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## South Africa as a Geopolitical Hub for Migration and International Student Mobility

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### Abstract

This paper examines the rise of higher education within geopolitical hubs, based on the case of South Africa. South Africa has strategic geographic, economic, and political features that contribute to its emergence as a geopolitical hub. This paper discusses the concept of a geopolitical hub in the South African context based on three focus areas: (1) transport, trade, and tourism; (2) global and regional multilateral organisations; (3) peace and political stability; and (4) regional agreements. As we will explore, all these aspects have direct implications for international student mobility.

**Keywords:** Higher education, South Africa, student mobility

### Introduction

The growth of regional higher education hubs is a rising phenomenon (OECD, 2014), but it is less understood in the context of the global mobility of international students. As more and more students seek international study opportunities (OECD, 2019), the factors that drive decisions to stay within one's home region cannot be fully attributed to geographical convenience. While the ease of transportation, cultural and language familiarity in one's home region may prove to be less daunting than traveling greater distances, there may also be national partnerships, government incentives, visa policies, and other geopolitical factors that contribute to within-region migration (Lee & Schoole, 2015).

While the European Union is commonly given as the most prominent example of regional mobility, the phenomenon is also now occurring within the Global South. For example, of the 72,457 international students in South Africa in 2013, 65,719 (90%) were from within the African continent (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013). Such inter-regional migration can benefit participating countries by maintaining highly skilled talent and resources within the region. In particular, Africa has long been positioned as a victim of 'brain drain,' with its human capital being lured to Western Europe and the United States (Zezeza, 2003). According to Lee and Schoole, (2015), what is less noted, however, are the ways in which some African countries combat such trends by preparing and supporting international students within the continent, and in some cases, from beyond continental borders. This paper seeks to investigate both the regional and global mobility of international students, particularly the factors that drive and shape educational migration towards South Africa, using the geopolitical hub phenomenon as a framework.

We argue that the ability of South Africa to attract international students and the rapid increase in numbers – from 12,557 in 1994 (Kwaramba, 2012) to 72,457 in 2013 (DHET, 2013) – can be explained in terms of the country's emergence as a regional power and hub following its readmission to the international community after the democratic elections in 1994. South Africa has strategic geographic,

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economic, and political features that contribute to its emergence as a geopolitical hub (see definition in the following section). In this paper, we discuss the concept of a geopolitical hub in the South African context, based upon the role of South Africa in the following four focus areas: (1) transport, trade, and tourism; (2) global and regional multilateral organisations; (3) peace and political stability; and (4) regional agreements. As we will explore, all these aspects have direct implications for international student mobility.

We supplement our arguments with international student data gathered from student surveys and interviews in seven South African universities. The institutions range in type, setting and location. They include instances of each of the three university types (traditional research, comprehensive, and technology universities) and are located in urban and rural settings in the following provinces: Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Northwest, and Western Cape. In total, 1,682 international students completed the survey, and 51 students were interviewed. The full methods, including data collection and analyses, are in an article written by the authors (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). Selected tables and interview data are presented in this paper in order to elaborate on how the concept of South Africa as a geopolitical hub was experienced by international students.

### **The Concept of a Geopolitical Hub in the South African Context**

We define a geopolitical hub as regional power resulting from natural causes (such as geographic location, or the presence of natural resources and minerals), and man-made infrastructure (such as shipping, rail, and air transport), based on the insights of Scholvin and Draper (2012). Scholvin and Draper (2012) propose that South Africa is an economic gateway to the African continent based on its location, physical geography, and extensive transport infrastructure, all of which reinforce the country's role as a geopolitical hub, which we will apply to South Africa's higher education sector.

South Africa's favourable elements provide economic as well as geopolitical benefits. As the following sections will demonstrate, South African politicians and business leaders have strategically used the country's geographic location as a magnet for direct foreign investment, an attraction for tourists and international students, a home for refugees and asylum seekers, and a strategic partner in regional agreements, all of which have contributed to the country's ascendancy within the continent. This paper argues that South Africa's role in each of the four focus areas mentioned makes the country an ideal case to study in seeking understanding of the phenomenon of a geopolitical hub.

