

We Need A Plan For The Transition To Renewable Energy

03-18-2024 ~ *Radical societal transformation is inevitable; a plan could make a difference between catastrophe and progress.*

Our
Renewable
Future



*Laying the Path
for One Hundred Percent
Clean Energy*

RICHARD HEINBERG AND DAVID FRIDLEY

The transition to renewable energy is inevitable given the current climate crisis and the fact that fossil fuels are a finite resource. To make the shift, a detailed plan is required to indicate the first steps and anticipate challenges in allocating resources and the policies needed to achieve the outcome. Germany has arguably accomplished more toward the transition to renewable energy than any other nation, largely because it has such a plan—the “[Energiewende](#),” which seeks a 60 percent reduction in all fossil fuel use by 2050 and a 50 percent reduction in primary energy use through efficiency in power generation, especially for buildings and the transport sector.

What follows are some components of a basic plan that can be adapted according to each country or state and adjusted for contingencies.

Level One: The ‘Easy’ Stuff

The easiest way to kick-start the transition is to switch to solar and wind power for electricity generation by building lots of panels and turbines, respectively, while phasing out coal. Distributing generation and storage of these energy sources (rooftop solar panels with home- or office-scale battery packs) will help. Replacing natural gas will be harder because gas-fired “peaking” plants are often used to buffer the intermittency of industrial-scale wind and solar inputs to the

grid.

Electricity accounted for [less than a quarter](#) of all final energy used in the United States in 2022. Since solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal produce electricity, it makes sense to electrify even more of our energy usage—heating and cooling buildings with electric air-source heat pumps and cooking with electric induction stoves, for example.

Transportation represents a large swath of energy consumption, mostly due to the growing number of personal cars. As of 2021, there were [250 million gasoline-fueled automobiles](#). While we are busy replacing these with electric vehicles, we can easily and cheaply promote walking, bicycling, and public transit.

Substantial retrofitting is needed for energy efficiency. Building codes should be strengthened to mandate net-zero or near-net-zero energy performance for new construction. Zoning codes and development policies should encourage infill development, multifamily buildings, and clustered mixed-use development. Using more energy-efficient appliances will also help.

The food system is a significant energy consumer. Increasing the market share of organic local foods can dramatically lower the amount of fossil fuels used to manufacture fertilizers as well as in food processing, and in transportation. We can also sequester enormous amounts of atmospheric carbon in topsoil by promoting farming and land management practices that build soil rather than deplete it.

By our calculations, these actions could reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent in 10 to 20 years.

Level Two: The Harder Stuff

Solar and wind technologies provide energy intermittently. When they become dominant, we must adapt to this with substantial amounts of grid-level energy storage and a major grid overhaul to get the electricity sector to 80 percent renewables. We'll also need to time our energy usage to coincide with sunlight and wind energy availability.

The transport sector will require extensive and costly restructuring. Densified cities and suburbs can be reoriented to public transit, bicycling, and walking. All motorized human transport can be electric, with more public transit and intercity

passenger rail links. Heavy trucks could run on fuel cells, but it would be better to minimize trucking by expanding freight rail. Sails would increase the fuel efficiency of shipping, but relocalization or deglobalization of manufacturing would be a necessary co-strategy to reduce the need for shipping.

Although much of the manufacturing sector runs on electricity, many raw materials used during the manufacturing processes either *are* fossil fuels or require fossil fuels for mining or transformation. By replacing fossil fuel-based materials and by increasing the recycling of nonrenewable materials, we can reduce dependency on mining.

If we do all this and build far more solar panels and wind turbines, we could, by our calculations, achieve roughly an 80 percent reduction in emissions.

Level Three: The Really Hard Stuff

Eliminating the last 20 percent of our current fossil fuel consumption will take even more time, research, investment, and behavioral adaptation. One example is that we currently use enormous amounts of cement in construction with concrete. Cement-making needs high heat, which could theoretically be supplied by sunlight, electricity, or hydrogen—but only with a complete redesign of the process.

This is the time to make all food production organic and to ensure that agriculture builds topsoil. Eliminating all fossil fuels will entail redesigning food systems to minimize processing, packaging, and transport.

The communications sector—which uses mining and high-heat processes to produce phones, computers, servers, wires, photo-optic cables, cell towers, and more—presents a challenge. The only good long-term solution here is to make devices that last and then repair, fully recycle, and remanufacture them only when absolutely needed. The internet could be maintained via low-tech, asynchronous networks now being [pioneered in poor nations](#), using relatively little power.

In the transport sector, scrapping petroleum will require costly substitutes (fuel cells or biofuels). Global trade will inevitably shrink. With no ready substitute for aviation fuels, we may have to relegate aviation to a specialty transport mode. Planes running on hydrogen or biofuels are an expensive possibility, as are dirigibles filled with (nonrenewable) helium.

On land, paving and repairing roads without oil-based asphalt is possible, though it will require a complete redesign of processes and equipment.

If we can do all this, we can get beyond zero carbon emissions; with carbon sequestration in soils and forests, we could reduce atmospheric carbon each year.

Scale Is the Biggest Challenge

It is possible to design a renewable energy system that 1) has minimal environmental impacts, 2) is reliable, and 3) is affordable—as long as relatively modest amounts of energy are needed. Once current U.S. scales of energy production and usage are assumed, something has to give.

We sacrifice the environment (due to the vast tracts of land needed for siting wind turbines and solar panels) for the purposes of reliability (because solar and wind are intermittent) and affordability (because of the need for storage or capacity redundancy).

Power is another hurdle: massive ships and airplanes require energy-dense fuels. Renewable energy resources can supply the needed power, but scale is crucial. While building and operating a few hydrogen-powered airplanes for specialized purposes would be technically feasible, operating fleets of thousands of commercial planes with hydrogen fuel is daunting from both a technical and economic perspective.

It's Not All About Solar and Wind

Solar and wind are the favored energy sources of the future; equipment prices are falling, the rate of installation continues to be high, and there is considerable potential for further growth. However, their inherent intermittency will pose increasing challenges as they become more dominant. Other renewable energy sources—hydropower, geothermal, and biomass—can more readily supply controllable baseload power, but these sources have much less opportunity for growth owing to limits on siting, geology, and supply.

Hopes for high levels of wind and solar energy supply are driven mainly by the assumption that industrial societies can and should maintain very high levels of energy use. The challenge is always scale: If energy usage in the United States could be scaled back significantly (70 to 90 percent), then a reliable all-renewable energy regime would become much easier to envision and cheaper to engineer.

We Must Adapt to Less Energy

Considering the speed and scale of emission reductions required to avert climate catastrophe, people in industrialized countries will have less energy than they are used to consuming.

Despite our understandable wish to maintain current levels of comfort and convenience, it's worth keeping an ecological footprint analysis in mind.

