

Evolving Trade Blocs and Geopolitical Risk: Qualitative Narratives and Visual Meaning

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Abstract

The contemporary global economy is undergoing a major transformation as evolving trade blocs increasingly influence international political and economic relations. In recent years, trade arrangements and regional alliances have expanded beyond their traditional function of reducing trade barriers and promoting economic integration. They now operate as instruments of strategic influence, geopolitical positioning, and geoeconomic competition in a world marked by fragmentation, multipolarity, and shifting power balances. This study examines how new and changing trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships and how geopolitical risks connected to these blocs are explained through qualitative narratives and visual representations. The study adopts a qualitative secondary-data approach and draws upon academic literature, institutional trade data, geopolitical risk datasets, policy reports, media discourse, maps, charts, and infographics to analyse both the structural and representational dimensions of the topic. The analysis shows that evolving trade blocs shape global relations by altering diplomatic alignments, market access, supply-chain configurations, investment patterns, and strategic dependencies among states. These blocs create new spaces for regional cooperation while also intensifying competition, selective alignment, and economic fragmentation. The study further finds that geopolitical risk associated with trade blocs is not merely an objective consequence of conflict, sanctions, strategic rivalry, or economic instability, but also a socially constructed and communicatively mediated phenomenon. Policy discourse, media narratives, and institutional commentary frame trade blocs in varying ways, presenting them as mechanisms of cooperation, instruments of balancing, or sources of tension and uncertainty. Similarly, visual representations such as maps, charts, dashboards, and media visuals simplify complex geopolitical realities and shape how risks are interpreted by audiences. These representational forms influence public understanding and policy perception by highlighting certain patterns while downplaying others. The study concludes that evolving trade blocs must be understood through a dual lens: as material structures within the global economy and as representational objects within geopolitical discourse. Their significance lies not only in their institutional and economic functions but also in the narratives and visuals through which they are made meaningful. In doing so, the study offers a more integrated understanding of the relationship between trade architecture, geopolitical risk, and the politics of representation in an increasingly uncertain global order.

Keywords: Trade blocs, geopolitical risk, geoeconomic fragmentation, narrative framing, visual geopolitics, global trade, multipolarity

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Overview of the Study

The contemporary international system is being reshaped by the evolution of trade blocs, regional economic cooperation, and the intensification of geopolitical risk. In earlier phases of globalization, trade liberalization was often discussed in the language of multilateralism, market expansion, interdependence, and efficiency. However, in the present era, the global economy is increasingly marked by strategic competition, competing regional alignments, and the reconfiguration of trade and production networks. This has made the study of trade blocs more significant than ever before. Trade blocs are no longer viewed only as frameworks for tariff reduction and economic coordination; they are increasingly understood as instruments that affect global power relations, supply chain resilience, and economic security. Recent developments in the global economy indicate that the international trade order is moving away from a universal integration model toward a more fragmented and strategically differentiated system (Aiyar et al., 2023).

Historically, regional and inter-regional trade agreements emerged to facilitate economic integration among neighboring or like-minded countries. Such arrangements sought to promote trade, encourage investment, and foster closer economic

ties. Over time, however, their function has expanded. In the current geopolitical context, trade blocs are deeply entangled with diplomatic strategy, security concerns, and geoeconomic influence. The emergence and expansion of arrangements such as BRICS, RCEP, and various Indo-Pacific economic formations reflect a world in which regional trade institutions are increasingly linked to questions of strategic autonomy, alignment, and rivalry. Preferential trade agreements and mega-regional blocs have therefore become central not only to economic management but also to geopolitical positioning (Dadush & Domínguez, 2023; Ravenhill, 2020).

At the same time, geopolitical risk has gained renewed prominence as a factor shaping trade relationships and economic behavior. Geopolitical risk refers broadly to the uncertainty arising from international conflicts, sanctions, diplomatic tensions, strategic rivalry, and political instability. Such risks have direct implications for trade flows, supply chains, investment decisions, and broader patterns of global economic governance. Research has shown that geopolitical tensions can reduce trade flows, intensify fragmentation, and contribute to economic uncertainty (Blanga-Gubbay & Rubínová, 2023; Caldara & Iacoviello, 2022). These developments suggest that economic linkages can no longer be studied independently of political competition.

In addition to their material effects, trade blocs and the geopolitical risks associated with them are also interpreted and communicated through narratives and visuals. Policy discourse, media coverage, official charts, maps, and infographics do not simply present information; they frame meaning. They shape how the public, policymakers, and analysts understand emerging blocs, strategic competition, and risk. A trade bloc may be represented as a vehicle of cooperation, a challenge to the existing order, or an instrument of geopolitical rivalry depending on the narrative and visual frame used. This study is therefore concerned not only with how trade blocs affect global relations, but also with how the risks associated with them are narrated and visually constructed.

1.2 Problem Statement

Trade blocs have become increasingly important in the contemporary global economy, yet there remains insufficient clarity regarding how their evolution is altering political and economic relationships across regions and among major powers. A substantial portion of the existing literature examines regional integration, trade creation, trade diversion, or the macroeconomic effects of agreements, but relatively less attention is given to the broader geopolitical implications of changing trade architecture. As fragmentation, regionalization, and geoeconomic rivalry become more visible, there is a growing need to understand trade blocs not only as economic institutions but also as geopolitical formations that influence alignments, dependencies, and contestation (Aiyar et al., 2023; Grimes, 2016).

Another major problem is that geopolitical risk is often treated as a measurable external condition without adequate attention to the way it is interpreted and communicated. While geopolitical risk indices and economic models provide important insight into the impact of conflict and uncertainty, they do not fully explain how risk is made meaningful through public discourse, policy narratives, and visual representation. Narratives shape whether a bloc is viewed as cooperative, revisionist, defensive, or exclusionary. Visuals such as maps and charts may appear objective, but they also organize space, define boundaries, and simplify complex international realities (Dodds, 2019; Ó Tuathail, 2017; Pickles, 2017).

