

The Ultra-Right Is Governing Argentina. Who Is Javier Milei And What Is He Doing?



*Lucía Converti -
celag.org*

07-04-2024 ~ On December 10, 2023, Javier Milei was elected president of Argentina with 55.6 percent of the vote. The eccentric president has attracted global attention for his outrageous media style, his extreme ideas like “blowing up” the Central Bank of Argentina, and a mixture of messianism and mysticism with religion and [canine esotericism](#). Beyond the media show, Milei represents a radical shift in a country governed by progressivism during the last twenty years—Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), and Alberto Fernández (2019-2023)—except for the interval of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019), when it was clear that the institutions of the public (for health care, for education, and more) were considered to be inviolable.

Javier Milei’s public appearance began as a commentator on different [television programs](#). He was one of the promoters of the protests against the mandatory isolation imposed during the pandemic, alleging the restriction of individual freedoms, and based on his popularity in social media, he was [elected national deputy](#) in the legislative elections of 2021 for his party “La Libertad Avanza” (Liberty Moves Forward). In 2023, with a strong erosion of the ruling party due to a dragging and poorly managed economic crisis, and an alliance with the conservative right “Juntos por el Cambio” (Together for change), he became President of the country.

Javier Milei defines himself as an anarcho-capitalist and a disciple of the Austrian economic school. What does this mean? Contrary to global practices of economic protectionism, Milei proposes unrestricted market freedom. He also proposes it not only as a foreign trade policy but also as a domestic policy.

Based on [Murray Rothbard's philosophy](#), Milei considers the state an illicit association that appropriates taxpayers' money to sustain the privileges of the "political caste." He believes in the market as the "natural" regulator of life in society and, therefore, public ownership and administration of services as an aberration. For instance, he believes public education and public health should not exist. This philosophy vindicates the "Law of Talion," or an "eye for an eye," as a valid practice of justice.

From this perspective, he intends to position himself as one of the leaders of the global ultraright that discusses [combating](#) "cultural Marxism." This is the way in which they characterize progress for rights, women, sexual diversity, migrants, and those excluded from the system in general. Milei also adopts a [denialist position with respect to climate change](#) and the scientific evidence for it.

From Political Philosophy to Government Practice

From his role as economic columnist, and presidential candidate, Milei promised the end of inflation, which averaged 8.6 percent monthly in Argentina in 2023 until Milei took office, and the dollarization of the economy.

Since he took office, as part of his economic policy, he has caused a devaluation of more than 100 percent of the local currency and embarked on a strong deregulation of economic activity, which implied an increase in the prices of basic goods and services. Additionally, as administrator of the state's resources, he slowed down investment in public works and [cut expenses](#) at all functional levels.

These measures provoked a great redistribution of income from the working class to the sectors that live off the economic and financial income it produces as well as big businessmen. They also created an economic recession that equals and in some sectors exceeds the levels reached during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this context, the government celebrates that inflation has been reduced monthly since it took office (from 25.5 percent in December caused by the devaluation to 4.2 percent in May), and boasts of a fiscal surplus (which hides the actual debt of the country). But the purchasing power of the minimum salary

(considering a total basic food basket) was 30 percent, poverty reached [55 percent](#) of the population in the first quarter of 2024 (with an increase of approximately 11 percent in the first 3 months of government), and an increase in the unemployment rate is expected due to the magnitude of the recession and the layoffs that have already taken place.

This economic arrogance is spread from the executive power to the rest of the powers of the state, especially toward the legislature and the federal governments; such arrogance pressures and extorts the institutions of the state so that whatever decrees and laws are proposed by the executive have to be approved without discussion. Given the impossibility of such power to the executive, it had to negotiate with its political allies and give them ambassadorships in exchange for their support.

The official discourse and public policy persecute and target the [freedom of the press](#), the institutions of national culture, those rights that guarantee the [lives of women who have been raped](#), those laws that promote non-discrimination in terms of [sexual orientation](#) and xenophobia, and institutions such as public universities, [social movements](#), and human rights organizations.

Milei's foreign policy is torn between the attempt to obtain dollars to maintain its anti-inflationary policy and its [ultraright](#) ideological positioning. For instance, it exaggerates positions against China but later renegotiates [a swap](#). It [defends the state of Israel](#) from charges against the genocide Israel is perpetrating in Palestine, but always from behind the cloak of the Western empire.

How Long Will It Last?

One of the most heard phrases in Argentina, once Milei entered the presidential balloting, was "He is not going to do everything he says." This phrase served both to justify voting for him and to protect the voters emotionally from the disaster that would follow if he won the presidency. However, Milei is doing quite a lot of what he said.

The other most frequently heard phrase is "How long will it last?" Although the politically correct answer is "four years" as in every democratically elected government in Argentina since the reestablishment of democracy in 1983, the economic and social crises experienced do not leave room for such an accurate answer and even less so with the application of policies so extremely detrimental

to the majority.

If we look at his economic plan and review Argentina's history, we can find similarities with two recent historical moments. The first is Carlos Menem's government (which for Milei was the best in Argentina's history) and the second is Fernando De la Rúa's government.

Menem's government (1989-1999) applied structural changes at the economic level (neoliberalism). It had a boom moment (which allowed Menem to be reelected) by curbing inflation achieved by the exchange rate parity with the dollar. This was sustained at the beginning of the policies of privatizations of services and public goods as well as of foreign indebtedness. However, it resulted in the closing of many national companies and industries and an increase in unemployment that exceeded 20 percent at the end of his second term in office.

De la Rúa's government (1999-2001) followed the policies of Menem's government. Although it entered power to carry out a "radical" change, it ended up in multiple debt renegotiations with the World Bank and the IMF. This resulted in strong fiscal adjustment programs and increasing poverty levels. De la Rúa ended his term of office declaring a state of siege, resigning, and leaving the Government House by helicopter.

Within this framework, Milei has begun to implement an economic plan that reduces inflation and reactivates economic activity as Menem did if he obtains new IMF loans, privatizes companies, and obtains dollars to liquefy Argentina's banking system; such policies will have similar consequences in terms of economic activity, employment, and poverty in a shorter period of time. Or, if he does not manage to access the necessary funds in dollars, he will have to rely on ever greater economic adjustment and repression with a government closer to that of De la Rúa. Helicopters should be on standby.

For the time being, for six months the streets of the City of Buenos Aires and the central squares of all the provinces of the country have been the [epicenter of constant mobilizations](#) against the policies applied and the laws promoted by the government. Among the government's adherents, though, the situation continues to be justified under arguments such as "We are in bad shape, but we are doing well," "We have to let it govern," and "Who did you want to vote for?" Those who still support Javier Milei cling to the fall in the inflation rate, but the latest polls

also reflect [a fall in his positive image](#), especially in the provinces of the interior of the country where Milei received strong support to reach the presidency.

