

## From Geopolitical Shifts to Global Sustainability: Management Challenges in a Reordered World Economy

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of geopolitical shifts and global sustainability imperatives to identify the evolving management challenges facing institutions, corporations, and governance systems. Drawing on 201 documents retrieved from Scopus (1905–2025), a bibliometric analysis was conducted using Bibliometrix (R) and VOSviewer to map thematic structures, co-occurrence networks, and longitudinal evolution of research. Findings reveal that the field has transitioned from early discussions on geopolitics, trade, and sustainable development to recent emphases on energy transitions, finance, and institutional reform. Motor themes include geopolitical risks, international trade, and sustainability, while emerging areas such as digital economy, climate finance, and global governance remain underexplored. Annual scientific production demonstrates an exponential rise since 2023, underscoring growing scholarly interest. The study highlights key research gaps around institutional reform, regional perspectives, digital innovation, and supply chain resilience. These insights provide a foundation for future scholarship and practical strategies, suggesting that management in a reordered world economy must integrate geopolitical risk assessment with sustainability transitions to ensure resilience and legitimacy... .

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The early 21st century has witnessed sharper geopolitical shifts, ranging from rising great-power competition, trade wars, reconfiguration of supply chains, to geopolitical risk arising from resource scarcity, climate change, pandemics, and technology governance. These shifts are reshaping not only interstate relations but also the framework within which global business, institutions, and economies operate. At the same time, there is growing urgency for global sustainability. Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors are no longer peripheral but central to how institutions, corporations, and governments plan, strategize, and navigate risk.

In this altered landscape, management challenges abound. Traditional global economic paradigms built on assumptions of steadily increasing globalization, stable institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO, etc.), and relatively predictable regulatory environments - are under stress. New risk vectors are emerging: from geopolitical uncertainties, supply chain disruptions, cross-border data governance, currency volatility, to evolving standards for environmental performance. Corporations, governments, and multilateral organizations are being forced to adapt their governance structures, strategic management approaches, and leadership models to remain resilient.

This paper explores the management challenges inherent in the process of creating a “new world order,” with particular attention to how geopolitical shifts impact

global sustainability, and how institutions, corporations, and governance systems must adapt. The aim is to provide a literature-based foundation that maps what is known, what the gaps are, and what directions future research should take.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Geopolitical Shifts and Global Economic Reordering

The global economy is undergoing profound transformations driven by shifting geopolitical dynamics, the reconfiguration of international alliances, and the rise of new economic powers. Scholars argue that the traditional dominance of Western economies is increasingly challenged by emerging markets such as China, India, and Brazil, reshaping the global balance of power (Friedman, 2019; Schwab, 2016). This multipolarity has created both opportunities and uncertainties for international business, compelling firms and governments to reassess strategies in trade, finance, and investment (Stuenkel, 2016).

The Russia - Ukraine conflict, U.S. - China trade tensions, and decoupling trends in technology have intensified discussions around economic security and resilience (Bremmer, 2022). These geopolitical shifts have not only disrupted supply chains but also forced organizations to consider new frameworks for managing risk and long-term competitiveness (Tooze, 2021).

## Global Sustainability as a Strategic Imperative

Parallel to geopolitical realignments, the sustainability agenda has emerged as a critical driver of global economic policy and corporate governance. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided a normative framework that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions of development (United Nations, 2015). Research emphasizes that sustainability is no longer peripheral but central to business strategy, shaping investment flows, consumer expectations, and regulatory landscapes (Dyllick & Muff, 2016).

Corporate sustainability transitions are increasingly studied within the context of global governance mechanisms. For instance, the Paris Agreement has created new pressures on governments and firms to decarbonize, with implications for industrial strategy and competitiveness (Falkner, 2016). Moreover, sustainable supply chain management has become a central focus as firms grapple with integrating environmental goals while maintaining efficiency (Seuring & Müller, 2008).

