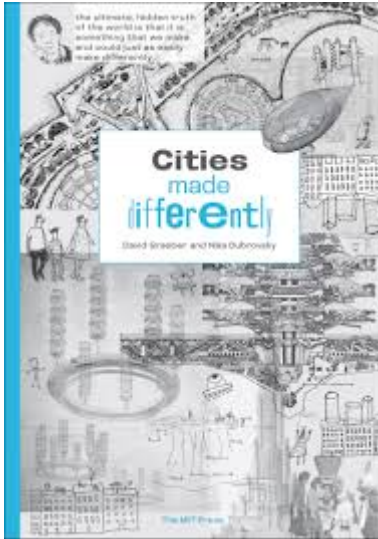


# Cities Made Differently: Try Imagining Another Urban Existence



11-22-2024 ~ *We know from history that there are many ways we can live together—let's explore the idea.*

In thousands of ways, we are taught to accept the world we live in as the only possible one, but thousands of other ways of organizing homes, cities, schools, societies, economies, and cosmologies have existed and could exist.

We started a project called Made Differently: designed to play with the possibility and to overcome the suspicion—instilled in us every day—that life is limited, miserable, and boring.

Our first focus is [Cities Made Differently](#), exploring different ways of living together. Read and imagine four different kinds of cities taken from our book which are listed below, and continue your exploration, downloadable at [a4kids.org](#), for drawing and dreaming.

## *City of Greed*

What if you had to live in a city whose citizens must pay not only for housing and health care but also for the air they breathe?

The dystopian novel *The Air Merchant* takes place in a secret underground factory city. Mr. Bailey, the factory owner, condenses air from the atmosphere and sells it to his fellow citizens for a profit. Eventually, the Earth's atmosphere

thins, creating a catastrophic shortage of breathable air. With the price of air increasing, fewer and fewer humans can afford to keep breathing.

When people can't pay for the air they breathe, the police throw them out of the city. Everyone lives in constant fear of suffocating, thinking only of how to earn enough money to spare their loved ones and themselves that terrible fate. The food company Nestlé is often criticized for its irresponsible use of water in India, Pakistan, and other developing countries. Captured in the documentary film [We Feed the World](#) (2005), former Nestlé chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe said:

"It's a question of whether we should privatize the normal water supply for the population. And there are two different opinions on the matter... NGOs, who bang on about declaring water a public right... That's an extreme solution. The other view says that water is a foodstuff like any other, and like any other foodstuff, it should have a market value. Personally, I believe it's better to give a foodstuff a value so that we're all aware it has its price..."

### *City as a Family*

Imagine a city without any strangers, where everything is shared, and everyone looks after each other. There are no shops, no money, and no danger at all.

We think of the family as a group that practices "basic communism": from each according to his ability to each according to his needs. Any family is thought to be protected by bonds of kinship from the cruel laws of the outside world. Unlike businesses, rarely will a family throw out a sick child or an elderly parent because they are no longer "revenue-generating assets."

According to Roman law, which still underlies the value system of Western societies, a family was all those people living within the household of a *paterfamilias* or father whose authority over them was recognized as absolute. Under the protection of her father, a woman might be spared abuse from her husband, but their children, slaves, and other dependents were his to do with as he wanted.

According to early Roman law, a father was fully within his rights to whip, torture, or sell them. A father could even execute his children, provided that he found them to have committed capital crimes. With his slaves, he didn't even need that excuse.

The patriarchal family is also the model for authoritarianism. In ancient Rome, the patriarch had the right to treat his household members as property rather than as equal human beings.

The Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that humankind originally lived in small bands of hunter-gatherers composed of close friends and relatives until big cities and agriculture emerged, and with them wars, greed, and exploitation.

However, archaeology shows us numerous examples of how people in different times and across different parts of the Earth lived in large metropolitan areas while managing their collective affairs on a fairly egalitarian basis. At the same time, there have always been small communities where status inequality prevailed and a privileged minority at the top benefited by exploiting the rest.

We know from our personal experience that in almost every family there are elements of both authoritarianism and baseline communism. This contradiction never fully goes away but different cultures handle it differently.

### *A City of Runners*

The people who live in this city believe that real life is all about constant competition.

The people in a city of runners find it fascinating or even necessary to keep track of who among them is more important, who is richer, smarter, more beautiful, or more worthy. There are many ideas about how the city came to have habits like this.

One of the city's revered philosophers, Thomas Hobbes, believed that the natural state of human beings is to seek violent domination over their neighbors, and that society without the authority of the sovereign would quickly turn into a battle of all against all. Constant competition between people is thus seen as an enjoyable game as compared to real war, which is always lurking around the corner.

Naturally, in cities like this, there must be some who are poor, ugly, and unhappy. Just as in some children's games, there are winners and losers.

People living in the city of runners foster an admiration for winning in their kids, and an ambition to surpass their peers in all areas. Children in the city of runners

have no interest in learning together, sharing, or mutual aid. Helping someone pass an exam is considered “cheating” and is strictly punished. All their lives, adults are engaged in constant competition over beauty, skill, and wealth.

Runners believe that people who live differently from them and who refuse to play their games simply choose to be losers. During the 1968 student unrest in Western countries, some disaffected young people abandoned the big cities for the “sleepy” provinces where they created autonomous settlements, many of which still exist today.

### *Underground City*

Living in an underground city could be safe and convenient. Without weather, there’s no risk of storms. And no trees mean no forest fires.

Underground cities have been around practically forever. The city of Derinkuyu in the Turkish province of Cappadocia, for example, was built between 2000 and 1000 BCE. The landscape of volcanic tuff—a unique soft stone—could be hollowed out without requiring complex tools, making room to house 20,000 people. The underground city boasted a stable, corrals, churches, schools, canteens, bakeries, barns, wine cellars, and workshops. The intricate system of tunnels connecting it all together meant that intruders would not know their way around and quickly get lost.

