

The Role Of Ancient DNA In Modern Traits

08-07-2024 ~ *Ancient human retrovirus DNA could be one of the markers of susceptibility to mental illness—specifically schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder, a new study suggests.*



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An international team of researchers examined 732 post-mortem brain samples and identified variations in DNA associated with different psychiatric conditions, which they cross-referenced with data from large genetic studies. The research appears in [Nature Communications, May 22, 2024](#).

In [a summary of their work for a nonspecialist audience](#), three of the study authors report that their research is the first to show that ancient viral DNA is one of the avenues through which genetic susceptibility to psychiatric disorders may occur. They are careful not to attribute causality here, but to note that their findings “suggest” a link that deserves further exploration.

Human Endogenous Retroviruses

The ancient viral DNA is called human endogenous retroviruses, or HERVs, and makes up about 8 percent of the human genome. HERVs are DNA sequences that originated as viral infections millions of years ago and evolved in mammals through genetic mutations and deletions over time. Retroviruses are those that infect cells by inserting a copy of their own genes into the cell DNA.

First identified in the 1980s, HERVs have been [characterized as “viral fossils”](#) that continue to be passed on to modern generations. At first, HERVs were considered

to be “junk DNA,” with no known functions. As genomic technology advanced, scientists identified some specific roles for HERVs, such as producing RNA (ribonucleic acid) molecules that lead to proteins, and possibly regulating neighboring genes.

Most HERVs are thought to be inert, but [some are known to play an active role in human physiology](#). For example, two known beneficial HERVs are those involved in the formation of the placenta and in embryogenesis, helping to make pregnancy possible. Other HERVs have been detected in some types of cancer, and research is beginning to look at how to target and possibly control these HERVs to treat the cancer.

HERV Variations and Mental Illness

The new findings reported in Nature Communications looked at how variations in HERVs are involved in regulating neighboring neurological genes in specific, finely mapped locations in the genome known to be associated with psychiatric conditions. Their approach identified HERVs in the adult brains of Africans and Europeans who had a psychiatric diagnosis at the time of their death.

“It is not clear yet how the expression of the high confidence risk HERVs may play a role in psychiatric disorders,” the authors write. However, they found that some of the 1,238 HERVs identified in the brain were associated with “risk for complex psychiatric traits.”

The new research is important for advancing our understanding of mental illness and possibly finding new ways to treat it. Older studies dating back to the 1960s identified a link between genetics and mental illness, but no specific mechanism for heritability. Much of the research came from adoption and twin studies carried out in Denmark over a decade by a joint U.S. and Danish research team.

[Led by psychiatrist Seymour S. Kety at Harvard Medical School](#), the Danish studies spanned 1968 to 1994. Although the studies are generally accepted in the field as supporting a genetic basis for schizophrenia, there are some who challenge this, questioning the methodology and subjective interpretation of the data. [Criticisms of the Danish twin studies](#) point to the fact that control group adoptees were placed in more favorable environments than the study subjects, that the study did not include environmental variables, and that the definition of schizophrenia and its spectrum was not rigorous.

More recently, scientists have used genome-wide association studies to analyze genetic links to psychiatric disorders. [A 2023 review of these studies](#) stressed that “...there is no single ‘disease-gene’ for psychiatric disorders, but thousands of genetic variants that act together and collectively influence the risk of illness. Given that most of these genetic variants are commonly occurring, every human being has a genetic risk to each psychiatric disorder, from low to high.”

Another factor to consider is the possibility of [infection from viruses or bacteria that triggers neurological, immune system, and psychological changes](#), in association with [schizophrenia](#) in particular.

Implications for Human History

We know the effects of severe mental illnesses and how society has dealt with those persons severely affected, often in inhumane ways. But are there any possible benefits to individuals who may have smaller numbers of genetic variants linked to a particular mental disorder?

Stanford biologist Robert Sapolsky has a provocative answer to this question, in his analysis of how individuals with a moderate number of genetic links to schizophrenia might have provided the ancient basis for modern religions.

Sapolsky begins [a Stanford University class on the biological underpinnings of religiosity](#) by outlining the positive adaptive value for people who have some genes linked to certain genetic disorders, but not enough to cause full-blown illness. Sickle-cell anemia, for example, conveys protection from malaria to those with some of its marker genes. Similarly, cystic fibrosis, crippling when full-blown, is associated with protection from cholera and dehydration in those who have some of its marker genes. In that lecture, Sapolsky makes the point that it’s about too much allocation/expression of the genes. Just the right amount, and you have protection. Too much, and you have a chronic health issue.

In the same way, Sapolsky says, individuals who are on the spectrum of schizophrenia may have used their particular qualities of schizophrenia—seeing visions, hearing voices, obsessive-compulsive ritualistic behavior, intrusive thoughts, anxieties, and superstitions—positively in ancient societies.

Sapolsky bases his analysis on the data from the [adoption studies in Denmark by Harvard psychiatry professor Seymour S. Kety](#) and his U.S. and Danish research team, noted above. The Danish adoption studies found that schizophrenics often

had family members who were a little “off,” not severely ill, but not quite “normal”—people whom they termed schizotypal.