A further issue is the lack of strong interdisciplinary integration between international political economy and critical geopolitics. Many economic studies focus on structural outcomes, while many discourse-oriented studies examine language and representation separately from trade systems. This has led to fragmented understanding. The present study addresses this problem by analyzing how evolving trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships and how the geopolitical risks connected with them are explained through narratives and visual representations.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the changing role of trade blocs in shaping global political and economic relationships and to analyze how geopolitical risks associated with these blocs are represented through qualitative narratives and visual forms. The study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the contemporary global order by integrating structural analysis of trade-bloc evolution with interpretive analysis of discourse and visual meaning.

1.4 Scope, Relevance and Applicability of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to the analysis of evolving trade blocs and their relation to geopolitical risk within the context of the contemporary global political economy. It focuses particularly on the way trade blocs affect political and economic relationships and how associated risks are represented through discourse and visual tools. The study does not attempt to provide an exhaustive empirical examination of every trade bloc in existence; rather, it draws on major developments and prominent examples such as BRICS, RCEP, and regional trade arrangements discussed in the scholarly and policy literature.

The study is relevant because the global economy is currently witnessing increasing fragmentation, strategic reorientation, and geopolitical tension. Regional blocs and alliance-based trade structures have become central to debates on decoupling, de-risking, strategic autonomy, and global governance. The applicability of the study lies in its usefulness for analyzing not only trade structures themselves but also the communicative practices through which these structures are explained and understood. It offers a framework for examining trade blocs as both institutional and representational phenomena.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The literature on trade blocs, geopolitical risk, and global economic fragmentation has expanded significantly in recent years, particularly in response to growing concern about strategic rivalry, supply chain disruption, and the restructuring of international trade. At the same time, scholarship on narratives, discourse, and visual geopolitics has shown that global events are not only material developments but also representational constructions. This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the present study in chronological and thematic sequence, beginning with broader works on regional trade governance and critical geopolitics and moving toward recent studies on geoeconomic fragmentation, geopolitical risk, and trade reorientation. The review is organized into four broad themes: trade blocs and regional economic integration; geopolitical risk and global trade; narratives and geopolitical interpretation; and visual representation of geopolitical risk.

2.2 Trade Blocs and Regional Economic Integration

Grimes (2016) examines regional trade agreements as instruments of global governance and argues that they have gained importance as multilateral institutions face limitations. The study highlights that regional agreements are not merely technical arrangements for trade liberalization; they shape rules, standards, and relationships among states. This insight is important because it positions trade blocs as governance structures that can both support cooperation and create fragmentation.

Around the same period, broader geopolitical and economic discussions increasingly linked regional arrangements with transformations in sovereignty and global order. Agnew (2018) argues that globalization and sovereignty exist in tension rather than in simple opposition. This argument is particularly relevant to trade blocs, which may deepen integration while simultaneously provoking concerns about autonomy, dependence, and national interest.

Ravenhill (2020) further develops the understanding of regional trade agreements by showing that they have evolved far beyond tariff-focused frameworks. Modern trade agreements increasingly address regulatory standards, investment, and strategic coordination. Ravenhill's contribution is valuable because it demonstrates that contemporary regionalism is no longer purely economic in form or function.

Antràs (2020) introduces the idea of de-globalization in relation to global value chains, arguing that geopolitical tensions, technological shifts, and economic shocks are encouraging firms and states to reconsider global production networks. This study is relevant because it links changes in trade structures to wider patterns of regionalization and strategic adaptation. Miroudot (2020) complements this perspective by focusing on resilience and robustness in global value chains. The study suggests that the pursuit of efficiency is increasingly being balanced by a concern for resilience,

particularly under geopolitical uncertainty. Taken together, these works indicate that trade blocs are now embedded within broader concerns about security, resilience, and strategic dependence.

Recent research has further emphasized fragmentation. Aiyar et al. (2023) argue that geoeconomic fragmentation is reshaping the international trade system by raising costs, weakening efficiency, and disrupting existing networks. Dadush and Domínguez (2023) similarly show that preferential trade agreements are contributing to fragmentation and that geopolitical considerations now play a central role in their formation. These studies are central to the present topic because they establish that trade blocs are increasingly linked with power politics and strategic competition rather than simple market integration.

2.3 Geopolitical Risk and Global Trade Relations

Pastor and Veronesi (2013), although focused on political uncertainty and financial markets, provide an important foundation for understanding how political instability influences economic performance. Their work indicates that uncertainty has broad effects on decision-making, investment, and market behavior. This insight is relevant to later discussions of geopolitical risk in trade contexts.

Caldara and Iacoviello (2022) make a major contribution by developing a geopolitical risk index that captures the intensity of tensions, conflicts, and related uncertainty through textual analysis of news coverage. Their work demonstrates that geopolitical risk has measurable effects on economic activity, trade, and investment. This is especially useful for the present study, as it establishes geopolitical risk as a concept with both empirical and interpretive relevance.

Blanga-Gubbay and Rubínová (2023) show that geopolitical conflicts reduce trade flows, especially when countries are politically distant. Their study directly connects conflict and diplomatic friction with trade reorientation, making it clear that trade patterns are shaped not only by economic fundamentals but also by political alignments. Campos, Estefanía-Flores, and Timini (2023) develop this further through the concept of geopolitical distance, arguing that political proximity and alignment significantly affect trade relationships.

Schleper, Blome, and Wuttke (2023) focus on geopolitical disruptions in supply chains and show how tensions and conflicts create vulnerability for firms operating in interconnected production systems. Their work is important because it connects macro-level geopolitical developments with meso-level supply chain consequences. Wang, Yao, and Kim (2025) show that geopolitical risk negatively affects international trade in Belt and Road economies, while regional cooperation can partly mitigate those risks. This highlights the dual nature of trade blocs: they can intensify strategic differentiation, but they can also serve as protective frameworks against uncertainty.

Kazi, Sohag, and Mariev (2025) examine how geopolitical risk leads countries to reorient trade toward politically aligned partners. Sohag, Kalugina, and Samargandi (2023) analyze BRICS trade integration and show that geopolitical risk can alter the direction and depth of trade integration depending on the level of cooperation among member states. These studies strongly support the idea that evolving trade blocs are connected to both opportunity and uncertainty in the global economy.