According to calculations by the Global Footprint Network, the productive land and water available to each person on Earth to live sustainably in 2019 was [1.6 global hectares](#). Meanwhile, the per capita ecological footprint of the United States was 8.1 global hectares per capita in 2018 (if the entire world population lived at this footprint, it would [require](#) five planet Earths).

Clearly, we should aim for a sustainable energy and material consumption level, which, on average, is significantly lower than at present. If we don't achieve this, we will eventually be caught short, with significant economic and political fallout.

What should we do to prepare for energy reduction? Look to California as a model: Since the 1970s, its economy has grown [while its per capita electricity demand has not](#). The state has encouraged cooperation between research institutions, manufacturers, utilities, and regulators to determine how to keep demand from growing by changing how electricity is used.

Consumerism Is a Problem, Not a Solution

Conservation beats consumption in the dawning post-fossil fuel era. If it becomes more difficult and costly to produce and distribute goods, people will have to use them longer and repurpose, remanufacture, and recycle them wherever possible. The switch from consumerism to conservation will transform America's culture, economy, and government policy.

The renewable economy will likely be slower and more local. Economic growth may reverse itself as per capita consumption shrinks. If we are to avert a financial crash, we may need a different economic organizing principle. In her 2014 book on climate change, [This Changes Everything](#), Naomi Klein asks whether capitalism can be preserved in the era of climate change. Although it probably can, in the absence of overall growth, profits for a few will have to come at a cost to everyone else, a situation we have seen in the years since the financial crash of 2008.

Population Growth Makes Everything Harder

Population is a climate and energy issue. If energy and materials are likely to dwindle in the decades ahead, population growth will mean even less consumption per capita. On a net basis (births minus deaths), we are gaining [83 million humans each year](#)—according to a 2017 UN report—an unprecedented number, even if the percentage rate of growth is slowing.

Policymakers can help reduce the population by promoting family planning, public persuasion, raising the educational level of poor women, and giving women complete control over their reproductive rights. (For detailed recommendations, consult population organizations such as [Population Institute](#) and [Population Media Center](#).)

Fossil Fuels Are Too Valuable to Allocate Solely Based on Market Forces

For non-energy purposes, industrial societies will need fossil fuels for some applications until the final stages of the energy transition—and possibly beyond. Crucially, we need fossil fuels for industrial processes and transportation to [build and install renewable energy systems](#). We also need them for agriculture, manufacturing, and general transportation until robust renewable energy-based technologies are available. This poses several problems.

As the best of our remaining fossil fuels are depleted, we extract and burn ever lower grade and harder to get coal, oil, and natural gas. Virtually all new production prospects involve tight oil, tar sands, ultraheavy oil, deepwater oil, or Arctic oil—all of which entail high production costs and high environmental risk compared to conventional oil found and produced during the 20th century.

Refining heavier, dirtier fuels (in the case of tar sands) creates ever more co-pollutants, with disproportionate health impacts and burden on low-income communities. The fact that the fossil fuel industry will require ever-increasing levels of investment per unit of energy yielded has gloomy implications for the energy transition: the deteriorating fossil fuel sector will need a large chunk of society's available capital to maintain current services, just as the build-out of renewables will require even more capital.

The danger is that fossil fuels will become so costly we'll no longer be able to afford the transition project.

But we cannot accelerate the transition too much. Rushing the transition will

mean an overall increase in emissions—unless we reduce other current uses of fossil fuels. To fuel the transition without increasing overall greenhouse gas emissions, we may have to deprive some sectors of the economy of fossil fuels before adequate renewable substitutes are available. This would mean reducing overall energy consumption and the economic benefits of energy use while taking care to minimize the impact on already vulnerable and economically disadvantaged communities.

We are entering a period of fossil fuel triage. Rather than allocating fossil fuels simply on a market basis (those who pay for them get them), it would be fairer to find ways to allocate fuels based on the strategic importance of the societal sectors dependent on them and on the relative ease and timeliness of transitioning these sectors to renewable substitutes.

Agriculture, for example, might be deemed the highest priority for continued fossil fuel allocations, with commercial air travel assuming a far lower priority. Perhaps we need not have just one price on carbon but different prices for different uses. Not only do we see scant discussion of this prospect in energy policy literature, but few governments even acknowledge the need for a carbon budget. The political center of gravity, particularly in the United States, will have to shift significantly before decision-makers can acknowledge the need for fossil fuel triage.

As fossil fuels become more costly to extract, there may be an ever greater temptation to use our available energy and investment capital merely to maintain existing consumption patterns, putting off any effort to effect the transition. If we procrastinate too much, we will reap the worst possible outcomes—climate chaos, a gutted economy, and no way to build a bridge to a renewable energy future.

Everything Is Connected

Throughout the energy transition, great attention will have to be given to the interdependent linkages and supply chains connecting various sectors (communications, mining, and transport knit together most of what we do in industrial societies). Some links in supply chains will be hard to substitute, and chains can be brittle: a problem with even one link can imperil the entire chain.

Consider, for example, the materials required to manufacture and operate a wind turbine. The components come from different manufacturing sectors in various

places in the world.

Planning will need to take such interdependencies into account. As every ecologist knows, [you can't do just one thing](#).

This Really Changes Everything

Energy transitions change societies from bottom to top and from inside out. From a public relations standpoint, it may be helpful to give politicians or the public the impression that life will go on as before while we unplug coal power plants and plug-in solar panels. Still, the reality will probably be quite different.

During historic energy transitions, economies and political systems underwent profound metamorphoses. The agricultural revolution and the fossil-fueled industrial revolution constituted societal watersheds. We are on the cusp of a transformation that is every bit as decisive.

If the renewable energy transition is successful, we will achieve savings in ongoing energy expenditures needed for each increment of economic production, and we may be rewarded with a quality of life that is actually preferable to our current one.

We will enjoy a much more stable climate and greatly reduced health and environmental impacts from energy production activities. However, converting to 100 percent renewable energy will not solve other environmental issues such as deforestation, land degradation, and species extinctions.

Possibly, the most challenging aspect of this transition is its implication for economic growth. Whereas the cheap, abundant energy of fossil fuels enabled the development of a consumption-oriented growth economy, renewable energy will likely be unable to sustain such an economy.

Rather than planning for continued, unending expansion, policymakers must begin to imagine what a functional post-growth economy could look like. Among other things, the planned obsolescence of manufactured goods must end in favor of far more durable products that can be reused, repaired, remanufactured, or recycled indefinitely.

It seems wise to channel society's efforts toward no-regrets strategies—efforts that shift expectations, emphasize quality of life over consumption, and reinforce

community resilience. Even though it may be impossible to envision the end result of the renewable energy transition, we must seek to understand its scope and general direction.

