

Settler Colonialism: 'It Ends With Us' In Palestine And Israel



Richard D. Wolff

01-30-2025 ~ My birth emerged from European capitalism's fascistic catastrophe in the 1920s-1940s. That catastrophe also produced Israel's experiment with settler colonialism in Palestine. This article refers to both these incidents to analyze the current Palestine-Israel catastrophe.

My reasons or qualifications to write such an article start with the fact that my maternal grandmother and grandfather were killed at the Nazis' Mauthausen concentration camp. My father's sister was killed in Auschwitz. My mother and her sister spent years in different concentration camps. Because of these events, my parents fled Europe and started a family in the United States. Like some other descendants of victims who witnessed such atrocities, I have tried to understand their victimization and the complex effects this had on my life directly and indirectly.

Descendants differ in their responses to what happened. Some turn inward seeking safety in a survival-focused disengagement from the larger world and its history. Some try for comfort by believing that part or all of the world has moved beyond the conditions that produced fascism's victimizations. Some suffer long-simmering mixtures of impotence, rage, and fear that it will happen again. Among them are those who fight fascism wherever they see it reemerge and also those who perpetrate further cycles of victimization against others. Still others try to work out an understanding by writing articles and books.

Israel tried to operate settler colonialism on the pattern of earlier European settler colonialisms established around the world. That effort linked to me

indirectly in a remarkably personal way. Without grasping why, I chose to participate in a program for Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates that took 20 of us to East Africa in the early 1960s as volunteers for a summer of teaching. I began to learn there what settler colonialism meant. Further studies grew into my doctoral dissertation later at Yale based on research in the records of London's Colonial Office and the British Museum. My resulting book, *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974), tried to analyze Kenya's settler colonialist economy.

Britain had expelled the native population and reserved the nation's fertile highlands for a few thousand of its white émigrés. In addition to land and police protection, Britain provided its émigrés with coffee seeds, transport, and a market to operate a Kenya-grown coffee export economy. The millions of Kenyan Blacks forcibly relocated into constricted reservations found them to be inadequate to sustain their lives. Their survival thus required them to do low-wage labor on the coffee plantations of the white settlers. Taxes on those low wages helped finance the British colonial government that enforced a ruthlessly exploitative settler colonial system. This economic and racialized apartness in Kenya paralleled the better-known apartheid in South Africa.

Such economic systems provoke constant resistance ranging from desperate individual and small group acts to mass movements to organized rebellions. These acts of resistance occurred in Kenya, South Africa, and elsewhere too. Britain routinely repressed them. In Kenya, eventually, organizers gathered around Jomo Kenyatta and mobilized the so-called Kenya Land and Freedom Army to rebel. Their fight widely came to be known as the 1950s Mau Mau uprising against the British government. That uprising's death counts included 63 British military officers, 33 settlers, more than 1,800 native policemen and auxiliary soldiers, and the widely held guesstimate of more than 11,000 Kenyan rebels. The British repressed the rebellion, imprisoned Kenyatta, and loudly declared victory.

Britain's victory, however, sounded the death knell for its Kenya colony. Mau Mau showed the British the rising levels of resistance and rebellion they would face indefinitely from the settler colonies they had created. British politicians saw these as mushrooming costs of the colonies they could not afford. Since the end of World War II, European colonialisms had been dissolving almost everywhere. British leaders could not escape accommodating the historical reality. Shortly after Mau Mau, Britain acknowledged Kenya's national independence, freed

Kenyatta, and accepted him as Kenya's new leader. Independence ended Kenya's settler colonialism.

The Kenya lesson in settler colonialism deeply impacted British leaders but proved one that Israeli leaders refused to learn from. Given the particular histories of Zionism and European Jews, most Israeli leaders were determined to impose settler colonialism on the Palestinian people and to preserve it by force.

Israeli leaders' declaration of independence in May 1948 provoked immediate Palestinian and Arab resistance that has continued to this moment. Mass movements and broad rebellions have punctuated that resistance and enjoyed increasing external support (from Arab, Islamic, and other sources). The demise of previous European settler colonialisms left a legacy of immense difficulties for Israeli efforts to erect and sustain another.

One crucial aspect of their response to those difficulties was to form an alliance with a world power that could help defend its settler colonialism. The resulting close alliance with the United States positioned Israel as its front-line agent in the Middle East, the United States's dominant military extension to where major global energy resources were located. Undercutting Israel's early socialist, collectivist, and kibbutzim components was facilitated by the alliance with the United States. Most Zionist leaders willingly paid the price of this alliance. Another price was Israel's military, economic, and political dependence on the United States. Finally, Israeli leaders cultivated strong cultural and family connections to financially and politically influential partner communities inside the U.S. and Europe. In these ways, Israeli leaders hoped that settler colonialism might survive and grow despite many examples in history that proved otherwise.

For some decades it seemed, to many inside and outside Israel, that its leaders' strategy and connections might secure its settler colonialism. But then what happened in Kenya began to repeat itself in Israel (each in different conditions). Palestinians resisted, mass movements followed, and finally, powerful, organized rebellions arose. Israeli victories over each in turn proved to be mere preludes to later, higher forms of opposition with ever more global support. Israeli victories resembled those achieved by their British counterparts in Kenya.

It is equally clear now in Israel and Palestine that the prospect of endless warfare into the future is going to likely cost ever more lives and injuries, physical and

psychical damages, and economic and political losses. The victims who survived Israel's extreme violence in Gaza are already surfacing more motivated, better trained, and with more effective weapons to take up their fight. The children of those victims will likewise include many determined to end Israel's settler colonialism.

History, and now time itself, is on the Palestinians' side. Even a staunch Israeli supporter like former Secretary of State Antony Blinken had to admit a stark reality (although he neither admitted its historic meaning nor its political implications). He [said](#), "Indeed, we assess that Hamas has recruited almost as many new militants as it has lost. That is a recipe for an enduring insurgency and perpetual war."

Britain's dying empire forced its acceptance of Kenya's independence in 1963 and the end of its settler colonialism. The current decline of the United States empire is forcing something similar in Israel. After the latest and the worst Gaza war, Israel's crucial ally is inching closer to the conclusion Britain reached in Kenya after the Mau Mau uprising.

For growing numbers of United States leaders, the risks and costs of its alliance with Israel are rising faster than the benefits. Many have been persuaded, including United States citizens, that providing Israel with funds and weapons rendered the United States "[complicit in a genocide](#)" and, therefore, isolated globally. The ceasefire imposed by Donald Trump has followed. Whether and how it functions and how Israel resists and evades the ongoing criticism will matter far less than the more basic trajectory underway now. History suggests that Benjamin Netanyahu or his successors will eventually be disconnected from the United States. Their lost alliance will hasten the end of Israel's settler colonialism.

By Richard D. Wolff

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A New Military Strategy Of French Neocolonialism In Africa: Reorganizing Under The Cover Retreat



01-27-2025 ~ *Left parties of West Africa warn that announcements of withdrawal of troops by France-backed regimes in its*

former African colonies are an attempt to deceive the anti-imperialist movement by hiding its military presence from public view.

In his New Year's address, Alassane Ouattara, president of Ivory Coast since 2010—when he took power with the aid of French military intervention—[announced](#), “We have decided on the coordinated and organized withdrawal of French forces” from the country.

However, his address didn't mention terminating the 1961 military agreements with France. These “agreements are at the root of the problem. As long as these agreements exist, France will be able to use them to carry out military maneuvers or intervene at the request of its servants in power in Ivory Coast,” general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Ivory Coast (PCRCI), Achy Ekissi, told Peoples Dispatch.

The only concrete commitment made by Ouattara in his speech was that “the camp of the 43rd BIMA, the Marine Infantry Battalion of Port-Bouët, will be

handed over to the Ivorian Armed Forces as of January 2025.”

