

# PVV Blog 5 - The 'Monocultural Confession' Of The Dutch Party For Freedom



03-05-2024 ~ Party for Freedom MP and Speaker of Parliament Martin Bosma presents the '20 foundations of the Multicultural Confession of Faith' in chapter 7b of his book [De schijn-élite van de valse munters](#).

This 'Multicultural Confession of Faith' is said to have 'made a great impression on the elites of the Netherlands'. This ideology would 'involve the flattening of the leading culture in favor of minority/immigrant cultures', Bosma claims. The multicultural ideology is, according to Bosma, based on a number of foundations, namely the following:

- 1 Multicultural societies are superior to monocultural societies;
- 2 Mass immigration is inevitable, the influx can be attributed to globalization;
- 3 Mass immigration is the result of guest labor;
- 4 Mass immigration is good for the economy, for healthcare and the welfare state. We need immigrants;
- 5 We also have a moral obligation to welcome large groups of foreigners as a way to make up for the Second World War, our colonial past, slavery or the Crusades;
- 6 Mass immigration should be viewed purely nationally. The behavior of Muslims in other countries is of no importance to the Netherlands;
- 7 Today's mass immigration can be compared to the arrival of immigrants in the sixteenth century (to the Netherlands). Muslims will assimilate, it is a matter of time. Muslims are Huguenots in the making;
- 8 Islam is a religion and will therefore develop like all other religions, namely towards a liberal version or even an Enlightenment;
- 9 There is a moderate Islam;
- 10 Christians have also had their pranks, so don't whine about Islam;
- 11 The Bible also contains strange things, just like the Koran does. So there is

no problem;

- 12 Muslims' commitment to their ideology should be denied or underestimated, problems they may cause are explained by socio-economic conditions;
- 13 At most, these problems concern a single Moroccan street thief. Demographically, the Muslim influx poses no problem whatsoever;
- 14 Muslims form a 'vulnerable group' and therefore deserve extra protection from the government;
- 15 Welfare state and immigration country go well together;
- 16 The problems started with the Party for Freedom. If Wilders would just stop, the issues would soon be over;
- 17 Anyone who opposes Islamization belongs to the extreme right;
- 18 The lesson of the Second World War is that any form of patriotism or nationalism is wrong and tolerance is always good;
- 19 The 'May 1968-left' movement, which was ultimately wrong about communism, is now right about Islam and the multicultural society'.

And then Bosma writes before formulating the twentieth article:

'And especially this one:

\*20 If the multiculturalists are wrong, the Netherlands and the West will get a second chance'.

*Dixit* Martin Bosma. And as a final comment he states the following:

'These foundations have never been thought through or proven. In fact, they are all wrong'.

*The elite impressed by the confession of faith*

Martin Bosma has placed himself in the world of thought of 'the elites' and has from that perspective considered society, especially when it comes to 'mass immigration' and 'Islam'. He has not defined who constitutes 'the elites' nor has he researched or quoted what the elites really think about these topics. It is his interpretation of what 'the elites' think. The foundation on which this thought exercise stands is therefore weak. But this empirical or scientific argument is of course not important to Bosma. Bible verse Isaiah 20:5 in his book is leading. The text reads as follows:

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who represent darkness as light and light as darkness; who pass off bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter'.

For Martin Bosma, the world consists of either good or evil and woe to those who call evil good or good evil. It is therefore not surprising that Bosma states that the 20 foundations of the 'Multicultural Creed' are incorrect or 'evil'.

### *The 'Monocultural Creed'*

If all 20 points of the Multicultural Creed are incorrect, and therefore 'evil', then the Party for Freedom version of that creed would be 'good', and would be called the 'Monocultural Creed', and the 20 statements would read as follows :

