

How Countries Prepare For Population Growth And Decline



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

09-11-2023 ~ Around the world, diverse initiatives are being introduced to manage population changes.

[In early 2023](#), India surpassed China as the most populous country in the world with the latter having 850,000 fewer people by the end of 2022—marking the country's first population decline since [famine struck from 1959 to 1961](#).

While this reduction may seem modest considering China's 1.4 billion population currently, an ongoing decline is anticipated, with UN projections suggesting that China's population could dwindle to [below 800 million by 2100](#).

Populations fluctuate through immigration, emigration, deaths, and births. China's previous one-child policy, enforced from 1980 to 2015, and the [resulting gender imbalance](#) slowed its birth rate. The Chinese government is now trying [to boost birth rates](#), including by discouraging abortion.

The [Malthusian population growth model](#), proposed in the 1700s, suggested that populations grow exponentially and outpace resource availability until inevitable

checks, such as famine, disease, conflict, or other issues, cause it to drop. During the high global population growth rates of [the early 1960s](#), these concerns abounded. Yet around the world, population growth has slowed dramatically, and in China and many other countries, natural decline is already underway.

A 2020 study published in [the Lancet medical journal](#) revealed that based on current population trends, more than 20 countries are on track to halve their populations by 2100. The Pew Research think tank, meanwhile, declared that [90 countries](#) will see their populations decline by 2100, while the Center of Expertise on Population and Migration (CEPAM) predicts the global population will peak at 9.8 billion around [2070 to 2080](#).

The fear of a shrinking and aging population looms over governments and [economists](#) alike. Increased payments toward pension and social welfare systems will strain a reduced labor force, while younger populations also [contribute more](#) to economic growth and innovation. Countries may also experience a reduction in their global influence—not least because of a [smaller population available for military service](#).

[Various metrics gauge](#) fertility and birth rates, but the total fertility rate (TFR), which measures the number of children a woman will have in her lifetime, is the most common. Yet achieving replacement level fertility rates, typically [2.1 children](#) per woman, has proven challenging.

The decline in global fertility rates can be attributed to societal and cultural shifts, family planning initiatives, wider access to contraception, improved infant mortality rates, increased cost of child-rearing, urbanization, delayed marriages and childbirth due to educational and career pursuits, and social welfare systems reducing reliance on familial support.

A case in point is Japan, whose population peaked at [128 million in 2008](#) and has since shrunk to below 123 million. It is poised to decrease to [72 million](#) by century's end, its decline sustained by a low fertility rate, an aging population (almost [30 percent](#) of the population is 65 or older), and limited immigration. Initiatives to slow this decline include [changing immigration laws](#) and government-sponsored [speed dating](#).

Remarkably, despite hitting a record low [in 2022](#), Japan's TFR is [now higher](#) than China's and South Korea's. Since 2006, South Korea has invested [more than \\$200](#)

[billion](#) in establishing public daycare centers, free nurseries, subsidized child care, and other initiatives to boost its TFR. [But at 0.78](#), South Korea's TFR remains the world's lowest. South Korea's government also introduced immigration reforms in the [early 21st century](#), all while leading the world in automation with [1,000 robots per 10,000 employees](#)—more than double of second-ranked Japan.

In Europe, efforts to boost populations have occurred for decades. For instance, [Romania](#) criminalized abortion and banned contraception except for certain medical conditions in 1966. Consequently, illegal abortions increased, and Romania had the highest maternal mortality rate in Europe in the 1980s as a result of this. While Romania's TFR stabilized at 2.3 by the late 1980s, it [collapsed in the 1990s](#), alongside a [population exodus through emigration](#) that has been sustained [after Romania joined](#) the EU in 2007.

[Other Eastern European nations](#) have experienced similar TFR declines and emigration. Contrastingly, Western European countries have managed to grow slightly since 2000, but [largely only due to immigration](#). Even so, countries like Italy have seen population declines, spurring initiatives by the government to offer houses to foreigners for as little as 1 euro in an effort to [repopulate small towns](#).

The U.S. has a [lower average age](#) than most European countries and saw a rebound in TFR rates [in the 2000s](#). But [this dropped](#) after the recession in 2008 and it has never recovered. And unlike European countries, life expectancy continued to [decline after COVID-19](#). [Immigration](#) has mitigated these issues, but as in Europe this has become increasingly political, and the U.S. population growth rate has slowed considerably. While there is no official policy to boost birth rates, the U.S. [promotes family planning initiatives](#) abroad. Republican and Democrat administrations have [meanwhile oscillated](#) since 1984 between enforcing and rescinding the Mexico City Policy, requiring foreign NGOs to not “perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning” in order to receive U.S. government funding for family planning initiatives.

Russia's TFR faced a rapid decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union, reaching a low of [1.16 in 1999](#), and causing a population decline. However, government initiatives saw it rebound to [1.8 in 2014](#) before falling again. The Kremlin announced a [desired TFR of 1.7 in 2020](#), and [increased](#) payments for

parents of at least two children. To further stabilize its population, Russia has also relied on [immigration](#) and taking parts of Ukraine.

Iran's birth rate policies have fluctuated over the last few decades. During the 1950s, Iran [implemented fertility controls](#) but abolished them after the 1979 Islamic revolution. However, they were reintroduced in the [late 1980s](#) to release pressure on the economy. Once seen as a "[success story](#)," Iran's TFR fell faster than anticipated to 1.6 in 2012. That year, the government began attempts to boost the birth rate by [limiting access](#) to birth control, abortion, and vasectomies.