By Lucía Converti

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Source: Globetrotter

Greece Just Became The First European Country To Impose A 6-Day Workweek



C.J. Polychroniou

07-02-204 ~ Years of brutal neoliberal capitalism combined with the left's betrayal have led to widespread political demoralization.

Just when one thought that the neoliberal dystopia created in Greece since the eruption of its debt crisis could not get any darker, the current right-wing

government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has replaced the nation's five-day workweek with a six-day workweek and flexible working hours. The controversial new law kicks into effect July 1, as Greeks have accepted it with little resistance.

The six-day workweek applies to both the public and the private sector. Specifically, the new labor law affects businesses, organizations and continuously operating enterprises that currently use the five-day workweek model and enables employers to compel their employees to work six days a week. The additional working day will be paid with an additional 40 percent of the daily wage.

As a poster child of neoliberal transformation, Greece is the first country in Europe to introduce the six-day workweek, and it comes at a time when other European countries have already adopted or tested, [with overwhelmingly positive results](#), a four-day workweek system.

What is even more ironic about the new labor law is that Greeks already work the [longest hours in Europe](#) (while earning lower wages than at the beginning of the country's financial crisis), while labor productivity, defined as real gross domestic product per hour worked, is approximately [61 percent of the European Union average and 55 percent of the eurozone average](#). In fact, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Economic Outlook, [labor productivity has actually fallen in recent years](#), revealing the moribund state of the existing economic model in Greece.

The new labor law, which was approved last September by a Parliament dominated by conservatives, was allegedly designed with the intent of putting an end to skilled labor shortages. This is complete gibberish, as virtually all of Europe seems to be facing skilled labor shortages. Roughly [75 percent](#) of employers in 21 European countries reported having difficulty finding workers equipped with the right skills in 2023, while [82 percent](#) of German employers reported experiencing problems with finding qualified candidates for open positions in 2024. Yet, only Greece's right-wingers seem to think that making a transition from a five-day workweek to a six-day workweek is the way to address skilled labor shortages. Moreover, they are aloof from the anxieties of citizens everywhere who demand better work-life balance, as well as oblivious to the empirical evidence available that a shortened workweek results in [increased](#)

[employee productivity and company performance.](#)

The change is motivated by a deep-seated desire on the part of neoliberals and the domestic capitalist elite to further degrade the position of workers and to maximize labor exploitation. True enough, international creditors (the so-called [troika](#) of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) had recommended back at the height of the debt crisis that Greece should adopt a six-day workweek, but the new labor law is the work of former Minister of Labor and current Minister of Health Adonis Georgiadis, whose long and rich history of antisemitism and political involvement in far right politics is [well documented](#). Georgiadis, who also serves as vice president of the right-wing New Democracy party, has in fact gone on record saying that it is the “right” of workers to work 16 hours a day.

In practice, the new labor law may very well realize this ultra-reactionary vision for the future of workers and work in Greece. It allows workers to work eight hours a day in two different business establishments and includes a series of highly flexible employer-employee arrangements such as allowing the former to offer new workers a six-month probationary period and release them without compensation during the first year. Employers can also call an employee into work on their day off with just a 24-hour notice.

In a different era, such reactionary labor measures would have at least encountered massive waves of public anger and protests. Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the father of the current Greek prime minister and a Thatcherite, managed to stay in power for only three short years (1990-1993) on account of the large-scale opposition by trade unions, socialists and communists to his ambitious plan for structural reforms of the Greek economy based on deregulation policies, market liberalization and wild privatization schemes of all public sector enterprises and all social services. Even members of his own New Democracy party opposed his radical privatization schemes.

Unfortunately, today the social reordering in Greece is so deep and profound that public pain for private gain has become the new norm as many years of brutal neoliberal capitalism combined with the left’s betrayal have resulted in a condition of political demoralization among the citizenry that makes it difficult to see how the country can wriggle out of its ongoing neoliberal nightmare.

Greece may be the first country in Europe to institute a six-day workweek, but employees in many companies in China already work six days a week and a [number of companies in the U.S.](#) also plan to mandate a six-day workweek in 2025. Undoubtedly, the erosion of labor rights and increased labor exploitation are easier to realize in conditions where trade unions have been weakened and the anti-capitalist left is feeble or nonexistent, for they are both essential to effectively challenge the irrational and inhumane project of neoliberal capitalism.

The Path From Debt Crisis to Neoliberal Dystopia

During the course of the infamous bailouts that took place between 2010 and 2015 following the outbreak of the Greek debt crisis in late 2009, the small southeastern European country was converted by the troika into a neoliberal laboratory.

Leaning on [the myth of Greek profligacy](#), the troika pushed a ruthless neoliberal policy agenda that comprised massive budget cuts in health care and education; major wage adjustments, with wages in the private sector falling even faster and lower (by over 23 percent) than in the public sector; [pension reforms](#) (pensions paying over 2,000 euros per month were cut by more than 40 percent, while pension paying less than 1,000 euros per month were cut by 14 percent); sharp cuts in social protection systems; massive tax increases; [privatization](#) of all state assets in the form of a fire sale; and draconian labor reforms that essentially demolished the whole system of collective bargaining and turned the labor market into a jungle.

The country's main political parties (the social democratic PASOK, the conservative party of New Democracy, and the Coalition of the Radical Left, aka, Syriza) all took turns at governing during the debt crisis and all three of them ended up signing bailout agreements and, subsequently, consenting to the transformation of Greece into a neoliberal dystopia.

Shockingly enough, but hardly surprising, very little of substance has changed in Greece since the bailouts. The economy functions on the same deficient model, with tourism and low wages acting as main drivers of growth. The state (including the judicial system) suffers from the same old pathologies of [corruption](#) and inefficiency (though the use of new technologies in administrative affairs serves to create the illusion that a new era has dawned in state-citizen relations). Meanwhile, the shadow economy continues to thrive, amounting to about one-fifth

of GDP; the average monthly wage is [20 percent lower than 15 years ago](#), unemployment is still over 10 percent, and the second-highest in the EU; and the debt-to-GDP ratio is much higher now than it was during the pre-crisis era. Indeed, all the bailout agreements managed to do vis-à-vis the allegedly unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratio at the end of 2009 was increase it. In 2009, the ratio of public debt to GDP stood at [115.1 percent](#). At the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, it was at [161.9 percent](#) — though it is expected to start declining from 2024 to 2029 and Greece is now [repaying earlier loans](#) from the first bailout.

The sadistic neoliberal measures introduced by the troika and obediently implemented in turn by the country's three main political parties have left Greece unable to pursue an alternative economic model. Consequently, socio-economic inequalities widened, democracy suffered severe blows, and the citizenry seems to have given up all hope for meaningful social change after [Syriza's](#) rise to power ended in a total fiasco. As evidenced by the [record-low voter turnout](#) in last month's European Parliament elections, Greeks today appear to feel helpless in the face of the crude realization that the country's political establishment unequivocally places the interests of the euromasters and the domestic corporate and financial elite above those of working people.

