

The Global Risks Report 2025

The following 2 pages are extracts from the Global Risks Report 2025 that best link to what you study as part of your A-Level geography course. The full report can be read here:

https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2025.pdf

World Economic Forum

The report uses findings from the Global Risks Perception Survey which surveys over 900 global leaders across academia, business, government, international organisations and general society.

This document brings together extracts from the report linked to your A-Level geography studies.

“Global risk” is defined as the possibility of the occurrence of an event or condition that, if it occurs, would negatively impact a significant proportion of global GDP, population or natural resources.

Declining optimism

As we enter 2025, the global outlook is increasingly fractured across geopolitical, environmental, societal, economic and technological domains. Over the last year we have witnessed the expansion and escalation of conflicts, a multitude of extreme weather events amplified by climate change, widespread societal and political polarisation, and continued technological advancements accelerating the spread of false or misleading information. We seem to be living in one of the most divided times since the Cold War.

The time to act is now- is consensus possible in a fragmenting world?

Deepening divisions and increasing fragmentation are reshaping international relations and calling into question whether existing structures are equipped to tackle the challenges collectively confronting us. Levels of global cooperation across many areas of geopolitics and humanitarian issues, economic relations, and environmental, societal and technological challenges may reach new lows in the coming years. Key countries appear to be turning inward, focusing on mounting domestic economic or societal concerns, just when they should be seeking to strengthen multilateral ties to confront shared challenges.

The Western-led global order is expected to continue its decline over the next decade but will nonetheless remain an importance locus of power. Alternative power centres are likely to strengthen, not just led by China, but also by key emerging powers, including India and the Gulf states.

The decade ahead will be pivotal as leaders will be confronted with increasingly complex global risks. But to prevent a downward spiral in which citizens worldwide will be worse off than before, ultimately there is no option other than to find avenues for dialogue and collaboration.

The world in 2025

The current geopolitical climate, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and with wars raging in the Middle East and in Sudan, makes it nearly impossible not to think about such events when assessing the one global risk expected to present a material crisis in 2025: close to one-quarter of survey respondents (23%) selected State-based armed conflict (proxy wars, civil wars, coups, terrorism, etc.) as the top risk for 2025.

These results are likely to reflect the depth of respondents’ fears surrounding the two major current cross-border conflicts, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East, and perhaps also concern around the risks of conflict over Taiwan, China.

Regarding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the position taken by the new US administration will be critical to its evolution. Will the United States take a firmer stance towards Russia, counting on such a move acting as a deterrent to further Russian escalation, and/or will it increase pressure on Ukraine, including reducing financial support? In the latter case, European governments might increase their own support for Ukraine. The spectrum of possible outcomes over the next two years is wide, ranging from further escalation, perhaps also involving neighbouring countries, to uneasy agreement to freeze the conflict.

In the Middle East, any shift towards a full-scale Iran-Israel war over the next two years would draw in the United States further. Such a war would, in turn, generate more long-term instability in the entire region, including the Gulf economies, where US military bases could become targets. Meanwhile, recent political developments in Syria raise both opportunities and risks. Hopes are high that there could be a revitalization of the economy and a more inclusive political environment. However, building stability across Syria will be challenging, given the many competing interests that are involved. These include both domestic groups and foreign states; if other countries decide to intervene more heavily while the transition unfolds, this could lead to renewed confrontations.

In addition, conflict over Taiwan, China cannot be ruled out. Limited armed confrontation could be triggered more easily if global tensions are high around geoeconomic confrontation and if rhetoric is aggressive. Both the United States and China may go further in the coming years in undertaking military manoeuvres close to Taiwan, China designed to show strength and act as deterrent. A major risk is that just one such manoeuvre could be misinterpreted by the other side and/or lead to accidental loss of life or destruction of hardware, leading to tit-for-tat military escalation.

Waning appetite for multilateralism

With the world facing this wide spectrum of ongoing armed conflicts, and escalation risks in the two major cross-border conflicts, the current weakness of the multilateral security framework with the UN Security Council (UNSC) at its core is alarming. The UNSC has not managed to stop conflicts from escalating, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the wars in the Middle East and in Sudan.

Despite discussions over the last year about reinvigorating UN peacekeeping operations, these are in decline on aggregate, with their size having been reduced from over 100,000 peacekeepers in 2016 to around 68,000 in 2024.

The UNSC faces ongoing structural challenges, and over the next two years risks having even less impact, given the new US administration's likely less favourable stance towards the UN generally and its preference for seeking solutions to conflicts unilaterally. There is a danger that more governments lose faith not only in the UNSC, but in multilateralism as a forum for resolving conflicts, and that the world instead becomes more adversarial, with conflicts ending only via battlefield, winner-takes-all victories and not through negotiated, multistakeholder peace agreements. While there continue to be discussions that aim towards reform of the UNSC, they are unlikely to make meaningful progress over the next two years given the complexity of aligning national interests and the current lack of political will to do so. Furthermore, there is no viable alternative global governance set-up in sight.

