

# Niger Resists In The Crosshairs Of Sanctions And Climate Catastrophe



12-05-2024 ~ *Aboubakar Alassane of the West Africa Peoples Organization (WAPO) explains how Nigeriens are enduring the consequences of unprecedented floods that have devastated their economy already crippled by sanctions.*

In the aftermath of the devastation left behind in the wake of unprecedented floods, Nigeriens are rebuilding their livelihoods and economy with the help of several relief measures instituted by the government to drastically cut prices of essential commodities and services.

The Sahel-wide flooding between June and October of 2024 has exacted a particularly high toll on the people of Niger, destroying crops, cattle, houses, and infrastructure in one of the world's poorest countries. The country's economy had already been strangled by seven-month-long sanctions.

By late September, at least 339 were killed, many more injured, and 1.1 million people displaced by the floods caused by unprecedeted rain. The storms affected almost 190,000 hectares of cultivated agricultural land in a country with one of the highest child malnutrition rates.

Maradi region, the agricultural hub of south-central Niger, was the worst affected, with "the equivalent of an entire month's worth of rain falling in a day," said Aboubakar Alassane, a member of the coordination council of West Africa Peoples Organization (WAPO).

Masses of livestock, one of the most important sources of foreign exchange in Niger, were washed away in the Agadez region in the Sahara desert in the central north of the country. This destroyed the sole livelihood of nomadic communities.

The floods have further eroded the food supply that had already been dwindling, with agricultural land and pastures shrinking due to deficit rainfall over the five

years before this deluge.

This climate catastrophe took place as Niger was already suffering under the harsh sanctions imposed by the regional bloc Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). France egged on ECOWAS following the ouster of the regime of Mohamed Bazoum in Niger, perceived domestically as a puppet of the Western European country.

Mass protests against the military deployment and economic domination of Niger by its former colonizer culminated in a coup. This was led by the head of Bazoum's presidential guard, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, removing Bazoum on July 26, 2023. A military government called the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) was formed.

Sanctions followed on July 30, without any notice period. State assets were frozen. A no-fly zone was imposed. The borders of this landlocked country were closed immediately. Even those trucks that had already cleared paperwork were halted at the borders. Between July 30 and October 31 of 2023, [42,037 tons of various goods, worth over \\$23 million](#), were prevented from crossing into Niger.

Alassane recounted that immediately after the sanctions were imposed, the price of a 25 kg bag of rice nearly doubled from 12,000 to 21,000 CFA Franc, a colonial currency through which France continues to exert monetary control over its former colonies in West Africa.

A 75 kg bag of corn, "which had never exceeded 23,000 CFA, was selling at 40,000. Millet prices rose similarly, with niébé beans reaching 47,000 CFA, up from 20,000-25,000 before sanctions. Within a week, people were forced to line up in long queues" to buy the limited supplies of food items that had to be rationed, he said.

The foreign market for onions was cut off. Onions are [one of Niger's main irrigated crops](#), over 90 percent of which used to be exported. Hundreds of thousands of farmers were unable to sell their produce. Many more who were involved in the agricultural supply chain and export industry lost their livelihoods. The government is still struggling to resolve the disputes that arose between farmers, transporters, and exporters due to the sudden inability to make payments.

Neighboring Nigeria, on which [Niger depended for 70 percent of its electricity](#), cut off power in violation of the bilateral agreements. “Electricity was rationed to four hours per neighborhood in Niamey. Dosso and Tillabéri only had electricity for six to eight hours when the old thermal generators, purchased in the 1980s, did not break down,” he added. Students were not able to study after dark. Meanwhile, Nigerien uranium powered France’s nuclear plants.

Desperation and misery increased amongst the poorest as a consequence of the economic devastation caused by the sanctions, ostensibly imposed to “restore democracy.”

#### *Sanctions Have Only Served to Consolidate Popular Support of the Military Government*

Be it “Cuba, Russia, DPR Korea, Iraq, Iran, Venezuela, Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, and now Niger,” sanctions have always been imposed to make the people suffer “to turn them against their governments.” However, like in all these countries, it has “had the opposite effect,” maintains Alassane.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup removing Bazoum, Niger was divided between those who supported the coup and those who opposed it, he explained. It was amid this confrontation tearing Niger’s political fabric two ways, that the ECOWAS imposed sanctions and threatened war with the backing of France.

“We had never given anyone the mandate to kill us because a president was deposed by a coup,” Alassane said. He described what followed as a “patriotic surge” that united the country behind the CNSP. The government consolidated its popular support by ordering the French troops out of the country and demonstrating its commitment to implement the popular will.

France refused to withdraw its troops, provoking mass demonstrations outside its military base and embassy in Niamey. “The march amid the pouring rain on September 2, 2023, was an unprecedented display of popular strength in the history of Niger,” Alassane said. “Some even say that the proclamation of the country’s independence did not draw as large a crowd proportionally to the population.”

Later that month, neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso vowed to defend Niger if attacked. They had also suffered sanctions after similar popularly supported coups in recent years removed French-backed regimes and forced French troops

out of the two countries. The trio came together to form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

ECOWAS, on the other hand, was a divided bloc, with its member states facing domestic opposition to the war from popular movements and opposition parties. France announced its retreat in late September of 2023 and completed the withdrawal of its troops by the end of the year.

In January 2024, the AES states announced their decision to withdraw from ECOWAS, threatening to halve its geographical expanse and disrupt the 15-member bloc's trade and service flows [worth almost \\$150 million](#) annually. Amid this existential crisis looming over ECOWAS, its leaders met in late February and lifted the economic sanctions "on purely humanitarian grounds."

However, "we still feel the effects," Alassane said. With no confidence in the economy, which suffered missed deadlines for payments due to a freeze on transactions due to sanctions, "businesses are closing one after another."

"Spare parts for vehicles and other mechanical equipment are slow to arrive. We are forced to repair using second-hand parts, which are often defective. The automobile fleet, which is essential for a landlocked country, is shrinking more and more. Every day, we see people struggling with old broken vehicles."

