

# Learning From History, If We Dare



*Gary M. Feinman*

The New Gilded Age, wars along the Russian border, a global pandemic, battles for women's rights, even the *Titanic*: history does rhyme with the present. Yet as former New York Times columnist Bob Herbert once observed: "If history tells us anything, it's that we never learn from history."

That's something we can realistically change. And if we do, we'll have an easier time addressing the macro and multiple challenges humanity faces, and finding the pathways to necessary compromises and alliances with people across all borders.

But our blinders and misconceptions about the past constrain the knowledge that we have to plan for a better future. Societies don't get much out of living memory because the longer-term ramifications from recent decisions generally remain unsettled, and most of the big problems we face are the cumulative products of decades or centuries of the wrong approach to humanity's histories and transitions. To leverage and learn from humanity's history regarding what fostered sustainability in the past, we need to know the outcomes.

The good news is that through concerted research in history and archaeology, we now know a great deal more about the different paths that people have taken and their outcomes than we did just *fifty* years back. Long-term perspectives on cities, states, and empires are now much fuller and more regionally diverse than was known decades ago. Synthetic, comparative analyses have been undertaken. We now know what worked and what did not.

To draw better inferences and learn from past human histories, it is necessary to

challenge three pervasive myths, which fundamentally shape not just what we think about the past, but why so many see history as irrelevant when it comes to guiding the present and shaping the future. Each myth is pervasive and entrenched as the ideas and presumptions behind them were born and entangled with the roots of the Western tradition of social sciences, baked into the frameworks through which researchers traditionally study the past.

The first myth supposes that humans in their natural state are nasty, brutish, and self-absorbed, only tamed by the power and coercion of the state. Clearly, humans do have the capacity for great selfishness, but as a species, we also are better cooperators with non-kin than any other animal. This seeming paradox is explicable if we recognize that people are not by nature either uniformly cunning or cuddly, but rather humans, past and present, are capable of both cooperation and selfishness depending on context. Our nature is not one-dimensional. Cooperative behavior is situational; we engage when an individual's wants dovetail with their larger social network. Lack of alignment short-circuits cooperation whether the network is large or small.

The first supposition or myth undergirds a broadly held second one—that large premodern societies were universally coercive or despotic in organization. Autocratic governance kept the ever-selfish in line, the argument goes. Ancient Athens and republican Rome generally have been categorically distinguished as the unexplained exception to this presumed premodern path, which came to an end just a few centuries ago when ideas from the Classical era were rediscovered, giving rise to The Enlightenment, when Europeans adopted reason, science, democracy, and more.

The latter scenario became the mid-twentieth-century justification for the third myth, the walling off of modernity from the deeper past. Only after the Enlightenment with rational thought could people organize themselves democratically, in forms of governance where voice, power, and resources were not monopolized by a few.

These three myths underlie the severing of deep history, especially non-Western pasts, from the present. Often in the absence of robust historical information, contemporary observations of non-Western peoples were categorically slotted into imagined pasts that led stage-by-stage to modernist Western presents and futures.

Progressive visions of human history spurred research in history, archaeology, and related disciplines. What we have learned over recent decades does not conform with those starting myths and expectations. Change was not linear, nor was it uniform from region to region. Likewise, premodern governance was not consistently despotic, especially in the Indigenous Americas. Yet in every global region, how people governed themselves shifted over time.

When it comes to the past, we also know the outcomes. And, in the region where I study, prehispanic Mesoamerica, cities that were governed more collectively with less concentrated power tended to persist as central places longer than those urban settlements that were ruled more autocratically. A similar pattern, albeit less definitive, was also found for a global sample of states and empires. More in-depth study is necessary, but these historical patterns seem worth investigating in other regions and probing further where they have been documented. The role and success of governance and institutions in facing and meeting the challenges of the past unlock a treasure trove of information that just may guide us toward better futures.

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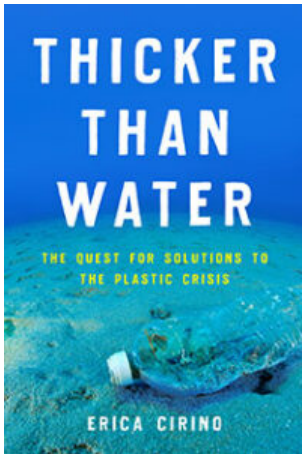
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# Nanoplastics Are Entering Our

# Bodies



*Plastic is in the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. How does it get there—and what does it mean for human health?*

The air is plasticized, and we are no better protected from it outdoors than indoors. Minuscule plastic fibers, fragments, foam, and films are shed from plastic stuff and are perpetually floating into and free-falling down on us from the atmosphere. Rain flushes micro- and nanoplastics out of the sky back to Earth. Plastic-filled snow is accumulating in urban areas like Bremen, Germany, and [remote regions like the Arctic and Swiss Alps](#).

