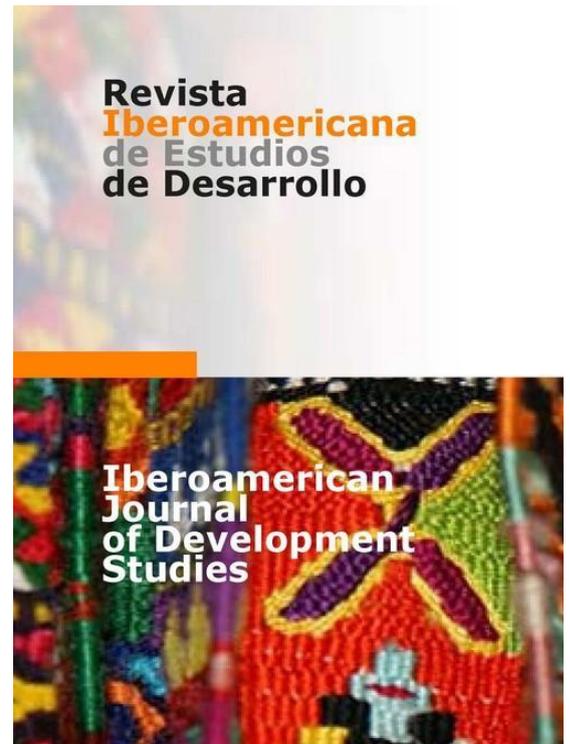

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in Latin America: Rival
Connectivity Frameworks in a
Fragmented Order***

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The global gateway and the BRI in Latin America: rival connectivity frameworks in a fragmented order

La puerta de entrada global y la BRI en América Latina: marcos de conectividad rivales en un orden fragmentado

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Abstract

This article examines the strategic competition between China and the European Union (EU) through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Gateway, focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Based on the premise that infrastructure has emerged as a new geopolitical and geoeconomic tool, it analyses how each actor uses infrastructure to consolidate its power and influence. Employing a qualitative and comparative method, the study outlines the presence of both initiatives in the region. The findings indicate that the BRI has enabled China to expand its influence, whereas the Global Gateway has yet to achieve comparable results for the EU. Nonetheless, the primary aim of the Global Gateway appears to be containing China's rise and defending the principles and institutions of the Liberal International Order. Thus, both initiatives should be understood as broader efforts to reshape regional power dynamics and influence the international order.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, global gateway, Latin America and the Caribbean, infrastructure, hegemony, international order.

Resumen

En este artículo, se examina la competencia estratégica entre China y la Unión Europea (UE) a través de la Iniciativa Franja y Ruta (BRI) y la Puerta Global, con especial atención a América Latina y el Caribe (ALC). Partiendo de la premisa de que la infraestructura ha emergido como una nueva herramienta geopolítica y geoeconómica, se analiza cómo cada actor la utiliza para consolidar su poder e influencia. Mediante un método cualitativo y comparativo, se describe en el estudio la presencia de ambas iniciativas en la región. Los hallazgos indican que la BRI ha permitido a China expandir su influencia, mientras que la Puerta Global aún no ha logrado resultados comparables para la UE. No obstante, el objetivo principal de la Puerta Global parece ser contener el ascenso de China y defender los principios e instituciones del orden liberal internacional. Por lo tanto, ambas iniciativas deben entenderse como esfuerzos más amplios para reconfigurar las dinámicas de poder regionales e influir en el orden internacional.

Palabras clave: Iniciativa Franja y Ruta, puerta de entrada global, América Latina y el Caribe, infraestructura, hegemonía, orden internacional.

Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was announced in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia. Nearly a decade later, in December 2021, the European Union (EU) launched a comparable initiative: the Global Gateway.

Since its inception, the BRI has generated extensive scholarship. Scholarship ranges from broad analyses of the BRI's motivations, priorities and objectives (Ahmed & Lambert 2022, Clarke 2018, Ferdinand 2016, Zhou & Esteban 2018) to examinations of its geopolitical, geoeconomic and strategic implications (Cai 2018, Flint & Zhu 2019, Petry 2023). By contrast, scholarship on the Global Gateway remains limited, with notable exceptions, such as Heldt (2023) and Kondratieva (2024) on its geopolitical dimension, and Tagliapietra (2024) on its economic aspects, Karjalainen (2023) on its attractiveness, and Rech (2024) on the initiative as a response to the BRI. Similarly, González and Marquina (2024) discuss the Global Gateway as an EU effort to enhance its influence in the Global South.

Comparative studies of the BRI and the Global Gateway remain scarce and focus largely on global infrastructure competition (Abels & Bieling 2024), or on financing models (Larsen 2025). Regarding their presence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), only Neves and Honório (2024) offer a comparative perspective, though their analysis centres, mainly on the region's internal context rather than on China's and the EU's strategic motivations.

Therefore, this article aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by conducting a comparative analysis of the BRI and the Global Gateway, focusing on the strategic motivations and objectives underlying both initiatives' presence in the LAC region. By adopting this comparative perspective, the study seeks to advance the understanding of global geopolitical competition. This research is especially pertinent, given the contemporary context, where the United States (US), under the second Trump administration, appears to once again reject its role as the world's policeman, while China continues to expand its influence within the Global South. In this increasingly fragmented

global landscape, it is essential to examine how the EU, positioning itself as a defender of the Liberal International Order (LIO), navigates these dynamics.

Accordingly, this research will investigate how China and the EU seek to capitalise on the infrastructure gap in the LAC region through the BRI and the Global Gateway, respectively, to pursue their strategic regional and global objectives. The study will first analyse the underlying dynamics of both initiatives within the LAC region, identifying critical elements that facilitate an assessment of their objectives, motivations, and status. This analysis will subsequently form the basis for evaluating the geopolitical and geoeconomic intentions associated with each initiative. To guide this research, the following question has been formulated: *How do China and the EU seek to capitalise on the infrastructure gap in the LAC region through the BRI and the Global Gateway, respectively, for hegemonic purposes?*

The article proceeds as follows. It first outlines the theoretical and methodological framework, then introduces the BRI and the Global Gateway. Subsequent sections examine their presence and investments in the LAC region, followed by an analysis of the findings considering the theoretical framework. The article concludes with the key insights.

2

Theory and methods

To address the research question, we adopt a Neo-Gramscian framework, which understands the international system through the historical interaction between social forces, state forms, and world orders (Cox 1981, 1983). While social forces derive from relations of production, state forms correspond to types of political organisation, and world orders are expressed in global patterns of power, production and legitimacy that shape international relations (Cox 1981).

From this interaction emerges what Cox (1981) calls the «historical structure» – an interdependent set of material forces (relating to production and economic organisation), ideas (about the world and international relations) and institutions (which sustain and reproduce the order). This historical structure defines the context for political action and is maintained by a specific hegemonic configuration. The latter finds its

counterpart in the corresponding world order and is sustained through the coherence between social forces, state forms and the broader global order (Bieler & Morton 2004; Cox 1981, 1983).