### **Geography as a Stage**

Spykman (1942) conceptualizes geopolitics as a science that seeks to explain social phenomena as a result of natural causes; they address the geographical roots of economics and politics by studying the impact of location and physical geography on mankind. Building on this perspective, Scholvin (2011) shows how a geopolitical perspective provides insights that cannot be gained from a solely social scientific viewpoint. In seeking more insight into the notion of geopolitics, Fairgrieve (1917) distinguished between the "drama of the world history" and the "stage of the world history," showing how the stage shapes the drama. He argued that geography "controls" history by staging opportunities and posing constraints. Human action is possible only within the limits set by geography and often takes paths implied as rational by geography (Fairgrieve, 1917).

In elaborating on this proposition of geography as a stage in the South African context, consider for example, the presence of precious minerals in South Africa. The presence of precious minerals does not control humans in the sense of forcing them to industrialize a country. Only human decisions determine whether, when and how to extract these minerals (which are controlled by geography), thereby leading humans to industrialization. Nevertheless, the presence of the minerals was a necessary condition for industrialization and makes industrialization likely because the actions of humans are "conditioned by their surroundings" (Fairgrieve, 1917, p. 22).

### **South Africa's Stage**

In his analysis of the impact of geography and geology on the emergence of South Africa as a regional economic power, Scholvin (2011) shows how the Gauteng province became the centre of economic

activity and helped South Africa become a continental power. The geology of South Africa is marked by vast quantities of precious minerals, including the Witwatersrand (rich with deposits of gold, manganese and uranium), which indicates a geographically-induced pattern of economic integration into Southern Africa. In other words, the geography of Southern Africa favours a continental African orientation for South Africa, not only because of favourable conditions such as transport, but also because of the precious minerals which follow geographical patterns. These factors in turn are fundamental to the existence of a regional mining-and-industry complex (Scholvin, 2011).

### **Rise of the Mining-and-Industry Complex**

Scholvin (2011) concludes that geography has guided history in Southern Africa, for example, the quantity and quality of mineral resources discovered in South Africa laid the foundation for the rise of South African mining companies. Mining companies used the strength and resources they gained from exploring and exploiting vast local mineral reserves in order to expand throughout sub-Saharan Africa, exporting knowledge and expertise as they did so. Geography explains why South Africa was able to develop a manufacturing sector and export its products to the rest of the continent. Geology provided the necessary material basis for this path and induced it. This was complemented by strong support for national industries by the apartheid regime. The abundance of resources in South Africa induced the rise of the mining-and-industry complex. In addition, the country benefitted from man-made roads, tourism, telecommunications, and financial services that made South Africa a magnet for tourists, investors and road freight operators.

### **Effects of the Mining-and-Industry Complex**

For the mining-and-industry complex and the transport infrastructure to evolve and develop into one of the best in the region, skills and expertise had to be developed and deployed. In this regard, higher education has played an important role in the development of not only the mining industry and transport infrastructure, but also in related industries like financial services, trade, telecommunications, and tourism. This paper supports previous writings on how industry and universities are inextricably linked (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In the case of South Africa, the growth and strength of mining engineering departments in higher education were attributable to that of the mining industry, with the industry investing in the universities, which in turn supplied skilled labour to the mining industry.

### **Effects on South African Universities**

The mining and industrial complex laid the foundations for South Africa's most prominent universities. For example, the University of the Witwatersrand was originally the South African School of Mines, which was established in Kimberley in 1896, following the discovery of diamonds. In 1904 the school was transferred to Johannesburg and called the Transvaal Technical Institute. It became the Transvaal University College in 1906 and was renamed the South African School of Mines and Technology four years later. Thus, the emergence and history of the university was intimately linked with mining as the university-trained students and supplied skills for the industry. In return, the mining industry invested heavily in the university. Major mining houses such as the Chamber of Mines, GENCOR and Anglo American, and mining magnates such as the Oppenheimer family, have historically been associated with the growth and development of the university's Faculty of Engineering. These industry-university ties resulted in investment in infrastructural development and a number of new buildings erected at the university were named after prominent mining magnates.

