

# DEGLOBALIZATION | By Edward Ashbee

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Edward Ashbee's *Deglobalization: Short Histories* provides a rigorous and thought-provoking analysis of the forces that have shaped globalization over the past three decades, critically assessing whether recent developments signal a shift toward "deglobalization" or "slowbalization." Ashbee meticulously charts the mounting backlash against globalism, which has become increasingly pronounced across Europe, North America, and

parts of Asia. This resistance reflects mounting discontent with globalization's uneven impacts, from labour market disruptions to perceived threats to national sovereignty and cultural identity. These systemic fractures challenge the assumption of globalization's irreversibility and set the stage for Ashbee's broader discussion: Is the world undergoing a true reversal—or merely a recalibration—of globalization in the contemporary era?

Ashbee presents a nuanced critique of globalization, rejecting both deterministic narratives that depict it as an inevitable trend and revisionist claims that dismiss it as a mere ideological construct. Engaging with competing theoretical perspectives, he challenges conventional understandings by framing globalization as a “variegated process” shaped by political, economic, technological, and structural forces.

Ashbee conceptualizes globalization as a dynamic process that facilitates the cross-border movement of goods, services, ideas, capital, and people while

fostering deep integration across economies, cultures, technologies, and governance structures. This process, he contends, has engendered unprecedented levels of interdependence, challenging traditional notions of national sovereignty and reshaping global institutional frameworks.

Ashbee argues that globalization, widely perceived as an irreversible trend before the 2008 financial crisis, reached its zenith during this period. Nowhere was this more evident than in East Asia where rapid export-driven growth and China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) catalyzed its economic integration into the global system. In contrast, globalization in the West followed a different trajectory. The dot-com boom and rapid advancements in technology and financial services fostered an optimistic belief in a new economic paradigm—one in which sustained, uninterrupted growth was believed to be driven by innovation in technology and finance. Meanwhile, the expansion of transnational interactions, particularly through offshoring manufacturing,

triggered fundamental shifts in global production structures, making supply chains increasingly decentralized yet deeply interconnected.

However, behind this façade of progress lay systemic vulnerabilities. Ashbee highlights how localized disruptions can generate far-reaching global repercussions. The emergence of the term globalism reflects a growing perception that globalization has not only fostered economic interdependence but also empowered a transnational elite, fueling anxieties about a diminishing role for nation-states. As the book illustrates, various events and structural trends have stalled—or even reversed—key facets of globalization. The 2008 financial crisis exposed the fragility of the global financial system, while the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the risks of over-reliance on cross-border supply chains, prompting a reconsideration of economic resilience and national self-sufficiency.

Ashbee applies Karl Polanyi's double movement framework to contextualize the backlash against

globalism, illustrating how societies respond to the destabilizing effects of unregulated market forces. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, leftist critiques of globalization were increasingly overshadowed by populist and nationalist movements, which reframed opposition to globalization as a battle against globalism. The New Washington Consensus captures the shift in economic policymaking, particularly in North America and Europe, where national security and geopolitical competition have overtaken market liberalization as policy priorities.

Ashbee examines the role of ideational entrepreneurs—political leaders such as Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, and Viktor Orbán—who have used nationalist rhetoric to position themselves as defenders of economic and cultural sovereignty. He argues that these movements reflect broader anxieties about global economic integration. However, the book would benefit from expanding this discussion to include multinational corporations, international organizations, think tanks, and media influencers as ideational entrepreneurs who play

important roles in shaping globalization and deglobalization narratives.

While global trade has slowed, Southeast Asia continues to experience economic integration through ASEAN-led initiatives and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Addressing these regional divergences would provide a more nuanced understanding of globalization's transformation and its shift away from a Western-centric model.

The rise of techno-nationalism has accelerated deglobalization, as states increasingly prioritize domestic technological development and seek greater control over critical industries. Ashbee examines the resurgence of industrial policy as a key economic intervention tool, noting its broad adoption across the political spectrum to enhance economic resilience, national security, and future competitiveness.

In the US, industrial policy has made a forceful comeback, ranging from covert initiatives like the US military-industrial complex to explicit policy

interventions, aiming to bolster domestic manufacturing and high-tech sectors, particularly as a countermeasure to China's technological rise. A similar trend is evident in Europe and the UK, where governments have embraced more interventionist approaches to safeguard key industries.

Ashbee argues that industrial policy and economic nationalism are closely intertwined, as both emphasize national advantage and zero-sum competition. However, such state-led interventions often provoke retaliation, fueling protectionist cycles, trade frictions, and technology decoupling. While insightful, Ashbee's discussion could have delved deeper into the long-term risks of industrial policy, particularly its role in exacerbating trade tensions, increasing fiscal burdens, and distorting market incentives. A more detailed examination of the US-China tech rivalry and its impact on deglobalization would further strengthen the book's relevance.

Ashbee highlights a renewed emphasis on national identity and border controls, challenging the notion of an increasingly homogenized global identity. He

cites Theresa May's statement at the 2016 Conservative Party conference—"If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere"—as emblematic of the broader tensions between globalism and nationalism.

Ashbee's analysis highlights that the shift toward populist nationalism is not merely a reaction to economic pressures but is actively shaped by political narratives that portray globalization as a threat to national identity and social cohesion. This evolving discourse suggests that deglobalization is not just an economic transformation but also a profound cultural, political, and ideological realignment—one that redefines national identity in an era of heightened uncertainty.

Published in late 2024, this timely volume contextualizes contemporary economic, political, and technological transformations within a broader historical framework, offering a critical reassessment of globalization's trajectory and the counterforces that have contested its progress.



*Deglobalization* offers a nuanced analysis of globalization, presenting deglobalization not as a linear retreat but as a complex and contested reconfiguration of the global economic order. Rather than drawing definitive conclusions, Ashbee raises critical questions that reflect the fluidity and uncertainty of the current global landscape.

A crucial question remains: How can nations collaborate to avoid a descent into a Cold War 2.0—one that deepens divisions between “us” and “them” amid intensifying tech rivalry between the Great Powers? More fundamentally, who defines “us” and “them” in this evolving geopolitical landscape?

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