Originally known as the 43rd Infantry Regiment, and established in 1914 as a detachment of the French colonial army in Ivory Coast, this battalion served France “during both world wars, the Indochina War, and the Algerian War. In 1978, it was renamed the 43rd BIMA without altering its primary mission: safeguarding imperialist interests, particularly those of France, monitoring neocolonial regimes, and intervening militarily when necessary to uphold the neocolonial order,” PCRCI said in a statement.

Directly under French command, this battalion “is one of the visible faces of French domination in Ivory Coast,” which the former colonial power needs to invisibilize to salvage the last few military footholds it has left in its former colonies in the West African region.

France Reorganizing Toward ‘A Less Entrenched, Less Exposed Model’ of Military Deployment

“We have bases in Senegal, Chad, Ivory Coast, and Gabon. They are located in capital cities and sometimes even within expanding urban areas, making their footprint and visibility increasingly difficult to manage. We will need to adapt our base structure to reduce vulnerabilities, following a less entrenched, less exposed model,” General Thierry Burkhard, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, [reckoned](#) in January 2024.

By then, France had lost its major bases in the region. Amid a wave of protests against France’s continued economic and military domination of its former colonies, the regimes it had backed in Mali, Burkina Faso, and [Niger were removed by coups](#), supported by the anti-colonial movements.

The popularly supported military governments replacing them ordered the French troops out. Enduring sanctions, threats of a France-backed military invasion, and attacks by terror groups it allegedly supports, the three neighboring countries united to form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

Reenergized by their success, the popular movements in other countries listed by Burkhard were growing, posing an increased threat to the French bases and its allied regimes, increasingly perceived as French puppets in the region.

Less than three months after the general had stressed the need for a “less

entrenched, less exposed model” of French military deployment in this region, Macky Sall, who was then Senegal’s France-backed president, was ousted by popular vote in the March 2024 election. Promising to free Senegal from the yoke of French neocolonialism, the then-opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye won the election, despite preelection violence and a crackdown by Sall’s government.

“Senegal is an independent country, it is a sovereign country and sovereignty does not accept the presence of [foreign] military bases,” President Diomaye [told](#) AFP in late November 2024. French military foothold in Senegal, the first in General Burkhard’s list of four former colonies where the last of its military bases were to be salvaged, is all but lost. Diomaye announced in his [New Year speech](#) that he had instructed his defense minister to draft a new policy ensuring the withdrawal of all foreign troops in 2025.

Electoral Threat to French Interests in Ivory Coast

“France does not want to find itself in a situation like in Senegal, where the pro-imperialist camp was wiped out by Pan-Africanists” in the election, Ekissi [explains](#). Ivory Coast’s former President Laurent Gbagbo, who was bombed out of office by the French military in 2011 to bring Ouattara to power, is challenging Ouattara in the presidential election due in October 2025.

Ekissi described Gbagbo as a socialist who was “sometimes anti-imperialist and Pan-Africanist, but hesitant in directly combating French interests” during his presidency from 2000 to 2010. Anti-imperialism directed against France was not a part of the populist politics in the early years of his rule. Such politics was mostly limited to the small Communist Party, which was founded in 1990. But that was about to change.

Soon after Gbagbo took office in 2000, the Socialist Party-led coalition running the French government lost power in 2002. “The liberal wing of French imperialism, which had come to power, could not allow Gbagbo, a socialist, to lead the most important French neocolony in West Africa,” [added](#) Ekissi.

Civil War

Taking advantage of the discontent that had been brewing in the Muslim north, which had for decades felt marginalized by the Christian south, France helped Ouattara organize an armed rebellion in 2002.

After serving as the prime minister during the last three years of the one-party

France-backed dictatorship of Félix Houphouët-Boigny—president of the country since independence in 1960 until his death in 1993—Ouattara had been marginalized in the succession race within the ruling party, which he then lost to Gbagbo in the 2000 election.

Following a five-year stint in the IMF as its deputy managing director from 1994 to 1999, Ouattara returned to domestic politics by starting a civil war in 2002 and dividing Ivory Coast's army.

In the meantime, French troops “positioned themselves between the two armies, splitting Ivory Coast into two.” Repressing anti-French protests with massacres that killed hundreds in 2002 and again in 2004, French troops positioned themselves to become the key player in the crisis, which ended with the ouster of Gbagbo in 2011.

The election in 2010, in which Ouattara contested against Gbagbo, was “manipulated by France,” Ekissi maintained. Defecting to Ouattara's base at a hotel in the capital Abidjan, guarded by French troops under the UN's cover, the election commission's president announced that Ouattara had won with 54.1 percent of the vote.

However, the country's Constitutional Council declared the announcement as “invalid” as it was made after the deadline had expired. It thus reversed the verdict in favor of Gbagbo, citing “irregularities” in the results submitted by the election commission.

French Bombardment of Ivory Coast's Presidential Palace

In the months after Gbagbo's swearing-in ceremony in late 2010, French troops, operating mainly from the 43rd BIMA, killed thousands of soldiers and protesting civilians defending Gbagbo, Ekissi recalled. Finally bombing the presidential palace in April 2011, France helped Ouattara's forces capture Gbagbo.

Accused of crimes against humanity, Gbagbo became the first former head of state to be tried at the time in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague. Almost eight years after his arrest, he was [acquitted in 2019](#). The prosecutors' appeal against his acquittal did not succeed. The ICC [upheld his acquittal](#) in 2021, following which he returned to Ivory Coast.

In March 2024, Gbagbo declared his candidacy for the presidential election in

October 2025. The popular support he enjoys today is “unequivocal,” [said](#) Ekissi. And the popular movement against France is today stronger than ever before.

In the early years of Gbagbo’s administration, after the civil war broke out in 2002, “people had already come to understand the full extent of France’s ruthlessness, criminality, and manipulations,” Ekissi [explained](#).

The anti-imperialist politics had begun to spill out of the confines of the left and consciously pan-Africanist organizations and into the populist domain. But the “hesitant leaders” of Gbagbo’s party “had not allowed it to flourish.”

‘A Rallying Cry of the Ivorian People’

However, after 2011, following France’s bombardment of the presidential palace and killing of Ivory Coast’s soldiers and civilian protesters, “the call for the unconditional withdrawal of French troops from Ivory Coast has become a rallying cry of the Ivorian people,” [maintained](#) the PCRCI.

“Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist victories in the AES countries have further galvanized the movement against France in Ivory Coast,” [added](#) Ekissi. Ouattara’s “imprisonment of human rights activists visiting Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger for up to six months,” has not succeeded in quelling the growing domestic popularity of the AES example. “Today, even the right wing or so-called centrist parties, historically opposed to any emancipatory struggle, dare not openly attack” the AES countries.

The demand for French withdrawal, initially championed only by the communists and Pan-Africanists, is now being raised by all major opposition parties. After Gbagbo emerged as a credible electoral threat to Ouattara’s regime, the government barred him from contesting.

The stated reason was that, months after his acquittal by the ICC, the Ivorian judiciary had convicted him in absentia in 2019 of robbing the Central Bank, which he had nationalized. Arguing that he was “unfairly” convicted, Ekissi pointed out that “the Central Bank had never filed a complaint” against Gbagbo.

Relying on several legal arguments, his party has nominated him despite the government taking his name off the electoral roll. Other opposition parties are also growing increasingly assertive in their demand that the election must be “inclusive.”

With the prospect of the electoral defeat of Ouattara by a Pan-Africanist coalition on the horizon, France has been unable to find a replacement for him, Ekissi [explained](#). “It could accompany Ouattara in his madness to win these elections in blood. But this is a big risk, against which Senegal’s result is a warning.”

Feigning a Retreat to Confuse the Sovereignty Movement

Instead, France is feigning a retreat in an attempt to “confuse the sovereignty movement, while waiting for an opportunity to reposition itself in the ‘center,’” camouflaging its military presence in the meantime, Ekissi [argued](#).