## Management Challenges in a Complex Global Order

The intersection of geopolitical uncertainty and sustainability goals creates unprecedented management challenges. Scholars highlight the need for adaptive capabilities and strategic resilience to manage risks arising from financial volatility, regulatory divergence, and fragmented markets (Ghemawat, 2017). In particular, global firms must reconcile the pursuit of economic performance with sustainability imperatives and political pressures in host economies (Rugman & Verbeke, 2004).

Corporate governance has also come under scrutiny as boards and executives navigate competing demands from stakeholders, ranging from investors focused on ESG performance to governments concerned with national security (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). These tensions highlight the importance of rethinking governance models to ensure accountability and legitimacy in a globalized yet fragmented context.

## Trade, Finance, and Institutional Realignment

International institutions such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank play pivotal roles in mediating geopolitical and sustainability agendas, yet their legitimacy and effectiveness have been increasingly questioned. Existing global institutions were designed for a post-World War II order, which no longer reflects contemporary realities of power distribution and technological change (Ikenberry, 2018). This mismatch has led to calls for institutional reform to address emerging challenges such as climate finance, digital sovereignty, and equitable trade rules (Hopewell, 2016).

In the financial sphere, the rise of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and debates around de-dollarization illustrate how global capital flows are being reshaped by geopolitics and technological innovation (Auer et al., 2021). At the same time, alternative payment mechanisms and financial risk management have become crucial for firms and governments facing sanctions, trade restrictions, and volatile exchange rates (Cohen, 2019).

## Leadership, Workforce, and Cross-Cultural Management

The management of multinational corporations requires leadership strategies that are sensitive to both cultural diversity and geopolitical tensions. Research underscores the need for leaders to demonstrate agility, empathy, and resilience when managing hybrid and multicultural teams in uncertain environments (Mendenhall et al., 2017). Additionally, borderless work models have created new human resource challenges, particularly in relation to cross-border data governance, digital platforms, and varying privacy regulations (Westerman et al., 2019).

Effective leadership in this context involves not only managing people across diverse political and cultural systems but also embedding sustainability and ethical considerations into corporate values (Maak et al., 2016). The ability to align organizational cohesion with global responsibilities is increasingly framed as a defining characteristic of successful leadership in the 21st century.

## Philosophical and Normative Dimensions

Beyond practical management concerns, the literature also explores normative and philosophical dimensions of global governance and sustainability. Some scholars argue for the evolution of a more integrated system of global governance that transcends national interests, potentially even envisioning forms of "world government" or cooperative global federalism (Held, 2010). Others highlight the role of religion, ethics, and human values in shaping global responses to crises, emphasizing that sustainable progress requires not only institutional reform but also cultural and philosophical transformation (Sachs, 2015).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data source and search strategy: The analysis reported here is a standard bibliometric workflow. Documents were retrieved from Scopus using a refined search string -

(TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "geopolitical" OR "geopolitics" OR "political economy" OR "global power\*" OR "geostrategy" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "sustainab\*" OR "sustainable development" OR "environmental policy" OR "green economy" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "management" OR "strategy" OR "organization" OR "leadership" OR "policy" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "global economy" OR "world economy" OR "international economy" OR "economic order" OR "international trade" ) )

Data cleaning and preparation: Records were pre-processed to remove duplicates, harmonize keywords (merging synonyms into a 'Key Word Merged field), and correct obvious journal name variations; a standard pre-processing steps for bibliometric mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

## Analytical tools and techniques

Bibliometrix (R) was used for data cleaning, producing the thematic-evolution maps (strategic diagrams), and the three-field plot (sources - authors - keywords) (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

VOSviewer (and its visualization paradigms) guided network visualization approaches and cluster interpretation (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Thematic

detection relied on co-word analysis and community-detection (modularity-based) to extract clusters; the centrality/density strategic diagram approach was used to classify themes into motor/basic/niche/emerging categories (co-word and thematic evolution methods following Callon et al., 1991; Cobo et al., 2012).

### Time slicing and thematic evolution

To examine change over time, the corpus was split into three consecutive time slices (early - from 1905 to 2018, middle - 2019 to 2024, recent of 2025) and thematic overlap and continuity were traced across these periods using longitudinal science-mapping methods (Cobo et al., 2012). Total 201 documents were found, however from the year 1905 to 1999 only 11 documents were available.