Our descendants will inhabit a renewable world that works differently from ours. Whether it will be better or worse depends on our current decisions. The sooner we address the most obvious and pressing decisions (starting with a mandatory global cap on carbon emissions), the earlier we can anticipate the succeeding waves of problems and choices.

By David Fridley and Richard Heinberg

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Josine Franken (vrijwilliger NIOD) **~ Het oorlogsdagboek van Paula**

Bermann



03-18-2024 ~ Kort geleden heb ik het oorlogsdagboek van de Duits-Joodse Paula Bermann getranscribeerd en is het gepubliceerd, zodat het nu voor ieder digitaal toegankelijk is. Heel bijzonder was de ontmoeting met Linda Bouws, een kleindochter van de dagboekschrijfster, waarbij René Pottkamp (NIOD) en ik aanwezig waren.

In de archieven van het NIOD liet René ons de originele dagboekcahiers zien en dat was een mooi moment.

Voor de transcriptie hebben we dankbaar gebruik gemaakt van de vertaling die in de jaren tachtig werd gemaakt door emeritus Prof. Winkelman. Het Kurrentschrift is voor een leek niet te ontcijferen.

Hoewel Paula Bermann aan het begin van de oorlog al ongeveer 20 jaar in Nederland woonde, gebruikte zij het Kurrentschrift uit haar jeugd; opdat het niet door anderen gelezen kon worden.

Paula Bermann beschrijft heel nauwgezet de steeds verder beperkende maatregelen die de Joodse mensen werden opgelegd. Een boeiend, indringend verslag.

Aan de transcriptie is een indrukwekkend interview toegevoegd, dat Linda Bouws in 1987 had met haar tante Inge van Es, dochter van Paula Bermann.



Linda Bouws, René Pottkamp &

Beschrijving NIOD:

Paula Bermann (9 maart 1895) groeide op in een liberaal Joods gezin in het Duitse Konken en Kusel. Tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog was zij verpleegster aan het front in Frankrijk. In augustus 1918 trad zij in het huwelijk met de Amsterdamse Joodse zakenman Coenraad van Es. Het echtpaar kreeg drie kinderen: Hans (1919), Inge (1923) en Sonja (1927). Van 1940 tot 1944 houdt Paula in Amsterdam een dagboek bij. Dat doet ze in het Kurrentschrift, een Duitse schrijfmethode die nog maar weinigen kunnen lezen. Het dagboek vormt een beklemmend verslag over de wereld in oorlog, haar Nederlandse gezin, haar familie in Duitsland. Bermann is politiek zeer goed geïnformeerd en beschrijft gedetailleerd het dagelijks leven in Amsterdam, waar het gezin een benedenhuis bewoont aan de Valeriusstraat 135.

Tussen de regels door klinken haar angsten en verlangens, en haar weerzin tegen een opgelegde identiteit: zowel Duits als joods. Als Duitse wordt ze gewantrouwd, als joodse opgejaagd. Op 24 augustus 1942 moeten Paula, Coen en Sonja onderduiken; ze vinden onderdak bij het gezin van beroepsmilitair Jan Kooy in Jutphaas, vlak bij Utrecht. Bermanns dagboek aantekeningen zijn doortrokken van weemoed, boosheid, zorg om haar kinderen Hans, Sonja en Inge, afkeer van haar landgenoten en angst voor verraad. Het dagboek eindigt abrupt: voorjaar 1944 worden Paula, haar man Coen en hun dochter Inge verraden, opgepakt en via Westerbork naar Bergen-Belsen gedeporteerd. Vlak voor de bevrijding sterven Paula en Coen: hij bezwijkt aan difterie, waarna zij zelfmoord pleegt door tegen stroomdraad aan te lopen. De drie kinderen overleven de oorlog.

Het dagboek is te vinden via www.niod.nl – archief – 244 Europese dagboeken en egodocumenten – [2007, dagboek Paula Bermann](#).



René Pottkamp & Josine Franken

Venezuela's Election In The Crosshairs Of New U.S. Regime Change Scheme



Venezuela - *Source:*
wikipedia.org

03-15-2024 ~ *As Venezuela prepares to head to the polls in July, the U.S. has already started drumming up suspicion and doubt around the electoral process.*

Twenty-five years after Hugo Chávez took office and began the [Bolivarian Revolution](#) in Venezuela, U.S. officials have still not tired of dreaming up new plots to overthrow the country's government. Five years ago, following the last presidential election, they attempted to install Juan Guaidó—a politician most Venezuelans had never even heard of—as the country's head of state. And now, with the date for the next presidential election officially set for July 28, the Biden administration is gearing up for the biggest regime-change push since the Guaidó coup attempt.

Venezuela has long been a target for U.S. intervention because of its efforts to build an alternative model to the neoliberal capitalism pushed by institutions like the IMF and World Bank. First theorized and implemented under the leadership of Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela puts forward a new model that emphasizes using the country's resources, such as its oil revenue, to fund crucial missions. These then guarantee rights such as education, food, housing, transportation, culture, and sports to historically excluded majorities, to decrease longstanding socioeconomic inequality. A central part of the Bolivarian Revolution is the political and cultural transformation of the people through the promotion of Venezuelan national culture, internationalism, anti-imperialism, and the empowerment of all people as political subjects with rights and responsibilities. It is a project in direct contradiction to U.S. interests in the oil-rich country and the region Washington considers its backyard.

The 2024 Elections

President Nicolás Maduro is running for re-election as the candidate of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the broader Great Patriotic Pole coalition. He has built his campaign around a [program](#) referred to as the [“Seven Transformations,”](#) proposing major new initiatives in the fields of economic modernization, asserting national sovereignty, safety and security, ensuring social rights, political participation, the environment, and geopolitics. These aim to maintain the pro-poor, socialist orientation of the country's development model while enacting reforms to stimulate greater economic activity and counteract the impact of crippling U.S. sanctions.

The opposition is divided into several different camps. The largest coalition of

opposition parties is called the Unitary Platform and consists of parties or factions of parties controlled by the Venezuelan elite who were displaced from positions of power as a result of the Bolivarian Revolution. The Unitary Platform has taken part in several rounds of negotiations with the government over the past year leading up to the elections and signed an agreement last October known as the “Barbados Agreement.”

In this agreement, the opposition was granted concessions on issues related to the organization of the electoral process, and in exchange, the United States agreed to loosen some sanctions relating to Venezuela’s oil and mining industries. The Barbados Agreement stipulated that only opposition figures who are eligible according to existing laws would be permitted to run. At this stage, the Unitary Platform has not chosen a candidate.

The specifics of how the electoral process will be carried out, regulations on campaigning on media platforms, participation of electoral observers, and the updating of electoral rolls were outlined in [an agreement signed on February 28](#). The agreement was the product of dialogue among over 150 political and social organizations and was based on over 500 proposals. Ninety-seven percent of the political parties registered with the National Electoral Council participated.

