

EU Citizens Are Fully Aware Of EU's Democratic Deficit: An Interview With C. J. Polychroniou



06-09-2024. Europeans go to polls this week for parliament vote. What is at stake? Is the future of the European Union (EU) at risk on account of the surge of the far-right? But is the EU even a democratic institution worth saving? And why is the Left in crisis across Europe? Political economist/political scientist C. J. Polychroniou tackles these questions in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri.

Alexandra Boutri: Elections for the European Parliament (EP) are taking place this week from Thursday 6 June to Sunday 10 June. Some 373 million citizens across the 27 members of the European Union (EU) are eligible to vote, but it remains to be seen whether the “surge” in participation in 2019 will continue in 2024. Let’s talk about participation in the world’s only transnational elections because the general impression is that Europeans do not take very seriously the EP elections.

C.J. Polychroniou: Participation in EU elections has always been low. We saw a “surge” in participation in the 2019 EP elections in which just slightly over 50% of EU citizens cast a vote. And this was the highest turnout in 20 years. So, yes, it’s obvious that Europeans are not as excited about EU elections as they are about national elections. Votes to the European Parliament also tend to be uncorrelated to national elections in the various member states. They are really low-turnout protest votes. And the reason that Europeans do not take seriously the EP elections is because they are fully aware of the EU’s democratic deficit.

The EP is the only directly elected EU body; yet its authority is extremely limited. Unlike national parliaments, it cannot initiate legislation. What it does is simply debate legislation and can pass or reject laws. It can also make some amendments. It is the European Commission that is solely responsible for planning, preparing and proposing new European laws. Those laws are then

debated and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union which consists of one government minister from each member state (and is not to be confused with the European Council which consists of the heads of government of every EU country). Essentially, we are talking about a rubber-stamping exercise on the part of the EP with regard to legislation. The European Commission is the EU's executive body, surrounded by some 32,000 permanent bureaucrats, but the European Council is the highest political entity of the Union. The Commission president is proposed by the European Council and then approved by the Parliament.

In sum, the EP is not a normal legislature and is clearly the weakest of the three main institutions of the EU. Brussels is also the home of European lobbying. There are more than 30,000 lobbyists in town, most of whom represent the interests of corporations, and they work very closely with EU bureaucrats and politicians. Lobby groups are involved at all levels of lawmaking. So, unfortunately, there is much to be said about the EU being in essence a corporate-driven entity with power vested in an unelected and unaccountable elite. By the same token, countries like Germany, Europe's economic and political powerhouse, have a lot to answer for. Germany has refused to "think European" with regard to EU reform, particularly on economic restructuring, solidarity, and social cohesion. Its policies have created a major rift between Northern and Southern Europe that is having far-reaching effects on the nature of the mission of the Union.

Alexandra Boutri: There is a general feeling however that this year's EU elections are different. They matter because of the surge of far-right ideology across Europe. What's at stake with the 2024 European Parliament elections, and why is the far-right thriving across Europe?

C. J. Polychroniou: What one hears from European heads of government and EU-enthusiasts in general is that the 2024 EU elections are crucial because they will have an impact on the EU's response to the increase in democratic backsliding. To be sure, there is serious democratic backsliding across Europe. And I am not talking about the usual suspects like Hungary under Orban. We have seen, for instance, how so-called liberal European democracies like Germany responded to people protesting Israel's mass killings in Gaza. The German government has cracked down on pro-Palestine protests, raided the homes of activists, and banned speakers from the country. In Greece, its right-wing Prime Minister Kyriakos

Mitsotakis publicly boasted that his government will not tolerate university students setting encampments in support of Palestine and even took the outrageous step of trying to deport students from UK and European Union member states that took part last month in a pro-Palestinian demonstration rally at Athens Law School. It is quite an irony indeed to hear European leaders urging citizens not only to cast a vote but to act “responsibly” in this year’s EU elections. For them, apparently, democracy exists only when citizens align their views with existing government positions on domestic and foreign affairs!

Having said that, the surge of the far-right across Europe is a very serious and dangerous matter. The far-right poses a threat to the survival of democracy in every country in which it happens to have a large presence. I am less concerned about its threat to the EU than the threat that the far-right ideology poses to the democratic development of domestic society.

