

Prabowo Subianto: Indonesia's Defense Minister Poised For Presidency Amid Allegations Of Controversial Past



*Prabowo Subianto - Source:
nl.wikipedia.org*

02-28-2024 ~ As preliminary results hint at Prabowo Subianto's victory in Indonesia's presidential race, political tension rises with Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan seeking an inquiry into alleged irregularities. Beyond the election drama, Indonesia grapples with persistent issues from economic struggles to foreign relations.

Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's defense minister and a former army general, is poised to become the next president of the country. Although the official results are due next month, preliminary figures indicate that Prabowo will secure close to 60 percent of the vote.

Two unsuccessful presidential candidates in Indonesia are calling for an official inquiry into the recent election. Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan have alleged widespread irregularities in the February 14 election, including instances

of vote-buying and intimidation.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy and the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, shifted from a 32-year dictatorship to a democracy about 25 years ago. Despite progress, challenges persist like poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, and ethnic and religious divisions.

With vast natural resources, Indonesia actively seeks foreign investment for infrastructure and resource extraction and has strengthened commercial ties with China even while avoiding taking an active position in the escalating U.S.-China rivalry. In this regard, Prabowo will likely continue the policy of his predecessor outgoing President Joko Widodo.

Position by Candidate

The contest for the presidency saw a three-way race between Subianto and former governors Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Subianto, representing the Advanced Indonesia Coalition, is expected to get over [58.84 percent of the votes](#). Baswedan is likely to come in second with around 24.46 percent, while Pranowo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) will come in third with around 16.7 percent of the votes.

Elections were also held for parliament in which [18 parties](#) took part. Parties need to garner a minimum of 4 percent of the total national vote to obtain representation in parliament. In the 2019 elections, 20 parties were in the running, yet only eight successfully secured seats in the House. In this election, while results are yet to be finalized, far-right Islamist groups have suffered a setback.

This is the third time that 72-year-old Subianto, a 72-year-old military general and the son-in-law of dictator Suharto, contested for the presidency. In his earlier attempts in 2014 and 2019, he was defeated by Joko Widodo. This election, however, saw the old rivals coming together with Widodo's son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, contesting as Subianto's vice-presidential candidate. While Widodo, who remains immensely popular, did not explicitly back Subianto, the widespread perception was that the ticket had his support and there are allegations that state agencies backed the candidacy of the defense minister.

Subianto was in the thick of military affairs during the brutal Suharto dictatorship. He was a commander of the notorious Kopassus, the special forces

unit of the Indonesian Army set up in 1952. The unit has been accused of involvement in torture, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights violations, particularly during periods of political unrest and conflict. Kopassus was alleged to have participated in rights violations in Timor-Leste where an independence movement culminated in its gaining independence in 2002 following UN intervention.

Prabowo himself was for a while barred from travel to the United States due to accusations of human rights violations. He was discharged from the military following similar accusations. In 2023, activists launched a campaign called 'Don't Vote for a Kidnapper' highlighting his alleged involvement in the detention and disappearance of 13 activists who were active in the campaign against the Suharto dictatorship.

Critics have expressed concerns about Subianto's record during this campaign considering the repression over the years in West Papua where protests have been met with arrests and internet shutdowns. For decades, the people of West Papua have fought against Indonesian occupation, advocating for the right to self-determination. [In 2019](#), the region witnessed widespread protests against racism, intensifying tensions between Papuan demonstrators and security forces.

This election saw a concerted effort to whitewash Subianto's image with the former general being rebranded as a genial elder. An entire generation has grown up with few memories of the horrors of the Suharto era and Subianto's role. He also benefited from being seen as the candidate continuing the legacy of Widodo. The outgoing president had contested the previous two elections as the candidate of the center-left Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

The political realignment in this election was one of the reasons for a campaign marked by the absence of any major policy alternatives. While some of Widodo's decisions, such as the plan to shift the capital from Jakarta, saw much debate, there was little opposition to aspects of his economic legacy, such as the widely opposed [Omnibus Bill](#) and other issues raised by labor movements and environmental groups.

Subianto's main rival was Anies Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta, who was perhaps the candidate diverging the most from Widodo's legacy. He was a key opponent of the plan to shift the capital and headed the right-wing Coalition

of Change for Unity, garnering support from conservative Islamic groups. The other candidate, Ganjar Pranowo, the former governor of Central Java province who was once seen as a potential successor to Widodo, sought to highlight the PDI-P's traditional welfarist agenda.

Economic Challenges and Ongoing Struggles

Indonesia has faced tough economic times in its history. There was the [Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s](#), which caused a severe recession, social unrest, and the fall of the authoritarian regime led by Suharto. Then, in 2008-09, the global financial crisis brought a slowdown in growth, a bigger current account deficit, and a drop in the value of the country's currency, the rupiah. The most recent challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. It made the [economy shrink](#), more people became poor and jobless, and public health and the [value of the rupiah](#) fell further. In 2021, the poverty rate in Indonesia stood at [10.15 percent](#), impacting 27.5 million people. Additionally, the unemployment rate for youth, as a percentage of the total labor force aged 15-24, remains at [14.1 percent](#).

Indonesia faces several ongoing challenges. One significant issue is the large number of people without jobs or with low-quality jobs, particularly those engaged in low-skilled and informal work. These individuals face difficulties when unexpected events occur, and they lack sufficient social protection. Additionally, Indonesia struggles with competitiveness and productivity due to insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of well-trained individuals, a lack of innovation, and governance issues. This is likely to lead to a decline in the manufacturing sector, a significant contributor to employment. In the long term, it is expected to contribute to a higher unemployment rate and a decline in the standard of living.