Hegemony is therefore understood not as a condition that one state can possess over others, but as a phenomenon emerging from social, political and economic relations that combine coercion, and consent (Bieler & Morton 2004, Cox 1983). Although hegemony is often portrayed as something that arises organically, it is important to note that it initially develops «within a state but is then projected outwards on a world scale» (Bieler & Morton 2004, p. 87). Consequently, states do not pursue hegemony in themselves; rather, they act as agents of the prevailing hegemonic conjuncture (Cox 1981).

Pass (2018, 2019) challenges this interpretation, contending that Cox's approach is limiting, because it denies an ontological distinction between structure and agency and thus excludes intentionality in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic structures. In contrast, Pass (2018) proposes a «neo-neo-Gramscian» perspective, suggesting that hegemonic projects can be intentionally constructed and pursued by political actors, even within the constraints imposed by material and social structures. Hegemony is thus conceived as a phenomenon with two interrelated dimensions – a structural one and a political one –, the latter being linked to the conscious action of political agents (Pass 2019). It is Pass's approach that underpins the analysis presented here.

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the evolving character of both the BRI and the Global Gateway, a soft application of the Neo-Gramscian framework is more appropriate. This approach avoids imposing rigid categories on processes that are still taking shape. Accordingly, the present analysis proceeds from the premise that the current historical order is capitalist, statist and liberal internationalist. This entails assuming that productive forces are globalised and organised around a market economy, that the sovereign state remains the dominant political form, and that the international order is structured around liberal internationalism, with the US and its institutions as its central pillars. This constitutes the prevailing historical-social structure within which both the BRI and the Global Gateway operate.

Building on this, our analysis focuses on the micro-structural level, examining how each initiative seeks to mobilise and reconfigure material forces, ideas and institutions, with the aim of advancing its respective hegemonic project. We therefore argue that, through the BRI and the Global Gateway, China and the EU respectively seek

to promote a hegemonic conjuncture in LAC. In doing so, both actors aim to advance an economic model aligned with their own, together with principles, values and worldviews that reflect their respective perspectives, as well as a model of governance consistent with their domestic systems. Through this process, each seeks to secure a hegemonic position – or at least a position of significant influence – within the region. Ultimately, we argue that the contest between these initiatives may contribute to a reconfiguration of the contemporary historical-social structure itself.

This dynamic must, however, be interpreted considering the current state of the international order. The international order is experiencing a crisis marked by the deterioration of liberal principles and values, disregard for the norms of international law, the emergence of populist and anti-globalisation movements, and the decline of American hegemony (Cha 2020, Acharya 2017). We are thus witnessing a period of hegemonic power vacuum. Once the hegemonic leaders of the liberal order, the US have lost their hegemony, due to the decline of their power, the emergence of new relevant actors, and the retrenchment in their foreign policy (Cha 2020, Lind 2024, Acharya 2017). In this sense, the international order is undergoing a period of interregnum; that is, a transitional phase between orders marked by turbulence, uncertainty, imbalance, and fragmentation (Babic 2020, Knight 2022).

In line with the above, and following the works of Babic (2020), Knight (2022), and Acharya (2017), we argue that the international order today is a fragmented order. This means that it is characterised by the inability of a single actor to shape the international system and by the coexistence of multiple poles of power and decision-making that compete with one another, thereby rendering the order uncertain and unbalanced.

It is in this context that actors such as the EU and China seek to attain greater influence through the diffusion and imposition of hegemonic projects aimed at preserving the pre-existing order or promoting a new ordering, using Latin America as one of the arenas of this rivalry. In this process, the US factor cannot be disregarded. Traditionally regarded as the US backyard, US commitment to the LAC region has not been uniform; meanwhile, other actors capable of projecting influence, such as China, have emerged, contributing to the erosion of US influence in the region (Hirst *et al.* 2024, O’Keefe 2020). In this sense, authors such as Hirst *et al.* (2024) acknowledge that the US no longer exercise hegemonic power over the region.

The operationalization of this theoretical framework relies on a qualitative methodological approach, suited to understanding complex, multi-variable phenomena in evolving social and political contexts, and to interpret them subjectively. The methodological approach is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, which holds that the social world is constituted by values, beliefs, practices, and meanings. The researcher's aim is therefore to identify and interpret the meanings and relationships that shape social reality. In line with the theoretical premises outlined above, this research conceives historical structures as the existing socio-political context within which the phenomena under analysis unfold. Historical analysis is therefore instrumental to the investigation. On this basis, facts are examined through an interpretivist lens, that seeks to understand them by analysing the meanings attributed to them by actors. Material factors, such as trade data, are not disregarded; however, their relevance lies in the interpretation of their significance for the analysis and in the examination of the meaning conferred upon them by actors through discourse and practice. This approach enables an interpretative and subjective analysis of the political, economic and social dynamics underlying the phenomenon under examination.

To operationalise the research design, we adopt a hermeneutic logic, which seeks to understand the meaning of actions, texts and practices, complemented by an exploratory method. The latter is justified by the relative novelty of the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, we aim to investigate the dynamics at play, generating insights and formulating an explanatory hypothesis, without making claims of absolute or universal validity. Complementarily, we also employ the comparative method, which allows us to analyse the presence of the BRI and the Global Gateway in the region from a comparative perspective. In this sense, this study does not claim exhaustive coverage nor causal proof; it aims to provide an interpretive and hypothesis-generating comparison.

The research draws on both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources include reports from think tanks and relevant academic literature. Primary sources comprise transcriptions of political speeches from official and media channels, as well as government documents and news articles from credible outlets and agencies.

Data will be examined through interpretative textual analysis, following the hermeneutic tradition and drawing on authors, such as Milliken (1999) and Fairclough and Fairclough (2016). This analytical technique provides the flexibility required for the subjective interpretation of the relationships, patterns and meanings under investigation. In this sense, rather than employing formal coding procedures, we conduct a close reading

of the selected transcripts and documents, interpreting them considering our theoretical framework to identify components relevant to it. Specifically, we seek to identify elements that demonstrate how each actor seeks to benefit from and/or mobilise material factors, ideas, and institutions in support of its hegemonic project. Material forces were interpreted as references to physical infrastructure and investment mechanisms; ideational elements as narratives and conceptions about order and development; institutional aspects as multilateral institutions and governance frameworks. In this sense, the analysis followed a structured interpretive logic: (1) collection of documents according to predefined criteria (relevance, timeframe, official sources...); (2) close reading to identify material, ideational and institutional components; (3) cross-case comparison.

We also employ an interpretative and narrative form of process tracing (Castillo 2022, Crasnow 2017) to describe the evolution of the BRI and the Global Gateway in LAC.