Although India now holds the mantle of the world's most populous country, its TFR is now [below replacement level](#). Nonetheless, its population will continue to grow, fueled by a large, youthful population—a demographic feature increasingly common across the Global South. While India's population is eventually projected to begin declining [by the 2060s](#), India is currently managing its youthful population [through initiatives](#) such as promoting employment opportunities abroad.

The perils of not utilizing a large working population [extend beyond](#) unrealized economic potential. Without economic prospects, large youthful populations can generate significant social and political upheaval. Neighboring Pakistan is [trying to reduce its population growth](#) to avoid exacerbating strains on resources, infrastructure, education, and health care systems.

Pakistan's concerns are similar to much of Africa. Aside from Afghanistan, the top 20 countries with the highest TFR [are all located in Africa](#). Nigeria's population is projected to grow from 213 million currently to 550 million [in 2100](#), while some projections see [half of all births](#) in Africa between 2020 and 2100. Even so, family planning programs have helped [slow growth in recent years](#) across the continent.

Contrastingly, the experience of countries where campaigns supporting fertility have seen some success (including [Germany](#), the [Czech Republic](#), and [Hungary](#)) suggests direct financial incentives, tax breaks, cheap/free child care centers, generous maternity/paternity leave, housing assistance, and more flexible approaches to work-life balance are successful at interrupting decline.

While gender equality has often been cited as a barrier to higher birth rates in the past, this no longer seems to be the case. Highly educated women had the lowest fertility rate in the U.S. [in 1980](#), for example, but this was not true in 2019.

Additionally, Mongolia's TFR declined from 7.3 kids per woman in 1974 to under two by 2005. [But Mongolian birth rates then increased to around three children per woman by 2019](#), despite Mongolian women becoming [better educated](#), increasingly represented in [traditionally male-dominated fields](#), and having access to improved [rural maternal health services](#).

Nonetheless, Mongolia's recent population boom [has resulted in](#) school crowding, pollution, housing problems, and other issues, and points to the need for flexible approaches to population growth, decline, and stabilization.

With a median age in Europe of [44.4 years old](#) and a median age of [about 19 in Africa](#), different parts of the world will require different measures to deal with fluctuating population numbers this century. China is not alone in the perception that it will [grow old before it grows rich](#), and such countries will develop their own methods to deal with aging societies. Seeking the creation of long-term sustainable approaches to population management, which avoid coercion but also provide help for those raising children, should be prioritized.

Byline:

[John P. Ruehl](#)

Author Bio:

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

John P. Ruehl is an Australian-American journalist living in Washington, D.C. He is a contributing editor to Strategic Policy and a contributor to several other foreign affairs publications. His book, [Budget Superpower: How Russia Challenges the West With an Economy Smaller Than Texas](#), was published in December 2022.

Source:

Globetrotter

Economic Growth In G7 Versus BRICS: A Reality Check



Richard D. Wolff

In the United Kingdom, the BBC [prepared and published data](#) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in January about different nations' growth forecasts for 2023 and 2024. The BBC foregrounded some really bad news for the UK. Of nine major industrial economies—the G7 (the U.S., Canada, Japan, Germany, the UK, France, and Canada), plus Russia, and China—the UK would be the only one to suffer real economic decline: a contraction in its 2023 GDP (its total annual, national output of goods and services). So dubious a distinction for the UK followed the long political night of rule by the Conservative Party. That night's darker moments included austerity after the severe 2008-2009 global capitalist crash, scapegoating Europe for the UK's economic troubles, Brexit taking place during the peak of that scapegoating, enjoyment of COVID cocktail parties by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government that it prohibited for the British public, and endless, transparent, and cringeworthy lying to the public when caught and exposed. But the BBC's [report](#) on the new IMF data was shocking about far more than the poor performance of the UK economy.

For the rest of 2023, the IMF says China's GDP will grow more than 5 percent or more than twice Japan's GDP growth rate. All other G7 countries will grow their GDPs more slowly than Japan. China's growth rate will be more than triple that of the U.S. in 2023. Finally, the IMF's projected GDP growth for 2024 *shows both Russia and China growing much faster than any G7 country*. These comparative forecasts comprise a reality check that clashes with most politicians' statements,

mass media accounts, and propaganda barrages (worsened by the Ukraine war) emerging from the G7's old capitalist establishment. The [BBC report](#) was thus both rare and arresting.

For 30 years, skepticism and disparagements confronted China's claims about its economic growth. When these attempts to debunk Beijing's claims were subsequently proven wrong by the country's stunning record of superior economic growth, the intensity of these efforts nonetheless mounted. Disbelief in China's economic achievements grew even as in-person visits to China confirmed high rates of industrialization, internal migration and urbanization, and fast-rising mass consumption levels. The need to disregard China's economic transition from extreme poverty to economic superpower status rivaling the U.S. reminds us of the Cold War-driven nonrecognition of Soviet economic achievements after 1945. A parallel nonrecognition figures again in the G7 sanctions strategy against Russia over the Ukraine war. For anyone seriously interested in understanding the momentous changes now sweeping across the world economy, one question looms. How do we account for the gap between what the old capitalist establishment says (and may even believe) and what is real?

The answer is that we are confronted with a combination of denials and pretenses that are caused by the conjoined decline of U.S. capitalism and its global empire (or hegemony). Those declines have occasionally become clear enough, at least fleetingly, to observers within the old capitalist establishment. For example, such key moments include the U.S. military's inability to "win" local wars even against poor countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Another example was the U.S. medical-industrial complex's subpar performance in managing the high number of COVID deaths and illnesses. U.S. capitalism's crash in 2020 and into 2021 was severe and then was followed immediately by a bad inflation and then a fast, destabilizing tightening of credit: not exactly a stellar economic record. Debt levels of the U.S. government, corporations, and households are at or near record levels. Inequalities of wealth and income, already extreme, keep rising. A public viewing such facts might reasonably wonder whether something bigger is at play beyond these events being seen in isolation. Might there possibly be a systemic problem?

