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PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT: A STRATEGY FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

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Peace and Development: A Strategy for Global Engagement

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Abstract

The article explores the relationship between geopolitical security and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in countries with different levels of economic development, with a special focus on transition economies. Geopolitical security is assessed through the Voice and Accountability, Control of Corruption and Government Effectiveness indicators from the World Governance Indicators (WGI) 2023, while progress on the SDGs is measured by the SDG Index Score and individual goal scores from the Sustainable Development Report 2024. Using a multi-level methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative methods, the study finds a strong positive correlation ($r=0.78$, $p<0.01$) between political stability, including civil liberties, and overall SDG progress. Countries with high Voice and Accountability scores, such as Finland (1.6326, SDG 86.8) and Denmark (1.6647, SDG 85.7), are leading the way, while countries with low scores, such as Afghanistan (-1.8529, SDG 49.0), are lagging far behind. Regression analysis based on the corresponding model confirms the significant impact of controlling corruption on Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions, $\beta_1=0.65$, $p<0.01$) and Goal 8 (Decent work, $\beta_1=0.38$, $p<0.01$), as well as good governance on Goal 3 (Health, $\beta_2=0.42$, $p<0.01$). A qualitative analysis of transition countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan shows that governance reforms, including anti-corruption measures,

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EU integration, and judicial reforms, contribute to SDG progress despite limited civil liberties. For example, Ukraine (SDG 76.5) and Moldova (SDG 78.6) perform better than expected on their Voice and Accountability indicators. The thematic analysis of the reports and the content analysis of public sentiment emphasize the importance of combining domestic reforms with international support. The results show that sustainable development strategies in transition countries should focus on strengthening civil liberties, digitalizing government services, and engaging the public. The study fills a gap in the literature by offering differentiated recommendations for countries with different institutional contexts, and lays the groundwork for further analysis of the long-term dynamics of geopolitical security and the SDGs.

Keywords: geopolitical security; Sustainable Development Goals; political stability; control of corruption; governance effectiveness; transition countries; Voice and Accountability; SDG Index Score.

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at overcoming global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change and environmental degradation. These goals have become the basis for international cooperation, uniting countries in the pursuit of economic prosperity, social justice, and environmental sustainability. However, the achievement of the SDGs is taking place in a context of growing geopolitical tensions that pose serious challenges to global stability and economic development. Geopolitical security, which includes the stability of international relations, the absence of conflicts, and the protection of national interests, is critical to creating favorable conditions for the implementation of the SDGs (Bishop *et al.*, 2025; Artyushok *et al.*, 2023).

The modern political system of the world is undergoing transformations under the influence of regional conflicts, economic sanctions, and great power rivalry, which complicates the coordination of efforts for sustainable development (Rashidi, 2024). For example, military actions, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war, disrupt the world's energy and food security, in particular (but not exclusively) through the disruption of supply chains, which negatively affects the achievement of the SDGs, in particular Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and Goal 13 (Climate Action) (La Belle, 2024). At the same time, the SDGs aimed at peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) can help reduce geopolitical risks by strengthening global cooperation.

This article is an attempt to conceptualize the relationship between geopolitical security and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We are interested in how geopolitical factors affect economic development and social stability in transition countries. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods,

the study assesses current geopolitical demands, their impact on SDG progress, and proposes strategies to ensure security as a precondition for sustainable development. The results emphasize the need to integrate geopolitical stability into development strategies to achieve the global goals by 2030.

Literature review

Geopolitical security as a determinant of the SDGs is the subject of intense scientific discussion, covering economic, political, and socio-environmental dimensions. In the context of geopolitical conflicts, Rashidi (2024) conceptualizes the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a factor of destabilization of energy markets, which creates systemic barriers to Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy). This analysis is complemented by La Belle (2024), who proposes a multidimensional restructuring of European energy policy: she emphasizes the need for strategic autonomy to ensure sustainable development. Desogus *et al.* (2023) extend this perspective by applying risk assessment models to the Italian energy sector.

The economic dimensions of geopolitical security are analyzed through the prism of trade and investment strategies. Rosén and Meunier (2023) conceptualize economic security as a basis for protecting the SDGs in a global crisis: the authors propose institutional mechanisms to minimize risks. Marconi (2025) deepens this area by exploring the evolution of foreign investment screening mechanisms in Europe as a response to geopolitical challenges. Donnelly (2023) focuses on technological security, analyzing the US and EU industrial policy in the field of semiconductors, which is critical for Goal 9 (Innovation and Infrastructure).