The growing vacuum in ensuring global stability at a multilateral level will lead governments around the world increasingly to take national security matters into their own hands, coordinating security and defense efforts only with select allied countries, or making unilateral military decisions. More countries will attempt to gain a greater degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Defense budgets could be prioritized over other long-term investments, placing at risk spending in areas such as healthcare, education and infrastructure. This accelerating military spending would represent a continuation of recent trends: World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of \$2.4 trillion, with 2023 seeing a steep rise over 2022. The top five countries accounted for 61% of the total. As governments with strengthening militaries perceive that multilateral constraints on unilateral military action are weaker, there could be more instances of cross-border military interventions in the coming years.

Worsening humanitarian crises

Even beyond global security considerations, multilateralism appears set to endure its most difficult period since the founding of the UN in 1945. Over the next two years, more questions are likely to be asked by national governments about the roles and priorities of key multilateral institutions, and there could be constraints placed on their funding. The outlook for this broader weakening of multilateralism is associated with declining global budgets for humanitarian aid.

Declining funding translates into an acute risk of humanitarian crises deepening. Global humanitarian efforts are highly dependent on the financial and human resources and institutional know-how provided by the UN. This know-how, in areas such as logistics or relationships with local governments and NGOs, has been built up over decades and is irreplaceable over a short- or even medium-term time horizon. Over 90 million people in need receive humanitarian aid or development assistance from UN institutions on an annual basis. A rising number of these individuals, as well as others who also need support but are unable to access it, will be at increasing risk of insecurity, disease, malnutrition and starvation over the next two years if UN institutions and the humanitarian sector overall are weakened further.

Aiming for A*: Questions based on the 2025 Global Risks Report

1.The Global Risks Report 2025 is written by the WEF which is one of the IGOs you learnt about.

What is the WEF and what is its role?

What other IGOs did you learn about and how do they differ from the WEF and each other?

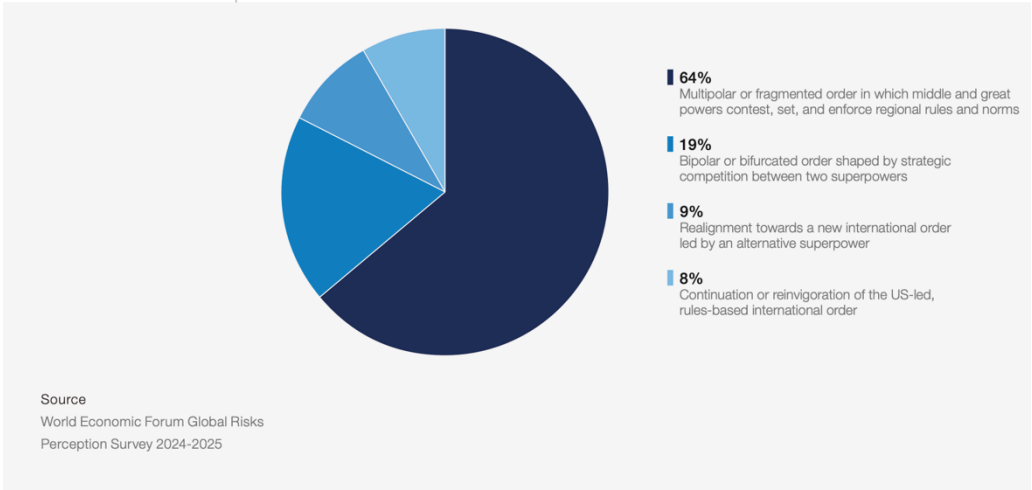
2. Under the subheading 'Declining Optimism', the following events are mentioned as evidence of our increasing fragmented world. Complete the table below: what is one example of each event that you've learnt about in your studies? The last row has been started for you.

Global Issue	Example studied as part of A-Level course
Expansion and escalation of conflict	
Extreme weather events amplified by climate change	
Widespread societal and political polarisation	
Continued technological advancements accelerating the spread of false or misleading information	The rise of AI and how this links to the superpower characteristics of cultural and political (/soft) power. Key points for how AI links to superpower status:

3. The report says that 'the Western-led global order is expected to continue its decline over the next decade'. What does this phrase 'the western-led global order' mean and why is it expected to decline?

4. Figure F is taken from the report. It shows that 64% of survey respondents think that there will be a multipolar or fragmented order / approach to cooperation on global risks in 10 years.

FIGURE F **Global political outlook**
"Which of the following best characterizes the global political environment for cooperation on global risks in 10 years?"



Based on your study of Superpowers, complete the table below:

Evidence for the existence of a multi-polar world in 10 years	Evidence against the existence of a multi-polar world in 10 years

Based on what you have learnt, which of the 4 options shown in Figure F do you think is most likely and why?