The rise of the far-right in Europe is driven by several factors. The first is fear of economic insecurity. There has been a fundamental shift in recent decades away from the social policies of the post-war era to a ruthless form of capitalism that exploits insecurities, produces staggering inequality, and exacerbates people’s anxieties about the future. The far-right taps into people’s fears, insecurities, and grievances with promises of a return to a golden past and a restoration of “law and order.” It uses everywhere it flourishes ultra-nationalist and xenophobic language but in many, but not all cases, utilizes the context of an economic policy platform which is against austerity and open to social public spending for working-class people. The radical right-wing parties in France, Italy and Finland, for example, are hostile to neoliberalizing reforms and EU-level austerity. In France, Marine Le Pen’s National Rally has managed to create the image of being a “working-class” party.

The second factor is disillusionment with the EU and with established policies. For many European voters, both the EU and mainstream political parties (center-right and center-left political parties) work directly against the interests of the common people and serve instead the interests of the few. Another factor is of course Europe’s failed migration policies, though there is no mechanical link between immigration and the surge of the far-right.

Alexandra Boutri: Can you elaborate a bit on this? Because there is a widespread impression that immigration is the cause behind the surge of the far-right.

C. J. Polychroniou: Immigration is having an effect on right-wing and extreme right-wing voting. That's an undeniable fact. But the whole issue is quite complicated. It's not a clear-cut case that immigration itself is what's driving support (which is strongest, incidentally, among people of low income and with few educational opportunities) for the far-right. For instance, some studies have shown that unskilled workers feel threatened by the presence of unskilled or low-skilled immigrants from outside of Europe simply because they feel unprotected but that "[high-skilled immigration from non-European countries has a negative impact on extreme right-wing parties.](#)" Thus, the formation of anti-immigrant sentiments may be related to the degree of economic and social integration of immigrants.

But there is an irony here. The EU as such has no integration policy. What it has is a strategy of migrant containment, and "integration" depends entirely on the member states, with national governments defining and applying the term differently.

Other studies have shown that certain demographic factors, such as *emigration* (the movement of people *out* of a region) may also be fueling the spread of anti-immigrant far-right parties. As young people leave the smaller towns in which they grew up for better opportunities in major cities, the regions they leave behind experience a rise in support for extreme right-wing parties due to the negative effects of local population decline and the subsequent deterioration of these regions. [Sweden](#), not long ago dominated by the Social Democratic party, seems to provide the perfect example for the link between emigration and the surge of the far-right.

Alexandra Boutri: *European left-wing forces are in crisis. Why is that, especially since the socioeconomic environment in Europe is quite depressing? Shouldn't one expect the radical left, and not the far-right, to be thriving under dire economic conditions?*

C. J. Polychroniou: The mainstream left is clearly in decline. By that I mean social democratic and socialist parties. That's your mainstream left. But then the question is what do we mean by "radical left?" Do we include parties like [Syriza in Greece](#) and Podemos in Spain in the camp of the "radical left?" I think it would be a crude joke to do so. Some anti-systemic movements of the left are out there, but they are very small and fractured. In Greece, there are scores of radical left

parties and organizations, but with few followers and yet it's impossible to get them to agree to the formation of a United Front. You encounter the same phenomenon in many other European countries. It is a sad and disconcerting state of affairs. The reasons for the crisis of the left are political and ideological in nature and scope and they deserve an in-depth discussion which cannot be done here. However, I think there is a real misunderstanding on the part of the left about economic uncertainty and political preferences. Scholars who have studied the effects of economic crises on voting behavior found that it is extreme right-wing parties that tend to benefit from the effects of [macroeconomic shocks](#). Of course, there are other variables at play when examining individual case studies where economic crises lead to political support for the extreme right, such as the nature of the political culture in place and the organizational skills of left parties and movements in existence. But, on the whole, it appears that in times of economic downturn, voters turn to the right, not to the left, for solution to their problems. Today this is even more understandable when the left has nothing concrete to offer to Europe's citizens. In France, people cite inflation and security as their main concerns. And opinion polls show that the National Rally has a lead ahead of the EU vote. But I am not sure to what extent the left understands why it is failing to convince citizens why they should vote for it, and not the forces of reaction.

Source: [Originally published by Z. Feel free to share widely.](#)

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He has published scores of books and over one thousand articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Alexandra Boutri is a freelance journalist and writer.

The Far Right's Political Power Is Expected To Grow In EU Elections



C.J. Polychroniou

06-06-2024 ~ *Far right and hardline conservative parties may emerge as the third-biggest political force in the European Parliament.*

Every five years, citizens of European Union (EU) governments elect their representatives as members of the European Parliament. With 720 seats up for grabs, this year's election, which will take place from June 6-9, is especially crucial for the future of the continent for several reasons.