Wind and storms carry particles shed from plastic items and debris through the air for dozens, even hundreds, of miles before depositing them back on Earth. Dongguan, Paris, London, and other metropolises around the world are enveloped in [air that is perpetually permeated by tiny plastic particles](#) small enough to lodge themselves in human lungs.

## *Toxic Tires*

Urban regions are especially full of what scientists believe is one of the most hazardous particulate pollution varieties: synthetic tires' debris. As a result of the normal friction caused by brake pads and asphalt roads, and of weathering and wear, these tires shed plastic fragments, metals, and other toxic materials. Like the plastic used to manufacture consumer items and packaging, synthetic tires contain a manufacturer's proprietary blend of poisons meant to improve a plastic product's appearance and performance.

Tire particles from the billions of cars, trucks, bikes, tractors, and other vehicles moving across the world escape into air, soil, and water bodies. Scientists are just beginning to understand the grave danger: In 2020, researchers in Washington

State determined that the presence of 6PPD-quinone, a byproduct of rubber-stabilizing chemical 6PPD, was playing a major factor in a mysterious [long-term die-off of coho salmon in the U.S. Pacific Northwest](#). When Washington's fall rains heralded spawning salmon's return from sea to stream, the precipitation also washed car tire fragments and other plastic particles into these freshwater ecosystems.

Up to [90 percent of all coho salmon](#) returning to spawn in this region have died—much greater than is considered natural. As the study's lead author, environmental chemist Zhenyu Tian, [explained](#) in a 2020 interview with Oregon Public Broadcasting, 6PPD-quinone appears to be a key culprit: "You put this chemical, this transformation product, into a fish tank, and coho die... really fast."

### *Microplastic Inside Human Airways*

While other researchers had previously searched for, and detected, microplastic dispersed in indoor and outdoor air, Alvis Vianello, an Italian scientist and associate professor at Aalborg University in Denmark, was the first to do so [using](#) a mannequin emulating human breathing via a mechanical lung system, [publishing his study's results](#) in 2019. (Despite the evidence his research provides—that plastic is getting inside of human bodies and could be harming us—it was not until 2022 that modern health researchers first [confirmed the presence of microplastics in human lungs](#). And as comprehensive health research has ramped up, we are just beginning to understand how having plastic particles around us and in us at all times might be affecting human health.)

Vianello and his colleague Jes Vollertsen, a professor of environmental studies at Aalborg University, explained that they've brought their findings to researchers at their university's hospital for future collaborative research, perhaps searching for plastic inside human cadavers. "We now have enough evidence that we should start looking for microplastic inside human airways," Vollertsen [said](#). "Until then, it's unclear whether or not we should be worried that we are breathing in plastic."

When I met Vollertsen in 2019, he had speculated that some of the microplastic we breathe in could be expelled when we exhale. Yet even if that's true, our lungs are indeed holding onto some of the plastic that enters, potentially resulting in damage.

Other researchers, like Joana Correia Prata, DVM, PhD, who [studied microplastics](#) at the University of Aveiro in Portugal, have highlighted the need for systematic research on the [human health effects of breathing in microplastic](#). “[Microplastic] particles and fibers, depending on their density, size, and shape, can reach the deep lung causing chronic inflammation,” she [said](#). Prata noted that people working in environments with high levels of airborne microplastics, such as those employed in the textile industry, often suffer respiratory problems. The perpetual presence of a comparatively lower amount of microplastics in our homes has not yet been linked to specific ailments.

While they’ve dissected the bodies of countless nonhuman animals [since the 1970s](#), scientists only began exploring human tissues for signs of nano- and microplastic in earnest during the late 2010s and early 2020s. This, despite strong evidence suggesting plastic particles—and the toxins that adhere to them—[permeate our environment](#) and are widespread in our diets. From 2010 to 2020, scientists have [detected](#) microplastic in the bodies of fish and shellfish; in packaged meats, processed foods, beer, sea salt, soft drinks, tap water, and bottled water. There are [tiny plastic particles embedded in conventionally grown fruits and vegetables](#) sold in supermarkets and food stalls.

### *Petrochemical-Based Plastics, Fertilizers, and Pesticides*

As the world rapidly ramped up its production of plastic in the 1950s and ’60s, two other booms occurred simultaneously: that of the world’s human population and the continued development of industrial agriculture. The latter would feed the former and was made possible thanks to the development of petrochemical-based plastics, fertilizers, and pesticides.

By the late 1950s, farmers struggling to keep up with feeding the world’s growing population welcomed new research papers and bulletins published by agricultural scientists extolling the benefits of using plastic, specifically dark-colored, low-density polyethylene sheets, to boost the yields of growing crops.

Scientists laid out step-by-step instructions on how the plastic sheets should be rolled out over crops to retain water, reducing the need for irrigation, and to control weeds and insects, which couldn’t as easily penetrate plastic-wrapped soil.

