of publications employing the term “Global South” increased over the past years. Figure 2 maps connected keywords, with darker colors representing older publication dates. Specifically, both “Global South” and “Africa” have increased in prominence since 2018. As illustrated by the map, health was already a trending research topic between 2016 and 2017, but global health became more apparent as a keyword in 2020 (average publication year).

Interestingly, the bibliometric research and content analysis demonstrates that COVID-19 did not play a key role in recent publications. Smith (2022) mentions COVID-19, but only as a contextual element to understand politics related to climate change in the Philippines. Kroll and Adelle (2022) also mention COVID-19 exploring its impacts on food systems. Kutor et al. (2022) explore the lockdown de-restriction amid COVID-19. None of them assesses the consequences of the pandemic for the interest representation system. Health is one of the most relevant policy domains in the selected

studies, but it is not necessarily related to the global pandemic. This is surprising due to the effects of COVID-19 and increased interest in the topic and interest groups activity in the Global North (see, for example. Chaqués-Bonafont and Medina, 2021, in Spain, or Junk *et al.*, 2022, in 10 European democracies).

Figure 2 - Map of related keywords averaged by publication date³



Source: general sample (N=151).

Let's move now to the geographical focus. The list of predominant keywords (Table 1) includes geographical entities like Brazil, India, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Africa and India occur most often overall. This implies limited geographical coverage of advocacy activities in the Global South to date. The qualitative look into the most recent texts points towards further expansion of the list by Ghana, Indonesia, and Thailand. However, it is worth of noting that countries are not always studied in isolation. Brazil, India, Nigeria, and South Africa are often mentioned as comparative yardsticks, with the United Kingdom and the United States being used most often. That is evidence in itself that comparative studies are on the rise, and they appear not only between the Global South but also, between Global South and North countries.

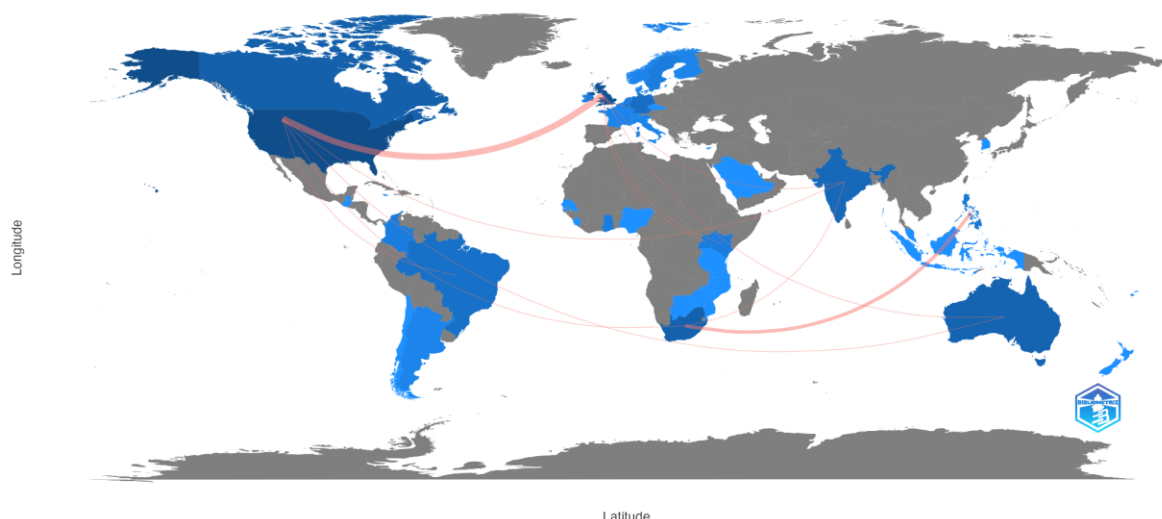
³ Occurrence = 2, Attraction = 2, Repulsion = 0. Normalisation method: fractionalisation.

4.1 Authors and their affiliations: Who writes about interest groups in the Global South?

Of the 401 authors in the original sample, 23 are connected through co-authorship, and they are co-authors in the same document. Only 5 have two or more documents. Figure 3 portrays the collaboration networks between the countries to which authors are affiliated. On the map, the lines represent the collaboration ties between countries, whereas the darkness of the country's outline is related to the number of publications in each country.

Figure 3 - Country collaboration map

Country Collaboration Map



Source: general sample (N = 162) - generated with Bibliometrix.

The predominant countries in the country collaboration map are the United States (50 documents) and the United Kingdom (36), followed by Canada (18), South Africa (15), and Australia (13). Although several authors are affiliated with institutions in the Global South, countries from the Global North, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, are still prevalent. Indeed, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada concentrate on scientific production as they have the highest number of publications (83, 66, and 32, respectively). In the decade between 2012-2022, US and UK-based scholars together are responsible for more than 53% of outputs. Just 5 countries hosted the authors of 80% of all outputs.

On a positive note, within the top 5, we find one Global South country: South Africa. This indicates that international research regarding the Global South is still generated primarily by scholars working in countries from the Global North. It is worth noting that we did not check for authors' country of origin, only the institutional affiliations, opening it for future analysis to see if scholars

working on these topics live and work away from their home countries. This finding is not surprising, as the analysis focused on publications in English.