Ji (2024) further illustrates that regional trade blocs in the Indo-Pacific are increasingly securitized. Rather than being driven solely by prosperity concerns, these blocs are often shaped by strategic calculations, alliance formation, and regional balancing. This reinforces the claim that geopolitical risk is now deeply embedded in trade architecture.

2.4 Narratives and Geopolitical Interpretation

While the literature on trade and geopolitical risk provides structural insight, it does not fully explain how these developments are interpreted. This is where narrative and discourse-oriented scholarship becomes important. Dodds (2019) argues that geopolitics is shaped not only by territory and state behavior but also by discourse, representation, and spatial imagination. His work shows that understanding global events requires attention to the stories told about them.

Ó Tuathail (2017) is especially influential in this regard. He argues that geopolitical knowledge is constructed through discourse and representation rather than simply discovered. This means that trade blocs, conflicts, and international alignments are interpreted through language, categories, and symbolic framing. In the context of this study, this

perspective is essential because it helps explain how geopolitical risk linked to trade blocs becomes intelligible through narrative.

Narratives in media and policy discourse can frame trade blocs in sharply different ways. A bloc may be presented as a stabilizing force, a challenge to the existing order, a form of protectionism, or a strategic counterweight. These framings influence how the public and institutions interpret developments such as BRICS expansion, de-dollarization, or supply chain decoupling. Although many trade-focused studies do not dwell on narrative processes, the works of Dodds and Ó Tuathail provide the theoretical basis for analyzing how meaning is constructed around trade-related risk.

2.5 Visual Representation of Geopolitical Risk

Visuals are central to the communication of geopolitical meaning. Pickles (2017) shows that maps and cartographic representations are not neutral mirrors of reality but are shaped by political and ideological assumptions. This is highly relevant to the present study, as maps of trade corridors, bloc boundaries, or strategic regions can simplify, dramatize, or selectively emphasize geopolitical relationships.

Dodds (2019) also points to the importance of visibility in contemporary geopolitics. Charts, infographics, and media visuals create authority by presenting complex information in apparently objective form. Yet these visual tools can also reinforce binaries such as East versus West, developed versus developing, or democratic versus authoritarian. In the context of trade blocs, visuals may highlight connectivity, exclusion, strategic influence, or vulnerability depending on their design and framing.

The literature thus suggests that visual representation is not a secondary matter. It is an active part of how geopolitical risk is understood. Visuals can translate abstract trade patterns into emotionally and politically resonant images. They can also support policy messaging and public interpretation. This makes visual analysis an essential dimension of any study concerned with the meaning of trade blocs and geopolitical risk.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature reviewed above provides substantial insight into regional trade integration, geopolitical risk, global fragmentation, discourse, and visual representation. However, several important gaps remain.

First, much of the economic literature treats trade blocs primarily as structural or institutional arrangements and does not sufficiently integrate geopolitical representation into its analysis. Second, studies on geopolitical risk often focus on measurement and economic effects but do not fully examine how such risk is narratively framed and visually communicated. Third, discourse and critical geopolitics scholarship explains narrative and representational construction well, but it does not always engage deeply with the changing institutional architecture of trade blocs. Fourth, there is limited interdisciplinary work that brings together trade-bloc evolution, geopolitical risk, narrative framing, and visual meaning within a single analytical framework.

The present study addresses this gap by combining insights from international political economy and critical geopolitics. It examines both how changing trade blocs affect global relationships and how the risks associated with them are represented through narratives and visuals.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology adopted for the study titled *Evolving Trade Blocs and Geopolitical Risk: Qualitative Narratives and Visual Meaning*. The chapter outlines the research design, nature of the study, sources of data, criteria for selecting documents and datasets, methods of analysis, tools used, and ethical considerations. The methodological framework has been designed in accordance with the objectives of the study, which require an examination of changing trade blocs as structural phenomena and of geopolitical risks as representational and interpretive phenomena.

The study is based on secondary data and is qualitative in orientation. Unlike a survey-based study that measures respondents' opinions, the present research seeks to analyze how trade blocs evolve, how they affect political and

economic relationships, and how the associated geopolitical risks are explained through discourse and visual representation. Accordingly, the methodology is interpretive and analytical rather than experimental or survey-based.

3.2 Research Design

The present study follows a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the objectives of the study require interpretation of meaning, discourse, representation, and geopolitical framing rather than measurement of individual attitudes through primary survey instruments. The study is descriptive because it describes the evolution of major trade blocs and the changing context of global trade and geopolitical competition. It is analytical because it examines the relationship between trade-bloc evolution, geopolitical risk, narrative framing, and visual communication.

The design is also document-based and secondary-data oriented. It combines textual interpretation with contextual analysis of economic and geopolitical developments. This allows the study to address both material and representational dimensions of the topic. The research design is therefore suited to an interdisciplinary project that draws on international political economy, geopolitical risk studies, and critical geopolitics.

3.3 Nature of the Study

The study is empirical in the broader sense that it relies on existing evidence, documented developments, and publicly available secondary sources. However, it is not a primary survey study. Rather, it is a qualitative secondary-data study that interprets existing trade, risk, and representational materials.

The study is exploratory to the extent that it investigates an area where interdisciplinary integration remains limited. It is also interpretive because it seeks to understand how geopolitical risks are explained and made meaningful. Since narratives and visuals play a major part in the second objective, the nature of the study necessarily extends beyond conventional trade analysis.

3.4 Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To study how new and changing trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships.
2. To understand how geopolitical risks related to trade blocs are explained through narratives and visual representations such as maps, charts, and media visuals.

3.5 Sources of Secondary Data

The study draws upon two major forms of secondary data:

1. **Institutional and database sources related to trade blocs, regional trade agreements, and global trade patterns.** These sources provide information on trade agreements, participating countries, agreement dates, trade flows, and broader trade governance structures. For this purpose, data can be drawn from the WTO Regional Trade Agreements Database and the World Bank's WITS Data Download portal. The WTO database provides agreement profiles, participating economies, key dates, provisions, and downloadable Excel/CSV data, while WITS provides downloadable trade statistics and summaries useful for comparative analysis.