This “plasticulture” has become a standard farming practice, transforming the

soils humans have long sown from something familiar to something unknown. Crops grown with plastic seem to offer higher yields in the short term, while in the long term, use of plastic in agriculture could create [toxic soils that repel water instead of absorbing it](#), a potentially catastrophic problem. This presence of plastic particles in the soil causes increased erosion and dust—as well as the [dissolution of ancient symbiotic relationships](#) between soil microbes, insects, and fungi that help keep plants—and our planet—alive.

From the polluted soils we've created, plants pull in tiny nanoplastic particles through their roots along with the water they need to survive, with serious consequences: An accumulation of nanoplastic particles in a plant's roots diminishes its ability to absorb water, impairing growth and development. Scientists have also found evidence that [nanoplastic may alter a plant's genetic makeup](#) in a manner increasing its disease susceptibility.

#### *Plastic: Part of the Human Diet*

Based on the levels of micro- and nanoplastics detected in human diets, it's estimated that [most people unwittingly ingest anywhere from 39,000 to 52,000 bits of microplastic](#) in their diets each year. That number increases by 90,000 microplastic particles for people who regularly consume bottled water, and by 4,000 particles for those who drink water from municipal taps.

In 2018, scientists in Austria detected [microplastic in human stool samples](#) collected from eight volunteers from eight different countries across Europe and Asia. By 2023, scientists had detected the presence of plastic particles in people's [lungs](#), [bloodstreams](#), [veins](#), [placentas](#), [feces](#), [testes/semen](#), and [breast milk](#). And while the long-term health impacts of plastic on the human body are still unknown, it is well understood that plastic has toxic effects on [laboratory animals](#), [marine wildlife](#), and [human cell lines](#).

In a 2022 [study](#), researchers showed that nanoplastics less than 100 nanometers wide can enter the blood and organs of animals and cause inflammation, toxicity, and changes in neurological function.

Clearly, micro- and nanoplastics are getting into us, with at least some escaping through our digestive tracts. We seem to be drinking, eating, and breathing it in.

And [these tiny particles are just one component of plastic's myriad forms of pollution](#). From the moment plastic's fossil fuel ingredients are extracted, to its

production, transportation, use, and eventual disposal in landfills, incinerators, and the environment, the plastics pipeline emits toxic chemicals that pollute Earth's air, soils, waters, seas, animals, plants, and human bodies, and releases greenhouse gases that drive the climate crisis. Most often harmed are already underserved groups, including Black, Brown, Indigenous, rural, poor, and fenceline communities everywhere, driving severe injustice worldwide.

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*Source:*

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**India Will Pay 70% Of Cost But Micron Will Own 100% Of The Plant—A Curious Business Model**





*Prabir Purkayastha*

The deal with Micron during PM Modi's visit to the United States has made headlines as a major technological breakthrough and a new dawn for India's electronics chip-making industry. Implicit in this hurrah for the Micron deal is that India has [completely missed the bus on the key technologies](#) involved in electronic chip making. And for those who know technology would realize that the Micron deal is only for packaging of the chips, their assembly and testing, a relatively low end of the electronics industry. It does not touch the core technologies of *designing* and *fabrication of* chips, let alone the holy grail of chip-making technology: the lithographic machines that are central to chip fabrication.

The U.S.-India ties had hit a rocky patch, with India refusing to sanction Russia or aligning with the West and G-7 on a "rule-based international order." Where the West makes all the rules. With Prime Minister Modi and President Biden both facing what could be difficult elections soon, they both urgently needed a reset in U.S.-India ties. For India, it is getting technology for critical sectors in India and declaring a new dawn. For Biden, India is part of its *derisking* and long-term plan to *disengage* its industries and market from China.

Late as it already is, the Modi dispensation is finally beginning to understand that technology is not something that, if you have money, you can buy from the global market. It is the closely-held knowledge of companies and countries. Today, it is electronics that drive everything: from the battlefield to artificial intelligence, from your lowly washing machines to the most expensive fighter planes. In the Ukraine war, a few dollars worth of chips are at the core of cheap drones to the most expensive aircraft and missiles. In war, tanks and artillery are also integrated with missiles and drones, shaping the modern battlefield, with radar and satellites providing real-time information to those running the battles. Modern electronic chips are the "brains" of all of this equipment, just as it is in almost any industry and device.

If India has to maintain its autonomy in global affairs, it has to start thinking about the [future of its electronics industry](#). What sits at the heart of the electronics industry is the ability to make the latest generation of chips. If not today, then at least tomorrow. And we need to start today, as we missed the chip-making bus when we decided not to rebuild the chip fabrication plant—the SemiConductor Complex—we had built in Mohali. The plant, a critical component of our self-reliance in electronics, had [mysteriously burnt down in 1989](#).