- 1 'Multicultural societies are not superior to monocultural societies;
- 2 Mass immigration is not inevitable, the influx cannot be attributed to globalization;
- 3 Mass immigration is not the result of guest labor;
- 4 Mass immigration is bad for the economy, for healthcare and the welfare state. We don't need immigrants;
- 5 We do not have a moral obligation to welcome large groups of foreigners as a way to make up for the Second World War, our colonial past, slavery or the Crusades;
- 6 Mass immigration should not be viewed nationally. The behavior of Muslims in other countries is of great importance to the Netherlands;
- 7 Today's mass immigration cannot be compared to the arrival of immigrants in the sixteenth century. Muslims are not going to assimilate, it is not a matter of time. Muslims are not Huguenots in the making;
- 8 Islam is not a religion and will therefore not develop like all other religions, namely in the direction of a liberal version or even an Enlightenment;
- 9 There is no moderate Islam;
- 10 Christians have not (had) any pranks, so the more reason there is to whine about Islam;
- 11 There are no strange things in the Bible, unlike the Koran. So there is a problem;
- 12 The commitment of Muslims to their ideology should be recognized or not underestimated, problems they cause are not explained by socio-economic conditions;
- 13 These problems are really not about a single Moroccan street thief. Demographically, the Muslim influx poses a major problem;
- 14 Muslims do not form a 'vulnerable group' and therefore do not deserve extra protection from the government;

- 15 Welfare state and immigration country do not go together at all;
- 16 The problems did not start with the Party for Freedom. If Wilders just stops, the contradictions will certainly not be over;
- 17 Anyone who opposes Islamization is not extreme-right;
- 18 The lesson of the Second World War is that any form of patriotism or nationalism is good and tolerance is not good;
- 19 The 'May-1968-left' movement, which was ultimately wrong about communism, is now wrong about Islam and the multicultural society;
- 20 If the multiculturalists are wrong, the Netherlands and the West will not get a second chance'.

### *Further analysis*

A guiding principle in this series is the question of 'whether things are as bad as they look'.

The ideas of the Party for Freedom as expressed in the book by parliament chairman and party ideologue Marin Bosma are sharp and reject all forms of migration and Islam.

When the party sat down in governmental coalition negotiations the party withdrew a number of unconstitutional bills relating to Muslims in the Netherlands. Party leader Wilders also conformed to the view of the other three potential coalition parties, that Islam is a religion that enjoys protection under the Constitution, in contrast to his previous view that Islam is a 'totalitarian ideology'. But, religion or ideology, party leader Wilders reiterated his view on Islam in a parliamentary debate: 'So, I still think that Islam as a religion is a reprehensible, hateful religion that incites violence. So the (Party's) position on Islam will not change.'

If the Party for Freedom enters a new government, it is certain to me that the 20 statements of the 'negative monocultural Party for Freedom ideology' will become visible in one way or the other, directly or indirectly, in statements and bills from a possible Party for Freedom government.

A party that has spoken out so clearly in negative terms about immigration and Islam does not deny its roots. Impossible.

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# The Adaptive Value Of Teenagers: How Peer Learning Contributes To Primate Success



*Brenna R. Hassett*

03-01-2024 ~ Anthropological science is our species' attempt to address our most fundamental questions about who we are and how we got here. It asks for evidence of the evolutionary path we have traveled to become the most successful primate on the planet; it seeks clues as to why *Homo sapiens*—and not our recent relatives—came to be the sole survivor of millions of years of hominid evolution. Many singular traits of our species and those of our immediate ancestors have been held up as prime movers in making us a world-dominating ape: controlling fire, walking upright, and making tools. However, more than anything, the [evolution of big brains in the Homolineage around 2 million years ago](#) is often identified as a turning point where we started to become the thinking animal. At some point in our evolutionary history, we became the ape that learns—and capacity for learning might just be the thing that let *Homo sapiens* become the species that we are today.

Of course, *Homo sapiens* is not the only animal that learns. It's certainly not the only primate either—learning is a critical part of our closest relatives' repertoire. Rather than relying on instinct, many primates pick up skills and information by

*learning* them. In many species, learning is done through observation, which is as simple as it sounds: a baby will watch its mother to learn what foods are good to eat, or the young watch an experienced adult doing a particular task. As social animals, primates have a greater number of teachers available to them than other species, and *who* they learn from changes as they grow. [Infant vervet monkeys, for instance, quickly learn to eat the foods their mothers like](#)—but when they get older and move to a new group where that food isn't liked, they will quickly learn to eat what their peers eat.