Within the general picture of outputs of the Global South and lobbying activities, scientific production is concentrated in a relatively small number of countries. However, data also reveals a tendency towards diversification, similar to the one identified by Carammia (2022) when studying the internationalization of political science in Europe more broadly. Between 2000 and 2009, more than 70% of the scholars who published in the top 100 journals were based in the US or the UK. The top 10 countries hosted 87%, and the top 20 hosted 95% of all authors (Carammia, 2022, p.658). Over time, international scientific production became relatively less concentrated, including authors from Italy, Hungary, and, more broadly, Central and Eastern European countries. A similar trend is also visible in our sample, with South African and South Korean-based scholars (see also below).

If we focus on co-authorship with research organizations as the unit of analysis, the analysis shows 32 institutions connected through co-authorship. The University of California has the greatest number of relevant outputs (8). However, it is important to highlight that this label includes all the different branches of the University, such as those located in Los Angeles and San Diego. The second-ranked institutions in publications are the University of Cape Town (5) and the University of Washington (5). Based in South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council is one of the institutions with the greatest number of citations (130), along with the South African Constitutionalism Fund, the University of Dayton (Ohio), and the University of Seoul (South Korea). Interestingly, the set of institutions shows a more diverse profile than the network map of countries (see Figure 3).

Besides universities, several government bodies, research institutes, and non-profit organizations are among the institutions in the bibliometric data exported from Scopus. Examples are the UN-Habitat, Oxfam, the Ministry of Health of Mozambique, and Human Rights Watch. The predominance of these institutions is due to funding and commissions. The most relevant affiliations, however, encompass Massey University (10 articles), Deakin University (7 articles), the University of Cape Town (7 articles), the University of Washington (7 articles), and the University of California (7 articles). Beyond the above analysis, it is worth noting that the concentration of publications in certain institutions is not always linked with the same author. Consequently, we can argue that there is a trend in specialization and development of research clusters focused on the Global South lobbying in the organizations listed above.

The evidence suggests that this niche is still concentrated, reproducing the intellectual hierarchy of other academic fields. Research on the Global South, published in English, has grown but is still concentrated in leading US/European institutions

5 Conclusion⁴

Employing bibliometric techniques yields a detailed overview of interest group publications on the Global South and lobbying and tracks thematic developments occurring in these works. This provides an opportunity to assess both how these studies are developing and their relation to mainstream literature on interest groups in the Global North. The goal of this article was to assess how international publications address interest groups in the Global South. We sought to explore what and how studies that “thrive” in the international academic field frame interest groups in countries from the Global South. Through bibliometrics, we identified the trending topics, authorship, and collaborations between countries. With qualitative content analysis, we explored recent publications in-depth.

Although the number of publications has grown over the past decade, the topic remains a niche area in the international literature. In this sense, researchers should enhance their efforts to build more comprehensive datasets encompassing other countries than those identified in our sample. Moreover, it is necessary to give more visibility to research produced in the Global South. More systematic and encompassing literature reviews – and including other languages – are crucial to providing the big picture of this field and making these studies more visible.

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Software such as VOSviewer and R can help to give an overview of the field by providing visuals for connections between authors and keywords. A qualitative assessment might complement bibliometric analysis, offering more detailed information on texts. New computational techniques might be helpful and save time, as content analysis software has started incorporating artificial intelligence tools, although these need to be tested. On the empirical dimension, comparative studies reuniting empirical evidence from other regions rather than Northern countries should be encouraged.

Language remains a significant obstacle in the production and circulation of scientific knowledge. Highly recognized journals—especially those with metrics such as Impact Factor (IF)—continue to publish primarily in English. Unsurprisingly, most scholars in the field are affiliated with institutions in the Global North, with the United States and the United Kingdom—the two largest English-speaking academic hubs—producing the highest volume of publications. These dynamics raise important questions about the hierarchies underpinning scientific knowledge and its field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). Linguistic dominance and the concentration of prestigious institutions in specific regions act as structural barriers that hinder scholars, and thus their insights, from the Global South in gaining international visibility and recognition. These studies also reproduce methodologies and theories shaped by the Northern experiences.

⁴ **Data Availability Statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on a GitHub repository: <https://github.com/nayalbrecht/bibliometrics>.

However, in terms of content, both the bibliometric and qualitative analysis revealed that scholars working on the Global South tend to focus on different types of organizations, such as social movements and NGOs compared to those working on the Global North, frequently focusing on “lobbying”, “interest groups”, and “interest organizations”.

In contrast to what we found about the Global South, the research literature on the Global North frequently employs the terms “interest groups”, “interest organizations” or “lobbying”. Searching for these terms in Scopus resulted in 46,359 documents (compared to the 162 publications on the Global South). This discrepancy between the Global North and the Global South raises questions on conceptual stretching and regional differences. A common vocabulary is necessary for comparative studies, as it allows for testing theories in diverse contexts. Phrased differently, we need universal categories which might be applied to different times and places (Sartori 1970). However, researchers must be careful with conceptual stretching. In this sense, Sartori (1970) criticized excessive generalization because it leads to elusiveness.

