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### Authors

Lerch, Julia C

Bromley, Patricia

Meyer, John W

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# Global Neoliberalism as a Cultural Order and its Expansive Educational Effects\*

Julia C. Lerch  
University of California, Irvine

Patricia Bromley  
Stanford University

John W. Meyer  
Stanford University

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\* Equal authors. Corresponding author: Julia C. Lerch ([lerchj@uci.edu](mailto:lerchj@uci.edu)), Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, 3151 Social Sciences Plaza, Irvine, CA 92697-5100, USA.

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## **Global Neoliberalism as a Cultural Order and its Expansive Educational Effects**

### **Abstract**

The global neoliberal era has sparked a burgeoning literature. Most accounts emphasize the political economy of the period, focusing on global markets and privatization. By contrast, we conceptualize neoliberalism as a broad cultural ideology that has reshaped how we think about people and institutions in all arenas of life, not just the economy. We delineate three main assumptions of neoliberalism as a cultural model. First, neoliberal ideology re-envisioned society as consisting not of structures, but of individual human persons who are attributed immense agency, entitlement, and rationality. Second, the neoliberal model re-defines natural and social contexts in a manner that supports such imagined human actorhood, depicting them in terms of abstract rationalistic principles that apply universally. A third assumption, building on the previous two, is that progress is seen as emerging from universalized and abstracted human knowledge, rather than, for instance, from the material capacities of the state. Altogether, these assumptions amount to a dramatic cultural shift with broad consequences that include, but stretch far beyond, free markets. We illustrate these consequences by considering their expansive effects on education, drawing on existing studies and descriptive data. Overall, we expand sociological understandings of the cultural dimensions of neoliberalism.

**Key words:** neoliberalism, world culture, education, neoinstitutional theory

## **Global Neoliberalism as a Cultural Order and its Expansive Educational Effects**

The neoliberal era that came to the fore in the 1980s and went global at the end of the Cold War has reshaped institutions and people's lives across the globe. The dominant emphasis in the existing literature concerns the consequent globalization of neoliberal economics, such as free markets and privatization, linked to global policy frameworks like the Washington Consensus (e.g., Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb 2002; Babb 2005; Harvey 2007; Centeno & Cohen 2012 pp. 318-322; Reinsberg et al. 2019). But neoliberalism involved far more than economics: it reflects a broad world cultural order that brought dramatic change in models of society and the place of individuals and states within it. In this paper, we outline three central assumptions of neoliberalism as a world cultural ideology and consider their worldwide effects on education, a central institution in this ideological model.

In what follows we provide a sketch of the liberal models that lie in the background of our arguments and then discuss three dimensions of neoliberalism as a broad world cultural order. A first element at the heart of the neoliberal model is that society is re-defined as made up of individual persons, rather than institutionalized structures or collectives. Humans are attributed enormous entitlements, rationality, and capabilities in all domains of life (not just the economy). Second, the neoliberal model re-envisioned natural and social realities matching these imagined possibilities for empowered human action, constructing them in terms of abstract and rational processes. A third assumption, combining the empowered individual and the imagined rationalized world, is that people's universalized and abstracted knowledge is the main motor of progress.

These three dimensions of the neoliberal cultural model support great and expansive change in education systems. We discuss these using empirical illustrations and evidence from

existing research, before concluding with a discussion of the implications for society and sociological scholarship. A first point is that educational contents and pedagogies, as well as organizations, are reshaped to align with neoliberal cultural models of the person and society. Educational structures and curricula shift to reconstruct the imagined individual person – however unrealistically – as having increasing rights and capabilities for effective action in all domains of life. In addition, educational structures and curricula increasingly treat the natural world, society, and the nation-state as subject to systematic and rationalized principles that individuals can understand and control. Second, the neoliberal faith in the empowered individual and the rendering of more and more arenas as rationalized and suitable for schooled knowledge accelerated educational expansion beyond market demands. As a result, education worldwide expanded on multiple fronts– in discourse, organization, content, and enrollments. A final point is that as neoliberal principles have turned education into a centrally important institution and locus of social stratification, they have also helped generate a backlash against the knowledge society and its educated elites. Altogether, we argue that neoliberalism involves cultural principles with sweeping consequences that include, but stretch far beyond, the free markets that have transfixed the literature.

### **Background: Liberal Models of Society**

The neoliberal principles and educational effects we outline are not a complete break with the past but build on earlier liberal trends. Liberal models, which have long stressed education, became globally dominant in the wake of World War II. Horrific crimes perpetrated in the name of nationalism delegitimated both statist and ethno-cultural bases of national solidarity and provided the impetus for envisioning a stable world order of national states in

harmony. The new order was dominated by liberal principles, embodied in the treaties and organizations of the United Nations system (Ruggie 1982). Education continued to be seen as a *national* institution (Ramirez & Boli 1987; Mundy 2007), in part because Cold War geopolitics ensured that nation-states remained central on the world stage, but earlier foci on primordial national identities were delegitimated. States were to transition into more administrative and less charismatic systems (Evans et al. 1985; Sassen 2008).

During this period of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie 1982), the education of the national citizenry was defined as both a citizen right and a core pillar of national development and modernization (Inkeles 1973; Chabbot 2003). As both a right and a tool for development, mass and later elite education expanded, worldwide. Enrollment in primary and secondary education became increasingly universal in many places (Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer 1985; Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal 1992), and enrollment in higher education exploded everywhere (Schofer & Meyer 2005). Concretely, Barro and Lee (2013: 32) estimate that in 1950 just 1.1% of the world’s population over age 15 had completed a tertiary degree: by 1990 this grew to 4.4% and by 2010 to 6.7%.

### **Dimensions of Neoliberalism as a Cultural Order**

The neoliberal era marked a shift from the prior world order – a “disembedding” of liberalism from the national state (Ruggie 1998). The end of the USSR produced a triumphalist reaction; a previously implausible promotion of extreme forms of liberalism worldwide around ideals of capitalism, democracy, and socio-cultural freedom (Fukuyama 1992/2006). These principles formed a new kind of transnational or global governance system (McGrew & Held 2002; Djelic & Sahlin-Adnersson 2006).

Our goal is to develop sociological understandings of the *cultural* dimensions of neoliberalism, moving beyond prevailing scholarly emphases on the political economy of the period. Sociologists of course have long conceived of the economy as cultural terrain (e.g. Dobbin 1994; Fourcade & Healy 2007; Bandelj 2008; Zelizer 2010; Wherry 2014). In this vein, many studies move beyond economics in attending to the cultural, as well as social and political elements of neoliberalism (see e.g. Larner 2000; Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb 2002; Brown 2003; Fourcade 2006; Mudge 2008; Centeno & Cohen 2012 pp. 322-331; Fourcade & Healy 2013; Kentikelenis & Babb 2019). While generating a much richer understanding of the neoliberal period, the primary focus remains on the culture of neoliberalism *as an economic doctrine*, exemplified by Brown's (2003) statement that neoliberal rationality involves "extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action" (para. 7).

We expand on these studies by developing a broader account of neoliberalism as a cultural order. In our argument, the neoliberal construction of rationalized markets as the preferred arena for individual action and choice is just one dimension of a much more general change in models of society ushered in by the neoliberal period. As a broad cultural theory, neoliberalism envisions purposive choosing persons as commanding rationalized natural and social realities at large, not just the economy. Seen in these broad terms, the neoliberal model is underpinned by three main cultural assumptions, which we outline in the following paragraphs.