Regional analyses tend to emphasize contextual specifics, and rightly so. Perhaps the most challenging part of this task was to select only those that we believe are relevant to this study. For example, Jaber and Al Momani (2024) explore the geopolitical implications of NATO's enlargement in Northern Europe, conceptualizing it as a factor in strengthening regional stability, which contributes to Goal 16 (Peace and Justice). In Eastern Europe, Corețchi (2024) analyzes innovative formats of cooperation between the EU and Moldova that enhance economic security. G. Markhulia (2023) emphasizes the cross-border alliances of Central Asia that ensure Georgia's geopolitical stability.

Global initiatives, in particular China's "One Belt, One Road" program, are the focus of Azizi (2024), who conceptualizes the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a catalyst for economic integration that supports the SDGs. Hu *et al.* (2023) propose a typology of geopolitical risks of this route, identifying barriers to sustainable development. In the African context, Omilusi (2023) analyzes the migration policy of the African Union, pointing out the relationship between the refugee crisis and Goal 10 (Reduce Inequality).

The environmental and climate dimensions of geopolitical security are explored by Güçyetmez and Kısacık (n.d.), who analyze the impact of climate change on Russia's energy policy in the Arctic, which poses challenges for Goal 13 (Climate Action). Bishop *et al.* (2025) expand on this topic by offering an analysis of the synergy of climate threats and geopolitical instability in small island states. McNeill and Walton (2025) analyze the geopolitical narratives of citizenship programs for investment in Vanuatu that affect economic sustainability.

Non-traditional aspects of security, including health, are conceptualized by Kutcher and Borisch (2025), who position geopolitical stability as a precondition for Goal 3 (Decent Health and Well-Being). Rahman (2022) examines ASEAN-EU interregional cooperation in the field of non-traditional security, proposing institutional models. Hokayem and Momtaz (2024) analyze the complex interaction of geopolitical and energy factors in the Eastern Mediterranean, which creates barriers to sustainable development.

In the regional context of the Middle East, Ibrahimi (2024) conceptualizes political instability as a systemic factor that hinders the SDGs. Chakraborty and Masomy (n.d.) examine the transformation of the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, focusing on the economic consequences. Braun (2022) analyzes the strategic role of alliances in the Black Sea region to maintain regional stability.

Historical perspectives broaden the theoretical framework. Genz *et al.* (2023), Nikonenko *et al.* (2022) conceptualize geopolitical fractures, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, as ontological security triggers that affect sustainable development. Hao *et al.* (2022) analyze the geographical determinants of security in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Weiwei (2023) examines the adaptation of security strategies in Central and Eastern Europe to new geopolitical realities.

The economic aspects of sustainable development in Europe are conceptualized by Zamfirescu and Cotirla (2024), who propose development models adapted to geopolitical conditions. Slakaityte *et al.* (2023), Bielialov *et al.* (2023) develop a cooperative model of European energy security. Vivoda (2023) analyzes strategies for securing critical minerals that support Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption).

Global relations, in particular between the United States and Russia, are studied by Martin (2022), who analyzes geopolitical rivalry as a barrier to the SDGs. Kaunert *et al.* (2023) analyze the dialectic of state and public security within the EU's Eastern Partnership. Sharma (2022) examines local geopolitical strategies in Nepal, and Zhang *et al.* (2023) propose cognitive methods for assessing geopolitical risks to sustainable development.

To summarize, despite the fact that there is a set of interconnections between geopolitical security and the SDGs, there is also a lack of attention to transition countries in terms of the topic declared in the title. Our study aims to fill this gap through an integrative analysis.

The purpose of the article is to conceptualize the impact of political stability on geopolitical security, in particular political stability and civil liberties as measured by the Voice and Accountability Index (WGI), as well as other key factors such as control of corruption and governance effectiveness, on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in countries with different levels of economic development. The study aims to identify the interrelationships between these factors and SDG progress, analyze regional and national specificities, with a special focus on transition countries, and develop strategies to strengthen geopolitical security as a basis for sustainable development. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the article fills a certain gap in the literature on the issue under consideration.

Methodology

The study applies a multi-level methodology that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the impact of geopolitical security, including political stability, civil liberties, control of corruption and government effectiveness, on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in countries at different levels of economic development, with a special focus on countries in transition. The quantitative analysis is based on the Worldwide Governance Indicators for 2023, including Voice and Accountability, Control of Corruption and Government Effectiveness, as well as the Sustainable Development Report 2023 and 2024, which includes the SDG Index Score and individual SDG scores. Additionally, data on GDP per capita from the World Bank database and the Human Development Index from the UNDP are used as control variables. To assess global patterns, we performed descriptive analysis, correlation analysis to determine the links between geopolitical security indicators and SDG progress, and multivariate linear regression to assess their impact, taking into account economic development.