This raises questions on conceptual frameworks as researchers employ different meanings, which might be an obstacle for larger comparative studies. Nonetheless, the focus of publications in English on public interest organizations highlights the relevance of understanding lobbying and interest representation beyond the mantra “business as usual”. Therefore, further studies might explore asymmetries between diffuse interest organizations and private membership groups.

Defining interest groups is challenging. The problem remains unresolved as studies are rarely clear about what they mean by “interest groups” or “interest organizations” even in the small niche of international scientific knowledge. Adopting an excessively broad definition of interest groups makes it difficult to differentiate the concept from other political organizations or phenomena - such as advocacy. In this sense, we subscribe to Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney’s (2004) approach, who suggest differentiating interest groups from other policy participants. According to the authors, the category “interest groups” requires membership and organization. They are multi-member groups whose goal is affecting policies. Alternatively, “policy participant” refers to any politically engaged actor - even temporarily.

Thus, policy participants may act as interest groups when they mobilize to influence decisions. The membership requirement also highlights that interest organizations advocate for sectorial interests in contrast to organizations whose aim is defending broader collective rights, whose breadth goes beyond their members (Jordan; Halpin; Maloney 2004). Consequently, studies on the Global South do not require formal membership to frame NGOs or other organizations as interest groups.

Against the context of growing scholarly production and an already visible network of international collaborations, the outputs of lobbying activities in the Global South might shed a light on new definitions and classification systems. It is an area of scholarly endeavor to keep an eye on. And, as indicated above, there is still plenty to explore despite the challenges.

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Lobby e Defesa de Interesses Além do Norte: um estudo bibliométrico exploratório da literatura internacional sobre o Sul Global

RESUMO: Pesquisas sobre lobby e grupos de interesse tradicionalmente focaram no Norte Global, deixando o Sul Global pouco explorado por estudos comparativos. Este artigo tenta preencher essa lacuna por meio do mapeamento da literatura em inglês sobre representação de interesses na América Latina, Ásia, África e Oceania. Com base em 162 publicações indexadas na base Scopus (2012-2022), combinamos um estudo bibliométrico com uma análise qualitativa de conteúdo para identificar tendências temáticas, uso conceitual e padrões de autoria. Os resultados revelam um deslocamento do lobby centrado em interesses comerciais para defesa de interesses difusos coletivos, tais como direitos humanos, gênero e governança climática. Apesar dessa diversificação temática, a produção do conhecido continua concentrada em instituições do Norte Global, reforçando hierarquias linguísticas e estruturais no campo acadêmico internacional. Discutimos como a ambiguidade terminológica – entre “grupos de interesse”, “defesa de interesses” e “lobby” – dificulta estudos comparativos e argumentamos em favor de maior clareza conceitual baseada em enquadramentos estabelecidos para evitar “alongamento conceitual”. Por meio do mapeamento da estrutura social e intelectual desse nicho, o estudo contribui para construção de teorias, reforça estratégias metodológicas para analisar redes intelectuais e reflete sobre as implicações da dominação linguística para descolonizar pesquisas sobre lobby.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Bibliometria, análise bibliométrica, política comparada, Sul Global, grupos de interesse, defesa de interesses, lobby.

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Lobby y Defensa de Intereses Más allá Del Norte: un estudio bibliométrico exploratorio de la literatura sobre el Sur Global

RESUMEN: Las investigaciones sobre el lobby y los grupos de interés se han concentrado tradicionalmente en el Norte Global, dejando al Sur Global relativamente poco explorado por los estudios comparativos. Este artículo busca llenar esta laguna mediante un mapeo sistemático de la literatura en inglés sobre la representación de intereses en América Latina, Asia, África y Oceanía. A partir de 162 publicaciones indexadas en la base Scopus (2012–2022), combinamos un análisis bibliométrico con un análisis cualitativo de contenido para identificar tendencias temáticas, usos conceptuales y patrones de autoría. Los resultados revelan un desplazamiento desde un enfoque del lobby centrado en intereses comerciales hacia la defensa de intereses difusos y colectivos, como los derechos humanos, el género y la gobernanza climática. A pesar de esta diversificación temática, la producción de conocimiento continúa concentrándose en instituciones del Norte Global, lo que refuerza jerarquías lingüísticas y estructurales en el campo académico internacional. Asimismo, discutimos cómo la ambigüedad terminológica —entre “grupos de interés”, “defensa de intereses” y “lobby”— dificulta los estudios comparativos, y argumentamos a favor de una mayor claridad conceptual, basada en marcos teóricos consolidados, para evitar el “estiramiento conceptual”. Mediante el mapeo de la estructura social e intelectual de este nicho de investigación, el estudio contribuye al desarrollo teórico del campo, fortalece estrategias metodológicas para el análisis de redes intelectuales y reflexiona sobre las implicaciones de la dominación lingüística en los esfuerzos por descolonizar la investigación sobre el lobby.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Bibliometría, Análisis bibliométrico, Política comparada, Sur Global, Grupos de interés, Defensa de intereses, Lobby.