



# What Is a Global Polycrisis?

And how is it different from a systemic risk?

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This discussion paper argues that the concept of “global polycrisis” provides a necessary and productive framework with which to understand and address major problems afflicting humanity today. A global polycrisis occurs when crises in multiple global systems become causally entangled in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects. These interacting crises produce harms greater than the sum of those the crises would produce in isolation, were their host systems not so deeply interconnected.

The paper elaborates several important features of this definition, compares it to other authors’ use of the term, and distinguishes it from the related concept of systemic risk.

The primary purpose (or analytical function) of the polycrisis concept is to focus attention on the *causal mechanisms* by which a crisis spreads through one global system and then interacts with crises in other global systems to create an inextricable global polycrisis. As a preliminary hypothesis, we suspect that *positive feedbacks* play a crucial role in amplifying, accelerating, synchronizing, and interweaving crises across global systems. A key research question is thus how these positive feedbacks form between global systems and their crises. The value-added of the global polycrisis framework ultimately hinges on its ability to generate novel, profound, and actionable insights on dynamics such as these.