### ***Redefinitions of Personhood and Society: Global Individual Actorhood***

At the core of the neoliberal model is individual actorhood and a changed social ontology. Society is built up not from structures but from individual persons who are the locus of expansive attributed rights and action capabilities (Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Frank and Meyer

2002; Meyer 2010). This is partly a continuation of liberal trends. But in the earlier liberal era, individual empowerment was often understood within a state-centric framework, with individuals' rights and standing rooted primarily in nation-state citizenship rather than their individual humanity (Ramirez and Boli 1987). The human person was in good part understood as a national citizen and the dominant 'actors' in the world were nation-states rather than individual humans. With neoliberalism, empowered individuals are put front and center and no longer thought to depend on the nation-state (or other collectives) for their status.

Importantly, individual choice and action come to be seen as underpinning all social, cultural, and political domains. For example, there was a well-known explosion in international associational life from the 1990s onward, attributed to increased space for individual cross-border action with the demise of Cold War *realpolitik* (Boli & Thomas 1999; Reimann 2006). Numbers of private organizations, and international ones, grew at an unprecedented rate (Bromley & Meyer 2015). Related, the societal changes of neoliberalism spurred not just cut-throat efficiency in business, but also the rise of contemporary corporate social responsibility movements (Kinderman 2012; Djelic & Etchanchu 2017). Politically, democratic forms diffused worldwide, re-organizing polities around the aggregation of individual choice and interest (Huntington 1991; Diamond 1999, 2008; Wejnert 2005; Simmons et al. 2008).

Reflecting this intensification of individualism, national and international assertions of human rights expanded very rapidly in the neoliberal era (Elliott 2007, 2011, 2014). During this era, rights were articulated and codified for more kinds of people (e.g., women, children, immigrants, disabled people, and sexual minorities: Kymlicka 1995; Ignatieff 2008; Skrentny 2009). To cite one example, the widely ratified 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) included an impressive 54 articles (around 40 of which spell out substantive rights) and



three optional protocols (Burman 1996). Overall, more rights were involved, beyond traditional civil, political, and social rights: individuals now had rights to choose their culture, religion, sexual identity, and to some extent national and ethnic memberships (Stacy 2009; Enriquez 2013). The extant literature points to tensions between human rights and constraining neoliberal economics (in education, see Hill & Kumar 2012). But all these rights are reflective of an intensified liberal “cult of the individual” (Durkheim 1969) and the individualism that impacts all social sectors in the neoliberal era. There are clearly conflicts in practice, but a great deal of coherence in the underpinning theory and ideology of the individual (for a more critical depiction of the symbiosis of human rights and neoliberal ideologies, see Odysseos 2010).

Individuals were not only attributed more rights, they were also increasingly seen as empowered and even morally obligated to protect their own and others’ rights. Formerly, rights-related issues were mostly seen as the preserve of the national state, but during the neoliberal era rights were more often explicitly defined as universal human rights, rather than citizenship or other group rights, with the exception of some collective rights of indigenous groups (Shafir & Brysk 2006; Cole 2006, 2011). For example, the CRC specifically framed children’s rights as being human rights (Pais 1999), and the feminist movement reconceptualized “women’s rights as human rights” during the 1980s and 90s (see Grewal 1999). With this unprecedented emphasis on human rights, all humans acquired the obligation to support the rights of all other humans. They were seen, in short, as legitimated ‘actors,’ and this term, implying enhanced responsibility as well as capability and empowerment, was increasingly used in the social sciences (Meyer & Jepperson 2000; Hwang & Colyvas 2011). Crucially, almost all of these expanded rights are envisioned in universalistic, and thus global, terms: universal features of personhood that

transcend local settings and allow (indeed, require) individuals to act and mobilize on a supranational scale (Soysal 1994; Elliott 2007, 2014; Meyer 2010; Tsutsui 2017).

### ***Redefinitions of the Natural and Social World: Universalism and Abstraction***

The neoliberal conception of the empowered human ‘actor’ depends on re-imagined natural and social contexts. In particular, the assumption of universal, and thus globalized, individual actorhood calls attention to a world beyond the national state. Social, political, cultural, economic, and even natural life becomes envisioned on a larger stage – populated by individuals with theoretically limitless capacities for action anywhere and everywhere. At the same time, neoliberal globalization does not clearly specify what this larger stage for human action is. Regional associations like the European Union do not build anything like the heroic states of yore; and the United Nations system is even further from this model. Efforts to produce a defined global human culture, history, and language exist, but occupy relatively marginalized roles in the neoliberal world order (Elliott & Schmutz 2012; see also Kim 1999). Despite foci on human personhood, the extreme individualism of the neoliberal era precludes the construction of a defined global human society (Meyer & Risse 2018).

Instead of positing a real global entity, the globalized world under neoliberalism is thus largely imagined in terms of universalism and abstraction. The scientization of nature and society is obviously a longer-term historical process (Schofer 2004). But the neoliberal era propelled an intensification of universalistic principles, expanding the possibilities for individual action by universalizing the contexts in which people operate. The natural environment and all aspects of society are seen as subject to systematic, rationalized, and universalistic principles that apply at all levels of reality – local, national, global, and, in theory, beyond the earth (Drori et al. 2003).

The natural sciences, with their laws transcending the laws of national states, play a central role, as do the social sciences built on scientized models. These bodies of knowledge blossom in the neoliberal era, both in their purely abstract forms, and in their penetration of the professional training systems (engineering, business, medicine and the like: Drori and Moon 2006; Frank and Meyer 2020). A corollary is that social and natural life everywhere can be compared, assessed, and acted upon under the same scientific and quasi-scientific frameworks, in domains ranging from environmental damage (Hironaka 2014) to gender arrangements (Boyle 2002) to educational systems (Kamens & McNeely 2009; Kamens & Benavot 2011; Kijima 2013). It is a vision suitable for the rational and agentic humans at the heart of the neoliberal model.

### ***Redefinitions of Progress: The Knowledge Society and Economy***

A final assumption of the neoliberal model builds on the previous two and emerges from the myth of empowered individuals embedded in rationalized social and natural environments. In earlier visions – including the liberal period – a good deal of progress and change were seen as organized around material realities: the construction of railroads and factories, or the production of material goods. It is not that these notions of progress disappear in the neoliberal world. Increasingly, however, the assumption is that individuals steer the fate of the world through the application of abstracted and universalistic knowledge. Progress of all sorts becomes seen as dependent on, and constituted by, the knowledge of individual human persons (Schofer, Ramirez, and Meyer 2020).

The assumption is reflected in the extreme focus on ‘knowledge’ societies and economies during the neoliberal era (Powell and Snellman 2004). The knowledge society and economy are dependent not on the material productive capacity of the state and economy, but on the

knowledge, choices, and innovations of human individuals (Drucker 1993). Indeed, conceptions of the economy come to include all sorts of roles far from traditional notions of agricultural and industrial production in greatly expanded “service sectors” (Wyatt and Hecker 2006). As we detail below, education and especially higher education is envisaged as an essential motor. The knowledge that is imagined is of a highly schooled and professionalized nature, built around universalism and abstraction (Baker 2014). Alternative forms of knowledge – for instance, emerging from local traditions or faith – are not what is needed (Frank and Meyer 2020).