So what is the Micron deal? Micron is a major manufacturer of memory chips, and it is this realm of business that has made it one of the world’s leaders in the semiconductor industry. It would have the necessary credentials if it decided to set up a memory fabrication plant in India, unlike the Foxconn-Vedanta fabrication proposal greeted with a lot of fanfare, where [Foxconn does not have any experience in chip-making](#). But that is not what Micron is offering. It has offered to set up a plant in Gujarat to only “assemble, package and test” chips that Micron has fabricated elsewhere. Micron has such chip fabrication plants in the United States and also in China, whose products, the chips will be packaged and tested in India. So if chip-making was India’s goal, it would not be delivered through the Micron deal. What we are getting is the lowest end of the chip-making technology, assembling and testing chips that have been made elsewhere. We are not competing with the United States, China, South Korea, and Japan on chip making but with countries like Malaysia. Malaysia is already streets ahead of us in this area, with about [13 percent of the world’s in OSAT outsourcing market](#). Locating such plants in Malaysia and now India would be a part of the de-risking strategy of the U.S. companies, where they shift the low end of the chip production to countries like Malaysia and India while encouraging new high-end chip fabrication to the United States, such as [Micron’s \\$100 billion mega-fab](#) in Clay, Washington.

Let us look at the investments involved in setting up the Micron plant and who is footing the bill. The total cost of setting up the plant is estimated to be \$2.75 billion, with the central government providing a 50 percent subsidy and the Gujarat state government throwing in another 20 percent. Micron is investing only 30 percent of the total capital! In other words, Micron will hold 100 percent ownership in a plant costing \$2.75 billion, in which they would have invested would have invested only 0.825 billion! Even industry reports—e.g., *eeNews Europe*—calls this an [“extreme level of subsidy.”](#) In other words, to burnish

Modi's image, tarnished by BJP's loss in Karnataka and the continuing riots in Manipur, this is a part of the public relations exercise that his team is doing. If we look at this deal for getting low-level technology—assembly and testing—we are “subsiding” a leading U.S. manufacturer so that we can assemble and test the chips built in Micron's high-end plants in the United States and China.

India is not the only country providing subsidies for technology and setting up plants. So are the United States and China. The United States has a \$52 billion government kitty for subsidizing chip manufacturing and other core activities. China has a National Fund and another popularly called the Big Fund (National Integrated Circuits Industry Development Investment Fund), both investing \$73 billion in China's chip-making industry. But both these countries are funding the high end of the electronics tech stack, advanced chip making, devices, CAD tools, lithographic machines, etc., virtually nothing (only about 5 percent) in the assembling and testing of chips. Even when they do invest, they do much lower amounts and also as a fraction of the total cost. According to the South China Morning Post, [quoted by Yahoo Finance](#), China gave \$1.75 billion in subsidies to 190 Chinese firms, with China's leading chip fabricator SMIC, receiving roughly about 20 percent of that amount!

There is no question that India, having missed the chip-making bus, needs to ramp up its ambitions and bootstrap a chip-making industry. To do this successfully, it has to have a plan, where to invest and how much to invest, and when to invest. Yes, it has to return to old-fashioned planning, dismissed by BJP-RSS ideologues as “socialism.” And yes, every country plans its science and technology, including how to develop people, the key to technology development. Not one-off shots and driven by which companies come and what they offer. Instead, what is our path forward, and what do we need? And paying 70 percent of the cost while offering our land, cheap labor so that a U.S. company can get 100 percent of the ownership, in a segment where countries like Malaysia are streets ahead of us, is not investing in technology. It is simply a PR exercise.

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# Greek Left Leaders Betrayed The Working Class. Conservatives Won A Landslide



*The ascendance of the right in Greek politics shows how a left without strong class politics is a losing proposition.*

Greece's conservative party New Democracy won another landslide victory in the country's second election in just five weeks, trouncing Syriza, the so-called radical leftist party, by an even wider margin than in the first election. New Democracy finished by almost 23 points ahead of Syriza, a result that allows the conservatives to control 158 seats in the country's 300-seat parliament. Moreover, the result of the June 25 Greek elections makes New Democracy "the most powerful center-right party in all of Europe," as its leader and prime minister for a second consecutive term Kyriakos Mitsotakis aptly noted in the aftermath of his party's historic victory.

Why are the conservatives so popular in debt-ridden Greece, and what lessons can be gained for the left worldwide from the electoral collapse of Syriza? Political scientist and political economist *C. J. Polychroniou* discusses these questions with French-Greek journalist *Alexandra Boutri* in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*.

*Alexandra Boutri:* Immediately following the results of the Greek parliamentary elections of May 21, which saw the conservative party of New Democracy win by an astonishing 20-point margin over the radical leftist party Syriza, you published

an essay titled [“The Rise and Fall of Greece’s Radical-in-Name-Only Syriza Party.”](#) Well, in the repeat election on June 25, Syriza lost to New Democracy by an even bigger margin. Are you surprised at all by the electoral results? For many people, I suppose, it is still hard to explain the implosion suffered by Alexis Tsipras’s party when only eight years ago it was the governing party.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* I am not in the least surprised by the even bigger margin that New Democracy won over Syriza. If anything, the only surprising element in the evolution of Greek politics over the past 15 years or so was Syriza’s meteoric rise to power. We know of course that politics is always dynamic, but it’s hard to find another case in contemporary European history where a political party of any ideological orientation rose to power when it was struggling 10 years earlier to win just 4 percent of the vote.