3

Framing the BRI and the Global Gateway

In recent years, infrastructure and its control have become highly significant political elements, with international actors competing to project influence and secure resources and supply chains. This competition has prompted discussions about a new era of «geopolitics of infrastructure», marked by rival efforts to shape global connectivity (Curtis 2023). This phenomenon has both a geoeconomic dimension, where economic instruments serve strategic aims, and a geopolitical one, as geoeconomic tools facilitate infrastructure control that enables geographical influence. Two paradigmatic cases exemplify this dynamic: the BRI and the Global Gateway.

The BRI, announced in 2013, is an infrastructure initiative comprising land and maritime corridors. The initiative's primary objective is to «promote the connectivity of Asian, European, and African continents and their adjacent seas», to foster the development of all parties involved (Xinhua 2015). It seeks to foster partnerships among participating states and build global connectivity networks.

The BRI outlines several overarching priorities: enhancing governmental communication; promoting free trade, reducing barriers and facilitating investment; fostering industrial cooperation; enabling capital circulation and financial collaboration, and advancing cultural, academic and public health exchanges (Xinhua 2015). A key priority is infrastructure interconnectivity, centred on road, rail, air and energy networks supported by construction investment and the standardisation of norms and standards (Xinhua 2015).

Due to its multi-corridor nature, the BRI also includes specific goals tailored to each corridor's characteristics; for instance, the digital corridor seeks to enhance global digital connectivity by investing in digital infrastructure and advancing technological development (Hemmings 2020, Hussain *et al.* 2024). The health corridor, in contrast, aims to improve global public health through the enhancement of healthcare infrastructure, coordination of health policies, and support for global health governance (Huang 2022, Zeng *et al.* 2023). Meanwhile, the green corridor focuses on sustainable infrastructure, promoting renewable energy and the construction of eco-friendly infrastructure (Geng & Lo 2023, Shen & Wang 2025).

Despite potential economic benefits and rhetoric of reciprocity, the BRI is not merely an economic initiative; it fundamentally serves China's national interest (Ferdinand 2016). As an initiative designed to logistically connect the globe – particularly to strengthen connectivity between China and other regions –, the BRI inherently incorporates both geoeconomic and geopolitical dimensions. This duality is evident in how the initiative enables infrastructure control for economic and military purposes while expanding Chinese influence (Ahmed & Lambert 2022, Ferdinand 2016). Through the BRI, Beijing positions itself to compete with the US via economic and military means, thereby consolidating its presence in the West (Ferdinand 2016). In this context, Duarte's (2019) frames the BRI as a security instrument enabling China to secure energy resources, safeguard value and supply chains, mitigate overproduction risks and strengthen military mobilisation capacity.

The European Commission introduced the Global Gateway in December 2021 as «a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world» (European Commission 2021a). Its primary objective is to promote stability and international cooperation, while showcasing European principles (European Commission 2021a, 2021b).

The Global Gateway specifically aims to develop smart, clean, and secure connectivity solutions in areas such as digitalisation, energy transition, health, transport, education, and research (European Commission 2021a). To achieve this, it prioritises sustainable infrastructure development to reduce the global investment deficit, while also supporting various other types of projects (European Commission 2021a, 2021b). Its specific goals include combating climate change, protecting the environment, improving public health, addressing the global development gap, enhancing competitiveness, and strengthening global value chains (European Commission 2021a, 2021b). Additionally, it seeks to improve people's lives by fostering prosperity, creating jobs, and establishing sustainable services (European Commission 2021b).

Unlike large-scale infrastructure initiatives, Global Gateway prioritises smaller investments, that adhere to European principles, values and international standards (European Commission 2021a). These include democratic values, good governance, transparency, social rights, and compliance, with international environmental and quality standards (European Commission 2021a). By promoting favourable financing conditions, the EU aims to minimise dependency and mitigate the risk of investment misappropriation through corruption (European Commission 2021b).

The Global Gateway sets out five cooperation priorities, each addressing gaps in global infrastructure. The first priority is the digital sector, focusing on developing secure infrastructure and technologies (European Commission 2021b). The second priority is climate and energy, aiming to ensure access to energy resources and raw materials while prioritising sustainability and climate change mitigation (*ib.*). The third priority is transport, with a focus on investing in transport networks, incorporating smart technologies, emphasising sustainability, resilience, and safety (*ib.*). The fourth priority is health, which aims to build resilient supply chains and develop healthcare infrastructure (*ib.*). Finally, the fifth priority is education and research, aiming to reduce educational disparities, advance digital education, and promote academic and scientific exchanges (*ib.*).

Like the BRI, the Global Gateway offers economic benefits, while serving Brussels' strategic interests. In fact, the Global Gateway is framed as an initiative to provide alternative investment opportunities for less developed countries, thereby preventing dependency. Through this approach, the EU seeks to counter the potential expansion of Chinese influence facilitated by the BRI, while simultaneously reinforcing its presence in regions of the Global South (González & Marquina 2024).

The initiative also has a security dimension, reflected in investments in secure infrastructure and protected value chains. Through these efforts, the EU seeks to safeguard supply chains and secure access to critical raw materials essential for its economy.¹ As Heldt (2023) highlights, the Global Gateway signifies a geopolitical shift for the EU, positioning it as an initiative to extend the global projection of European power.

This section underscores the geopolitical relevance of infrastructure and the growing ambition of international actors to control global connectivity as a means of consolidating influence and projecting power. The cases of the BRI and the Global Gateway exemplify how infrastructure initiatives serve the national interests of China and the EU, respectively. Building on this understanding, the subsequent analysis will explore how the expansion of the BRI and the Global Gateway into the LAC region aligns with the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of both actors.

4

Exploring Belt and Road presence in the LAC region

Initially, the BRI did not include the LAC region, having been conceived as a Eurasian initiative later extended to Africa. The LAC region was incorporated only in 2017, following Xi Jinping's speech at the first Belt and Road Forum, in which he stated that the BRI would be open to American states (Xinhua 2017). This announcement was followed by Panama's accession in June (Nedopil 2025).

Including the LAC region in the BRI was a natural progression given China's longstanding diplomatic and economic ties with the region. Historically, Beijing has maintained close relations with the LAC region, establishing comprehensive strategic partnerships with key countries, such as Brazil, Peru, and Mexico, as well as with several other LAC countries (Li & Zhu 2019). China has also become a critical economic partner for the region, currently holding the position of the largest economic partner of the LAC and the second-largest trading partner globally, only behind the US (Roy 2023, Zhang & Prazeres 2021).

¹ See Dialogue Earth (2023).

