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# The World In 2050: Four Forces Shaping Civilization's Northern Future



## Synopsis

"A compelling portrait of the future and vividly relates the big challenges facing the world now." —Jared Diamond, New York Times bestselling author of *Collapse* and *Guns, Germs, and Steel* The world's population is exploding, wild species are vanishing, and our environment is degrading. What kind of world are we leaving for our children and grandchildren? Just who will flourish—and who will fail—in our evolving world? Combining the lessons of geography and history with state-of-the-art model projections and analytical data, Guggenheim fellow Laurence C. Smith predicts how the eight nations of the Arctic Rim (including the United States) will become increasingly powerful while the nations around the equator struggle for survival. Like Bjorn Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, *The World in 2050* is as credible as it is controversial, projecting the looming benefits as well as the problems of climate change.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Smith, a UCLA geography professor, explores megatrends through computer model projections to describe "with reasonable scientific credibility, what our world might look like in forty years' time, should things continue as they are now." Laying out "ground rules" for himself—including an assumption of incremental advances rather than big technology breakthroughs and no accounting for "hidden genies" such as a decades-long depression or meteorite impact—he identifies four global forces likely to determine our future: human population growth and migration; growing demand for control over such natural resource "services" as photosynthesis and bee pollination; globalization; and climate change. He sees the "New North" as "something like America in 1803, just after the

Louisiana Purchase... harsh, dangerous, and ecologically fragile." Aside from his observations of "a profound return of autonomy and dignity to many aboriginal people" through increasing political power and integration into the global economy, Smith's predictions, limited by his conservative rules, are far from earthshaking, and suspending his rules for a chapter, he admits that "the physics of sliding glaciers and ice sheet collapses" as well as melting permafrost methane release are beyond current models, and that even globalization could reverse, with "political genies even harder to anticipate than permafrost ones." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

How will civilization change over the next 40 years if humanity balloons to nine billion, sea level rises by a foot and atmospheric temperature by several degrees, and globalization continues apace? From those assumptions, Smith, a university-employed geophysicist, posits answers with a focus on the Arctic Ocean and its coastline. Familiar with the Far North through scientific field trips, Smith embeds personal observations into his predictions about the effects of boreal warming. Becoming more accessible to ships, Arctic regions in Russia, Alaska, and Canada will experience a raw-materials bonanza, with oil, natural gas, minerals, and water resources likely to be exploited as permafrost melts and summer sea ice recedes. Festooned with data, his discussions of such prospects valuably avoid either environmental or industrial advocacy and lay a factual foundation for his readers to learn how demographic and economic trends in the world's southerly population belts might influence development of the Arctic. Concluding with a half-dozen events that could upset his forecast, Smith exhibits trend-spotting skill in this readable account of the Arctic frontier. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I'll start off with the positives right up front, because I think the author, Laurence C Smith, deserves it. He has written a wonderful book, chock full of great information and insights, about a hugely complicated subject and with a difficult task and did an amazing job breaking it down and into a useful form. I love the fact that he is very measured in his predictions even though I'm sure if you're looking for a pie in the sky, gee-whiz, futurist vision, you'll be disappointed. He doesn't rely on or try to predict the black swans or easy answers to arrive at his main predictions. He does look at some of the larger out-of-tolerance scenarios at the end though which is refreshing and shows the scope of his thinking. Some books I've read such as the Next 100 Years try to do way too much and try to be too cool, thus eliminating their usefulness. Mr Smith is very realistic in his approach and what he bases his predictions on. The world doesn't make such leaps as our imagination can handle like