Religion, Good Works, and Metamagical Thinking

In the appropriate context, Sapolsky says, a schizotypal individual could play a unifying role in an ancient society. Think of the shaman or medicine man in more recent native cultures, or the founding stories and rituals of today’s Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern religions, which all have similar elements.

Sapolsky reviews in detail the similarity in the outline of the ritual, numerology, and anxiety-calming behavior of religions. For all religious beliefs, the description of religious behavior—its “structural steel” and “building blocks” as Sapolsky terms it—is on the mark. How the beginnings of theology mesh with the particular qualities of schizotypicals, from the metamagical to ritualist, is eerily recognizable.

The positives for society also ring true: Good works are motivated, and ritual behaviors (think holiday celebrations) are unifying and calming. Religious believers today, Sapolsky notes, live longer and are healthier than nonbelievers.

As Sapolsky emphasizes, a schizotypal person has to get it “just right” in order to succeed, and a society has room for just one such person at a time. Failed schizotypal leaders often branch off into cults, and have bad endings, like the Manson or Waco cults.

Sapolsky also reminds us that today’s society still harbors metamagical thinking. A Gallup poll he quotes, for example, found that 25 percent of Americans believe in ghosts and 50 percent believe in the influence of the devil.

A New Frontier?

Sapolsky’s presentation on the biological underpinnings of religiosity is mesmerizing. If you have an interest in human behavior on any level, the ideas provoke more serious thinking, which is always a good thing.

This area of research and discussion is a sensitive one, with considerable history associated with some of humanity’s darkest chapters; genetic determinism in the form of eugenics and racism was an ugly feature of the World War II era.

How ancient HERVs (and modern microbial infection) influence the genetics of

schizophrenia and other mental illnesses is an important subject for research and a necessary one if we are to find better treatments.

By Marjorie Hecht

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Source: Human Bridges

Credit Line: This article was produced by [Human Bridges](#).

Forget Wealth Tax. We Should Abolish Extreme Wealth Altogether



C.J. Polychroniou

08-02-2024 ~ *Wealth taxation may sound like a good idea, but can it really address, let alone solve, the problem of inequality?*

Economic inequality is the scourge of the 21st century. The rich are getting richer and faster than any other time since the onset of neoliberalism, which calls for

“free-market” capitalism, regressive taxation, fiscal austerity and the rejection of the social state. They get richer not only when the economy is on an upswing but even amid crises. Billionaires more than doubled their net worth during the pandemic, according to [Bloomberg Billionaires Index](#).

The latest analysis shows that the [richest 1 percent gained \\$42 trillion](#) in new wealth over the past decade, which amounts to “nearly 34 times more than the entire bottom 50 percent of the world’s population.” In the meantime, the very poor and low-income people across the globe, including the [U.S.](#), are actually getting poorer. So much for [trickle-down economics](#) which was popularized during the 1980s by the Reagan administration’s vast capital gains and income tax cuts and continues to persist to this day in spite of its major flaws. [Cutting taxes on the rich](#) not only increases economic inequality but has no effect on economic growth and unemployment.

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However, inequality should not be examined purely from an economic perspective. Over the years, numerous [studies](#) have shown that economic inequality influences public attitudes toward democracy by generating political disillusion and low trust in government and other institutions, like Congress. Inequality also undermines social mobility, contributes to [political polarization](#) and fuels [authoritarianism](#).

Finally, inequality contributes to climate change. The richest 1 percent is responsible for more carbon emissions than the poorest 66 percent, according to a 2023 report by [Oxfam](#). Of course, while the world's wealthiest people make a huge contribution to climate change, they are also able to insulate themselves from the worst impacts of global warming.

In sum, the super-rich can be blamed for many of the most serious ills confronting societies in the twentieth-first century. The only consequential question here is this: what can be done about it then?

One of the most frequent responses to the problem of rising inequality is a call for the implementation of a wealth tax. Wealth taxation may sound like a good idea, but can it really address, let alone solve, the problem of inequality? The answer is an unqualified "no." At least for the world's advanced economies. Indeed, even if it's possible to discover all the wealth that the very rich people own (much of which is hidden in companies or put in trusts) and then proceed with an accurate asset valuation, this will have very little impact, if any, on the daily lives of people who try to survive on minimum wages. Wealth taxation alone will have no impact on workers without social protection and no bargaining power at companies. It won't protect workers at the "gig economy" and part-time workers.

To effectively address economic inequality, we must identify the root cause of the problem, and one simple way to do this is by asking a rather simple question: How does one become superrich? Where does this immense wealth come from? Because as the renowned progressive economist James K. Boyce recently [put it](#) "nobody 'earns' a billion dollars.

There must be something very rotten with an economic system that allows individuals to generate obscene amounts of wealth to the point they can hijack the political system and undermine democracy. Democracy cannot exist when we have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. The idea that rich and poor are equal before government in democratic societies is ludicrous. As disparities in wealth and income grow, so do the disparities in political influence.

