

Collapse Q & A

When you create a site about the collapse of civilization, people are bound to have questions. Below, I answer some of the most common questions I get.

What Is Collapse?

Collapse is very difficult to define because it's not something that happens all at once. There won't be a day when we wake up, check the news, and see headlines like, "Civilization has collapsed." In fact, I would argue that collapse has already begun.

There's a quote, often attributed to sci-fi writer William Gibson, that says, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed yet." I would say the same thing about collapse. It's already here, it's just not evenly distributed yet.

If you're a middle-class citizen with a roof over your head and food to eat, the collapse hasn't happened yet. If you're one of the [100 million refugees](#) around the world, or if you're one of the [800 million people](#) who can't find enough food to eat, the collapse is already here.

Still, one could argue that there have always been refugees and starving people in the world. And we're not talking about collapse in just one area, but the collapse of civilization as a whole. To help clear this up, let me share some popular definitions of collapse from people in the world of [collapsology](#).

Joseph Tainter, author of [The Collapse of Complex Societies](#), said,

A society has collapsed when it displays a rapid, significant loss of an established level of sociopolitical complexity."

Everyone can agree that the modern world is incredibly complex. As a society gets more and more complex, it requires more and more energy to sustain itself. Once there isn't enough energy to keep it going, many of the institutions and organizations that we take for granted will break down, and everything will start to become simpler.

Nate Hagens, director of The Institute for the Study of Energy & Our Future, refers to this as [The Great Simplification](#).

All this might sound a little vague, so here's a more specific definition from Jared Diamond, author of [Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed](#). He says,

By collapse, I mean a drastic decrease in human population size and/or political/economic/social complexity over a considerable area, for an extended time."

According to this definition, collapse won't be official until the human population starts to decline. We know this is going to happen. Humans are in a state of [ecological overshoot](#), which means we are using the Earth's resources (forests, aquifers, fossil fuels, etc.) faster than they can regenerate. In fact, humans are already using the equivalent of [1.75 Earths](#) every year.

Once a species goes into overshoot, its population is certain to decline. It's impossible to say when, but at some point we won't be able to extract enough fuel, mine enough minerals, create enough fertilizer, and grow enough food for everyone on the planet.

Here's an even more specific definition from Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens, authors of [How Everything Can Collapse](#). They say,

A collapse is 'the process at the end of which basic needs (water, food, housing, clothing, energy, etc.) can no longer

be provided [at a reasonable cost] to a majority of the population by services under legal supervision."

This is where my mind tends to go when I think of collapse. I didn't start feeling frightened about all this until 2020 when I came to the realization that I probably won't die the way most people do—very old and lying in a hospital bed.

Because of what I've learned about [climate change](#), [resource depletion](#), and the [loss of biodiversity](#), I now realize there's a good chance I will die from disease, starvation, murder, or perhaps a natural disaster such as a hurricane or extreme heat wave.

If you're over 60 or very rich, this might not be the case for you. But for the vast majority of people under 60, there's the very real possibility of a death that is both painful and terrifying.

I don't enjoy writing sentences like that. Doing so fills me with fear and grief, but I think it's important to be honest about what we're facing. Only then can we take appropriate action.

I want to share one more definition of collapse. This one is from Jem Bendell, author of a paper that went viral called [Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy](#). He says,

When we contemplate this possibility of 'societal collapse', it can seem abstract... But when I say starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war, I mean in your own life. With the power down, soon you wouldn't have water coming out of your tap. You will depend on your neighbours for food and some warmth. You will become malnourished. You won't know whether to stay or go. You will fear being violently killed before starving to death."

That is what I mean by collapse. I'm not saying that surviving through collapse is impossible; I'm just saying that for most people, it will be extremely difficult.

How long it takes to play out is another question. Things could seem relatively normal one day, then a black swan event could lead to the breakdown of law and order just days later. On the other hand, collapse could play out slowly, like another Great Depression that just keeps getting worse every year.

There's no way to know how or when the collapse will happen. All I know for certain is that it *will* happen. So instead of sticking our heads in the sand, let's start wrapping our heads around this new reality and figure out what we can do to mitigate the damage, save as much as we can, preserve our knowledge, and give future generations a fighting chance.

How Can You Be Sure That Collapse Is Inevitable?

To fully answer this question, I would have to write a book. A long one. And in fact, many people *have* written books on it.

It's not just that collapse is inevitable, it's that continued growth is impossible. The things our civilization needs to continue growing—sand, topsoil, freshwater, fossil fuels, rare-earth minerals, and a stable climate—are disappearing. Even if world economies stopped growing and simply maintained their current levels, we would still run out of natural resources [in a matter of decades](#).

There are many climate activists who insist that collapse is not inevitable, and that if we stop burning fossil fuels and transition to renewables, we can save civilization. What they don't realize is that we are already out of time.

According to the IPCC, to limit warming to 2°C (a temperature

rise that would still be disastrous), we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions [by 25% before 2030](#). And since global GDP is directly linked to greenhouse gas emissions, GDP would be reduced by about 25% as well. It would be an economic crash on par with the Great Depression.

Plus, we would have to keep cutting greenhouse gas emissions in the 2030s and 2040s. Imagine a Great Depression that lasts not one decade but several decades, and keeps getting worse and worse. People would learn to live simpler lifestyles, but the transition would be very painful.

Having more renewables would certainly help, but the technology isn't nearly advanced enough to replace fossil fuels. [Not by a long shot](#). Besides, it looks like there [aren't enough metals](#) in the ground, anyway.