Seen through a wider lens, then, the cultural content of neoliberalism is not limited to the construction of neoliberal economic or market-based rules and values. The three neoliberal principles, or assumptions, that we have outlined paint a much broader picture. The ‘market’ is certainly central, but it is best seen as a master metaphor for the individualized and universalized social (and natural) world imagined by the neoliberal cultural model.<sup>1</sup> Universally, the expanded human individual is imagined to be in control of democratic political life, market economic life, free social and familial life, cultural, linguistic, and religious entitlement, and the taming of nature. Even developments usually seen as at odds with global neoliberalism or as a sort of double movement against it are embedded within this broader world cultural frame (see e.g. Kinderman 2012 and Lim 2021 for the intertwining of neoliberalism and corporate/non-profit social responsibility).

### **The Expansive Educational Consequences of Global Neoliberalism**

Once we recognize these cultural underpinnings of the neoliberal model, we can see a much wider set of consequences. To illustrate this, we now turn to the very central case of

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<sup>1</sup> We thank [anonymized] for this useful point.

education and delineate three main ways in which neoliberal cultural principles have reshaped education as an institution. Education is a useful setting as it is often seen as a paradigmatic case where neoliberal market competition has de-sacralized a public domain (see Mudge 2008, pp. 704 and 718).

### ***Changing Goals: Education for Individual Agency in a Universalized World***

A first key point is that the goals of education were re-organized in the neoliberal era to reflect, and facilitate, individual agency in a universalized world. Educational structures, content, and pedagogies shifted to embody and transmit the logics of empowered personhood and of universalistic understandings of society and nature, and there was an intensifying focus on the individual rather than the collective (Ramirez 2006a). This in turn has undermined the earlier educational centrality of the nation-state – in content and in organization – and impeded the educational construction of a real global collectivity that might parallel national society. We here review these matters empirically and by way of examples.

#### *Education for Individual Agency*

Society as composed of agentic people, beyond structures. The intensification of individualism transformed how society is depicted in educational curricula. Older foci on national institutions and elites stagnated, and curricula increasingly emphasized society as made up of individual people – depicted as having agency for action. At the level of mass schooling, for instance, textbooks in the social sciences increasingly discussed diverse groups of persons in society, such as ethnic and cultural minorities, as well as women and children (Bromley 2014; Russell, Lerch, & Wotipka 2018; Jimenez & Lerch 2019). Authorized by conceptions of society

as consisting of diverse people, various social groups mobilize to demand inclusion in school textbooks (see e.g. Kurien 2006 for social movements demanding positive portrayals of Hinduism in American school textbooks). In universities, there was much growth in gender and women's studies, and programs focused on ethnic and racial identities proliferated (Cole 2006, 2011; Rojas 2007; Olzak & Kangas 2008; Brint et al. 2009). Many forms of curricular discrimination and omission remain (see e.g. Ferree & Hall 1996), but there were notable trends towards inclusion.

Beyond depicting the individual, curricula in the neoliberal era showed them as having agency in society, rather than portraying them as passive recipients of the robust action of elites or nation-states. In general, discussions of human rights (a key indicator of neoliberal foci on individual agency) became much more prominent in educational curricula around the world (Suarez 2007; Meyer, Bromley, & Ramirez 2010; Bajaj 2011). Table 1, adapted from Lerch et al. (2017), shows growing emphases on individual agency in secondary school textbooks through the post-War period. The measure is an index assembling many items reflecting human agency in society, such as textbook discussions of rights-bearing individuals and suggestions for student action in the world. The scores jump after 1990, reflecting the brave new world of the period. Figure 1 provides an illustrative example from a 2008 Kenyan textbook. The example shows a unit entitled "Democracy and Human Rights." The text states that individuals must not only vote in elections (an "old" civic duty), but also speak out against issues ranging from mismanagement of public funds to environmental destruction. An activity asks the students to discuss how they can prevent corruption. Clearly, the text envisions individuals in a democracy not as dutiful citizens, but as empowered actors.

[Table 1 and Figure 1 about here]

The student as agentic. The intensified individualism of neoliberal culture produced curricula that focused more on the interests and choices of the individual than the authority of the teacher, state, or a canon (Lerch et al. 2017). It also created changes in the nature of educational pedagogies. Student choice and interests took center stage as a pedagogical matter, with growing emphases on student-centered and participatory teaching and learning (Robinson 2011; Szakács 2018; Schaub et al. 2019). Instruction in the sciences is designed to make the student a participant and actor – a real scientist – rather than a passive observer (McEneaney 2003). Instruction in the social sciences makes the student a participating actor in civic and social life, rather than a passive learner of history: indeed, a growing emphasis on courses in civics and social studies has challenged an earlier dominance of history in mass education worldwide (Wong 1991; Benavot 2005; Hymans 2005). Similarly, Frank and Gabler (2006) show striking expansions in social science curricula in universities around the world. Even in the humanities, emphases on student participation rather than more passive learning rise: students are to do rather than just learn the arts, music, dance, and creative writing (Frank & Meyer 2020).

Overall, a worldwide review of high school textbooks in history, social studies, and civics shows they become much more student-centered over time (Bromley, Meyer, & Ramirez 2011a). Table 2 shows a notable increase in the period after 1990. It reports textbook scores on a number of indicators capturing the participatory involvement of students in the learning process.

[Table 2 about here]

Educational structures as choices: Alongside the rise of new content and pedagogies, educational structures come to reflect the neoliberal principles of expanded individual agency. Standardized requirements weaken, as do long sequences of required courses (Frank & Meyer

2007). Student “interests” drive more of the educational system and “markets” drive the production of knowledge; in higher education this shift has been called “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004), though this term overemphasizes the economism involved. There is a broad expansion of the curricular choices available to students (Robinson 2011). A Department of Sociology might, for example, offer a course aimed at appealing to students, such as the Sociology of Rock and Roll, but not a classic one in Political Sociology. The students are to have a “personalized” experience of higher education; it would seem inappropriate to provide too much substantive specification.

Under neoliberalism there is an assumption that education should be geared toward the choices and interests of students and their families, as opposed to some centrally defined public interest. At the level of mass schooling, ideologies of school choice – as exemplified by voucher and charter school initiatives – become popular (Renzulli & Roscigno 2005; Torche 2005). At the university level, evaluation systems for students become increasingly important, allowing them to give feedback on faculty and have input into university decision-making; accountability becomes central (Strathern 2003; Apple 2005; Holloway & Brass 2018). The assumption is that students can and should be empowered participants in the development and assessment of university teaching, and of their overall experience outside of the classroom.

### *Universalism, Abstraction, and Action Capability in Education*

In addition to reshaping education around the logic of empowered personhood, neoliberal cultural principles increased educational emphases on universalistic understandings of society and nature. Since universal knowledge enables and legitimates action, the empowered neoliberal student should be equipped with knowledge of abstract principles and generalizable skills, and



the capacity to act on them. It becomes less important for the student to have substantive knowledge of particular settings, which presumably might delimit their action to these locales. Traditional authoritative content weakens and empirical realities become instances and illustrations for the application of generalized rules and skills, rather than part of a canon of facts.

The shift is reflected in a transformation in the types of knowledge taught in educational curricula. Subjects built around abstract universalistic knowledge gain in authority during the neoliberal period. In the university, the sciences and social sciences, with their generalizable and abstract skills, become more prominent, having earlier replaced the original high forms of academia found in theology and law (Frank & Gabler 2006; Drori & Moon 2006, Drori et al. 2003). Overall, fields of study that focus on rational human action in the world flourish, as reflected in the “rise of the practical arts” (Brint 2002): programs on business, medicine, engineering, education, or public policies of various sorts (Frank & Gabler 2006; Frank & Meyer 2020 call these areas “socio-sciences”). Subjects emphasizing universalistic processes for analysis, abstraction, and decision – such as computer science or statistics or “big data” analysis – grow especially dramatically (see e.g. Cope & Kalantzis 2016 for the rise of “big data” in education; see also Jarke & Breiter 2019 and Science and Technology Observatory 2019).