First, the deadliest war on European soil in more than 70 years has been going on since February 24, 2022, yet Europe remains politically subservient to the United States and is thus completely incapable of forging a strategy of its own to deal with the Ukraine crisis.

Second, Europe is facing an [economic stagnation](#) so severe that its [economic laggards](#), namely Greece, Portugal and Spain — peripheral countries with severe vulnerabilities as they rely excessively on imports and tourism while carrying high public debt and facing high unemployment levels — have become the EU's top

economic performers.

Third, democracy in European states has been in decline for several years now. For example, declines in the [rule of law and freedom of the press](#) are well documented, while the recent bans of pro-Palestine protests speak volumes of Europe's democracy deficiencies. Meanwhile, far right parties are making big inroads across Europe.

Fourth, the EU has failed as a political and economic union in promoting integration, in defending humanistic values and in securing prosperity for future generations. It has also failed, subsequently, to create a framework for collective governance. These failures are built into the architecture of this Frankenstein-like entity as the EU was not intended to be democratic and its institutions and their decision-making procedures lack democratic legitimacy.

It is for all the above reasons that many Europeans have become disillusioned with mainstream political parties and why far right parties are gaining support, with [young people fueling the growth of right-wing extremism](#).

In the 2019 elections for the European Parliament, 50.7 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. This was a historic turnout, although there was a dramatic difference between different EU member states. In some countries, such as in Belgium and Luxembourg, voter turnout was over 80 percent, but less than 30 percent voted in central and eastern European countries like [Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic](#). There was also lower turnout in Italy, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Malta and Bulgaria. While overall, Europeans vote more for their heads of government than for representatives in the European Parliament, it seems that socioeconomic indicators play a crucial role: Voter turnout is lower in countries where the average salary is lower, though there are exceptions. Nonetheless, [the voter turnout in 2019 was the highest it had been in 20 years](#).

The outcome of the 2019 European Parliament elections was a mix of encouraging and ominous results. First, pundits who had predicted a huge surge of far right parties were proven wrong, but the EU's political landscape was nonetheless shaken up as mainstream political parties (center-left and center-right parties), which had dominated the EU since its inception, lost their majority for the first time in the European Parliament. Nationalist and far right parties ended up with more representation in the European Parliament after the 2019 elections than in

any previous one, but the Greens also did quite well, winning more seats (55) than ever before in the European Parliament.

In sum, there was no such thing as “[a new dawn](#)” for the far right. Still, it was obvious that the far right was on the march as it scored well not only in countries where it had already taken root (such as in France, Italy, Austria and Hungary), but also saw increases in other countries, including Germany, Sweden and Spain. But the alternative and radical left won just 5 percent of the vote, losing 14 seats and ending up with just 38 seats in total. Radical parties of the left are facing a truly existential crisis in Europe and there are no signs of a turnaround. Europe’s radical left is fractured, demoralized and lacks a vision for the future, let alone a strategy for radical social change. Its economic agenda and rhetoric have been hijacked by the far right as the left narrative is no longer about the working class.

Unsurprisingly enough, and given that the economic and political environment across Europe has deteriorated since 2019 while far right ideas and parties have become mainstream and normalized in many member states, the [forecast](#) for the 2024 European Parliament elections is that there will be a major shift to the right and the far right, while center-left and green parties will lose seats. So, while we may still not witness a “new dawn” for the far right in 2024, it is quite certain that far right and hardline conservative parties will emerge as the third-biggest political force in the next European Parliament. The only consolation from this ominous development is that, for the time being, the far right is divided. [Marine Le Pen](#), the leader of the National Rally party in France, has distanced herself from Germany’s AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) and is making overtures to Italy’s Giorgia Meloni, who has emerged in the last two years as [Europe’s most powerful right-wing leader](#) and is now widely regarded as a [kingmaker](#) ahead of the European elections.