At this point, limiting warming to 2°C is our best-case scenario, but the latest research suggests that even [1.5°C will trigger tipping points](#) that can't be stopped, leading to runaway warming that will raise the average global temperature by several degrees no matter what we do.

Don't get me wrong. We should still draw down our use of fossil fuels *as quickly as possible*. A more controlled collapse now would be better than an uncontrolled collapse later, but collapse is going to happen either way.

And as I already pointed out, even if there were no climate change, we would still have the problem of dwindling resources. Back in 1972, a study by MIT scientists predicted that under a business-as-usual scenario, civilization would begin to collapse around 2040. Recently, researchers have looked at all the data gathered since then and have determined that [we are right on schedule](#).

Is Surviving Collapse Even Possible?

Honestly, I don't know. It depends on how severe the collapse is. It looks as though the best-case scenario is a severe global depression that reduces the world population by several billion later this century, and the worst-case scenario is the extinction of the human race.

If the truth is somewhere in the middle (as it usually is), there will still be billions of survivors. However, their survival will depend on their health (are they dependent on any medications that might become unavailable?), on their skills (are they able to grow food, raise animals, and live without electricity?), and most importantly, on their community (do they know people who can actively help them survive?).

This is why I'm always encouraging people to take care of their health, learn new skills, and make new connections. The more prepared you are, the better your chance of survival. It's that simple.

What Is The Point Of This Website?

The point of this website is to warn people about the collapse and teach them how to prepare for it.

Before I created this site, I already had a couple of sites about preparedness and homesteading. Then in 2020, I came to the realization that civilization is likely to collapse in my lifetime, and definitely in my children's lifetimes.

I wanted to warn as many people as possible, and I figured that the most effective way for me to do that was to create a website and fill it with articles about why collapse is coming and how to prepare for it. If this site helps even just a few

people survive the collapse, it will be worth it.

To learn more about how this site came to be, check out [this page](#).

Will Humans Go Extinct?

In the long run: Yes, of course. In the short run: I don't know, but I hope not.

There are some people who are convinced that humans will go extinct this century, and I can understand why. When you look at how quickly we are [raising temperatures](#), [destroying ecosystems](#), and [polluting the Earth](#), it's easy to conclude that the planet will become uninhabitable for humans.

There are many ways it could happen. Nuclear war is the most obvious. The war in Ukraine could easily spiral into a massive nuclear exchange between NATO and Russia. Or there could be nuclear war between India and Pakistan, or Israel and Iran, or the U.S. and China. As the world becomes more unstable, nuclear war will become more and more likely.

But even if we manage to avoid nuclear war, there are other ways that humans could come to a quick end. For example, warming in the Arctic could release huge amounts of methane from a kind of ice known as [clathrates](#).

Since methane traps [far more heat](#) in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, it could cause the planet to warm even faster, melting more clathrates and releasing even more methane in a feedback loop that raises temperatures by several degrees Celsius in a relatively short period of time.

This is known as the [clathrate gun hypothesis](#). There is still debate among scientists over whether this is possible, but if it is, it would cause most species on Earth to go extinct as they would be unable to adapt to the rising temperatures quickly enough. If most species go extinct, it is likely that

humans would, too.

If neither of these scenarios plays out, then I think it's unlikely that humans will go extinct this century. Even if most of the planet becomes uninhabitable, there will still be tolerable climates near the poles. And if enough of the surviving people know basic skills like hunting, foraging, making fire, building shelter, herbal medicine, off-grid cooking, and so forth, then humans will have a good chance of survival.

Humans are surprisingly resilient. You might not think so looking at the average person, but people can go through intense trauma and hard times and still manage to carry on.

At one point, the human population got as small as [a few thousand people](#) after the eruption of a super-volcano called Toba. It was so bad that it dimmed the sun for six years and lowered average temperatures by as much as 20 degrees in some places.

But somehow, even without the knowledge and tools we have today, humans survived. I like to think that someday, there will be new societies of hunter-gatherers living in Greenland or Antarctica.

What Should I Do?

Learn, prepare, and survive. Those are the three main categories on this website, and they're the three main things you should do.

Start learning about climate change, biodiversity loss, peak oil, pollution, and the many other problems that are leading toward the collapse of civilization. The better you understand these topics, the easier it will be for you to warn others about what's coming.

But don't just spend all your time doom-scrolling. Start

learning survival skills like how to hunt and forage, how to collect and purify water, how to grow food, how to build a fire, how to cook off grid, how to build a shelter, how to create herbal remedies, and more. Anything that will help you survive in a post-collapse world.

Of course, no one can learn it all. If you want to focus most of your learning in one area (for example, maybe you love learning about herbal medicine), then by all means, go for it. However, it is critical that you start making friends with like-minded people who have other skills.

Many people have this idea that they can survive by living in a bunker filled with guns and supplies. This isn't realistic. Eventually, you will run out of supplies and you'll have to come out in search of food and water. When that happens, you will need other people who can help. People who know about gardening, carpentry, sewing, and all the other skills required for human flourishing.

As the meme below says, "We won't survive a collapse by killing each other. We will only survive with benevolent skilled communities working together."



Why is it that everyone I meet, that expects a pending societal collapse, is focused on weapons? Do you have seeds? Do you have tools? Do you know how to filter water? Where are your crafters? Who can blacksmith, work leather, sew, do carpentry? Who knows medicine, herblore, and can identify edible plants? We won't survive a collapse by killing each other. We will only survive with benevolent skilled communities working together. Get with it.

Worried About The Collapse Of Civilization?

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