Another pressing concern is environmental degradation and climate change, posing risks to the country's natural resources, biodiversity, and its ability to handle disasters. A survey by [Bath University](#) found that 89 percent of Indonesian participants were worried about the potential impact of climate change on their lives, with 66 percent believing they would be directly affected. The highest levels of concern were reported in disaster-prone provinces like Jakarta, South Sumatra, and North Sumatra.

The endorsement of a former Suharto-era general by significant factions of the Indonesian ruling class carries considerable weight. This support is notable in the

midst of widespread [protests sweeping across Indonesia](#), where millions are expressing opposition to Israel's brutal actions in Gaza. Simultaneously, internal social tensions are on the rise due to declining living standards, adding a layer of complexity to the country's political landscape. The official results and subsequent actions by the incoming administration will determine how Indonesia addresses its multifaceted problems and charts its course in the global arena.

By Pranjal Pandey

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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Source: Globetrotter

On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) V - Between Graveyard And Museum's Sphere



On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) V - Between Graveyard and Museum's Sphere

Het Nieuwe Domein, Ligne 5, Sittard - 3.2.2024-30.6.2024

At first glance, a cemetery and a museum seem to have little in common. Yet they both give meaning to the artworks Joseph Sassoon Semah presents in the exhibition.

He takes the visitor on a wonderful journey of exploration from King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, through Baghdad's lost public space, the waiting room of his grandfather Sassoon Kadoori (1886-1971), the chief rabbi of Baghdad, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, to spatial architecture based on the Talmud Bavli.

Performance

Joseph Sassoon Semah, Peter Baren, Masja Austen, Emile Schrijver, Ulco Mes, Theresie Tholen, Aletha Steijns, Jom Semah

Camera & Editing: Bob Schoo. www.n-p-n.info

Outdated Narratives Have Humanity In A Downward Spiral—It's Time To Tell 'Stories for Life'



April M. Short

02-24-2024 ~ A short film and narratives project “*Stories for Life*” seeks to bring about the shift in culture that humanity needs to survive.

The stories we do and don’t tell about ourselves and these times in which we’re living shape the direction of our lives and our cultures. Stories have the power to alter how we interact and relate. Those who study cultural anthropology and the origins of humanity are [finding](#) that cultural stories—the things people collectively believe about ourselves and our capacities—have forever shaped human societies, going back to our early hominid ancestors. In shifting those narratives now, they argue, we have the realistic potential to evolve on purpose as a species. Given the dire, [multifront crises](#) of our times—from climate disaster to war to poverty—this kind of cultural and social evolution is desperately needed.

An animated short film, which screened between acts on the big screens of each of the four main stages at the Glastonbury Music Festival in 2022, delves into the idea of story as a means for change. It is titled, “[Stories for Life](#),” and it opens with scenes of fire, a child digging through a pile of trash, plastic rubble floating in the water, and smoke billowing from an industrial tower. A narrator’s voice speaks over the imagery: “Life is in trouble. As a species, we are facing multiple crises that we can no longer ignore. At the root of them all is our economy; an economy designed to destroy life; an economy designed by us.”

As the narration continues, a series of illustrated signs seem to lay out the challenges of our world, one by one: “Capitalism is crashing. Society is dividing. Democracy is degrading. Climate is tipping. Ecology is vanishing. Disease is spreading. Inequity is rising. Protest is pervading.”

The film takes viewers through a brief history of humanity’s relationship with the Earth. It delves into the problems of our current ways of living, then offers the potential to rewrite the story of our values, and begin to create livable systems in which value is based on the well-being of all life.

Over animations of cave paintings, constellations, and wildlife, the film reminds viewers that “our ancestors lived in intimate relationship with the more-than-human world” and told stories about, “nature as our family, our guardian, our guide. But then some of... [our ancestors] imagined and created ways to control the natural world. This made them feel more powerful and superior to nature. Separate from it. The more powerful they felt the more disconnected from nature

they became. And so they began to tell new stories. Stories that normalized domination, control, and the oppression of life. About how nature is our slave, there to be captured and exploited. They began to scorch, spoil, and suffocate our world. And as they did so, these stories spread, and became common sense.”

This narration comes with animations of the industrialization and commodification of resources: factories, men in suits and wigs, ships with cargo. The film goes on to explain that such stories have led people down the path of greed, grand, hustle, and blind progress, and made people “feel separate, not only from nature but from each other, in constant competition and conflict.”

Horror Stories, Love Stories

The narrator notes that these stories then became horror stories of ruined lives and a ruined world, as images of refugee camps, rubble heaps, and melting ice caps show on screen. “But, it doesn’t have to go on like this,” the narrator says. “We can choose to live by different stories: Love stories about interconnection and interdependence. Love stories that measure success by well-being—the well-being of all life including our own. Love stories about interconnection and interdependence.” Now, the scene is blooming flowers, mycelial networks, collaborative groups of people, and brightly colored animal life.

The film outlines how these “love stories” will lead us to reconnection, so that we can regenerate our relationships with nature and each other, and create a steam that nourishes and supports the life we all want to live rather than destroying life. It closes with the reminder that “we all have the power to tell these stories,” and that many people are already doing so.

The concept behind the film is part of a larger website project launched in 2020, also called Stories for Life, aimed at highlighting stories that support ways forward for humanity and all life. It began as a collaboration between the [Green Economy Coalition](#), [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#), and the [Spaceship Earth](#), and as its [website](#) states: “This project was inspired by the question ‘how do we tell the story of a new economy?’”