Links:

WTO Regional Trade Agreements Database: https://data.wto.org/en/dataset/ext_rta
WITS Data Download: <https://wits.worldbank.org/datadownload.aspx?lang=en> (WTO Data Portal)

2. **Narrative, geopolitical risk, and visual-data sources related to geopolitical developments, public discourse, and media representation.** These sources are used to analyze how geopolitical risks connected to trade blocs are framed and communicated through narratives, events, and visual material. For this purpose, the study uses the Geopolitical Risk Index data and the GDELT Project. GDELT offers global news-based data across more than 100 languages and supports analysis of themes, events, emotions, and images, making it useful for narrative and visual

interpretation.

Links:

Geopolitical Risk Index: <https://www.matteoiacoviello.com/gpr.htm>

GDELT Project: <https://www.gdeltproject.org/> (GDELT Project)

3.6 Criteria for Selection of Data and Documents

The selection of data and documents was guided by relevance, authority, recency, and conceptual fit. Sources were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- direct relevance to trade blocs, geopolitical risk, narrative framing, or visual geopolitics
- academic credibility or institutional reliability
- usefulness for addressing one or both objectives of the study
- capacity to illustrate either structural transformation or representational meaning
- suitability for qualitative analysis

The literature used in the study mainly spans the last decade, with selected earlier works included where they provide important theoretical foundations. This allows the study to remain current while still drawing on foundational perspectives.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

The present study adopts qualitative methods of secondary-data analysis in order to examine how evolving trade blocs influence global political and economic relationships and how geopolitical risks related to these blocs are explained through narratives and visual representations.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used to present the broad pattern of geopolitical risk and the changing context of trade blocs in the contemporary global economy. This includes identifying major trends in global risk, country-level variation, and the wider geopolitical environment in which trade blocs operate.

Trend Analysis

Trend analysis is used to examine the movement of geopolitical risk over time. It helps in identifying periods of increase, decline, and fluctuation in the risk series and in understanding how these movements relate to changing global political and economic conditions.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is applied to understand how geopolitical risk linked to trade blocs is explained in policy discourse, institutional commentary, and media-based interpretation. The study examines whether trade blocs are framed as mechanisms of cooperation, instruments of strategic balancing, sources of competition, or drivers of uncertainty.

Visual Analysis

Visual analysis is used to interpret the meaning produced by charts, graphs, maps, dashboards, and related visual materials. Attention is given to how visuals simplify complex developments, highlight certain geopolitical patterns, and shape interpretation of risk and trade relations.

Comparative Interpretation

Comparative interpretation is used to compare geopolitical risk across countries, trade-bloc contexts, and representational forms. This allows the study to identify differences in how geopolitical developments are structured, communicated, and understood in relation to evolving trade blocs.

3.8 Tools and Techniques Used

The study uses tools and techniques appropriate for qualitative analysis of secondary data. The cleaned Excel workbook is used as the main tool for organizing, filtering, and interpreting the geopolitical risk dataset. In particular, the sheets containing the full cleaned data, core GPR series, country-level long-format data, and data definitions are used to support structured analysis. **Microsoft Excel** is used to prepare tables, identify patterns, compare country and bloc trends, and generate graphs for interpretation.

The study also uses **document analysis** to examine academic literature, policy materials, and institutional sources related to trade blocs and geopolitical risk. **Comparative interpretation** is used to compare patterns across countries and trade-bloc contexts. **Narrative interpretation** is applied to understand how geopolitical developments are framed in discourse, while **visual interpretation** is used to analyze charts, graphs, maps, and other visual materials. These tools and techniques are suitable for a qualitative secondary-data study and support the analysis of both the structural and representational dimensions of the topic.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study is based entirely on secondary sources and publicly available materials. No human participants were involved, and no personal or confidential information was collected. Ethical care has nonetheless been taken in the selection, interpretation, and citation of materials. The study aims to represent sources accurately, avoid distortion of arguments, and maintain academic integrity in all stages of writing and analysis. All sources used in the study are acknowledged properly in the reference section.

3.10 Summary

This chapter outlined the qualitative secondary-data methodology adopted for the study. A descriptive, analytical, and interpretive design was selected because the objectives require examination of both structural developments and representational practices. The study relies on academic literature, policy materials, geopolitical risk data, narratives, and visuals. Methods such as descriptive analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and visual analysis were used to construct a comprehensive framework for the study. This methodology provides a coherent basis for the results and discussions presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction to Empirical Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical analysis of the study in direct alignment with the two research objectives. The analysis is based on the cleaned secondary geopolitical risk dataset and is interpreted in relation to evolving trade blocs and their wider political, economic, narrative, and visual significance. Since the study is qualitative in orientation, the dataset is not treated only as numerical evidence but as a basis for broader interpretation of strategic alignment, regional economic restructuring, and geopolitical meaning. The first objective is addressed by examining the pattern of global geopolitical risk and its implications for changing political and economic relationships among trade-bloc contexts. The second objective is addressed by interpreting how these risks are communicated through narrative framing and visual presentation using charts, comparisons, and bloc-linked representation. Tables and figures are used throughout the chapter to support concise, objective-wise interpretation.