Similarly, the University of Cape Town was initially established as the South African College in 1829. This high school for boys housed a small tertiary education facility, which grew substantially from 1880, around the same period of the discovery of gold and diamonds in Kimberly and Johannesburg, respectively. From 1880 to 1900, the college created the departments of Mineralogy and Geology to directly address the country's surge in demand for mining skills (<https://www.uct.ac.za/about/intro/history>). The South African College became a fully-fledged university by 1900, with investments from both the government and the private sector. The faculties of Engineering in these universities are still among the leading programs in the country.

### International Student Mobility

Beyond national historical ties and mutual development, we argue that international student mobility is a key component in the today's knowledge economy. South Africa is home to globally ranked universities, including the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand, and Stellenbosch University, all of which are among the top 300 universities in the world (Times Higher Education, 2020). Thus, the country attracts a good number of international students from around the world, particularly from the Southern Africa region, pursuing Engineering degrees. The DHET (2013) data (see Table 1) shows that about 7,225 African students studying in South Africa were enrolled for different Engineering degrees; of which 5,505 were from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and 1,720 from other African countries. The table further shows enrolments in engineering specialisations: mechanical, metallurgical, and mining. These subfields are relevant to the discussion of emergence South Africa's mining industry and its expansion to the African continent, demonstrating the role the country is playing in human resources development on the African continent.

**Table 1.** Number of international students (African) studying engineering

Region	Engineering	Mechanical Engineering	Metallurgical Engineering	Mining Engineering
SADC	5,505	891	126	219
Other African	1,720	299	32	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,225</b>	<b>1 190</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>258</b>

Source: DHET (2013)

### South Africa as a Geopolitical Hub

We now explore the concept of a geopolitical hub in the South African context, based upon the role of South Africa in the following four focus areas: (1) transport, trade, and tourism; (2) global and regional multilateral organisations; (3) peace and political stability; and (4) regional agreements.

#### The Role of South Africa in Transport, Trade and Tourism

**Transport:** Economic integration in Southern Africa would not have been possible without transport. According to Scholvin (2011), from the time that Southern Africa was first connected to the European economy via harbors and railway lines during the colonial era, most of Europe became highly dependent on South Africa as a direct trading partner – and as a gateway for extra-regional trade. As Odén (2000) points out, the capacity for inland transport and shipping to the rest of Southern Africa is most efficient in South Africa, with its network of railway lines and roads connecting landlocked countries to South African harbors. Building the transport infrastructure (i.e., railway lines and roads) was facilitated by South Africa's topography consisting of plains, which made it easier to build upon than having to navigate mountain ranges, vast rivers, or dense forests.

Just as its transport infrastructure connects South Africa to Southern Africa, and therefore facilitates trade within the region, it also contributes to South Africa being attractive, and providing easy access for tourists and students from the Southern Africa region. South Africa has the biggest airport on the continent that not only links the country to the region and to the rest of continent, but also to the rest of the world. The three major airports in South Africa (located in the cities of Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town) together process about 32.3 million passengers and 333,000 air traffic movements per year (Government Communication and Information System [GCIS], 2013; 2014). Such diverse means of access provide South Africa with exposure that contributes to attracting international students considering further study.

**Trade:** The reputation of South Africa's economy, including the domination of Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) in relation to its peers in the region, makes it a destination of choice for international investors. The volume of trade (exports and imports) from South Africa's neighbouring countries supports the thesis that geography matters. South Africa is a key trading partner, especially in terms of imports into Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique,

Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The dominance of South Africa as a source of imports for most countries in Southern Africa correlates with the expansion of the South African private sector into those countries. South African telecommunications firms, tourism companies and financial services providers have gained dominant positions, not only in Southern Africa, but also in the most lucrative markets of East and West Africa (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria) (Games, 2003).

Moreover, South Africa has experienced an increase in overseas foreign direct investment as exemplified by the acquisition of local companies by multinational corporations (MNCs). This strategy, to control the regional networks that South African companies have built over the years, has proven to be highly successful. Examples over the past decade include the acquisitions of Massmart Holdings by Walmart; of Absa Bank by Barclays Bank PLC; and of Vodacom by Vodafone in the retail, financial services, and telecommunications sectors, respectively. By purchasing South African enterprises and their regional networks, such MNCs have turned South Africa into a major economic hub.