Take [corporations](#), for example, which exert enormous influence, thanks primarily to [campaign donations and lobbying](#). Their actions, which range from opposing labor laws and policies that benefit workers to restricting unionization, exacerbate inequalities at all levels of society and across the globe. Moreover, the

surge in billionaire wealth and the surge in “[corporate power and monopoly power](#)” form a powerful connection. The very rich are not simply beneficiaries of the existing economic order. They are in control of the working arrangements of the global economic system. Yet despite the enormous power that corporations have on people’s lives and the communities in which they operate, there are very few policies and mechanisms at national or international level to curtail that power.

Of course, we know that billionaires and big corporations [pay very little in taxes](#), but we need much more than wealth and corporate taxation. We need ways to curb the power of big corporations and their drive to maximize shareholder value at the expense of everything else. We should also set a cap on extreme wealth. There is no social value for having billionaires. We should [abolish the superrich](#), perhaps an easier task, politically speaking, than finding ways to tax them. Democratic societies could hold a referendum on whether we should abolish extreme wealth.

In addition, we could create economic arrangements that provide a minimum income to ensure that everyone’s basic needs are met. This can be done either through [universal basic income](#) or [guaranteed income programs](#).

Last, but not least, we can challenge the rule of capital by advancing democratic forms of economic governance and economic planning. [Participatory economics](#) is one such alternative that would change the economy as we know it since it entails [social ownership of production and self-managed workplaces](#). Worker cooperatives are established in various parts of Europe, particularly in Italy and Spain. The [Mondragon Corporation](#) in the Basque region of Spain is owned by its workers and represents the biggest and most successful case of worker cooperatives. Of course, for economic transformation to occur, breaking down hierarchical structures and putting workers in charge of business activities is not enough. What needs to happen is that the values of worker cooperatives spread across the economy and that power is wrested away from the capitalist class.

In today’s world, we can tackle economic inequality only by shifting the conversation to its root causes and then coming up with blends of policies that work together to put an end to the driving forces behind inequality. Spending all political capital on something like a wealth tax will only help to prolong the life of an immensely cruel and dangerous economic system. An easier and far more

effective way to end plutocracy is through the power of democracy via a binding referendum that calls on citizens to decide whether or not we should abolish altogether extreme wealth.

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Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/abolish-extreme-wealth>

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The Venezuelan People Stay With The Bolivarian Revolution



Venezuela - Source:
wikipedia.org

On July 28, the 70th birthday of Hugo Chávez (1954-2013), Nicolás Maduro Moros won the Venezuelan presidential election, the fifth since the Bolivarian Constitution was ratified in 1999.

In January 2025, Maduro will start his third six-year term as president. He took over the reins of the Bolivarian Revolution after the death of Chávez from pelvic cancer in 2013. Since the death of Chávez, Maduro has faced several challenges: to build his own legitimacy as president in the place of a charismatic man who came to define the Bolivarian Revolution; to tackle the collapse of oil prices in mid-2014, which negatively impacted Venezuela's state revenues (over 90 percent of which was from oil exports); and to manage a response to the unilateral, illegal sanctions deepened on Venezuela by the United States as oil prices declined. These negative factors weighed heavily on the Maduro government, which has now been in office for a decade after being re-elected through the ballot box in 2018 and now in 2024.

From Maduro's first election victory in 2013, the increasingly far-right opposition began to reject the electoral process and complain about irregularities in the system. Interviews I have held over the past decade with conservative politicians have made it clear that they recognize both the ideological grip of *Chavismo* over the working class of Venezuela and the organizational power not only of Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela but of the networks of *Chavismo* that run from the communes (1.4 million strong) to youth organizations. About half of Venezuela's voting population is reliably wedded to the Bolivarian project, and no other political project in Venezuela has the kind of election machine built by the forces of the Bolivarian revolution. That makes winning an election for the anti-Chávez forces impossible. To that end, their only path is to malign Maduro's government as corrupt and to complain that the elections are not fair. After Maduro's victory—by a margin of 51.2 percent to 44.2 percent—this is precisely what the far-right opposition has been trying to do, egged on by the United States and a network of far-right and pro-U.S. governments in South America.

Europe Needs Venezuelan Oil

The United States has been trying to find a solution to a problem of its own making. Having placed severe sanctions against both Iran and Russia, the United

States now cannot easily find a source of energy for its European partners. Liquefied natural gas from the United States is expensive and not sufficient. What the U.S. would like is to have a reliable source of oil that is easy to process and in sufficient quantities. Venezuelan oil fits the requirements, but given the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, this oil cannot be found in the European market. The United States has created a trap from which it finds few solutions.