This decision, in line with the strategy articulated by Burkhard, requires France to get rid of its direct command of the 43rd BIMA, the country’s most visible and provocative structure of neocolonialism.

It was not Ouattara’s decision to expel French troops from this base, the Communist Party maintained, arguing that it was rather France that decided to hand over this “land asset” to the army of Ivory Coast to get rid of its visible presence.

But “there are light bases in Assini, Bouaké, and Korhogo,” Ekissi [pointed out](#), adding that U.S. troops expelled from AES countries have also set up a base in the Odienné region along the borders with Mali and Guinea.

The French army has also established an international counter-terrorism school in the coastal town of Jacquville. It is a part of the NATO countries’ effort “to prepare destabilization operations to target the AES countries, and carry out surveillance and ‘neutralization’ of supposed Russian advances in the region,” he [said](#).

By merely receiving command of the 43rd BIMA, while retaining other smaller foreign military bases, training schools, and the 1961 military agreements with France, Ouattara is only helping “to hide its army from public view,” Ekissi [said](#).

“The imperialist power, sensing its end, is trying to protect its military power in the region with a new strategy,” involving a “minimal physical troop presence” scattered over “small mobile bases,” while “multiplying its training schools” and increasing “assistance operations,” [added](#) Ekissi.

Tried and Tested in Benin

“Since February 2023, Benin has served as the testing ground for this new military strategy,” the Communist Party of Benin (PCB) [said](#) in a statement. The increasing number of French troops arriving that year after their expulsion from the AES countries set up camp next to the Beninese military base in the Kandi region in the country’s north.

After this provoked a public backlash, the French presence was downsized in the region. French troops still operate from Kandi late at night, flying “military equipment and personnel to the airport constructed in the W National Park, located at the intersection of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger.” But they are fewer in number, and do not maintain a high visibility in Kandi anymore, PCB’s first secretary Philippe Noudjenoume [told](#) Peoples Dispatch. “Another more discreet base has been constructed further inland near Ségbana.”

New camps, which the Beninese government calls “advanced posts,” have been cropping up “along the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.” French troops have been dispersed across Beninese camps “to direct military operations and intelligence,” while officially masquerading as “instructors,” Noudjenoume explained.

“The objective” of such dispersal “is clear: to conceal the presence of French forces, whose previous concentration in military bases inflamed local patriotic sentiments, by making them less visible,” [reads](#) PCB’s statement.

This posture has allowed Benin’s President Patrice Talon to claim that there are no French military bases hosted in the country. “While technically true—there are no autonomous French military camps—the reality is different,” the statement [added](#). French military personnel, in collaboration with the European Union, are not only training and equipping the Beninese military but are also directing its ostensible counter-terror operations.

AES countries, on the other hand, have accused France of using such border bases in Benin and Ivory Coast to support terror operations aimed at destabilizing its popular governments that ordered French troops out.

Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are “closely monitoring the deceptive maneuvers initiated by the French junta, which pretends to close its military bases in certain African countries, only to replace them with less visible mechanisms that pursue the same neocolonial ambitions,” the AES [said](#) in a statement in December 2024.

'France Itself Has Engineered Its Retreat'

This statement followed the announcement of French troops' withdrawal by Chad's government in late November 2024, soon after Senegal's president indicated in interviews that the continued presence of French troops was unacceptable.

However, unlike Senegal, Chad is not ruled by a Pan-Africanist movement-backed leader who came to power by defeating a France-backed incumbent in an election. Chad's President Mahamat Déby is a second-generation French loyalist, whose military coup to inherit power after his dictator father's death in April 2021 was backed by France.

Repressing anti-French protests with massacres, mass arrests, and custodial torture, Déby has since maintained his power through brute force.

With his main opponent from the Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF) being gunned down by his security forces and other serious opposition candidates being barred from contesting the election, Déby won the presidential election in May 2024, with his own prime minister playing the opposition candidate.

However, his grip on power had become increasingly insecure, with mass protests aching to break out again at the slightest opening of democratic space, amid murmurs of discontented sections of the army ready to back the anti-France protest movement against Déby.

His government's announcement of French troops' withdrawal in this backdrop was met with skepticism, despite affirming, unlike in the case of Ivory Coast, that it had scrapped its military agreement with France.

"All the African governments that have successfully expelled French troops from their territories have popular support, unlike Chad, where the people have endured unprecedented repression under Déby's rule backed by France," PSF's Ramadan Fatallah told Peoples Dispatch.

Other sections of the anti-French movement who initially believed in the slightest credibility of the announcement by Déby's government are also now increasingly skeptical.

Mahamat Abdraman, secretary general of the Rally for Justice and Equality of the

Chadians (RAJET), [said](#) that “France itself has engineered its retreat” from Chad. It has “adopted a new method of colonization,” requiring a smaller presence of its troops while embedding itself within African militaries and government. Déby’s security adviser and former director of his political police, along with his foreign minister and two of his wives, are all French nationals, he pointed out.

While continuing to exercise control through subtler means, France is “orchestrating” a formal withdrawal from Chad. Such a posture will allow it to deny responsibility for more domestic atrocities Déby’s regime may commit in the future and evade being openly implicated in any acts it may undertake to destabilize neighboring Niger at France’s behest, Abdraman [told](#) Peoples Dispatch.

The fact that France is compelled to cover up its tracks in the region with such maneuvers is a testimony to the “weakening” of its neocolonial power, [said](#) Ekissi. And “no amount of imperialist maneuvering can halt the inevitable collapse of French colonialism in Africa,” PCB’s statement concluded.

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We Have Entered The Era Of ‘Global Boiling’—Marine Wildlife, Ecosystems, And Economies Are

Being Devastated



01-27-2025 ~ *Marine heat waves are causing record-breaking ocean temperatures that kill animals and impact ocean-based industries.*

The [ocean absorbs 90 percent of the excess heat](#) generated by burning fossil fuels and deforestation. Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions is the primary driver of long-term global warming. Today, humanity is officially in uncharted waters. According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, in February 2024, the average global sea surface temperature (SST) reached 21.06 degrees Celsius, the [highest level ever recorded](#) by the service. The previous record of 20.98 degrees Celsius was set in August 2023.

Overall, 2023 saw [record-breaking marine temperatures](#), and the likely culprit is human-caused climate change. The extraordinarily high sea surface temperatures recorded in 2023 provide a frightening glimpse into the planet's future. A [study](#) by researchers at the University of Reading and Imperial College London, published in March 2024 in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, found that temperatures in the top 100 meters of ocean basins around the world have steadily increased since 1980. The Atlantic basin, in particular, has experienced substantial heat amplification since 2016.

They [concluded](#) that extreme sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic during 2023 “lie at the fringe of the expected mean climate change for a global surface-air temperature warming level (GWL)” of 1.5 degrees Celsius and closer to the average of 3.0 degrees Celsius GWL. If this scenario is attained globally, it would have [catastrophic consequences](#), including the eventual collapse of ice caps. This would lead to an uncontrollable rising sea level that would consume low-lying cities and contaminate water sources with seawater worldwide.

Marine heat waves are also a factor in extreme weather events, as the energy of warm surface water leads to hurricane formation. In August 2023, [Hurricane Idalia](#), sitting over unusually warm surface water in the Gulf of Mexico, intensified

quickly. It strengthened from 80 mph winds to a Category 3 storm, gaining 40 mph in less than 24 hours. The warm water was like rocket fuel for the approaching storm.

The year 2024 did not see much relief from the heat. In August 2024, the Arctic Ocean's mean sea surface temperatures—a critical measure of the intensity of the ice-albedo feedback cycle during a summer sea-ice melt season—were between [2 and 4 degrees Celsius warmer](#) than mean values in most Arctic Ocean marginal seas in August of any year between 1991 and 2020, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We have entered a new era of elevated marine temperatures, which is of great concern.