Tunnels are found underneath many cities. Rome is famous for its catacombs, and at one time subterranean burial chambers were commonplace. These days, tunnels tend to be for underground trains called subways. In Beijing, the residents became so fearful of nuclear war that they built an entire bunker city, with 30 kilometers of tunnels connecting underground houses, schools, hospitals, shops, libraries, theaters, and factories. There’s even an underground roller skating rink!

Mexico City has not gone as far as to build an entire city underground, but architect Esteban Suarez is planning an underground apartment building. And what a building it will be! Piercing the center of the Mexican capital with its tip will be a 65-story pyramid—no wonder they call it the earthscraper. The glass-enclosed area above the surface will be for recreation and outdoor concerts.

Underground, the building will be heated and powered with geothermal energy, making the pyramid energy self-sufficient. It’s not easy building downward into

the earth, but building underground won't disrupt the historical landscape of the city. And it evades the city's building codes restricting the height of structures to eight floors.

Mirny, a town in the Russian far north, has its eye on an abandoned diamond mine as the site for an underground city. There are no more diamonds to be found, but its abandonment threatens neighboring villages with cave-ins and landslides. Moscow architect Nikolai Lyutovsky has proposed a solution: building a strong concrete skeleton inside the quarry to strengthen its walls while covering its top with a transparent dome, resulting in an underground eco-city fit for 10,000 people.

Located in the Yakutia Republic, the town has a harsh arctic climate with temperatures reaching as low as -60 degrees Celsius in the winter. But underground, the temperature never falls below zero. The quarry would thus be good for both people and plants. Its architects have allocated most of the city's inner space to vertical farms. Farms for food production, technical laboratories, factories, and research centers are located underground and, aboveground, there will be play centers and schools. Moving between the underground and the surface is quick and easy.

Going underground to avoid possible misfortunes—might seem like a good idea, but there's a catch: if you don't like the rules of your community it's tough to get out. How important is it to be able to easily leave one community, whose rules no longer suit you, and join a different one?

*By David Graeber and Nika Dubrovsky*

*Author Bios:*

*David Graeber* was an anthropologist and activist and is a [bestselling author](#).

*Nika Dubrovsky* is an artist, writer, and founder of the [David Graeber Institute](#) and the [Museum of Care](#).

This excerpt is adapted from Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber's [Cities Made Differently](#) (MIT Press, 2024, all rights reserved) and is distributed in partnership with [Human Bridges](#).

*Source:* MIT Press

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# COP29 Ignores Militarism, Putting Meaningful Climate Deal Out Of Reach



**COP29**  
Baku  
Azerbaijan

11-22-2024 ~ *Leaders of the world's top polluting nations skipped COP29, which also failed to address how militarism fuels emissions.*

The 2024 UN climate change conference, COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, is now nearing its end and reports are that talks are deadlocked. The two biggest elephants in the room are militarism and climate financing.

Wars generate more carbon emissions than many countries, while the [U.S. military](#) is the [single largest institutional source](#) of greenhouse gas emissions, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have resulted not only in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, but have caused catastrophic damage to the environment and paved the way to hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere. For example, it's estimated that the first two years of Russia's war on Ukraine will have generated [175 million metric tonnes](#) of carbon dioxide. This is more than the total emissions generated individually by many countries, including the Netherlands, Venezuela and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Gaza's future habitability is very much in doubt. In just the first six weeks of the assault, Israel dropped a staggering 29,000 bombs on Gaza, with the majority of the bombs being [2,000 pounds](#) and supplied to Israel from the U.S. Emissions from just the first 120 days of Israel's war on Gaza (October 2023-February 2024) exceeded the annual emissions of 26 countries and territories,

according to a [study](#) by an international team of researchers. When the war infrastructure (built primarily by Israel but also including that built by Hamas) is taken into account, the total emissions increase to more than 36 countries and territories, while the emissions associated with the rebuilding of Gaza are “projected to be higher than the annual emissions of over 135 countries,” according to the same study.

COP29’s failure to address militarism’s contribution to climate change ensures any progress will be trivial. But let’s look at another elephant in the room: coming to an agreement on climate finance, which is the main objective for the countries gathered at the climate summit. The annual \$100 billion target established in 2009 to support developing countries in reducing emissions and adapting to the threats of global warming was met for the first time in 2022 — two years after the initial deadline. Moreover, that figure is now recognized by the [Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance](#) as highly insufficient. Developing countries need trillions of dollars to combat climate change and address its impacts. A few countries, such as [India](#) on behalf of like-minded developing countries and [Saudi Arabia](#) on behalf of the Arab Group, have called for developed countries to provide at least \$1 trillion annually to developing countries, but this is a wishful thinking proposal. The number being floated instead in private discussions is [\\$200 billion](#), which was rejected by developing nations as totally unacceptable. In the meanwhile, the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ended without concrete progress on climate finance and “[only words of support for Baku](#).” It is highly doubtful that we will see a final text at COP29 with concrete numbers for the finance goal that corresponds to the actual needs of and demands from Global South. To make matters worse, the current geopolitical context, diminishing appetite for climate action among world leaders, and the fact that Donald Trump is returning to the White House do not bode well for the future of climate action in general.

There are other processes underway at COP29 that are disconcerting. Several world leaders and government officials did not even bother to travel to Baku. The absence of Europe’s major leaders from the summit is especially striking. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz opted, for different reasons, not to attend COP29. The leaders of the United States, Russia, China, India and Brazil also did not go to the UN climate conference. In other words, the



leaders of the world's top polluters skipped COP29.

Climate scientist [Bill Hare](#) was spot-on when he explained the absence of big name world leaders from COP29 as “symptomatic of the lack of political will to act.” Indeed, the prime minister of Papua New Guinea, one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change, decided not to attend COP29 in protest of the sincerity of developed countries to address the climate crisis, while the country's foreign affairs minister described the summit as a “[total waste of time.](#)”

Another irony about COP29 is that the host country's president has defended oil and gas, calling them a “[gift from the god.](#)” Of course, this raises the question of why COP29 is being held in Azerbaijan, a country whose exports rely almost totally on oil and gas. Or why COP28 and COP27 were held in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, respectively, since both countries are major exporters of petroleum and thus have major vested interests in maintaining and even expanding the fossil fuel industry.