flying cars and crazy technology but moves at a logical pace; when disruptive tech does arrive, the world and society are a very large ship to turn. Mr Smith realizes this. I learned a lot from what he sees in demography and as other reviewers have noted, things like grain as water transfer and the relationship of water to, well, everything. I also love how he is a true scientist and can be critical of his own results and conclusions and is a big factor when I read things like this. Now here is the negative part, though negative is too strong of a word. This would be more aptly titled "The North in 2050," as the northern states such as the NORC countries are the primary focus of the book and his predictions. He sets up global forces such as demography, climate change, resources, and globalization (the push) and combines them with what is happening in the north (the pull) to predict how we will transition north. I believe all his predictions are fairly accurate as I mention above and I strongly believe this kind of specialization is needed in predictions... now it just needs to be combined with the rest of the world. I can completely understand why he takes this tack, as the Northern latitudes are his academic baby, so it is what he sees in the world and sees it as the most important. Luckily, his insight and passion (combined with his wit and writing style) add greatly to our knowledge and understanding. It just means that the book doesn't accomplish the breadth it advertises though it benefits from its depth. Overall, you WILL learn something (or really a lot of something) from this book and appreciate the work he has put in. It adds to the discussion in a realistic and logical manner and breaks down a complicated subject. It will open your eyes to the north and get you thinking. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the future, the north, or just for a good academic read about where our world could be headed. Well done Mr. Smith!

I found this book excellent. I teach Globalization to M.A. students and I plan to use selected portions of this book in my future Globalization courses as a student reading and discussion assignment. The book is very useful to help place Globalization in perspective also in the context of other major developments and global forces since -as one of the other reviews also indicates - it "identifies four global forces likely to determine our future: human population growth and migration; growing demand for control over such natural resource "services" as photosynthesis and bee pollination; globalization; and climate change" In a university course on Globalization one typically (or at least often) tries to cover the various "dimensions of globalization" placing more or less emphasis on each one, depending on the audience and the purpose of the course. Namely, one tries to examine the political, economic, social, cultural, ideological, environmental and institutional dimensions of globalization and their various sub-variables, as these manifest themselves or as they emerge and develop further in various "places and levels" on our globe at various times. One such "place or

level" is the Arctic North. In a course one can of course also "cover" the other main "global forces" above (other than globalization, and namely demographics, natural resource consumption, and climate change in the context of covering the "environmental dimension of globalization" ) But the book provides an alternative treatment which also does not treat globalization necessarily as a given or as necessarily continuing in the same form or to the same extent as it is occurring today. In any case in a university learning setting it is often just as important to stimulate students' critical thinking and their capacities to analyze, synthesize and examine using multi-disciplinary lenses, rather than providing any final analysis or definitive answers. One of these disciplinary lenses which often is neglected by non-geographers is that of the discipline of geography which can contribute a great deal to our understanding. (Geography and past History are two aspects of present reality which are relatively speaking constant and unchangeable though of course they can be interpreted in various ways and as such can also help us in trying to understand possible likely futures) And the book is certainly useful in providing alternative future scenarios and helping the reader consider how or why they may or may not come about (or their relative probabilities) and what and who could or could not do something about them. I also thoroughly enjoyed reading the book because it also tells a personal story and some of the adventures of the author in researching and writing the book and his various travels to areas of the North which I think are all extremely interesting and which most of us typically know very little about.

Very well researched book. very educational on many aspects of how the world works, like energy and demographics. I did not know much about how energy and clean water was made until I read this. I believe this should be required reading for all college freshmen to stimulate debate on how to prevent or at least minimize the effects of human impact on the environment and other species.

The focus of this book is climate change and the resulting shift of people and economies north. I began reading with some skepticism about climate change, but the author makes an unemotional, objective case. He doesn't make demands to reduce activities that increase global warming; he simply extends the current trends in warming, population growth, and economic growth, and then projects the consequences (good and bad) to the world's population. I hoped that his analysis would have considered expanding technology. While it is difficult to measure technological trends and project what will be commonplace in the future (20 years ago, who projected that social media would be a cultural force?), technology may well change energy utilization, efficiency and production. That in turn may control global warming and his projections of geographic shift of the

people. The book is very thoroughly researched and I learned a great deal (quite unexpectedly) about immigration attitudes and policies, aboriginal rights, and international relations.

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