Even within the sciences and social sciences, the trend is towards more universalistic curricula over more concrete forms. Abstract biology replaces more concrete botany and zoology (Frank & Gabler 2006). In mathematics, a focus on understanding mathematical processes and developing “mathematical mindsets” replaces what is now seen as “rote learning” (Boaler 2015). And in political science, universalistic theories like rational choice displace earlier foci on the study of particular places, such as world regions (Fukuyama 2005; see also Szanton 2004 for social scientific universalism versus area studies more broadly). Along a related dimension, the

natural and social sciences shift toward celebrating “applied” research over “fundamental” or “basic” research to a far greater degree than in prior eras, making ever growing social and natural domains susceptible to rational human action (Ramirez 2006b; Frank & Gabler 2006). So, for example, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (2019) can advertise on its website that “new application areas are constantly being discovered while established techniques are being applied in new ways and in emerging fields,” and point to a stunning array of careers for mathematicians ranging from systems biology to data mining to finance and ecology.

The long-term widely decried decline in the humanities – study fields tied to particular periods, cultures, and forms – follows (Bowen & Shapiro 2014). These arenas recede in their traditional forms. But they reappear in new guises emphasizing student empowerment, participation, choice, and expression (see, e.g., Rojas 2007 for the rise of black studies). Instruction shifts to focus on the student as performing participant, interpreting texts and creating art rather than simply observing and listening (Bryson 1995, 2002). Attempts to enforce “proper” versions of language, history, literature, music and art lose their bite (Allardyce 1982) – the students are now prepared to take action in creating their own world. Today, it would seem almost abusive to require students to memorize many concrete details of history, literature, and the arts. Instead, they can learn how to use “methods,” how do to “research,” how to imagine and innovate, how to “communicate,” how to “interact,” and so on (Frank & Meyer 2020).

The resultant educational emphases are, to a surprising extent, free of concrete substance: they can be applied anywhere. No longer made up of concrete and particularistic details, local natural and social systems come to be taught as instances of universal categories, worldwide subject to the same universalistic laws that govern human action.

### *The Taming of the Nation-State*

These shifts toward individualism and universalism greatly impact the national state. In the liberal era, much curricular attention focused on the nation-state and the communal structures rooted within it – such as race, ethnicity, and religion (Lerch, Russell, & Ramirez 2017; Lerch et al. 2017). While World War II had stigmatized nationalist and racist ideologies, curricula continued to take national and other social differences for granted – and sometimes organized them hierarchically. For instance, nomadic societies could routinely be depicted as inferior to pastoral ones. Indigenous and minority groups were often left out or shown as requiring civilizing and assimilation into the national state (FitzGerald 1979; Loewen 1995/2007; Moreau 2003; Crawford 2013).

In the neoliberal era, however, the nation-state loses particularistic content and is portrayed as a stylized instance of universal society, everywhere rooted in human action. For instance, Szakács (2018) finds that Romanian textbooks depict their country mainly as a proper instance of Europe (which is seen as a proper instance of a world-defined society). Similarly, Soysal and Wong (2006) find that changes to citizenship education in several countries across Europe invoke a new type of citizen, a “universal citizen equipped with civic qualities and ready to participate in a multitude of public spaces – local, national, European, and global” (81; see the same chapter for similar trends in Asia). National heroes tend to be de-emphasized, as are great national political and military figures (Mao 1995; Soysal 2002). Indeed, war – previously often seen as the crucible of the nation-state – is less celebrated (Lachman & Mitchell 2014). Overall, the expanded and universalized picture of the wider environment lowered the primordially and charisma of the national state, adding layers of scientized reality on top of depictions of national and state structure more than entirely replacing them (Bromley & Cole 2017).

This de-particularization of the nation-state has not been a purely curricular affair, but an organizational one, too. As the social and natural systems into which students are socialized come to be imagined in universalistic terms, the realization grows that education can and should be structured similarly around the world. Educational comparisons and rankings and universal ‘best practices’ prosper in the neoliberal era, displacing earlier assumptions of nationally unique educational systems. Moreover, educational involvement by non-state organization and groups of individuals became increasingly legitimate and indeed, encouraged, in the neoliberal era (Ball 2012). Philosophies of New Public Management reconstructed the nation-state as an instance of “organization,” challenging its distinctiveness as an “actor” generally, and as provider of education specifically (Hood 1991). In higher education, the role of the nation-state was reframed. No longer seen as ultimate funder and planner of the university sector, it became tasked with regulating what were increasingly market-based systems of higher education (see the transition from Jencks & Riesman [1968] on the post-war rise of the national academic professions, to Slaughter & Rhoades’s reversal in the neoliberal era [2004]). The number of private higher education institutions increased dramatically, as privatization became a preferred model for expanding higher education (Buckner 2017a). At the level of mass schooling, private individuals and groups joined the nation-state as equally legitimate (and in some cases preferred) providers of schooling, as evident by home schooling and charter school movements (Stevens 2009; Fuller 2003; Berends 2015).

### *The Limited Supra-National Collective*

While undermining the nation-state and leading to an unprecedented emphasis on empowered individuals in universalized action settings, the neoliberal era paradoxically also

undermined the educational construction of a real supra-national entity. We can contrast the present situation with one that might have arisen under different cultural conditions, where educational globalization might have involved the emergence of a strong global Minister of Education, reporting to a central world state. This Minister might emphasize sciences and social sciences, but would likely also give priority to the construction of a world society, with its history, cultural achievements, language(s) and iconic places and events. Neoliberal individualism reduces the legitimacy of these older bases of identity-building (which played a central role in constructions of national communities), precluding the construction of a real global collectivity that might parallel national society.

Thus, despite unprecedented universalization, educational emphases on a standardized and globalized human identity, history, and culture are relatively weak in the neoliberal era. The student is empowered and responsible to be a good “citizen” – even a “global citizen” – but of an imagined expansive universe of abstract skills and principles, not a specific global society akin to the shared customs and relations of a national one. A handful of international efforts aim to create a more cohesive supra-national society, and under other cultural conditions more curricular attention could be given to these efforts. For example, the UNESCO World Heritage Education Program was initiated in 1994 to give “young people a chance to voice their concerns and to become involved in the protection of our common cultural and natural heritage” (UNESCO 2019a). More recently, UNESCO has launched a new initiative on the “Futures of Education,” seeking to “reimagine how education and knowledge can contribute to the global common good [...] and shape the future of humanity and planet” (UNESCO 2019b). Under an ideology that prizes the development of individual identities, however, such educational

emphases on a shared human identity are rather rare, at this point in time: there is much ambiguity in what brings humans together as a global society (Meyer and Risse 2018).

In sum, in contrast to the celebration of the nation-state, the neoliberal curriculum and education system make a feeble effort to embed the student in standardized supra-national authority systems. The student is to be socialized to a generalized personhood, not citizen-membership in a defined political order. Grand narratives of human history are often critiqued as being incomplete or biased. One historian explains, “It is hard not to conclude that global history is another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues” (Adelman 2017). Instead of a shared substantive culture, the universal society constructed through education is built on abstract principles of universal knowledge and capability: the generalized human actor is dramatized, but real global citizenship is a distant dream.