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Urgent Need for Radical Change (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Finding The Roots Of Religion In Human Prehistory



Deborah Barsky

07-01-2024 ~ *In a world so profoundly transformed by science and technology, it seems reasonable to ask: Why do religions still exist?*

A glance at recorded history shows us that humans have “always” felt a need to explain phenomena perceived to exist beyond our comprehension. Today, we turn to science to seek answers to our questions about the universe. But in the past, preliterate people developed spirituality to deal with their deepest metaphysical queries.

But when exactly did this conceptual revelation evolve and why did it take root so strongly?

In all regions of the world where writing has evolved, we find documents that corroborate humanity’s long history of creating stories to fill in the gaps, defining the limits of our understanding. In many cases, such stories provide deeply symbolic narratives intended to unite people and help them deal with themes that are difficult to explain, like the emergence of life and the paradoxes surrounding

the inevitability and permanence of death.

In many parts of the world, [uncannily similar cosmological stories](#) appeared soon after the founding of the [first urbanized civilizations](#) (i.e., [creation myths](#)) These stories serve to address metaphysical issues, and often (anthropocentrically) provide anecdotal accounts to explain how humans fit into the overall scheme of things. Some stories evolved into myths and were steeped in moral reckonings that served to model and control individual conduct in response to the growing population density, which followed the establishment of production-consumption economies.

[Cultural convergence](#) is, however, not just commonly observed in creation myths. The Acheulian techno-behavioral revolution; Upper Paleolithic blade technologies; Holocene farming and megalithic structures; and the invention of writing are all examples of landmark techno-social developments that occurred in similar timeframes in vastly different areas of the globe where cultural transmission through direct contact was unlikely to have occurred.

Before science, our ancestors dealt with the unknown by inventing stories that they incorporated into their lives as reasonable replacements for truth. Even though they shared a lack of scientific grounding, some of these stories were passed on over the centuries and eventually became enduring religious beliefs that continue to be embraced by many people.

The ancient mythical stories inscribed on Bronze Age monuments or incised into clay tablets recount exhaustive stories that imply an older origin or perhaps a long history of oral transmission. The question arises: *without written accounts, how can we discern when prehistoric humans began to replace real-life situations with abstract ideas as a way to rationalize what they could not understand?*

Myths are stories that provide alternative interpretations of real-life events and are socialized through specific [ritual](#) behaviors. They are as distinct and diverse as the cultural entities that created them. Cyclicity is a common feature of these stories that are often ritualized in specific calendrical phases, with strong ties to celestial events associated with seasonal changes. The ritualized narration involves role-playing and specific attire and takes place within family units or in large communal gatherings. Such periodic get-togethers strengthen social ties, while their predictability provides reassuring stability that people can count on,

especially during uncertain times.

History is replete with more recent examples of religion being used as a means of controlling large masses of people by manipulating their fears of cosmic reprisal or other non-verifiable retribution. In modern society, this strategy remains an incredibly powerful tool that has been effectively exercised by just a handful of individuals highly placed within a social hierarchy. But religious practices and spiritualism are essential social mechanisms in the many thousands of hunter-gatherer lifestyles we have emerged from.

Early forms of spiritualism can be defined as *expressions of a belief in unseen cosmic forces thought to be guiding the universe*. In archeological records, evidence of spiritual behavior is very difficult to identify before the invention of writing. In fact, we know very little about how early [*Homo sapiens*](#) and other forms of the genus *Homo* they encountered (like [*Neandertals and Denisovans*](#)), dealt with the disturbing emotional void caused, for example, by untimely death, or other kinds of trauma originating from uncontrollable or unknown sources.

The human brain is programmed to use reason to process what is seen and experienced to be able to comprehend situations and react to them in ways that are optimal for self-preservation. While we turn to science today to understand the world that surrounds us, our ancestors were left to wonder and question their universe. Prehistoric people would have experienced natural disasters (flooding, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and periods of intense weather deregulation) the true causes for which would have been beyond their grasp. Creating stories to explain such events would have permitted them to remember and learn from them, as well as to deal with them emotionally.

Assigning reasoning to catastrophic or cosmological events by transforming them into myth is an effective survival strategy that allows humans to share and process significant occurrences. This approach fatalistically transfers these events to an imaginary force beyond human control. Unlike science, spiritual or religious claims cannot be proven or tested, nor do they provide empirical knowledge allowing us to intervene or change the situation.

Among the existential predicaments troubling human consciousness, death stands out as a singularly problematic theme that has long been a source of human angst; we simply cannot conceptually grasp the idea of termination of self; of

infinite nothingness following our demise. Archeologists concede that intentional burials could represent the first concrete evidence of a spiritual act performed by our ancestors, one that could imply that they were experiencing a new awareness or discomfort in dealing with the concept of death.

During the Lower Paleolithic (a cultural period dating globally to between around 2.6 million and 350,000 years ago), hominins left abundant evidence of their passing in open-air contexts, rock shelters, and caves in Africa and Eurasia. So far, none of these discoveries suggest that the [*H. erectus*](#) (or other related species) carried out special handling of the remains of their dead, [whose bones have been found discarded alongside those of the animals they consumed and the tools they used to butcher them.](#)

Identifying sepulchers in ancient prehistoric contexts is difficult for archeologists because natural erosive forces tend to erase the evidence over time. Intentional burial may, however, be identified by the presence of human remains (one or more individuals) found in anatomic connection (indicating rapid or careful inhumation); corpses arranged in particular postures (fetal position); or intentionally modified (disarticulation and displacement of body parts); or in specific orientations (facing in a particular cardinal direction); or intentional modification of the substratum (digging of a pit); or by the presence of grave goods (red ocher, shells, beads, antlers, ivory, etc.).

Intentional displacement of the dead is evidenced at the 430,000-year-old site of the [Sima de los Huesos](#), where the skeletal remains of some [29 pre-Neandertal individuals](#) were found at the bottom of a deep pit within a karst cave system at the [Sierra de Atapuerca](#), in Spain. A single, carefully crafted handaxe discovered among the human fossils makes this exceptional accumulation of pre-Neandertals even more intriguing because [the tool has been interpreted as some kind of “offering.”](#)

The oldest burials presently documented are from the Levant and date to around 100,000 years ago. They were found in cave sites attributed to the [Neandertals and anatomically modern humans that coexisted in the area during the Middle Paleolithic](#) (the period dated roughly between 350,000 and 40,000 years ago). Meanwhile, the discovery of an [intentional burial of a modern human infant in Panga ya Saidi, Kenya, dating back 78,000 years, is the earliest burial found in Africa.](#)

[Cases of intentional burial have long been recognized at Neandertal sites across Eurasia](#), underpinning the growing body of evidence suggesting that these hominins had developed complex symbolic behaviors [previously thought to be reserved only for our species](#). These burials, alongside evidence of aesthetic concerns in the fabrication of their tools and even [body ornaments](#), and [art](#) demonstrate that the Neandertals possessed some form of spiritual awareness and perhaps even primitive forms of coded symbolic behavior. Sometimes exogenous materials like rare or unusual rocks, carnivore teeth, or even flowers (in the case of [Shanidar cave](#), in Iran) were deposited in these burials, further strengthening this hypothesis.