In June 2022, the U.S. government [allowed](#) Eni SpA (Italy) and Repsol SA (Spain) to transport Venezuelan oil to the European market to compensate for the loss of Russian oil deliveries. This allowance revealed Washington's shift in strategy regarding Venezuela. No longer was it going to be possible to suffocate Venezuela by preventing exports of oil, since this oil was needed as a result of U.S. sanctions on Russia. Since June 2022, the United States has been trying to calibrate its need for this oil, its antipathy to the Bolivarian Revolution, and its relations with the far-right opposition in Venezuela.

The U.S. and the Venezuelan Far-Right

The emergence of *Chavismo*—the politics of mass action to build socialism in Venezuela—transformed the political scenario in the country. The old parties of the right (Acción Democrática and COPEI) collapsed after 40 years of alternating power. In the 2000 and 2006 elections, the opposition to Chávez was provided not by the right, but by dissenting center-left forces (La Causa R and Un Nuevo Tiempo). The Old Right faced a challenge from the New Right, which was decidedly pro-capitalist, anti-Chavista, and pro-U.S.; this group formed a political platform called La Salida or The Exit, which referred to their desired exit from the Bolivarian Revolution. The key figures here were Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, and María Corina Machado, who led violent protests against the government in 2014 (López was arrested for incitement to violence and now lives in Spain; a U.S. government official in 2009 said he is “often [described](#) as arrogant, vindictive, and power-hungry”). Ledezma moved to Spain in 2017 and was—with Corina Machado—a signatory of the far-right [Madrid Charter](#), an anti-communist manifesto organized by the Spanish far-right party, Vox. Corina Machado's political project is underpinned by the proposal to privatize Venezuela's oil company.

Since the death of Chávez, Venezuela's right wing has struggled with the absence of a unified program and with a mess of egotistical leaders. It fell to the United States to try and shape the opposition into a political project. The most comical

attempt was the elevation in January 2019 of an obscure politician named Juan Guaidó to be the president. That maneuver failed and in December 2022, the far-right opposition [removed](#) Guaidó as its leader. The removal of Guaidó allowed for direct negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the far-right opposition, which had since 2019 hoped for U.S. military intervention to secure them in power in Caracas.

The U.S. pressured the increasingly intransigent far-right to hold talks with the Venezuelan government in order to allow the U.S. to reduce sanctions and let Venezuelan oil go into European markets. This pressure [resulted](#) in the Barbados Agreement of October 2023, in which the two sides agreed to a fair election in 2024 as the basis for the slow withdrawal of the sanctions. The elections of July 28 are the outcome of the Barbados process. Even though María Corina Machado was barred from running, she effectively ran against Maduro through her proxy candidate Edmundo González and lost in a hard-fought election.

Twenty-three minutes after the polls closed, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris—and now a presidential candidate in the November elections in the United States—put out a [tweet](#) conceding that the far-right had lost. It was an early sign that the United States—despite making noises about election fraud—wanted to move past their allies in the far-right, find a way to normalize relations with the Venezuelan government and allow the oil to flow to Europe. This tendency of the U.S. government has frustrated the far-right, which [turned](#) to other far-right forces across Latin America for support, and which knows that its remaining political argument is about election fraud. If the U.S. government wants to get Venezuelan oil to Europe it will need to abandon the far-right and accommodate the Maduro government. Meanwhile, the far-right has taken to the streets through armed gangs who want to repeat the *guarimba* (barricade) disruptions of 2017.

By Vijay Prashad

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

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Source: Globetrotter

With Project 2025 And Agenda 47, The USA's Coups Come Home To Roost



C.J. Polychroniou

07-29-2024 ~ *The authoritarian, dystopian settings that the U.S. created in so many places across the world are being reconceived by ultra-conservative forces affiliated with Trump for the purpose of introducing them here.*

Since the rise of the United States into a global power, U.S. policymakers have been keen on halting the spread of popular government abroad by undermining democratic institutions; overthrowing or assassinating elected leaders; and installing brutal, vicious military dictatorships. Indeed, the fact of the matter is that the United States has invaded more countries, organized more coups, and installed more military dictatorships than any other imperialist power in the course of history. During the Cold War alone, Washington staged dozens of

invasions, orchestrated or sponsored numerous coups that installed subservient governments, and engaged in total in [over 70 attempts at regime change](#).

U.S. involvement in foreign coups was so widespread that a common joke was that there has never been a coup d'état in the United States because there is no U.S. Embassy there. Of course, the joke was before the political era of former U.S. President Donald J. Trump and thus has lost some of its sting. Because what happened at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 was a coup attempt incited by the rhetoric of an outgoing president as part of his effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Moreover, Trump has warned voters of a "[bloodbath](#)" for the country if he is not elected in November 2024.

The roosters have come home to roost. The U.S. is sleepwalking toward democratic collapse and into a Trump proto-fascist dictatorship. If [Donald Trump](#) gets elected in November, "[the gloves are off... its four years of scorched earth,](#)" as Republican National Committee boss Lara Trump proudly announced to an audience a few months ago. Never mind people like [John Bolton](#) who tried to make the argument that Trump did not attempt a coup on January 6 because he is not competent enough to have done so. Those who entertain such thoughts seem to imply that it takes brilliance to destroy democracy. Yet, a reactionary revolt against democracy (or what's left of it in the U.S.) has been underway since Trump gained control of the GOP. Trump encouraged violence during his 2016 campaign and levied harsh attacks against his opponents. Upon assuming office as president, he exhibited blunt authoritarian tendencies and levied attacks against the press. And when he lost a free and fair election in 2020, he tried to block a peaceful transfer of power.

