



INTEGRATION TRENDS IN THE SYSTEM OF CONTEMPORARY  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract:** The article examines contemporary integration trends within the system of international relations in the context of accelerating global transformations. It conceptualizes integration as a multidimensional and multi-speed process shaped by economic interdependence, political competition, institutional diversity, and sociocultural dynamics. Particular attention is paid to the reconfiguration of global interdependence under conditions of regionalization and relative de-globalization, as well as to the growing role of flexible and cooperative forms of regionalism. The study analyzes the impact of multipolarity and geopolitical rivalry on integration projects, highlighting the emergence of alternative institutional frameworks and competing integration trajectories. The article argues that functional integration in areas such as climate policy, energy, healthcare, and digital regulation is becoming a key driver of cooperation. In conclusion, the paper underscores the need for adaptive, hybrid governance mechanisms capable of reconciling effectiveness, legitimacy, and resilience in contemporary international integration processes.

**Keywords:** international integration, regionalism, globalization, de-globalization, multipolarity, global governance, non-state actors, institutional change, transnational cooperation.

In the twenty-first-century international relations system, integration is seen as a multifaceted, multi-speed, multipolar process in which institutional, political, sociocultural, and economic vectors are entwined in a complicated web of interdependencies. Though they still offer valuable analytical tools, traditional theories of regional integration must be significantly modified to fit the new circumstances brought about by the resurgence of geopolitical rivalry, digital transformation, and transboundary issues (pandemics, migration, climate change) [1].

One of the main trends is "regionalization amid de-globalization," or more accurately, a reconfiguration of global interdependence: under the pressure of strategic competition, transregional and global mechanisms are being partially reorganized, while integration processes are becoming more intense within individual macro-regions. The European Union continues to be the most developed example of intricate multilevel integration—economic, institutional, and partially political—while also showing how integration is susceptible to both internal conflicts and foreign shocks (democratic governance, criminalization, Euroscepticism). In light of the escalating external issues (energy, security, and financial stability), analyses of European legislative and expert sources indicate that the case for greater economic coordination is becoming stronger [3].



Alongside integration in its classical sense (removal of trade barriers, harmonization of regulations, creation of supranational institutions), there is a growing prevalence of forms of “cooperative regionalism,” in which member states prefer flexible formats of cooperation, “coalitions of interest,” and sectoral networks. This “multilevel regionalism” better corresponds to the heterogeneous economic and political realities of the Global South, where integration processes often unfold through intergovernmental initiatives, interregional agreements, and thematic alliances [2]. As a result, integration is partially transformed into an institutional mosaic: alongside formal organizations operate flexible platforms, private-law supply chains, and digital regulatory networks.

The influence of multipolarity and geopolitical rivalry on the character of integration initiatives is a third significant trend. The establishment of alternative institutions and economic initiatives (such as infrastructure projects, interstate currency, and payment mechanisms) is prompted by the growing influence of new centers of power (China, India, and regional powers). This results in the partial replacement of previous integration centers and the formation of “competing integration orbits.” Integration can be used as a tool for both economic cooperation and strategic posture in the global arena, as seen by the growing influence of BRICS and associated projects [4]. Recent empirical research highlights the ambivalence of these initiatives: they increase prospects for collaboration but frequently lack mutual trust and deep institutionalization. Recent empirical research highlights the ambivalence of these initiatives: while they increase opportunities for collaboration, they frequently lack the deep institutionalization and mutual trust that are essential for long-term political integration.

The diffusion of actors is a fourth characteristic of modern integration processes: in addition to states, non-state actors—transnational corporations, local and regional governments, network-based civil society organizations, and international standard-setting bodies—are becoming more important and influential. In order to establish economic regulations, technical standards, and governance practices outside of traditional international processes, these parties establish a “parallel norm-setting infrastructure” [5]. This means that in the context of digitalization and global value chains, private contracts, platform ecosystems, and technical protocols frequently influence integration outcomes more so than diplomatic accords. Traditional institutions are forced to reconsider their legitimacy and regulatory authority as a result of this power transfer.

The functional differentiation of integration is a fifth trend: integration procedures are increasingly centered upon digital regulation, healthcare, energy cooperation, and environmental goals. This is because international issues call for specific solutions, which might then act as “entry vectors” for more extensive integration. An example of this is the collaboration on migration and climate challenges, which at the same time unifies scientific-administrative networks and establishes forums for political communication across governments with disparate interests and statuses. However, if integration efforts continue to be narrowly focused and non-overlapping, these formats may serve as both sources of fragmentation and processes of convergence.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the institutional and normative challenges: while new regional and interregional forms frequently suffer from deficiencies in legitimacy and transparency in decision-making processes, traditional multilateral structures show limited capacity to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. This leads to a paradox: while the globe is growing more interconnected, the institutions that oversee this interconnection are still not

adequately adjusted. Strengthening horizontal coordination across current institutions and developing hybrid mechanisms that would combine the operational effectiveness of private and network-based players with the legitimacy of public institutions are the two strategies needed to address this challenge.

In conclusion, a variety of forms and trajectories characterize integration trends in the modern system of international relations, ranging from fragmented, multilevel, and functionally oriented cooperation in other parts of the world to the deepening of institutional integration in established regions. The ability to balance regionalization with global public goods, combine strong institutions with adaptable networks, and create regulations that guarantee both efficacy and legitimacy will decide integration's future. From updating regionalism theories to creating new strategies for transnational regulation and collective governance of global risks, political science and the practice of international relations must develop theoretical and practical tools for analyzing and managing these intricate processes.

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