But before such a line of thought can jell into a conscious question, let alone any serious pursuit of an answer, denial sets in. A systemic breakdown seems an unbearable thought, so denial of systematicity is undertaken. Statements about

specifics are carefully crafted to omit connecting them to their context of a declining capitalist system. Evasion of the systemic dimension leads to undervaluing the dangers each particular problem or crisis presents. Like rose-colored glasses, anti-systemic glasses make economic problems appear less dangerous, narrower, and more limited in effects than they actually are. The anti-systemic bias is a form of denial.

Consider, for example, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen or other officials when they bemoan deepening U.S. economic inequality. They do not refute nor even seem able to imagine that within a declining capitalism, the richest and most powerful will use their positions to shift the costs of its decline onto others. For example, raising interest rates these days to counter inflation—instead of imposing wage-price freezes like former President Richard M. Nixon did in 1971 or imposing a goods rationing system as former President Franklin D. Roosevelt did in the 1940s—is an anti-inflation policy choice. The burden of this option falls more heavily on middle- and lower-income recipients than on the rich. Similar cost-shifting is entailed by a policy of huge federal budget deficits because they are financed by borrowing disproportionately from (and thus paying more interest to) the richest parts of society. Yet mainstream G7 discussions of those policy choices and deficits rarely link them to the decline of U.S. capitalism and its global hegemony.

Complementing denial of systemic problems in G7 economies are loud pretenses about their good health in contrast to problems elsewhere. Like the repeated affirmations about a “great” U.S. economy contrasted with deep difficulties afflicting the Russian and Chinese economies. Ironically, those difficulties are regularly rendered as systemic, flowing from the “natures” of an “authoritarian” or socialist economic system. For example, in recent years, mainstream U.S. media reported that Russia’s ruble would soon “collapse,” that China’s building boom was collapsing, that China’s anti-COVID policies were wrecking its economy, and so on. Apropos Russia’s economy, the late U.S. Senator John McCain [dismissed](#) Russia as a “gas station masquerading as a country.” Around former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden, the argument was often advanced that beyond all policy specifics (regarding tariffs, trade, sanctions, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), economic system change in China was necessarily a goal on the horizon.

Reality undermines these denials and pretenses. That is one reason why they

struggle so hard to obscure reality. For example, China's economic performance, as measured by its world-leading GDP growth over the last quarter century, undergirds its confidence in and loyalty to its particular economic system. The [BBC's graphic](#) only further confirms that confidence. By the same logic, that [graphic](#) challenges the systemic self-confidence of the old G7 capitalist establishment. Denials and pretenses are not likely to be sustainable responses to the widening differences between G7 performance and the emerging (and already larger in GDP terms) alternative gathered around the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

Of course, both G7 and BRICS are heterogeneous assemblages including many significant differences among their members. Nor is there any guarantee that either bloc will retain its capitalist or socialist components or make transitions between them. Relations between the G7 and BRICS, like any possible transitions among various forms of capitalism and socialism, are now crucial social issues and struggles. Social movements inside both blocs will shape those issues and those struggles. To do that, especially if wars are to be avoided, social movements will need to set aside denials and pretenses and face realities.

Byline:

[Richard D. Wolff](#)

Author Bio:

Richard D. Wolff is professor of economics emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a visiting professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University, in New York. Wolff's weekly show, "Economic Update," is syndicated by more than 100 radio stations and goes to 55 million TV receivers via Free Speech TV. His three recent [books with Democracy at Work](#) are *The Sickness Is the System: When Capitalism Fails to Save Us From Pandemics or Itself*, *Understanding Socialism*, and *Understanding Marxism*, the latter of which is now available in a newly released 2021 hardcover edition with a new introduction by the author.

Source:

Independent Media Institute

Credit Line:

This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media

Neocolonial Debt Traps Are Forcing Poorer Countries To Rely On Fossil Fuels



Tess Woolfenden - Photo: Debt Justice

To break our global dependence on fossil fuels, we must take on neocolonial debt, researcher Tess Woolfenden says.

In the current age of climate emergency, many countries in debt are being forced by Global North elites and institutions to continue to rely on fossil fuels in order to repay loans taken from rich countries. This neocolonial debt trap creates a vicious cycle because — as a [new analysis](#) from the organization Debt Justice shows — revenues from fossil fuels are not enough to repay debts and instead leave countries even deeper in debt while at the same time worsening the prospects of achieving the goal of zero global emissions by 2050.

This debt trap is one of many ways in which colonialism continues to shape the current era. While dozens of countries gained independence through successful decolonization struggles after World War II, colonialism persists through the use of economic and political pressures to control “dependencies” as a means of reinforcing global capitalism.

In the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, Tess Woolfenden, senior policy and research officer at Debt Justice and the author of the aforementioned report, discusses the dynamics between debt and fossil fuels, highlights the consequences of fossil fuel colonialism and offers concrete policy solutions for breaking the cycle.

C. J. Polychroniou: Tess, it's a well established scientific fact that greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (CO2) cause global warming. The burning of fossil fuels — coal, oil and gas — accounts for over 75 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and 90 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, making them the largest contributor to global climate change. Yet, fossil fuels still account for more than 80 percent of global energy production and the energy transition proceeds very slowly. In fact, it is [projected](#) that by 2023, “fossil fuels will still account for 78 percent of the global energy mix.” Why is it so hard to phase out fossil fuels?