Intentional human inhumations associated with grave goods are also known from the Eurasian Upper Paleolithic ([especially the Gravettian cultural period](#); 32,000 to 26,000 years ago). During this phase of human evolution, spectacular cave paintings conveyed stylized animals, abstract signs and symbols, and even [shamanistic figures](#), indicating perhaps that these ancient people possessed animist spiritual visions.

During the Neolithic Period (roughly 10,000–8,000 years ago, depending on the region), people developed more sedentary lifestyles, strengthening their ties with the lands they adopted and within which they buried their dead. Depending on the region, this practice eventually developed into various forms of ancestor veneration, fortifying societal links and regional identities. Strong social ties gave individuals a sense of “belonging” that was consolidated on the spiritual level by creating rituals that were woven into the stories they told.

New compartmentalized arrangements were established, and societies that produced, accumulated, and traded goods needed to find ways to protect them. The reinforcement of religious belief codified behavioral norms that sharpened differences and reinforced the frontiers separating people based on culture. [Civilizations](#) were thus established within imaginary frontiers that were endlessly redrawn through successive battles based on imagined interpopulation differences.

In the modern world, religion continues to be a powerful influential force shaping the lives of millions of people. It is easy to understand why so many people still cling to the security provided by ritualized participative behaviors. The hope afforded by spiritual belief helps fight the feeling of alienation in a globalized and

digitalized world dominated by technologies beyond our understanding.

By Deborah Barsky

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The Mystery Of The Missing Apes Who Came Before Humans

06-29-2024 ~ *The fossil record of our ape ancestors in Africa is almost nonexistent for a period of about 8 or 9 million years.*



The fossil record of our ape ancestors in Africa is almost nonexistent for a period of about 8 or 9 million years. This long gap lasted from about 16.5 million to 7 to 9 million years ago, during the Miocene geological epoch.

Yet fossil remains in Europe and Asia show an abundance of ape species flourishing and evolving new traits during that gap period for African apes.

The unanswered question is: How did the current ape species found in Africa evolve? The ape species now living in Africa are the closest living evolutionary relatives that humans have. For this reason, it is important to know where they came from. Are they the descendants of those apes that migrated to Eurasia during the Miocene and then returned to Africa? Or is the lack of African fossil remains from that period simply a result of local conditions, such as wet acidic soils, that might have destroyed them?

Paleoanthropologists have approached the puzzle from different angles. One hypothesis for the missing ape fossil record in Africa is that [apes originated in Africa and then migrated to Eurasia](#) in the mid-Miocene, where they evolved the preconditions for evolving into humans. In this scenario, the better-adapted ape species that weathered the late Miocene climate change, then returned to Africa where the human lineage then evolved.

Reconstructing Ape Lineages

Another approach is to infer the missing ape evolution that might have occurred in Africa, but without leaving any fossil remains, by using genomic evidence from living ape species to reconstruct the missing lineages. University of Cambridge paleontologists Robert A. Foley and Marta Mirazón Lahr proposed a model of what this possible ape evolution might look like in a [January 2024 article in Trends in Ecology & Evolution](#).

Foley and Mirazón Lahr refer to the inferred evolutionary tree of extinct apes as “ghost lineages.” “Ghost lineages are species or groups of species that have not been observed directly, either in fossils or living species, but which have been inferred from gene sequences,” the authors said in an interview.

Tracing these ghosts is made possible by modern genomics, especially DNA analysis.

“We know about these ghosts by building phylogenetic or evolutionary trees of known species--such as apes, humans, Neanderthals, and so on--and looking for points in the trees that can only be explained if there were other, unknown species involved,” they said. “These are the hypothetical ghost lineages. Research has shown ghost lineages in hominin, chimpanzee, and gorilla lineages, as well as in many other taxa.” (Taxa is the technical term for divisions of species.)

“In hominin evolution they are ‘ghosts’ in the sense that we think they must have

existed and been part of our history, leaving only traces in our DNA.” (Hominins is the term for humans and our fossil relatives.)

African Ape Ghosts

Foley and Mirazón Lahr discuss two plausible ghost models for extinct African apes based on the existing genomic evidence: a low-divergence and a high-extinction model.

In the low-divergence model, the *Gorilla* lineage branched off from the last common ancestor of *Pan* (ape ancestor) and *Homo* (human ancestor) between about 7.2 and 11 million years ago. Then both *Pan* and *Gorilla* ancestors of today’s existing ape species branched off from their ghost lineages. This view holds that the ancestors of the living ape species had only two periods of species growth, about 3 to 3.5 million years ago, and later, less than 2 million years ago.

As Foley and Mirazón Lahr point out, this rate of divergence “contrasts strongly with that of the hominins,” but it is still possible. “It seems unlikely given the geographical range, environmental diversity, and time involved, that so little divergence occurred.”

The other hypothesis is the high-extinction ghost model, which holds that the African ape evolution followed a similar trajectory to that of hominins. The apes diversified and dispersed into new regions, but earlier lineages became extinct. This is a scenario that Foley and Mirazón Lahr find “more probable.” This high-extinction pattern follows what is known about the hominin fossil record from fossil finds in the last 50 years.

Foley and Mirazón Lahr stressed the importance of knowing more about the missing ape evolutionary evidence in the interview. “Chimpanzees and bonobos are the closest living relatives of humans, having a last common ancestor about 7 million years ago. Humans and their ancestors must have evolved in parallel to the African apes. However, with no fossil record, we know virtually nothing about African ape evolution.”

“There is a general tendency to think that unlike us, they have changed little since the last common ancestor,” they said. “However, this is almost certainly not true, and we need an ape fossil record to tell us when, where, and how the living apes evolved. Similarities and differences from the evolutionary history of humans will be ground-breaking discoveries.”

Pieces of the Puzzle

Paleoanthropologists have proposed possible explanations for the puzzle of the missing Late Miocene ape fossils. For one, the climate and geography changes in Africa may have not allowed the preservation of ape remains in this period. It's also possible that the forest soil of ape habitats was too acidic for fossils to survive. Another factor may be that paleontologists have not looked in the right places for ape fossils.

But Late Miocene ape fossils are not entirely missing from Africa. [A partial lower jaw and 11 teeth from a now-extinct ape species](#) that lived about 10 million years ago was discovered in Nakali, Kenya in 2005 by an international team of paleontologists, which named it *Nakalipithecus nakayamai*.

The authors of an article describing this find write that it “suggests that it is highly probable that large-bodied hominoids survived through the Middle to Late Miocene in Africa, giving rise to the last common ancestor of African great apes and humans.” (Hominoids are humans, their fossil ancestors, and the anthropoid apes, which include chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans.)