4.2 Analysis with Reference to Objective 1: To study how new and changing trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships

4.2.1 Trend Analysis of Global Geopolitical Risk

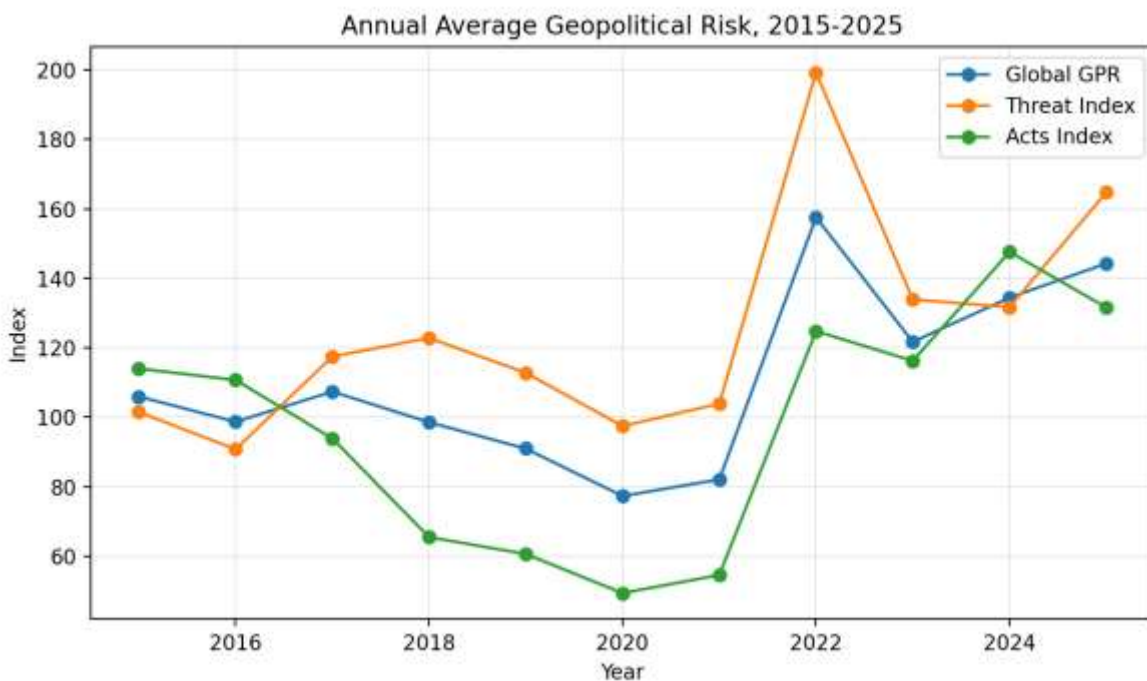
The trend of global geopolitical risk provides an important background for understanding the evolution of trade blocs in the contemporary period. When geopolitical instability rises, states are more likely to reconsider their trade dependencies, strategic partnerships, and regional alignments. The annual averages show that the global environment

became significantly more volatile after 2021, which suggests that trade-bloc politics now operates under a more uncertain and contested international setting.

Table 4.1 Annual Average Global Geopolitical Risk Indicators, 2015-2025

Year	Global GPR	Threat Index	Acts Index
2015	105.95	101.52	114.02
2016	98.68	90.77	110.71
2017	107.38	117.47	93.91
2018	98.55	122.85	65.44
2019	90.95	112.77	60.60
2020	77.29	97.47	49.32
2021	82.07	103.89	54.55
2022	157.58	199.27	124.80
2023	121.71	133.92	116.24
2024	134.45	131.69	147.60
2025	144.29	164.78	131.64

Figure 4.1 Annual Average Geopolitical Risk, 2015-2025



Interpretation The annual averages show that geopolitical risk intensified sharply in the post-2021 period. The global GPR index rose from 82.07 in 2021 to 157.58 in 2022, indicating a major structural jump in international tension. Although the index moderated in 2023, it remained elevated and increased again in 2024 and 2025. This suggests that geopolitical instability has become more embedded in the global environment rather than being a short-lived spike. For trade blocs, such a pattern matters because regional agreements and strategic alignments increasingly operate in an atmosphere of recurring risk, which affects trade cooperation, supply-chain restructuring, and political positioning.

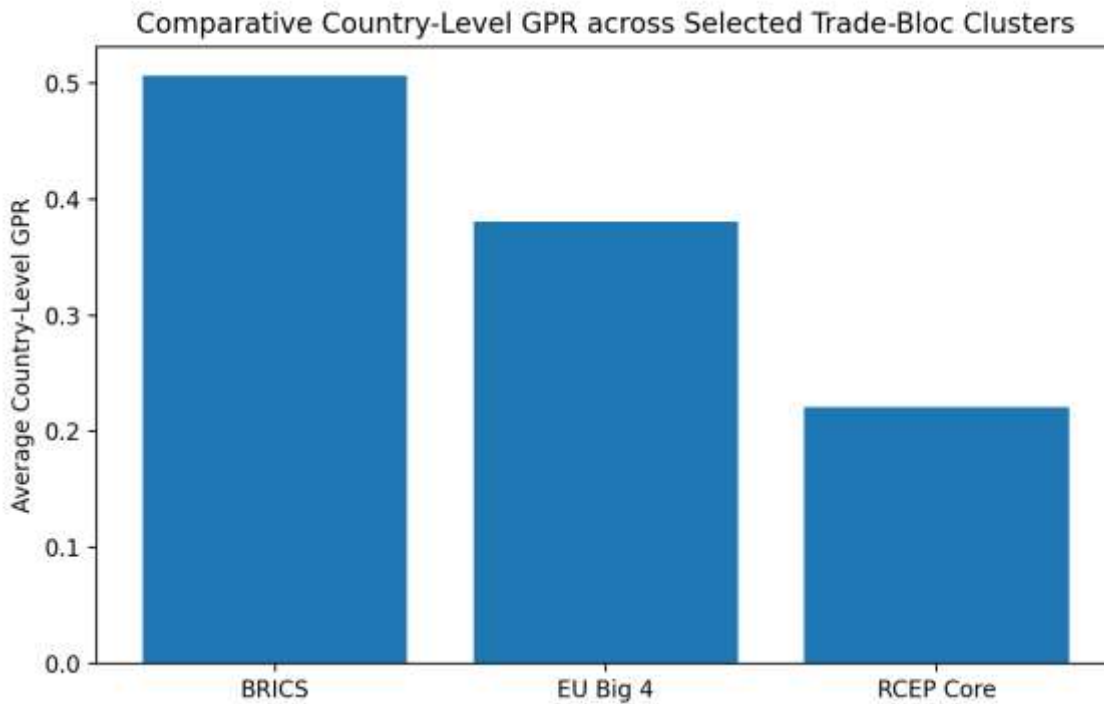
4.2.2 Geopolitical Risk in the Context of Major Trade Blocs

To address the first objective more directly, geopolitical risk is compared across selected trade-bloc clusters. The comparison does not suggest that all members of a bloc share identical conditions; rather, it provides a broad picture of the strategic environment in which major bloc contexts operate. This comparison helps explain why some trade blocs are narrated more often as stabilizing coalitions, while others appear more closely linked with strategic contestation and geopolitical balancing.