Niger relies on the port of Cotonou in Benin for most of its imports of machines, spare parts, equipment, and food essentials, while exporting cash crops, uranium, and other minerals. Although the sanctions imposing border closure were lifted, Alassane said that the CNSP has been forced to keep the border closed from Niger's side due to threats of terror attacks.

The official reasons stated by France for stationing its troops in its former colonies in this region was to fight these terror groups it had helped spawn across the Sahel with its participation in the war destroying Libya. During its nearly decade-long troop deployment, terror attacks only increased.

After being compelled to withdraw, France is [accused of aiding these terror groups](#) to destabilize AES states. "France has set up new military bases on the Beninese side of the border to train terrorists to carry out attacks on Niger and Burkina Faso," Alassane said, explaining Niger's compulsion to close the Beninese border despite consequent shortages.

Already reeling under the pressure of this economic crisis, the Nigerien people were additionally hit by the country-wide floods this monsoon. Although floods in this season are common in the region, the scale of devastation left in its wake this year is "[unprecedented](#)."

### *Relief Measures*

The CNSP has taken several measures to provide relief, including "a 50 percent reduction in the cost of medical procedures, examinations, and other services in public hospitals and health centers," Alassane said. To increase domestic food availability, the CNSP has banned exports of cereals and pulses outside the AES countries.

Despite being heavily reliant on imports for its own food needs, "more than 50 percent of the harvest were exported to Nigeria" over the last few years because farmers could not find remunerative prices in the local market, he explained.

To mitigate this problem, the CNSP has launched a campaign to provide remuneration to the farmers by purchasing their produce above the market price, while making it available for the domestic consumers at a subsidized rate.

Eighty percent of the farming is done on high lands that escaped the devastating impact of the floods, Alassane added. In fact, the yield has been "excellent" due to above-average rain. The government is prioritizing securing this harvest. All these measures have "drastically" dropped the prices of cereals, he said. As of November 2024, the price of a 75 kg sack of millet was down by about 45 percent since July.

With the price of cement slashed by 50 percent through a waiver on certain taxes on the commodity and exemption of its inputs from taxation, "new construction projects are visible in capital Niamey and other main cities," Alassane said.

Despite all these travails, the Nigeriens have endured in the crosshairs of climate catastrophe and sanctions. At no point did these issues undermine popular support for the CNSP, Alassane insists. "As proof" he points out that "each time the CNSP announces the holding of the National Consultative Council" under the pressure of the ECOWAS, France, and their Western allies, it has been forced to backtrack due to popular opposition.

This council, he added, "is set up every time there is a coup d'état to declare" that

the military is only ruling as a “transitional government” whose decisions will be reviewed by the council until a new constitution is drafted and power ceded to a civilian government after an election. Mali and Burkina Faso have constituted such councils.

However, Nigeriens do not want this council. Every time there has been a coup in the past, the council has served as “a door for Western imperialism” to intervene, be it through NGOs or other blocs of civil society. This ensures that another French puppet takes power when the transitional period comes to a close, Alassane explained.

*By Pavan Kulkarni*

*Author Bio:* This article was produced by [Peoples Dispatch](#) / [Globetrotter News Service](#). Pavan Kulkarni is a journalist with Peoples Dispatch.

*Source:* [Peoples Dispatch](#) / [Globetrotter News Service](#)

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# The Carbon Soil Opportunity: Organic Farming Helps Counter Climate Change



12-03-2024 ~ *Switching to organic products is an easy way to eat healthier and support the environment.*

Climate change is no longer an abstraction. I can literally see it at my front door. My figs ripened in October 2024, which has never happened before as it was never warm enough during that month. In my home state of Oregon, [wildfires set](#)

[new records this year](#), with almost 2 million acres [burned](#).

Meanwhile, in my hometown, Eugene, we had the [longest stretch](#) of consecutive days when temperatures reached at least 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. It's hard for me to think about the world that I will leave to my grandchildren. So I look for what I can do, and believe it or not, there's hope right at the grocery store; buying organic can contribute to combating climate change. Organic farmers actually store carbon in the soil, meaning there's less in the air to change our climate.

A series of long-term studies mentioned below demonstrate that organic farming increases soil carbon. In other words, organic farming is carbon farming. [Federal law defines organic farming](#) as a farming method, so we know what we're buying. Organic farmers use cover crops, mulches, and crop rotations to build healthy soil. They utilize various techniques to prevent pest problems, using only certain pesticides, which have been thoroughly reviewed as a last resort. You can support carbon farming by buying organic.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) [2023 Synthesis Report](#) states that carbon sequestration in agriculture has one of the highest potentials for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon sequestration, or carbon farming, uses farming techniques to increase soil carbon, keeping it out of the atmosphere (For more details about carbon farming and farmers who are using the method, see "[How Land Use Is a Tool for Solving Climate Change](#)" and "[Carbon Farming: A Sustainable Agriculture Technique That Keeps Soil Healthy and Combats Climate Change](#)."

Referring to the IPCC recommendations, the World Economic Forum's November 2024 article [states](#), "[E]nhancing soil carbon sequestration through regenerative agriculture could sequester up to 23 gigatons of carbon dioxide by 2050, a substantial portion of the mitigation required to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius."

### *Studies on Organic Farming and Soil Carbon—the Big Picture*

Organic carbon farming has been documented by scientists for decades. In 2012, researchers from Switzerland, Scotland, and Italy [published](#) a meta-analysis of 74 studies that were pairwise comparisons of organic and conventional farms growing various crops around the world—from all continents except for Africa

and Antarctica. The researchers measured soil carbon in three ways (if the underlying study provided the necessary data): the soil carbon concentration, the amount of soil carbon per unit area, and the rate at which the soil carbon measurements changed. They found that for all three measurements, soil carbon was greater at the organic farms than conventional farms. They concluded that “organic farming has the potential to accumulate soil carbon.”

Meanwhile, a [2017 study](#) by Northeastern University and the Organic Center—which studied more than 1,000 soil samples from both organic and conventional farms across 48 states in the U.S.—“found that organic soils had 13 percent higher soil organic matter and 44 percent higher long-term carbon storage than conventionally managed soils.”