According to Mercator Ocean International, a nonprofit scientific research organization based in Toulouse, France, the monthly mean sea surface temperature in the Mediterranean Sea reached [26.42 degrees Celsius](#) in September 2024, a record high that surpassed the previous records set in 2020 and 2022. At a global level, September 2024 was the second-warmest month on record (after August 2023), with a sea surface monthly mean temperature of [20.87 degrees Celsius](#).

Impact on Marine Wildlife

Extreme heat in the oceans devastates coral reefs, which thrive in a narrow range of temperatures. [Warm water](#) is best for corals and their symbiotic algae, ideally between 23 and 29 degrees Celsius. If it gets much hotter, the algae that coexist with and provide food for the tiny coral polyps will be expelled, and the corals will bleach. Corals can die if the ocean water doesn't cool quickly or if bleaching events happen repeatedly. Between 1950 and 2021, the ocean reefs have [lost half of their capacity to provide ecosystem services](#).

Ocean temperatures of 38 degrees Celsius in the Florida Keys could harm coral and cause problems for all marine life, as evidenced by previous marine heat waves.

The so-called "[Blob](#)," a persistent marine heat wave in the northeast Pacific Ocean from 2014 to 2016, caused a [chain of events](#) that upended entire aquatic ecosystems. It greatly impacted organisms, large and small, throughout the food chain. [High surface temperatures caused](#) krill populations to decline, and a harmful algal bloom spread in shellfish from Alaska to Southern California,

shutting down the clam industry.

In February 2024, researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration completed a mission to assess the impact of the 2023 marine heat wave on corals in the Florida Keys Marine Sanctuary. Their [preliminary findings](#) are worrisome. The scientists found extreme heat killed nearly 80 percent of the approximately 1,500 staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*), which provide critical habitat for a host of other marine life.

“The findings from this assessment are critical to understanding the impacts to corals throughout the Florida Keys following the unprecedented marine heat wave,” [said](#) Sarah Fangman, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary superintendent. “They also offer a glimpse into coral’s future in a warming world. When the ecosystem experiences significant stress in this way, it underscores the urgency for implementing updates to our regulations, like the [Restoration Blueprint](#), which addresses multiple threats that will give nature a chance to hold on.”

In recent years, extreme heat has forced wildlife to feed closer to shore, [entangling whales in fishing gear](#) and [stranding](#) thousands of California sea lions. Tens of thousands of [seabirds have also died](#) due to extreme temperatures.

Impact on Fisheries

Heat waves have also caused fishery disasters, [affecting populations of sardines](#)—a key feeder fish for larger marine species—and causing the collapse of select salmon and cod fisheries.

Between 2014 and 2016, the marine region along the Pacific coastline of the Baja California Peninsula in Mexico experienced an unprecedented period of intense and prolonged marine heatwaves that impacted local marine ecosystems. A team of scientists from Stanford University published a [study](#) in Nature in November 2024 in which they calculated that during this period of elevated sea temperatures, lobster, sea urchin, and sea cucumber fisheries suffered a 15 to 58 percent decrease in aggregate landings, particularly impacting small-scale fisheries.

“In the face of extreme environmental shocks such as marine heatwaves, small-scale fisheries operating near biogeographic transition zones are among the most vulnerable,” [they write](#).

The Era of Global Boiling

Warmer ocean temperatures have long-term impacts on the environment. This includes a reduction in the ability of the ocean to take up carbon dioxide. Warm water holds less gas, including carbon dioxide—the most important greenhouse gas—than cool water. So, as the ocean warms, less heat-trapping gas is removed from the air, and more stays in the atmosphere. It's a vicious cycle: as the ocean warms, less carbon dioxide is absorbed, and more remains in the air, which causes the planet to heat up even more.

Marine heat waves are parallel to heat waves on land, as evidenced by 2023's record-setting terrestrial heat waves in the [southeastern United States](#), [Southern Europe](#), and [China](#). Studies of these heat waves reveal that they would have been "[virtually impossible](#)" without human-caused climate change. In July 2023, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres [declared](#), "The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived."

Still, there is some good news. In 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act was passed, which directs [\\$369 billion in investments](#) toward modernizing the U.S. energy system. This includes reducing climate pollution by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. While this is not enough, it's an essential first step.

When we first recognized climate change as a serious concern [many decades ago](#), there were no clear solutions or answers to the enormous challenges that climate scientists projected. However, with the [falling cost of solar and wind energy](#), better [battery storage](#), and crucial [gains in energy efficiency](#), viable solutions that are much [less expensive than burning fossil fuels are available](#).

Exceptionally warm global waters will not disappear. However, we can avoid the worst impacts of climate change and even hotter water temperatures by taking rapid action to strengthen local, state, and national climate policy initiatives.

By David Hastings

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The Venetian Republic Offers Powerful Lessons To An American One In Need Of Repair



Flag of Republic of Venice (1659-1675)

01-26-2025 ~ *The Venetian Republic's political system, emerging alongside those of other Italian city-states, was founded on collaboration and power distribution. Its rise and decline highlight the importance of adaptability in the face of shifting global political dynamics.*

Over more than a thousand years, Venice transformed from a modest refuge into a dominant Mediterranean power. Despite various crises and encircling empires, the Venetian Republic avoided foreign rule, revolution, and collapse.

It developed an adaptable and efficient political system, building on its semi-independence from the 5th century until Napoleon's conquest in 1797. In an international system dominated by self-proclaimed democratic republics, the longevity and eventual downfall of Venice's oligarchic republican model provides insights for tailoring governance to contemporary challenges. Its unique political structure inspired founding fathers of the United States, like Alexander Hamilton

and [John Adams](#), who looked to Venice's early system when shaping the republic. By blending Roman legal principles, Byzantine refinements like the [Justinian Code](#) (a compilation of Roman laws shaped by Greek traditions that codified and systematized legal practices), and its original innovations, Venice became a symbol of stability, endurance, and independence.

The Origins of Venice and Its Push for Independence

Venetian society was deeply paternalistic, governed by a hereditary elite with limited public participation, and yet it contained many elements of distribution of powers and checks on authority that are ubiquitous today. Geopolitically savvy and [culturally diverse](#), Venice was open to new and foreign influence while preserving its traditions. Venetian diplomat Gasparo Contarini's 16th-century account, shaped by his family's central role in Venetian politics, alongside other sources, highlights Venice's self-proclamation as the [Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia](#)—the Most Serene Republic of Venice.

Venice's origins, according to tradition, [trace back to 421 AD](#), when Roman refugees fleeing invasions in northern Italy established self-governed settlements in the Venetian Lagoon. The Rialto, which became synonymous with Venice, only emerged [as the city's center 400 years later](#). The collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 left northern Italy contested, with instability driving more settlers to the lagoon.

[During the 5th and 6th centuries](#), trade networks and influential families began to shape the region. They [reflected a mix of loyalties](#): pro-Byzantine landowners tied to the mainland coexisted with a rising merchant class seeking autonomy, along with the Frankish factions loyal to Rome. These groups dominated the informal councils, assemblies, and tribune leadership roles that governed early Venetian society.

By the 7th century, Venetian settlers recognized Byzantine authority in exchange for protection and securing vital trade access. Historian [John Julius Norwich](#) emphasized the Byzantine's role in shaping Venice's identity, alongside its Roman heritage.

[In 697 AD](#), the lagoon's settlers elected their first doge (duke), marking the beginning of Venice's independence. Initially, the doge's authority required approval from Constantinople, but [Byzantine authority in the region was never](#)

[strong](#) and gradually faded. Seeking stronger local governance to navigate the delicate political landscape, Venetians resisted certain Byzantine decrees and a [revolt in 726](#) saw them elect their own doge without outside interference. In the early 9th century, Venice [successfully secured greater autonomy](#) from the Byzantine Empire while keeping the Frankish Empire at bay by playing a crucial role in mediating peace between them, a settlement later known as [Pax Nicephori](#).