But even if Trump isn't capable enough to draw up a plan on his own for the dismantling of our democracy from within, there are plenty of extreme right-wingers able and willing to show him how it can be done. Indeed, the authoritarian, dystopian settings that the U.S. created in so many places across the world from the end of the Second World War to the present—through Washington's support of oppressive political regimes that committed massive violations of human rights against their own citizens and forced them to live under constant threat—are being reconceived by ultra-conservative forces affiliated with Trump for the purpose of introducing them here inside the United States. This is precisely the aim of Project 2025, a Heritage Foundation plan to reshape the United States in a manner consistent with the ideology and vision of

[neoliberal proto-fascism.](#)

Project 2025 is not Trump's plan, but a plan for Trump. It's also fair to point out that Trump has publicly denied knowing anything about the dystopian Project 2025. Yet, many of the people who worked in high-level positions during his presidency served as authors of the project. In fact, *CNN* reported finding some 240 people "[with ties to both Project 2025 and to Trump.](#)" It is thus ludicrous for Trump to claim ignorance of this extreme far-right agenda and having "[no idea who is behind it.](#)" Also, Paul Dans, director of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project at The Heritage Foundation and who had previously served in the Trump administration as the chief of staff at the Office of Personnel Management, said on a radio show during the Republican primary race last year that "[Trump's very brought in with this.](#)" Last week, the same person suddenly claimed that the idea that Trump is attached to Project 2025 is a "hoax."

More important, while Trump and his campaign staff have pointed out that Agenda 47 is their official policy platform for the 2024 presidential election, Project 2025 and Agenda 47 have a lot of overlap in terms of ideas and policy plans. They both contain plans for the reshaping of U.S. government and civil society that can only be described as "fascist." They both assert that the mission they serve is to rescue the country from the influence of the radical left.

Project 2025 envisions the end of the administrative state by placing the entire federal bureaucracy under direct presidential control. In other words, the plan is for Trump to rule as a Unitary Executive, long considered a pathway for autocracy. Likewise, Trump's plan in Agenda 47 is to dismantle what it calls the "deep state" by firing thousands of civil servants and replacing them with party hacks (though in Agenda 47 they are called "patriots who love America"). In doing so, Trump claims, federal bureaucrats and politician will be "[held accountable to the American people.](#)" Not to the president, mind you, who will now have complete control of the federal bureaucracy, but to the American people. Of course, not a single word is mentioned in Agenda 47 about how the "people" even enter the power equation of holding bureaucrats and politicians accountable to the popular will. But authoritarian leaders and wannabe dictators have always been masters of propaganda who engineer techniques of mass manipulation through the politics of illusion. And no propaganda tool is more effective in the authoritarian playbook than the one that justifies the dismantling of checks and balances as "[corrupt obstacles to the popular will.](#)"

State control over public education and teachers has always been an integral component of fascist ideology and strategy. In the neoliberal proto-fascist mentality that guides the thinking of the architects of Project 2025, the contention made however is that federal intervention in education should be severely limited and that, ultimately, the federal Department of Education should be eliminated. This is because their reactionary vision for the future of the United States would not object to the conversion of public schools into religious zones and calls for the rejection of “gender ideology” and the banning of “critical race theory.” Thus, it is of paramount importance that complete authority over primary and secondary education, including funding, transfers to the state and local level. Likewise, Project 2025 also endorses universal school choice and allowing families to access public funds to pay for private school tuition. Moreover, Project 2025 wants to ban any public education employee or institution from using a pronoun in addressing a student that does not “[match a person’s biological sex](#)” without the written permission of a student’s parents or guardians.

The call for the banning of “critical race theory” is utterly revealing of the ideological underpinnings of the architects of Project 2025. They want to see “critical race theory” forced out of classrooms because, they argue, its emphasis on the racist history of the United States “disrupts the values that hold communities together.” It’s rather shameful though that they omitted mentioning slavery as one of the values that should “hold communities together.”

As for higher education, which comes under severe attack by the reactionary minds behind Project 2025 for being “hostile to free expression” and “American exceptionalism,” student loans and grants should be placed into the hands of the private sector. They also call on the next president to downplay the value of a bachelor’s degree by removing it as a requirement for any federal job unless it is specifically demanded.

Agenda 47 is an even more extreme version of Project 2025 on the issue of education and comes much closer to authentic fascism. [Trump’s proposals for K-12 schools](#) call for, among other things, ending federal funding to any school teaching “critical race theory,” certifying only teachers who embrace “patriotic values,” firing Department of Education employees deemed radical zealots and Marxists, pushing prayer in public schools, and abolishing teacher tenure.