Unlike the German far right AfD, and perhaps Le Pen’s National Rally, Meloni does not want to dismantle the EU (she has not delivered on her election campaign promise to clash with the European Union elites) and has even tried to convince people that she rejects fascism, claiming it cannot coexist with democracy and that her far right party Brothers of Italy has [consigned fascism to history](#). Nonetheless, her migration policy and domestic policy measures, particularly in the areas of civil rights and social and cultural values, show that she is clearly pursuing a far right agenda, and her rhetoric finds a strong resonance with people who are drawn to fascism. Even so, Meloni has succeeded

in being seen as a reliable partner of NATO and the U.S., while her foreign policy stances on Ukraine and Israel have erased whatever worries Brussels and Washington may initially have had about her leadership.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether Meloni will align herself with the center-right or with the far right in the new European Parliament. The question about whether Meloni is a pragmatist or an ideological politician may very well be answered by the strategy that she decides to adopt in her role “as a kingmaker for the EU.” But the bigger question is whether this really matters much. The EU is failing Europe’s citizens, and perhaps a case can be made that it is disillusionment more than anything else that is driving Europeans to the far right since all mainstream political parties across the continent remain pro-EU. As a case in point, [the far right is surging even in Ireland](#) — and this is a country that had never before had a far right movement.

There are many factors — such as deindustrialization, profound economic inequalities, the decline of the welfare state and the failure of the left — that have contributed to the rise of extreme right-wing parties and movements in Europe. However, the most consistent theme of the far right’s platform is opposition to immigration, and occasionally opposition to feminism and to LGBTQ rights. It is also mainly anti-immigrant sentiment that is fueling the surge of far right politics in Ireland. In Germany, support for the AfD stems largely from opposition to the country’s policies on migration.

In sum, the reasons for the rise and surge of the far right in Europe abound; thus, there needs to be a multilevel strategy to confront the monsters of neo-fascism. Moreover, the results of the upcoming EU elections will surely tell us a great deal about the contemporary European state of mind and what may lie ahead for the continent. A “new dawn” for the far right isn’t out of the question. But even then, the European situation may not be as dramatic as the one facing U.S. voters in November, where their choice for the highest office in the land is between a former president who was rated by scholars as the worst president in U.S. history and is now convicted of falsifying business records, and an incumbent who is seen by many, both at home and abroad, as a war criminal.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist

who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

The Humble Carrot's Colorful History



*Adam Alexander -
Photo: Chelsea
Green Publishing*

06-05-2024 ~ *The carrot has followed armies, colonial explorers, and politicians to become one of the world's most prized vegetables.*

We have the Arabs to thank for introducing carrots (*Daucos carota*) to Western Europe. Two distinct subspecies led to the domesticated carrot. The subspecies *D. carota sativus*, native to Turkey, was grown by the Arabs and consumed by their invading armies, both animal and human.

At the end of the 10th century, carrots were mentioned in a cookery book compiled by [Ibn Sayyār al-Warrā](#), an author from Baghdad. Called *Kitab al-T. abih* (Book of Dishes), it is the earliest known Arabic cookbook. It may have been added to the libraries of Europe's Moorish invaders who started their own vegetable gardens in the Iberian Peninsula early in the eighth century.

The first historical record of carrots as a crop in Spain and southern Europe, however, is found in the work of the great Arab agriculturalist [Ibn al-'Awwām](#), towards the end of the 12th century. This suggests that by this time, a number of different but unnamed varieties of carrots were being grown.

Some 200 years later, carrots were cultivated in northern Europe and were valued for their high sugar content. Recipes at the time turned carrots into jams, sweet condiments, and puddings.

A Colorful Debate

Although they came in various colors and shades—red, white, and yellow—they became the most favored in Europe because they were sweeter and didn't turn a muddy brown when cooked. The word "yellow" is used with some literary license, as carrot color has been the subject of much scholarly discourse over the years, including whether the orange carrot existed before the attentions of Dutch breeders.

While Moorish invaders introduced southern Europe to the western subspecies *sativus*, its relative, *D. carota atrorubens*, spread further east from Iran and the Hindu Kush along the Silk Road. Modern genetic sequencing shows that Chinese carrots, which come in red, white, purple, and orange, are all derived from [atrorubens](#).

Similarly, deep-red descendants of this family branch remain firmly part of the food culture of Rajasthan, a state in northwestern India. Colored varieties have

become [trendy in Western food culture](#), having been a staple in the East for centuries. [Gajar al halwa](#), a Rajasthani dessert that calls for red carrots, dates at least back to the [Mughal Empire](#), which blended Persian, Mongol, and Islamic cultures. The sweet is still very popular throughout India.

The Color Orange

Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492 sparked a transfer of native vegetables in both directions across the Atlantic. The colonizers who followed him planted carrots, which could be stored for long voyages. However, it was not until the beginning of the 17th century that the carrot underwent a dramatic change of fortune.