[Another ape fossil find](#) by a different international team, is from the Chorora Formation near the southern part of the Afar rift, named *Chororapithecus abyssinicus*. The fossil is dated about 8 million years ago, and as [the journal Nature reports](#), “The attribution to the gorilla lineage looks all the more important as it helps constrain the split between gorillas and the lineage leading to hominins and chimpanzees, and suggests that this split occurred in Africa.”

A Hot Debate

The paleoanthropology community is not unified in its solutions to the missing ape evolutionary puzzle, and some think that it's likely that apes made a round-trip, prompted by climate changes in the Miocene. In this view, apes originated in Africa and some dispersed to Eurasia for a few million years, where they evolved some proto-human characteristics, and then returned to Africa about 7 to 9 million years ago.

Asked about the Eurasian scenario, Foley and Mirazón Lahr replied: “This is a tricky one! The idea that the last common ancestor of the African apes and hominins was recent (in the geological sense, about 9 million years ago) is hotly debated. On the one hand, it is tempting to see a long line of ape evolution in

Africa--there is a very rich fossil record of them. But on the other hand, fossils most similar to the African apes are found in Western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean.”

And here, the views of the collaborators diverged: Robert A. Foley felt that “this makes the ‘into Africa’ hypothesis more probable,” but co-author Marta Mirazón Lahr said, “the absence of later Miocene fossils in Africa--a big blank space--leaves the question open.”

Future fossil discoveries are likely to shed more light on some of the ghost apes and help solve the puzzle.

By Marjorie Hecht

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Source: Human Bridges

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

Ahead Of The Debates, What Are The Myths And Realities Of Biden’s Economy?



Robert Pollin ~ Photo: UMass Amherst

06-27-2024 ~ Progressive economist Robert Pollin weighs in on “Bidenomics” and the economic policies of Trump’s administration.

The economy is a top issue for many voters ahead of the 2024 presidential election. In a lengthy interview ahead of the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, world-renowned progressive economist Robert Pollin offers a detailed and thorough assessment of the actual state of the U.S. economy and the effects of Biden’s economic policies. Pollin is a distinguished university professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His books include *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy*; *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity*; and *Back to Full Employment*. He has been a consultant to, among other organizations, National Nurses United, the American Postal Workers Union, the Washington State Labor Council, Labor Network for Sustainability and the BlueGreen Alliance.

C. J. Polychroniou: The economy will be one of the key issues in the 2024 U.S. election and may very well determine whether it will be Joe Biden who will be reelected as president or whether we will see Donald Trump return to the White House. As one would reasonably expect, of course, the two primary candidates for the 2024 presidential election have radically different takes on the state of the U.S. economy. Biden recently told NBC’s “TODAY” that “America has the best economy in the world,” while Trump claims that the economy is collapsing. Let’s start by talking about “Bidenomics,” the nickname for Biden’s economics policies and plans. Is Bidenomics a real economic philosophy? If so, what does it encompass?

Robert Pollin: Bidenomics does certainly encompass an overarching framework

for dealing with many of the most basic economic problems under U.S. capitalism today, while still, obviously, operating well within the boundaries of the existing capitalist social order.

The starting point for Biden's economic program is the aggressively pro-Big Business, pro-Wall Street and pro-rich neoliberal variant of capitalism that has dominated U.S. policy making for the past 45 years, under both Democratic as well as Republican administrations. Biden has been pushing out of this neoliberal straightjacket through initiatives that support working people, unions, a viable climate stabilization project and public sector-led economic development initiatives more generally. Of course, Biden himself has never been a leftist of any variety. He is a rather career politician and centrist Democrat. But he has allowed his administration to be moved leftward by the Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren presidential campaigns and allied progressive labor unions and social movements throughout the country. These union and progressive groups deserve major credit for this accomplishment.

More specifically, what does it mean that Biden has been pushing out of the neoliberal straightjacket?

We can begin with Biden's first major economic policy initiative. This was the March 2021 American Rescue Plan. Its purpose was to prevent the onset of a full-scale economic collapse on the order of the 1930s Great Depression in the face of the global COVID lockdown. The Biden rescue plan entailed a massive injection of government spending, at \$1.9 trillion (or about 9 percent of overall U.S. economic activity, i.e. GDP) at that time. This boosted overall spending in the economy, which, in turn, counteracted the sharp rise in unemployment and spending cuts by both households and businesses that resulted from the COVID lockdown.

It is true that two previous stimulus measures to counteract the COVID lockdown were enacted while Trump was still in office, in March and again in December 2020. (The December 2020 measure was passed after Trump had lost the 2020 election.) In combination, these two initiatives under Trump were actually larger than the Biden stimulus. But the composition of government stimulus spending was much more egalitarian under Biden. Biden's American Rescue Plan focused on direct stimulus checks to households, providing funds for state and local governments to sustain their public health, education and public safety programs, the expansion of unemployment benefits, the protection of workers' pension

plans, and expanding the tax credit program for low-income families with children. By contrast, [the stimulus measures under Trump](#) were heavily skewed to supporting businesses. Big corporations and Wall Street firms were at the front of Trump's handout line.

The Biden rescue plan, in combination with the prior Trump measures, did indeed prevent a 1930s-level economic collapse in 2021. Unemployment in the U.S. could well have risen to perhaps 15-20 percent in 2021. Who knows how severely the global economy could have unraveled from there? But this achievement by the Biden administration has gone mostly uncredited, given that it succeeded in preventing a calamity that did not happen, as opposed to advancing a positive economic breakthrough of some sort.

In terms of positive initiatives, for starters, the Biden administration has been, overall, more supportive of U.S. workers and the union movement than any U.S. administration since the New Deal under Franklin D. Roosevelt. This represents a 180-degree reversal from the Trump years. As one highly visible example, Biden himself was on the picket line in 2023 supporting the highly successful United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against Ford, GM and Chrysler/Stellantis. Biden has also vocally supported organizing efforts at, among other places, Starbucks, Tesla, Toyota and Amazon. More broadly, the U.S. Labor Department, National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and even the Federal Trade Commission under Biden have also been strongly pro-worker on critical health and safety issues and employees' rights at the workplace.

At the same time, Biden has not been fully consistent in supporting labor. Most notably, in 2022, he imposed a settlement to prevent a strike by U.S. railroad workers. This meant that [the new union contract](#) did not provide any paid sick leave for the workers, something many union leaders thought they could have won had Biden stayed with them. The power of capital prevailed in this case. Still [more organizing](#) is the only answer.