Trump’s Agenda 47 and Project 2025 also share the same extremist views on

immigration and climate change. Project 2025 wants to demolish the entire U.S. immigration system while Trump wants to engage in draconian measures against undocumented immigrants, which includes a pledge to deport millions of undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

Regarding climate change, Project 2025 is all about a project that backs a fossil fuel agenda and wants to go so far as to eliminate the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration because it's "[one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry.](#)" Trump's stance on energy and climate as expressed in Agenda 47 is in full alignment with Project 2025 and can be summarized by three words: "[DRILL, BABY, DRILL.](#)"

Finally, both the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 and Trump's Agenda 47 (along with his already established record on the matter) make abundantly clear that serving the interests of a plutocracy is of equal importance to them as destroying the environment and turning back the clock on social and cultural progress through the implementation of extreme authoritarian measures. Among other major changes to the tax system, Project 2025 calls for reducing the corporate tax to 18% and cementing the tax on capital gains and dividends at 15%. A second Trump presidency would most certainly also see another round of tax cuts targeted at the very rich.

In sum, there should be little doubt in any concerned citizen's mind that the reactionary forces in this country, led by one of the most authentic con artists in political history, are as close as they have ever been to dismantling U.S. democracy and replacing it in turn with a dystopian setting guided by the very same vision, values, and even tactics that have been the hallmark of U.S. imperialist efforts to install and support neo-fascist regimes around the globe.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/project-2025-agenda-47>

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The Science Of Twins And The Human Fascination With Them



Nancy Segal, professor of psychology, Cal State Fullerton

Fascination with twins and what [twin studies](#) tell us about human nature is universal. There is no question that behavioral and medical science advances have happened largely because twins yield a wealth of information just by being themselves.

Twin research takes place at two levels:

- (1) Studies that are strictly for twins. Such studies examine the pros and cons of twins being separated at school, dressing alike, or sharing their friends.
- (2) Studies with broad implications. Psychological analyses and medical research are conducted to understand the genetic and environmental factors affecting behavior and health which can be applied to the general nontwin population.

Twin Types

There are two main types of twins: Monozygotic (MZ, identical) and Dizygotic (DZ, fraternal). [MZ twins](#) share all their genes having split from a single fertilized egg within the first two weeks following conception (there are exceptions). [DZ twins](#) share half their genes, on average, having formed from the separate fertilization of two eggs released simultaneously. There are, however, variations

within each type. For example, there are MZ twins who show [mirror-image reversals](#) and DZ twins with different fathers.

Twin Methods

The classic twin study is simple and elegant. Researchers compare the similarities and differences of identical twins to those of fraternal twins. The greater resemblance between identical twins than between fraternal twins is consistent with the view that genetic factors influence the behavioral characteristic or physical trait under study. Of course, environmental influences also affect every measured trait.

There are variations on the classic twin method, two of them being twins reared apart and twins as couples. Identical twins reared apart offer pure estimates of genetic influence given that they share all their genes, but not their environments. Fraternal twins reared apart offer informative contrasts. Twins as couples focus on the quality and outcomes of twins' social interactions as the twins work together on a joint project or task. Comparing identical and fraternal twins in this regard tells us about the factors contributing to cooperative or competitive social exchanges.

Research

The research described below is located at the juncture of developmental psychology, behavioral genetics, and evolutionary psychology, with a focus on twin studies. Developmental psychology is concerned with the biological and environmental events, both before and after birth, that underlie changes in intellectual and physical growth. Behavioral genetics (BG) examines genetic factors affecting intelligence, personality, interests, and other measured traits. BG is concerned with variation within groups. Evolutionary psychology (EP) is concerned with how and why the mind is designed the way it is, and how this design, together with environmental events, produces behavior. EP is concerned with human universals. Twin research can assess behavioral-genetic and evolutionary-based hypotheses and questions.

Twins Reared Apart

Identical twins reared apart—the rare “elite pairs” among multiples because they cleanly separate genes and experience—have revealed genetic effects on intelligence, personality, interests, and more. One of the most striking findings from the investigators of the [Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart](#) is that the

personality traits of reared-apart identical twins are as similar as the personality traits of reared-together identical twins. This suggests that personality similarity among family members living together is explained by their shared genes, not their shared environments. I also conducted a study of the relationships formed by reared-apart twins, with hypotheses generated by the evolutionary psychological concept of [kin selection](#) discussed by W.D. Hamilton. Natural selection favors genes predisposing individuals to act in ways that favor the transmission of those genes. Hamilton reasoned that close relatives should be predisposed to act more [altruistically](#) toward one another than distant relatives, given the perception of similarities associated with shared genes.

Mirroring what we see in twins reared together, identical reared-apart twins generally form closer ties than fraternal twins reared-apart twins. This is likely due to their perceptions of resemblance. Most striking, however, is that twins as a group feel closer to their newly found twin than to the adopted sibling they were raised with since childhood. Here, a perceived lack of resemblance may contribute to this result, consistent with what kin selection would predict.