## Findings & Analysis

### Three-field Plot

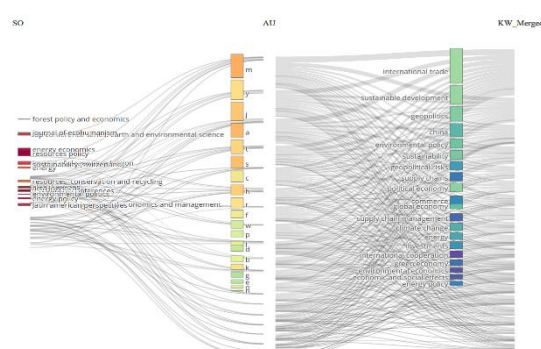


Figure-1 Three-field plot

Figure-1 presents the three-field plot linking - sources (journals) on the left, authors in the middle, and merged keywords on the right. This visualization shows how scholarly outlets and author contributions align with dominant thematic foci in the field.

On the source side, journals such as Energy Economics, Resources Policy, Sustainability, Resources, Conservation & Recycling, Energy Policy, and Forest Policy & Economics emerge as leading publication venues. These outlets indicate that debates around geopolitics, sustainability, and management strategy are concentrated in interdisciplinary and policy-oriented journals rather than purely management outlets.

On the author side, the plot displays a wide distribution, highlighting multiple contributors rather than dominance by a few scholars. This suggests that the field is collaborative and relatively dispersed. And, on the keyword side, the most frequently occurring and strongly linked terms include - international trade, sustainable development, geopolitics, China, environmental policy, sustainability, geopolitical risks, supply chains, political economy, and global economy. Their strong centrality underscores their role as anchoring concepts in the literature.

The three-field plot highlights the interdisciplinary nature of research at the nexus of geopolitics, sustainability, and management. Scholars from economics, policy, and

environmental sciences converge around shared themes, with international trade, and sustainable development acting as bridging constructs. For management research, this suggests that firm-level strategy discussions are being shaped in adjacent disciplines, opening scope for deeper managerial theorization.