This year will surpass 2023 as the hottest year on record and will also be the first year in which the planet will be [more than 1.5 degrees Celsius](#) above the pre-industrial level. Yet the delegates at COP29 are still talking about the old climate benchmark when “1.5C has been deadlier than a doornail,” according to [Zeke Hausfather](#), climate scientist at Berkeley Earth.

However, COP29 countries have taken a step toward the adoption of a global carbon market framework, that is, trading schemes in which carbon credits are sold and bought. Yet it is still unclear that carbon markets can be a reliable tool for combating climate change, as many critics contend that carbon offsets can [disincentivize decarbonization](#). This is, after all, the corporate world's go-to tool for addressing climate emissions. The European Union led the way in the creation of an international [emissions trading system](#) (ETS) in 2005, but it has been widely regarded as a failed climate solution. [China](#) created its own national ETS in 2021, but most studies reveal that its implementation has had limited to very little impact on industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Unfortunately, COP29, like all other UN climate change conferences preceding it, will end in disappointment. Moreover, pledges made at these global climate change conferences are voluntary and legally nonbinding. At last year's climate conference, countries promised to transition away from fossil fuels. What has



been happening instead is that the burning of fossil fuels continued to rise in 2024, and [global carbon emissions](#) from fossil fuels hit a new high.

To say that time is running out to save humanity and the planet from a global climate catastrophe is an understatement. Yet, all indications are that the powers that be are bent on keeping fossil fuels around until they run out. Capitalism is of course the main cause of global warming, and reforming capitalism in a drastic way, and as soon as possible, might be the only way to proceed with effective climate action.

Thus, there is a dual challenge ahead for climate activists: Fighting climate change while seeking simultaneously to reform capitalism. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury to wait for the end of capitalism as time to save the planet is fast running out. All concerned citizens must demand climate action from their own governments. We need to embrace grassroots strategies and nationwide campaigns. Climate activism and organized labor must find common ground. Hence the importance of a just transition; hence also the importance of a working-class strategy for climate change.

The problem is not simply fossil capital, but all major factions of the capitalist class, especially that of finance capital. [Banks](#) have financed fossil fuels with nearly \$7 trillion since the Paris Agreement was adopted by nearly every country in 2015. Both corporate and finance capital defend neoliberalism and austerity economics, thus standing on the way to a just and much needed redistribution of wealth to build a clean energy infrastructure and thus end our reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels.

Neoliberalism and the climate crisis are interlinked. Neoliberal capitalism has commodified the planet's resources and has created a situation where short-term profit-making is being put above the livelihood of workers and the state of the environment. Corporations have free rein to deplete natural resources in the name of profit and efficiency. Banks dominate fossil fuel financing because of short-term gains and because their primary goal is maximizing profit.

As COP29 draws to a close, there is not much hope for any major breakthroughs. Preparations for COP30, which will be convened in Belem, northern Brazil, next year, are already underway, with the host country planning to present an agenda that combines biodiversity, adaptation and climate change. In the meantime, the

annual global average temperature will most likely continue to rise as carbon emissions will increase, and the Trump administration will be busy undoing climate solutions.

There is a ton of work to do to save the planet from global warming. But it won't happen in global climate change conferences, and surely not without massive pressure from civil society.

Activists must not give up fighting the good fight. We have a world to win.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/cop29-ignores-militarism-putting-meaningful-climate-deal-out-of-reach/>

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# Sri Lanka's National People's Power Sweeps General Election



11-17-2024 ~ On October 15, [data from the Election Commission of Sri Lanka](#) showed that the National People's Power (NPP) coalition scored a decisive victory in Sri Lanka's first general election since defaulting on its external debt.

With 61.56 percent of the popular vote, the NPP won 159 seats in Parliament. This gave President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) a supermajority in parliament and the power to make constitutional amendments.

The NPP won a majority of the popular vote in 21 out of 22 electoral districts in the country. In the southern district of Hambantota, a traditionally left-wing Sinhala nationalist constituency that was the stronghold of the [Rajapaksa family](#), the NPP secured 66.38 percent of the vote.

In the central Nuwaraeliya district, where many of the voters are Tamil-speaking workers in tea estates, the NPP secured a 41.57 percent plurality of the vote. In the northern Jaffna district, a stronghold of conservative Tamil nationalist parties, the NPP secured a plurality, with 24.85 percent of the popular vote.

This is a significant turnaround for the NPP, as during the presidential election, AKD polled poorly in both the north and in the central tea estate regions.

These developments may indicate that traditional identity-based parties are undergoing a significant crisis of legitimacy, as economic grievances and bitterness toward the established political elite take center stage.

They also indicate the success of the NPP in driving a grassroots campaign that emphasized national unity, or in their words, "a national renaissance."

Several parliamentarians who were a mainstay in electoral politics for decades lost their seats entirely. The disintegration of the two great poles of Sri Lankan

electoral politics—the center-right United National Party (UNP) and its breakaway Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), and the center-left Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and its breakaway Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)—continued.

Sajith Premadasa's SJB, with just 17.66 percent of the vote, will sit in opposition. Namal Rajapaksa's SLPP secured just 3.14 percent of the vote. Ranil Wickremesinghe's new alliance, the New Democratic Front, secured just 4.49 percent of the vote.

Importantly, voter turnout declined from 79.46 percent in the September presidential election to 68.93 percent—the lowest turnout for an election since 2010. This likely played some role in boosting pro-incumbent bias as disenchanted voters of parties other than the NPP chose to stay at home.

### *Challenges Ahead*

In the realm of economic policy, the new NPP government is sitting on the ticking time bomb that is Sri Lanka's 17th IMF program and its accompanying debt restructuring deal, sealed by AKD's predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe. One of AKD's key campaign promises was to conduct an independent debt sustainability analysis and renegotiate this deal. This will be much easier said than done.