Over the following centuries, Venetian autonomy increased as it forged ties with Rome to enhance its influence in Europe. Venice's role in the 1204 [sack of Constantinople](#), led by Latin forces, [solidified its independence](#) as a sovereign republic, coinciding with the [rise of powerful republican city-states across Italy](#). Its push for independence was vital in shaping a political system aligned with Venice's unique needs, values, and aspirations as a sovereign state.

Constraining Doge Power and Creating a Republic

Like the Roman Republic, Venice lacked a formal written constitution or judicially enforced laws. Instead, its political system [relied on unwritten customs](#), allowing flexibility in responding to new challenges, and also demonstrating that the republican culture depends on habits of the heart and mind more than documents that record statements of principle.

Though dominated by a hereditary elite, Venice's republican system prioritized power decentralization, an unusual approach at the time that encouraged a balance of authority and political stability. Early doges ruled autocratically for life, often attempting to establish dynasties, leading to rivalries, assassinations, and exiles. By 1032, [Venetian patricians chose to abolish de facto hereditary dogeship](#), and though the doge retained a lifetime title, they could be deposed or pressured to resign.

[Secrecy was essential](#) to shielding political affairs from outside influence. With few grand political rallies or public speeches, rivalries were mostly confined to private councils. This restraint also helped prevent stirring up public sentiment, avoiding sensationalism, and maintaining a sense of calm and order in the city.

Venetians were willing to adapt when necessary, but once a solution proved effective, they stuck with it. The threat of factionalism over the doge's position, [led by the Tiepolo and Dandolo families](#) in the 1200s, prompted patricians [to](#)

[introduce a unique voting process](#) for the doge in 1268. Combining lotteries and voting, this system would remain largely unchanged for the next 500 years.

Council members gathered and drew from an urn containing hundreds of balls (*ballotta*)—30 gold and the rest silver; those drawing gold advanced, while those who picked silver exited. The *ballottino*, a young attendant, managed the urns. The 30 who picked gold then repeated the lottery, reducing their number to nine. These nine members then deliberated and agreed on 40 candidates, each requiring a minimum of seven votes from the group of nine to be considered. The process continued: the 40 were reduced to 12, who nominated 25; the 25 to nine, who nominated 45, and finally, the 45 to 11, who selected 41 electors. The final electors deliberated and voted on the doge, who required a minimum of 25 votes to win.

The process combined the impartiality of lotteries with the selectivity of voting, minimizing the chance for corruption while ensuring the legitimacy of decisions through broad consensus. The often weeks-long change [broke the families' duopoly](#), and ensuing elections often [took weeks](#).

Contarini [observed](#) that doges were neither glorified nor vilified. Their terms were subject to posthumous review, with poor leadership censured or erased from public memory, while the contributions of effective rulers were recognized. This helped to ensure that leadership was viewed as a collective effort rather than the achievement of any single individual.

[Fear of the doge's authority also led patricians](#) to steadily decentralize power into hereditary committees, integrating government expertise within the oligarchy. This ensured balanced decision-making and reduced the risk of autocratic rule. [In 1142](#), the Minor Council was established as a small executive body to assist and monitor the doge. This was followed by the Great Council [in 1172](#), which became the foundation of Venetian governance and the principal legislative body, severely limiting the doge's power. Membership in the Great Council was a lifetime privilege for patrician males.

[From 1179](#), judicial authority was invested in the [Quarantia Criminale](#) (criminal law), followed later by two other [Councils of Forty](#) (highest appeal court). By the early 13th century, [the Senate](#) emerged from the Great Council, focusing on trade and foreign policy, and was composed of serving and former officials.

Meanwhile, in response to the [failed 1310 revolt](#) by Bajamonte Tiepolo, the Council of Ten was created to [track down conspirators](#), later evolving to handle crises, conduct investigations, and oversee internal security. Despite rising governmental complexity, Venice's bureaucracy remained efficient and avoided runaway growth.

Political offices outside the dogeship also faced constraints. Terms were typically limited to one year to prevent consolidation of power and reelections often required formal approval. Close relatives [were prohibited](#) from holding the same office, running in the same election, or voting in elections involving each other to prevent familial monopolies.

Contarini [noted](#) that accountability was shared among the elite. Nobles who supported candidates were held financially liable if those candidates were later convicted of embezzlement and unable to repay the amount. Corruption resulted in punishments such as property confiscation and exile, with the competitive noble families keeping each other in check.

As the doge's role became largely symbolic, real power shifted to the Council of Ten, the Great Council, and the Senate. These bodies dominated Venetian politics during its Golden Age, Renaissance, and eventual collapse, [adapting to changing needs](#) while maintaining cohesion and expertise through overlapping membership.

The *Arengo* or *Concio*, a general assembly of Venetian general citizens, initially played a strong political role alongside the doge. However, Venice's noble families were similarly distrustful of commoner influence through democracy. Public participation in governance declined sharply after the [Serrata of 1297](#) or the closing of the Great Council, which [solidified hereditary governance](#) and [saw the Arengo lose its political authority](#) before it was formally [abolished in 1423](#). These decisions effectively ended democracy in Venice and ensured political power remained concentrated among the nobles. Given the rarity of democracy at the time, this approach nonetheless permitted greater political stability by minimizing potential disruptions from populist movements.

Social Hierarchy and Economic Opportunities in Venice

The late 13th and early 14th centuries "[marked the formal separation of the nobles from the rest of the population](#)," entrenching Venice's oligarchy and

placing the non-patrician majority—approximately [95 percent](#) of the city's population—under elite control. The disconnect between the elites and commoners could be stark—Contarini [praised](#) Venice's commitment to protecting commoners during crises like the plague, but later accounts paint a less charitable picture.

Despite limited political representation and rigid social classes, Venice's nobles managed to maintain enough support for the political system to survive. [A tiered hierarchy emerged](#) under them, with the *cittadini*—a privileged class of merchants, skilled artisans, notaries, and administrators—forming approximately [eight percent of the population](#), while the majority were commoners (*popolani*).

Social hierarchy in Venice [was strictly enforced, with laws dictating what each class could wear](#). Intermarriage between patricians and *cittadini* was rare, though the latter class experienced regular turnover. Richer *cittadini* often surpassed certain aristocratic families in wealth, while patricians invested in merchant enterprises, creating economic interdependence.

The *cittadini* also [controlled the civil service](#), led by the Grand Chancellor of Venice—the highest-ranking non-noble official. Through the [Order of Secretaries](#), the *cittadini* served as notaries, clerks, tax collectors, and judicial officers. The wealthiest of their families with long-standing Venetian roots (*cittadini originari*) were [included in the Book of Silver](#) and granted additional opportunities in committees. Granting the *cittadini* some political influence prevented the patricians from completely dominating government affairs and ensured efficiency through their administrative expertise.

Despite the large and relatively powerless commoner class, Venice avoided the social upheavals common in other Italian city-states. [According to Dennis Romano](#), professor emeritus of history at Syracuse University, 14th-century Venice remained stable because patricians and commoners were less rigidly separated, and tradition coexisted with flexibility. Social networks could overlap and [legal and moral boundaries](#) occasionally blurred during this period. [Social rules were relaxed](#) during holidays and festivals, elevating a sense of civic community, while commoners [could participate in religious roles](#), including as members of the clergy.

Symbols of unity, such as the Venetian mask, [the lion of Saint Mark](#), and the

figure of the doge, reinforced civic identity. Legal protections through the [Avogaria de Comun](#) (public prosecutors), [established in the late 12th century](#), ensured justice for commoners and legal representation for the poor. The state also supported infrastructure projects, welfare institutions, and charities, and wealthy nobles were expected to engage in philanthropy without fanfare and provide financial aid to the state during crises.

Venice's economic allure and social mobility opportunities were, however, arguably the most crucial factors in maintaining stability. Venetian contract law [ensured trust and stability in trade](#). The republic's vast commerce and trade networks and position as a vital connector between the East and the West [offered opportunities](#) to commoners rarely found elsewhere.