Tess Woolfenden: Very simply, the people with the power to phase out fossil fuels — governments, corporations and institutions — do not want to. The [fossil lobby is powerful](#), and with huge profits to be made ([\\$52 trillion since 1970 reportedly](#)), it is in their interests for the world to keep burning fossil fuels despite the devastating consequences.

For years, climate justice activists have fought to get the powerful global north [governments](#), institutions, corporations and [billionaires](#) overwhelmingly responsible for creating the climate crisis to transition to clean, renewable energy. But despite making various commitments over the years, phasing out fossil fuels is still not happening. For example, at COP26 governments committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, yet just last week [research by the International Institute for Sustainable Development](#) showed that the world's richest governments put a record \$1.4 trillion into subsidising oil, coal and gas in 2022. Rich governments clearly do not see these commitments as binding.

In the case of many Global South countries, we also must consider their [long-](#)

[standing dependency on fossil fuels](#). For decades, Global South governments have been reliant on their natural resources, including fossil fuels, to keep their economies going and to repay high debt burdens. This dates back to colonialism where, under European rule, countries' economies were transformed to focus on the export of raw materials such as oil and coal, to feed industrial growth taking place in Europe. The [ongoing extraction of resources](#) and inequalities in the global trade, tax and financial systems have meant that Global South countries have not been able to diversify their economies, and remain reliant on commodity exporting even today — many refer to this as the “commodity dependency trap.” What's more, Global North governments and Global North-dominated institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have extended this trap by [encouraging and enforcing Global South reliance on commodity exporting](#), through, for example, conditions attached to loans. This has kept countries poor and reliant on loans; it has also guaranteed cheap access to Global South countries' natural resources. So, for many Global South countries, phasing out fossil fuels also requires us to dismantle deep long-standing inequalities etched into our global systems.

Debt Justice, a U.K.-based organization, has just released a report, titled “The Debt-Fossil Fuel Trap,” which you actually wrote, on the links between debt and fossil fuel production in Global South countries. But before we get into those links, what do you make of the argument that Global South countries should be allowed to continue relying on the burning of fossil fuels for development purposes while the Global North countries reduce their carbon footprint?

I understand this argument. It comes from a place of recognizing that the Global North has used up more than its fair share of atmospheric space and has been able to develop and profit in the process, while Global South countries bear the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Why should countries in the Global South now not be able to do the same?

But as many groups in the Global South highlight, to do so would lead us further down the path of climate catastrophe. It would also maintain Global South countries' reliance on fossil fuels, extending commodity dependency and the economic injustices and challenges this presents.

Instead, in the global debt movement we call on rich, polluting governments, institutions and corporations to pay their “climate debt” — the debt they owe for

the destruction of the climate crisis they caused — and to provide reparations. These are broad, expansive demands that would allow Global South countries to put an end to their reliance on fossil fuels and have the resources they need to transition to clean, renewable energy.

The analysis behind “The Debt-Fossil Fuel Trap” suggests that the developed countries and major global institutions like the IMF and the World Bank have trapped many Global South countries into dependence on fossil fuels as a way of repaying their debt. First, can you talk a bit about the external public debt dynamics that the world’s poorest countries have to deal with and how the climate crisis and further dependence on fossil fuel projects is driving them even further into debt distress?

An important starting point is to understand that debt in Global South countries is not an accident or necessity — Global South indebtedness has been [engineered by Global North elites](#) to pilfer wealth and maintain their position of power in a postcolonial setting.

Many Global South governments started their journey of independence in an economically weak position after centuries of colonial rule and had no choice but to borrow. Former colonial powers were happy to lend — not because they were generous or invested in the development of Global South countries, but because it benefited them, politically and economically. Global South governments have [spent trillions on interest payments](#) to wealthy Global North lenders since 1970, while at the same time, governments and institutions like the IMF and World Bank have used their power as lenders to [control and shape global south government policies](#), including forcing decades of austerity onto Global South countries and communities with [devastating consequences](#). Many lenders, but especially the private sector, have seen Global South countries’ need to borrow as a [huge opportunity for profit](#), charging extortionate interest rates on their loans supposedly to cover the risk of lending. The result is recurring debt crises.

Thanks to these dynamics, and the economic impacts of the 2008 financial crisis, COVID-19 and the Ukraine war (none of which the Global South bears responsibility for), Global South countries are once again in debt crisis. [Fifty-four countries are in crisis](#), while many others are struggling with high debt burdens. This means the resources that countries could be spending on addressing the needs of people, from health and education to addressing the climate crisis, are

instead being spent on debt repayments to wealthy creditors. Our analysis shows that lower income countries are spending [five times more](#) on debt repayments than addressing the climate crisis.

But it's not just that debt is hampering climate action. The climate crisis is also making debt much worse, due to the refusal of Global North elites to adequately and justly respond to the climate crisis they created.

On the one hand, Global South countries are being forced to pay for the costs of the climate crisis themselves, pushing many into more debt as rich governments, institutions and corporations [refuse to provide adequate, non-debt creating climate finance](#) to Global South countries. In Pakistan for example, after devastating floods in 2010, the country had to borrow [\\$20-40 billion more](#) than would have otherwise been the case. On the other hand, we have the reality that Global South governments are trapped in fossil fuel exploitation which also exacerbates debt, despite Global North governments' and institutions' claims to the contrary. As I mentioned before, Global North governments and institutions like the IMF and the World Bank have long pushed commodity dependency in the Global South, including extracting and exporting fossil fuels, [seeing this as a way for Global South countries to develop, grow and repay debt](#). Not only has this caused devastating human and environmental harm to Global South communities and land. But also, the financial benefits of such endeavours often [do not materialise and can push Global South countries further into debt](#).