As the 16th century drew to a close, Flemish growers started to work on improving the carrot's color, yield, appearance, and eating quality. Yellow, Western varieties, being biennial, were less likely to bolt (produce flowers and seeds rather than expand root size and leaf growth) than their Eastern cousins, and they were genetically predisposed to grow a single bulbous root full of sugars and flavors.

The word 'orange' is relatively new to the English language and first appeared in 1502 in reference to [clothing belonging to Margaret Tudor](#), the Scottish Queen. The orange, native to China, arrived in Europe with the Arabs at the beginning of the eighth century and was called the *sinaasappel* (Chinese apple) in Dutch.

The Spanish took the Persian word for the fruit, *narang*, referring to the bitterness of its skin, and called it *naranja*, which in Old French translated as 'orange.' The 2011 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary describes the color orange used in Old English as *g.eolurēad* (yellow-red). This name for the fruit was probably adopted into Middle English at the same time as the orange first appeared in Britain after the Norman Conquest in 1066, but it was not used to describe the color of a carrot until much later.

So, it is not surprising that descriptions of carrots of all shades of yellow and red didn't describe them as 'orange' until the word became a common adjective in sixteenth-century English. Because of this, earlier descriptions fail to help the researcher determine a variety's true color.

Although red carrots were cultivated across Europe from the eleventh century, highly selective breeding by the Dutch led to the familiar orange variety becoming

ubiquitous 500 years later. It is a common belief that breeders created the carrot to honor the Dutch royal family, but this is a myth. Nevertheless, the carrot became a tool for political propaganda when William and Mary took over the British throne after a bloodless coup in 1688 known as the Glorious Revolution. William inherited the title of sovereign Prince of Orange after a feudal principality, complete with orange groves, in Provence, southern France.

The reality is that the Dutch were growing orange carrots long before William inherited his title and moved to England. Nevertheless, the orange carrot is the Netherlands' national vegetable, and many of its people still cling to the idea that its color was created as a tribute to the House of Orange. As a marketing strategy and way to raise 'brand awareness,' it was brilliant, and it would be churlish to disabuse them of their belief. Since the carrot genome was unraveled, we have learned that orange carrots are the direct descendants of yellow varieties and are a testament to Dutch breeders' genius.

A Long-Lasting Heritage

By the 17th century, carrots had become part of a subsistence diet throughout Europe and the Americas, but different varieties had yet to be given names. A seed seller from London, William Lucas, lists red, orange, and yellow carrots in his catalog of 1677. Although Dutch breeders had named varieties, these were kept from consumers for another hundred years.

At the end of the eighteenth century, English merchants at last listed a few named varieties. The Curtis seed catalog of 1774 includes three: Early Horn, Short Orange, and Long Orange. In 1780, J. Gordon of Fenchurch Street listed just two carrots: the Early Horn and the Orange or Sandwich carrot (Sandwich refers to where they were grown).

Carrots grow best in light soil, and the land around Sandwich in Kent was perfect. Flemish immigrants escaping Catholic persecution in the latter half of the sixteenth century settled in Kent and grew them there for themselves and their new Protestant queen, Elizabeth I. We also know that Early Horn is one of the oldest named varieties and is related to many of those we enjoy today.

Not only do we have to thank Dutch breeders for the ubiquity of the orange carrot, but we should also give thanks to a Dutchman, O. Banga, who wrote a considerable body of work on the history of carrot cultivation and breeding in the

early 1960s. He identified two Dutch varieties, Scarlet Horn and Long Orange, as the progenitors of almost all of today's orange carrots.

Genetic analysis shows us that purple carrots that originated in Afghanistan mutated into yellow ones. As a reminder, descriptions of carrots as being red actually describe those colored purple, similar to red cabbage and red beetroot. Color changes in the earliest cultivated carrots happened through accidental mutation rather than hybridization. The Western Europeans' preference for the yellow over the purple carrot was encouragement enough for those 18th-century Dutch breeders to work on ever-deeper yellows until they got a sweet and tasty orange the consumer would buy.

By the middle of the 18th century, we had new varieties: Early Half Long-Horn, Late Half Long-Horn, Early Short-Horn, and Round Yellow; the last two being the parents of nineteenth-century classics, Paris Market, and one of my favorites, Amsterdam Forcing. It is a testament to breeders' skill that these two early varieties continue to be hugely popular after over 250 years in cultivation. Other carrots, such as Nantes types—with cylindrical roots—resulted from a century of breeding from the now-extinct cultivars Late Half Long-Horn and Early Half Long-Horn. The name suggests the French had a hand in developing this type.