### Thematic Evolution



Figure-2 Early Period

Figure-3 Middle Period

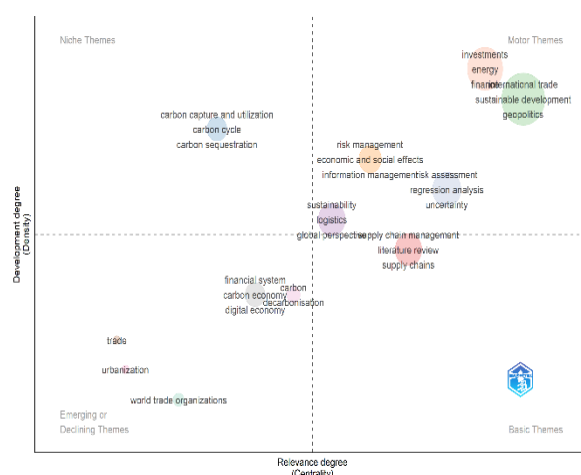


Figure-4 Recent Period

| Dura<br>tion             | Motor<br>Themes  | Basic<br>Themes   | Niche<br>Themes  | Emergi<br>ng<br>Themes   |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Earl<br>y<br>Perio<br>d  | Geopoliti<br>cs,<br>political<br>economy,<br>internatio<br>nal trade,<br>and<br>sustainab<br>le developm<br>ent. | Environ<br>mental<br>policy,<br>and<br>supply<br>chains.  | Resource<br>allocation,<br>and<br>Natural<br>resource<br>manageme<br>nt.                     | Globali<br>zation,<br>and<br>World<br>trade<br>organiza<br>tions.                              |
| Mid<br>dle<br>Perio<br>d | Geopoliti<br>cal risks,<br>Global<br>economy,<br>and<br>Sustainab<br>ility.                                      | Supply<br>chain<br>manage<br>ment,<br>Resilien<br>ce, and<br>Internati<br>onal investm<br>ents. | Urbanizati<br>on, and<br>Logistics.  | Globali<br>zation,<br>and<br>WTO/tr<br>ade<br>policy.  |
| Rece<br>nt<br>Perio<br>d | Energy,<br>finance<br>and<br>investme<br>nts,<br>decarboni<br>sation,<br>and<br>sustainab<br>ility               | Supply<br>chains,<br>Geopolit<br>ical risks,<br>and<br>political<br>econom<br>y                 | Carbon<br>capture &<br>sequestrati<br>on, and<br>digital<br>economy/f<br>inancial<br>systems | Global<br>governan<br>ce,<br>instituti<br>onal<br>reform,<br>and<br>trade<br>organiza<br>tions |

**Table-1 Thematic Evolution**

The above figures (2, 3 &4) shows the positioning of clusters in terms of centrality at (x-axis) and density at (y-axis). Four quadrants classify themes into motor (well-developed and central), basic (underdeveloped but central), niche (well-developed but isolated), and emerging/declining.

In the early stage, the field was defined by grand narratives of geopolitics, trade, and sustainable development, with environmental policy and supply chain considerations only beginning to enter the mainstream. The middle period reflects a maturing field where sustainability and geopolitical risks form the backbone of discussion. Managerial concerns such as supply chain, resilience, and international investment risk enter the debate, reflecting real-world shocks (financial crises, climate risks, geopolitical conflicts). In the recent period in 2025 the field has shifted toward operationalizing sustainability through energy and finance, with persistent managerial challenges around supply chains. Supply chains, geopolitical risks, and political economy remain important but are now established and less dynamic. At the same time, niche and emerging areas such as digital financial systems, carbon removal technologies, and

global governance reform remain underexplored. These represent high-potential gaps to address.

#### Cross-Period Gaps

**Institutional Reform Gap** - Across all maps, WTO, governance, democracy, trade policy remain weakly integrated. Research underexplores how global institutions must adapt to geopolitical and sustainability challenges.

**Digital and Innovation Gap** - Information management, innovation, digital economy appear as niche or basic but not motor themes. The role of digital platforms, AI, and cross-border data governance in reshaping global sustainability is a missed area.

**Energy and Climate Finance Gap** - Energy policy, renewable energy, carbon capture, decarbonisation are present but not fully central. There is a lack of strong literature connecting geopolitical risks with energy transitions and green finance.

**Regional/Geo-economics Gap** - Russia, India, Africa, developing countries appear sporadically and weakly. There is limited comparative work on how different regions navigate sustainability and geopolitics.

**Supply Chain & Risk Gap** - While supply chains gain prominence over time, integration with risk management, resilience, and global institutional mechanisms is still underdeveloped.

These gaps align with prior reviews pointing to under-explored intersections (Feng et al., 2023; Gor et al., 2024; Boubaker et al., 2022.)

#### Co-Occurrence Network Map Analysis



**Figure -5 Co-occurrence Network Map**

The network highlights “international trade,” “sustainable development,” and “geopolitics” as the largest nodes indicating their high frequency in the dataset, while their centrality shows they act as connecting bridges across clusters. This means the academic literature predominantly frames global sustainability challenges through trade and geopolitical perspectives, suggesting that management research is focusing on the intersection of economic exchange and sustainability goals.

Among the peripheral nodes are - Africa, logistics, governance approach, Brazil, India which are pointing towards under-explored region and sectoral perspectives. The bridging concepts such as, political economy, environmental policy, and global economy are acting as connectors between the dominant sustainability - trade



discourse and the fragmented regional/governance themes.

#### Annual Scientific Production

A very long low baseline (virtually no publications) for many decades from 1905 to 1997, then a slow and irregular increase from 1997 to 2007, and finally a sharp, recent surge in annual publications from the year 2023. The recent spike is large which is many times higher than the average in the preceding decade indicates the field has entered a fast-growth phase.