The eventual Stories for Life project was co-created by Dan Burgess and Paddy Loughman with the purpose of helping to “create stories that contribute to the re-design of a healthier economy. To bring forth new and ancient stories into our culture, which weave a narrative of interconnection and help us design a new

type of economy,” as [notes](#) the Stories for Life website.

Co-creator Dan Burgess—a writer, podcast host, and learning guide—says his work centers on supporting the growth of regenerative cultures and creative activism, all aimed at cultural shifts that may “help people remember we are part of a living Earth.” He says in addition to himself and Loughman, there have been [many](#) collaborators and supporters, and that Stories for Life’s creators ultimately wanted to help make more readily accessible and clear “the relationship between everyday stories and how they shape cultural narratives, and how those things shape the design of human systems—in this case, the economic system,” he says. “We wanted to help more people understand that and see that in these times, stories are very powerful and we’re all carrying them. So in that sense we all have the ability to make an impact.”

He adds that another aim was to weave together thinking around how cultural stories are currently shaping westernized economic systems, and the destruction those systems are responsible for.

“What we were trying to do [from the outset] is explore the role of stories in either maintaining and perpetuating these destructive economic designs,” he says.

Stories for Life eventually [published eight chapters](#), each referencing the stories of many people. As the Overview chapter states, “There is a better narrative. A healthier narrative that has been carried by cultures around the world for thousands of years, and is now being recognised by the latest scientific breakthroughs. A narrative grounded in the recognition that we are all entangled, integrated, dependent on each other and the more-than-human world around us.”

Burgess shares that the Stories for Life film and concept are being shared by a number of groups and organizations around the world, as a means of inspiration and provocation.

“Our Indigenous brothers and sisters have always known what our ancestors knew, and what modern science now tells us is true: that we are all entangled and wrapped up with life,” he says, adding that Stories for Life was an opportunity to bring together a lifetime of experiences and learning, in a package that seeks to make these concepts more accessible.

Learning Journeys

Burgess suggests the Stories For Life project is a way of giving permission to people to explore new ways of looking at our world—himself included. On his podcast, the [Spaceship Earth](#) podcast, which started in 2018, he began to offer what he calls peer-supported learning journeys, for creative activists and regenerative change-makers.

“It’s a kind of action learning,” he says. “We work as a group and we explore, quite deeply, our connection with the natural world. We support each other to cultivate our creative courage to start to point our creative energies at trying to offer something to these times which is going to slow down the destruction of our living Earth and start to bring people back together.”

Out of this exploration, a collaboration between Stories for Life and Burgess’s learning platform, [Becoming Crew](#), launched a three-month learning journey offering in 2023, for people looking to work with stories in this way.

“It’s this idea of becoming [crew on Spaceship Earth](#), like stepping up in service and becoming active participants in the changes we need,” he says. The learning journey brought together a group of 40 different practitioners from nine countries who work with concepts of story and narrative in our culture, who had been on the podcast.

“We deeply explored some of the Stories for Life work, building practices to help people explore the natural world around them in much more intimate, relational ways—and use that re-entanglement with nature as a way of exploring their creativity, and how stories are evolving for them.”

He says there are two major story themes that Stories for Life is working to shift. One centers on how people can, at the micro and macro levels, steer the stories of our relationship to the natural world away from those that frame it as a commodity resource that is separate from ourselves.

“There are millions of stories every day that people are working with, which keep perpetuating that view of the living world as resource,” he says. “You’ve only got to look at the pollution of the oceans, rivers, the air we’re breathing—the toxicity: We treat the living world as a slave to human progress.”

The other major theme with which Stories for Life is working involves shifting

people's conceptions of what is realistic and possible.

"Can we help people imagine a world where we've shifted the dominant story of how we measure success away from productivity, accumulation, and growth to a story of the well-being of all life?" he asks. This is a reframing of value, which measures success by the health and well-being of fellow humans and the ecosystems we are a part of.

Burgess says Stories for Life's narratives are a way of birthing and seeding new stories that may "bring us back together and help people recognize that we're entangled with all life... and begin to see cultural stories that completely help us, reframe what success is all about in this culture, what it is to be human, what is our relationship with the natural world."

By April M. Short

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Source: Local Peace Economy

Credit Line: This article was produced by [Local Peace Economy](#).

Understanding Iran's Non-State

Network



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
Institute*

02-22-2024 ~ Recent months have brought sharper focus to Iran's network of non-state actors across the Middle East. While useful for military projection, Tehran has also cultivated them as political entities for decades.

During a three-day period in January 2024, Iranian-supported militant groups [employed an anti-ship missile](#) to attack an oil tanker in the Red Sea, [launched rockets](#) into northern Israel from Lebanon, and [used a drone strike](#) to kill three U.S. soldiers in Jordan. These incidents marked the extension of attacks by Iranian-backed groups in the Middle East into the fourth straight month since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, 2023.

[Largely diplomatically isolated](#) since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, unable to challenge U.S. military power, and lacking the nuclear brinkmanship card held by North Korea, Iran has evolved its strategy of utilizing militant groups for decades. [Iran's Quds Force](#) has provided training, funding, and weapons assistance to various militant groups in the region, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. This strategy has advanced Iran's geopolitical interests and afforded it plausible deniability, but not all of its associates march in lockstep with Tehran.

Part of Iran's approach involves transforming militant forces into powerful political actors. Hamas, [founded in 1987](#) as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, gained prominence during the First Intifada against Israeli forces. [Hamas grew closer to Iran](#) during the early 1990s after the Oslo Accords initiated an ultimately failed peace process, with Iran providing financial and weapons support [during the Second Intifada](#) from 2000 to 2005. When Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas established administrative control over the territory after [winning elections](#) the following year, and has forbade elections since.