What was even more surprising in this development is that Syriza was hardly a political party per se. It was more of a protest political organization that included many different factions of the Greek left, all under one roof. However, it evolved very quickly once the balance of power started changing in its favor. Within a year or two before its rise to power, Syriza, under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras, transformed itself into an inclusionist populist party after having successfully tapped into the anti-austerity anger that had spread across different segments of the Greek population on account of the notorious bailout programs that had been signed in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Greek/euro crisis by the nation’s two mainstream parties, the socialists (PASOK) and the conservatives (New Democracy) respectively. Yet, it took Alexis Tsipras only a few weeks after coming to power in 2015 to capitulate to the demands of the deeply hated troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and eventually to sign a third bailout agreement that extended Greece’s status as Germany’s de facto colony.

But Greek voters, especially those on the left, do not in general have short memory or faulty perceptions. Not only did they not forget Syriza’s betrayal, but they also did not miss how incompetent its leadership had been when it came to overall governance. Tsipras and his inner circle aligned themselves with big capital, ignored the working class, squeezed the middle class as much as they could and proceeded with massive privatization schemes — all in order to satisfy the international creditors.

In May 2019, Syriza lost the national elections after having lost both the European and local elections. It paid the price for having become another mainstream party. But what may have sealed its complete downfall was that during the time it was in opposition it engaged for the most part in outrageous, petty politics (such as attacking the prime minister's wife, for example, and saying that the country was being run by a junta!), thus failing miserably to act as the main opposition party. The ruling party's policies went largely unchallenged, and voters could not find in Syriza a convincing alternative consistent with the values of the left.

In light of the above, it is anything but surprising that in both the May and June elections, Syriza suffered big losses even in working-class districts of major urban centers. Indeed, Syriza is the only party of the left in the last 40 or so years to have lost support in the traditional working-class districts of Greece. I am also not surprised at all by the fact that Yanis Varoufakis's MeRA25 party, which was established in 2018, failed to make it into the parliament. Varoufakis may be very popular abroad but remains extremely unpopular with Greek voters of all political persuasions.

However, what is quite surprising to me about these elections is the low voter turnout (slightly over 52 percent), which continues to drop to a new historic low. Not only that, but like in many other parts of the world, the Greek youth is shifting to the right for solutions to today's societal problems. This is a truly discouraging development, and I am not sure what it will take to turn things around. In this context, what is even more disturbing is the fact that far right parties have made a comeback in Greece less than three years after party leaders of Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi political organization, were convicted of being part of a criminal organization and sent to prison. Three far right parties, with a combined total of nearly 13 percent of the popular vote, have won seats in Greece's next parliament. This was the most shocking surprise of the Greek legislative elections that took place on June 25.

*My understanding is that Greek society is fairly conservative and that the party of New Democracy has a rather miserable record when it comes to respecting democratic values and human rights. If this is so, why is Mitsotakis's government so popular?*

You are right on both counts. Greek society is indeed quite conservative to this

day and democratic and human rights have received acute blows under Mitsotakis's New Democracy government, which is mainly composed of neoliberal hacks and traditional authoritarian right-wingers. But that's not an odd combination. Ever more increasingly, economic neoliberalism needs political authoritarianism in order to carry out its so-called reforms.

Conservative social orders maintain and reproduce themselves not on their own but rather through the planned execution of specific policies and practices carried out by the ideological apparatuses of the state. In the case of Greece, the media and the church play vital roles in the depoliticization of the public and the reproduction of culturally conservative views and attitudes respectively. Media ownership in Greece is in the hands of a few media magnates (mainly industrialists and shipping tycoons), each of whom owns scores of media outlets even though demand lags way behind supply. For international news, Greek mainstream media rely on foreign sources and partnerships with foreign newspapers. The domestic news tends to be largely sensationalistic in nature and scope, with heavy emphasis on celebrities and lifestyle. Naturally, none of the mainstream media outlets are advocates of a progressive socio-economic agenda. They are all in favor of economic liberalization policies and extol the virtues of the free-market system while their owners maintain deep ties with the state, which of course go beyond the media industry (direct state funding and various forms of indirect subsidies) and extend into their primary business activities. As for the Greek Orthodox Church, which has a strong presence in every geographical region of the country, it has always been close to conservative and right-wing ideologies and practices.