According to 2022 WITS data, trade between the LAC region and China exceeded USD 480 billion.² This represents an increase of about 90 % from 2012, and an astonishing rise of around 4,000 %, compared to the year 2000. Similarly, Statista data for 2022 show that Chinese FDI in the region reached almost USD 600 billion.³

Since 2017, more than twenty additional LAC states have joined the BRI, and nine are now members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB 2025, Nedopil 2025). Cooperation between China and the LAC region within the BRI framework has expanded significantly since 2017, as shown by numerous cooperation agreements in trade, infrastructure, investment, science and technology, culture and health (Lou 2024).

The BRI's expansion in the LAC region spans trade, financing, FDI and infrastructure development (De Sousa *et al.* 2023). This expansion employs typical BRI instruments, such as the Silk Road Fund (SRF) and the AIIB. It also involves multilateral frameworks, such as the China-CELAC Forum, as well as regional institutions, like the Caribbean Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, where China's involvement has been steadily increasing (De Sousa *et al.* 2023).

In this context, it is noteworthy that the primary platform for cooperation between China and the LAC region has been the China-CELAC Forum. The forum's 2022-2024 action plan outlines several key cooperation priorities. In the realm of trade, the plan emphasises strengthening trade relations, fostering corporate cooperation, facilitating investment, promoting service trade collaboration, advancing financial cooperation, and increasing Chinese funding for infrastructure projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2021). Regarding technological collaboration, the action plan prioritises boosting Chinese investment and financing in digital infrastructure and services, including the development of 5G networks, big data, cloud computing, and communication infrastructure (*ib.*). In the energy sector, the plan aims to enhance cooperation through policy coordination and increased Chinese investment in energy projects, particularly in clean and renewable energy (*ib.*). Additionally, the plan highlights collaboration in public health, agriculture, sustainable development, and poverty alleviation (*ib.*). Overall, it underscores the desire to strengthen cooperation and investment within the BRI

² Véase <https://wits.worldbank.org/countrysnapshot/en/LCN>.

³ Véase <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278017/capital-stock-in-chinese-direct-investments-in-latin-america/>.

framework, with particular attention to the Digital Silk Road (DSR), Health Silk Road (HSR), and Green Silk Road (GSR) (*ib.*).

China portrays the extension of the BRI to the LAC region as an opportunity for multidimensional development, addressing existing development gaps (Fernandez *et al.* 2023, Gonzalez-Jauregui & Tussie 2023). Accordingly, the BRI in the LAC region seeks to promote economic and trade relations, foster new connectivity infrastructures, strengthen political and institutional ties, and advance the concept of South-South Cooperation (De Sousa *et al.* 2023).

China's motivations for expanding the BRI to the LAC region align with the broader strategic objectives of the initiative, encompassing both economic and geopolitical considerations (De Sousa *et al.* 2023, Fernandez *et al.* 2023). These motivations primarily include the pursuit of new markets for Chinese exports, the acquisition of resources and raw materials, the strengthening of political and diplomatic relations, and the expansion of Chinese enterprises (Gélvez Rubio & Gachúz Maya 2021, Rodríguez & Rüländ 2022). Historically, trade relations between China and the LAC region have focused heavily on raw materials, and the BRI represents an opportunity to diversify these ties into new sectors (Jenkins 2022). One of China's strategic motivations for expanding the BRI to the LAC region is to increase its influence in the area, thereby counterbalancing US hegemony (Jenkins 2022, Lei 2024, Schulz 2021). Additionally, China seeks to enhance its soft power within the region (Rodríguez & Rüländ 2022).

For LAC countries, the primary motivations for joining or engaging with the BRI are predominantly economic and commercial. These motivations include opportunities for infrastructure development and the economic and trade benefits associated with it (De Sousa *et al.* 2023, Fernandez *et al.* 2023, Jenkins 2022, Rodríguez & Rüländ 2022). Another significant factor is the BRI's financing and development model, which, unlike traditional Western frameworks, does not impose political conditions and remains flexible. This characteristic makes it particularly attractive to states facing fiscal challenges and development constraints (Rodríguez & Rüländ 2022).

Among the motivations and interests of LAC countries in joining or engaging with the BRI is the desire to strengthen their sovereignty by reducing dependence on the West and its influence over domestic affairs (Lei 2024, Schulz 2021).

The BRI currently finances approximately 138 infrastructure projects in the LAC region, amounting to investments exceeding USD 94 billion. These projects are complemented by increased trade, as previously noted, as well as agreements in the

banking and financial sectors, including the establishment of Chinese banks within the region. In addition to economic collaboration, cultural exchange has also intensified, exemplified by the significant rise in the number of Confucius Institutes (Lou 2024).

According to data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the primary BRI investments are concentrated in Brazil, Argentina, and Ecuador (IISS China Connects 2025). Collectively, these projects encompass both traditional sectors and emerging areas, including digital technology, sustainability, healthcare, and space exploration. Notably, the BRI has supported the development of safe and smart cities, such as Cutral Co in Argentina, Colón in Panama, or Ventanilla in Peru, as well as Porto Alegre and Boa Vista in Brazil. Additionally, surveillance systems have been provided to Sucre in Bolivia, as well as to Ecuador and Uruguay (*ib.*).

In the digital sphere, Huawei’s 5G network technologies have been deployed, particularly in Ecuador and Colombia. Moreover, there has been significant investment in submarine fibre optic cable projects, including the Suriname-Guyana Submarine Cable System, the Fibra Óptica al Pacífico, and the Fibra Óptica Austral (IISS China Connects 2025, Reconnecting Asia 2021).

Within the green economy, key projects include sustainable energy production initiatives, such as the Cónдор Cliff and La Barrancosa dams in Argentina, hydroelectric power plants in Bolivia and Ecuador, and the wind farm in Las Tunas (Cuba) (IISS China Connects 2025).

In the healthcare sector, significant initiatives include the construction of the Pedernales Hospital in Ecuador and the donation of medical equipment (*ib.*). Additionally, BRI investments extend to the mining sector and transport infrastructure, including the rehabilitation of the Belgrano freight railway in Argentina, the construction and operation of the RegioTram de Occidente in Colombia, and the construction of the Desiré-Delano-Bouterse Highway in Suriname (*ib.*).