While they suffered more during conflicts, famines, and plagues, the diverse composition of the *popolani* made it difficult for them to unite around common grievances. Additionally, Venice's stable governance and potential for social mobility left them better off than those in neighboring city-states and empires. As a result, though commoners were excluded from major political decisions, they accepted their limited role, trusting in the fairness and accountability of Venice's governing class, institutions, and rule of law.

Within the city, a thriving retail sector and diverse economic opportunities complemented a strong manufacturing base. Venice became a leader in shipbuilding, [wool and silk cloth production, and glassmaking](#), attracting talent and investment. Commoners could also [join merchant guilds and trade associations](#) along with *cittadini*, gaining modest political representation and participation in collective decision-making. [In later centuries](#), Venice evolved into a hub of printing and intellectual life, eventually becoming a center for culture and leisure, renowned for its prestige as a museum city. Venice's economic adaptability, driven by both patricians and the merchant class, was key to Venice's sustained prosperity, driving innovation and supporting the city's ability to respond to shifting trade and political dynamics.

Military Strength, Foreign Holdings, and Diplomacy

But Venice's survival and success also came from its military strength. Surrounded by larger states, its central hub in the Venetian Lagoon provided a defensible core for its navy. The [state-owned Arsenal](#), a pioneering shipyard, and private enterprises enabled the mass production of ships, blending commerce and

defense. [Merchant ships were often fitted for combat](#), doubling as warships to protect trade routes, while military expeditions were [self-sustaining](#) through trade conducted en route. Boasting the [strongest navy in Europe](#), Venice compensated for its limited land power by [employing professional mercenaries](#) and *condottieri* (or military commanders).

The republic avoided overextension, [focusing on maintaining positive relations with its limited territories](#). Mainland cities enjoyed considerable autonomy, with several independent city-states [voluntarily joining the republic](#). During the [War of Cambrai](#) (1508 to 1516), Venice contemplated ceding mainland territories, [but revolts](#) in occupied cities in support of Venice helped drive out invaders.

[At its height in the 16th century](#), Venice's *dogado* around the lagoon housed approximately 150,000 inhabitants, with its wider territories encompassing 2.3 million people. [The Domini da Tera](#) administered mainland Italy, while the [Domini da Mar](#) governed overseas colonies. Venetian military officials, like their political counterparts, were rotated regularly to avoid power accumulation and provide numerous nobles with administrative and military experience.

[Revolts in Crete against Venetian rule](#) exposed governance flaws in its territories, but efforts to promote greater equality between Venetian settlers and local populations eventually brought peace and showcased Venice's adaptability in managing overseas territories.

Venice also maintained its independence through skilled diplomacy and a calculated focus on the balance of power. Supported by an expansive network of spies, diplomats, and agents, the small republic successfully navigated challenges from larger, powerful rivals, including Byzantium, the Carolingians, the Holy Roman Empire, the Ottomans, France, and Spain. An early strategic alliance with Byzantium [secured access to key ports](#), while ties with Rome and trade posts as far as China reinforced its position as a reliable trading partner and intermediary. Ties with entities like the [Hanseatic League \(a trading network\)](#) further expanded Venice's global reach.

Even during its economic decline, Venice played a powerful diplomatic role. Several Venetian popes [were elected from the 1400s to 1700s](#), and Venetian diplomat Alvise Contarini played a crucial role in [mediating the Peace of Westphalia](#) in 1648, ending the Thirty Years' War.

Steady Decline

The seeds of Venice's decline were nonetheless sown early into its foreign expansion. The [Fourth Crusade](#) in 1204 enriched Venice and expanded its territories but strained its relations with Eastern Orthodoxy. The smaller, weakened Byzantine Empire, restored after the crusade, could not withstand the rising Ottoman Empire, whose [conquest](#) of Constantinople in 1453 disrupted Venice's critical eastern trading routes. Venice maintained a strong presence in the Mediterranean, but logistical challenges, heavier taxation, and growing Ottoman competition gradually pushed it into a defensive retreat.

In 1492, Spain's accidental arrival in the Americas marked a shift in global trade and the need for larger, ocean-bound ships. Venice's lack of access to the Atlantic, which would fuel later European empires, was soon compounded by the Portuguese voyage to India via Africa in 1498, further undercutting its trade with the East. Venetians later established footholds in cities like Paris, London, and the Low Countries to collaborate with the rapidly growing Atlantic powers, but they [struggled](#) to keep pace.

The city's preference for autonomy left it isolated in a rapidly changing European geopolitical landscape. While Venice's early history of isolationism gave way to expansion, the city reverted to a more defensive and conservative isolationism in a world dominated by global powers. Repeated outbreaks of plague, particularly in 1575 to 1577 and 1630 to 1631, devastated Venice's population and weakened its economic and military foundation.

By the 17th century, Venice's once-adaptative nobles and political system had come to resist reform. Venice's oligarchic social and political structure, as noted by historian John Norwich, had become [rigid and highly corrupt](#). The nobility, formerly active merchants, [had become](#) passive investors, landowners, or city administrators. Destitute aristocrats could no longer sustain their privileges, weakening both their status and the socio-political hierarchy. Political activists, inspired by French Jacobin ideals and Italian nationalism, became increasingly vocal.

Venice's system had also arguably become too outdated by the 18th century. [Nation-states and the modern concept of nationalism](#) simply overwhelmed merchant republics in demographics, territory, and wealth. Napoleon's revolutionary changes in both warfare and social systems allowed the French

military to take Venice without a fight. The Great Council then [voted itself out of existence](#), and France transferred the region to Austria, which shifted the center of the regional government to Milan and prioritized nearby Trieste as a port instead. Venice was later incorporated into Italy in 1866, which it has remained part of ever since.

Venice's Strengths and Other Former Republics

Other Italian city-state republics also achieved prominence. [Florence](#) flourished with its banking sector, textile industry, and legal protections afforded to its citizens. Lucca maintained independence longer than Venice, while Pisa and Siena enjoyed periods of prominence. Genoa emerged as a significant maritime power, rivaling Venice for centuries.

However, Florence shifted to hereditary and dynastic rule under the Medici family in the 16th century and conquered Pisa and Siena. Lucca lacked Venice's scale and influence, while Genoa, despite its strengths, struggled with internal tensions. Merchants and aristocrats were often at odds, as were [rival noble clans who reverted to warring among themselves during peacetime](#). This instability often required foreign mediation, gradually eroding Genoa's autonomy, while its later alliance with Spain further subordinated Genoa's independence.

In contrast, Venice managed to avoid conquest, retaining its republican system, political autonomy, and global significance long after many of its counterparts had faded or been absorbed. Even centuries after its fall, no other Italian republic holds the same mystique of Venice. The city's cultural impact alone was immense, producing creative figures like Tintoretto, Antonio Vivaldi, and Giovanni Bellini, and attracting Andrea Palladio and Titian. Its architectural beauty, set against the lagoon and emulating Roman styles, remains an international draw. Venice's maintenance and adaptation of Greek and Roman political influences created a system that lasted centuries, which though weakened by the time of French conquest, may have had the potential to rebound.

Venice's independence movement, [which has accelerated since 2014](#), is unlikely to achieve secession due to significant barriers, including the constraints of Italy's constitution, lack of international recognition, and disputes over the territorial feasibility of such a split.

The city's modern economy [is driven by tourism](#), with more than [5.7 million](#)

[visitors in 2023](#). Other Italian city-states survive in their own ways: Genoa [revived as a key port city in the 1800s and remains so today](#). [The Grimaldi family](#), originally from Genoa, meanwhile, seized control of Monaco in 1297 and has ruled the country ever since. [San Marino](#), a city-state republic with a claim to a 1700-year-old history, successfully diplomatically negotiated its independence in 301 AD.