### ***Institutional Expansion: Education for the Knowledge Society and Economy***

Neoliberal theories of individual empowerment and a universalized world have made education a much more central, and much more expanded, institution than ever before. Progress is seen as driven by abstracted and universalistic knowledge embodied in individual human persons, who are highly schooled: a central feature of neoliberal ideology is that the creation of a “knowledge society” or “knowledge economy” is produced by education (Gibbons et al. 1994; Frank & Meyer 2007, Frank and Meyer 2020). Education is thus a core requirement for the individual human ‘actors’ populating the universalized neoliberal world and becomes a fundamental, and globally enforced, human right – as reflected in the Education for All movement (Chabbot 2003; Schaub, Henck, & Baker 2017). As a result, the reach and centrality

of education as an institution expanded enormously during the neoliberal period. Discourse and organization focused on education proliferated nationally and supranationally, enrollments grew (especially in higher education), and new educational domains and tasks were constructed. Again, we review these matters using descriptive data and illustrative examples.

### *Expansionary Discourse*

One indicator for the increased importance of education in the neoliberal era is expansion in educational discourse. For example, there was a striking expansion in reporting to international organizations on national education policies and reforms (Bromley et al. 2021). Figure 2 depicts this trend by graphing counts of country reports related to education submitted to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank under various initiatives since the early 1990s. The figure shows an expansion in both the types of submitted reports, and in numbers for most types, with the World Bank’s “Systems Approach for Better Education Results” (SABER) initiative triggering a particularly notable recent reporting increase. Jakobi (2011) shows a similarly increased focus on education in political party policies of OECD countries. International organizations themselves increased their scientific output (Zapp 2018) and expanded their discourse on higher education (Buckner 2017b). As one example, the European Union made educational improvement central to its vision of the development of a knowledge economy (Teichler 2002) – a policy program that has had enormous impact elsewhere. The focus was particularly on higher education, and the world’s universities were subject to evaluation in their status as “world class” (Shin & Kehm 2012).

[Figure 2 about here]

### *Expanded Organization*

Beyond educational discourse, global and national organization dedicated to the promotion of education proliferated in the neoliberal era. One global indicator is the expansion of numbers of education organizations of varying sorts worldwide. For example, Mundy and Murphy (2001) show the rise of transnational advocacy networks in education. Numbers of educational international governmental and non-governmental organizations both expanded greatly (Mundy et al. 2016). Figure 3 shows explosive growth in international non-governmental organizations focused on education since the mid-century, with a clear boost in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Former charitable structures, given a generalized human right to education, turn to schooling as fundamental. Indeed, the Education for All movement saw an unprecedented involvement of non-governmental groups and individuals in global educational governance (Chabbott 2003). In a study of a subset of these organizations, Bromley (2010) finds that their concerns have greatly expanded, and now encompass not only service delivery but also monitoring, evaluation, and research. Further, more private for-profit structures got involved in the education enterprise (Ball 2012). At the national level, a recent cross-national study shows massive growth in domestic civil society organizations focused on education (Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer 2018).

[Figure 3 about here]

Another organizational indicator is a growth in international educational standards. We discuss these above as discursive structures, but they increasingly take on organizational authority. This is exemplified by the Bologna Process – a major and long-lasting enterprise of the European Union aimed at harmonizing higher education institutions (Teichler 2002; Vögtle &



Martens 2014). And the influential (world) university rankings that have emerged in the past two decades to classify and compare local universities within a shared global arena have taken on organizational and policy power in many countries, and begun to shape individual choices among students (see Espeland & Sauder 2007 for U.S. law schools; see also Rauhvargers 2011; for effects on individuals see Cebolla-Boado, Hu, & Soysal 2018). At the level of mass schooling, structures to expand and implement standardized assessments grow, with especially remarkable development in international tests: in terms of numbers, participants, and tested domains (Kamens & McNeely 2009; Kamens & Benavot 2011; Kijima 2013). At the national level, following on these models, educational assessments become commonplace (Ramirez, Schofer, & Meyer 2018).

### *Enrollment Growth*

The expansion of education discourse and organization was accompanied by, and gave rise to, a notable boost in educational enrollments. The earlier liberal period had massively expanded primary enrollments (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal 1992). The expansionary effects of the neoliberal period were thus more visible at the secondary and, even more, the tertiary level. The world gross secondary enrollment ratio increased from around 50% in the mid-1980s to above 75% in 2017 – presumably in part due to the pressures of the Education for All movement (World Bank 2018). Even more dramatically, the world tertiary gross enrollment ratio increased from less than 15% in the mid-1980s to almost 40% in 2017 (World Bank 2018). While liberal models had made mass education central to the production of citizens and workers, neoliberal models made tertiary education central to the construction of knowledge economies and societies.

Figure 4 examines the issue further by showing global averages of national rates of growth in the gross tertiary enrollment ratio. Obviously, we see an early bump during the liberal decades, likely reflecting enrollment growth as newly independent countries built up their higher education sectors (though it is worth noting that raw changes in enrollment ratios are relatively small, given the smaller size of higher education systems then). Importantly, however, we see a second bump during the late neoliberal period. Though percentage growth in enrollment ratios declines during the 1980s and is flat in the early 1990s (a testament, perhaps, to austerity measures), there is a clear boost later on, suggesting that an imagery of neoliberalism as exclusively suppressive of enrollments is too simplistic. The lowered growth rates in recent years may reflect rising anti-liberal oppositions to education (which we discuss below) (Schofer, Lerch, & Meyer 2018).

[Figure 4 about here]

Studies of the lowest and highest ends of formal schooling report a similar boost during the neoliberal era. Adult education enrollments rose, the result of an emphasis on lifelong learning (Jakobi 2009). And in the 1990s and beyond, efforts to expand early childhood education increased, rooted in the belief that “learning begins at birth” (UNESCO 1990). Parallel to the earlier expansions in primary and secondary enrollment (which begin prior to and expand beyond the evidentiary basis of a link between schooling and economic growth), expansions in early childhood education on cultural grounds begin before, and expand beyond, the contemporary wave of recent research advocating an instrumental rationale for preschool (Wotipka et al. 2017).

### *Expanded Domains and Tasks*

The growth in enrollment is driven in part by increases in the numbers of students in existing programs, but also by the creation of entirely new domains of education. For instance, education is called on to sustain human life in humanitarian crises (Kagawa 2005; Lerch & Buckner 2018), save and protect the natural environment (Frank, Robinson, & Olesen 2011; Ardoin et al. 2018), promote health and well-being (Inoue 2003), and prevent terrorism (Christodoulou & Szakács 2018). In addition, many more specialized educational programs prosper: education in emergencies, for refugees, for migrants, for prisoners, for disabled people, and so on (Lerch 2017; Lerch & Buckner 2018; Russell, Buckner, & Carsley 2020). The types of topics discussed in schools and universities also expanded (Frank & Meyer 2020): universities create new programs in, for example, gender studies, public policy, computer science and environmental studies. The overarching point is that the neoliberal principles we have outlined make education seem the obvious solution for all sorts of problems. Education expands on multiple fronts and takes on greater value.

The expansionary changes are especially striking when we recall that, only a few decades earlier, governments and international organizations were meaningfully concerned about “over-education.” Higher education for all was assumed to be unnecessary, and potentially destabilizing, for national progress (Boudon 1973; Dore 1976; Collins 1979/2019). As recently as 1979, a World Bank working paper could reach the conclusion that preschool interventions were not justifiable (see Wotipka et al. 2017). Such arguments lost purchase in the neoliberal era, with its emphasis on education as principal foundation for an economy and society now seen as rooted in “knowledge.”