Consolidating armed Palestinian opposition under Hamas allows Tehran to challenge Israel directly. But as a Persian and Shia Muslim country operating in a predominantly Arab and Sunni Muslim peninsula, Iran has offset its diplomatic and [cultural isolation](#) by using the Palestinian cause to [criticize](#) Arab governments growing closer to Israel in recent years. Supporting Hamas against perceived inaction from Arab leaders has been a [constant feature](#) of Iranian public messaging. Further normalization between Israel and Arab states is [now paused](#) due to the Israel-Hamas war.

While Iran denied prior knowledge of the October 7 attack, it has [expressed public support for Hamas since](#) . Hamas's leader Ismail Haniyeh has meanwhile stated that Iran provides [\\$70 million annually to the group](#) in addition to ongoing logistical and weapons assistance, largely through [smuggling operations](#) . However, relations between Iran and Hamas are largely limited to opposition to Israel and the West, and Hamas also receives financial support from [Turkey, Qatar,](#) and [other sources](#).

Instead, Hezbollah has emerged as Iran's most important non-state ally. Established as a Shia militia [in 1982](#) during the Lebanese Civil War, Hezbollah's significant military forces have been utilized to target Israeli and Western forces in the Middle East. Since the recent conflict's onset, Hezbollah has [launched hundreds of missiles](#) into northern Israel, but the destruction caused by the 2006 Lebanon War against Israel has made it [cautious of further escalation](#).

Hezbollah is also strategically valuable in its role as an envoy to other militant groups. Hezbollah has historically trained Hamas militants in weapons systems and military exercises [in Lebanon and Syria](#). Like Iran, Hezbollah also denied knowledge of the Hamas attack on October 7, but Iranian, Hezbollah, and Hamas

officials have since [met regularly](#) to discuss strategy and cooperation.

Beyond its military role, Hezbollah has evolved into Lebanon's political powerbroker. Eight of its members were first elected to the Lebanese parliament in 1992, it joined the government for the first time [in 2005, and in 2018](#) , a Hezbollah-led coalition gained the majority of Lebanese parliamentary seats. Despite [losing its majority](#) in 2022, its lingering influence over [Lebanese politics](#) indicates that Iran remains close to a state capture-like situation, where external forces and interest groups gain systematic control over a country's decision-making process.

Additionally, [Hezbollah operates](#) clinics, schools, banks, businesses, and other entities that have shielded it from Lebanon's economic collapse and political stagnation since 2019, maintaining its "state-within-a-state" structure. In addition to weapons and logistical support, Iran is believed to [provide \\$700 million](#) to Hezbollah every year. And when sanctions diminish [Iranian assistance](#), Hezbollah also secures funding from [legal businesses](#) to [criminal enterprises](#), activities which span across the Middle East, [Africa](#), [Europe](#), [Latin America](#), and [the U.S.](#)

Iran's militant network in Syria meanwhile [surged after the civil war broke out](#) in 2011, threatening Iran's long-term ally President Bashar al-Assad. Hezbollah and Iran recruited from Syria's Shia community to form groups like the Mahdi Army and al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi Brigade, as well as some Sunni groups like [Liwa al-Quds](#), to aid the Syrian armed forces against ISIS and pro-Western forces. The [Zainabiyoun Brigade](#) and [Fatemiyoun Brigade](#), largely consisting of Shia Muslims from Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been used by Iran in Syria.

As the Syrian government's position has stabilized, Iran has attempted to integrate pro-Iranian militant groups into the Syrian armed forces and has used them to [increase Iran's political and economic influence](#) in Syria as it [competes with Russia](#) . Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, they have [launched numerous strikes](#) against U.S. and allied forces within Syria.

Pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia militant groups have similarly [increased rocket attacks](#) against U.S. forces in Iraq since October 7. Their growing strength goes back to the U.S.-led occupation after 2003 that allowed Iran to bring groups like the Badr Organization, funded and trained in Iran, [back into Iraq](#). Iran also organized with other developing " [Special Groups](#)" of Shia militias to attack U.S. forces.

After the departure of most U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, Iranian-backed groups sought political integration into Iraq's fragile democracy. Alongside the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba in Iraq (both distinct from Lebanese Hezbollah), and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) became some of Iraq's [most prominent political and militant forces](#). In 2014, numerous pro-Iranian militant groups in Iraq were consolidated into the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) [to combat ISIS](#), playing a crucial role in liberating much of the country and elevating their status.

In Iraq's 2018 parliamentary elections, the PMF became the second-biggest bloc and "[achieved one element of state capture](#)" by securing government funding for itself the following year. PMF members now directly or indirectly control crucial government institutions like the Interior Ministry and Supreme Court, and [December 2023 elections](#) saw the coalition win 101 out of 285 provincial council seats.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI), a [leading group of PMF militias](#), has taken the initiative in attempting to push remaining U.S. forces out of the country. Their attacks since October 7 have [intensified discussions](#) within Washington over whether to do so, while Iran denied knowledge of the drone attack [which killed three U.S. soldiers](#) in January 2024.

Washington has similarly been confronted by the Houthis since October 7. Emerging in Yemen in the early 1990s as a Shia Islamist group amid the country's civil war, the Houthi movement [initially focused](#) on religious and cultural revivalism and combating corruption. Hezbollah [performed early outreach](#) to the Houthis before Iran increased its financial, logistical, and weapons support in the 2010s as Yemen's civil strife escalated. Iranian support increased further after Saudi Arabia invaded Yemen to fight the Houthis in 2015 until Saudi forces pulled out of the country in defeat [in 2023](#).