Nonetheless, U.S. officials have presented this electoral process, subject to such extensive deliberation and approved with such wide support, as an attack on democracy.

María Corina Machado and the Fraud Narrative

The approach of the U.S. government follows a familiar script—wage a campaign in the media and through international organizations to cast doubt on the integrity of the electoral process so relentlessly that the result can be presented as fraudulent no matter what the actual evidence is on election day.

The key piece of the “electoral fraud” narrative is already in place and revolves around the disqualification of the opposition figure María Corina Machado.

Machado is the oldest daughter of Henrique Machado Zuloaga, who was an executive of Sivena. One of Venezuela’s largest steel companies, Sivena was nationalized in 2008 under Hugo Chávez. Since the start of the Bolivarian Revolution, Machado has been active in the right-wing opposition and has gone so far as to support destabilization campaigns and attempts to overthrow

Venezuela's democratically elected governments. She served as a member of Venezuela's National Assembly from 2011-2014.

In July 2015, the Venezuelan comptroller general's office [announced that Machado was barred](#) from holding public office for a period of one year after neglecting to disclose the extent of her earnings while she held public office.

The investigations into Machado continued. In July 2023, opposition deputy José Brito requested an update on Machado's eligibility for holding public office given the upcoming presidential election and her stated intention to run. The comptroller general's office responded, confirming that the disqualification of Machado was maintained and constituted a 15-year ban due to her support of regime change plots.

Though she initially refused to participate in the process, Machado appealed her ban through the Barbados Agreement procedure, which also stated that all candidates must defend Venezuela's independence and reject violent actions against the government. In January 2024, the Supreme Court of Venezuela issued a [sentence rejecting Machado's appeal of the ban](#).

The Biden administration immediately sought to use economic coercion to undermine this decision by an institution of Venezuela, a sovereign state. As part of the Barbados Agreement, the U.S. government issued licenses to certain oil companies permitting them to resume operations in Venezuela despite the sanctions. At the end of January, the State Department announced that the sanctions waivers issued to these companies would not be renewed once they expire on April 18.

At the same time, there is endless media reinforcement of the position that an election without Machado cannot be considered legitimate. On January 30, a few days after the Supreme Court rejected her appeal, Machado went on the television network CNN and was presented to viewers as ["Venezuela's main opposition leader."](#) An earlier Washington Post article is also typical of this narrative, headlined, ["She's the front-runner in the race to oust Maduro. He's out to block her."](#) This combination of economic and political pressure is what has led to explosions in right-wing street violence in the past, following the 2013 presidential election when Maduro was first elected.

Machado: Regime Change Operative?

In 2002, following the short-lived coup d'état against Chávez, Machado signed the decree which established an unelected government under chamber of commerce head Pedro Carmona. In 2005 she [met with former U.S. president](#) George W. Bush at the White House to discuss “democracy” (i.e., the overthrow of the Venezuelan government) More recently, she has been a key supporter and leader of the numerous right-wing plots to overthrow the democratically elected President Nicolás Maduro. These include the 2014 and 2017 [guarimba](#) protests which saw extreme violence against security forces and chavista supporters, as well as the destruction of infrastructure.

In 2014, Machado was removed from her post in the National Assembly after she attended a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) [in the place of the Panamanian representative](#) in order to testify about 2014 protests, to speak out against the government, and to call for foreign support for her cause. The move was widely condemned as a violation of both the Venezuelan constitution and Panamanian law, and in response, Panamanian civil society and movement organizations [filed a lawsuit](#) against her for [usurping a public post](#).

Machado has also [celebrated](#) the effectiveness of the illegal sanctions regime imposed on Venezuela in applying political pressure for regime change, and on several occasions, has [called for even more sanctions](#). The sanctions have had devastating consequences for the Venezuelan people, well documented by different UN bodies and [rapporteurs](#), [human rights organizations](#), and [think tanks](#). United Nations special rapporteur Alena Douhan noted that “[t]he announced purpose of the ‘maximum pressure’ campaign—to change the Government of Venezuela—violates the principle of sovereign equality of states and constitutes an intervention in the domestic affairs of Venezuela that also affects its regional relations.”

In 2019, Machado [supported](#) the push by Juan Guaidó’s parallel, fictitious government to [request that the OAS apply the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance](#) (TIAR) against Venezuela to end the “usurpation of power” by Maduro. The activation of TIAR would have provided a legal justification for foreign military intervention, (more) economic sanctions, and a commercial blockade.

Machado participated and benefitted from the looting of the state companies and assets that the [Guaidó “government” had illegally seized](#) such as [Monomeros](#) and

CITGO.

U.S. Seeks to Delegitimize Venezuela's Democracy

An examination of the actual facts of Machado's political career shows how the truth is much more complicated than the mainstream narrative about a government baselessly repressing an opponent.

After years of political instability caused by right-wing plots to overthrow the democratically elected government and [even assassinate the leader](#), the Venezuelan government has pursued a straight-forward principle: political forces of any ideological variety can participate in elections as long as they do not conspire with foreign powers to undermine the independence of Venezuela or its sovereign institutions. This is in line with practices around the world. In the United States, for instance, there has been a great deal of public attention to the clause of the 14th Amendment that bars those guilty of insurrection from public office.

As the July 28 elections approach, tensions between the disparate elements of the Venezuelan political scene are bound to intensify. But the Biden administration is bound to be guided by the same overarching goal that has animated the policy decisions of Democratic and Republican administrations alike—remove from power one of the most long-standing opponents of Washington's dominant role in the western hemisphere.

By Zoe Alexandra and Walter Smolarek

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Nepal Experiences Another Political Reversal As Public Takes A Backseat



03-15-2024 ~ Nepal's recent political changes, forming a coalition government led by the two largest communist parties, have implications for stability. Pushpa Kamal Dahal's continued prime ministership and the inclusion of smaller parties signal shifting alliances.

On March 4th, Nepal's two largest communist parties united to establish a new coalition government, including smaller parties as partners. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, leader of the Maoist party, will continue as prime minister, a year after his initial election. Dahal has severed ties with the Nepali Congress Party, the largest parliamentary group, and has allied with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), the second-largest party led by Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli. Following the shift in coalition dynamics, the prime minister is obligated to seek a vote of confidence in Parliament within 30 days, a process anticipated to result in his favor.

The new Left Alliance coalition will consist of four political parties: the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the Rastriya Swatantra Party, and the Janata Samajbadi Party or People's Socialist Party.

The increasing rift between the Maoist Centre and Nepali Congress parties regarding the claim to the chairmanship of the National Assembly—Nepal's upper house of government—had posed a significant threat to the already delicate ruling coalition.