Other republics outside Italy emerged during Venice's time but struggled to endure. The Novgorod Republic [established in 1136](#) in modern Russia, thrived on trade and featured a large assembly, term limits, and checks on elite power. However, its lack of a strong military left it vulnerable, and Moscow captured it in 1478.

The Dutch Republic, [established in 1588](#), decentralized government between provinces and the States General for shared decision-making. It prioritized legal protections, religious tolerance, trade, literacy, and social mobility, though the Dutch East and West India companies undermined republican ideals through colonization and slavery. In 1795, the Dutch Republic fell to France and was replaced by the centralized Batavian Republic, [which struggled](#) with regionalism and reliance and dominance by France. By 1810, it became a French-controlled monarchy, until Dutch independence in 1813 reintroduced a monarchy that persists today.

Modern Republican Rule

Modern republics remain young and show a range of adaptations. Parliamentary republics rely on coalition-building, but this risks marginalizing even the most popular parties. Votes of confidence can swiftly remove leaders, but shorter political terms can lead to prioritizing [short-term visions](#). Presidential systems can, meanwhile, run the risk of autocracy, particularly [with longer-term limits and incumbency advantage](#). Other challenges include promoting democratic participation without runaway populism, balancing decentralization and centralization, creating effective political bodies without needless bureaucracy, and striving for peace while remaining prepared for conflict.

Switzerland stands out for its sustained stability, avoiding revolution, occupation, or imperialism [since its unification in 1848](#). It combines regional and international autonomy, open trade, and its role as a global financial and diplomatic hub. Seasonal canton voting embodies direct democracy and encourages citizen

participation. However, universal suffrage faces resistance tied to immigration, with referendums on non-citizen voting rights [from 1992 to 2016](#) struggling in areas with higher foreign populations, reflecting concerns over integration and “[over-foreignization](#)” in the country.

Singapore, an independent city-state republic since 1965, has thrived and maintained its autonomy by emerging as a trade hub, [balancing Cold War powers](#) and [rising U.S.-China tensions](#) over the last 20 years. Despite its nominally democratic and republican system, governance has remained centralized under the People’s Action Party, dominated by Lee Kuan Yew’s family and close allies.

The Need for Greater Corporate Accountability

The discussion of decentralized leadership should extend beyond nations to the private sector. Early corporations like the British East India Company, as well as modern constitutional republics, were modeled [on medieval chartered towns](#) that were given powers to legislate, imprison, and wage conflicts.

Modern multinational corporations operate globally, influencing markets, negotiating with governments, and increasingly [having access to armed](#) forces. Their growing autonomy has led to efforts to link corporate governance with civic responsibility, including proposals to replace the hijacked democratic “[one share, one vote](#)” system that has [allowed major shareholders](#) to consolidate power and exploit corporate governance in recent decades.

The likelihood of self-imposed corporate accountability is low. However, introducing more layered governance with checks and balances could improve oversight, as private governing entities continue to evolve. [Increasing experimentation](#) with private cities globally signals a resurgence of corporate governance, seen more than a century ago in the U.S. with [company towns](#). Similarly, Próspera, a [private charter city on Roatán Island](#) in Honduras, is run by a U.S. corporation with a proclaimed commitment to libertarian ideals.

It’s important to view the workers and communities these corporations interact with as similar to state subjects. The growth of corporate power challenges the classical liberal idea that contracts between companies and workers should be free of authority. Republican-style corporate leadership in such projects could address concerns about civic participation, autocracy, and the rule of law.

Venice’s Lessons for Modern Democracies

Many factors contributed to Venice's success: expansive trade networks, social mobility, technological innovation, geographic advantages, military power, and diplomatic prowess. These elements were mutually reinforcing, underpinned by political stability achieved through distributing authority across collaborative bodies. While Venice's oligarchy compromised the non-hereditary ideal of republicanism, it effectively prevented dynasties and upheld the principle of power distribution. The public largely trusted the nobles, though the exclusive nature of the noble class contributed to their decline in later centuries.

Venice's political evolution and trajectory are a priceless repository of history for modern democracies to study. The presence of a non-hereditary figure like the doge provided a unifying focal point for governance, helping to anchor symbolic authority and reduce factionalism. A commitment to checks and balances allowed for a balanced distribution of power. Economic opportunities were cultivated by elites and merchant classes and embraced by the commoners, driving Venice's prosperity and social mobility. Its ability to continuously adapt its political and economic systems was similarly a major reason for its long-term survival.

Today, frequent power and public opinion shifts, coupled with the influence of wealth and corporations, are fueling instability and gridlock, undermining the long-term effectiveness of democratic institutions. History shows that democratic societies have voted to unintentionally dismantle their own democratic and republican systems, and contemporary voters have often [turned to populism and autocracy in the 21st century](#) out of frustration.

But how much power should rest with individuals? Governance could be strengthened by withholding our tendency to center authority in people and instead placing it into political bodies. Venice's system, for all its strengths, failed to create a fully open, meritocratic system, but its emphasis on collaborative bodies within a professional political class is something modern democracies may need to reconsider. Had Venice's republican system continued to adapt rather than become increasingly rigid, it may have endured to this day.

By John P. Ruehl

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Our Ability To Think In Terms Of Numbers Is Universal, Abstract, And Independent From Language



*Frederick L.
Coolidge, Ph.D.*

Photo: UCCS

01-24-2025 ~ *Frederick L. Coolidge explains the link between numerosity and language.*

Most people learn to count and do basic arithmetic at a young age and don't give these skills a second thought. But numerosity or numeracy, the ability to think about and use numbers, is more than a basic skill: It is what underlies the human power of abstraction, metaphor, symbolism, and the essence of thought.

The connection of numerosity to language and culture is a fascinating topic. Scientific research has shown that even cultures that only use numbers up to 2 or 3 [are able to master using larger numbers](#) when they are taught the language

required.

Advanced imaging technologies have enabled scientists to look at areas of the brain cortex connected to particular math skills. The frontoparietal region of the brain has been identified as [the location for coordinating goal-directed tasks](#).

How old human numerosity is, how numbers are connected to language or abstraction, and whether animals have numerosity are subjects of debate in the scientific community. I interviewed [Frederick L. Coolidge](#), a professor of psychology, who specializes in cognitive archaeology and has [written broadly on the subject](#).

Coolidge has taught at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, since 1979 and co-directs its Center for Cognitive Archaeology.

He argues that humans are not the only species to have numerosity, that numerosity does not require language, and that it expresses itself culturally.

Marjorie Hecht: How old do you think numerosity is, and why?

Frederick L. Coolidge: Because monkeys possess the capacity for numerosity, and we have a common ancestor with monkeys about 25 to 30 million years ago, this suggests that numerosity has a very ancient origin.

Why? Because evolutionarily it must have been important for the earliest primates, who appeared about 60 million years ago, to be able to distinguish quickly among one, two, or three things. Further, we are descendants of this primate lineage. This ability, subitization, is one of the two core processes in numerosity.

Imagine an ancient primate facing a predator or more than one. They would be at a distinct advantage if they could immediately (as if without overt conscious thinking) take on a single predator as opposed to three! Imagine if they sat there thinking, "Hmm, should I go this way to take on this one predator or should I go that way and take on three predators" (assuming of course, there was no other recourse).

The second core process of numerosity is an analog set of comparisons, that is, distinguishing quickly between a small set and a large set of things (any number of things). Again, imagine an ancient primate trying to decide between a tree with

25 apples versus 50 apples. The ability to quickly distinguish the tree with more apples might be invaluable due to competition with other animals.

MH: Is numerosity inherently abstract?

FLC: Yes, because if oneness, twoness, and threeness can be applied to any type of things, be they tangible like apples or intangible like angels, numerosity is the essence of abstractive thinking. Therefore, because numbers can be applied to any thing, it is this capacity that underlies abstractive thinking.

As the British mathematician A. N. Whitehead (1911) wrote: "... the leading characteristic of mathematics [is] that it deals with properties and ideas which are applicable to things just because they are things, and apart from any particular feelings, or emotions, or sensations.... This is what is meant by calling mathematics an abstract science."