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, the Houthis have fired several missiles [into southern Israel](#). But their principal distraction has been [attacks on shipping](#) in the Red Sea in support of Hamas and the Palestinians. Acting in coordination with Iranian and Hezbollah officials, the Houthis have [completely disrupted global trade](#) and raised doubts over the U.S. ability to ensure open sea lanes.

Doing so has [enhanced their domestic support](#) and expedited Yemen's peace

process, the conclusion of which would give the Houthis significant political control over the country. Iran has continued to offer support, [providing data](#) from an Iranian surveillance vessel to direct Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and [ongoing weapons shipments](#) to the group.

While the more prominent pro-Iranian militias have been mentioned, smaller cells also exist. The [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#) complements Iranian influence in Gaza. In Bahrain, the [Al-Ashtar Brigades](#) and [Saraya al-Mukhtar](#) have been responsible for numerous attacks on security and government targets in promotion of Shia interests, and Kuwait has witnessed several scandals involving the surfacing of pro-Iranian Shia militant cells [over the last decade](#).

But Iran's cultivation of militant groups and political exploitation is not without risk. The ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict has put Hamas's rule in Gaza to the test, potentially undoing decades of investment. And Iran has only varying degrees of control over all these groups. Hamas's open support for Sunni militant groups in the Syrian civil war conflicted with Iran's support for Syria's Shia-dominated government, resulting in a [temporary withdrawal of Iranian funding](#). Despite resuming in 2017, the affair highlighted Hamas's and Tehran's ideological divisions.

Iran is also alleged to have advised against the Houthis seizure of Yemen's capital [in 2014](#) and Iraqi militia leader Qais al-Khazali's attack on U.S. forces [in 2020](#). Control over Iraqi militants has similarly weakened [since 2020](#), and even Hezbollah military officials have reportedly [refused orders from Iran](#) in Syria. Yet voicing public dissatisfaction with these groups would undermine Iran's portrayal of leadership and unity against Israel and Western powers, limiting its ability to rebuke them or reign them in.

Iraq's Iran-aligned groups meanwhile have "[fierce internal rivalries](#)" that inhibit greater coordination, and Iran's interference in Iraq has resulted in significant consequences. In the 1980s, Iran's support for Iraq's Kurds [saw Iraq support Kurdish separatists](#) in Iran, which continue to attack Iran from Iraq [to this day](#). The January 2024 exchange of fire between Iranian forces and [Balochistan militants](#) in Pakistan, followed by retaliatory strikes by Pakistan against groups in Iran, revealed the challenges Iran faces in managing militant groups both internally and with its neighbors.

Iran, however, will likely persist with its strategy, even if it obtains nuclear weapons. Its proxy groups' amassed military and political power have helped Iran challenge its enemies and inch close to state capture (or state failure) in several countries. As the U.S. continues its gradual pullout from the Middle East, there is no telling how these groups may continue to evolve—with or without Iranian assistance.

By John P. Ruehl

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Growing Clues That India's Central Narmada Valley Was A Key Hub In The Human Story

02-22-2024 ~ In December 1982, a geologist digging in India's Central Narmada Valley found something he did not expect. Arun Sonakia, who at the time worked for the Geological Survey of India, unearthed a hominid fossil skullcap from the Pleistocene era.

The discovery sent shockwaves through the field of paleoanthropology and put South Asia on the map of human prehistory. Some experts concluded that the skull likely belonged to a member of a predecessor species of ours, [Homo heidelbergensis](#), or perhaps was a [hybrid](#) of homo species, while Sonakia himself

suggested “[an affinity... to *Homo erectus*.](#)”

The specimen remains the oldest human fossil [found](#) in the South Asian subcontinent; while expert opinions vary, testing [seems to indicate](#) the fossil was between 250,000 and 150,000 years old. For several decades, it was the *only* ancient human fossil found in South Asia—despite abundant finds of tools and other relics.

But in more recent years, more than a dozen other fossil bones that have been discovered have shined a light on the Central Narmada Valley as a [potential](#) hotbed of human evolutionary activity. Paleoanthropologist Anek R. Sankhyan and his team discovered new fossils [between 1983 and 1992](#), followed by further finds between 2005 and 2010.

Sankhyan shared during an interview that only the Central Narmada Valley has so far yielded human fossils from the Pleistocene period in South Asia. The valley, he says, was a key stop along the migration route from Africa to Southeast Asia for *Homo erectus*. [Homo erectus](#) was an archaic human ancestor that [lived](#) between about 1.9 million and 100,000 years ago and adapted to regions from Eastern Africa to China to Southeast Asia. It has not been established whether *Homo erectus* comprises one species spread wide geographically or multiple species involving local variations.

Sankhyan connects the Narmada Valley with some of the more sophisticated [Acheulean](#) stone tool cultures that emerged with *Homo erectus* in Europe and Africa. [Acheulean tools](#) are characterized by multiuse-hand axes used for roles ranging from woodcutting to butchering animals.

In the Central Narmada Valley, [Sankhyan’s evidence](#) from his paper—published in *Advances in Anthropology* in 2020—on the subject seems to show at least two distinct types of hominins represented: the large “robust” line uncovered through Sonakia’s skullcap discovery, and an evolving “short and stocky” hominin line from 150,000 to 40,000 years ago discovered by Sankhyan and his team.