Relative to his Democratic and Republican predecessors during the neoliberal era, the Biden administration has also been active in advancing anti-monopoly policies, including lawsuits and other initiatives against Apple and Google, and through [blocking mergers](#) between Spirit and JetBlue Airlines, and between Kroger and Albertsons supermarket chains. These measures to counter giant corporations' market power also feeds into the Biden administration's efforts to

control inflation. What has become clear over the past three years is that one major driver of overall price increases — i.e. inflation — has been what is now termed “greedflation.” Greedflation refers to giant corporations marking up prices and fattening profits. They get away with this because they dominate their respective markets. Antitrust policies are supposed to restrain such corporate greed. But prior to Biden, the enforcement of antitrust policies had been [feeble](#) for decades. More on this below.

Biden has also proposed significant tax increases on U.S. corporations and the rich, even while, unfortunately, these proposals have zero chance of passing in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. These measures could go far to financing, for example, an extension of the Child Tax Credit program that was enacted as part of the March 2021 COVID lockdown stimulus bill. Before it expired, this short-term measure [cut child poverty roughly in half](#) in 2021, from roughly 10 percent to 5 percent of all children. It could continue to significantly improve living conditions for the poor and near-poor in the U.S. if it were [renewed](#), as Biden has proposed. By contrast with the fate of Biden’s progressive tax proposals, the huge tax cuts for and the rich that Trump proposed soon after he took office in 2017 did indeed become law within months. Trump has promised more of the same if he gets reelected. Big capital and [billionaires](#) are [openly salivating](#) at the prospect.

Both the climate-focused and broader public investment-led features of Biden’s agenda are best represented by three initiatives that Biden did manage to get enacted into law in 2022-2023: the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the CHIPS and Science Act. These are measures to advance a green energy transition, infrastructure and semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S. In combination, these programs are designed to support about \$300 billion per year (about 1.2 percent of current GDP) in new investments, with clean energy investments amounting to about \$100 billion per year, or one-third of total investment spending coming from these measures. At this level of new investment spending, these programs would generate around [3 million jobs per year](#), equal to about 1.8 percent of the current overall U.S. workforce.

Despite its name, the IRA was never actually focused on inflation control. Rather, it is the most ambitious climate stabilization program ever enacted in the U.S. The origins of the IRA trace back directly to the work of committed and effective

Green New Deal activists throughout the U.S., such as those in the Sunrise Movement, 350.org, the Working Families Party, the Labor Network for Sustainability and the BlueGreen Alliance. Their organizing efforts were then embraced by members of Congress, including (among others) Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Pramila Jayapal, and Senators Edward Markey and Bernie Sanders. The version that Biden got enacted was far less ambitious than what had come out of the Green New Deal movement, and is, by itself, not close to adequate for achieving a zero CO² emissions global economy by 2050 that is needed to stabilize the global average temperature within a reasonably safe range. But the IRA has nevertheless induced [a huge boost in investments](#) — and resulting job creation — in solar and wind power, battery production and electric vehicles.

One of the biggest concerns tied to the Biden climate agenda is that the policies are designed to explicitly support U.S. producers over foreign firms. This is true even though, at least at present, foreign firms — in particular Chinese firms — can produce solar panels, electric vehicles and rechargeable batteries at much lower costs and higher quality than U.S. producers. The Biden administration is fighting to enable domestic U.S. firms to compete effectively here, and to support job creation and community development through a U.S. economy-centered green transition. In my view, it isn't obvious how best to balance the domestic versus the global goals during the green transition. But at the very least, the Biden program is moving a green transition program forward in the U.S. Trump has vociferously promised, over and over again, to shut this down entirely. The emerging far right parties in Europe are aligned with the Trump position.

Is there a disjunct between economic facts and perceptions right now in the U.S. How have Biden's policies actually affected the labor market?

The polling evidence on people's perceptions about the economy are confusingly mixed. Thus, according to the most recent polls, most people respond that their own personal economic circumstances are in good shape. Most even say that conditions are good overall in their home states. But a [majority](#) do also still respond that, overall, the U.S. economy is in bad shape.

This pattern has been termed a "vibecession" — that people have a sense that the overall U.S. economy is in bad shape even while they themselves are fine, and even when, objectively, overall economic conditions, by standard measures, are

indeed positive relative to the previous 50 years under neoliberalism. To cite now just the most basic relevant measures, the official U.S. unemployment rate, at 3.6 percent for 2023 and 3.8 percent for the first five months of 2024, is [lower](#) than at any comparable period over the past 54 years. The expansion of job opportunities has been across the board, in all economic sectors. Average real wages — that is, what you can buy with your paycheck, after adjusting for inflation — have also gone up across the board for the past 18 months, if only by [about 1 percent](#).

I do need to emphasize that I am speaking in relative terms about the good economic conditions under Biden. Over his three years in office, Biden has certainly not reversed 50 years of pro-Big Business, anti-working-class policies under neoliberalism. As just one indicator, the average real wage — i.e. how much your wage can purchase, after controlling for inflation — was in 2023, at [\\$28.90](#), almost exactly what it was in 1973. This is despite average labor productivity — what the average worker produces in a day — has more than [doubled](#) since 1973. This \$28.90 average real wage today is also below a living wage standard throughout all U.S. regions, as measured by the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#).

The MIT Living Wage Calculator defines the “living wage” as “the minimum income standard that, if met, draws a very fine line between the financial independence of the working poor and the need to seek out public assistance or suffer consistent and severe housing and food insecurity.” According to this measure, the \$28.90 average real wage nationally is 10-12 percent below a living wage for a one adult/one child family in Alabama, Mississippi, South Dakota and West Virginia, and nearly 40 percent below a living wage for the same family type in California, Connecticut and New York. Meanwhile, over the same 50-year period since 1973, average CEO pay has increased by [between 13- to 20-fold](#), depending on the specific measure.

What these figures show is that the struggle to reverse neoliberalism is a long-term project. Building a strong union movement is the single most important fight that needs to be won. On balance, the Biden administration has certainly been supportive. But, as is always true, the most critical work needs to be done by committed and effective organizers and working people themselves.

What about inflation, which seems to be a problem for Biden’s campaign? The Consumer Price Index rose 3.3 percent year over year in May, according to the Labor Department. Is inflation really a problem, and if so, why?

The current level of overall inflation, at 3.3 percent — meaning that the price of an average basket of consumer goods increased by 3.3 percent over the past year — is not a problem in itself. Indeed, it is remarkable that inflation has come down from the 2022 peak of 8 percent without the economy having gone through a recessionary ringer, much less a full-scale depression.

But there are certainly problems associated with inflation in the U.S. economy today. This begins with the Federal Reserve's inflation control policies. The Fed is clinging to the proposition that U.S. inflation must come down still further, to 2 percent. The Fed holds this position, [despite](#) the fact that, for the last 60 years, U.S. economic growth has been consistently higher on average when inflation is in the 3-5 percent range, as opposed to being 2 percent or below. The Fed is therefore holding the interest rate that it controls for policy at a very high 5.3 percent rate in an effort to slow the economy and raise unemployment. In the Fed's view, this is the only reliable path for getting inflation down to 2 percent and keeping it there.