The debt restructuring deal negotiated by Wickremesinghe includes novel instruments such as “governance-linked bonds” which link interest rates to the government's willingness to pass “anti-corruption” legislation—corruption being a dog whistle reserved for countries in the Global South that are insufficiently subordinated to the neoliberal paradigm.

The deal also includes “macro-linked bonds” which have no upside for Sri Lanka. According to these, higher GDP growth rates in the country will be met with higher interest payments to private bondholders, like BlackRock, who own the largest [share](#) of Sri Lanka's debt.

Some [analysts](#) predict an economic meltdown starting in 2027 when Sri Lanka will have to begin repaying its external debt, likely running down its foreign currency reserves and forcing it to borrow again from international bond markets. In order to deliver on its campaign promise of system change, the NPP will have to put an end to this debt spiral and begin to industrialize the country.

In the realm of foreign policy, the NPP will have to navigate the recently elected Trump administration, which is likely to double down on the Indo-Pacific Strategy to contain China. Following the end of Sri Lanka's Civil War in 2009, the U.S. has applied increasing pressure on the country, often leveraging human rights issues to push through a combination of economic and governance reforms.

In the past decade, the U.S. has attempted to push through economic [agreements](#) like the [Millennium Challenge Compact](#) which contained provisions to privatize land. It has also promoted military agreements like the Status of Forces Agreement and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, both of which aimed to improve interoperability between the U.S. and Sri Lankan military in order to draw the latter into the United States' New Cold War on China.

Should it choose to take on these tasks, the NPP will have to tap into the insurgent multipolar movement in the Global South in order to build a united front against debt and imperialism. They will need to rekindle the [Bandung Spirit](#) and restore Sri Lanka's leading position in the [Non-Aligned Movement](#). Time will tell if the NPP is up to this task.

### *Internal Contradictions*

A decisive factor in the next four years will be how the internal balance of forces plays out within the NPP coalition, where the biggest party is the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Many of the NPP's new parliamentarians are young and inexperienced and have few links with the old JVP. The latter was modeled on a Marxist-Leninist cadre-based party.

The ideological makeup of the NPP is therefore eclectic, including many middle-class professionals, academics, artists, and political activists. Some have a markedly liberal cosmopolitan character that is in stark contrast to the old JVP's base of mainly rural cadres known for their militancy and patriotism. Managing this dialectic of old and new will be another challenge for AKD.

Meanwhile, the shock of an electoral wipe may force the right-wing forces, namely the UNP and SJB, to regroup. They will take every opportunity to evoke a red scare and paint even the most moderate reform as a communist takeover. They will use their links with imperialists in the West to do this.

Finally, there is the traditional nationalist camp which includes the Rajapaksas, various splinters of the Old Left, and Sinhala nationalists. It is clear that it is

primarily the disenchanted voters of this bloc that form the bedrock of support for the NPP. Therefore, there will likely be much pressure on the NPP to live up to the populist and patriotic traditions of southern Sri Lanka.

*By Shiran Illanperuma*

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*Source:* Globetrotter

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## U.S. Recruits South Korea To Help Colonize And Militarize Space



11-15-2024 ~ The United States is colonizing and militarizing Earth's orbit, recruiting allies such as South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol administration. More specifically, the U.S. Space Force is

creating a "swarm" of satellites that, when combined with AI, seeks to attain a god's eye view across all domains of war. This proliferated warfighter space architecture (PWSA) of small low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites would allow the United States—in its [Department of Defense's words](#)—"to sense, make sense, and act at all levels and phases of war, across all domains, and with partners, to deliver information advantage at the speed of relevance." These actions have started an international arms race to space. In 2020, China [applied](#) to the United Nations International Telecommunication Union to launch its own LEO satellites.

Yet, saddled with \$35 trillion in debt, the United States can't do it alone. It needs its arms industries and allies such as South Korea. This has led the Yoon



administration to launch its own [NewSpace program](#) to nurture its own aerospace industry. The colonization and militarization of Earth's orbit will generate [trillions of dollars](#) for war profiteers while impoverishing humanity and the planet.

On October 19, 2024, dozens of activists from struggles across South Korea held their first national gathering—the “National Discussion on the Space Industry And Militarization of Space”—opposing the Yoon administration's NewSpace program due to its destructive military, economic, and environmental costs.

### *South Korea's NewSpace*

Held as part of Space4Peace's annual “Keep Space for Peace Week” actions (timed to coincide with the UN's World Space Week), the conference was held in Daejeon, one of the three locations for Yoon's regional space cluster. Sung-hee Choi, of the People Against the Militarization of Space and Rocket Launches, explained that LEO satellites are promoted for their potential to provide universal internet access, such as SpaceX's Starlink, with little mention of their dual military purpose. The U.S. Air Force recognized [in 1996](#) that this dual purpose would give it the “ultimate high ground” in warfare.

Choi explained how the United States's massive debt means it [needs](#) allies such as South Korea to win space colonization. In 2016, the U.S. signed a [space cooperation agreement](#) giving South Korea access to U.S. aerospace technology and knowledge. In 2022, the Yoon administration agreed to [house](#) a U.S. Space Force foreign command, [integrating](#) South Korea's satellites into the United States's military satellite network. In June 2024, South Korea conducted its first multi-domain military exercises with the United States and Japan that included the space domain. Then, in September 2024, South Korea [signed a Letter of Intent](#) with the U.S. to share non-classified aerospace technology through the U.S. Space Forces-Space Joint Commercial Operations.

SpaceX is central to the United States's NewSpace approach to addressing its space needs via the private sector. Harnessing its reusable rocket technology, its [399](#) launches, and Starlink's [6,371](#) active satellites (60 percent of the world's total), SpaceX's Starshield (Starlink's military version) [provides](#) the satellite and launch services for the U.S. Space Development Agency's proliferated warfighter satellite architecture. Following the United States's lead, the Yoon administration is creating its own version of SpaceX: [Hanwha Aerospace](#).