### ***Backlash: Contradictions of, and Reactions to, Neoliberal Education***

The neoliberal order arises against oppositions from older statist and corporatist structures and doctrines. Its globalization also generates opposition from local, national, and religious forces. And the new world elites built around education and professionalism invite conflicts akin to older conflicts among economic classes. These conflicts are intensified by inconsistencies within liberalism itself, which are amplified in the neoliberal era: built on doctrines of human equality, it sustains and creates enormous inequalities.

These forces have created, in the past decade or more, a considerable worldwide backlash against neoliberalism. The backlash has affected all the social institutions penetrated by neoliberalism, not just the economy, and it appears in both national and global discourses. For example, individualist familial and sexual rights face attacks against homosexuality and the rights of women, often framed as defending collective entities, such as the so-called ‘natural’ family (Velasco 2020, Lerch et al. 2021). Global political rights face assertions of raw nationalism and attacks on democracy and free association (Bromley et al. 2020; Diamond 2008). Ethnic, racial and religious boundaries are set against individual rights; there is a striking rise in cultural variants of populism that target immigrants, refugees, and ethnic or religious minorities as ‘outsiders’ (Kyle & Gultchin 2018). And, of course, markets – especially global ones – are undercut in the name of national sovereignty (Guillen 2018).

Education – a most central institution of liberal and neoliberal society – comes under special attack. This is most visible in conspicuously anti-liberal countries (e.g., Hungary, India, Turkey), but is very widespread (Schofer, Lerch, & Meyer 2018; Lerch et al. 2021). It involves attempts at redirection or restriction, but often can also include increased physical attacks or

constraints on academic freedom. Figures 2-4 all show very suggestive recent changes worldwide: global organizational growth weakens, and rates of enrollment growth are cut back.

So along with the exorbitant faith in education that we have outlined, there are clear bases of resistance and reaction and attacks on educational systems. We can distinguish two bases of reaction: first, as education becomes central in national and world stratification systems in the neoliberal era, populist resentments focus more and more on the unequal authority and power held by schooled elites (in contrast to traditional class reactions to economic power). Second, the authority of unelected but schooled supranational professional communities produces reactions celebrating alternative local and national cultural, religious, economic, and political authority.

#### *Equal Schooled Personhood and Unequal Educational Stratification*

With the growth in enrollments and content, and the rise of the “knowledge society,” education became, worldwide, a central component of social stratification (Mijs 2016; Chmielewski 2019). Elites increasingly came to be defined – and created – by education, as opposed to property, family status, and political power. As one example, education credentials represent the few legally accepted rationales for providing unequal pay for equal work, despite the well-known and long-standing doubts about human capital theory as a rationale for this practice (Bowles & Gintis 1975; Collins 1971). As another, residential segregation (perhaps especially in the U.S.) is now driven by parents moving to good schools (Owens 2017). Research on social stratification, following on the changes, shows education becomes a critical element in structures of inequality (Kerckhoff 2001; Reardon & Bischoff 2011; Reardon & Owens 2014), sometimes legitimated by scientized doctrines about testing (Grodsky, Warren, & Felts 2008).

Overall, education comes to both legitimate and distribute highly schooled markers of elite status, such as cosmopolitan knowledge and orientations (Igarashi & Saito 2014).

As education became central in stratification everywhere, the schooled elites came to be defined at global levels, providing a more integrated global elite. This reflects broad changes in societal structure, with huge sectors of professional roles essentially constructed by expanded educational certificates and competencies (Haas 1992; Djelic & Quack 2010). In the “schooled society” (Baker 2014) the authority of schooled knowledge penetrates far down into the social structure, organizing local life (including sexual and family relationships) around general principles and bringing them under the jurisdiction of the educational system.

Naturally, this aggressive reorganization of stratification, and much of social life, under the authority of education provokes reactions. And so hostility that might once have been focused on economic elites and their power, comes increasingly to be directed against the putative arrogance of the educated authorities of the knowledge society. This is articulated by populist elites in countries running from Brazil to Hungary to Turkey.

### *Global Universalism and Local Diversity*

The reactions are in part facilitated by the particular type of globalization that has marked the neoliberal era. The neoliberal world order is organized around standardized and universalistic principles, rooted in scientific or social scientific doctrines that are developed and diffused by highly schooled elites. This form of globalization provides a weak basis for global collective action. It provides global order via universal and abstract principles without rooting these in a global entity with its own ontological status and primordial attachments (such as a world state).

This decentralized culture of rationality, with decentralized organizational structure, valorizes diversity more than unifying mechanisms of social control. Indeed, the individualism of neoliberal ideology affirms the validity of local and individual choices to form their own economic, political, cultural, and social mentalities. Older ideas of “cultural relativism” are superseded by much more aggressive notions of positive entitlement to a chosen culture: “diversity” is a positive collectively legitimated good.

Enabled by global validations of diversity and a decentralized world cultural order, various forms of oppositional claims against the neoliberal world order and its educated elites are thus encouraged. In addition to the populist reactions highlighted above, reactions can take the form of assertions of national, ethnic, religious, or cultural distinctiveness against a universalistic image of society and personhood that is seen as Western, American, or Christian – or simply global (see Bonikowski 2017 for various reactions).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Global neoliberalism is characterized by an unprecedented celebration of a human actor who could reign over rationalized and thus universal social and natural environments by wielding schooled knowledge. The human person becomes even more central in all institutional areas – most dramatically in expanded educational structures and curricula – and is seen as possessing ever more rights and capabilities. This individual is seen as acting (often rationally) in expanded arenas of generalized universalism (market imagery is employed, but far beyond economic arenas). The rationalization involved is envisioned in a supra-national order on this planet, but also putatively applicable everywhere and anywhere. In expanded education, forms of authoritative and concrete substantive educational content weaken, and the empowered student is

located in a great cosmos of universalized abstractions, with concrete materials serving as illustrative loci of choice and decision in every sector of social life. The social entity of which this student is a part, however, loses concrete definition and becomes universalized and abstract: the imagined global society is stateless and amorphous, constituted mainly by “knowledge.” Overall, education becomes central to all domains of life and to global stratification systems in the neoliberal era, and a growing target for backlash against schooled elites and their knowledge society.

Seeing neoliberalism in these broader terms suggests that existing analyses of its nature and impacts have been hampered by a conceptual narrowness that has unduly confined our attention to the neoliberal economy and its culture. Using the case of education, our goal has been to provide arguments and illustrative evidence that the neoliberal vision of individuals embedded in markets is only one part of the story – itself a reflection of a much broader underlying cultural shift. Of course, the effects of neoliberalism reach far beyond education.

Future studies could extend our arguments to study the reconstruction of other sectors in line with such *cultural*, as opposed to narrowly economic or cultural-economic, neoliberal imperatives. Social sectors worldwide have undergone major transformations in recent decades and broadened analyses of the changes wrought by neoliberalism could usefully expand explanations of these phenomena beyond economic and cultural pressures toward marketization.

For example, neoliberalism clearly intensified long-term changes in familial structures. Women and children were seen as individuals rather than family members: thus divorce and abortion became legitimated choices (Wang & Schofer 2018). Homosexuality was destigmatized and expanded sexual and gender identities and practices were enabled (Frank, Camp, & Boutcher 2010). The family as corporate entity was undercut, and individuals were increasingly seen as



able to choose sexual and familial identities. Similarly, neoliberalism supported expanded individualism in work life and organization. Occupations and organizational memberships were seen as individual choices, and much mobility was legitimized. Communal and corporate structures were weakened. Aside from the economy, political and social life were organized, and individual choices, and changes in choices, were disembedded from communal structures. For instance, individuals could freely change their religious and other commitments. Ethnicity and language identities were increasingly seen as individual choices (Boli & Elliott 2008). Across the board, older structures of religion, charity, recreation, medical care, and schooling were rationalized as ‘organizations’ inhabited by choosing individuals (Bromley and Meyer 2015). For example, church and school and hospital and recreational arrangements all became ‘non-profit organizations.’