In Argentina for example, the government and IMF are pushing the development of fracking in the Vaca Muerta oil and gas field, in part to [generate revenue to repay debt](#). Activists have been highlighting that, because of the huge investments needed for this project, it will likely [exacerbate debt levels](#) rather than reduce them. In Mozambique, government guarantees on liquified natural gas (LNG) projects could [exacerbate the government's already unsustainable debt burden](#), while the expected profits from LNG projects — which are yet to materialise — reportedly [enabled the government to take out huge loans](#) from the private sector which pushed the country into a debt crisis. In Ghana — a country already in debt crisis - contracts which force the government to buy gas and other fossil fuel supplies at a set price and volume which far exceeds the country's needs have reportedly added [\\$1.2 billion to the country's debt burden](#).

The reality is that high debt burdens are severely hampering Global South

countries' ability to address the climate crisis. Meanwhile, the failure of Global North elites to adequately respond to the climate crisis is exacerbating the debt crisis — a crisis which is already in full swing and causing significant harm to Global South countries and communities. We have to break this cycle if we want to avoid total climate catastrophe.

With debt as a prime example, we can see that colonial legacies continue to shape the contemporary global political economy. And the same goes with fossil colonialism, which refers to the exploitation of fossil fuels in the Global South by companies and governments from the Global North. In fact, even the German and European Union green hydrogen projects in Africa follow colonial patterns, [according to critics](#). So, what solutions are there for the Global South countries, and can there be climate justice without debt justice?

As a starting point, we urgently need debt cancellation. But this is not happening currently, largely because of a lack of political will. There is a G20-led process in place to support countries seeking debt relief from their external bilateral and private creditors, but it has failed. Only four countries have applied, and only one finalised a deal with both its bilateral and private creditors — Chad. But this deal [didn't actually provide any debt relief](#) and instead locked the country [further into fossil fuel exploitation](#) by including oil revenues as part of the country's debt repayment deal to commodities trading company Glencore (a challenge [Suriname is also facing with its private creditors](#)).

Part of the reason this process is failing is because powerful creditors in the private sector — like BlackRock — have not been forced to participate in the process. While being one of the biggest investors in fossil fuels in the world, BlackRock is also one of Global South countries' largest bondholders and could make huge profits from the debt it holds. For example, [BlackRock could make profits of 110 percent if repaid in full by Zambia](#). We need to force these creditors to the table, and the best way to do this is legislation. Nearly all Global South external debt owed to the private sector is governed under English or New York law, so the U.K. and U.S. have a special responsibility to act and introduce new laws that would force private creditors to participate in debt relief.

But debt cancellation is only part of the story. As we have seen in the past with the mass debt cancellation that took place in the early 2000s, debt cancellation without wider reform that addresses the injustices and inequalities embedded in

debt and financial systems will just see debt levels build up time and time again.

That's why many of us in the debt movement are also demanding reparations — a broad set of demands that seek repair for the harms of injustice already experienced and realized over centuries, and that ensure those harms cannot happen again. From a debt perspective, this includes many elements, from regulating creditors and their predatory behaviour to ending Global South countries' commodity dependency and reliance on borrowing to meet people's needs. It also means recognizing that debt is one tool of injustice and exploitation among many and must be recognized as deeply connected to other struggles, including, of course, the climate crisis.

Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).

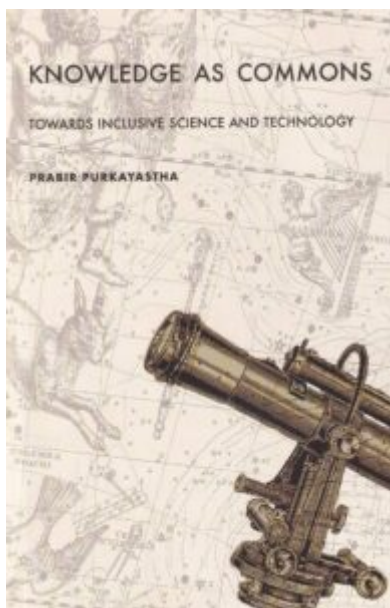


C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and*

Social Change (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Is Intellectual Property Turning Into A Knowledge Monopoly?



The twentieth century saw the emergence of public funded universities and technical institutions, while technology development was concentrated in the R&D laboratories of large corporations. The age of the lone inventor—Edison, Siemens, Westinghouse, Graham Bell—had ended with the nineteenth century. The twentieth century was more about industry-based R&D laboratories, where corporations gathered together leading scientists and technologists to create the technologies of the future. In this phase, capital was still expanding production. Even though finance capital was already dominant over productive capital, the major capitalist countries still had a strong manufacturing base. In this phase of development, science was regarded as a public good and its development was largely concentrated in the university system or publicly funded research institutions. Technology development was largely regarded as a private enterprise. Science was supposed to produce new knowledge, which could then be mined by technology to produce artifacts. The role of innovation was to

convert ideas into artifacts. The system of intellectual property—patents and other rights—arose to provide protection to the useful ideas embodied in artifacts. From the beginning, patents also had a public purpose—the state-granted monopoly for a certain period was meant to ensure the eventual public disclosure of the invention: the quid pro quo being full public disclosure in lieu of a limited-term monopoly.