### *Crops That May Be on Your Grocery List*

Eating organic fruits and vegetables is better for the environment and has overall health benefits. “Not only does organic production help reduce public health risks, mounting evidence shows that food grown organically are rich in nutrients, such as Vitamin C, iron, magnesium, and phosphorus, with less exposure to nitrates and pesticide residues in organically grown fruits, vegetables, and grains when compared to conventionally grown products,” [states](#) the Organic Trade Association.

Below is a list of popular items we regularly purchase from grocery stores. I chose these products because they are foods that most of us buy often. For each food, There is at least one study showing that choosing organic can help support carbon sequestration and, therefore, allows us to play our part in combating climate change:

#### *Corn*

[A 2015 review article](#) examined six long-term organic and conventional corn farming comparisons. Each study involved one site, with some plots managed organically and others managed conventionally. Four studies were done in the Midwest, one in California, and one in Maryland. All the studies grew corn in rotation with other crops. The studies were initiated between 1981 and 1998, and these plots had been continuously used for farming between 10 and 24 years when soil carbon was measured.

In five of the six studies, soil carbon capture increased in instances of organic

treatments compared to conventional treatments. (The one exception was a plot that used to be a dairy farm and had high soil carbon levels at the beginning of the study.) The review article concludes, “These results suggest that organic farming practices have the potential to reduce nitrate leaching, foster carbon sequestration, and allow farmers to remain competitive in the marketplace.”

### *Wheat*

An [11-year comparison](#) of organic and conventional wheat farming (with other crops grown in rotation) in Nebraska found that soil organic matter (one way to measure carbon) was higher in the organic plots than in conventional plots.

### *Tomato (in rotation with corn)*

California’s Century Experiment has compared organic and conventional tomato (and corn) farming since 1993. [Measurements](#) of soil organic carbon showed that the concentrations in organic plots were two to three times higher than in the conventional plots. The study authors noted that the increases occurred throughout the soil profile, down to a depth of 6 feet.

### *Potato (in rotation with wheat and corn)*

A [long-term field study](#) in Switzerland that compared organic and conventional farming systems showed that soil organic carbon was higher in the organic plots. The researchers collected soil samples over two decades after the experiment started. A [study](#) in Germany found that while carbon was sequestered in the organic plots for more than 15 years, in the conventional plots, the soil lost carbon.

### *Almonds*

In 2018 and 2019, researchers in California [compared](#) eight conventional almond orchards with eight organic orchards. (The researchers identified the organic orchards as “regenerative,” but all were certified organic.) The trees in the orchards had been growing for between three and 38 years. Total soil carbon was about 30 percent greater in organic orchards than in conventional orchards. The researchers concluded: “Our results support the notion that converting agriculture to regenerative systems could contribute to remediating several imminent global problems, including climate change diminishing water resources,

biodiversity loss, agricultural pollution, human health problems, and diminishing rural economies."

### *Strawberries (in rotation with broccoli and lettuce)*

In 2004 and 2005, researchers, mainly from Washington State University, [compared](#) 13 pairs of organic and conventional strawberry farms in Watsonville, California. The farms had been either organic or conventional for at least five years. They found that the amount of carbon in the soil from organic farms was higher than 21 percent compared to conventional farms.

### *Apples*

Scientists from Washington State University and the United States Agency for International Development [compared](#) conventional and organic apple production in a commercial orchard in the Yakima Valley. Trees were planted in 1994, and soil measurements were taken in 1998. At that time, soil organic carbon in the organic plots was about 15 percent higher than in the conventional plots.

### *Citrus*

Two studies, one from [Brazil](#) and the other from [Italy](#), showed that total organic soil carbon was higher in organic citrus orchards than in conventional orchards. The increase in soil carbon was 30 percent in the Italian study and 300 percent in some Brazilian measurements.

### *Extra Benefits*

Organic farming benefits people who grow and harvest food because they are exposed to fewer pesticides. According to a 2024 [study](#) from California, researchers looked for seven common herbicides and two fungicides in carpet dust from homes in the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area. The frequency at which each pesticide was detected and its amount increased in homes where larger amounts of pesticides were used nearby. None of these pesticides are used on organic farms.

"Our findings suggest that most of these herbicides and fungicides travel from the field via primary and secondary drift to homes in the surrounding area, potentially impacting the health of children and other vulnerable groups," the study published in Environmental International [states](#).

Organic farming also benefits those of us who eat the food. In 2024, [Consumer Reports](#) (CR) analyzed pesticide contamination of 59 common fruits and vegetables. The data came from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, spanning seven years, and included both conventional and organic produce. The analysis by CR found that pesticide contamination posed significant risks in 20 percent of conventional foods but in almost none of the organic foods. Eating more organic produce ensures a healthier diet.

### *Tackling a Global Problem With Personal Choices*

Climate change is an enormous and complex problem, and the solutions are also complex. There's no single silver bullet that can fix the crisis, including carbon farming. Even its [proponents](#) state that converting power generation to solar or wind energy and reducing the destruction of natural ecosystems are more significant measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, while organic food is sometimes hard to find and more expensive, it is a relatively simple step that many of us can incorporate into our daily lives, providing a crucial opportunity to help mitigate climate change.

*By Caroline Cox*

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*Source:* Independent Media Institute

*Credit Line:* This article was produced by [Earth | Food | Life](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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# Digging Up The Roots Of Human

# Culture



Deborah Barsky

11-28-2024 ~ *What led humans on the unique path of cultural development? And can we do anything useful with newly reconstructed histories of this process?*

Culture is central to defining humanity. Throughout history, many definitions have been proposed to describe what we mean when we talk about *culture*, leading to considerable confusion.

The word “culture” was once reserved to designate the customs and behaviors of particular groups of people in specific regions and timeframes. In recent years, however, definitions concerning *what is and what is not culture* have widened considerably, to the point where “culture” is now used to describe the behaviors of numerous life forms. For example, it has become common to refer to culture when describing the social structures of [sperm whales](#) and [other animals](#), including [insects](#).