Following its Standing Committee meeting on February 28, the Maoist Centre opted to fight for the National Assembly chairmanship while Dahal had promised

support to the Nepali Congress (NC) in the election for the Chair. Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba intended for the party's senior figure and recently elected legislator, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, to take on the position of National Assembly Chairman.

Dahal, known for leading a decade-long armed struggle against the then-monarchy starting in 1996, transitioned into mainstream politics following a 2006 peace deal facilitated by the United Nations. Although currently serving his third term as prime minister, he is yet to complete a full five-year term. Since abolishing its 240-year-old monarchy in 2008 and becoming a republic, Nepal has witnessed the formation of 13 governments.

The Electoral System in Nepal and the State of the Parties

The Federal Parliament of Nepal is structured into two houses: the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. The House of Representatives is composed of 275 members, with 165 elected through a [first-past-the-post](#) system, representing specific constituencies, and the remaining 110 chosen via proportional representation. On the other hand, the National Assembly comprises 59 members. In this house, each of the seven provinces elects eight members through an electoral college, and the President additionally appoints three members based on government recommendations.

The Nepali Congress (NC), a center-left social democrat party, is the largest party in the House of Representatives, securing 89 seats. Close behind is the Left Wing Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), led by KP Sharma Oli, with 79 seats. Dahal's party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), holds 30 seats. The Rastriya Swatantra Party has 21 seats, while the Janata Samajbadi Party has 12 seats. The newly formed coalition of these latter four parties boasts a combined strength of 142 seats.

Dahal holds the role of kingmaker due to the intricate coalition dynamics in Nepal. The Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) have a history of ups and downs in their relationship, preventing them from forming an alliance at present. Despite past collaborations, their governments collapsed due to disputes over various issues. This leaves them with no alternative but to consider Dahal's party as a potential alliance partner. Dahal's credibility is further bolstered by his past leadership in the struggle for democracy.

Economic Situation

The inflation rate in Nepal was at [7.26 percent](#) in the financial year 2021-22. The industrial sector contributes about 14 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs approximately 14 percent of the workforce. The informal sector encompasses small- or medium-scale industries, agriculture, and service sectors where workers are limited in number and face restricted opportunities for organization. This informal sector constitutes [62 percent](#) of the total employed labor force.

A significant number of young individuals are seeking employment opportunities abroad. Between 2008 and 2022, more than [4.7 million](#) new work permits were issued, with a considerable portion of the Nepalese workforce, approximately 1 million individuals, presently employed in India. Concurrently, the unemployment rate in Nepal has surged to [10.9 percent](#). This has led to a greater number of people looking to migrate to other nations for jobs.

Nepal's per capita income stands at [\\$1,337](#), placing it among the region's lowest. This translates to an average daily income of \$3.60 per person, reflecting the economic challenges faced by the population.

Surprisingly, despite the historical presence of various Left formations at the helm of the country, successive governments have consistently advocated for promoting and integrating [private capital](#) into Nepal's economy. This intriguing paradox raises questions about the alignment between political ideology and economic policies.

Implication for Nepal Politics

The shifts and inconsistencies in Nepal's political landscape haven't resonated well with the Nepalese people. Longtime political analyst Ashesh Ghimire suggests that "such inconsistencies could potentially fuel the rise of right-wing forces in the long run." If these political maneuvers are perceived as mere strategies to seize power by a select few, there is a risk of eventual alienation from the broader political landscape over time.

Numerous examples and indicators underscore the dissatisfaction among the people. The manifestation of discontent is apparent through the [protests held](#) in November last year, which called for the restoration of the monarchy in the country. The rise of Rastriya Swatantra Party further emphasizes this trend, as

the party advocates for a shift back to a unitary system, diverging from Nepal's constitutionally established federal democratic republic.

Ghimire asserts that "right-wing and imperialist forces, along with their representatives, are capitalizing on... discontent to strengthen political entities and leaders aligned with their interests."

During the general elections of 2022, the RSP emerged as the fourth-largest party in the House of Representatives. It achieved victory in seven constituencies: four in Kathmandu, one in Lalitpur, and two in Chitwan. Securing a 10.70 percent vote, the RSP attained recognition as one of the seven national parties in the Federal Parliament.

Moreover, Ghimire observes that the Left in Nepal has deviated from its political stance. He further notes that "a select few individuals transforming into a privileged 'creamy layer' persist in exerting influence on the government, reaping substantial benefits from the prevailing circumstances. The government should strive to curtail capitalist exploitations and focus on serving the interests of the working people."

In Nepal, the socialist project faces challenges in promoting productive forces and ensuring fair distribution. The main obstacle is the dominance of finance capital, which not only fails to contribute to productive activities but hinders them. This is amplified by the ties between national finance capital and global finance capital, posing unique hurdles for a smaller state like Nepal.

Situated between the growing economies of India and China, Nepal is subject to their varying interests. Both India and China seek to establish favorable relations with Nepal and maintain influence on its politics. However, the recent entry of the United States onto the scene has added a new dynamic. China, in particular, appears increasingly concerned about the expanding influence and presence of the U.S. in Nepal through activities and investments like the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#). Should the United States gain a significant upper hand in Nepal, it would pose a formidable challenge to the socialist project within the country.

The [2022 election manifesto](#) of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) outlined key foreign policy priorities. It advocated for the country's liberation from foreign military activities to establish a zone of peace. It firmly opposed

involvement in any bilateral or multilateral military alliances. Additionally, it called for a review and potential scrapping of treaties such as the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, the Tripartite Agreement of 1947, transboundary water agreements, and trade- and transit-related treaties.

But Dahal's track record in dealing with immediate neighbors as well as major powers has been checkered, marked by a tendency to make promises easily but struggle to fulfill them. However, in his favor this time, he heads a government comprising parties sharing similar political ideologies.

As Nepal navigates these dynamics, Dahal's leadership and the government's response to economic and public concerns will shape the nation's political trajectory.

By Pranjali Pandey

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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Source: Globetrotter

How Effective Is International Aid And Assistance?



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
Institute*

03-15-2024 ~ Assistance outcomes differ by country, but special interests and the absence of a unified vision increase the risk of mismanagement and corruption. Rising debt levels across the developing world suggest these policies may be nearing their zenith.

On February 1, 2024, Ukraine secured a [€50 billion aid package](#) from the European Union (EU), aimed at bolstering its defense capabilities and facilitating the country's reconstruction. Dozens of other [countries](#), along with Western-dominated multilateral lenders like the International Monetary Foundation ([IMF](#)) and the [World Bank](#), as well as [private investors](#), have contributed billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2022. Billions more are pledged.

While international support has been crucial for Ukraine, Kyiv will be expected to pay much of this back. Approximately half the global population now live in countries where debt payments [exceed spending](#) on education and healthcare. While wealthier countries can manage debt sustainably, poorer countries face challenges in avoiding the detrimental effects of excessive debt, leading to stunted development.