The question, "Why is Mitsotakis's government so popular?" doesn't have a straightforward answer. Most polls indicate that large majorities voted for New Democracy because of perceived better future prospects under a Mitsotakis government. In essence, what this says is that the success of New Democracy is really all about the failure of Syriza as an alternative option. Be that as it may, the next four years are going to be a real challenge for the Mitsotakis government. The European Union rules about government budget deficits (3 percent of GDP) and debt (60 percent) to GDP ratios, which had been suspended since 2020 due to the pandemic will end in 2024. So, austerity will soon again be in full swing throughout Europe, and especially in Greece because of the country's unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratio, which now stands at close to 180 percent. In

sum, it is highly unlikely that Mitsotakis will be able to keep his campaign promises about raising wages, salaries and pensions; reducing further the value-added tax rates; improving the public health care system, which has myriad problems due to lack of proper funding and large-scale inefficiencies; and tackling inequality.

*Migration in Europe has become a contested issue, though it is probably accurate to say that it is not a defining issue as it is in the United States. Was immigration an important determinant in the electoral success of New Democracy, given that the Mitsotakis government has taken a tough line on migrants since coming to power in 2019 and pledged ahead of the first election in May 2023 to extend the border wall with Turkey?*

It is quite accurate to say that migration is not among the top issues of concern for most European citizens, and thus it is not as prominent a wedge issue as immigration is in the United States. Rising prices, the international situation, energy supply, the environment and climate change were seen by far as the more important national issues facing the European Union, according to [a survey](#) released in June 2023. Here, it is also important to underline for context that “in Europe, immigration accounted for 80 percent of the population growth between 2000 and 2018, while in North America, it constituted 32 percent in that same period,” [according to](#) the International Monetary Fund.

In Greece, survey after survey reveals that citizens regard issues related to the cost of living and the economy in general as most important to them, but issues such as public health and the environment also figure prominently. It is also worth noting that climate change and the destruction of the environment rank in various polls as the most serious problems facing the planet. In [one survey](#) conducted in 2022, only 9 percent of respondents ranked immigration as a major threat to the country. And in [a poll](#) released just a few days before the May 2023 elections, the cost of living, public health and low wages were listed as the most important issues facing Greek citizens, with immigration far down on the list.

Having said that, there is also no doubt that many Greek citizens have approved of Mitsotakis’s tough border policy in reducing the flow of migrants. But perhaps this should not be surprising considering the fact that until several years ago, the overwhelming majority of what the Mitsotakis government calls “illegal” immigrants who arrived into Europe came through Greece. The number of asylum



seekers in the Greek islands has fallen dramatically in the course of the last few years, largely through pushbacks, which have been widely criticized by human rights organizations and extensively covered by the media. Pushbacks are of course illegal under international law. However, insufficient attention has been paid to “push-forwards” by the Turkish Coast Guard and the smuggling of migrants.

Unfortunately, it is the right that has succeeded in enforcing its agenda on migration, just as it has on a host of other issues. The left’s response has been to adopt a softer stance on the specific issue but without really offering a blueprint for a fair and humane immigration system. When he was prime minister, it should be noted, Tsipras opposed taking down the Evros fence at the border between Greece and Turkey. In addition, as opposition leader, he supported the decision of the Mitsotakis government in early 2020 to close the border along the Evros River when Turkey unilaterally opened its borders to Greece to allow many thousands of refugees and migrants to reach the European Union. But most of Syriza’s supporters seem to be against the border fence and in favor of the free movement of migrants.

It is important for the left to strike a balance between national and international solidarity, but that is easier said than done, which is why there have never been specific answers from leftist leaders to queries from working-class people whether countries with high rates of unemployment and low wages can afford to have uncontrolled migratory flows. Indeed, [European data](#) on living conditions showed that in 2022, more than 95 million in the EU were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Would therefore uncontrolled migrations to Europe improve or cause further deterioration of living conditions in the continent? The truth of the matter is that any leader of a left party eyeing power in today’s Europe would prefer that this question wasn’t asked!

To answer now directly your question, I don’t believe that immigration on its own played a critical role in the electoral success of New Democracy. It may have played a part but only in conjunction with voters’ belief that Mitsotakis is better equipped as prime minister to deal with the pressing economic issues facing the country and its people.

*Do the Greek elections offer any lessons for the left in general?*

We may have an ontological problem here in the sense that it has become evidently very difficult to define what constitutes left-wing politics in this day and age. There is always of course a structural gap between theory and practice, but it seems that this gap has become increasingly huge in today's political universe. Today's left is having a very hard time convincing voters that it presents a viable alternative to the status quo even though discontent is extremely widespread across the world, with inequality being at the core of the politics of discontent. But if there is anything the case of Greece's Syriza party teaches us it is that a left without class politics is a losing proposition. Historically, left-wing parties have always had strong links with working-class people and communities, but this is no longer the case today. Hence the reason why the working class has embraced right-wing populism.

Secondly, a party of the left cannot become a catch-all party. Indeed, ever since the 1990s, all over Europe, catch-all parties have been weakening. Syriza did not learn this lesson and tried to transform itself into an inclusivist populist party to the point of even seeking to attract voters from the now-defunct neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. The end result was that it lost the left.