Country	Project	Corridor
Argentina	Solar and Wind Farms	GSR
Argentina	Facial recognition surveillance system	DSR
Argentina	Donation of medical supplies	HSR
Argentina	«Safe city» project in Cutral Co	DSR
Argentina	Belgrano Cargo Railway Rehabilitation	BRI

Country	Project	Corridor
Bolivia	El Espino-Charagua-Boyube Highway	BRI
Bolivia	Steel Processing Plant	BRI
Bolivia	Surveillance system in Sucre	DSR
Bolivia	Hydroelectric Power Plants	GSR
Brazil	5G Huawei technology	DSR
Brazil	Acquisition of Majority Stake in Terminal de Contêineres de Paranaguá	BRI
Brazil	«Smart city» project in Boa Vista and Porto Alegre	DSR
Chile	Wind Farm	GSR
Chile	Submarine cable «Fibra Óptica Austral»	DSR
Colombia	Construction and operation of the RegioTram de Occidente	BRI
Colombia	Metro line construction	BRI
Colombia	Huawei 5G technology	DSR
Cuba	Solar Park	GSR
Cuba	La Herradura Wind Farm Complex	GSR
Ecuador	Hydroelectric Power Station	GSR
Ecuador	Quinindé-Las Golondrinas Highway Upgrade	BRI
Ecuador	Huawei 5G technology	DSR
Ecuador	Eloy Alfaro International Airport	BRI
Ecuador	Pedernales Hospital construction	HSR
Grenada	Expansion of Maurice Bishop International Airport	BRI
Guyana	Supply of Huawei smart surveillance cameras	DSR
Panama	«Safe city» project in Colón	DSR
Peru	Acquisition of Majority Stake in Terminales Portuarios Chancay	BRI
Peru	«Safe city» project in Ventanilla	DSR
Peru	Submarine cable «Fibra Óptica al Pacífico»	DSR
Suriname	Desiré-Delano-Bouterse Highway	BRI
Suriname	Suriname-Guyana Submarine Cable System	DSR
Uruguay	Surveillance technologies	DSR

Table 1

Some BRI projects in Latin America and the Caribbean

Source: developed by the author with data obtained from IISS China Connects (2025) and Reconnecting Asia (2021).

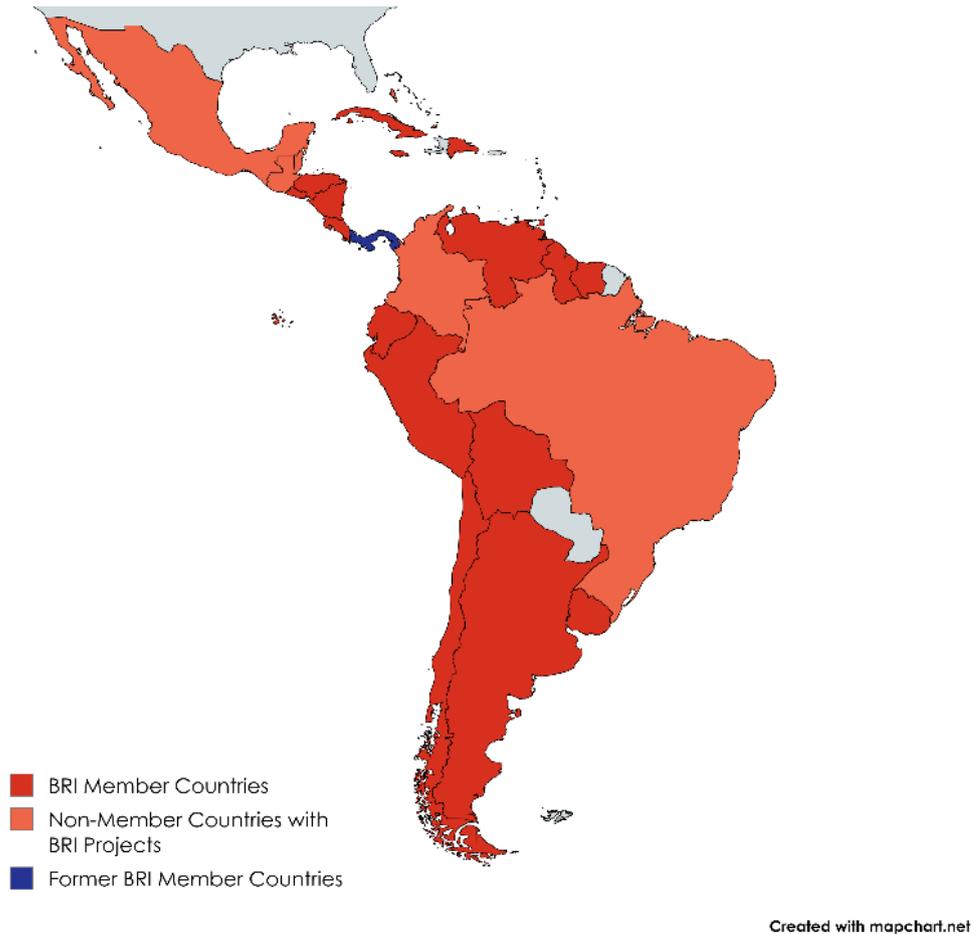


Figure 1
BRI and AIIB Member Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

Source: developed by the author with data obtained from AIIB (2025) and Nedopil (2025).

5

Exploring the Global Gateway footprint in the LAC region

The Global Gateway was introduced as a globally focused initiative, with a primary orientation towards less developed regions, particularly Africa, Central Asia, and the LAC region (European Commission 2021b). In December 2021, just days after the initiative’s launch, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, announced a «relaunch» of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the LAC region during a meeting with LAC and Caribbean leaders (European Council 2021).

Subsequently, in June 2023, the EU unveiled the New Agenda for Relations between the EU and LAC, marking a «new era of cooperation» between the two regions (European Commission 2023c). This document underscores the «natural» ties that connect the regions, existing economic and trade relations, and shared interests and objectives, particularly in upholding the «rules-based international system» (European Commission 2023c).

The Global Gateway is presented as a strategic opportunity to address the «inequalities and structural challenges» faced by the LAC region, while promoting a «fair and inclusive ecological and digital transition» (European Commission 2023c). Investment priorities are primarily focused on environmental sustainability and the development of digital networks and technologies (European Commission 2023c). These priorities are further delineated in the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, which identifies four key investment and cooperation pillars: green transition, digital transformation, human development, and health resilience and vaccine production (European Commission 2025).

In terms of green transition, the Global Gateway is positioned as a cooperation framework towards a just ecological transition. This not only entails investment in projects but also enhanced dialogue and cooperation (European Commission 2023c). Particularly, this focus aligns with the energy sector, aiming to strengthen the LAC region's capacity for renewable energy production (European Commission 2023c).

Simultaneously, the Global Gateway aims to strengthen infrastructure, improve connectivity, and modernise existing systems to enhance efficiency, thereby reinforcing regional energy security (European Commission 2023c). This security dimension is also reflected in the Global Gateway's commitment to supporting the LAC in addressing and adapting to climate change, given the region's heightened vulnerability to environmental disruptions (European Commission 2023c).

Within the framework of digital transition, the Global Gateway promotes digital policies aimed at empowering individuals and businesses. Key investments include developing 5G infrastructure, modernising public administration through digitalisation, and fostering policy cooperation and coordination on regulatory frameworks (European Commission 2025).