Outwardly, the Yoon administration promotes its investment in aerospace as a source of regional development for underdeveloped areas. Yet, as Hyun-hwa Oh, co-president of Catholic Climate Action, mentioned, few people living in those places are aware of how these new industries are used for waging war and even fewer have a say in whether or not to host them. Worse, many are forced to choose between jobs building weapons or no jobs at all.

### *The Costs of War 4.0*

The fourth industrial revolution is transforming the way we wage war. If satellites will integrate and control all domains (naval, air, land, space, and cyberspace), then at the heart of its command center (the Joint All-Domain Command and Control) will be AI and machine learning in order to [“extract intelligence autonomously and build predictive models of what they \[satellites\] observe.”](#) As presenter Hee-eum noted, we are already witnessing the human costs of War 4.0 through Israel’s Lavender AI program. As [reported in +972 magazine](#), during the first weeks of the Israeli bombing of Gaza, Lavender identified nearly all those that would be targeted for bombing. Despite knowing about the AI program’s 10 percent error rate, most of the targets it selected were rubber-stamped in about “20 seconds.”

War 4.0 also accelerates environmental destruction. As Hee-eum highlighted, the roundtrip to launch satellites releases greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving a car around the earth 70 times. Worse, it releases soot that [absorbs heat](#) and can increase temperatures in the upper atmosphere. Furthermore, the AI that will sift through the satellite data is highly energy-intensive. Even ChatGPT [requires](#) 10 times more electricity than a Google search. Furthermore, a Starlink satellite is deorbited after [five years](#) and then is burnt up upon reentry, producing aluminum oxides that [deplete the ozone layer](#). The U.S. Air Force prefers even [shorter life spans](#) to enable more frequent upgrades. The expansion of these satellites will create more space junk burning up and polluting the atmosphere.

### *Still Fighting Cold War 1.0*

If the conference launched the fight against the Yoon administration’s militarization of space, it also remained connected to frontline struggles against militarization in South Korea, the United States’s first line of attack against China. In particular, presenters spoke about the construction of airports with dual military functions. Kim Yeon-tae president of the People’s Action to Nullify The New Saemangeum Airport, noted the absurdity of spending over 40 trillion won

(\$30 billion) to build 10 more airports in an area as small as South Korea, where [11 out of 15](#) airports are running at a loss. Constructing new airports only made sense when taking into account their dual military use. More specifically, Saemangeum International Airport—right across from China and connected to the U.S. Kunsan Air Force Base—would allow the Air Force Base to launch more jets. Soon-ae Kim, chair of the Operating Committee of Jeju’s Green Party, explained how building a second airport on the island as well as prospects of its military use violate Jeju’s official designation as an island of peace.

Conference speakers and attendees made clear that their movement was rooted in frontline struggles against profiteering from human and environmental destruction and that it would continue. Yong-woon Hwang, a journalist and activist against the Jeju Naval Base, proposed building public awareness around AI and the militarization of space through the annual [Whistler Film Festival](#). Ultimately, the activists gathered to build a better world we can live in and leave behind for our children.

*By Dae-Han Song*

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*Source:* Globetrotter

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## **The Choices That Australia Makes**



*Vijay Prashad*

11-14-2024 ~ If you go to the bluff at Kings Park in Perth, Australia, you can overlook the Swan River and enjoy a remarkable view. Across the bay, there is a phalanx of steel and glass buildings that rise to the skies. Each of these buildings carries a sign that glistens in the sharp sun: BHP, Rio Tinto, Chevron, Deloitte, and others. Kings Park no longer survives merely with the patronage of the British King, who continues to claim sovereignty over Australia. Part of it is now named Rio Tinto Kings Park, needing the corporate profits from this enormous mining company to sustain its charms. Down one of the avenues of the park there are trees set apart by a few meters, and at the base of these trees are small markers for dead soldiers from past wars; these are not graves but remembrances that are crowned by Australian flags. The park brings together the three crucial pieces of Western Australia, this province of which Perth is the capital which is the size of Western Europe: the British monarchy, the mining companies and its affiliates, and the role of the military.

### *Of Kings*

A few days before I arrived in Canberra, an aboriginal senator, Lidia Thorpe, [interrupted](#) the celebration of King Charles III to say, “You are not my king. This is not your land.” It was a powerful demonstration against the treatment of Australia ever since the arrival of English ships to the country’s east in January 1788. In fact, the British crown does claim title to the entirety of the Australian landmass. King Charles III is head of the 56-country Commonwealth and the total land area of the Commonwealth [takes](#) up 21 percent of the world’s total land. It is quite remarkable to realize that King Charles III [is nominally in charge of](#) merely 22 percent less than Queen Victoria (1819-1901).

The day after Senator Thorpe’s statement, a group of aboriginal leaders met with

King Charles III to discuss the theme of “sovereignty.” In Sydney, Elder Allan Murray of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council welcomed the King to Gadigal land and [said](#), “We’ve got stories to tell, and I think you witnessed that story yesterday in Canberra. But the story is unwavering, and we’ve got a long way to achieve what we want to achieve and that’s our own sovereignty.” When Captain James Cook (1770) and Captain Arthur Phillip (1788) [arrived](#) on this Gadigal land, they were met by people who had lived in the area for tens of thousands of years. In 1789, a smallpox epidemic brought by the British killed 53 percent of the Gadigal, and eventually—through violence—they reduced the population to three in 1791. It is accurate, then, for Elder Murray to have said to the press after King Charles III left that “The Union Jack was put on our land without our consent. We’ve been ignored.” What remained were *barrangal dyara* (skin and bones, as the Gadigal would have said). Given the value of the land in Sydney, the Gadigal clan would today be one of the richest groups in the world. But apart from a few descendants who do not have title to the land, the ghosts of the ancestors walk these streets.