Ukraine remains in desperate need of foreign financial assistance, humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, military support, and technical capacity building. However, quiet caution has emerged among various international supporters. Ukraine's capacity to implement Western-backed [political, economic, and](#)

[corruption reforms](#), expel Russian forces, and repay loans is being questioned. The hesitation underscores the challenges of coordinating a diverse array of donors over time.

The EU has been the primary source of financial assistance for Ukraine, and the recent approval of its latest aid package followed months of debates [between member states](#). The IMF also provided [a \\$15.6 billion](#) loan in 2023, marking the first IMF loan awarded to a country at war. Foreign investors have meanwhile increasingly sought [guarantees and insurance](#) for investing in Ukraine, with the Ukrainian government [working with the World Bank](#) to implement such policies.

The U.S. has [provided the bulk of Ukraine's](#) foreign military aid, but the most recent [\\$60 billion](#) in military assistance has been stalled for months due to opposition in Congress. Republican support for Ukraine [has declined markedly since the early days of the war](#), leading proponents of the pending military aid package [to emphasize its benefits](#) for U.S. companies, job creation, and reducing the maintenance costs of holding or destroying U.S. weapons stockpiles.

However, this line of thinking has ignited pushback from [across the political spectrum](#). Republican politicians have become increasingly critical of providing Ukraine with a "[blank check](#)," while accusations of potential [money laundering](#) have been raised. The lack of a long-term, bipartisan strategy toward Ukraine from Washington has left defense contractors [hesitant to increase arms production](#), already under scrutiny for [price-gouging](#) during increased demand.

Adding to this reluctance is concern in the U.S. over establishing long-term outlets for defense contractors. For instance, [since 1979](#), the U.S. has given Egypt roughly \$50 billion in military aid, [including](#) fighter jets, helicopters, tanks, armored personnel carriers, surveillance aircraft, counterterrorism training, and border security assistance. After Congress canceled half of the annual payment of \$1.2 billion to Egypt in 2013 following a military-led coup (as well as [\\$250 million](#) in annual economic aid), [U.S. officials](#) noted that the U.S. government would have to pay for the missed shipment and the costs of winding down the programs. Aid to Egypt was later fully reinstated [in 2015](#),

Despite the resumption of military aid to Egypt, [persistent questions](#) surround the allocation of these funds. It has helped prevent Egypt from becoming adversarial, but Cairo has nevertheless grown closer to [China](#) and [Russia](#) since 2013. U.S.

weapons manufacturers maintain lucrative export opportunities, but this assistance has also [helped enrich and strengthen](#) Egypt's military and has empowered it to [absorb other forms of foreign aid](#). The [IMF's conditions](#) on giving Egypt a \$3 billion loan in 2023 hinged on the military government's commitment to political and economic reform, but this remains unlikely.

Egypt, with a debt of \$11 billion, stands as the [IMF's second-largest debtor country](#), following Argentina (\$32 billion) and ahead of Ukraine (\$9 billion). The [World Bank](#) counts India (\$39 billion), Indonesia (\$19 billion), and Pakistan (\$18 billion) as its top debtors. The combined global debt owed to the IMF and World Bank tops \$300 billion, with their global reach having expanded significantly from their [original focus on rebuilding Europe after World War II](#).

These organizations began large-scale crisis intervention in developing countries in the early 1980s to address their foreign debt challenges. As the U.S. raised interest rates to combat inflation, dollar-denominated loans caused [significant defaults and debt restructuring](#), particularly across Latin America.

The IMF and the World Bank advocated for [privatization of industries](#) and [export-driven industrialization](#), eliminating trade barriers and granting foreign corporations easier access to raw materials. Beginning in the 1980s, conditions associated with [Structural Adjustment Programs](#) (SAPs) saw economic growth return, but aid recipients became more market-dependent and reliant on the IMF and World Bank, while wages remained low through devalued currencies.

The end of the Cold War and the establishment of the modern global financial system saw credit-hungry governments shifting their reliance on countries and multilateral organizations to embrace private lenders, including private equity and venture capital.

The impact of broad lending strategies became evident in Pakistan's loans in the [Private Power Policy in 1994](#). The World Bank took a dominant role in the project, [which provided guarantees](#), alongside the Asian Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of Japan. The Benazir Bhutto government in Pakistan [offered sovereign guarantees](#), attracting considerable foreign investment with assured, repatriable dollar-pegged returns.

However, changes in Pakistani governments altered the long-term political direction of the project, while local independent power producers (IPPs) engaged

in price-gouging and [an oversupply](#), plunging the country into debt. The World Bank [was criticized](#), alongside Pakistani governments and IPPs, for a lack of oversight and the misappropriation of funds. Today, Pakistan faces [acute energy shortages](#) and its debt level [has surged](#).

Pakistan can also rely on other sources of funding. Saudi lending to Pakistan goes back [to the 1970s](#) while China entered Pakistan's debt market [in the 2000s](#). [Over the next few years](#), Pakistan will need to issue major repayments to Saudi Arabia, China, and private investors, which has led to standoffs over the issuing of additional loans and deciding whose, along with Western loans, get repaid first. This has raised concerns about the sustainability and strategic wisdom of Pakistan's growing reliance on external debt.

China's assistance to countries [often serves as a solution](#) for its surplus labor, savings, and the industrial capabilities of its state-owned enterprises. Chinese steel, cement, coal, and other sectors accumulated enormous capacity, and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) enables China to export these resources. However, this often results in contracts for projects being [awarded to Chinese companies](#), marginalizing local industry and intensifying dependency, while minerals and natural resources are [extracted and exported](#) to China. Despite [debates over the outcome of some projects](#), they have proven effective in enhancing Chinese influence and garnering favor from foreign governments and populations.

Diverse sources of lending have also converged in the 21st century in what were labeled "[frontier markets](#)." In the 2010s, investor interest surged in frontier bonds, where developing countries issued debt in their own currency, diverging from the commonly used "Eurobonds," often denominated in U.S. dollars. Frontier bonds shielded developing countries from volatile currency swings, allowing them to adjust payment terms beyond the jurisdiction of London and New York courts, and provided the option to manage debt through currency printing.

With enticing [low debt-to-GDP ratios and](#) the allure of high-yield securities, Wall Street [encouraged these countries to borrow](#). The debt of African countries surged as their governments issued [sovereign bonds](#) in prominent global financial hubs like London and New York, coupled with a rise in lending from Chinese state-owned banks. Despite their self-assumed roles as global financial watchdogs, the IMF and World Bank also encouraged these loans and failed to

sound the alarm over this growing source of debt, focusing [more on foreign currency-issued debt](#). By 2015, African governments received \$32 billion in loans but were paying [\\$18 billion in interest](#) per year, with debt continuing to rise.