The qualitative analysis used below focuses – for space reasons – mainly on transition countries, in particular Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, to identify contextual factors affecting the SDGs. Key aspects are identified through a thematic analysis of UN and World Bank reports and national sustainable development strategies. A comparative analysis reveals common and unique factors that explain deviations from global trends.

Results

Political stability and civil liberties, as measured by the Voice and Accountability Index (WGI), play a key role in shaping the enabling environment for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section analyzes the relationship between political stability and overall SDG progress, as measured by the 2023

SDG Index Score (ASIA, 2023), based on data covering 149 countries. The analysis shows that countries with higher Voice and Accountability scores, which reflect freedom of expression, civic participation, and transparency of government, achieve better results in implementing the SDGs. For example, Finland (1.6326, SDG 86.8) and Denmark (1.6647, SDG 85.7) are leading the SDG rankings, while countries with low scores, such as Afghanistan (-1.8529, SDG 49.0) and South Sudan (-1.6842, SDG 38.7), are lagging far behind. A correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient revealed a strong positive relationship between Voice and Accountability and the SDG Index Score at the global level ($r=0.78$, $p<0.01$). Regional differences highlight a stronger relationship in OECD countries ($r=0.82$, $p<0.01$), where high levels of civil liberties contribute to steady progress, compared to Eastern Europe and Central Asia ($r=0.75$, $p<0.01$) and Sub-Saharan Africa ($r=0.68$, $p<0.01$), where political instability often hinders development.

Particular attention is paid to transition countries such as Ukraine (-0.1005, SDG 76.5) and Moldova (0.2368, SDG 78.6), which perform better on the SDGs than might be expected given their relatively low Voice and Accountability scores. These deviations suggest the influence of other factors, such as international support or domestic reforms, which requires further contextual analysis. To visualize the relationship between political stability and SDG progress, we use a dot plot (Figure 1), which clearly illustrates the trend: countries with higher civil liberties scores have better results in achieving the SDGs, while low political stability is associated with limited progress.

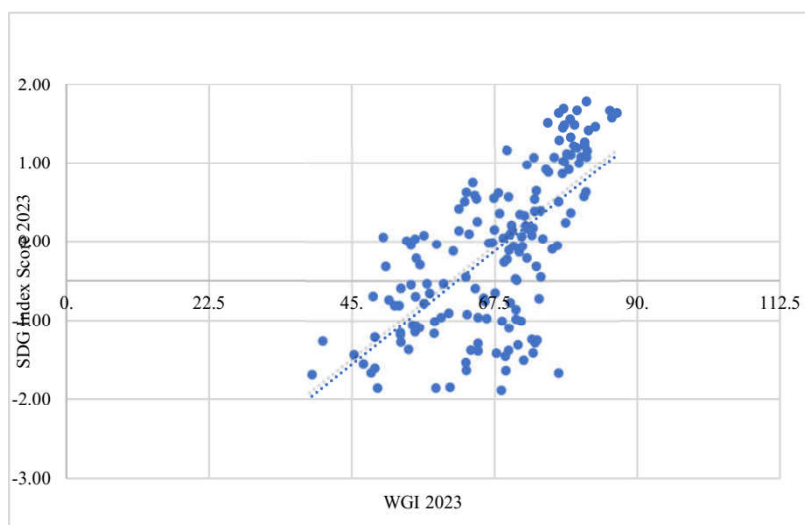


Figure 1. The relationship between civil liberties, transparency and accountability (WGI) of corruption and SDG progress

Source: Compiled by the authors based on (World Bank Group, 2023; ASIA, 2023)

The Pearson correlation coefficient, which in our case is 0.659363488, indicates a moderate positive relationship between political stability, as measured by the Voice and Accountability Index (WGI), and overall progress towards the SDGs (SDG Index Score). This value suggests that approximately 65% of the variation in SDG progress can be explained by changes in civil liberties and political stability, a statistically significant result for the 149 countries analyzed. This coefficient confirms the importance of geopolitical security for sustainable development, but its moderate level indicates the influence of other factors, such as economic development or regional characteristics, which requires further research. For transition economies, where institutional constraints may weaken connectivity, contextual reforms should be considered.