Table 4.2 Comparative Average Country-Level GPR across Selected Trade-Bloc Clusters, 2015-2025

Trade-bloc cluster	No. of countries	2015-2025 average	Peak year	Peak value
BRICS	5	0.506	2022	1.068
EU Big 4	4	0.381	2022	0.673
RCEP Core	9	0.201	2017	0.277

Figure 4.2 Comparative Country-Level GPR across Selected Trade-Bloc Clusters



Interpretation The bloc-wise comparison shows clear differences across selected clusters. The BRICS group records the highest average country-level GPR over 2015-2025 at 0.506, followed by the EU Big 4 at 0.381, while the RCEP Core remains lower at 0.201. The BRICS average peaks at 1.068 in 2022, indicating a much sharper exposure to geopolitical stress in that year. This finding is significant for the first objective because it suggests that changing trade-bloc environments do not unfold under equal geopolitical conditions. Some blocs operate under much higher strategic pressure than others, which can influence how they are narrated as either stabilizing coalitions or instruments of geopolitical contestation.

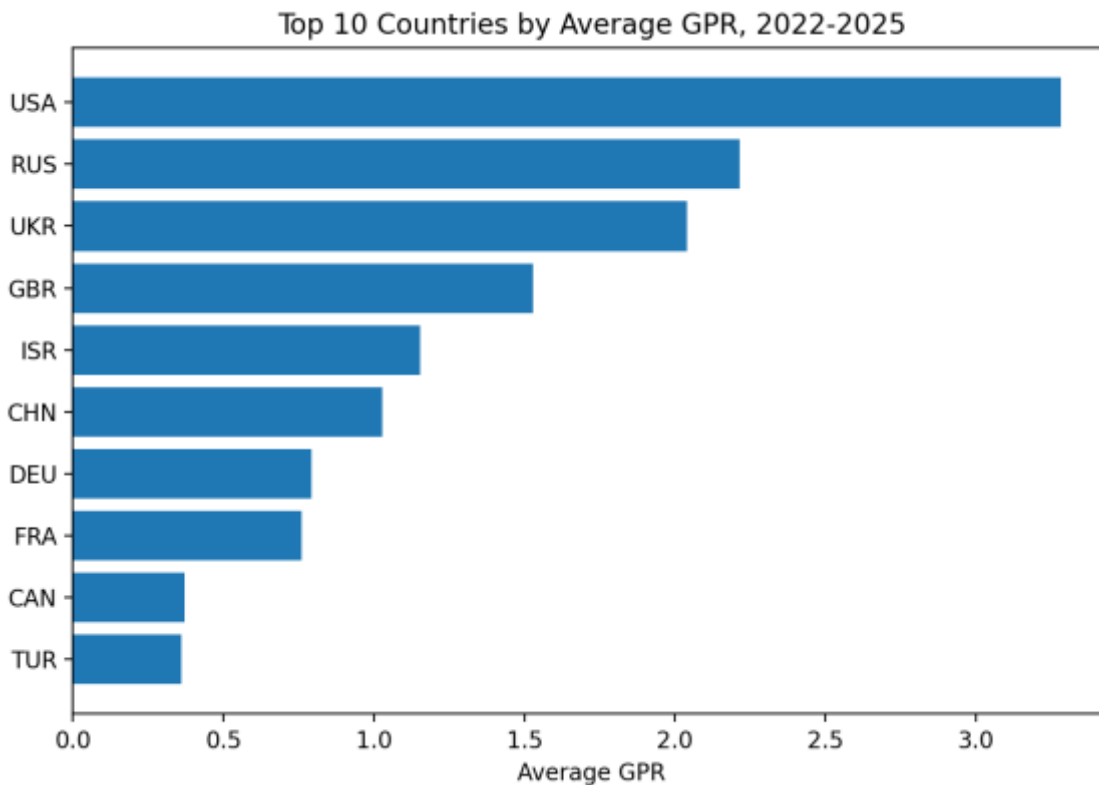
4.2.3 Country Concentration of Geopolitical Risk and Its Political-Economic Implications

A country-level comparison provides additional insight into how geopolitical risk is concentrated around major strategic actors. Since leading powers often anchor or heavily influence trade blocs, elevated geopolitical risk in these countries affects wider regional and international economic relationships. This analysis therefore supports the interpretation of trade blocs as formations shaped by unequal power structures and differentiated strategic pressure.

Table 4.3 Top 10 Countries by Average GPR, 2022-2025

Country	Average GPR (2022-2025)
USA	3.283
RUS	2.216
UKR	2.041
GBR	1.530
ISR	1.153
CHN	1.027
DEU	0.793
FRA	0.759
CAN	0.370
TUR	0.360

Figure 4.3 Top 10 Countries by Average GPR, 2022-2025



Interpretation Country-level averages show strong concentration of geopolitical risk in a relatively small set of countries. The United States records the highest average value over 2022-2025, followed by Russia and Ukraine. China and major European economies also appear among the higher-risk countries. This concentration is important because it indicates that the global discussion of trade blocs and geopolitical competition is anchored in a few strategic centers of power. Such concentration affects how global political and economic relationships are reorganized through trade alignments, regional bargaining, and bloc-based strategic response.