According to Banga, early twentieth-century breeders gave us Emperor. This long, tapering type is a cross between the Nantes and Chantenay, a red-cored variety (delicious, by the way) that had been bred from another eighteenth-century variety called Oxheart. Emperor types are the basis for most modern cultivars developed for today's supermarket trade.

Autumn King is an open-pollinated stalwart that has been around for a century or more and, thanks to climate change, one that can sit happily in the soil through the winter to be harvested as and when required.

The prettily named Flakkee, an excellent overwintering storage variety, has claims to Italian heritage. It is synonymous with Autumn King, which raises the question: Do we have another example of breeders renaming varieties to suit their markets and cultural sensibilities? Fortunately, many of these very earliest carrot breeds are still with us, and regardless of what they are called, they are culinary delights.

The world's love of carrots and the importance of color in different societies and

food cultures means the many traditional varieties grown for centuries will continue to thrive alongside modern cultivars, which are the product of sophisticated modern plant breeding techniques.

By Adam Alexander

Author Bio: Adam Alexander is a consummate storyteller thanks to forty years as an award-winning film and television producer, but his true passion is collecting rare, endangered, and delicious vegetables from around the world. He is a director of OF1200, a company championing food growing in Wales and celebrating local varieties. He is a seed guardian with the [Heritage Seed Library](#). He has appeared on television, including the BBC's "[Gardeners' World](#)" and "[Great British Food Revival](#)," as well as CNN's "[Going Green](#)."

Source: Independent Media Institute

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What Happened To Our Ape Ancestors?



06 - 03 -2024 ~ Millions of years ago, in the Miocene Epoch (23 to 5.3 million years ago), about 100 species of apes roamed Europe, Asia, and Africa. Just a few million years later, this number had drastically declined, presenting fascinating questions for today's paleoanthropologists.

What happened to the extinct species, which have been identified in Eurasian fossil remains over recent decades? How did some apes of these species persist and evolve? And, the most hotly debated question: Did the apes who were our human ancestors originate in Africa or Eurasia?

The traditional view, following Darwin, hypothesizes an African origin for both humans and modern apes. [More recent fossil evidence](#) supports a Eurasian origin for the ancestors of humans and modern apes, which migrated back into Africa, about 7 to 9 million years ago, before modern humans evolved from them. But even proponents of this Eurasian origin view acknowledge that not enough is known yet to be certain.

The Miocene Environment

The Miocene Epoch is known for its abundance of fossils from different geographical regions, including a wide variety of mammals. Over the epoch's nearly 18-million-year span, the Earth's climate and geography changed dramatically. The beginning of the epoch was warmer than the prior Oligocene, the mid-Miocene period is known as the Miocene Climatic Optimum, and the late Miocene was marked by cooling.

Over this epoch, the continents, seas, and elevations were shifting toward their present positions. As sea levels dropped around 16.5 million years ago, a land bridge between Africa and Eurasia permitted a migration of many species from Africa to Eurasia including apes. Fossil evidence suggests that some ape species made their way from Africa through Saudi Arabia.

Over a few million years in their new Eurasian environment, ape species proliferated and thrived, developing new physical characteristics, including larger brains. Toronto University anthropologist David R. Begun described these evolutionary changes as a preadaptation to "coping with the problems of a radically changing environment."

Later in the Miocene, the seas rose and cooler temperatures transformed the subtropical forest habitat in Eurasia into dry grasslands with more seasonal conditions. The many species of apes that had flourished in Eurasia no longer had an abundant food supply of fruits and an ape-friendly habitat. As Begun wrote in a [2006 Scientific American article](#), "Climate changes in the Late Miocene brought an end to this easy living."

The available Eurasian fossil data indicate that many ape species died out by about 9 million years ago. But a few species, including our human hominid ancestor, were able to adapt to the vast environmental changes and made their way south, back to Africa. (Hominid is the term for great apes, humans, and all their fossil relatives.)

The fossil record from Eurasia provides clues to how some ape species developed those traits that allowed them to adapt to climate and environment changes, in order to migrate into Eurasia and later back to Africa.

Who Were the Miocene Apes?

Paleoanthropologists identify ape population groups from millions of years ago by meticulously analyzing data from fossil remains, often only from fossil fragments. From teeth, jaw, brain size, bone shape, slope of skull and nose, and other physical clues, scientists differentiate species, characterize evolutionary changes, and infer behavior.