Thirdly, a party of the left needs a distinctive programmatic profile and willingness to fight for viable alternatives while also acknowledging the structural constraints of fully realizing those objectives in the course of just a few years after coming to power.

Finally, a strategy for winning an election must be based on the core values of the left. Lies and empty promises will come back to haunt a left party's leadership and ultimately set back the case for radical change.

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# The Struggle For Environmental Justice In Africa



<https://homef.org>

*The framework of our civilization is premised on the destruction of the planet.*

The struggle for environmental justice in Africa is complex and broad. It is the continuation of the fight for the liberation of the continent and for socio-ecological transformation. It is a fact that the environment is our life: The soil, rivers, and air are not inanimate or lifeless entities. We are rooted and anchored in our environment. Our roots are sunk into our environment and that is where our nourishment comes from. We do not see the Earth and her bountiful gifts as items that must be exploited, transformed, consumed, or wasted. The understanding of the Earth as a living entity and not a dead thing warns that rapacious exploitation that disrupts her regenerative powers are acts of cruelty or ecocide.

We bear in mind that colonialism was erected on the right to subjugate, erase, or diminish the right to life and the right to the unfettered cultural expression of the colonized. In particular, the colonized were dehumanized and transformed into zombies working for the benefit of the colonial powers. Ecological pillage was permitted as long as it benefited the colonizers. This ethos has persisted and manifests in diverse forms. Grand theft by the colonial forces was seen as entrepreneurship. Genocide was overlooked as mere conquest. Slavery was seen as commerce. Extractivism was to be pursued relentlessly as any element left unexploited was considered a waste. What could be wasted with no compunction

was life. So most things had to die. The civilizers were purveyors of death. Death of individuals. Death of ecosystems.

Thus, today, people still ask: What would we do with the crude oil or fossil gas in our soil if we do not exploit them? In other words, how could we end poverty if we do not destroy our environment and grab all it could be forced to yield? We tolerate deforestation, and unregulated industrial fishing, and run a biosafety regulation system that promotes the introduction of needless genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and by doing so, endanger our biodiversity and compromise our environment and food systems.

Plunder is presented as inescapable and desired under the cloak of foreign investment. Political leaders in despoiled regions offer ease of doing business, tax holidays, sundry lax rules, and other neocolonial governance policies.

The reign of exploitation and consumption without responsibility has driven Africa and indeed the world to the brink. The current *civilization of death* seeks ready investment in destruction through warfare and extractivism rather than in building resilience and adapting to the environmental changes that result from corporate and imperial misadventures.

We are in a reign in which condescension is the hallmark of multilateralism. The collective action needed to tackle global warming has been reduced to puny “nationally determined contributions” that add up to nothing. Rather than recognizing and paying a clear climate debt, we expend energy negotiating a *loss and damage* regime to be packaged as a humanitarian gesture. Pray, who negotiates what is offered as charity?

Today, Africa is facing multiple ecological challenges. All of these have resulted from the actions of entities that have seen the continent as a sacrificial zone. While the world has come to the conclusion that there must be an urgent shift from dependence on fossil fuels, we are seeing massive investments for the extraction of petroleum resources on the continent. And we must say that this investment comes with related infrastructure for the export of these resources out of the continent in a crass colonial pattern. A mere 1 percent of the labor force in the extractive sector in Africa are Africans. A mere 5 percent of investment in the sector is in Africa. More than 85 percent of the continent’s fossil gas infrastructure is for export purposes.

The shift to renewable energy brings the same old challenges to Africa. Extraction of critical minerals for renewable energy is done without prior consultation with and consent of our people. The continent's environment is being degraded just as it has been with the extraction of oil, gas, gold, diamond, nickel, cobalt, and other solid minerals. The array of solar panels and wind turbines could well become markers of crime scenes if precautionary measures are not taken now.

Are we against renewable energy? No. They provide the best pathway toward ending the energy deficit on the continent. However, this should be pursued through discrete, autonomous, and socialized ownership schemes.

While the world knows that we must rebuild our biodiversity, what we see is the push towards more deforestation in Africa and for monoculture agriculture, all of which are against our best interest and that of the world. A sore issue, land grabbing has not disappeared with the coming innovations.

As Chinua Achebe writes in his classic 1958 book *Things Fall Apart* about Eneke the bird, "Since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching." For us, until the despoilers of our environment halt their destructive acts, we will intensify our resistance and never give in to their designs. We believe this conference will not only break the yoke of colonialism but will also puncture the hold of coloniality. Our book, [\*Politics of Turbulent Waters\*](#), is one of the tools toward these ends.

Every African nation should:

- Commit to issuing an annual State of Environment Report to lay out the situation of things in their territories.
- End destructive extraction no matter the appeal of capital.
- Demand climate debt for centuries of ecological exploitation and harm.
- Require remediation, restoration of all degraded territories, and pay reparations to direct victims or their heirs.
- Support and promote food sovereignty including by adopting agroecology.
- Adopt and promote African cultural tools and philosophies for the holistic tackling of ecological challenges and for the healing and well-being of our people and communities.
- Promote and provide renewable energy in a democratized manner.
- Recognize our right to water, treat it as a public good, and halt and reverse its

privatization.