Reared-apart twins' unusual matching habits are not random events, but likely reflections of who they are. Separated twins have been observed to divide their toast into four square pieces, leaving one section uneaten; twins have been observed to enjoy typically hot drinks at lukewarm temperatures; twins who named their sons James Allan and James Alan have been seen. There are also twins who both used a rare Swedish toothpaste called Vademecum, twins who scratched their ears with a paper clip, and twins who dried their hands with three paper towels in public restrooms. These unusual behaviors were acquired *independently* by the twins before they knew they were part of a pair. These observations suggest that our own idiosyncrasies and signature quirks arise from a multitude of individually based factors expressed within the environments we seek.

Evolutionary Psychology and Behavioral Genetics: Fruitful Union or Ships Passing in the Night?

EP and BG have operated separately for too long. The reason for this separation is that BG focuses on individual behavioral differences within human groups and EP examines universal human behaviors. However, session panelists for a symposium under this title asserted that BG offers EP informative research designs for assessing evolutionary-based hypotheses and questions, especially those involving

kinship relations. Similarly, EP offers BG information for understanding why some behaviors show greater genetic influence than others. There is evidence that these two disciplines are coming closer together, albeit slowly.

By Nancy L. Segal, PhD

Author Bio: Dr. Nancy L. Segal is a professor of psychology at California State University, Fullerton, and the founder and director of the Twin Studies Center. She is the author of nine books on twin-related topics and is currently at work on her tenth. Ongoing twin studies in her laboratory include the behaviors of young Chinese twins reared apart (due indirectly to China's former One-Child Policy), tacit coordination, behavioral problems, family relationships, and bereavement. Please visit her website at drnancysegaltwins.org to obtain her books on twin-related topics, as well as to participate in research on twins.

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America's Two-Party System Is A Relic Of The Past And Bad For Democracy



C.J. Polychroniou

07-22-2024 ~ An Interview on the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election with C. J. Polychroniou.

The rematch between Biden and Trump is regarded by many as the most important election in modern U.S. history. It is also a rematch between two men that many voters have serious reservations about and feel that U.S. democracy can do much better than having a raving maniac and someone who is too gaffe-prone and seems to be experiencing cognitive decline run for the highest office in the most powerful nation in the world. In this case, however, the real culprit is America's two-party system, argues political scientist/political economist C. J. Polychroniou in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri, because it severely limits choices for the voters and discourages competition due to a winner-take-all system. Polychroniou also addresses the nature and character of today's GOP and why a second term for Trump could turn the U.S. into a neofascist dictatorship.

Alexandra Boutri: For the next few months, U.S. elections will be under the spotlight. The rematch between President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump is pivotal for the future of democracy in the U.S., critically consequential to Washington's European allies, and potentially transformative for today's geopolitical realities. The two men also differ radically when it comes to climate change and have different approaches regarding immigration and taxes. They are also quite apart across a broad range of issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Do you agree then with the often-made claim that the rematch between Biden and Trump is perhaps the most important election in modern U.S. history?

C. J. Polychroniou: Before I address your question, let me just say that we cannot discount the possibility that we won't have a rematch between two men that many American voters don't want anyway because Joe Biden may drop out of the presidential race before next month's Democratic National Convention. Nearly two-thirds of Democrats want Biden to step aside, according to a new poll conducted by [AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). Also, there are solid reasons why many American voters don't want to see another showdown between Trump and Biden. Trump is simply unfit for the highest office in the land, or any public office for that matter, while Biden, judging from the difficulties he is having

with speech and memory, can't possibly be relied on to serve another 4 years.

Be that as it may, the 2024 U.S. presidential election is enormously important for at least some of the reasons you cited, although parochialism is what drives most American voters. This election is also unlike any other in modern history because American voters are so polarized that the threat of civil breakdown is real. This is the best evidence that binary politics is bad and possibly dangerous for contemporary democracies. American voters don't have a viable range of choices, but the U.S. political system is set up for two major parties because of the winner-take-all politics. It is mainly the [winner-take-all system](#) that has also allowed the superrich to hijack the political system and transform the U.S. from a flawed democracy to a plutocracy.

Alexandra Boutri: You may have an excellent point here about the downsides of a two-party system, but why does polarization run so deep in today's United States?

C. J. Polychroniou: Political polarization among Americans has deep societal roots, with religion and race playing pivotal roles, but has been steadily intensifying in the last forty or fifty years. There is now such a huge gap between Democrats and Republicans over political and social values that each side fears that the other side will destroy the nation if they are allowed to dictate policy. Democrats tend to be quite liberal when it comes to social issues, but most Republicans identify themselves as social conservatives. However, it is interesting to note that an annual poll on values and beliefs conducted last year by [Gallup](#) found that more Americans identify themselves as socially conservative than at any time in about a decade, although the largest increase was among Republicans. The role of guns in society, abortion, race, immigration, gender identity and sexual orientation are among the issues that sharply divide supporters of the two parties, according to the latest findings from a [Pew Research Center](#) survey. Republicans and Democrats are also very much divided over [the role of government power](#) and [global warming](#). In sum, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Democrats and Republicans live in different worlds.