But while animal culture denotes behaviors that are learned and socially transmitted, human cultural practices go further, transforming these behaviors into coded systems that are reproduced within specific group settings. This explains the emergence of *tradition*—a key element of culture that seems exclusive to humans. Traditions provide abstract mechanisms through which humans *symbolically* assimilate the concept of identity over time.

This deeply symbolic derivation is only observed in humans. Human societies imbue culture with a network of meanings that can be shared and understood symbolically by individuals *belonging* to a particular social structure (family, tribe, community, and nation). The further we go back in time, the more difficult it becomes to reestablish the abstract (contingent) connections that once linked

these symbols to their meanings.

Over time, human culture has not only included the concrete manifestations of extrasomatic survival strategies but also encompassed abstract notions that are barely perceptible in archeological records.

The emergence of stone tools [more than 3 million years ago](#) marks the birth of culture in the human lineage. When the first *Homo habilis* remains were discovered at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, in the early 1960s, its name, which means *handyman*, was based on the idea that this hominin was the first toolmaker. This justified its placement at the root of the human family tree: the first species of the genus *Homo*.

However, this anthropocentric denomination proved to be short-lived. [As early as the 1970s](#), the probability that other genera, like [Australopithecines](#) and [Paranthropus](#), were also making tools, came to light in some archeological records. This likelihood continues to be [supported by new data](#), including discoveries of sites yielding stone tools that predate the emergence of *H. habilis*.

Because [they were systematically made using techniques that had to be learned and shared communally](#), these activities meet the standard definition of culture used by cultural anthropologists. Furthermore, the repetitive technologies employed to make stone tools are defined as traditions, adding further weight toward culture. From this stage forward, for a period spanning almost the entire evolutionary trajectory of our genus (some 2.8 million years), stone toolkits provide virtually the only material evidence that catalogs [successive phases of human cultural evolution](#) leading to the present.

Ancient stone tools are essential for tracking cultures and their interactions. In studying them, we can see how [culture evolves on uneven pathways on a cumulative trajectory](#). As human societies grew and sharpened their technological capacity, their cultural repertoire expanded, a process characterized not only by the empirical remains of their material culture but also by increasingly elaborate symbolic behaviors that—we logically infer—mirror the emergence of human consciousness.

The complex interplay of inter- and intra-human population exchanges and the capacity for learning, along with curiosity and inventiveness, have combined through time to create our species' current state. Despite the fragmentary nature

of archeological records, studying ancient stone toolkits brings to light precious information allowing us to recognize culture in the deep past. Lithic specialists, for example, identify and describe the specific stylistic traits and chains of production in the toolkits, permitting scientific inferences that contribute to the knowledge about our cognitive evolution.

Archeologists combine “cultural” data with fossil genomics to track and compare hominin lineages and reconstruct the [2.8 million-year-old story of our genus](#). They are seeing a braided account of populations distinguished by their cultural manifestations and divided into groups with divergent species across continents. Today, however, with only one species of *Homo* remaining on the planet (*H. sapiens*), the supposed intra-human differences no longer have any biological foundation and have been laid bare for what they are: purely symbolic cultural constructions.

Parallels are drawn to compare human expressions of culture and analogous behaviors in other life forms. This is demonstrated in primate studies and has often been recognized in the pioneering work of [Jane Goodall](#) in Gombe National Park, Tanzania, during the 1960s, when she observed wild chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) modifying branches and using them as tools to probe for termites in termite mounds. Some believe these observations could serve as a template for early hominin toolmaking behavior, a hypothesis supported by the [close genetic proximity of chimpanzees to humans](#) and their apparent physical similarities. [Primate toolmaking capacity continues to be explored](#) in the wild and in captivity, yielding probing results.

Interestingly, other animals, such as crows, practice surprisingly similar behaviors, also modifying leaves to probe into crevices to retrieve insects, and [even inventing compound tools](#). These “[crow tools](#)” are uncannily similar to those made by chimpanzees; the manufacturing processes, aims, and outcomes are also comparable.

Undoubtedly, there is a considerable gap separating the degree to which humans have developed material and immaterial cultures and the behaviors we observe in other animals. Through time, only humans have developed toolmaking into a fundamental adaptive strategy resulting in the techno-dependent species we have become. More importantly, *only humans imbue their manufactured objects and behaviors with symbolically relevant identitarian meaning*.

Language is a central pillar in any discussion about human culture and its origins; its emergence has been linked to the evolution of stone tool technologies. As early *Homo* reaped the benefits of their toolmaking capacity, they also increased their ability to compete with other animals for resources *and* these advantages gave them more free time to develop innovative ways to expand their benefits. Through time, successive hominin ancestors invented new and increasingly complex toolkits, requiring individuals to spend more time learning to make them. This process eventually [came to depend on vocal communication strategies](#).

Paleoanthropologists have demonstrated that the [cerebral and anatomical configurations necessary for spoken language](#) could have resulted from [changes in craniofacial features](#) occurring over millions of years, as early hominins adapted to upright stature and bipedal locomotion. As hominins came to rely on specific kinds of stone tools, the conditions that *made language physically possible* also led to its selection and development as an advantageous adaptive culture-sharing strategy.

When we think about what is unique about human culture, we often consider technology as central to characterizing civilizations. Technologies have evolved over time to synchronize culture in a way that assimilates individuals into discrete (but potentially huge) collaborative social units; in doing so, it plays a vital role in the mental construction of both personal and shared identities.

Sharing culture and technological know-how creates a common sense of time. Museums, historical sites, and fictional history present the past through symbols of progress or failure and thus serve to chart a shared timeline. Although archeological records correspond to a series of sequential stages—advancing our species through a process of “progress”—there is no inherent hierarchy to these developments, either at the biological or the cultural levels.

For those educated within a cultural framework that explains prehistory as a linear and codependent set of chronological milestones—whose successive stages are understood by conjured logical systems of cause and effect—this outlook is going to take time to be accepted. It takes an intellectual leap to reject such hierarchical constructions of prehistory and to perceive the past as *a system of nonsynchronous events closely tied to the shifting ecological and biological phenomena*.

This endeavor, however, allows people to recognize and use the lessons offered by the past. Notably, the fact that complexity of modern human culture results from baseline learning processes bolstered through time by biosocial adaptations.