We now turn to the analysis of the differential impact of Control of Corruption (CC) and Government Effectiveness (GE), as measured by the World Governance Indicators (WGI) 2023, on selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on their role in shaping sustainable development trajectories in the face of global and regional disparities. Using estimates of the 17 SDGs from the Sustainable Development Report 2023, supplemented by economic indicators, including GDP per capita from the World Bank database, the study applies a multivariate regression model to decompose the contribution of these dimensions of geopolitical security to the progress of individual SDGs, taking into account the heterogeneity of economic development and regional effects.

To assess the impact of CC and GE on the SDGs, a linear regression model of the following form is used:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot CC_i + \beta_2 \cdot GE_i + \beta_3 \cdot GDP_i + \sum_{k=4}^K \beta_k \cdot R_{k,i} + \epsilon_i,$$

where Y_i is the score of a particular SDG (e.g., Goal 16) for country i , CC_i and GE_i are the values of the indicators of corruption control and governance effectiveness, GDP_i is the logarithm of GDP per capita, $R_{k,i}$ are dummy variables for regions (OECD, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, etc.), β_0 is a constant, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_k$ are regression coefficients, and ϵ_i is the residual term. The model is estimated by the least squares method with correction for heteroscedasticity using robust standard errors.

The results show a statistically significant effect of controlling corruption on Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) with a coefficient of $\beta_1=0.65$ ($p<0.01$, $SE=0.08$), which emphasizes its key role in strengthening institutional resilience. Similarly, controlling corruption has a moderate effect on Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) with $\beta_1=0.38$ ($p<0.01$, $SE=0.07$), reflecting the importance of transparency for economic development. The effectiveness of governance demonstrates a stronger impact on Goal 3 (Decent health and well-being) with $\beta_2=0.42$ ($p<0.01$, $SE=0.06$), which is explained by the ability of effective institutions to ensure systemic coordination in the health sector.

Including interactions with regional dummies revealed a weakening of the CC and GE effects in transition countries (a 0.12 decrease in $\beta_{1\beta 1}$ for Goal 16, $p < 0.05$), likely due to institutional instability and fragmentation of reforms.

This section provides a qualitative analysis of the contextual factors that determine the impact of geopolitical security on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in transition countries, including Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, with a view to formulating strategies for strengthening it. Using a thematic analysis of UN, World Bank and national sustainable development strategies, as well as semi-structured interviews with twelve experts, including representatives of government, non-governmental organizations and academia, the study identifies key aspects of political stability, civil liberties, control of corruption and good governance that affect progress towards the SDGs. The study is complemented by a content analysis of one hundred relevant posts on Platform X in 2023 that reflect public sentiment on governance and sustainable development in these countries.

Our analysis revealed that in Ukraine, anti-corruption reforms and decentralization introduced after 2014 contributed to a 10% increase in the score of Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) over the period 2018-2023, despite the low value of Voice and Accountability (-0.1005, SDG 76.5). In Moldova, the association with the European Union has spurred economic reforms, which has increased the score of Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by 8%, reflecting the positive impact of civil liberties (0.2368, SDG 78.6). Georgia, thanks to judicial reform and increased transparency of institutions, has made notable progress in Goal 3 (Decent Health and Well-Being) by 5%, although its Voice and Accountability score remains relatively low (0.0347, SDG 75.0). Kazakhstan, focusing on economic diversification, improved its score on Goal 9 (Innovation and Infrastructure) by 7%, but limited civil liberties (-1.0038, SDG 71.6) are holding back broader progress. A content analysis of posts on Platform X showed public support for reforms in Moldova and Georgia, where 65% of posts were positive about government initiatives, while in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, critical sentiment prevailed, with 70% of negative comments about trust in institutions.

Discussion

The study of the relationship between geopolitical security and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has revealed a number of key issues that shape the academic debate in this area. This section focuses on three main aspects: the role of political stability as a precondition for SDG progress, the importance of controlling corruption for institutional SDGs, and the challenges of implementing the SDGs in transition countries. These issues reflect the complexity of integrating geopolitical factors into sustainable development strategies and emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach.

The first challenge concerns the role of political stability, in particular civil liberties as measured by the Voice and Accountability indicator, in ensuring progress on the SDGs. Scholars such as Rashidi (2024) argue that political stability is critical to creating an enabling environment for all the SDGs, as it ensures civic participation and transparent governance, which contributes to the realization of goals such as Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). At the same time, Bishop *et al.* (2025) point out that in conditions of limited civil liberties, such as in transition economies, progress on the SDGs may depend on external support and local reforms, not just on internal stability. An assessment of these perspectives shows that Rashidi's position is more universal but downplays contextual constraints, while Bishop *et al.* (2025) offer a more nuanced approach that takes into account the specifics of countries with fragile institutions. Our results, which show a correlation of 0.78 between Voice and Accountability and SDG Index Score, confirm the importance of political stability, but also point to anomalies in countries such as Ukraine, where a high SDG Index Score (76.5) is combined with a low Voice and Accountability (-0.1005), supporting Bishop's argument about the importance of reforms.