Further, abstraction in numerosity may give rise to the modern advanced characteristics of language, including analogizing and metaphorizing. Why is "love is a rose" so easily understood? Notice that the properties of a tangible thing like a rose we can readily understand and apply to an intangible abstract concept of love.

One minor problem with analogies and metaphors is where do the similarities stop. In class, I made students ponder the problem of nitrogen-fixing bacteria in a rose's roots and how that would apply to love. The value of metaphorization is not only a transfer of knowledge but also the creation of novel ideas.

MH: Is numerosity independent of language?

FLC: Monkeys and human infants (as young as 8 months old) have the capacity for numerosity. Therefore, it is independent of the faculty of language. Numerosity arises from neurons genetically dedicated to its two core processes, which are located in the lower parietal lobe—specifically the intraparietal sulcus—both in humans and nonhuman primates like monkeys.

I can find no coherent argument that numerosity requires language, sorry. It would be like wasting your time arguing evolution with a creationist.

MH: Does numerosity express itself culturally?

FLC: Yes, the capacity for numerosity may be older than primates, reptiles, and maybe even flatworms that emerged 545 million years ago—and I am not merely being facetious.

There is simply not a lot of grant money for the study of numerosity in amphioxus and planaria, but there should be. I propose that basic mathematics and then advanced higher math (algebra, calculus, etc.) were built upon the foundation of numerosity.

As soon as language became more elaborate with lots of words for things, it was as easy to name the [subitization](#) core process of oneness, twoness, and threeness. [Subitization is the ability to determine the number of elements in a set without counting.] In fact, it was as easy as one, two, three; *ek, do, teen* [Hindi]; *eins, zwei, drei* [German].

Interestingly, the Pirahã tribe in the Amazon have only the [number words](#) for one, two, and many (again the three-thing limit for subitization). So, as soon as we hominins had words for 1, 2, and 3, we figured out there could be words for numbers and then words for amounts greater than that. But subitization got us started. Then advanced math took off yet got its start from that foundation.

When humans could ponder their existence, they could ponder and witness death. This death anxiety wasn't easily relieved. We needed a very powerful rationalization to overcome this major existential anxiety. So, we created gods, typically a single god: God, Allah, Buddha, Brahma, etc. Notice, only one god, expressed by numerosity's (subitization's) oneness. We didn't need more to relieve our death anxiety as one god giving us immortal life is sufficient. Also, notice that the concept of a heaven always accompanies the concept of a god because death anxiety is the chief reason for the conception of a god.

However, subitization subtly expresses itself by urging us to think of twoness and threeness. Thus, Hinduism has one God, Brahma, but three forms, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Christianity has God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Even in comedy, we have three (the Three Stooges) because the limit of subitization appears to be three things.

In summary, does numerosity express itself culturally? God, yes!

By Marjorie Hecht

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

Trump's Vision For A "Golden Age Of America": Oligarchy Plus Ultranationalism

01-23-2025 ~ *Parallels between European fascism in the 1930s and Trump's MAGA vision were on full display this week.*



Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the United States put on display fascism's 21st-century iteration — a combination of oligarchic power and ultranationalism unlike anything in recent memory.

It was a shameful spectacle for a country that deems itself to be the world's greatest democracy and the leader of the so-called free world. Trump was flanked by [billionaire tech moguls](#) and [far right leaders](#) from Italy, Germany, Argentina, France, the U.K., and other countries around the globe. His [inauguration speech](#) promised a "golden age of America" by making the country "greater, stronger, and far more exceptional than ever before."

It was an inauguration speech dripping with authoritarianism and jingoism in which Trump cast himself as the savior of the country. "Our sovereignty will be reclaimed. Our safety will be restored. The scales of justice will be rebalanced," he said, and described the leadership of the past four years as incompetent and corrupt, without specifying Joe Biden or other Democrats by name.

The speech left little doubt about its ideological character. Indeed, the political message behind Trump's return to the White House was best captured by Elon Musk's [Nazi-like salute](#) during the inauguration celebrations (though, in this case, [predictably](#), the Anti-Defamation League rushed immediately to Musk's defense by downplaying the significance of the gesture). The South African billionaire has appointed himself as [leader](#) of the West's far right movement and has been fomenting fascism since he helped Trump win reelection. For Musk and his ilk, who expect to be the biggest beneficiaries of the new administration's much anticipated [anti-regulation blitz](#), Trump's return to office promises a new "[Golden Age](#)" of U.S. world dominance and prosperity for the super-rich.

Acting like an authoritarian from day one, Trump signed dozens of executive orders that pose a direct threat to democracy and make a mockery of human rights and the rule of law. He ordered a [crackdown on immigration, withdrew](#) the U.S. from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization, and [pardoned](#) about 1,500 of his supporters who attacked the U.S. Capitol four years ago. He signed executive orders that seek to [end birthright citizenship](#), which the U.S. Constitution has guaranteed for more than 150 years; [terminate](#) federal diversity, equity and inclusion guidelines; and roll back protections for transgender people.

Trump also signed an executive order that aims to weaken federal employee protections by reinstating [Schedule F](#) in the excepted service, which Biden had rescinded when he took office. This move is intended to help Trump replace federal employees with loyalists faithful to his agenda. The architects of Project 2025 advocated the revival of Schedule F as part of their aim to "[bend or break the bureaucracy to the presidential will](#)." And Trump announced that he will fire over 1,000 appointees from the Biden administration.

History never repeats itself exactly, but there are deeply troubling ideological and political parallels between European fascism in the 1930s and Trump's MAGA vision. To start with, ultranationalism is a key foundation of fascism. Mussolini came to power with a promise to make a "[clean sweep](#)" of Italy and to restore Rome to its "golden age." (Hitler had a similar vision for Germany, and a major difference between Italian fascism and Nazism is that the former did not prioritize biological determinism.)

Under Trump and his MAGA movement, ultranationalism has been given a new lease on life as the U.S. has had a long-standing tradition in ethnic nationalism

and extreme chauvinism. The [Alien and Sedition Acts](#), four internal security laws passed by the U.S. Congress in 1798 during the administration of President John Adams, called for the deportation of people from “hostile” nations and made it a crime to criticize the government. The slogan “America First,” fused with the idea of [“100 percent Americanism.”](#) was dominant between the World Wars. And as Adam Smith, director of the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford University, said, [in “1930s America, fascism was on the march.”](#)

Trump’s second term promises to turn ultranationalism into state ideology — and the blizzard of executive orders that took place on his first day in office signify in no uncertain terms that his administration will make good on its campaign vow to get rid of [“the enemy from within”](#) by any means necessary. If the latter materializes, the fusion between ultranationalism and the authoritarian state will produce a full-fledged neofascist government cohabiting with violent neoliberalism as the economic regime.

And it will materialize, starting with the sweeping action on immigration and border control, which will enable Trump to carry out his monstrous deportation plan. Having echoed Nazi language by dehumanizing immigrants of color as “animals” and [“poisoning the blood”](#) of the nation, Trump is bent on executing the most massive deportation in U.S. history. This plan isn’t merely a [“disgrace,”](#) as Pope Francis labelled it, but the apotheosis of cruelty.

In his last major essay, “Nine Theses on the Philosophy of History”, Marxist philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin describes in the ninth thesis Paul Klee’s painting named “Angelus Novus,” which Benjamin had purchased in the spring of 1921, as the Angel of History. He writes:

A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. ... This is how one pictures the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. That which we call progress, is this storm.

Klee's "Angelus Novus" is used by Benjamin, who at the time was fleeing from the gestapo, as a metaphor for the illusion behind the capitalist idea of progress. In the end, like this notion of progress, Trump's pursuit of a "Golden Age" can only lead to disaster and ruin, to catastrophe for the U.S. and the rest of the world.

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