Sankhyan says that the traits of the skullcap found by Sonakia vary among *Homo erectus*, *Homo sapiens*, and have features that are unique, making identifying it “[confusing](#).” He concluded that the skullcap is also representative of *heidelbergensis*, and perhaps might be a *heidelbergensis*-Neanderthal hybrid. A skull with so many traits is a clue that this region may indeed have been a

multispecies melting pot that puts our contemporary sense of human differences to shame.

Heidelbergensis was a species that was the ancestor of both Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens*, and [first appeared](#) 700,000 years ago, disappearing 200,000 years ago. It was an intermediate species between *Homo erectus* and modern human beings and Neandertals. *Heidelbergensis* was likely the first human species [to control fire and hunt large game animals](#). The hominid fossil found by Sonakia likely used tools like an Acheulian pick axe and was found near a crushed molar tooth of a *Stegodon*, a large, extinct relative of today's elephants. Sankhyan says that the ecology of the valley during the Lower Paleolithic was that of a warm woodland forest with megafauna like the *Stegodon*, during his interview.

The “short and stocky” line has been given its own nomenclature: *Homo narmadensis* by Sankhyan. This species was widespread in the Central Narmada Valley during the “Middle to Upper Paleolithic [era],” and hunted smaller game animals in a “broken forest ecology.” *Narmadensis* was discovered near significant numbers of [Mode 3 Acheulean tools](#), which are more sophisticated than the Mode 2 tools attributed to the *heidelbergensis* line.

Paleoanthropologist Sankhyan speculates that the “short and stocky” hominin line was the “likely precursor to the ‘short-bodied’ ancient populations of India, including the Andaman pygmy.” Interestingly, he believes that the so-called “hobbit” of Indonesia, [Homo floresiensis](#), also descended from this line. *Homo floresiensis* was a little more than three-feet tall and lived between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago.

While Sankhyan says that the government organization, Anthropological Survey of India, has not conducted further excavations since 2010, according to him, there have been individuals from other departments who “tried sporadic trial digging,” but those digs have not yielded any significant results.

As research continues in this area, we're likely to get even more insight into the varied hominin types who lived in the Central Narmada Valley in the last hundreds of thousands of years and how they interacted with one another. Regardless, the establishment of South Asia as a center of human evolutionary activity is likely to have consequences for how the region, and India in particular, understands itself and its prehistory and history.

For decades, nationalists, including representatives of today's far-right Hindu nationalists in India, have promoted the idea that South Asians and Indo-Europeans as a whole [originated from within India](#). Though this theory is [false](#) and unnuanced, the evolutionary history of hominins in the Central Narmada Valley offers new ground for Indian nationalists to make the argument that hominins or primates had their roots in India.

But if there are dangers in linking contemporary India with the prehistory of the subcontinent and its place in the world, there are also opportunities. As with India, fossil evidence in [South Africa](#), [Kenya](#), [Tanzania](#), [Georgia](#), and [China](#) indicates that these places were repeatedly home to prehistoric population centers—they all have equal claim to being part of a global and gradual humanization process.

As a result, a nonaligned or regionally connected Global South has a powerful new origin story and better pathways for connections, rooted in evidence outside of the historical narratives imposed on them by the West. Further research will establish what science shows, but it will be politics, geopolitics, and the direction chosen by the world's people that will contextualize the evidence within the human story.

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The Great 'Japa' Movement: A Blessing In Disguise, Not A Cry For Help



Adekunle Olajide

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Many Nigerians have been leaving the country in search of better opportunities in other countries, a trend that is widely known as the 'Japa Syndrome'. This has caused a lot of controversy and sparked a lot of debate on the popular social media platform, Twitter (now X), where many users have forecasted a bleak future for the economic situation of Nigeria owing to this mass migration.

The recent change of government, with President Bola Ahmed becoming the new leader, is regarded by majority of the youth as the final reason that made them embrace the 'Japa' movement - a buzz word that has taken a rightful place in Nigeria's urban lexicon.

However, those pressing the panic button may not be seeing the bigger picture. Only a few people have looked at the situation in-depth, like a Chess Master who evaluates all the possible scenarios before making his next move. Calling the current trend, a disaster for the Nigerian economy, is like a beginner chess player who only sees the board from one angle.

Have Nigerians actually taken a moment to consider that, beyond the mere surface, this whole 'Japa' movement might actually not be a cry for help situation, but rather a blessing in disguise?

If we can just take a step back and distance ourselves from the noise on social media or opinions of internet trolls and consider the long-term prospects of the 'Japa' movement. Perhaps, amidst the buzz, we will start to see the movement as the silver lining and driving force for our socio-economic and political resurgence and development.

Nothing is New under the Sun - Not even the Great 'Japa' Movement.

The concept of movement is one that has been ingrained in the very fabric of our humanity, a universal trait inherent in our nature that cannot be blotted out. It is often stated that 'movement is merely a construct of globalization' and that by nature, humans are peripatetic beings—beings with an instinctual desire to move from one place to another in search of opportunities or desires, be they material or incorporeal desideratum. This stands as both an anthropological standpoint and an undeniable fact!

Against this backdrop, it suffices to say that there, indeed, nothing new under the sun. The mass exodus of Nigerians, or the Great 'Japa' Movement, as I comically dubbed it, is not a novel phenomenon but rather a contemporary echo of historical migration patterns. The only distinction lies in the amplified buzz created by social media, turning it into a sensationalized narrative, as if it is the next big thing since sliced bread.