Alexandra Boutri: How would you describe today's GOP?

C. J. Polychroniou: Today's GOP is the creation of one man alone—namely Donald J. Trump. What I mean by that is Trump can shift the party in any direction he

chooses because he exerts a cult of personality over his followers. He can deliver fiery anti-abortion messages at some juncture during his political life, like he did when he first run for president because he needed the support of evangelical Christians, but then decline to endorse a national abortion ban at another juncture because he fears that it would cost him votes if he did so.

Trump is not about ideology, values or beliefs. Trump is the penultimate political opportunist who will say and do anything that might help him to achieve his goals. He is a clown, but a dangerous one who poses a real threat to democracy and the rule of law. The Republican Party has always been a reactionary political party but has now become an extreme political organization that fires up its base with lies and conspiracies. Trump employs the rhetoric of conservative populism, mocks the elite class, and pretends to be pro-worker. Never mind that Trump has no ideological convictions of his own and spent four years in office weakening unions and catering to the interests of the superrich. Most GOP voters have become blind followers of Trump and have neither the critical thinking skills nor the will to face the truth. They live in the political bubble that Trump has created for them. They would gladly take part in any political scheme conceived by Trump and even allow him to govern by dictatorial means. Moreover, virtually no Republican dares to stand up to Trump. He mocked and humiliated all his Republican rivals but in the end they all fell in line and kissed his ring. I have a hard time coming up with politicians anywhere else on the planet who are so cowardly and obsequious as the Republicans are in the “land of the free.”

Alexandra Boutri: By the same token, the Democratic Party also went from being the “party of the people” to the party of the financial elite. Would you say then that it is the Democrats who paved the path for the rise of someone like Donald Trump? Also, do you think that Biden can defeat Trump?

C. J. Polychroniou: The Democratic Party has always been a pro-business party. Until recently, the differences between Democrats and Republicans were not that great. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky used to say, “the United States has essentially a one-party system and the ruling party is the business party.” So, it was largely a myth to say that the Democratic Party was the “party of the people.” Nonetheless, Bill Clinton remade the Democratic Party to such an extent that it abandoned all pretext of being a party representing the working class. Clinton had revealed his anti-union credentials long before he made it to the White House. He had been working ceaselessly toward undermining the labor movement in [Arkansas](#) since

the mid-1970s.

The working class ditched Hillary Clinton in 2016. Working-class voters, feeling betrayed by the Democratic Party and its economic policies, were a key demographic element behind Trump's rise. Of course, it wasn't just economics that drove white working-class voters to Trump's camp. An equally important factor was racial and cultural resentment. Anyone who thinks that racism and xenophobia were not important factors in Trump's rise or that they don't figure prominently in the support he has been receiving since by the millions of his followers needs a reality check.

What is unusual is that President Biden, who has not only been very outspoken about supporting organized labor but leads in fact the most pro-union administration since that of FDR, may not be able to count as much as he should on working-class people and even on [all union groups](#) in his effort to get reelected. And the support of union groups will be crucial in swing states. It is also likely that many progressives angry over Gaza and who also think that Biden should suspend his campaign because of his cognitive decline will abstain from voting. Of course, I have no crystal ball, but if Biden can somehow manage to focus on his record and the huge differences between him and Trump, he can win. If he fails to do so or ends up having another disastrous performance in the second presidential debate on Tuesday, September 10, Trump will win by a landslide and there will be no one to blame but Biden himself.

If Trump returns to the White House, we should all brace ourselves for major shocks. We should expect to see mass deportations, systematic efforts to undermine democracy and rights in the U.S. and even abroad, the sacking of thousands of civil servants, the dismantling of the Department of Education, the expansion of presidential power (and bear in mind that an ultra-conservative Supreme Court gave presidents total immunity from prosecution for all official acts), major tax cuts for the rich, the end of policies to tackle the climate crisis, and even a rollback of policies that have aided minorities economically and socially. This is what's behind [Project 2025](#), a blueprint of over 900 pages for a second Trump term developed by the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation. Trump has tried to distance himself from Project 2025, but many of the policies that he has said he will carry out if he returns to the White House are already included in this extremist far-right agenda.

Alexandra Boutri: One final question, and it has to do with third-party and independent candidates running for president. Could they affect the 2024 vote?

C. J. Polychroniou: One could and should be in support of third-party candidates for all sorts of reasons. The problem however with the U.S. political system is that they have no chance of winning a presidential race. I doubt that they can even shake up the two-party system. You need some form of proportional representation, like the system that exists in many European democracies, for third parties in the U.S. to make a real impact on national politics. But third-party candidates can easily end up having the opposite than the desired effect, which is help the candidate they least want in the White House emerge victorious. This is yet another reason why America's two-party system, a relic of the past, is unquestionably bad for contemporary democracy.

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