Investment growth and sustainability in the abovementioned sectors require a robust higher education system that is able to supply the requisite human resources. In his study, Kwaramba (2012) argued that a powerful factor in student demand for international qualifications is employer demand for skilled labour that is geographically and culturally flexible. With products and services now being delivered across borders, students obtain much higher returns on their international education investments than in years past. The policies of sending and receiving countries also play a significant role in encouraging different modes of trade (Bashir, 2007). This demand for international qualifications has contributed to African students seeking to study in South Africa, which provides a diverse environment and more opportunities to work in multinational teams. Kwaramba (2012) further showed that the knowledge and skills requirements of global firms shape student demand for higher education. In fact, the DHET (2013) data demonstrates that Business and Commerce faculties in South Africa enrolled more students from the SADC region (34%) than Science, Engineering, and Technology faculties (30%).

The country's strong economy can be linked to the reputation and high standing of South Africa's higher education institutions in the rest of Africa. Exposure to multinational corporations and international perspectives influence the choice of international students to study in South Africa, thus contributing to the geopolitical hub phenomenon. One international student reflected on his choice of South Africa and the institution he studies at, in the following words: "The LLM International Trade and Investment Law in Africa is a unique course, and the method of delivery of lectures was particularly unique. This course (combining Trade and Investment) is not offered elsewhere on the globe."

**Tourism and international study:** South Africa's developed transport infrastructure facilitates the country's position as the leading African tourist destination (World Economic Forum, 2015). According to South Africa's Department of Transport (DT, 2014), the number of international arrivals in South Africa reached an all-time high of 14,860,216 in 2013, an increase of over 10% from the previous year – a rise of 2.5 times the global average. The vast majority of these visitors were tourists (9.6 million), which also increased compared to the previous year (9.2 million). Such initial exposure can serve as a gateway for international study. For example, when asked why he chose to study at a particular South African university, one of our interviewees said: "I have been to South Africa several times as a student and visitor." Another commented, "I visited South Africa prior to my coming to study here. It is a beautiful country and the coast in particular spoke to me. The general atmosphere of Port Elizabeth living also appealed to me." Clearly, exposure to South Africa as a tourist had an influence on these and other students in choosing to study in the country.

Europeans comprised the largest group of tourists, with a 7% increase to 1,494,978 tourists in 2013. During that year, the United Kingdom (UK) was South Africa's biggest overseas tourism market with 442,523 UK tourists visiting. The United States of America (USA) was South Africa's second biggest market, with 348,646 tourists, followed by Germany with 304,090 tourists. China was South Africa's fourth biggest overseas market at 151,847 tourists in 2013 (up by 14.7%), followed by India (up by 5.5% to 112,672 visitors) and Brazil (up by 5.6% to 82,802 visitors) (DT, 2014).

The growth of tourists from Brazil, India and China could also be the result of South Africa's admission into the membership of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries in 2010 (thus, forming BRICS). The alliances between these countries benefit not only tourism and trade, but also educational opportunities since travel and ease of access by nationals of these countries to other member countries is facilitated. In terms of higher education, India and China were the two biggest senders of international students from Asia to South Africa in 2013, a trend that is similar to their mobility to the United States (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). A student from India explained his reasons for studying in South Africa, which are related to opportunities offered by BRICS countries, in the following way: "It's [South Africa] an emerging market and lots of opportunities will be there in future. This is the number one MBA institute in Africa. Being from India, it gives me the opportunity to explore one of the BRICS nations and I will be in the position to do a job when foreign trade between India and SA is there."

The largest combined source of tourism, however, is from the African continent. International arrivals in South Africa from other parts of Africa were 6,889,389 in 2013, an increase of almost 4% compared to the previous year. Nigeria accounted for the largest source of tourists to the South Africa, growing by 15.4% to reach 84,589 tourists in 2013. The impressive increase of tourists from Nigeria coincides with Nigeria's position as a leading sender of international students from outside the SADC region, which amounted to 3,386 in 2013 (Lee & Schoole, 2015).