All these changes appear in worldwide drifts in discourse, organization, and practice. And they all supported, and depended on, expansive education to both create and reflect greatly enhanced norms of individual capacity and choice. Our arguments in this paper have drawn on extant descriptive data, illustrative examples, and existing studies to document the educational effects of the changes. Our propositions point to a number of empirical directions that might be explored in future research on education. Complementing existing work on curricular content that shows growing emphases on individual agency, future research could investigate more directly the expansion of horizons available to the contemporary student. Some survey studies suggest dramatically higher aspirations (Schneider & Stevenson 1999), and we may suppose that contemporary students imagine themselves as capable of great things: artistic and literary productions, scientific and technical accomplishments, social and political mobilization, and so on. This shift in orientation should be linked to a shift in styles of instruction, which might itself

be examined, for instance, by studying the evolution of teacher training programs for changing pedagogies under neoliberalism. The case of environmental activism certainly reveals massively expanded actorhood on behalf of children and youth, with young citizens suing their governments about inaction on climate change (National Geographic 2019), and sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg given a previously unthinkable voice and audience on the world stage.

Future work could further build on existing studies of the evolving subject composition in schools and universities to collect more fine-grained data on the different kinds of topics that are emphasized within subjects and disciplines. Our arguments suggest that within individual subjects and disciplines, we should see an expansion in schooled topics, in addition to a shift toward both universalistic and applied foci. While we have emphasized that universalistic emphases generally do not translate into the construction of a real global collective, future research could ascertain whether this might be truer for some subjects than others. For instance, while educational foci on a single human society might be rare, the construction of a shared physical planet is likely more common, especially with the proliferation of environmental education (Frank, Robinson, & Olesen 2011; Bromley, Meyer, & Ramirez 2011b). With the present state of scientific knowledge, curricula probably easily depict the world as a unified natural entity, the “earth,” though not as an actor with rights and powers (aside from the Gaia movement – Joseph 1990).

Our arguments further suggest that common views of neoliberalism as hollowing out the state might not fully capture the impact of neoliberal ideologies on public sectors like education. Neoliberalism as a cultural ideology has certainly expanded the range of actors in education and thus challenged the unique position of the nation-state. At the same time, however, the centrality of education in the neoliberal imaginary is likely to have expanded governmental structures in

education, and made them more elaborate. Following on existing work that shows massive global growth in non-governmental structures focused on education, future research could thus explore the general expansion of national governmental structures, whether built on centralized or nominally decentralized models (Baker & LeTendre 2005).

Finally, future research might consider the educational implications of the populist and nationalist movements that have gained strength in many countries over the most recent decade (Bonikowski 2016; Bonikowski & DiMaggio 2016; Norris & Inglehart 2019). A range of reactions against liberal and neoliberal institutions are on the rise, aided by the contradictions inherent in neoliberalism itself: far-right and nationalist movements and parties are revitalized, as are critical left-wing movements. Levels of democracy are declining, and the value of major international institutions like the European Union appears to be increasingly questioned (Diamond 2008; Kurlantzick 2013). Future research could examine the extent to which these reactionary and oppositional movements undercut the educational trends of neoliberalism and promote alternative values and structures. This as a real possibility: political leaders in a surprisingly diverse set of countries (e.g. Brazil, China, Hungary, Poland, Turkey, United States) are actively asserting nation-state control over education, as exemplified by Hungary's recent ban on gender studies in universities. These leaders dramatize the reality of difference based on religion, gender and the family, the nation, race, and ethnicity. They reject the faith in abstract universalism and individual empowerment characterizing the neoliberal era.

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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1.** Emphases on Human Agency in Textbooks over Time

	1950-1969 (n=89)	1970-1989 <sup>a</sup> (n=139)	1990-2011 <sup>b</sup> (n=248)
Proportion of textbooks with:			
any discussion of: <sup>c</sup>			
human rights	0.30	0.40†	0.51*
children	0.33	0.35	0.47**
women	0.43	0.35	0.56***
racial, ethnic, or religious minorities	0.49	0.51	0.60†
the rights of:			
children	0.06	0.13*	0.20*
women	0.16	0.17	0.35***
racial, ethnic, or religious minorities	0.09	0.15†	0.22*
citizen rights	0.56	0.66†	0.64
health rights	0.03	0.08†	0.12
educational rights	0.11	0.20*	0.21
language rights	0.07	0.06	0.08
religious rights	0.15	0.13	0.18†
cultural rights	0.07	0.08	0.08
any student role-playing activities	0.16	0.15	0.40***
any suggestions for student involvement (e.g., volunteer)	0.27	0.26	0.37**

Source: Adapted from Lerch et al. 2017

\*\*\*p < .001, \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05, †p < .1 (one-tailed tests).

### Notes:

- Significance indicates the results of a t-test comparing the difference between proportions in periods 1 and 2.
- Significance indicates the results of a t-test comparing the difference between proportions in periods 2 and 3.
- For the various group variables and the citizen rights item, ‘any discussion’ was defined as the presence of at least a paragraph in the book on the topic. For all other items, we simply measured whether the book mentions the item at all. For the group rights and issue rights, this was conditional on the book mentioning the group or issue in at least a paragraph.

**Table 2.** Emphases on Student-Centrism in Textbooks over Time

	1950-1969 (n=89)	1970-1989 <sup>a</sup> (n=139)	1990-2011 <sup>b</sup> (n=248)
Pictures, Especially Child-Friendly (0-3)	1.22	1.47*	2.09***
Preface Addressing Student Directly (0-1)	0.22	0.25	0.45***
Assignments for Students (0-2)	1.06	1.37**	1.70***
Open-Ended Questions for Students (0-3)	1.06	1.40*	2.01***
Student Role-Playing Activities (0-2)	0.18	0.17	0.50***
Student Encouraged to Develop own Opinion (0-1)	0.16	0.25*	0.48***
Discussion of Children (0-1)	0.33	0.35	0.47**
Discussion of Children's Rights (0-1)	0.06	0.13*	0.20*

Source: Adapted from Bromley, Meyer, & Ramirez 2011a

\*\*\*p < .001, \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05, †p < .1 (one-tailed tests).

Notes:

- a. Significance indicates the results of a t-test comparing the difference between proportions in periods 1 and 2.
- b. Significance indicates the results of a t-test comparing the difference between proportions in periods 2 and 3.

## UNIT 7 Democracy and Human Rights

### Responsibilities of an individual in a democracy

In class five we learnt about the importance and types of democracy. In this unit we shall study more about democracy.

Democracy is a situation where people elect leaders of their choice. For democracy to succeed, individuals have to fulfill several responsibilities. These are:-

#### 1. Participation in elections

It is important that all citizens take part in electing their leaders. This is a democratic right that must not be avoided. By participating in elections citizens will ensure that only good leaders who will serve their interests are elected. Participating in elections helps to throw out bad governments as it was done in South Africa in 1994 when the Apartheid regime was thrown out.



Fig. 7.1: A person voting. This is a responsibility in a democracy.

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#### 2. Participating in public meeting

Through public meetings important information is shared between leaders and people. Knowledge gained enables people to take part in various development activities. Participating in public meetings is therefore very important.