The long-term processes involved in human techno-selection have been compared to Darwinian natural selection: like biological evolution, technosocial innovations can emerge and persist, or remain latent in the human repertory. When specific conditions arise, they can be selected and, if successful, [be developed into defining aspects of the human condition](#).

At each stage of evolution, latent technological capacities exist within the structure of cultural variability; in different regions or time frames, they are selected, used, and refined, leading human groups to choose divergent evolutionary pathways. Refining these skills can even trigger technological revolutions; when the changes lead to positive results, they can set off wider cultural transformations in the populations that use them.

Culture evolves along diachronic trends. Distinct evolutionary stages occur (or not) in different areas of the world, sometimes in very divergent chronological frameworks. Humans have learned to adapt to rapid cumulative technological change by developing complex social behaviors as an adaptive response that favors the survival of our species. This process may have started gradually, but with the accumulation of breakthroughs, it continues in leaps and bounds into the present day.

Triggering a social response that could evolve in parallel to technological progress resulted in the emergence and sharpening of cultural traditions and identities, springboarding our genus toward exponential increases in social complexity. The archeological records and our own intuitive cerebral processes preserve the memory of our acquired anatomical and cultural developments. They are two sides of the same coin that evolved throughout human prehistory and beyond.

Like other primates, humans are social animals, and as individuals, we need to learn, imitate, and emulate “acceptable” behaviors within specific contexts. Culture represents the set of norms transmitted from generation to generation and dictates how individuals must behave to maintain social balance. Humanity shares and exchanges culture, but over time, we have also learned to exploit the

constructed sets of cultural norms that define the social unit we belong to and justify the exclusion of people living in less favorable situations. Humanity uses culture to invent differences between people with identical biological makeup, needs, and desires.

We have an increasingly useful 7-million-year-old global data set to better understand ourselves and how to survive and improve our well-being. With time, it will be increasingly recognized that using this information as a reference and planning tool is advantageous for practically every endeavor.

*By Deborah Barsky*

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*Source:* Human Bridges

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## **Defeating Trumpism With A People's Agenda**



*C.J. Polychroniou*

11-27-2024 ~ *We should raise walls of resistance as much as we can. More important, though, we should demand from the democratic forces to adopt a socio-economic agenda that puts people's needs above corporate interests.*

A clear consensus has emerged that the economy was the key factor behind Trump's stunning victory. However, that may not be a very accurate description about what led a disaffected electorate wanting to see Trump back in the White House as the U.S. economy had been in a rather good shape from the second quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2024 and was in fact [outperforming](#) all other advanced economies by a wide margin. Indeed, surveys had consistently shown that the majority of voters had [negative views](#) on the economy at large, thus revealing a disconnect between economic numbers and public sentiment. Unemployment was the lowest it had been in decades, consumer spending was up, and inflation had cooled off. Yet voters still thought the economy was trash.

The U.S economic system does [stink](#), no matter what the numbers show, and the political system is totally dysfunctional, which explains why so many voters were not fazed by Democrats' core message that Trump posed a threat to democracy. They were probably wondering where democracy was to be found when economic elites run the show. Forty-five years of neoliberal economics have exacerbated capitalism's inherent tendencies toward economic inequality, created a permanent state of economic insecurity, and led to the rise of an [oligarchy](#).

The United States is the [most unequal society](#) in the developed world. The rich are growing richer with every passing year while the middle class shrinks, and the poor are left to their own fate for survival. Massive social inequalities and economic disparities destroy trust and confidence in government and leave people thinking that the future is unavoidably grim. This is the primary reason for the rise of ethno-nationalism and authoritarian populism in the developed world, including of course Trumpism in the United States. It is the disastrous socio-economic and political consequences of neoliberalism that produce feelings of neglect, powerlessness and anger and lead voters in turn to cast their ballots for demagogues like Donald Trump who promise a return to a golden era.

The irony is that while Trump is an authoritarian bully who wishes to use the iron fist of the state to rollback immigration and crush social agendas and even those who oppose him, his economic views are overall staunchly pro-market and outrageously neoliberal. In that regard, there is nothing fascistic about Trump

when it comes to the economy. Statism lies at the heart of fascist ideology. The state is the all-powerful entity for fascists. The question of state-controlled planning of the economy is of paramount importance to fascism. For fascists, the state should not control all the means of production, as is the case with traditional socialism, but should dominate them.

Trump's proposals for the economy are seen as a mixed bag. That's because while he has proclaimed himself a champion for deregulation, he is in favor of protectionist trade policies. But Trump's trade policy should not fool people that he is not a neoliberal. With protectionist trade policies, Trump, as with the way he runs his own business, only sees the short-term advantages in economic policy. Moreover, protectionist trade policy does not depart from neoliberalism. As has been acutely pointed out by British political economist [Tom Wraight](#), Trump simply uses "the coercive power of the state to force other nations to conform to market-based economic logic."

Trump has promised an anti-regulation blitz from Day One upon his return to the White House on virtually all aspects of the economy, including environmental and public health regulations. After spending months lying to voters about his knowledge of [Project 2025](#), Trump has picked scores of people who worked on this ultra-reactionary policy manifesto for top posts in his administration. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 agenda for the economy, if fully implemented, would create a far more unequal and harsher society as it entails policies that will lead to massive cuts on all social programs, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program and food assistance, and calls for massive disinvestment in public services and a host of new tax cuts for wealthy households and corporations.

Project 2025 is the ultra-right wing game plan for the full completion of the neoliberal economic vision and political nightmare that started nearly half a century ago. It will produce far greater social dislocation and greater economic anxiety than any other time since the onset of the neoliberal counterrevolution. Most of those who voted for Trump on the basis of their perceptions about the direction of the economy and their belief that [the country is on the wrong track](#) will be deeply disturbed by the new economic and social realities that will emerge in the United States during the second Trump reign and will hopefully rethink their support for Trumpism. The problem is that the Democratic Party is either incapable or unwilling to offer citizens a new vision for the United States, one that

will end the rule of oligarchy, restore democracy, and put people and the planet above profit.