### *Of Minerals*

Australia is one of the widest countries in the world, with a large desert in its middle section. Underneath its soil, which has been walked on by a range of Aboriginal communities for tens of thousands of years, is wealth that is estimated to be \$19.9 trillion. This estimate includes the country’s holdings of coal, copper, iron ore, gold, uranium, and rare earth elements. In 2022, Australia’s mining companies—which are also some of the largest in the world—[extracted](#) at least 27 minerals from the subsoil, including lithium (Australia is the world’s largest producer of lithium, annually providing 52 percent of the global market’s lithium).

On May 24, 2020, Rio Tinto’s engineers and workers [blew](#) up a cave in the Pilbara area of Western Australia to expand their Brockman 4 iron ore mine. The cave in the Juukan Gorge had been used by the Puutu Kunti Kurrama people for 46,000 years and had been kept by them as a community treasure. In 2013, Rio Tinto approached the Western Australian government to seek an exemption to destroy the cave and to extend the mine. They received this exemption based on a law called the [Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1972](#), which had been drafted to favor mining companies. Rio Tinto, with substantial operations in Western Australia and around the world, has a market capitalization of \$105.7 billion, making it—after BHP (market cap of \$135.5)—the second largest minerals company in the world

(both Rio Tinto and BHP are headquartered in Melbourne). Hastily, BHP began to reconsider its permission to destroy 40 cultural sites for its South Flank iron mine extension in the Pilbara region (and after its investigation and conversation with the Banjima community) decided to save 10 sites.

Craig and Monique Oobagooma live in the northernmost homestead in Australia near the Robinson River. They are part of the Wanjina Wunggurr, whose lands are now [used](#) for the extraction of uranium and other metals and minerals. The uranium mines in the north are owned and operated by [Paladin Energy](#), another Perth-based mining company that also owns mines in Malawi and Namibia. There is also a large military base in nearby Yampi. Craig told me that when he walks his land, he can dig beneath the soil and find pink diamonds. But, he says, he puts them back. "They are sacred stones," he says. Some parts of the land can be used for the betterment of his family, but not all of it. Not the sacred stones. And not the ancestral sites, of which there are only a few that remain.

### *Of Militaries*

In 2023, the governments of Australia and the United Kingdom [signed](#) an agreement to preserve "critical minerals" for their own development and security. Such an agreement is part of the New Cold War against China, to ensure that it does not directly own the "critical minerals." Between 2022 and 2023, Chinese investment in mining [decreased](#) from AU\$1809 million to AU\$34 million. Meanwhile, Australian investment in building military infrastructure for the United States has increased dramatically, with the Australian government expanding the Tindal air base in Darwin (Northern Territory) to hold U.S. B-1 and B-52 nuclear bombers, expanding the submarine docking stations along the coastline of Western Australia, and expanding the Exmouth submarine and deep space communications facility. All of this is part of Australia's historically high defense [budget](#) of \$37 billion.

In Sydney, near the Central Train station, I met Euranga, who lived in a tunnel which he had painted with the history of the Aboriginal peoples of Eora (Sydney). He had been part of the Stolen Generation, one in three Aboriginal children stolen from their families and raised in boarding schools. The school hurt his spirit, he told me. "This is our land, but it is also not our land," he said. Beneath the land is wealth, but it is being drained away by private mining companies and for the purposes of military force. The old train station nearby looks forlorn. There is no high-speed rail in vast Australia. Such a better way to spend its precious

resources, as Euranga indicated in his paintings: embrace the worlds of the Aboriginal communities who have been so harshly displaced and build infrastructure for people rather than for wars.

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*Source:* Globetrotter

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## What Are Republics, Exactly? It's A Good Time To Learn



*11-13-2024 ~ Republican ideals have evolved over millennia, shaping governance across the globe. Modern republics continue to adapt, but face challenges in upholding their foundational principles.*

The 2024 U.S. presidential election was framed as a crucial test for the nation's political system, with ongoing concerns over oligarchy, mob rule, a breakdown of equal protection under the law, and the ultimate power of citizens to determine

the fate of the nation.

Republics have suffered total collapses throughout history, and there's no reason why the United States should be immune. The fear of that often prompts a superficial reference to the final fall of the Roman Republic or the end of Greek democracy.

But there's a deeper history: Republics came into being far earlier in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean civilizations. And we can draw from a much wider range of examples to learn from as we try to understand the challenges and the opportunities.

A true republic is a political system without monarchy or concentrated political power in any office, branch, or individual. Elected officials represent citizens to make decisions on their behalf, with separate branches of government providing checks and balances. While many associate republics with direct democracy in our times, there's a much wider array of power structures that developed in the formative era of republics.

The 20th century established republics as the global standard, with monarchies declining after World War I and most former European colonies declaring independence as republics following World War II. Fascist and communist countries, which centralized power in individuals or ruling parties, also reduced in number.

Despite their concentration of power, however, many fascist and communist states claimed the title of republics, and while [149 countries out of 193](#) identify as republics today, far less uphold republican principles and blend them effectively with democracy. Examining the historical evolution of republics highlights those best positioned to serve as the most resilient modern examples.

Republics require regular gatherings and assemblies, making them difficult to establish in sparsely populated agrarian societies, while empires generally concentrate power too heavily for self-rule to gain traction. It was in smaller city-states, particularly trade-focused ones, where citizens could form factions, exchange ideas, and influence government decisions and rules for commerce.

Some of the earliest experiments with republican governance appeared in ancient Sumerian city-states (4500–2000 BC), centered in modern-day Iraq. Kings acted



more as neutral [arbitrators rather than rulers](#), sharing power with aristocratic families and groups, as well as common citizens. In Kish, [citizens could appoint](#) a new king during crises, while in Uruk, assemblies of townsmen and elders had to ratify major military decisions.

The Sumerian city-states fell to the Akkadian and Babylonian Empires by 1750 BC, but Phoenician city-states, emerging about 250 years later in what is now Lebanon, revived republican ideals. Here, monarchical power [was often shared](#) with a merchant class and citizen council. Egyptian records dating to the mid-14th century BC describe Phoenician cities [sending delegates to represent citizens](#) rather than monarchs, with mentions of [alliances and aid requests](#) by the “men of Arwad” and “elders of Irqata.”