#### 3. Participating in commissions of inquiry

Sometimes the government finds it necessary to get certain information from the people. It then appoints commissions of inquiry. These are valuable chances of giving information in a democratic manner. Information gained will help in making good decisions for the welfare of the people.

An example is the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission between 1998–2001. Its representatives went round the country collecting views from the people.

#### 4. Participating in education

Education will enable individuals to know more about the society and the nation as a whole. This includes civic education which covers the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

#### 5. Pointing out bad things happening

In a democracy people are free to point out bad things without any fear. This allows these bad things to be corrected for development of that country. Bad things that can be pointed out are the following:

##### (a) Corruption

When an individual witnesses corrupt practices he or she should report this so that it can be stopped. Corruption leads to countries lagging behind in development. For example, when an individual sees a police officer receiving a bribe and not arresting a driver for overloading, this must be reported to their seniors.



Fig. 7.2: Police officers who have arrested motor operators.

##### Activity

Discuss with your friend the cases of corruption that you know and say how you would help to ensure they does not happen.

##### (b) Misuse of national resources

When an individual sees national resource getting misused, he or she must say this out. For example when government vehicles are used to carry goods for private purpose, this must be pointed out.

##### (c) Destruction of natural resources

The livelihood of people in any country depends on care taken to natural resources. When resources like forests, rivers, lakes or soil are destroyed, the lives of many people who depend on them are also destroyed. In a democracy, an individual should speak freely against this bad practice so that these resources can be saved.



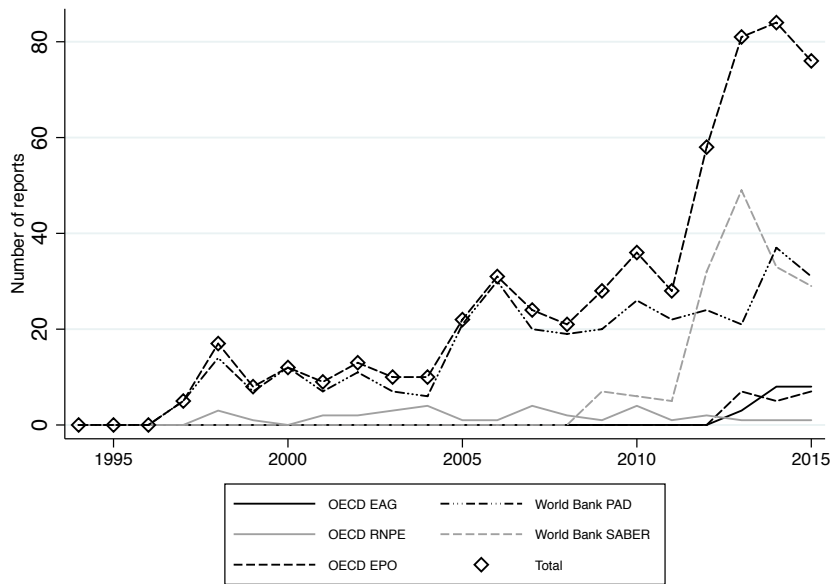
Fig. 7.3: Individuals should speak out against such destruction of forests.

##### (d) Mismanagement of public funds

When public funds are not properly used, we end up lacking services like education and health care. Individuals should therefore guard against such mismanagement of funds. When funds are properly managed, the country develops.

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Figure 1. A Democracy of Agentic Individuals in a Kenyan Textbook  
Source: Ondieki, Mbugua, & Muraya 2008

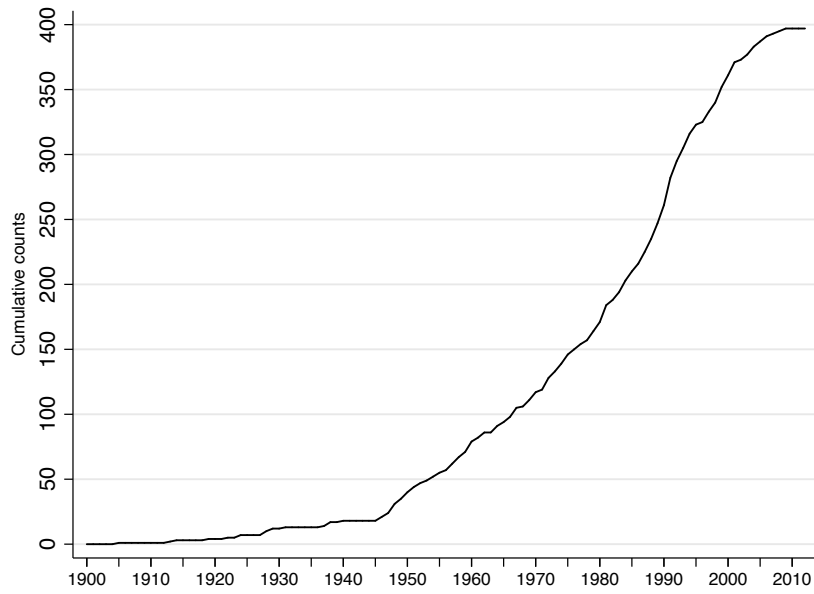


**Figure 2.** Growth in Countries' Educational Reporting to International Organizations, 1994-2015

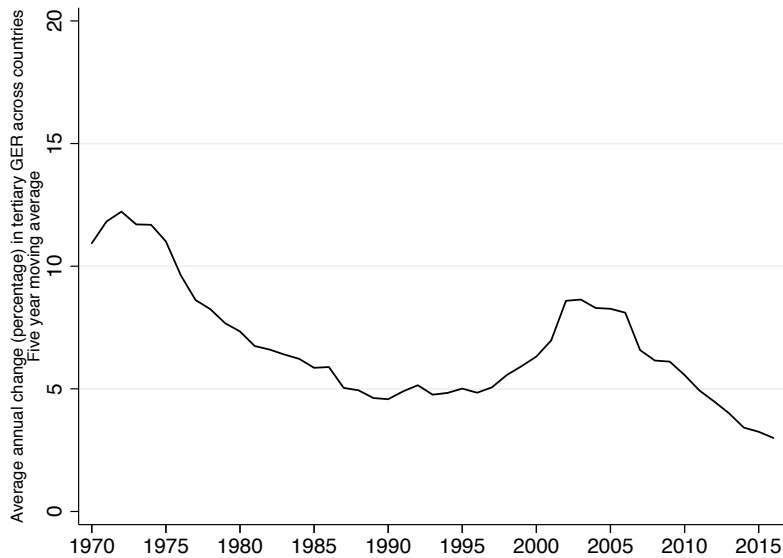
Source: Adapted from Bromley et al. 2021

Notes: The graph shows country reports related to education submitted to the OECD and the World Bank under various initiatives:

- EAG = Education at a Glance
- RNPE = Revised National Policy on Education
- EPO = Education Policy Outlook
- PAD = Project Appraisal Document
- SABER = Systems Approach for Better Education Results



**Figure 3.** Growth in Educational International Non-Governmental Organizations, 1900-2012  
Source: UIA 2013.



**Figure 4.** Average Annual Percentage Change in Tertiary Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER) Across Countries, 1970-2015

Source: World Bank 2018

Notes: Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to a given level of education.

In supplementary analyses, we re-created this graph using only countries that had observations in each decade (i.e. constant cases) to ensure the time trends are not driven by uneven data availability for countries over time. In addition, we examined the graph dropping all countries that were ever under communist rule during the time period, to ensure that the neoliberal bump is not unique to countries undergoing post-communist transition. Patterns were consistent with the ones shown here.