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THE RACE FOR CRITICAL MINERALS



LITHIUM RISING

From the moment the smartphone alarm wakes us up in the morning, we begin our day relying on the lithium-ion battery. The toothbrush, the e-bike, the laptop, tablet, camera, hearing aid and smartwatch.

The weedwhacker. The pacemaker. From the mundane to the lifesaving, lithium-ion powered devices get us through the day.

The demand for lithium batteries has skyrocketed in just a matter of years. This trend is forecast to accelerate with the global transition to electric vehicles. If the fate of global transportation and climate change doesn't raise the stakes high enough, consider that the critical minerals that go into batteries are increasingly vital for modern defense and warfare.

Access to minerals such as lithium, cobalt and nickel has emerged as a vital geopolitical, economic and social concern. And the race is on.

So where do these minerals come from? And who controls the supply chain?

This upcoming documentary film from the Bertelsmann Foundation tracks the entire process across five continents. From the lithium mines of South America, to the cobalt pits in the Democratic Republic of Congo; from nickel smelters in Indonesia, to battery gigafactories in Northern France, to recycling plants outside of Macon, Georgia, this documentary brings the viewer up close and personal with the people and communities impacted by this global transition.

It is a journey to the frontline of energy in the 21st century.

THE FILMMAKER

Samuel George is a documentary filmmaker at the Bertelsmann Foundation. George's documentaries focus on the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, offering candid perspectives that allow viewers to draw their own conclusions. Three of his films have been selected for national syndication on PBS, and eight are available or are scheduled for release on the Kanopy streaming service. George holds a PhD from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

THE PRODUCER

"Lithium Rising" is produced and funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan foundation based in Washington, DC. Bertelsmann Foundation Documentaries focus on governance, economics, social dynamics, and most importantly, where these issues intersect. Our films have broadcast on public television across the United States, and are available on streaming platforms. They have screened at film festivals, universities, and special events around the world. Our film catalogue is available at www.bfnadocs.org.

STATUS OF THE PROJECT

"Lithium Rising" will be complete by November, 2024.



“Lithium Rising” features filming in Bolivia, a country with some of the largest lithium reserves in the world. However, Bolivia’s long and brutal history of resource extraction has complicated its ability to access the mineral wealth.

Across the Andes, Chile is a global leader in lithium mining. However, the process—which requires a huge amount of water—occurs in the Atacama Desert, one of the driest regions on earth. Have the surrounding indigenous communities become “sacrificial zones”?



Most lithium batteries require cobalt, and 70 percent of the world’s cobalt comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where miners work under horrifying conditions.

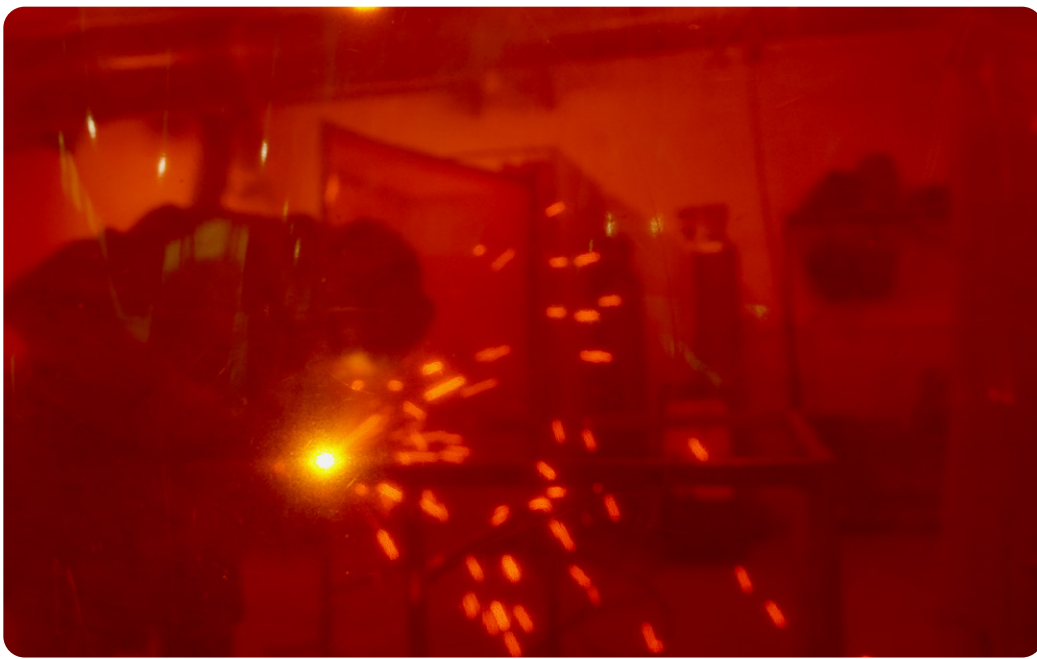
China currently dominates the critical mineral supply chain. This presents grave concerns for the United States.



Indonesia supplies over 50 percent of the world's nickel. Most of it goes to China. But what are locals getting out of the deal?

The United States has lithium! Thacker Pass in Northern Nevada holds one of the world's largest lithium deposits. But there is a catch: This part of Northern Nevada is home to Native people. Is the new mine dividing the tribe?





Could new battery plants bring manufacturing jobs back to Northern France, while also easing Europe's dependency on China? Folks in France's Battery Valley are betting on both.

EV production is booming in the American South. Labor activists believe this is because union penetration remains low there. Follow the story of the Blue Bird Bus Company as EV workers attempt to unionize; a harbinger of the labor battles to come.



What if we could build a lithium-ion battery without having to mine at all? "Lithium Rising" ends at the Ascend battery recycling plant in Covington, Georgia, where specialists recover the lithium from Chile, the Cobalt from the Congo, and the Nickel from Indonesia and prepare those minerals for their next life in a new cell.

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