The transformation of this system that had existed for several centuries came about as a result of two major changes in the production of knowledge. The first relates to the way in which, under the neoliberal order, the university system of knowledge production has been transformed into a [profit-making commercial enterprise](#). Secondly, the distinction between science and technology has blurred considerably and the two are more closely integrated than before. For example, an advance in genetics can almost seamlessly lead to an artifact—a drug, a diagnostic tool or a seed—that is both patentable and marketable. Similar is the case of innovations in the field of electronics and communications. Many disciplines of science and also research output in universities, are, in consequence, driven closer to the systems of production. The conversion of the university system into a system producing knowledge directly for commercial purposes has happened in tandem with the destruction of the R&D laboratories that were so much a part of the industrial landscape of the twentieth century. Finance capital controls university science, not just through “investment” in R&D, but also the purchase of “knowledge”. Its monopoly is exercised through buying the patents that university research produces. This monopoly in turn allows finance capital to dominate over industrial capital.

The end of the twentieth century revealed the rupture of finance capital and productive capital. Today, global capital operates far more as disembodied finance capital, controlling production at one end with its control over technology and markets at the other. In this phase, where capital increasingly lives off speculation and rent, there is also a marked separation of knowledge as capital from productive or physical capital—plant and machinery. Foxconn/Hon Hai Precision Industries manufactures Apple products but cannot claim a major share in the profits from their sale, since Apple holds the intellectual knowledge and property rights. Roughly, Apple gets 31 percent of the profits from an iPhone sale, Foxconn less than two percent.

The transformation of capital to rent seeking, by using its monopoly over

knowledge—patents, copyrights, industrial designs, etc.—characterizes the current phase of capital. With this, the advanced capitalist countries have increasingly become rentier and “service” economies. In essence, they dominate the world by virtue of controlling the global financial structure, new knowledge required for production, and distribution through retail and global brands.

Even as universities are captured by capital and turned into what is termed as [University Inc](#), the new knowledge they produce is still publicly funded. This is true alike of advanced capitalist countries and those like India. The direction of scientific research is dictated by private capital, which takes over any successful outcome, and yet this transformation of science did not come about through being privately funded. The cost of fundamental research is high and only a few of its research outputs may have immediate benefits in terms of advancing technology. This is where the state, whether in electronics or in genetics, takes care of the costs while the patents are handed over to private capital. A hallmark of the neoliberal system is the socialization of risk and privatization of rewards.

The understanding that science needs to be restored as an open and collaborative exercise has given birth to the commons movement. By a curious sleight of hand, capitalism sees the finite commons—the atmosphere and large water bodies such as lakes, rivers and oceans—as infinite, and demands the right to dump waste in these commons. Yet it regards knowledge, capable of being copied infinite number of times without loss, as finite and demands monopoly rights over it!

Never before has society had the ability it does today to bring together different communities and resources in order to produce new knowledge. It is social, universal labor, and its private appropriation as intellectual property under capitalism stands in the way of liberating the enormous power of the collective to generate new knowledge and benefit people.

Byline:

[Prabir Purkayastha](#)

Author Bio:

Prabir Purkayastha is the founding editor of [Newsclick.in](#), a digital media platform. He is an activist for science and the free software movement. His most recent book is [Knowledge as Commons: Towards Inclusive Science and Technology](#) (LeftWord, 2023).

Source:

Globetrotter

This adapted excerpt is from [*Knowledge as Commons: Towards Inclusive Science and Technology*](#), by Prabir Purkayastha (LeftWord, 2023). Reproduced with permission from LeftWord. This adaptation was produced for the web by [Globetrotter](#).

Another War Breaks Out In Northern Ethiopia, As The Threat Of Disintegration Looms



Regions of Ethiopia - Map:
en.wikipedia.org

“The worst-case scenario is unfolding in Ethiopia,” Gabriel Bizuneh tells me, as he organizes in the Ethiopian community in Washington, D.C. Once again, the federal government is at war with another region in a federal system where regions are demarcated on ethnic lines. Moreover, each region in Ethiopia has its own police force, special units, and local militia. This time, the federal government is at war with the Fano and Amhara special forces, which fought

against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and have been protecting civilians from the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)/ ONEG Shene attacks. "We have been pleading for so long for this conflict not to escalate further," Bizuneh adds, "but Henry Kissinger's policy of dismantling Ethiopia based on ethnicity, which the TPLF was an anchor for, remains in place."

The U.S. State Department supported TPLF, which recrafted the state on ethnic lines and is hostile toward the Amhara, who are a dominant ethnic group in Ethiopia. The Amhara dominance is deeply linked with the rule of Emperor Menelik, who was able to consolidate the modern state by expanding its borders in the south. Identity and culture are complex and evolving, but a colonial and Eurocentric interpretation of rigid identities that shaped the labor process, and controlled the natural resources and wealth, was effective in fermenting enmity and divisions. In Ethiopia, "[the seeds of genocide](#)" were sown by Italy, which after its decisive defeat in the 1896 Battle of Adwa (by a united front led by Menelik II and Empress Taytu), [introduced the idea of Ethiopia as a case of African colonialism](#).

While TPLF has been an effective tool to deepen this ethnic division, Kissinger can be credited as the originator of the State Department policy to support this agenda. Kissinger had identified Amhara as a dominant group (informed by analysis gathered from scholars such as Levine). He drew on an ethnic lens to interpret (or more accurately misinterpret) "[\[I\]ndigenous political change](#)" that resulted in the Dergue, the ruling military junta, turning sharply toward the USSR. Within Cold War geopolitics, Ethiopia had been receiving military aid from the United States ([even after Emperor Haile Selassie's overthrow](#)) until the Carter administration's strategic deployment of human rights to advance U.S. interests converged with Ethiopia's [Red Terror](#), and led to the emergence of the Soviet-leaning faction as the dominant force in the Dergue.