Mozambique's 2016 default unfolded [as substantial amounts](#) of previously undisclosed debt were exposed, [highlighting the foreign links](#) of the country's declining financial situation and a lack of oversight in dealings with private investors. In a prominent case from 2013 and 2014, a senior Credit Suisse banker signed an \$850 million loan agreement with French Lebanese businessman Iskandar Safa. The loan was [designated for the construction](#) of a coastal patrol force and tuna fishing fleet in Mozambique. A total of \$17 million in fees were granted to banks, and the remaining \$836 million was funneled to Abu Dhabi Mar, a company linked to the Safa family and based in the United Arab Emirates. The Credit Suisse banker left the bank shortly after the deals, and [found employment](#) under Safa.

This controversy left Mozambique burdened with incomplete economic projects and outstanding loans. Following the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS, the institution has paid [hundreds of millions of dollars](#) in settlements and debt forgiveness. Two hedge funds, VR Capital Group and Farallon Capital Partners, also [initiated lawsuits](#) against both Credit Suisse and the Mozambican government for their roles in the scheme. Furthermore, the Russian investment bank TVB Capital paid over \$6 million to the Securities and Exchange Commission for its involvement, while Mozambique [continues to seek](#) \$3 billion in compensation from Safa.

The effects of COVID-19 on supply chains and spending had already weakened Africa's financial stability, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further exacerbated the situation. The U.S. quickly raised interest rates, prompting international investors to begin divesting from local-currency debt in favor of dollar-denominated bonds. This led to the depreciation of local currencies and [escalated debt repayment costs](#) as inflation soared.

These effects have been felt across Africa. A 2023 meeting in New York between Nigeria's top financial officials and Western lenders highlighted Nigeria's financial challenges. In 2022, the country's debt repayments [surpassed its revenue by almost \\$1 billion](#), necessitating further borrowing to meet existing payment obligations for Africa's largest economy.

[IMF funding](#) has been partially reliant on the Nigerian government's commitment to removing 50-year fuel subsidies [in favor of](#) spending on energy and transportation infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The measures have [put further pressure](#) on inflation and a soaring cost of living, leading to [significant nationwide protests](#). Historically, [local corruption](#), coupled with that of [Western energy firms such as Halliburton, the involvement of politicians like Dick Cheney, and complicity of banks like HSBC](#), alongside the [expanding influence of China](#), has led to the concentration of much of Nigeria's resource wealth flowing to a select few beneficiaries.

Multilateral lenders like the IMF have had successful interventions in the past, including South Korea ([1997](#)), Mexico ([1995](#)), and working with the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) in Colombia from [1999-2001](#). China has also successfully [bailed out several countries](#) in recent years.

But it is crucial to note that in these instances, the beneficiary countries were already established allies and trade partners, enjoying privileged access to markets and previous subsidies that bolstered their industries. Additionally, criticism has been levied at the conditionality of the assistance, which increased the influence of lending countries and institutions on local economies.

The overall effectiveness of assistance to Ukraine will be difficult to determine so long as its conflict remains ongoing, and reconstruction is delayed. But attention has been brought to Ukraine's rising debt [being used as leverage](#) by investors to increase privatization and liberalization across the economy. Ukraine's increasing difficulty in securing funding and assistance only highlights the lack of a long-term strategy by lenders and the fragility of the country's situation.

Developing countries are now contending with [a new debt crisis](#) exacerbated by multi-level corruption involving competing and profit-maximizing parties. Without coordinated and comprehensive efforts, international assistance risks continuing the cycle of dragging some countries from one crisis to the next.

By John P. Ruehl

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The Left Needs A Positive Vision For How Immigration Policy Should Actually Work



03-11-2024 ~ As Democrats move right on immigration, the left must boldly embrace open borders, says author John Washington.

Militarized borders — comprising walls, barriers, fences and repressive border policies — have become something of the norm in today's world, which otherwise is in favor of the free movement of goods and capital. But that wasn't always the case. The United States, for example, had no federal immigration laws during the first century of its existence.

There are strong moral, political and economic arguments to be made against borders. In fact, the idea that the free movement of people across borders is detrimental to security and economic growth is largely based on biases and misconceptions, as John Washington points out in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows.

Washington is a journalist and author of the brilliant and provocative book *The Case for Open Borders*, which was published last month by Haymarket Books.

C.J. Polychroniou: The issue of border security has become a hot political issue in the U.S. since former President Donald Trump entered the political scene. In fact, immigration [today](#) is driving support for Trump more than in 2016, forcing Democrats and President Joe Biden in turn to embrace tougher border measures, including proposals for shutting down the U.S.-Mexico border. Now, you have just published a book titled [The Case for Open Borders](#) in which you seek to draw attention to the advantages of open border policies while knowing fully well that such arguments are highly unlikely at this political moment to find much, if any, support in mainstream society. Indeed, you recognize yourself in the book that “open borders” is a concept reviled by people across the political spectrum. So, what motivated you to write a book on this topic at this point in time?

John Washington: The political class has tried, failed, tried again and failed again to do what they claim they want to be doing with border and immigration enforcement. That history of failure goes back decades, even centuries. We have evidence showing long-, medium- and short-term flops of border enforcement measures failing to stop migration. While such evidence ranges internationally, I'll give a few U.S.-focused numbers here to underscore my point.

Currently, about [15 percent](#) of the U.S. population is foreign-born, which is pretty much exactly what it was 100 years ago. The pattern follows globally. About [3.5 percent](#) of global population are considered international migrants. That percentage has held steady for about 100 years despite dramatic increases in border enforcement. Those percentages now represent a vastly larger number of people.

Let's drill down a bit more: The U.S. immigrant population born in Latin America and the Caribbean was roughly 3 million in 1970 but [grew to over 22 million](#) as of 2019. That period exactly tracks the rise of modern immigration and border enforcement. So not only have these percentages held steady, but, despite vast expenditures and the militarization of borders, in gross numbers, far more people are crossing them today.

One other example of how deterrence measures don't work: In the months immediately following the most inhumane and well publicized of recent immigration enforcement measures, the family separation policy which was broadly implemented in 2018 (similar measures have existed before and after), *more* families came to the U.S.-Mexico border seeking protection. People move.

They have, they do and they will move, and walls and crackdowns haven't, don't and won't stop them.

So we can continue the extravagantly expensive and morally bankrupt charade of claiming border enforcement measures do what they purport to do — stop migration — or we can try a different and more humane approach.

I don't think that support for Trump has forced Democrats to implement more severe and inhumane border policies. Democrats are responsible for their own failures and their own inhumanity on this issue.

What I aimed to do with this book was bring some clarity to a contentious and largely misunderstood idea, to take back a term and the concept, "open borders," which is not a pipe dream or a dystopia but a means of extending freedom and justice.

You write in the book that the term "open borders" seems to be easily misunderstood even by people who are sympathetic to immigration. What exactly do you mean by "open borders," and what's the logic behind it?