### **The Role of South Africa in Global and Regional Multilateral Organisations**

South Africa is as a member of the G-20 countries of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and has participated past summits of the Group of Eight Industrialised countries (G-8) (GCIS, 2004). Its membership of and participation in these influential global institutions has bolstered South African exposure, attracting further attention, and elevating the country's standing in the world.

At a continental level, South Africa played a critical role in the restructuring of multilateral organisations and the development of programs for the recovery of the African continent. This position was made possible by the readmission of South Africa to the United Nations (UN) in 1994, following its successful transition to democracy. Twelve years after re-admittance to the UN, South Africa was elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the United National Security Council (UNSC) for the 2007/08 period, which was renewed for a second term in 2011/2012.

Under the leadership of former president Thabo Mbeki, South Africa played a leading role in the transformation of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), which became the political and economic fulcrum for Africa.

Among the OAU's goals are to

... promote the unity and solidarity of African States; co-ordinate and intensify their co-operation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa... giving due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and co-ordinate and harmonise members' political, diplomatic, economic, educational, cultural, health, welfare, scientific, technical and defense policies. (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/africa/oau.htm>)

Similarly, South Africa played a key role in the development and adoption of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which became the blueprint for Africa's economic recovery.

### **The Role of South Africa in Peace and Political Safety**

The emergence of South Africa as a geopolitical hub has also been boosted by the meaningful diplomatic and leadership role it plays in the region, the continent, and the world. Thus, it is no surprise that South Africa has risen in popularity as a destination for various participants seeking to benefit from opportunities in the business, education, or tourism sectors, and those applying for refugee or asylum status.

South Africa has contributed significantly to foreign policy and promoting regional peace, security, and stability, all of which have supported socio-economic development on the continent. Since becoming a democracy, the country has engaged in peacekeeping operations and has actively engaged in mediation or facilitation for other African countries such as Burundi, the DRC, Sudan, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe (GCIS, 2013; 2014).

Resulting from its membership in the UN and OAU, which embrace the culture of human rights, South Africa became a signatory to a number of conventions. In 1998, South Africa passed the Refugees Act, which established protection to those fleeing persecution and instability in other countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Africa has a “liberal asylum legislation that incorporates all basic principles of refugee protection including freedom of movement, the right to work and access to basic social services” (UNHCR, 2013, p. 1). Refugees and asylum seekers are thereby granted access to health facilities, schools, and social services.

South Africa quickly rose in stature from a country where people were fleeing persecution to becoming a leading destination for new asylum seekers. Almost 900,000 individuals filed applications for asylum or refugee status globally in 2012 (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNCHR], 2012). Among the 70,400 asylum claims, the USA was the world's largest recipient, followed by Germany, South Africa, and France. Within South Africa, Zimbabweans comprised more than half the number of applications seeking asylum between 2009 and 2012 (UNCHR, 2012, p. 23).

The inward flow of migrants into South Africa as refugees or asylum seekers also provides evidence of international student mobility<sup>1</sup>. For example, given the political instability in Zimbabwe over the past 15 years, there has been an influx of Zimbabwean refugees into South Africa. As with the asylum-seeking rate, in 2013 Zimbabweans constituted more than half the number of international students from the SADC region, and about 40% of the number of all international students in higher education institutions in South Africa (DHET, 2013).

Interviews with international students highlighted how they have used their refugee status to gain access into higher education, as the following quotations show:

I am a refugee student; I grew up here and spent all my academic years (primary to university) in this country.

I am a Rwandan refugee who fled the country for political instability, human rights abuse, and insecurity. I became a student as an alternative for life.