Here are some policies that should be included in a socio-economic agenda for the specific needs of the people in the twentieth-first century United States of America:

1. *Implementing Universal Health Coverage (UHC).* That is, a publicly administered system that guarantees that all people have access to the full range of quality health services when and where they need them. Financing of UHC could come entirely from broad-based tax revenues. Coverage would be universal and automatic. Covered services would include inpatient, outpatient, dental, mental health, and long-term health, as well as prescription drugs. All three levels of the U.S. government (federal, state, and local) would be involved in the health care system.
2. *Getting rid of all challenges and obstacles of union organizing,* which include making illegal threats to close a plant if workers select a union to represent them and threatening workers with loss of jobs or benefits if they join a union. Current U.S. law makes it difficult for workers to join unions and even excludes certain categories of workers.
3. *An industry-level approach to collective bargaining with active participation in social dialogue.* An industry-level approach to collective bargaining will secure the best economic compensation possible for workers.
4. *Undertaking a large-scale federal program of social housing construction.* The United States faces a deep and persistent housing affordability crisis that demands active government intervention. It is beyond naïve belief to think that the market can fix the housing crisis. Repairing the house market with market-oriented solutions such as [liberalizing zoning rules](#) and other regulations have never worked. They do not lead to a major increase in housing supply or in more affordable housing. A strong housing safety net should also be introduced to address the problem of homelessness and ensure home security for the most vulnerable.
5. *Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 or even \$20 per hour.* The current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour has been stagnant since 2009 and maintaining it is a scandal of grand proportions. No decent society, let alone the

richest country in the world, should accept having such a thing as the “working poor.”

*6. Fighting poverty and inequality.* Poverty should not be defined one-dimensionally based on income alone. Poverty should be seen as access to a variety of resources, such as education, health, energy, jobs, rights and personal security. The task of eliminating poverty should include both short-term (cash handouts) and long-term approaches (delivering social services and addressing the structural causes of poverty with initiatives such as the guaranteed-jobs program).

*7. Implementing the [Green New Deal](#).* Greening the economy is a vital and urgent task to save humanity and the planet from the impacts of global warming but also provides a macro-economic approach to sustainable economic growth. It's a win-win situation and only vested interests (fossil fuel industry, banks, oil-producing nations) and lack of political stand on the way to transitioning to a green economy.

*8. Cutting military spending.* The United States spent [\\$820 billion](#) on national defense during the fiscal year 2023. It spends nearly [8.4 times](#) as much on its military as Russia does and more than three times the amount of China. While the U.S. comprises just over 4 percent of the world's population, it accounts for nearly [40 percent](#) of global military spending. Between 2001 and 2022, the U.S. spent [\\$8 trillion on war](#). The notion that such enormous defense spending is important for national security questions is utterly absurd. The U.S. homeland has never been invaded and no nation threatens U.S. national security. The obscene amount of money that the U.S. spends on defense, which different methodologies estimated to be [above \\$1.5 trillion](#) for the fiscal year 2022, is for the building and maintenance of the U.S. empire. The U.S has over 750 overseas military bases, which only provoke geopolitical tensions and harm the United States, as [David Vine](#) demonstrates in his book *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. Money saved from cuts in the defense budget can go towards supporting social programs and/or for reducing the national debt. Arguing for reforms in Social Security and Medicare when the country spends so much money on the military is morally indefensible and will become politically unacceptable if people realize how wasteful and harmful military sending is.

At the heart of the neoliberal vision is a societal order based on the prioritization

of corporate power and free markets and the abandonment of public services. The neoliberal claim is that economies would perform more effectively, producing greater wealth and economic prosperity for all, if markets were allowed to perform their functions without government intervention. This claim is predicated on the idea that free markets are inherently just and can create effective low-cost ways to produce consumer goods and services. It is all rubbish, of course; nothing but an ideological pretext to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Neoliberalism is indeed not simply an economic doctrine but also a socio-political ideology that places individual self-interest before the common good, displays indifference to social inequalities and economic disparities and subsequently justifies plutocracy.

Trump's approach to government and corporate interests, which he will undertake with an extra heavy authoritarian twist, will magnify all aspects of the neoliberal nightmare that has engulfed the United States under both Republican and Democratic administrations for the past several decades. Unfortunately, a majority of the U.S. electorate refused to see what Trump really stands for and was duped into believing that their great leader is the one to take on the detestable liberal/neoliberal establishment and create in turn a system that works for the average citizens, not just the rich.

The next four years promise to be one of severe cruelty for the most vulnerable people in the United States and a nightmare for the environment. We should raise walls of resistance as much as we can. More important, though, we should demand from the democratic forces to adopt a socio-economic agenda that puts people's needs above corporate interests and consigns neoliberal capitalism to the dustbin of history.

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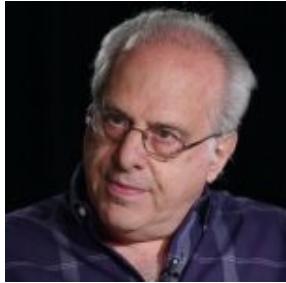
Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/how-to-defeat-trump>

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Progressive Economists (Verso, 2021).

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# A Reformist Program On Immigration (Or What Harris Might Have Said)



*Richard D. Wolff*

11-26-2024 ~ The immigration issue has split and/or weakened both center and left parties and movements across many nations in recent years. Serious economic and social problems afflicting national working classes have been “managed”—at least temporarily—by scapegoating immigrants as if they were responsible for those problems. Leaders on the left fear that many among their supporters are vulnerable to that scapegoating. In contrast, leaders on the right often see that scapegoating as a means to achieve electoral gains. Trump reflected and strengthened the view that such scapegoating can get votes. The widespread perception that Kamala Harris too would be “tough on immigrants” showed that she offered no real alternative program on immigration. Thus, the classically reactionary posing of the issue as “protecting the nation against an immigrant ‘invasion’” widely prevailed.