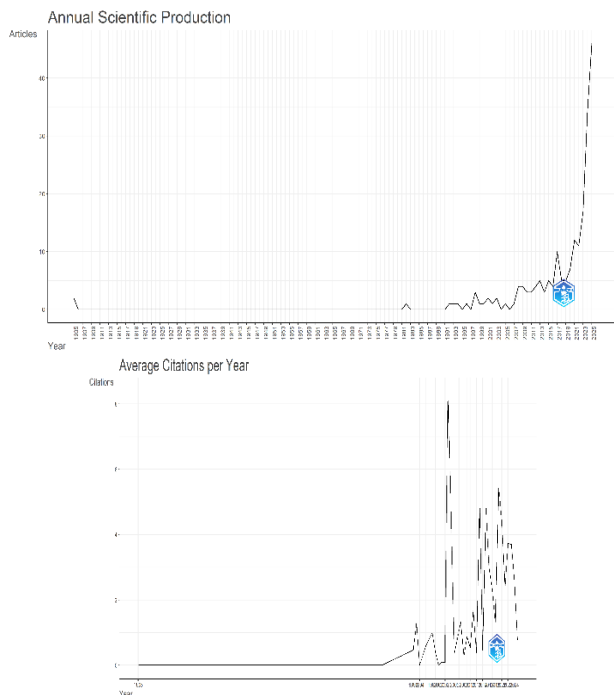


Figure -6 Annual Scientific Production      Figure -7 Average Citations Per Year

The average citations per year are generally low for the early period but show clear spikes in discrete years. These citation peaks suggest that a small number of highly influential publications drive attention in the field.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the profound ways in which geopolitical realignments and sustainability imperatives are reshaping management scholarship and practice. The thematic evolution maps show a clear intellectual trajectory: from foundational concerns with geopolitics and trade, to sustainability as a strategic imperative, and finally to operational issues around energy, finance, and governance. This trajectory mirrors real-world disruptions such as the U.S.-China trade conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the global de-carbonization agenda, all of which have accelerated the need for adaptive management frameworks.

The dominance of keywords like international trade, sustainable development, and geopolitics reflects a continuing reliance on macroeconomic and policy lenses. Yet, the co-occurrence network also reveals underexplored themes - notably digital platforms, AI, and cross-border data governance - which are likely to become central in the coming decade. Similarly, the weak integration of regional perspectives (Africa, India, Brazil)

suggests an imbalance in the literature, which is disproportionately anchored in global North debates.

Management challenges are particularly acute in supply chains, which emerge as both a central and evolving theme. The literature recognizes supply chain resilience as critical in an era of geopolitical shocks and sustainability transitions, but integration with broader institutional and risk frameworks remains insufficient. Likewise, while energy and climate finance appear in the recent period, they have not yet reached the status of motor themes, suggesting an urgent research frontier at the intersection of green transitions and global economic reordering.

The bibliometric evidence also highlights the institutional reform gap. Traditional institutions such as the WTO and IMF appear peripheral in the maps, despite their centrality to global economic governance. This disconnect indicates that scholarship has not yet fully theorized how these institutions must adapt to sustain legitimacy in the face of geopolitical fragmentation and sustainability imperatives.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study demonstrates that research at the nexus of geopolitics, sustainability, and management is expanding rapidly, particularly since 2023, reflecting the intensifying real-world salience of these issues. The field has evolved from macro-level debates on geopolitics and trade toward operational and governance challenges around energy, finance, and institutional legitimacy. However, significant research gaps remain: the role of digital innovation in sustainability transitions, the integration of climate finance with geopolitical risk, and the adaptation of global institutions to fragmented power dynamics.

For scholars, these gaps provide fertile ground for advancing theory and management frameworks that bridge sustainability and geopolitical risk management. For practitioners, the findings emphasize the need to embed resilience, adaptability, and ethical leadership into organizational strategies. In a reordered world economy, management must simultaneously navigate geopolitical uncertainty and advance sustainability imperatives - a dual challenge that will define both scholarship and practice in the coming decades.

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