As part of this digital partnership, the EU and the LAC have established a Digital Alliance to promote connectivity projects and strengthen political dialogue and coordination between the regions, with the aim of bridging the digital divide (European

Commission 2023c). The EU-LAC Digital Alliance serves as the driving force behind the Global Gateway's digital cooperation pillar in the LAC region. It encompasses the implementation of digital infrastructure projects, as well as the regulation of the digital sector, to ensure the compatibility of standards in areas such as 5G, digital markets and services, artificial intelligence, computing, data governance, and cybersecurity (European Commission 2023c). Moreover, it addresses issues related to data flows between the regions, facilitating new agreements and fostering digital cooperation (European Commission 2023c). Like the climate and environmental component, the digital dimension of the Global Gateway in the LAC region prioritises the security and resilience of connectivity infrastructure, digital services, and value chains (European Commission 2023c).

EU-LAC cooperation within the Global Gateway framework also aims to foster sustainable economic growth and human development, contributing to the construction of an inclusive, equal, and prosperous society (European Commission 2023c). In this context, it also seeks to enhance cooperation to address global challenges, promote social cohesion, tackle inequalities, and reinforce corporate social responsibility (European Commission 2023c). Additionally, the Global Gateway encourages collaboration in research and innovation, health security, healthcare, and food security (European Commission 2023c, 2025).

The EU's funding and development model for the LAC region aligns with the principles previously discussed. Through the Global Gateway, the EU offers an investment framework based on respect for principles and values, particularly international norms and fundamental rights (European Commission 2023c). Furthermore, Global Gateway investments emphasise sustainability, openness, inclusivity, and accountability, along with financial criteria, that ensure the sustainability of public finances, while allowing flexibility in political, economic, and social trajectories (European Commission 2023c). In total, the EU plans to allocate approximately €45 billion to Global Gateway-related projects in the LAC region by 2027 (European Commission 2023a).

The presence of the Global Gateway in the LAC region carries a mutually beneficial dimension, being portrayed as an opportunity to «address both challenges and opportunities» for both parties (European Commission 2023c). The EU underscores that the initiative enables the LAC region to harness its potential in the green, blue, and digital economies, ultimately benefiting both the countries in the region and the EU itself

(European Commission 2023c). This approach includes increasing bi-regional investments and bolstering the resilience of supply and value chains (European Commission 2023c).

Moreover, by enhancing cooperation with the LAC, the EU also seeks to secure access to a set of raw materials essential for the green transition. The EU acknowledges that the LAC region, being rich in critical raw materials, «will play a pivotal role in securing a timely transition that improves its productive and export capacity» (European Commission 2023c). Consequently, the Global Gateway not only facilitates resource access but also strengthens the resilience of both regional and global value chains.

The EU's commitment to the LAC region was reaffirmed by the President of the European Commission during the preview of the EU-CELAC Forum in August 2023. She highlighted that «the EU–LAC strategic partnership is more important than ever», viewing it as a fundamental element to uphold an international order based on rules and values, such as democracy and human rights (European Commission 2023d).

These observations reveal several underlying interests, driving European investment in the LAC region. Notably, in the energy and environmental domains, the EU aims to enhance cooperation, to reduce energy dependence on Russia and to offset the decision to limit cooperation with China on environmental matters (Dialogue Earth 2023, Reuters 2023).

On the LAC side, there is clear interest and commitment to participating in the Global Gateway; for instance, Mexico's ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg noted that the initiative provides an opportunity for the LAC region to develop new infrastructure projects and enhance competitiveness, particularly in healthcare, environmental sustainability, and sanitation (Atalayar 2023).

EU investment in the LAC region within the Global Gateway framework is outlined in the EU-LAC Investment Agenda. Cooperation, in turn, is structured around a multilateral framework, primarily through the EU-CELAC Summit (European Commission 2023b). Furthermore, the Global Gateway enhances cooperation with international financial institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (European Commission 2023c). Given the alignment of values and principles between the EU and LAC countries, and their shared dedication to international norms and institutions, the Global Gateway contributes to strengthening key global frameworks. These also include the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Digital Pact, the Paris Agreement, the

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Digital Agenda for LAC.

The tangible impact of the Global Gateway’s investments in the LAC region is evident through a variety of projects spanning multiple sectors. These initiatives are grouped into five key areas of partnership: Digital, Health, Climate and Energy, Transport, and Education and Research (European Commission 2025). According to the European Commission’s announcement, the Global Gateway finances 135 projects in the LAC region (European Commission 2023b).

In the energy sector, notable projects include renewable energy production in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, with a focus on green hydrogen production. Additionally, Bolivia is engaged in the construction of solar plants, while Uruguay is advancing projects on green hydrogen, as well as developing wind and solar farms (*ib.*). Moreover, the EU supports the marketing of European low-carbon technologies and works to enhance the resilience of the Andean Electricity Interconnection System (*ib.*).

In the digital domain, significant projects include the extension of the EllaLink submarine fibre optic cable in Brazil, the development of a submarine fibre optic cable in El Salvador, and 5G technology deployment initiatives in Costa Rica. The EU is also supporting the creation of AI legislation and regulatory standards in Argentina (*ib.*). Health-related projects are equally notable, with initiatives aimed at improving access to drinking water and sanitation systems in Paraguay and Ecuador, along with efforts related to vaccination campaigns, medical material production, and hospital construction in Honduras (*ib.*).

In the transport sector, key projects include the construction and operation of Porto de Santos in Brazil, the building of an urban light rail system in Arequipa (Peru), and the construction of the Suriname-Guyana Bridge (*ib.*). Finally, several environmental initiatives focus on the protection of regional flora and fauna, particularly in Brazil and Central America, alongside efforts to enhance the resilience of regional value chains (*ib.*).

Country	Project	Priority
Brazil	Green low-carbon technologies for SMEs and companies	Climate & Energy
Brazil	Renewable energy production	Climate & Energy
Brazil	EllaLink submarine cable extension	Digital
Brazil	Construction and operation of the Port of Santos	Transport

Country	Project	Priority
Paraguay	Improvement of access to water and sanitation	Health
Uruguay	Production of green hydrogen	Climate & Energy
Uruguay	Construction of wind farms	Climate & Energy
Uruguay	Adaptation of Montevideo Port infrastructure	Climate & Energy
Argentina	Protection of lithium and copper value chains	Climate & Energy
Argentina	Support to AI legislation and regulation	Digital
Argentina	Commercialisation of green low-carbon technologies	Climate & Energy
Argentina	Renewable energy production	Climate & Energy
Chile	Development of renewable hydrogen	Climate & Energy
Bolivia	Construction of solar plants	Climate & Energy
Peru	Construction of an urban light rail	Transport
Peru	Strengthening of the Andean Electricity Interconnection System	Climate & Energy
Ecuador	Improvement of drinking water and sanitation systems	Health
Colombia	Development of Bogotá Metro lines	Transport
Guyana	Manufacturing of health products	Health
Suriname	Construction of the Suriname-Guyana Bridge	Transport
Panama	Environmental protection project «Five Great Forests of Mesoamerica»	Climate & Energy
Costa Rica	Deployment of 5G infrastructure	Digital
Bahamas	Economic exploitation project of Sargassum algae	Climate & Energy
Brazil	Deforestation prevention project «Team Europe-Brazil Tropical Forests Initiative»	Climate & Energy
El Salvador	Construction of a surface metro line	Transport
El Salvador	Development of an optical fibre submarine cable	Digital
Honduras	Construction of hospitals	Health

Table 2

Global Gateway projects in Latin America and the Caribbean

Source: developed by the author with data obtained from European Commission (2025).