In short, the Fed's current high interest rate policy is completely unnecessary, but the Fed nevertheless persists. The question then is: Why does it persist? My UMass and PERI coworker Jerry Epstein has provided [the most straightforward answer](#), many times over. That is, the low inflation rate, at 2 percent or less, is actually best for Wall Street profits, even while it means higher unemployment or lower incomes for working people.

Another reason why inflation is a problem now is that we are still living with some aftereffects of the high inflation spike after COVID lockdown conditions were lifted. The 8 percent inflation rate in 2022 was due to the post-COVID supply shortages and heavy price markups that corporations were able to impose once lockdown conditions began lifting. This is where "greedflation" enters the story. On average, [a gallon of gasoline](#) went from \$2.23 in March 2020 to \$4.93 in June 2022. A [dozen eggs](#) went from \$1.53 in March 2020 to \$4.82 in January 2023. Buying a [used car](#) went from about \$22,000 in June 2020 to \$31,000 in June 2022. The fact that inflation has since come down to our current 3.3 percent rate doesn't mean that prices will have returned to their pre-COVID levels. It just means that prices have stopped rising so fast.

Some prices have actually fallen. As of June 10, a gallon of gasoline is averaging \$3.42, a nearly 30 percent decline relative to the January 2023 peak. A dozen

eggs are now at \$2.79, 44 percent below the January 2023 peak. Average used car prices are currently at about \$27,000, 13 percent below their 2022 peak. But for the prices of the full basket of consumer goods to fall — i.e. for there to be an overall *deflation* as opposed to our current mild inflation — would almost certainly require a recession. That is, unemployment would have to increase to well above the current 3.8 percent rate. Working people would then have less money in their pockets and more economic insecurity. Consumer spending would fall. Businesses would then face the prospect of scaling back their operations or shutting down altogether. In short, not a pretty picture.

As it is, the Fed's high interest rate policy has raised the costs of mortgage borrowing, which in turn has [pushed up housing prices generally](#). The share of households becoming delinquent on their credit card debt has also been rising over the past two years with rates on credit card debt also having [risen](#).

Republicans claim that Biden's spending is a danger to the U.S. because it has added more than \$6 trillion to the federal debt during the first three years of his administration and will probably add another \$1.5 trillion in the final year. U.S. government debt now stands at over \$34 trillion (and growing). Is Biden an extreme spender? I'd like your comments on this, and on whether the federal debt, which now stands at over \$34 trillion, is in danger of reaching unsustainable levels.

The U.S. government's debt level is now high, at nearly \$35 trillion. But let's break down this seemingly astronomical figure. First, we have to recognize that about 20 percent of this total is held by various federal government agencies, including the Federal Reserve. So, what the federal government actually owes outside of its own agencies is around [\\$28 trillion](#).

True, \$28 trillion does still sound gigantic. But is it? The relevant metric is, "*compared to what?*" Twenty-eight trillion dollars amounts to about 95 percent of current U.S. GDP. By comparison, in 2019, just before COVID, this measure of government debt was significantly lower, at 77 percent of GDP. Further, in 2007, before the Wall Street financial crisis and subsequent global Great Recession, this measure of U.S. government debt was at 35 percent of GDP. So, there has definitely been a sharp increase in federal indebtedness relative to the size of the overall economy during the past 15 years.

However, the most relevant measure of the federal government's debt burden is how much the government needs to pay out in interest every year on this debt. Just like, when we take on a mortgage to buy a house, the most relevant consideration is not the overall size of the mortgage, but how large will be our monthly payments relative to our family's income. Here the relevant figure had actually been historically low for 15 years, up until the Fed started raising interest rates in 2022. Thus, as of 2021, the government's annual interest payments as a share of GDP were at [their lowest point since the 1950s](#), at 2.4 percent of GDP. This interest payment burden, moreover, was half the 4.8 percent share of GDP that the government was paying per year in interest at the end of Ronald Reagan's presidency.

This historically low interest payment burden was due to the low interest rates at which the U.S. government was able to borrow, starting with the 2007-09 financial crisis and continuing until 2021. But following the Fed's policy of sharply raising interest rates in 2022, the government's annual interest payments have risen to 3.5 percent of GDP. This indeed is a big jump from the 2.5 percent share only 2 years prior. In today's economy, it amounts to a \$300 billion annual increase in the government's interest payments. But 3.5 percent of GDP in annual interest payments today still remains well below the nearly 5 percent peak figure delivered by Reaganomics. I don't remember any Republicans declaring that Ronald Reagan had caused a fiscal crisis.

In short, there is no federal government fiscal crisis at present, in that the government can, as needed and without question, cover 3.5 percent of GDP in annual interest payments. The only "extreme spending" under Biden was done in 2021 to prevent a full-scale economic collapse during the COVID lockdown. Trump injected comparable levels of emergency spending into the economy over 2020, the only difference being that Trump's COVID bailout policies were also designed to make the rich richer.

In our post-COVID economy, a major source of the federal government's current deficits is the ongoing impact of the tax cuts that were enacted under Trump in 2017. Naturally, these Trump tax cuts were designed as yet another vehicle for serving the rich. Thus, the richest 1 percent of households saved an average of roughly \$55,000 per year in taxes due to [Trump's 2017 tax cuts](#), while the savings for the lower 20 percent of households averaged \$100. Overall, the 2017 Trump tax cuts have meant an average of [nearly \\$200 billion a year](#) in foregone

government revenue. This amounts to fully two-thirds of the increase in the government's interest payments since 2022.

Trump has, of course, made clear that he intends to shower more tax breaks on the rich if he returns to the White House in 2025. Biden has made clear that he wants to raise taxes on the rich and large corporations.

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C.J. Polychroniou

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Air Pollution Is Killing Millions And Rising Exponentially—A Shift In Agriculture Can Solve It



Jimmy Videle ~ Source: YouTube

06-27-2024 ~ *We must find a better way to prevent land use from changing.*

In 1958, geochemist [Charles David Keeling](#) set up the Mauna Loa Global Monitoring Laboratory in Hawaii, which measured carbon dioxide (CO₂). Keeling believed that CO₂ levels were rising and wanted to prove it. Mauna Loa was a perfect location to obtain precise readings since it was located at an elevation of more than 13,000 feet in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. By 1959, the level of CO₂ was [316 parts per million volume \(ppmV\)](#). Since then, the curve has seen an [exponential rise](#). As of May 2024, the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere had risen to more than [426 ppmV](#).

It has been [more than 4 million years](#) since CO₂ levels were as high as today. “[The] CO₂ levels are now comparable to the Pliocene Climatic Optimum, between 4.1 and 4.5 million years ago, when they were close to, or above 400 ppm. During that time, sea levels were between 5 and 25 meters higher than today, high enough to drown many of the world’s largest modern cities,” [stated](#) a

report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

These pollution levels are undoubtedly human-caused and have primarily resulted from [burning](#) fossil fuels, deforestation, and land-use change by industrial agriculture. In designing our society from an anthropocentric point of view (prioritizing humans above all other species), we have not only neglected but also harmed the Earth's natural systems. To maintain a sustainable environment, we must adopt an eco-centric point of view that prioritizes the intrinsic value of all living things and preserves the ecological balance.