By the 6th century BC, the Phoenician city of Tyre had [functioned for seven years](#) without a monarch, governed instead under *suffetes*, or judges, elected for short terms. In Chios, a “[people’s council](#)” allowed citizens to debate laws and hold officials accountable. However, beginning in the 9th century BC and continuing over the next few centuries, Phoenician city-states were successively conquered or subjugated by the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Macedonian Empires.

Like other civilizations, Phoenicians established colonies and trading posts. Carthage, founded by Tyre in 814 BC in modern Tunisia, grew into a powerful city-state with its [own republican features](#). By the early 7th century BC, two elected *suffetes* from aristocratic families [replaced the monarchy](#). They governed alongside an aristocratic Senate, while newer [merchants could gain influence](#) and a popular assembly allowed citizens input on major decisions. Military and religious leaders also held considerable power.

Republican ideals weren’t confined to Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. Buddhist texts like the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* mention Indian republics called [Gana-Sanghas](#) in the 6th century BC. Some adopted republican styles of government, while others formed republican confederations, like Sumerian and Phoenician city-states, to make decisions collectively and protect against larger threats. [The Indian republics were gradually absorbed](#) by the Maurya Empire (321–185 BC) and other entities.

Ancient Greek city-states also developed republican ideals. [Sparta was governed by a constitution and popular assembly](#) as early as 600 BC, though it remained

largely monarchical. Athens established a direct democracy in 507 BC, known as *demokratia*, meaning “people” and “rule.” Greece’s slave-based economy allowed some citizens [time to participate](#) in politics, though this limited political fairness. [In 431 BC](#), Attica, the region surrounding Athens, had an estimated population of 315,000, of which only 172,000 were citizens, and just 40,000 male citizens could vote.

Still, [Athens’s democratic system](#) allowed these citizens to frequently debate, deliberate, and vote. They were overseen by the Council of Five Hundred, which was chosen annually by lot to draft laws and manage administration. However, following Athens’s Golden Age, 4th century BC Greek [critics like](#) Plato and Aristotle, and later historians like Polybius in the 2nd century BC, criticized the system for inefficiency and vulnerability to charismatic leaders to sway public opinion, leading to volatile policy shifts.

They emphasized balancing public, aristocracy, and monarchical roles to avoid the [typical political cycle](#) of chaos and order: first, a strong leader unites a restive society under a monarchy, which evolves into tyranny. It is overthrown and replaced by an aristocracy, which reduces into oligarchy. Democracy eventually replaces it but deteriorates into mob rule, restarting the cycle.

Invasions further weakened Greece’s republican and democratic systems, including in 338 BC, when Greece fell under the control of the Macedonian Empire, ending the independence of many city-states. Despite this, Greek states formed republican confederations to protect against threats, including the neighboring Roman Republic. The term *republic* derives from the Roman *res publica*, meaning “public affairs,” emphasizing shared governance, civic participation, and checks and balances. Since its founding in 509 BC, the Roman Republic’s political structure had evolved considerably. Polybius [expressed appreciation](#) for Rome’s system, where two tribunes were elected annually to represent the common citizens, while two consuls were elected and held executive power, checked by an aristocratic senate.

Romans were skeptical of Greek democracy, especially in Athens, due to its instability, infighting, and mob rule. Carthage’s republic seemed overly commercial and lacked the civic loyalty the Romans valued. This loyalty was central to Rome’s military, staffed by a citizen army [motivated by shared rewards](#). In contrast, Carthage’s strong, citizen-led navy protected trade routes, but its

reliance on mercenaries for land campaigns made them costly and unpredictable.

These factors reduced the ability to push back against Roman rule. By 146 BC, Rome defeated both Greece and Carthage, cementing its dominance and expanding political system. [Polybius suggests](#) that Rome's success over Carthage was partially due to its powerful, aristocratic Senate, while Carthage's policies were increasingly shaped by popular influence. He believed that Rome's decisions were made by elites versus the influence of the masses in Carthage.

Yet by this time, Rome was approaching its Late Republic phase. The scholar [Harriet Flower's research](#) argues that the Roman Republic wasn't a single entity but a series of six republics, each with unique political characteristics. Others have also challenged the notion of a single Roman Republic, placing Republican Rome into three main periods characterized by changing centers of power.

The Early Republic (509–367 BC) was marked by tensions between patricians (aristocratic elites) and plebeians (common citizens). The struggle for plebeian rights led to significant reforms, including the establishment of tribunes, elected by the [Concilium Plebis](#) to represent common interests, and often from the plebeian class.

During the Middle Republic (367–133 BC), the Licinian-Sextian laws of 367 BC were passed to again alleviate tensions between patricians and plebeians, limiting patrician land ownership, providing debt relief for plebeians, and ensuring that at least one of the two consuls was a plebeian. However, political power increasingly concentrated in the Senate, undermining these reforms.

During the Late Republic (133–31 BC), Rome's military success over rivals coincided with the growing influence of ordinary citizens in the judicial system, especially as jurors. Yet the republic was plagued by social conflict, corruption, and civil unrest. Sulla's march on Rome in 88 BC and his curtailing of the tribunes' power exemplified rising instability. After, figures like [Pompey in the '70s BC](#) and Julius Caesar in 59 BC began consolidating power, further undermining republican values. In 27 BC, Augustus formally transitioned Rome into an empire, while maintaining [the illusion of republican traditions](#).

Roman orator Cicero, a prominent defender of the Republic, inadvertently [accelerated its demise](#) through his support for Augustus, endorsement of dictatorial powers, and willingness to suspend legal norms during crises, showing

the dangers of sacrificing republican ideals to manage turmoil. For the next few centuries, republican ideals were largely sidelined.

The collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD saw [feudalism](#) and monarchies spread across its former territories and peripheral regions. This instability nonetheless allowed new republics to emerge, such as Venice, founded in 697 AD. It maintained a 1,100-year run as a [republic](#) through a political system that encouraged merchant participation and representation, shrewd diplomacy, social mobility, community cohesion, and an extensive trade network. It was eventually conquered by France in 1797.

During the Italian Renaissance (14th to 17th centuries), urbanization, advancements in communication, and Enlightenment ideals enabled the rise of new city-states. Merchant classes and other groups established republican systems as alternatives to European monarchies elsewhere as well. However, they were ultimately absorbed by empires, partly due to their inability to exploit the expanding Atlantic trade routes that reduced the importance of the Mediterranean.

Republics were not confined to Europe. [The Kongsu Republics](#) in modern-day Malaysia, particularly the Lanfang Republic declared in 1777, arose when Chinese settlers recruited by local sultans for mining formed companies to safeguard their interests. Over time, they evolved into self-governing territories with elected leaders and various levels of democratic governance. The Lanfang Republic was eventually defeated by Dutch colonial forces in 1884, with the rest absorbed through treaty or militarily defeated by the century's end.

The establishment of the United States marked the reemergence of the large-scale republican state. In 1787, after the Revolutionary War, the U.S. formally became a constitutional republic, aiming to eliminate monarchy while avoiding a chaotic direct democracy. The Founding Fathers created a [mixed system](#), balancing public participation with safeguards against aristocracy and emphasizing consent of the governed (though limited to white male landowners). The debates over constitutional amendments and expanding democracy [continued for decades](#), paralleling similar discussions in post-Revolutionary France after 1789.

Today, many republics exist, but their authenticity and stability can be

compromised. Being conquered imposes outside authority, while others pursue foreign expansion themselves, centralizing control and subjugating other territories. Republics such as those in 16th century Netherlands, 17th century England, and 18th century U.S. and France grew into empires or reverted to monarchies, adapting in ways whose lessons are still relevant today. These expansionist policies, often justified as essential for wealth and security, led to the abandonment of certain republican and democratic principles.

Republics can also shift toward authoritarianism, with modern policymakers perceiving more open democratic systems as unstable and vulnerable to manipulation. In recent years, China and Russia have seen reductions in public accountability, civil liberties, meaningful political participation, and concentrations of power behind Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. In North Korea, power has been concentrated in the leader's office since its founding, with leadership passed within the Kim family. Similarly, a dynasty has developed under the Aliyev family in [Azerbaijan](#) since the 1990s, with concerns that [Turkmenistan](#) may follow.

Countries with strong presidential systems, common in the Americas, risk [concentrating power in the executive branch](#). Fixed terms limit the removal of unpopular leaders, since, unlike in parliamentary democracies, no "confidence vote" mechanism exists for crisis situations. [Partisan loyalty](#) can also weaken checks and balances, and coups can be common.

Alliances and federations of Greek city-states like the [Achaean](#) and [Lycian Leagues](#), as well as the [Native American Iroquois Confederacy](#), formed assemblies and councils for representation and collective decision-making, influencing models like the [U.S. Constitution](#) and European Union (EU). The statement that the U.S. is "a republic, not a democracy" reflects the original aim to keep political power within the states rather than the federal government. However, authority has increasingly centralized in Washington, D.C., reducing state sovereignty, tensions mirrored in the EU between [individual states and Brussels](#).

Political apathy and extremism can also stem from the influence of billionaires and corporations over the political process, government corruption, and the erosion of social mobility. Social media platforms offer the chance for heightened political participation, but are increasingly vulnerable to disinformation spread by big tech and political actors, revealing new ways in which democracies can [veer](#)

[toward mob rule.](#)

The diversity of republics today reflects their historical variety, with countries still navigating the governance structures in their own contexts. Kazakhstan, initially authoritarian, has [seen some shift toward a more balanced system](#) with a more powerful parliament following popular protests in 2022, though it remains less democratic. Similarly, Singapore, often described as authoritarian, is still considered a republic [due to some checks and balances](#), maintaining a blend of controlled leadership and political structure.

An informed and engaged citizenry, supported by a strong economic base, is essential for a successful republic. Citizens must feel the benefits of their system, and these must endure through fair elections, the rule of law, and due process. Effective foreign policy also relies on wide-ranging trade networks and adaptable alliances, while maintaining a strong military and avoiding military overreach or falling into the trap of foreign conquest.

Historically, empire and monarchy have been more common than republics, shaping world order through hierarchical and anarchic systems. Within the global UN framework, which is designed to support the sovereignty and equality of nations (a principle rooted in republican ideals), republics can govern more democratically by collaborating in a way similar to ancient confederations. The Achaean League and Lycian League consisted of states with varying political systems cooperating within a loose, republican-style confederation. Modern blocs like the EU, ASEAN, and African Union allow countries to work together under common principles and boost their voice in the international system.

Changes in domestic politics have meanwhile seen the growth of direct democracy [in the 2010s](#), as more referendums and popular votes of legislative and constitutional issues emerged globally, but especially in Europe. While larger republics like the U.S., Germany, and India still avoid national-level votes on major issues, direct democracy is increasingly apparent at regional and local levels. Challenges remain in terms of deliberation and integration, as states like California and Arizona have seen ballot initiatives often rushed, leaving limited time for meaningful debate.

Modern [citizens' assemblies](#), based on those originating thousands of years ago, have also elevated these referendums in recent years and provided an alternative



to traditional political processes. They have influenced major policy changes, such as climate policies in France to abortion laws in Ireland, with assemblies, typically convened by legislative bodies in partnership with nonprofits, designed to reflect demographics. While they have led to concrete policy shifts, some recommendations have not been adopted, with lawmakers citing the importance of expert-led decision-making.

With the U.S. election behind us, reassessing republican ideals, both domestically and globally, is crucial. As the GOP potentially gains control over all three branches of government in a divided nation, how it implements policies will either ease concerns or amplify them. The future of republicanism depends on the U.S. shaping its domestic agenda for the common good and using its influence on the global stage in line with democratic principles.

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