From a historical perspective, the genesis of the 'Japa' movement can be traced to the 1980s, a period of military transitions, socio-economic breakdowns, and political maladministration in Nigeria. Following that, the movement took form during the urbanization wave in the country, a period when the ambitious youths migrated from their villages and hometowns to the cities, notably Lagos, Abuja, or Port-Harcourt, seeking improved working conditions and greener pastures. This trend, which was once overlooked despite its impact on agricultural productivity, has taken on a whole new level, and now we want to kick against it? So Nigerian!

Let's also not forget the darker times, when Nigerians and other Africans, in their quest to find better pastures, undertook life-threatening sojourns and illegal terrains through the great Sahara and crossing the Mediterranean in search of a better life. This movement is neither new nor did it started last years; it started way back!

Legitimacy and Legal Standpoint on Migration.

Moving on from historical records to the contemporary legal landscape, there are clearly established legal policies that fully legitimize migration.

To begin, *Section 41* of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria affirms the inalienable right of citizens to move in and out of their homeland. *Articles 12 (2)* of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and *Section 13(2)* of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) further emphasize the universal right of citizens to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their homeland.

These cogent legal perspectives underscore the legitimacy of citizens to freely move in and out of their home country and the right of people to seek employment and better opportunities wherever they may find them.

Nigeria Deserve your Gratitude.

It is quite disheartening to see Nigerians, both at home and abroad, continually tarnishing the image of the country, describing it as inhospitable, unfavorable and a place where the dreams and aspirations of Nigerians die.

This negative narrative, which is primarily aimed at triggering angst and hatred towards the Nigerian government, is often fueled by half-truths, hyperbolic comments, and warped information. This category of individuals can only be viewed as uninformed, tunnel-visioned citizens with an entitlement mentality.

These entitled critics are not aware of the historical realities of the present world powers, most especially the United Kingdom (UK) that they so much endear as the land of the golden fleece. They are not aware that, at one point in time, countries like the UK emigrated from their country and went about colonizing, conquering, and pillaging the resources of other nations, and bringing it back into the coffers of their homeland. Most of these world powers of today once emigrated to other parts of the world before becoming influential global forces.

These set of uninformed countrymen and women have forgotten that before they left the country to make exploits, Nigeria was their training ground that laid the foundation for them to migrate out of the country. Most of the graduate professionals that are now thriving in diaspora did receive their first-degree education in Nigerian tertiary institutions before leaving. Can they compare the cost of acquiring a competitive degree in Nigeria to anywhere else in the world?

Most people failed to notice that the Nigeria public tertiary education is highly

subsidized. Even in the early days, the federal government even sponsored the education of Nigerians studying overseas – our present and past university professors who got to study abroad on federal government scholarships can candidly attest being a beneficiary to the Nigerian government's beneficiary.

At present, Nigeria's public university students pay a minimal yearly tuition fee of about \$25 to \$75 yearly, for a period of 4 to 5 years to earn a competitive degree – an insignificant figure compared to what is obtainable in other parts of the world. Contrastingly, countries like the UK and USA require students to take on substantial student loans in order to finance their tertiary education.

Looking at the net migration figures, the population of Nigerians in the UK is still a fractional and insignificant figure compared to countries like India, Ukraine, Pakistan, and Poland. Latest figures published by the UK authorities showed that Nigeria is ranked in 7th place in the net migration index.

Considering the cost of living abroad, as well as the tax burden and educational expenses abroad, it is evident that Nigeria has provided a facilitating platform for success. Nigerians and Africans, when abroad, often excel and achieve extraordinary feats, owing their success to the foundation laid in Nigeria.

So, in the grand scheme of things, the favourable immigration policies, the diplomatic ties Nigeria has built with several countries of the world, the education qualification, work experience, information, and exposure that Nigerians are a beneficiary of, were all made possible by the foundation and groundwork that Nigeria laid over the years.

Now, this article piece is not pontificating that the situation of Nigeria is thriving or that the country economy is all fine and dandy. No! It only aims to set the records straight and establish that the narrative has been brandished and misrepresented by not only the media to sell their stories, but also by some Nigerians in the diaspora who only seek to make worse of the current situation.

Yes, the country is not working as it should, but it is essential to establish that the situation is not as dire as it has been painted to be.

The Upsides to the Great 'Japa' movement No one seem to be Talking About.

In July 2023, Peter Gregory Obi, the presidential candidate for the Labour Party

and former governor of Anambra state, expressed his endorsement of the movement stating how it will impact the nation's economy. His core belief is well underscored in his statement that "our brain drain today will be our brain gain tomorrow".

He made this statement to corroborate the sentiments of tech mogul, Bill Gates, who during an interactive session with innovators stated that the 'Japa' movement was good and healthy for Nigeria as their knowledge, experience and resources will be critical in building the New Nigeria. This is currently what is obtained in China, India, Ireland, and other developing countries. The assertions from these two prominent figures are a good signal of the potential fortune that the 'Japa' movement could bring.

So, while we wait for those fortunes, let us explore the often-overlooked upsides of this movement and discover how it might eventually work to the benefit of our beloved homeland.

I. Global Opportunities for our Professional Talents

The movement will afford our professional talents the opportunity to access globally recognized and financially rewarding work opportunities that are not readily available in the Nigeria labour market.

Cutting-edge fields such as Robotics, Stem-cell research, Blockchain Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Bio-medical engineering, Astrophysics and Space technology can become an avenue for them to not only arm themselves with great experience and work pay, but also reinforce the remarkable brilliance and drive of the Nigerian people. These guys could emerge as pioneers in these global fields and ultimately channeling their expertise towards national development.