Some fossils of Miocene apes have characteristics that begin to resemble those of humans, such as more modern teeth and jaw structure or whether they got around via ground or treetops. [Paleoanthropologists have systemized lists](#) of species and families on timelines, but interpretations of the role of Miocene apes in hominid history vary, and [uncertainties persist](#).

David Begun identified the genus (family of closely related species) of *Griphopithecus* as "[the best candidate for the earliest hominid](#)" in his 2010 analysis of Miocene hominids in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*.

Griphopithecus appeared about 16 million years ago in Germany and Turkey. Their thickly enameled teeth and powerful jaws, Begun suggests, gave them the ability to take advantage of resources in varied environments. When the climate became drier, the *Griphopithecus* could adapt from eating soft fruit to a harder food supply like nuts and roots.

Our Human Ancestors

Other Miocene ape families also developed characteristics that make them our potential human ancestors. The *Dryopithecus* genus had physical aspects that resemble those of early humans, such as a face profile that tilts downward and a larger brain case. A related Miocene ape found in Greece, *Ouranopithecus*, also had some more modern ape characteristics.

More recently, a finding from central Anatolia in Turkey, [reported in Communications Biology in 2023](#), presents more evidence of ape development in the Miocene with more human-like characteristics. A well-preserved skull initially thought to be *Ouranopithecus*, was found to have distinctive enough characteristics to be named *Anadoluvius*.

Many questions remain. For example, when did the adaptations (like knuckle-walking) occur that precede bipedalism, getting around upright on two feet?

[Paleoanthropologist Robert Foley suggests](#) that “[t]he significant factor that is key to understanding the emergence of the early bipedal hominins is the change in climate and environment that occurs at the end of the Miocene and into the Early Pliocene.” He explains that it led to a pronounced global cooling, and generally in Africa, a drier climate that reduced forest cover and expanded the number of savanna environments. This provided a general evolutionary “basis for adaption to terrestrial environments,” rather than arboreal ones.

A Plausible Scenario

The overall picture of when the specific characteristics of our human ancestors appeared has a plausible answer:

The proliferation of ape families and species in Eurasia, as documented in hundreds of fossils, supports the scenario that apes migrated from Africa around 16 million years ago, thrived and diversified in Eurasia along with many other animals, and then, using their evolutionary adaptations, began to make their way back to Africa at the end of the Miocene, about 7 million years ago, when the climate changed.

This is a round-trip scenario. Apes originated in Africa and migrated to Eurasia where they developed the preconditions for evolving into humans. Then the ape species that survived climate change returned to Africa where the human lineage developed.

Another piece of evidence supporting this hypothesis is that there is no fossil evidence of great apes in Africa between about 13.5 million years ago and 7 million years ago—the period when families of these apes proliferated in Eurasia. This is despite many known African fossil sites from that period.

A Continuing Evolution

The scenario presented here took place over millions of years. Paleoanthropologists are not in complete agreement about where human-like characteristics developed. It will take the discovery of many more fossils from Eurasia and Africa to settle this history.

Meanwhile, [as some have pointed out](#), there's a lesson here for today's evolving humans facing climate change, other environmental changes, and the challenge of space exploration. How will today's human beings adapt?

By Marjorie Hecht

Author Bio: Marjorie Hecht is a longtime magazine editor and writer with a specialty in science topics. She is a freelance writer and community activist living on Cape Cod.

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PVV Blog 9 ~ An Ideology Of Exclusion In Power



06-03-2024 ~ On May 16th, the Dutch Party for Freedom PVV, the liberal party VVD, the New Social Contract party NSC, and the Farmer Citizen Movement BBB, presented the [coalition](#) agreement for the upcoming cabinet. In [my previous blog](#), I already addressed the content of the agreement. Naturally, I followed the nature of the reactions with interest. How would the Dutch public respond, and how would the opposition in parliament react?

Debate in the House of Representatives

On Thursday, May 22nd, a debate took place in the House of Representatives about the coalition agreement. I watched it, and I found it confronting. Normally,

Party for Freedom leader Geert Wilders is the leader of the opposition, but now he spoke from the podium as the leader of the new coalition. He is or will soon become the most powerful person in the Netherlands once the new cabinet is installed. And he was already taking a step ahead: sovereign, sharp, and very experienced in debating, he parried all attacks from the opposition, and his three future coalition partners also closed ranks.