But it was not that simple. TPLF had debated these questions and concluded on pursuing an autonomous Tigray that ultimately remained within Ethiopia, while the Eritrean Liberation Front rejected it.

The Amhara have been targeted in massacres over decades without any systematic response to defend civilians. The massacre in Mai Kadra, Tigray region in November 2020, where [around 600](#) ethnic Amhara were killed overnight, was just one horrific instance. During the Tigray war, there was also an escalation in

targeted killings and massacres of ethnic minorities in the region of Oromia. This persists, [with two massacres having taken place in 2022 in the Wollega zone of the state alone](#). Tensions resulting from these incidents, and the federal government's declared intent to demobilize militia and Regional Special Forces under the National Defense Forces, have escalated fears of exposure to further attacks. The situation has become worse as a result of popular protests, and the assassination of a senior Prosperity Party (PP) official and his entourage. But the disproportionate response by Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's PP, which carried out drone attacks in August 2023 that led to [a high death toll](#) in civilian areas, has been atrocious. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has [raised alarm over the resumption of conflict](#) in the Amhara region, but this has not triggered as much global pressure as the war on Tigray.

The Pretoria Agreement excluded any broad-based representation across all affected interest groups including Afar and Amhara. It was effectively a truce between warring factions of the previous coalition government. Getachew Reda, spokesperson of the TPLF during the war, is now president of Tigray. There has been no accountability for violations by any side. The inclusion of the [geopolitically significant areas](#) of Welkait and Raya in the Tigray region in 1991, whose peoples identify as Amhara, remains a central flash point. Delegations of elders from Welkait have traveled to Addis Ababa and at times resorted to armed resistance, but to no avail.

An open alliance between the OLA and TPLF has escalated these threats, which was questioned by the Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa in his [last public statement](#), before he was killed in June 2020. How could there be a common agenda with TPLF? Nationwide protests after his tragic assassination saw ethnic minorities, including the Amhara, strung up and lynched in Addis Ababa and Shashamane, the homestead of Rastafarians who had relocated to Ethiopia in the 1950s. Meanwhile, Ahmed's PP has had [closed-door negotiations with OLA/ONEG Shene, the outcome of which has not been disclosed](#). Ahmed has also refused to reverse the TPLF/ Kissinger ethnic federalism.

Instead, in August, the Addis Ababa City Peace and Security Administration Bureau cracked down on "[institutions where homosexual acts are carried out](#)," a populist move, adding vulnerable queer folk to nationwide mass arrests under a state of emergency. A [UN situation report](#) also highlights a cholera outbreak, locust and army worm invasions, and dengue fever affecting different parts of the

country alongside rising numbers of displaced people. The latter includes people escaping conflict in Sudan.

Former President of the Amhara region Gedu Andargachew, in a [failed attempt to reject](#) the state of emergency decree, advised that the government must stop the dehumanization and persecution of Amhara across the country. Andargachew added that the government must not mobilize other regional governments to attack the Amhara region. Failure to do so risks state collapse in Ethiopia.

But there is still hope; People can join the calls to end the government attacks on the Amhara region; end the state of emergency; and release all political prisoners and those targeted for their ethnicity. Dialogue and independent investigations into violations spanning decades, across the country, and the prosecution of perpetrators for all violations are urgent. Failure to support these efforts may mean the Balkanization of the second-most populous country in Africa.

Byline:

[Tikur Netsanet](#)

Source:

Globetrotter

Credit Line:

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

The Korean War Continues With Biden's Renewal Of Travel Ban To North Korea



*Amanda Yee - Photo:
Liberation News*

The draconian travel ban prevents as many as 100,000 Koreans in the United States from visiting family members in North Korea.

On August 22, the U.S. State Department [renewed](#) its ban on the use of U.S. passports for travel to North Korea. This travel ban prohibits as many as [100,000](#) Korean Americans living in the United States from visiting their relatives in North Korea. The ban was first set in place by the Trump administration in 2017, and—in spite of Korean American activists’ repeated calls to lift the draconian ban—has been renewed annually since.

During his presidential campaign in 2020, Joe Biden had promised to “[reunite Korean Americans separated from loved ones in North Korea for decades](#),” but has extended the travel ban each year he has been in office. This current ban will [remain](#) in place until August 31, 2024, at which point it will either be lifted or extended again.

Families Separated by the Travel Ban

Kate Youngjoo Shim, an activist with the women’s peace organization [Korea Peace Now!](#), is one of the many Korean Americans the travel ban impacts. Born in Korea, Shim moved to the U.S. at the age of 15. Both sides of her family are originally from North Korea, and the ban now prevents her from visiting cousins and other close relatives there.

Shim pointed out the hypocrisy of the U.S. government lecturing North Korea on human rights while keeping so many Korean family members separated.

“The biggest human rights violation to me is not letting people see their family,” said Shim. “The U.S. government is always trying to say things about [North Korea’s] human rights conditions, but if you’re not letting people meet their mothers, their children, their immediate families... there’s no excuse.”

Things were not always this way. Shim’s grandmother was separated from her oldest son—Shim’s uncle—during the Korean War. After decades of trying to track him down while living in South Korea, her grandmother moved to the U.S. at the age of 65 in the 1980s in the hopes that it would improve her chances of finding and reuniting with him. The task had proved difficult for her in South Korea due to the political situation between the North and South at that time. Even after decades of not knowing where he was and against all odds, Shim’s grandmother remained hopeful that she and her long-lost son would meet again. After moving to the U.S., she even started working at a factory so that she could afford to bring him back gifts once he was found.