- Recognize the rights of Mother Earth and codify Ecocide as a crime akin to genocide, war crimes, and other unusual crimes.
- Ensure that all Africans enjoy the right to live in a safe and satisfactory environment suitable for their progress as enshrined in the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights.

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# **Archaeology Is Flipping The Script On What We Know About Ancient Mesoamerica**



*Mesoamerica - Map:  
en.wikipedia.org*

Recent archaeology emerging from ancient Mesoamerica is flipping the script of public understanding about the people and institutions that inhabited this world: the evidence tells us that cooperative and pluralistic government was at least as common as and more resilient than despotic states.

This more complex picture and the achievements of Mesoamerica's peoples are all the more impressive given the area's rugged terrain and resource constraints. Compared to ancient Eurasia, the inhabitants of Mesoamerica—the region stretching from Costa Rica to central Mexico—lacked beasts of burden and wheeled transport, and the use of metals was generally limited.

Until recently, our understanding of how most societies and early states developed was heavily grounded in interpretations of urban societies in Eurasia. Despotic, coercive rule was assumed (except for ancient Athens and republican Rome), the actions of the elite were ascribed great importance, and core functions of the economy were presumed to be in the hands of the ruler.

Precolonial Mesoamerica doesn't fit this cookie-cutter framework: neither was economic production or distribution centrally controlled by despotic rulers, nor was governance in societies with very large populations universally coercive.

This new perspective is the outgrowth of a decades-long shift in archaeological research's focus from temples and tombs to regional settlement patterns, urban layouts, house excavations, domestic economies, and agricultural production.

By concentrating on the archaeological record, recent generations of researchers have brought fresh attention to features of precolonial Mesoamerica that did not fit entrenched stereotypes, many of which had their roots in the 19th century.

Mesoamerica's cities and large-scale societies arose independently of other global regions, spawned by their own regional populations. Mesoamerican technological development never experienced the centralizing impact of the monopolization of bronze weaponry through control of scarce tin deposits, nor the "democratizing" or "decentralizing" effects of the adoption of more widely available iron.

Mesoamerica was also spared the stark inequalities in military and transportation technology that appeared in Eurasia when some societies developed the chariot, serious naval capabilities, and fortified palaces while others lagged behind. In Mesoamerica, military might came through the control of large infantries using weapons crafted primarily from widely available stone, all of which made for generally more balanced political relations than in Eurasia.

Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica is therefore emerging as an ideal place to examine the different ways that humans coalesced in urban contexts, in both collective and autocratic political formations, without some of the key factors that earlier scholars have traditionally seen as necessary or transformative for the rise of premodern societies.

How were these large, preindustrial urban centers in Mesoamerica organized? Were they long-lasting? And if so, what accounts for their comparative degrees of resilience across time?

[In a 2018 study](#), we coded data from a carefully selected sample of 26 precolonial Mesoamerican cities and prominent political centers. We found that more than half of them were not despotically ruled and that the more collective political centers had greater resilience in the face of droughts and floods, and warfare or shifts in trade. Cities that addressed their social challenges using more collective forms of governance and resource management were both larger and somewhat more resilient than the cities with personalized rulership and more concentrated political power.

In general, collectively organized political centers relied more heavily on internal finance generation, such as taxes, as compared to the more autocratic centers that relied more on external financing, such as monopolized trade networks and war booty. The more that political elites can support themselves without relying on financing from the general population, the less they face accountability from the people, and the greater the likelihood that governance and power are



hoarded. Additionally, higher levels of internal financing and communal resources often corresponded with evidence of the wider circulation of public goods and the bureaucratization of civic offices. Collectively organized centers with these features as well as spatial layouts, such as large open plazas and wide streets, that provided opportunities for householders and urban dwellers to communicate and express themselves seem to have fostered community persistence as major centers.

In a [later study](#) that included an updated and expanded sample of 32 well-researched Mesoamerican cities, we found that centers that were both more bottom-up and collective in their governance were more resilient. While some of these cities had palaces and monuments to rulers as their focal points, others featured more shared and equitably distributed forms of urban infrastructure. This includes apartment compounds, shared terraces or walls within neighborhoods, neighborhood plazas, temples and other civic buildings, and shared roads and causeways, all of which required cooperation and collective labor for their construction and maintenance and would have facilitated more regular face-to-face interaction and periodic public gatherings.

The implications of this archaeological research are too informative and powerful to stay put in textbooks. They resonate with evolving views of our present world, which are finding that public space, open communication, fair taxation, and effective bureaucracy can be cornerstones of well-being. These parallels with and understandings from the past can be insightful for us today as models to guide our future planning and identify the social models that best position us to survive the tests of time.

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