The Perfect Balance

Carbon dioxide gives our planet life. All living plants need it, converting it into an energy source. They assimilate carbon and expel the oxygen that all faunal beings require. When humans and animals breathe in oxygen, they exhale carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas (GHG) that traps heat. Other gases that heat the atmosphere include methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

If we were to look back 1 million years when humans were among the least populous species, and wild fauna was grazing, stomping, and climbing in grasslands and forests, the CO₂ from the plant decomposition and respiration of animals, the CH₄ from the belching, flatulating, and manure composition of ungulates, and N₂O would cycle naturally. The CO₂ levels were [between 200 and 280 ppm](#) “during the more recent ice ages”—perhaps the perfect amount to support abundant life. This ideal balance was in place for around [800,000 years](#).

As humans began to dominate the planet—killing large animals, cutting down forests, farming grasslands, and paving the natural world for our benefit—CO₂ levels began to climb at a torrid pace from 1950 onward.

Through our actions, we are producing so much extra CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O that all the natural mechanisms for carbon sequestration are being compromised. Instead of carbon cycling, it bounces back into the atmosphere and creates a gaseous ceiling (the “[greenhouse effect](#)”). The sun's rays pass through, but the heat is trapped and filters through more slowly. The more these heavy gases remain in the atmosphere, the more heat is trapped, causing the Earth to warm.

“Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1 degrees Celsius above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020,” according to scientists who

worked on the International Panel on Climate Change's [Synthesis Report 2023](#). "Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals."

"The Arctic has warmed nearly [four times faster](#) than the globe since 1979," [stated](#) a 2022 article in the journal Nature. This is alarming and could help explain why scientists believe sea levels will rise. When the ice melts, more fresh water enters the ocean.

1.5 Degrees Celsius Is the Threshold

Climate scientists have expressed concerns over rising temperatures and emphasized that we must limit the increase in the Earth's temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. A 2-degree Celsius increase would be catastrophic for the planet. Currently, [global efforts are insufficient](#) to prevent a climate crisis.

In the spring of 2024, I completed comparisons of monthly means against the 30-year normal in [Boileau, Québec](#). The results show that the 10-year average is 3 degrees Celsius above normal. This is what the northern part of North America is experiencing, causing significant climate disruption. The results are earlier springs, warming lows, and shifting the temperature range to what it is like hundreds of kilometers south of Boileau.

This resulted in the snowpack disappearing for the first time by the end of March; the impacts this will have on the floral and faunal community are entirely unknown as there is no earlier precedent. We are now in unknown territory. By the end of April 2024, the Earth had experienced its [11th month of record-breaking warmth](#).

According to NASA, 2023 was [the warmest year on record](#). The scorching temperatures and drought caused an unprecedented fire season in Canada, burning more than [18 million hectares](#) of area (44.5 million acres), which took a tremendous toll on Canada's wild flora and fauna. Lori Daniels, a professor in the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia, [recounted](#), "We were 10 to 15 degrees Celsius above normal in northern Canada, which... primes these [areas] for fire," according to CBC News.

The Earth will adapt and survive; it has done so for more than 4 billion years. Unfortunately for us and [countless other species impacted by our actions](#), adaptability will be pushed to the limits, and many will perish.

Shedding light on how grim the situation is, a September 2023 article by the Stanford Report [said](#), “The passenger pigeon. The Tasmanian tiger. The Baiji, or Yangtze river dolphin. These rank among the best-known recent victims of what many scientists have declared the sixth mass extinction, as human actions are wiping out vertebrate animal species hundreds of times faster than they would otherwise disappear.”

Impacts to Human Health

We are paying the price for our actions through the severe health impacts we face from polluting the environment.

In 2019, there were more than [17 billion viral respiratory tract infections globally](#). The most common in humans include influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza, adenovirus, rhinovirus, and coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic, which [first emerged](#) in December 2019, was considered such a human health crisis that humanity went into a global shutdown. From the onset of COVID-19 in 2020 until April 13, 2024, there have been [704.7 million cases](#).

Studies have [shown](#) that pollution makes respiratory infections worse. In fact, [according](#) to the Environmental Protection Agency, “The combination of experimental and epidemiologic studies has provided evidence of a relationship between short-term (daily) exposures to particle pollution and several respiratory-related effects, including elevated morbidity, higher frequency of emergency department visits and hospital admissions, as well as excess mortality.”

According to a 2022 [Lancet report](#) on pollution and health, “pollution was responsible for 9 million premature deaths in 2015, making it the world’s largest environmental risk factor for disease and premature death.” The report further stated that while the number of deaths due to household air pollution and water pollution might have seen a decline, the number of deaths because of air pollution and toxic chemicals has only increased, with hardly any progress made by low-income and middle-income countries.

According to a 2018 [study](#) in Japan, humans may experience increased heart rate and blood pressure at CO2 exposure between 500 ppm and 4,000 ppm. The

researchers warned that “short-term CO2 exposure beginning at 1000 ppm affects cognitive performances, including decision making and problem resolution.” Many indoor environments already see these higher levels.

Clearly, air pollution is a serious crisis that we should funnel more resources into.

Solutions for Clean, Fresh Air

Clean water, a healthy diet, and clean air are the most important things that sustain human life on Earth. Without them, our existence is in peril. It is still not too late to start taking remedial steps to prevent further destruction of the environment.

We must eliminate the burning of fossil fuels. Making [public transportation free](#) is one step in that direction. We also need to devise a plan for [transitioning](#) toward renewable energy.

We must stop cutting down forests for agriculture, forestry, or mining of so-called “essential minerals.” A new regulation should be put in effect immediately to provide a [moratorium on the development of all sacred lands](#). More trees will lead to more carbon sequestration, increasing oxygen levels. It is the most straightforward biological math.

We must significantly reduce the emissions of CH4 and N2O in the atmosphere. [Methane](#) is the second largest, and [nitrous oxide](#) is the third-largest contributor to climate change after carbon dioxide. We can drastically decrease these emissions by changing agricultural activities (one of the [main drivers](#) contributing to GHG emissions) that support raising livestock and growing monoculture crops (like corn and soy). Converting to a 100 percent [plant-based agricultural system](#) that eliminates the use of domesticated animals, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides will help mitigate the release of these greenhouse gases considerably.

Today’s biggest epidemic is the exponential rise of CO2-equivalent atmospheric emissions. With COVID-19, the world changed protocols within weeks of the outbreak. This shows that we *can* change today to stop the harm inflicted on the planet, the more than 8 billion humans, and countless other Earthlings. We need to realize that there is no bigger threat facing us currently.

By Jimmy Videle

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