Eventually, Shim’s family was able to track down her lost uncle in North Korea, and her grandmother was finally reunited with her son after 37 years. While there, Shim’s grandmother also met her brother after decades of separation. She would return to North Korea again to attend her grandson’s wedding.

Shim’s grandmother died more than 10 years ago. If she were alive today, she would no longer be able to visit her own child or other family members because of the travel ban.

The ban is a cruel expression of U.S. imperialist policy, and as the generation of Korean War survivors are now aging well into their 80s, lifting it is a matter of urgency now more than ever.

“My grandmother was one of the lucky ones,” said Shim. “There are so many unlucky people who cannot even see their family members. Or maybe a mother has her children there. Now it’s been 70 years [since the signing of the Armistice Agreement], so people are dying.”

Trips to North Korea Were ‘Life-Changing’

And it’s not only Korean Americans barred from visiting family members in North Korea—the travel ban prohibits any U.S. passport holder from traveling there, effectively prohibiting any kind of [cultural exchange](#) between American citizens

and Koreans in the North. These exchanges are essential to challenging the U.S. propaganda campaign that dehumanizes North Koreans in order to justify sanctions.

Gloria La Riva, an organizer with the [ANSWER \(Act Now to Stop War and End Racism\) Coalition](#), called her travels to the North in 1989 and 2015 “life-changing experiences.”

“I saw people and a country that is the opposite of the hysterical, demonizing images we see in the West,” La Riva recalled. “I met people who were thoughtful and kind to visitors. That is what struck me most of all. When we boarded a full train, people immediately offered us their seats, smiling—the best language of all.”

“That is the *real* reason the U.S. government bans its citizens from visiting North Korea,” she continued. “It is the same reason the U.S. travel ban to Cuba has existed for more than 60 years. The U.S. fears that we will see the Korean people as our friends, not our enemy. The travel ban is a denial of our right to see North Korea for ourselves.”

End the Korean War

The crimes that Washington has inflicted on Korea cannot be overstated. It was the U.S. that divided Korea along the 38th parallel in 1945 and separated millions of families, occupied the South, and dropped [more than 600,000 tons](#) of bombs over the peninsula during the Korean War. So extensive was the bombing campaign that [U.S. pilots even ran out of targets and would drop bombs into the sea to safely land](#). Over the course of the war, the U.S. military leveled “[nearly 90 percent of major cities and villages in North Korea](#),” killing a [staggering 20 percent](#) of its population.

On top of the murderous carpet bombing campaign, the entire Korean War itself was punctuated by U.S.-backed atrocities: the murder of more than [100,000 people](#) during the Bodo League massacre in 1950, which was committed by the government forces of U.S.-installed President of South Korea Syngman Rhee; the Sinchon massacre in which the U.S. military and South Korean anti-communist forces killed [more than 30,000 civilians](#); the No Gun Ri massacre where U.S. military forces opened fire on civilian refugees, killing around [300 people](#). Taken altogether, U.S. involvement in the Korean War was nothing short of genocidal.

While the [signing](#) of the 1953 Armistice Agreement brought an end to the fighting, it did not bring an end to the conflict. The U.S. refuses to sign a [peace treaty](#), and it, along with the South, remains suspended in an official state of war with the North. And even after the signing of the armistice, the U.S. government maintains a heavy military presence in Korea and continues to [ratchet up tensions](#) between the North and the South. South Korea remains under occupation: it's home to the largest U.S. overseas base, and a total of [28,500 U.S. military personnel](#) are stationed in the country. South Korea also hosts the [annual Ulchi Freedom Shield joint military exercises](#) with the U.S. These annual drills simulate the invasion of North Korea and include live-fire practice attacks from the air, land, sea, and space. The war games present a dress rehearsal for regime change in North Korea. And especially [since 2006](#), the U.S. government, along with the United Nations Security Council, have relied on a brutal sanctions regime to punish North Korea for defying U.S. imperialism. These sanctions have caused [food insecurity, malnutrition, and medical supply shortages in the country, leading to enormous suffering and thousands of preventable deaths](#).

The travel ban for the U.S., then, is another weapon of war, part of its broader strategy to further isolate North Korea and inflame tensions between both halves of the peninsula. And with Washington forging stronger military ties with [Australia](#), [the Philippines](#), and other countries in the "[Indo-Pacific](#)," as well as increasing its [militarization](#) of the South China Sea, the Pentagon's ultimate goal is to secure South Korea as an ally in its road toward [major power conflict](#) in Asia.

"We're in a period of extreme tension in Korea," explained Ju-Hyun Park, an organizer with the nonprofit [Nodutdol for Korean Community Development](#), which advocates for reunification of the country. "The U.S. does not want to do anything to de-escalate that tension because the current situation benefits U.S. interests. The more conflict there is in Korea, the easier it is to corral South Korea and Japan into an alliance against not only North Korea, but ultimately against China and Russia as well."

This path that Washington is leading North and South Korea down will only lead to more war and devastation for the Korean people. The U.S. government has never been interested in peace for the Korean peninsula. For more than 70 years, it's done everything in its power to divide North and South, obstruct any and every path to lasting peace, and turn Koreans against each other. What the U.S. government owes to the people of Korea can never be repaid. But the path toward

justice begins with lifting the travel ban to North Korea—along with signing a peace treaty to bring an official end to the Korean War.

Byline:

[Amanda Yee](#)

Author Bio:

Amanda Yee is a writer and organizer based out of Brooklyn. She is an editor of [Liberation News](#), and her writing has appeared in Monthly Review Online, the Real News Network, and Peoples Dispatch. Follow her on Twitter [@catcontentonly](#).

Source:

Globetrotter

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