I came to South Africa because I had no choice, as my life as well as those of my children, was in danger for political reasons. (Lee & Schoole, 2015, pp. 827-843)

### **The Role of South Africa in Regional Agreements**

The geopolitical role South Africa plays in the region and on the continent, particularly in the higher education context, is perhaps most directly attributable to governmental cooperation agreements to facilitate trade and migration. South Africa joined the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC), which is a constellation of Southern African countries united by the common purpose to bring an end to colonial and white-minority rule in southern Africa. According to Evans (1984), the rationale for SADC was driven by regional cooperation in the quest to end colonialism and pursue national liberation more so than economic, diplomatic alliance, and security concerns. SADC also aims to further socio-economic cooperation and integration, as well as political and security cooperation among the 15 southern African states. These joint goals further strengthen the African Union and its purpose.

Following the attainment of freedom and independence of all the SADC countries, there has been a growing emphasis on an economic agenda, with the initiation of the SADC Free Trade Area in 2000 (Schoole & De Wit, 2014). Late, in 2008, SADC joined the Common Market for Eastern and Southern

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of the Refugees Act of 1998 an asylum seeker in South Africa who is a holder of a Section 22 permit has the right to work and study and is protected against deportation to his country of origin. (<http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/index.php/refugee-status-asylum>)



Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community to form the African Free Trade Zone, which includes all the member countries of each organization. The African Free Trade Zone aims to strengthen the bloc's bargaining power when negotiating international deals (Schoole & De Wit, 2014).

SADC countries further signed a regional cooperation agreement in the field of education, called the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, which aims to develop harmonized, and eventually standardized policies on education and training. The SADC Protocol identifies areas of cooperation as follows: basic education, intermediate education and training, higher education and training, research and development, life-long education, and publishing and library resources (SADC, 1997). The Protocol further gives guidance on institutional arrangements for implementing it, as well as managing resources and scholarship fund assets.

One of the provisions of the protocol on higher education is that students from member states are treated as home students in terms of fees. This enables increased student mobility and provides further incentives for students to study in higher education institutions in member states. Governments have also used this provision to provide scholarships to their nationals to study in the universities of other member states. It appears that South Africa has been a beneficiary of this provision as attested to by data that show that some SADC students came here through the support and encouragement of their governments. The following quotes from students support this assertion:

South African universities are the best in Africa and since I had received the scholarship from my government to study in RSA, I could not resist.

[For me to study in South Africa was] chosen by my home government, probably cheaper for the home government.

I came to study here because of the economic situation back home. I was given the opportunity by a government scholarship, so I came to study in South Africa. (Lee & Schoole, 2015, pp. 827-843)

Furthermore, within SADC, the Southern African Regional University Association (SARUA) was established in 2005. This is a not-for-profit leadership association of the heads of the public universities in the 15 countries of the SADC region (Kotecha, Wilson-Strydom, & Fongwa, 2012). Its mission is to promote, strengthen and increase higher education, research and innovation through expanded inter-institutional collaboration and capacity-building initiatives throughout the region. As part of responding to national development needs and in order to address the need to transform the institutional cultures in South African universities, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (NPHE, 2001) was implemented. It encourages higher education institutions to recruit postgraduate students from the rest of the African continent, and in particular from the SADC region. To ease the process, the NPHE declared that “postgraduate students, irrespective of their countries of origin, would be treated as South African students for subsidy purposes” (NPHE, 2001 – Section 5.3). This led to a situation where in 2006, “61% of the African male graduates and 48% of the African female graduates were not South Africans” (Herman, 2011, p. 12).

As the data reported in this study shows, South Africa has been playing an important role in capacity building in the Southern African region. In so doing, it enables the regional higher education sector to respond meaningfully to the developmental challenges it faces, it consolidates a Southern African agenda for higher education, and it enables higher education to make a significant contribution to national and regional development.

In summary, this paper has made a case for the factors that contribute to South Africa emerging as a geopolitical hub in the Southern African region. These factors relate to the geography of the country, including its location and geographical infrastructure, its emergence as a destination of choice for international investors, its developed transport and telecommunication infrastructure, which among other things, contribute to the phenomenon of the country being a geopolitical hub. This paper also demonstrates that higher education development and internationalization do not occur in isolation, but are largely facilitated by economic, geographic, and political forces. Future research projects might study and contextualize these factors in more detail. Our concept of higher education systems within a geopolitical hub can be useful in examining international higher education in other regions.

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