Appeals to morality, multiculturalism, and compassion for the plight of most

immigrants failed to dissuade many on the left from disengaging and moving politically rightward. The center or moderate left needs but lacks clear, strong support for immigrants that does not alienate portions of their traditional electoral base. “Me-too” opposition to immigration, even if less harsh and hostile than that of the professional demagogues, will fail, as Kamala Harris’s campaign discovered. Moreover, classic left reformism suggests a radically different program on immigration. It is derived from the reformist program (the “Green New Deal”) to address climate change when it faced a parallel problem with job-holders in polluting industries. A parallel reformist program to deal with immigration might be called an “Inclusive New Deal.”

In contrast, conservative, right-wing, and fascistic political forces have used extreme opposition to immigration to grow their ranks. Those forces boldly accuse immigrants of bringing crime, disease, downward pressure on wages, competition for jobs, and burdensome, costly demands on schools, hospitals, and other public services. Even in the United States, a country mostly composed of successive immigrant waves (who obliterated and replaced the indigenous people), many of those immigrants’ descendants now hold anti-immigrant views. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, they rationalize those views by insisting that, unlike former immigrants, today’s differ in being “unwilling to work.”

Rightists advance their radical “solutions” such as sharply tightening immigration rules, refusing all further immigration, and deporting millions. Even where moral, ethical, and religious traditions call us to welcome immigrants, right-wingers have found that anti-immigration politics can work well. They attack center-leftists for seeking future votes by being pro-immigration or only weakly anti-immigration. In the United States, they attack the Democratic Party for not putting their American-born constituents first. Patriotism, as defined by such rightists, now entails a strict anti-immigrant position that displaces traditional religions’ endorsement of the opposite.

Immigrants forced to arrive as slaves, Black people in the United States, for example, fared differently: their integration was mostly slower and much more partial. Brown immigrants who arrived as other than slaves also suffered slower and partial integration. Anti-Black-and-Brown racism added further discrimination and life difficulties to the experience of those immigrants. Institutionalized racism denied opportunities for such immigrant communities to develop their members’ levels of education, job skills, businesses, personal wealth, and social confidence.

All immigrants suffer delays in their access to those qualities and capabilities, but the addition of racism worsens and lengthens those delays, including in U.S. society today. The difficulties usually endured by immigrants slow and skew the development of the economy they have entered. The occasional explosions of immigrants' resentments and bitterness at their treatment—and the usually very violent subsequent repressions—then add further damage to their host economies.

Repeated efforts by those opposed to immigration have rarely succeeded in stopping it. The broad range of social forces—including the persistent effects of colonial and neo-colonial subjugation, uneven capitalist development, and climate change—that propel people to emigrate usually outweigh their concerns for their own economic, personal safety, and family interests. For employers, immigration can cheapen labor costs by expanding the supply of labor power (especially when the opposite is threatened by falling birthrates or when capital accumulation risks bidding up wages). Undocumented immigrants offer employers notoriously outrageous opportunities for super-exploitation. Hence, they often support it.

An important social cost of immigration is the opportunity it has regularly presented to demagogic politicians. They have repeatedly scapegoated immigrants to deflect genuine mass discontent where it might otherwise threaten the domestic employer class. Is there unemployment? The demagogue suggests that jobs are being preferentially reserved for immigrants. Are public services inadequate? The demagogue suggests that immigrants are placing excessive demands on them and corrupt officials are directing them to immigrants to secure cheap labor or votes. Demagogues often insist—again despite evidence to the contrary—that immigrants commit more crimes and bring and spread more disease than the native-born.

The campaigns of Donald Trump and many Republicans scapegoated immigrants. Many Democrats' campaigns likewise featured the scapegoating of immigrants. In contrast, the real, basic economic problems of the United States were not seriously addressed in the latest presidential election campaigns. One of those is the immense gap between haves and have-nots that has widened over the last 40 years. Another is the economic instability that has the economy oscillating between inflation and recessions. Still another is the obvious decline of the American empire (the relatively declining roles of U.S. exports, imports, investments, and the dollar) within the global economy. These issues were

marginalized or, more often, ignored. Instead, candidates relentlessly scapegoated 12 million undocumented immigrants (among the poorest of the poor) as if they were the cause of and thus to blame for the deep problems of U.S. capitalism, an economy of 330 million people. Likewise, they excoriated China for the economic competition its economic growth has brought to the United States. Doing that conveniently deflects blame from the corporate employers who made the decision to move production from the United States to China. As usual, all social blame or criticism must be kept from touching the U.S. capitalist system that accounts for those profit-driven decisions.

Deep, costly, and lasting consequences have followed the demagoguery and divisions in societies that split over immigration. Much energy, time, and money is diverted from dealing with the nation's real economic problems to obsessive "coping with" immigration (homeland security budgets, border patrol budgets, and wall construction and maintenance). Still more is devoted to housing, policing, feeding, and otherwise "processing" undocumented immigrants. If high-priority policy instead created good jobs with good incomes for immigrants, huge portions of these social costs would be unnecessary. Moreover, worthwhile alternatives to failed existing immigration policies are available if sufficient political power places them on the social and political agendas of societies confronting immigration. A remarkable flaw of today's global capitalism lies in its provocation of massive migration of people alongside its massive, costly failure to plan or manage that migration.

One such alternative policy could solve *together* the recurring problems of unemployment, inadequate housing and social services, *and immigration*. In the U.S. case, another Marshall Plan or "Inclusive" New Deal, green or otherwise, is needed. It could create jobs performing public services (paid at or above the current median for such jobs) that would be provided, as a right, to every unemployed citizen as priority #1. As priority #2, equivalent jobs would be provided, as a right, to all immigrants. As priority #3, the jobs thus created would include expanding the housing and all other social services needed to adequately accommodate the entire population, native plus immigrant. The tragic social divisiveness of immigrant-vs-native competition for jobs might thereby be sharply reduced.

Such an Inclusive New Deal could be funded by (1) billions of dollars no longer needed for unemployment insurance, (2) increased income and other taxes paid

by newly employed native and immigrant workers, (3) increased taxes paid by businesses profiting from increased spending by those workers, and (4) an annual wealth tax of 2 percent on all personal wealth above \$20 million. Immigration could be reduced for the first five years of this Inclusive New Deal to get it fully established and running.