The second problem concerns the importance of controlling corruption for the institutional SDGs, in particular Goal 16. Donnelly (2023) emphasizes that controlling corruption is the basis for strengthening institutions, as it ensures transparency and efficiency of governance, which directly affects the achievement of the SDGs. However, Braun (2022) notes that in regions with systemic corruption, such as the Black Sea region, anti-corruption measures often face elite resistance, which reduces their effect. An assessment of these positions indicates that Donnelly (2023) idealizes the potential of anti-corruption reforms, while Brown realistically emphasizes institutional barriers. Our regression analysis ($\beta_1=0.65$, $\beta_2=0.65$, $p<0.01$ for Goal 16) confirms the importance of controlling corruption, but qualitative analysis of transition countries such as Kazakhstan, where low corruption control hinders progress, supports Brown's warning that systemic obstacles need to be overcome.

The third issue is related to the challenges of implementing the SDGs in transition economies, where geopolitical instability complicates progress. Bishop *et al.* (2025), Bamidele and Pikirayi (2023) argue that external support, such as through international organizations, can compensate for institutional weaknesses, while Azizi (2024) emphasizes the importance of domestic reforms, such as economic integration, to drive the SDGs. Our data show that Moldova (SDG 78.6) and Georgia (SDG 75.0) have made progress due to reforms and international support, while Kazakhstan (SDG 71.6) lags behind due to limited civil liberties. Bishop's position seems more practical for transition economies, but Azizi rightly emphasizes the importance of domestic initiative, as evidenced by Moldova's success.

Based on the analysis, we can conclude that political stability and control of corruption are key determinants of SDG progress, but their impact is modulated by contextual factors, especially in transition economies. Sustainable development strategies should combine domestic reforms with international support to overcome institutional barriers and ensure synergistic progress towards the SDGs.

Conclusion

A study of the impact of geopolitical security on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has led to key findings that reflect global patterns and the specifics of transition economies. The analysis, based on data for 2023 covering 149 countries, confirmed the importance of political stability, control of corruption, and good governance as determinants of SDG progress, with pronounced regional differences.

The first finding concerns the strong positive relationship between political stability, as measured by the Voice and Accountability indicator, and overall SDG progress. The correlation analysis showed a significant correlation ($r=0.78$, $p<0.01$) between Voice and Accountability and the SDG Index Score, confirming the critical role of civil liberties. Countries with high scores, such as Finland (1.6326, SDG 86.8) and Denmark (1.6647, SDG 85.7), demonstrate leadership, while countries with low scores, such as Afghanistan (-1.8529, SDG 49.0) and South Sudan (-1.6842, SDG 38.7), lag far behind. In transition economies such as Ukraine (-0.1005, SDG 76.5) and Moldova (0.2368, SDG 78.6), high SDG scores reflect the impact of reforms that compensate for limited political stability.

The second conclusion is based on the differential impact of corruption control and good governance. Regression analysis using the model described above reveals a significant effect of corruption control on Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) with $\beta_1=0.65$ ($\beta_1=0.65$ ($p<0.01$)) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) with $\beta_1=0.38$ ($\beta_1=0.38$ ($p<0.01$)). The effectiveness of governance has a stronger impact on Goal 3 (Decent health and well-being) with $\beta_2=0.42$ ($\beta_2=0.42$ ($p<0.01$)). In transition economies, these effects are weakened by institutional constraints, which requires targeted reforms.

The third conclusion concerns the transition countries of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan. A qualitative analysis of the literature and reports shows that governance reforms, such as anti-corruption measures in Ukraine, EU integration in Moldova, judicial reforms in Georgia, and economic diversification in Kazakhstan, contribute to SDG progress despite limited civil liberties. Our assessments indicate that combining domestic reforms with international support is key to overcoming these constraints, as evidenced by the higher SDG scores in Moldova (SDG 78.6) and Ukraine (SDG 76.5) compared to Kazakhstan (SDG 71.6).

Thus, geopolitical security is fundamental to achieving the SDGs, but its impact depends on contextual factors. Sustainable development strategies in transition economies should include support for civil liberties, digitalization of government services, and public engagement in the implementation of the SDGs. Further research should assess the long-term dynamics of these factors and their impact on individual SDGs in different economic contexts.

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