4.3 Analysis with Reference to Objective 2: To understand how geopolitical risks related to trade blocs are explained through narratives and visual representations such as maps, charts, and media visuals

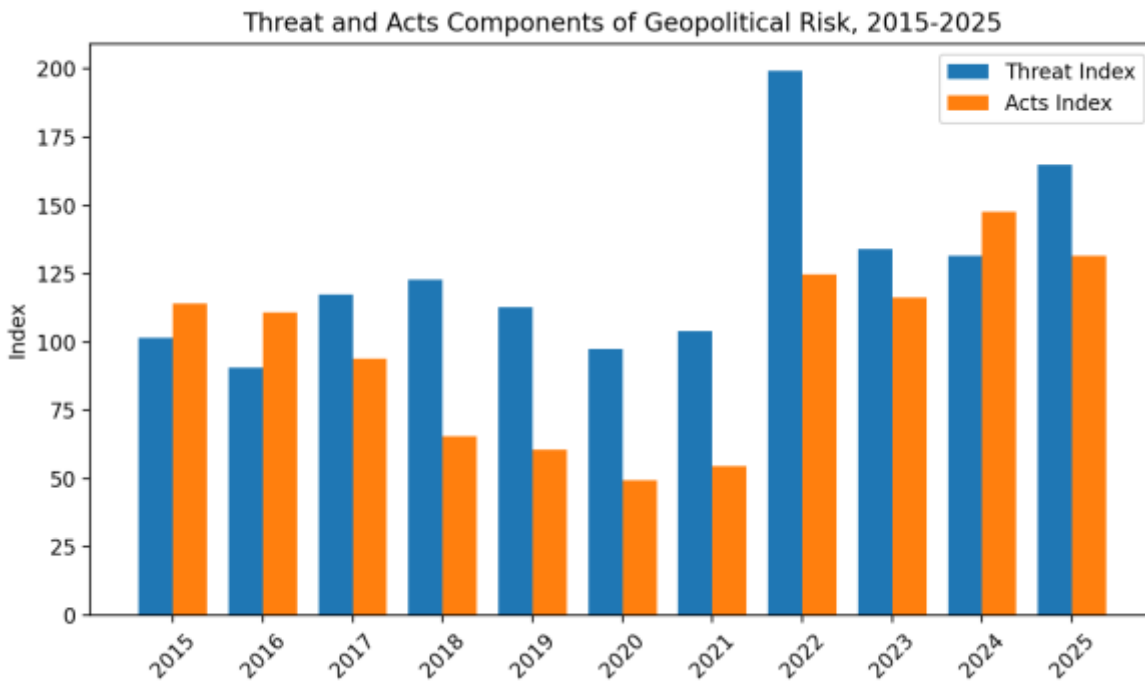
4.3.1 Threats and Acts Dimensions of Geopolitical Risk

To explain how geopolitical risk is represented, the study distinguishes between threat-based and act-based components of the global risk series. This is important because the meaning of geopolitical risk is often shaped not only by actual conflict but also by anticipation, rhetoric, escalation, and the expectation of instability. Narratives of trade-bloc risk therefore emerge both from what happens and from what appears likely to happen.

Table 4.4 Highest Monthly Global GPR Readings, 2020-2026

Peak Month	Global GPR	Threat Index	Acts Index
Mar 2022	318.95	403.71	250.96
Jun 2025	221.70	286.83	181.30
Feb 2022	216.16	320.61	105.22
Oct 2023	197.89	205.04	221.80
Apr 2022	191.14	221.91	184.42
Mar 2025	172.65	191.86	157.95
Jan 2026	167.67	219.09	99.69
May 2025	164.21	201.01	146.37

Figure 4.4 Threat and Acts Components of Geopolitical Risk, 2015-2025



Interpretation The comparison between threat and act components shows that geopolitical risk is frequently threat-led before it becomes event-led. Threat values remain above act values in many years, especially around periods of strategic confrontation and uncertainty. The largest monthly spike in the recent period occurred in March 2022, when the threat component crossed 403.71. This indicates that geopolitical risk is driven not only by realized conflict but also by anticipation, escalation, and the expectation of further instability. In relation to trade blocs, such threat-heavy

environments encourage narratives of de-risking, strategic caution, regional consolidation, and selective economic cooperation.

4.3.2 Narrative and Visual Interpretation of Geopolitical Risk

The tables and figures generated from the dataset do not simply present numbers; they also produce interpretive meaning. A line chart of rising risk emphasizes structural instability, while a bloc comparison visually communicates unequal geopolitical exposure. Likewise, the distinction between threat and act dimensions suggests that geopolitical risk is narrated not only through events but also through anticipation and strategic expectation. In this way, charts and comparative visuals become part of the narrative explanation of geopolitical risk linked to trade blocs.

Table 4.5 Narrative Frames Used in Explaining Geopolitical Risk Related to Trade Blocs

Narrative Frame	Central Meaning	Typical Representation
Cooperation and Resilience	Trade blocs as platforms of adaptation and stability	Cooperation, resilience, regional support
Strategic Balancing	Trade blocs as counterweights or alternative alignments	Strategic autonomy, counterweight, multipolarity
Fragmentation and Rivalry	Trade blocs as signs of division and contestation	Rivalry, division, selective alignment, exclusion

Interpretation The visual and narrative reading of the findings shows that geopolitical risk linked to trade blocs is explained through several recurring frames. In one frame, trade blocs appear as cooperative and resilient responses to uncertainty. In another, they are depicted as strategic counterweights to existing powers or institutions. In a third, they appear as signs of fragmentation and rivalry in a divided global order. The same geopolitical development may therefore acquire very different meanings depending on how it is narrated and visualized. This directly supports the second objective of the study.

4.4 Result and Discussion

The findings of the chapter directly address both research objectives. With reference to Objective 1, the analysis shows that changing trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships by encouraging strategic coordination, reshaping dependency patterns, and contributing to a more fragmented and regionally structured global economy. The rise in geopolitical risk over time, the unequal exposure across bloc contexts, and the concentration of risk among major powers all indicate that trade blocs now operate within a deeply strategic and politically contested environment. With reference to Objective 2, the analysis demonstrates that geopolitical risks related to trade blocs are explained through both narratives and visual representations. Policy discourse, institutional commentary, charts, and comparative visuals all shape how such risks are interpreted. The chapter therefore shows that evolving trade blocs must be understood through a dual perspective: they are material institutions influencing political and economic relationships, but they are also discursive and visual objects whose meaning is produced through language and representation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Future Scope

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the evolution of trade blocs and their relationship with geopolitical risk, with particular attention to the way such risks are explained through narratives and visual representations. The analysis shows that contemporary trade blocs are no longer confined to their traditional role as instruments of economic integration. They have increasingly become platforms of geopolitical contestation, strategic cooperation, and geoeconomic positioning. In the present global environment, changing trade blocs influence not only trade flows and investment patterns but also diplomatic alignments, power distribution, supply chain structures, and the strategic logic of global governance.