Figure 2

LAC Countries with Global Gateway Investment Projects

Source: developed by the author with data obtained from European Commission (2025).

6

Discussion

The international context of recent years has been marked by growing geopolitical and geoeconomic competition for access to, and control over, global connectivity infrastructures. These infrastructures have, in turn, become extensions of power. They enable international actors to strengthen their domestic economies and expand their global influence. Within this environment, the BRI and the Global Gateway have emerged as two highly geopolitical and geoeconomic initiatives, with China and the EU respectively using these projects as instruments in the new global competition. More broadly, we argue that infrastructures and global connectivity operate as tools of

hegemony through which actors such as China and the EU mobilise and reshape material forces, ideas and institutions around their wider hegemonic ambitions.

One of the main arenas of competition between these initiatives is the LAC region, which we consider here as a key stage on which the confrontation between their hegemonic projects becomes visible. Dynamics in this region therefore go beyond a simple logic of geoeconomic rivalry. They form part of a broader movement of confrontation between two hegemonic projects – one revisionist or reformist, and the other oriented towards preserving the *status quo*. This is observable across three dimensions: the material dimension, the ideational dimension, and the political institutional dimension.

7

Material dimension: the material factors behind the BRI and the Global Gateway

The material factors underpinning the BRI and the Global Gateway reflect each initiative's development model and investment logic, evident in their emphasis on economic and logistical corridors. These elements express the organisation of the social and economic forces embedded within each project.

The BRI is grounded in China's state-led development model, in which firms invest heavily but rely on extensive state financing. This model also follows a development strategy, that prioritises large scale economic and logistical infrastructure. Global Gateway, however, relies on a mix of EU and private financing, as well as external actors, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In development terms, both invest in capacity-building infrastructure, but the Global Gateway focuses more on small and medium-sized projects. It also stresses the resilience of infrastructures and value chains, as well as the sustainability and digital dimensions of its programmes, even if the BRI has expanded into these areas through the GSR and the DSR. Furthermore, while the BRI centres on hard infrastructure, Global Gateway prioritises soft infrastructure and the protection of existing systems. In digital terms, Global Gateway prioritises system resilience, whereas the BRI invests in surveillance technologies.

About financing models, the BRI follows a no-conditionality approach associated with the Beijing Consensus, making it attractive to many less developed and less democratic countries. Conversely, Global Gateway follows a Western-style model, with criteria to prevent over-indebtedness and promote EU values. It therefore aligns more closely with what is known as the Washington Consensus. While BRI financing is channeled through Chinese institutions, the Global Gateway promotes cooperation with LIO-linked bodies, such as the IMF and World Bank.

8

Ideational dimension: the ideas associated with the BRI and the Global Gateway

As with material forces, the BRI and the Global Gateway are linked to the promotion, and in some cases the reshaping, of certain ideas. In the case of the BRI, it is notable that the initiative forms part of the Chinese Dream and the proposal to build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind. Incorporating ideas such as win-win cooperation, the BRI advances a critique of Western financing and development models and, more broadly, of the LIO. In contrast, it puts forward a vision of the world that appears more just and balanced. It places harmony above conflict, and cooperation and reciprocity above neo-colonialism. Through a financing model free from political conditionalities, China can offer a development path that challenges ideas typically associated with the LIO. This alternative is particularly attractive to less developed countries – especially those that do not view Western criteria as fair and do not identify with demo-liberal political conditionalities.

By contrast, the Global Gateway conveys a worldview that aligns with the LIO. From the outset, the initiative promotes European values and highlights them as a central element of the cooperation it seeks to foster. Its financing model corresponds broadly to the Washington Consensus that shapes many of the international institutions of the LIO, such as the IMF and the World Bank, even if without the more rigid political conditionalities imposed in earlier decades. The initiative also encourages collaboration with institutions of the LIO at a moment when the EU is increasingly committed to defending and reasserting liberal internationalism. The Global Gateway thus serves as a mechanism for sustaining the LIO, with all the advantages and limitations that this

involves. It nevertheless signals an effort to respond more closely to the expectations of partners, rather than reproducing a paternalistic stance, that some observers may characterise as «neo-colonial».

9

Political institutional dimension: the institutions promoted by the BRI and the Global Gateway

Turning to the political institutional dimension, both initiatives are accompanied by a set of international institutions, that either embody them or facilitate their implementation. Although both rely on bilateral arrangements, their use of multilateral forums is evident. In the case of the BRI, cooperation is anchored in institutions operating outside the framework of the LIO, most notably the AIIB, as well as the Silk Road Fund and informal platforms, such as the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. For cooperation with the LAC region particularly, the BRI benefits from a structure built around the China-CELAC Forum.

The Global Gateway, by contrast, functions within a less formal and less institutionalised setting, promoting cooperation through more complex and decentralised channels. Global Gateway projects are generally implemented through collaboration between the European Commission, one or more EU Member States and the partner country. At the same time, the initiative draws on explicit multilateral instruments, such as the Global Gateway Forum and the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Forum. It also promotes cooperation within the institutions of the LIO, particularly the IMF and the World Bank. This reflects the initiative's alignment with the principles and values of the LIO. Indeed, the EU's involvement symbolises this alignment, given that the EU is not only an international actor but also a product of the liberal order and a manifestation of what it represents.

10

What does this mean for the regional and global order?

In general, the expansion of the BRI and the Global Gateway in the LAC region brings significant benefits to each actor and to their respective hegemonic objectives. In the case of the BRI, it appears to have contributed to China's establishment as the region's largest economic partner and second-largest trading partner. Nevertheless, this assessment must be approached with caution. Despite the increase in trade between China and the LAC region following the launch of the BRI, and although the initiative is recognised as having positive effects on economic cooperation, it has not been causally demonstrated that the initiative is responsible for this increase, as highlighted by Gonzalez Jauregui (2020), Jenkins (2022), and Yu (2024). In this sense, post-BRI trade trends may be understood as a continuation of previous patterns. This helps explain cases such as Brazil, a non-participating economy, having strengthened its relations with China. The initiative may therefore be viewed as a discursive update of pre-existing practices (Moreno *et al.* 2020).

Still, it appears plausible to recognise that, through investment, corporate expansion, and increased trade, the BRI reinforces Beijing's economic influence in the LAC region. This deepens regional dependence on China and grants Beijing significant access to strategic sectors. As a result, China gains greater scope for influence and can diffuse its hegemonic project more effectively.