Open borders could mean a lot of things, and I'm not aiming to have the perfect recipe or to try to prescribe concrete next steps. But I can offer what I think are some necessary ingredients: Opening borders must be coupled with ceasing the worst of extractive cutthroat capitalism as well as fighting for people's "right to remain."

To answer the first part of your question more concretely: I think open borders could look like what the European Union looks today, but without the militarized border of "fortress Europe" surrounding it. It could look like other passport-free zones throughout the world. It could look like the U.S., where people are free to cross state and jurisdictional borders, relocate to new communities with vastly different cultures, cuisines, climates and languages, where they are compelled to register, to civically engage and pay into the collective pot through taxes with the presumption that they are welcome.

Open borders are not to *just* knock down the wall, but also to reallocate the boondoggle expenditures toward resettlement and human and environmental reparations. It could make for more orderly human movement: people traveling through and registering at ports of entry rather than taking to the rivers, seas and

deserts.

Do “open borders” also apply to the flow of goods and services?

In terms of rights of mobility, a toaster oven currently has more freedom of movement than most human beings. The World Trade Organization counts somewhere around 400 free trade agreements throughout the world today. Scholar and activist Justin Akers Chacón, in his book, *The Border Crossed Us*, counts that only 40 of them had any provisions for the free movement of people, and those are for highly specialized workers. I don't think there's any hope of putting the genie back in the bottle in terms of stopping or significantly slowing the global trade of goods, but I think when it comes to mobility, I'd argue that human beings should have the same rights, at least, as toasters.

For the first century of its existence, the U.S. had pretty much open borders. The movement of people across borders was quite unrestrained in other parts of the world prior to the emergence of the nation-state and before nationalism became a key component of identity. Indeed, borders were not conceived of as divisions between cultures, languages and political dominions, yet despite powerful global trends in our midst, we are still in an era defined by the primacy of the nation-state. So is history in this case a good guide for making an argument in defense of open borders? In other words, can the gates be opened while the nation-state remains intact? How do we get there?

There are some qualifiers to the claim the U.S. had open borders for the first 100 years, including the state and municipal poor laws that functioned as proto-immigration laws; limits on citizenship to free, white and wealthy men; the forced transfer of millions of enslaved people; and the sporadically enforced “borderlines” drawn between colonizers and displaced Indigenous groups.

But yes, there were zero federal immigration laws for the first century of this country's existence. Until the 1990s, over 200 years after the country's founding, there was basically no wall or fence infrastructure on the U.S.-Mexico border. For about 95 percent of our country's history, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) did not exist. The current setup of militarized borders, criminalizing immigration and the archipelago of immigration detention centers, is very new. Which is also to say, very reversible.

I lean here on the scholarship of Jacqueline Stevens and Mahmood Mamdani, both

of whom present excoriating cases against the nation-state. Abolishing the nation-state may sound scary or disruptive, but I don't think it has to be. In fact, it would usher in more peace and justice. One obvious argument for why nation-states aren't a good way to organize ourselves is that most of us don't really live in nation states. The notion and centripetal pull of nationhood is, in almost all cases, a false construct. There are obvious examples like the United Kingdom, which is officially a multinational state: Britain, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland; or the Quebecois and the many distinct Indigenous groups in Canada, who feel much more tied to local or regional identity than any sense of Canadianness.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, reveals the arbitrary and colonial logic behind dividing populations into nation states, and includes convincing evidence that the construct of nationhood cleaves closely knit cultures at the same time it tries to tie together distant and unrelated people in, for one of his focused examples, Indonesia.

The fundamental problem is that when you ascribe a territory and governance to only a certain people, you necessarily exclude other people. Why not be honest and both recognize and foster plurinational states, or, as Stevens suggests, states without nations?

Communitarians and others claim that cultures have an important moral status, which is why they are opposed to open borders. How do you counter this argument?

Contrary to what border restrictionists desire, a static or closed culture is a dead culture. Protecting a dead culture is a dangerous mission, one fought on a slippery slope: It is to essentialize, say, Americanness or Germanness and try to hoard it from the other, or to hark back to a more oppressive and segregated past. Keeping borders closed to protect the idea of any culture embodies the same essence of efforts to "make America great again." Cultures are always in flux, and to blame migrants for changing culture is to miss the real culprits: natural shifts, international trade, and global connectivity and the Internet.

Trump's immigration plan is even more aggressive now than it was in 2016 or even during his four years in the White House. Could the issue of immigration hand the 2024 election to Trump?

It certainly could. But to try to out-Trump Trump in terms of immigration in order

to undercut a talking point is an idiotic policy. It also plays politics with people's lives. How we talk about and implement immigration policy has real and sometimes deadly effects on human beings. I don't see anyone in these high-level strategy and legislative debates taking seriously the humanity of migrants. That should be the polestar, not nonsense terms like "border security" or trying to reduce weekly or daily "encounters."

One of the central aims of my book was to articulate a positive vision for the left in terms of immigration policy. The left has been critical and defensive, or downright conciliatory to the right for decades but hasn't generated a coherent and positive vision for how immigration should actually work. I get the frustrating realities of governance, but I also think we should work with clear ideals rather than muddled half-steps.

Over the years, there have been various people and movements challenging reactionary nationalism by making the case for open borders. I think it's important that we acknowledge them, so can you discuss some of them?

People involved in the sanctuary movement in the 1980s and '90s ferried migrants over the U.S.-Mexico border and offered refuge and support once they were here. They also fought political and legal battles against not only deportations and border enforcement, but against the murderous economic and military interventions the U.S. was waging (and, under different guises, continues to wage) in Central America. The legacy of the sanctuary movement continues today with direct organizational descendants and offshoots as aid workers stand in solidarity and fight for the life and dignity of migrants.

The sanctuary movement didn't come out of nowhere. It was inspired and deeply influenced by the spirit and tactics of the civil rights movement, which in turn was inspired by labor and suffragist organizing, as well as the fight to abolish slavery. I think it's important to acknowledge and honor that throughline.

Of course, migrants themselves, when they cross borders, are committing a subversive and political act. They undermine the logic of borders and show the folly and fallibility of militarized border regimes.

I'll also recommend two books by contemporary thinkers who, along with many other colleagues and compas, are doing terrific work. Harsha Walia's *Border and Rule* and Todd Miller's *Empire of Borders*.

I hate to end on a down beat, but I do think it's germane to point out that the #AbolishICE hashtag has sort of fallen out of political fashion since Trump left the White House. (There remain some strong circles, however, where the fight to abolish ICE and border imperialism has definitely *not* fallen out of fashion.) ICE isn't abolished, of course, which underscores that deep and lasting commitment and deep and incisive analysis is essential if we want true justice.

Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for length and clarity

Source: <https://truthout.org/>

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