II. Foreign Remittances and Economic Growth

According to UK immigration authorities, over \$17.6 billion in foreign remittances were sent to Nigerians by our brothers and sisters living in the diaspora in 2021 alone. The foreign remittance is sure to significantly benefit the Nigerian governments and contribute to the nation's GDP as this monies will go into various areas of the economy in terms of expenditure, savings, business ventures and capital investment, all adding to the growth and development of the nation's economy.

III. Job Opportunities and Unemployment Reduction

The departure of Nigerian professionals who experienced career boredom, exhaustion, and the inability to move ahead in their career, will create a void that will demand filling. This vacuum will automatically create job opportunities to suitably qualified applicants who are unemployed or underemployed and by long-term implications, help reduce the unemployment rate and the unemployment gap in the nation's labour market.

IV. Improved Working Conditions and Competitive Markets

With this mad rush to emigrate as well as the knowledge and exposure of how foreign companies treat their employees, big businesses and corporations are now being forced to meet global standards and benchmarks by improving their working conditions and salary structures. This paradigm shift will help in improving the welfare of working professionals in Nigeria.

In furtherance to that, the movement has heralded and ushered a paradigm shift in the hiring requirements of employees. Now, hiring parameters will emphasize on work ethic and skillset over traditional academic credentials. Job applicants, regardless of their degree classification, can well be considered for roles that were previously restricted to only those with higher academic grades.

V. Government Inducement for Change

The 'Japa' trend, which is majorly an indictment of the Nigerian failing economy atmosphere, will act as a catalyst for government to act and do the needful. The fear of losing the nation's best brains and talents prompts the government to take essential steps to address the root causes and ensure the retention of our valuable human resources.

The Japa Movement Could Be Our Silver Lining.

Nigerians are known for their hard work, productivity, industry, professionalism, and a drive to succeed - attributes that contribute to enhancing Nigeria's global image and brand. While the short-term effects of the 'Japa' movement may create turbulence in sectors like health, technology, academia, and science; the long-term potential it hold can very well be the turning point the Nigerian economy desperately needs.

It is essential to note that reportedly, 91% of Nigerians living in the diaspora remain connected to the homeland. Majority of them have undertaken various charitable and non-charitable initiatives to improve the socio-economic atmosphere in Nigeria. These endeavors include business ventures, capital

investment, and socio-humanitarian efforts. Though they appear physically distant from the country, their hearts and love for Nigeria remain strong.

It is important that we remember the historical precedents of the '*Great China Movement*' and the '*Great India Movement*'. Both countries experienced and are still experiencing mass exodus of their citizens, but today, they emerged as great economies, with their citizens in the diaspora playing a crucial role in their development. The implication is clear - the Nigerians in diaspora will be instrumental in driving progress and advancements in various fields and sectors of government.

Let's also face this undebatable fact — Nigerians in diaspora harbour an innate longing to return home. The unique freedom and carefree lifestyle offered in Nigeria cannot be obtained anywhere else in the world. In fact, some Nigerians who are now abroad actually regret the move. This is as a result of the unanticipated challenges and gruelling experience that they faced when they got there. Those who couldn't secure their desired job roles were forced to settle for menial, and odd jobs just to meet up with their living expenses.

Others are in great distress due to the cultural shock they are forced to grapple with. The heartbreaking story of Sylvia Obianuju Chikwendu on TikTok, who tearfully recounted her struggles with the loneliness she endures since she relocated to Canada is one that resonate deeply in our hearts.

Furthermore, the burden of remitting a sizable portion of their hard-earned income to foreign tax authorities, due to higher tax that is obtained abroad is something that does not sit well with many Nigerians. Aside that, the very fact that there exists only a tiny window of opportunity for Nigerians in diaspora to showcase their entrepreneurial acumen and engage in business ventures, will further drive their desire to return.

Final Thoughts: There's No Place Like Home.

I believe it was Oliver Wendell Holmes Snr. who said that '*Where we love is home - home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts*'

Indeed, there is no place like home. Majority of Nigerians living abroad have indicated their readiness to come back to Nigeria after making their exploits overseas and they plan on coming back with a wealth of experience and a determination to contribute significantly to national development.

Their involvement and commitment to the betterment of Nigeria is evident in their influence during the #EndSARS Protest in 2020 and also, their mobilization efforts during the 2023 general elections.

To this end, the burden rests on the government's shoulder to create a welcoming environment to accelerate their return. Achieving this will entail implementing favorable laws and policies to attract foreign direct investment and increasing the ease and convenience of conducting businesses in the country. Improving the nation's ease of doing business will be pivotal in scaling enterprises and will ultimately attract creative minds and top talents to return and contribute their quota to nation's development.

One undeniable truth is that no matter how far one travels, there is truly no place like home. Even as our people physically move, their hearts remain tethered to the homeland. So, all those aspiring to 'Japa', we wish them nothing but the very best in their exploits. We hope they become great ambassadors of the beloved homeland and when the time is right, we do hope that they '*Jakpada*' (meaning to '*return home*', as said in Yoruba). We hope to see them bring back their bounties and reestablishing their roots towards the continued growth and development of the motherland!

To close, let the resonant words of Peter Gregory Obi resonate deeply in our hearts: *"Nigeria will grow and develop on all fronts when we build the new Nigeria that prioritizes investment in education, health, and support for small businesses, guarantees respect for the rule of law, security of lives and properties, and unity of the nation...then our diasporan Nigerians around the world will return home with their global training, skills, and resources, to immeasurably contribute to building a New and better Nigeria. We will not give up on our dreams for the New Nigeria."*

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