A major side benefit of this Inclusive New Deal would be the huge boost in receipts for Social Security. Another such benefit would be the reduced demands placed on social services by the better physical and mental health of all newly employed workers. Finally, as a social dividend from such an Inclusive New Deal, the official work week in the United States for all workers could be reduced from 40 to 36 hours (with no pay reduction).

Imagine the enormous social benefits that would accrue to the entire U.S. population, native and immigrant, from this different reformist approach to the immigration issue. In the United States and beyond, such an approach would reduce the social divisions over jobs, incomes, housing, homelessness, social services, and immigration. A strong, growing economy attracts immigrants, integrates them productively, and thereby impresses the world. A weak, declining economy not only fails to employ all its people productively but by deporting immigrants advertises its failure to the world. A radical program would embrace the freedom to migrate as universal and therefore reorient the global location of investment to serve that freedom both domestically and internationally.

*By Richard D. Wolff*

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*Source:* Independent Media Institute

*Credit Line:* This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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# The Hunter-Gatherer Guide To Keeping Society Equal



*Brenna R. Hassett -*

*Photo:*

*en.wikipedia.org*

11-26-2024 ~ There is a great deal of attention in modern societies to inequality and the social problems it causes. Often inequality is considered to be the unavoidable consequence of how society operates in many cultures, with large population numbers and competition for resources requiring a hierarchy of successful and less-successful individuals. While our globalized world may seem dominated by this kind of society, there remain groups around the world who even today live very differently, despite continual and sometimes inescapable pressure. Anthropologists, whose science is the study of humans, have been fascinated by the diversity of ways our species have found to exist, and never more so than when confronted with cultures whose ethos and way of being are radically different from the urban societies that dominate our world: where words are weapons that actually win; where showing off your skills will get you mocked, and where every aspect of life is carefully organized so that no one person should

ever have any more power than anyone else.

How do some people come to live in a group that has no one at the top, telling the rest what to do? Anthropologists call societies that do not have ranks *egalitarian*, which means that everyone in them is equal to everyone else. This is a form of social organization that is almost exclusively seen in groups of people who are not settled in one place, tied to one type of food or resource. Rather, they spend quite a lot of their time in small groups, moving around as suits their needs. These kinds of groups have been called hunter-gatherers, but a more accurate name might be foragers: they make their living by walking through their world and exploiting what comes to hand. More than a century of research into the groups who follow their food through the landscape, and do not tie themselves to one location or one crop, has built up a picture of societies that choose to organize themselves very differently from nation-states and kingdoms, and, most importantly, actively refuse to allow any sort of rank among themselves.

For a long time, there was [an assumption](#) that egalitarian societies were egalitarian simply because they were... simple. Living in small groups and moving constantly, they just couldn't build up mountains of wealth to wield power over other people. And with very small numbers of people in a group—say no more than a few dozen—anthropologists theorized that it couldn't be that complicated to run a society, so you wouldn't need a chief or a king making big decisions. As archaeology has revealed the shape of our distant human past, it is clear that before about 15,000 years ago, every human on earth lived the same mobile lifestyle. Living with only what you can carry and constantly on the move [would seem very taxing](#) to the armchair academic of the previous century. The rather impolite implication then is that modern human societies who chose to live in these mobile, egalitarian societies, were simply the last vestiges of a primitive form of human social organization—people who hadn't 'evolved' civilization.

It is actually quite remarkable that this idea that an equal society was an easy thing to maintain hung around for so long. One of the problems may have been that the groups who lived these mobile lifestyles were often in the process of being colonized and controlled when anthropologists arrived to study them, and so were in the middle of considerable social upheaval. But another problem may simply have been a failure of imagination. There was considerable shock when anthropologists like [James Woodburn](#) began to conduct fieldwork by actually learning the language of the group they were studying and going to observe and

ask questions of the people themselves about how life worked in a small foraging group. His work with the [Hadza people](#) of what is now Tanzania set in motion a train of research that pointed out that life in a small group is anything but simple. Tempers flare, relationships break down, and when you depend on your group for survival, any social unrest could have fatal consequences.

Groups from around the world who maintain an egalitarian ethos have shown that rather than being too simple to ‘invent’ rank, they are instead too complex to allow one person or group of people to simply take charge. Keeping everyone in a group on equal footing requires a huge amount of effort, and has to be constantly maintained. The Ju/'hoansi people of southern Africa reckon it is particularly important to [‘cool young men’s hearts’](#); to stop them being prideful and boastful if they display some special skill, everyone agrees it’s very important to bring them back down to earth. A hunter is never allowed to distribute his own meat; instead, the distribution is done in public, with everyone watching. Among the Ju/'hoansi, the proper etiquette is to [gently mock](#) a successful hunter—for instance telling them the giraffe that they have killed and will be feeding several camps for days was actually a bit scrawny, perhaps.

Mockery seems to be one of the most critical tools in the political inventory for groups that actively try to achieve equality. Jerome Lewis, an anthropologist who lived with the Mbendjele of Northern Congo for several years, [tells](#) how poor behavior is subtly (or not so subtly) corrected by women who act out whatever foolish or misguided thing someone has done. The improvisational theater always has an appreciative audience, and all of the group will laugh resoundingly at the person who has done something wrong. What might seem a recipe for social disaster in a group that must get along in order to survive is anything but; the mockery only ends when the person who is being made fun of eventually gives up and laughs along with the rest of the group.

We can now see that in those groups that refuse to have ranks among themselves, there are many ways that equality can be actively maintained, but they are almost entirely social. Many groups have a policy similar to that of the Ju/'hoansi when it comes to sharing meat or indeed, anything else that is in the camp—that it would be the height of rudeness not to. Those who transgress against the rules of society may have to face their whole society laughing at them. Even when and where groups choose to move is determined partly by social concerns. If you live in a small group, it is very important to stay connected to friends and family who

live somewhere else, in case, for instance, you decide you just can't stand who you are living with at the moment. It seems that the last human societies on earth to live the mobile lifestyles that our species maintained for hundreds of thousands of years do so largely as equals—but equals who must be very careful to stay that way.

*By Brenna R. Hassett*

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*Source:* Human Bridges

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