Polls

[Polls](#) among the Dutch public showed that the new center-radical-right government is reasonably well-received. This cabinet is rated higher than previous ones, particularly the last one, led by VVD leader Mark Rutte, who will soon step down after 14 years as prime minister and may become the new secretary-general of NATO. It is not surprising that the reception of this new cabinet is positive; after all, the PVV gained a quarter of the votes in the November 2023 elections, which naturally translates into a positive response.

The Opposition Paralyzed

The opposition in the chamber presented two main arguments: firstly, that this new coalition pays little attention to the poorest in the country, that it strengthens the financial position of businesses, and that it has planned unfeasible cuts, such as reducing the number of civil servants. The latter is unfeasible precisely because there are many vacancies in various ministries. The cabinet also envisions the strictest possible migration policy and believes that it will save billions. How these measures, often contrary to Brussels and international regulations, can save money is a question, but the Party for Freedom leader was not deterred in the debate. He believed in the measures, and if they didn't work, then "we will see that later."

An Ideology of Division

In my view, the opposition faced a major dilemma, namely dealing with predominantly positive reactions from the Dutch public. For instance, Frans Timmermans, the social-democratic leader of the opposition, was soon dismissed as a grump. He hammered on all the shortcomings of the proposed program, but he and other opposition parties faced the difficulty of articulating the fact that behind this coalition and its agreement lies an ideology of sowing division among people. The Party for Freedom and its leader are deliberately spreading a toxic ideology of inequality, especially concerning the Muslim community in the Netherlands. However, the coalition agreement hardly mentions this inequality

explicitly. It speaks of various measures, and the inequality is not easily read between the lines. This made it difficult for the opposition to sharply attack the coalition agreement, and thus Wilders and his partners came through the debate relatively unscathed.

Who Will Be the New Prime Minister?

A lingering question was who would become the prime minister of this new cabinet. The agreement between the four coalition parties was that the faction leaders would all remain in the House, including Party for Freedom leader Wilders. This was against his will, but it was part of the price he had to pay to form this cabinet. The other coalition parties were against a “Prime Minister Wilders.” Ultimately, the parties found a suitable candidate in their eyes: the seasoned top civil servant [Dick Schoof](#) (67 years old), who has worked for many years in various ministries and institutions on security, anti-terrorism policy, and the like. He is the embodiment of a civil servant, and it’s no wonder Forum for Democracy leader Thierry Baudet scoffed on X: “37 seats for an anti-establishment populist on November 22 (date of the elections last year, JJdR). And you get... the embodiment of the establishment. Incredible.” It seems that Mr. Schoof was pushed forward through backroom dealings and with the approval of current Prime Minister Rutte. Mr. Schoof is a former Labor Party member but has resigned his membership.

It is a bizarre and unprecedented situation in Dutch politics that a coalition is formed with a certain coalition agreement, and then a man or woman is sought to execute this program.

Mr. Schoof had no input in the negotiations over the agreement and its final result. But that he supports it is beyond doubt: otherwise, he would never have agreed to become prime minister.

Concerns from Mosques

Regarding the exclusionary ideology of the coalition I mentioned earlier, one can only expect a reinforcement of it from Mr. Schoof. In the past, he has regularly pushed the boundaries of the law regarding mosques and Muslims in the Netherlands, and has also crossed them. It is no coincidence that mosques in the Netherlands [issued a statement](#) saying: “The fundamental rights of Muslims have been under pressure for some time, and with the arrival of this prime minister, who must lead a coalition where the Party for Freedom calls the shots, it is a bit like giving a bunch of bullies brass knuckles.” And: “In a mature, democratic

constitutional state, citizens should not have to fear an incoming prime minister and a new cabinet. Unfortunately, this is now the case.”

I agree with the words of the mosque federation. The socio-economic measures proposed by this cabinet will hopefully withstand democratic criticism, but ideologically, this cabinet is a disaster for the country. As Sita Sitalsing, a columnist for the Dutch newspaper [*de Volkskrant*](#), wrote: “Unnoticed, the parties have swum into the Party for Freedoms’s trap.”

And: “The country is heading towards an unpredictable government that constantly tests and tries to cross the boundaries of propriety and the law. This affects the certainties and protections of everyone living in this country. What remains is a bad taste.”

These are sharp words from the mosques, the columnist, and many others, but I think this coalition, knowing it is supported by ‘the people in the country,’ will unwaveringly implement its program and spread the poison of exclusion in the process. I will keep an eye on it for you in future installments of this series.