The study found that evolving trade blocs affect global political and economic relationships in multiple ways. First, they create and reinforce regional spheres of cooperation by encouraging closer coordination among member states. Second, they reshape dependency patterns and strategic interconnections between countries by influencing access to markets, resources, technologies, and trade routes. Third, they contribute to fragmentation in the global economy by promoting selective alignment, bloc-based partnerships, and differentiated integration. In this sense, trade blocs serve a dual function: they promote cooperation within regions and among members while also sharpening strategic rivalry across blocs. This dual character is one of the defining features of the contemporary international order.

The study also highlights that geopolitical risk connected to trade blocs is not only an objective outcome of conflict, sanctions, strategic rivalry, or policy shifts. It is also a social and communicative phenomenon shaped by discourse and representation. The way media institutions, policy actors, and public commentators frame trade blocs influences how these blocs are perceived. The same bloc may be interpreted as a cooperative platform, a strategic counterweight, a challenge to the existing order, or a mechanism of resilience depending on the narrative used. Likewise, maps, charts, infographics, and media visuals often simplify highly complex geopolitical realities, drawing attention to certain relationships while minimizing or excluding others. These representational practices shape public understanding and influence policy interpretation.

Overall, the findings support the view that evolving trade blocs must be understood through a dual lens. They are material structures in the global economy, but they are also representational objects within political and media discourse. Their significance lies not only in their institutional composition and economic function, but also in the meanings produced around them through narratives and visuals. This combined perspective is particularly important in a world defined by multipolarity, strategic rivalry, regional realignment, and uncertainty. The study therefore contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how trade architecture and geopolitical risk interact in the contemporary global order.

5.2 Key Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. Trade blocs are increasingly influenced by geopolitical considerations rather than being shaped only by economic efficiency and market integration.
2. The evolution of trade blocs affects global political and economic relationships by altering cooperation patterns, competitive dynamics, and strategic alignments among countries.
3. Geopolitical risk has become a major factor in understanding trade relations, especially in contexts of sanctions, strategic competition, supply chain disruption, and fragmentation.
4. Trade blocs contribute to both integration and division, creating opportunities for regional cooperation while also intensifying strategic rivalry and bloc-based competition.
5. Narratives in policy discourse and media reporting play a major role in shaping how trade blocs and their associated risks are interpreted by the public and decision-makers.
6. Visual representations such as maps, charts, dashboards, and infographics are powerful interpretive tools that influence how geopolitical developments are understood.
7. The study shows that trade-bloc analysis is stronger when structural developments are examined together with discourse and visual meaning rather than in isolation.
8. The global trade environment is becoming more fragmented, regionally structured, and politically contested, making trade blocs central to the study of both economic governance and geopolitical strategy.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

For policymakers:

Communication related to trade-bloc developments should be clearer, more transparent, and less dependent on oversimplified geopolitical binaries. Since public understanding is shaped by official discourse as well as media narratives, policymakers should communicate both the economic and strategic implications of trade-bloc developments in a balanced and accessible manner.

For researchers:

Future research on trade blocs should combine structural economic analysis with discourse analysis and visual interpretation. Studies that focus only on trade indicators or only on narratives risk missing the interaction between institutional developments and public meaning-making. Interdisciplinary approaches are therefore strongly recommended.

For media organizations:

Media reporting on trade blocs and geopolitical risk should avoid alarmist or reductive framing. More balanced explanation, contextual analysis, and careful use of visuals can help improve public understanding of international trade and geopolitical change.

For educators and academic institutions:

Greater emphasis should be placed on geopolitical literacy, economic literacy, and the critical interpretation of maps, charts, and policy visuals. Since visuals now play an important role in shaping understanding of global issues, students and researchers should be trained to interpret them critically rather than passively.

For international institutions and think tanks:

When presenting trade data and geopolitical information, institutions should design visual materials that inform rather than dramatize. Charts, maps, and dashboards should be used to clarify complex realities, not to reinforce simplistic narratives or strategic binaries. Better visual communication can improve both public engagement and policy discussion.

5.4 Future Scope

The present study opens several directions for future research. First, future studies may undertake detailed comparative case studies of specific trade blocs such as BRICS, RCEP, the European Union, ASEAN, or AfCFTA in order to examine how each bloc is structured, represented, and interpreted across different political and media contexts. Such studies would deepen understanding of regional differences in both institutional development and public framing.

Second, future research may combine qualitative discourse and visual analysis with quantitative trade and geopolitical risk datasets to build mixed-method studies. This would allow scholars to connect statistical trends with the narratives and visual forms through which such trends are interpreted. A mixed-method approach would strengthen the ability to explain not only what is changing in the global economy, but also how those changes are socially understood.

Third, future work may focus more specifically on visual geopolitics by comparing the design, language, and rhetorical effects of maps, dashboards, policy graphics, and media infographics used by governments, think tanks, international organizations, and news agencies. Such studies could reveal how visual framing influences geopolitical imagination and strategic interpretation.

Another important area for future research concerns digital media and algorithmic visibility. Since narratives and visuals increasingly circulate through social media platforms, search engines, and digital news systems, future research may examine how digital environments shape the visibility, circulation, and interpretation of trade-bloc developments and geopolitical risk. Platform logic, algorithmic amplification, and audience segmentation may significantly influence how global developments are understood.

Finally, future studies may explore audience reception more directly by examining how different groups in different countries interpret the same trade-bloc developments differently depending on political culture, media exposure,

economic experience, and regional context. This would help extend the present study from structural and representational analysis toward broader questions of public interpretation and geopolitical understanding.

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