In addition, access to rare resources and raw materials meets China's industrial needs, while digital investments promote standards that rival Western ones. Another relevant factor is potential influence over trade routes crossing the region, which offers China greater economic leverage. These mechanisms strengthen China's influence and give Beijing increased political room for maneuver. Economic influence thus translates into political influence, reducing US predominance in the region.

The BRI's focus on physical infrastructure gives China control over strategic points, boosting its political influence. Control of, and access to, port infrastructure particularly may support potential military mobilization.⁴ In the digital sphere, digital investments grant potential access to sensitive data and opportunities for surveillance and political influence. The BRI therefore operates as a tool that enhances China's capacity to shape the actions and preferences of LAC states. Through this initiative, China reshapes regional geopolitical dynamics and asserts itself as a more prominent regional actor. It

⁴ See Xiangning and You (2020), Spencer *et al.* (2025), and Noorali and Mamadouh (2025).

also orients LAC states towards alternative institutions and norms, thereby weakening the LIO.

Regional governments' interest in joining the BRI, driven by opportunities for trade, infrastructure and growth, further benefits China. The appeal also stems from a development model that does not impose political conditions and applies relatively lenient criteria. This facilitates the successful diffusion of China's hegemonic project, supported by the promotion of material factors, ideas and institutions that diverge from, and in some respects challenge, the dominant international order.

Although the Global Gateway does not match the scale of the BRI, it clearly represents a markedly different reality. Its growing presence in the LAC region, like that of the BRI, is strongly connected to questions of power and influence. By expanding market access, supporting exports and financing European firms, Global Gateway enhances the EU's attractiveness. It thus positions the EU as a defender of the existing hegemonic configuration, namely the LIO. Although it does not give the EU control over key sectors, it diversifies investment and reduces dependence on China. Even so, it contributes to a diversification of investments that helps reduce dependence on China. At the same time, it supports the protection of value chains and ensures access to rare resources and raw materials needed for the EU's green transition.

Its limited focus on physical infrastructure curtails Global Gateway's geopolitical influence relative to the BRI. Since the EU is not a state, there is also no accompanying potential for military mobilisation. Consequently, the geopolitical weight of the Global Gateway relates more to its capacity for attraction and the political influence that this capacity generates.

This amounts to a softer form of geopoliticisation (see Adriaensen *et al.* 2025, Olivie & O'Shea 2023), tied to a humanistic perspective. Although the BRI also includes elements of humanism, this dimension is less prominent, which allows the EU to present itself not only as an economic actor but also as a development partner. Furthermore, just as in the economic sphere, the geopolitical role of the Global Gateway is tied to its objective of counterbalancing the BRI and preventing an expansion of Chinese influence in the region. As such, the Global Gateway introduces the potential for a reconfiguration of regional geopolitical dynamics, decreasing Beijing's influence. This counterbalancing ambition is likewise evident in the initiative's commitment to the principles, norms, and institutions of the LIO, which the BRI challenges. The Global Gateway therefore seeks to reinforce the engagement of LAC states with the liberal order.

In this sense, the Global Gateway grants the EU greater political and economic influence in the region, even if not to the same extent as the influence China achieves through the BRI. It serves as a vehicle for preserving the LIO. However, its more modest scale may weaken its effectiveness in this regard. It is also important to note that, although the EU operates within the liberal order, its action through the Global Gateway remains distinct from that of the US. If successful, this may generate implications for the regional and global order.

It therefore becomes clear that the Global Gateway and the BRI, despite certain similarities, are two initiatives with significantly different characteristics. They embody different development models and worldviews. At the same time, they pursue different objectives and priorities, which manifest in different ways, notably in the BRI's focus on physical infrastructures and the Global Gateway's emphasis on intangible infrastructures. Although both initiatives contain geopolitical and geoeconomic elements, they respond differently to the needs, interests and goals of their respective actors. This may reshape regional and global power dynamics.

	Analytical Dimension	Belt and Road Initiative	Global Gateway
Gramscian dimensions	Material Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese development model • Beijing Consensus • Large-scale physical infrastructure • Hard infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European development model • Washington/Brussels Consensus • Supply-chain resilience • Soft infrastructure
	Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community of Shared Future • Win-win cooperation • Narrative of a benevolent great power • Critique of liberal internationalism • Sino-centric world view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defence of the rules-based liberal order • Western liberal values • Centrality of (western) multilateralism
	Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIIB • Silk Road Fund • BRI Forum • China-CELAC Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU institutions (Commission; EIB; Team Europe) • EBRD • Supportive institutions of the Western-led order (World Bank & IMF)
Summary	Hegemonic Objective	To contest and transform the existing historical-social structure, advancing an alternative international order aligned with China's political-economic project.	To reconfigure and reinforce the liberal international order in a context of US retrenchment, sustaining the prevailing hegemonic configuration.

Figure 3

Analytical dimensions and hegemonic objectives of China's BRI and the EU's Global Gateway

Conclusion

Through this article, we have explored the contours and dimensions of the BRI and the Global Gateway within the LAC region. Our aim was to understand how China and the EU, respectively, seek to expand their infrastructure investment initiatives to enhance their geopolitical and geoeconomic interests and needs. The data obtained shows that, despite the identified similarities, there are clear differences in the dynamics of each initiative within the LAC region. These differences appear in financing models, investment levels, and nature of the projects.

We observed that both initiatives possess a clear geopolitical and geoeconomic dimension, enabling China and the EU to strengthen their power and influence in the region. However, while the BRI has already positioned China as the region's largest economic partner, the Global Gateway has not yet shown equally fruitful results. This constitutes our first finding: the BRI has contributed to China's expansion of its influence through economic and trade channels. In contrast, the Global Gateway appears to support the EU's interests, by aiming to strengthen its economic influence in the region, with a particular focus on reducing regional dependency on China.

Secondly, the BRI's focus on hard infrastructure grants China increased geopolitical influence and even potential military advantages, whereas the Global Gateway's emphasis on soft infrastructure does not offer similar outcomes for the EU. Nonetheless, the Global Gateway still carries geopolitical weight through its capacity to attract partners and counterbalance China.

Third, the Global Gateway's geoeconomic and geopolitical role in LAC largely reflects an attempt to contain China, while promoting LIO values and institutions. The EU, therefore, seeks to draw the countries of this region back towards the LIO.

These findings suggest that the EU's aims in LAC reflect its broader global strategy: countering China's rise and defending the LIO. Hence, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of both regional geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics, as well as global power and normative dynamics.

However, this study is not without limitations. The lack of concrete investment data associated with the Global Gateway, along with the relatively recent nature of the project, prevents a more in-depth analysis. Future research could address this gap by quantitatively assessing how each initiative strengthens Chinese and European influence in the region, as well as by examining the presence of both initiatives in other regions.

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