Primate life demands a host of skills that aren't passed down through instinct alone—and aren't always just survival skills. One of the best examples of such a skill is seen in the gloriously relaxed snow monkeys of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The snow monkeys are a type of macaque, one of the most numerous (and interesting) monkey species, with a broad range of habitats around Asia and a host of different adaptations to live in each environment. The adaptation of the Hokkaido macaques, however, is something else again: they have taught themselves to bathe in the hot tub. In the 1950s tourism to the natural hot springs of Hokkaido led to the construction of hotels and *onsen*, traditional Japanese baths, in a group of macaques' territory. One [day a young macaque fell into an onsen while chasing an apple](#), and realized it was actually quite nice. Her peers watched and learned and then taught their children how to hot tub too, and so it became an established behavior among the group.

Peer learning is incredibly important for juvenile primates, precisely because of the complicated social groups they live in. As any teenager could tell you, it's a matter of survival to fit in with your group, and, depending on your species, many young animals will move groups and have to learn entirely new ways of doing things. In some species, it will be the females that move groups, and they will carry with them any new skills from their home groups while also learning to adapt to new ones. In others, it will be males who may have a host of other challenges to overcome as they leave their birth groups. Gorillas, for instance, have a very rigid "harem" style social organization, with a handful of silverback males living with several females and their children. When the male children start to get older, they can either stay in their own groups and try to compete, or they can [join special](#) boy bands comprising those males that are too young (or too old) to challenge a silverback for a harem of their own. There, they can learn and practice the skills they need to build their own harem.

Peer learning is incredibly important to our species precisely because it is a way of transferring information beyond our own native social groups. Like the hot tubbing macaque or the young male gorillas, movement to a new group means that new ideas and skills are transported beyond their group of origin. Cultural transmission becomes possible, and ideas and adaptations are free to spread to wider groups. This means the number and scope of adaptations circulating is vastly increased—and with it, the evolutionary chances of the species. Humans have taken full advantage of this kind of learning by simply taking more time to do it. We take longer to move from puberty to full adulthood than any other species of primate. Indeed, [when full adulthood actually occurs](#) in our species is a matter of considerable debate.

When we look at the time in life when peer learning occurs, we see that it is when animals are on the cusp of adulthood—the ones that are mobile, changing groups, and playing around in an *onsen*—that contribute to this kind of wider learning. This is something that our species knows only too well. For anyone who has ever asked what the adaptive value of teenagers might be—or really, anyone during the long period between childhood and full adulthood that our species gives its young—the answer is simple. One of the most important adaptations we have made along the evolutionary path that has led to our species being the most prolific and successful primate on the planet is the time we take to learn how to be a better monkey.

*By Brenna R. Hassett*

*Author Bio:*

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*Source:* Human Bridges

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# How To Bust The Bankers' Club



03-01-2024 ~ *C. J. Polychroniou speaks with progressive economist Gerald Epstein about why alternative banking is possible and urgently needed.*

It's been almost a year since the banking crisis kicked off last March. On Friday, March 10, 2023, [Silicon Valley Bank](#), or SVB, or SVB, a state-chartered commercial bank based in Santa Clara, California, collapsed after facing a sudden bank run and capital crisis. SVB's collapse was the second largest bank failure in U.S. history since Washington Mutual in 2008. Two days later, New York-based Signature Bank also collapsed due to yet another bank run. But that was not the end of bank failures in 2023. On May 1, the San Francisco-based First Republic Bank, plagued by many of the same problems as those that doomed SVB and Signature Bank, also went under and was seized in turn by regulators who promptly sold all of its deposits and most assets to JP Morgan Chase. Two more banks would go on to declare insolvency later in the year, bringing the number of failed banks to a total of five.

Indeed, 2023 was the worst year for U.S. banks since 2008. But why do U.S. banks continue to fail after the reforms that were implemented in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis? Why does the business model of commercial banks remain so fragile? World renowned progressive economist Gerald Epstein,



author of the recently published book [Busting the Bankers' Club: Finance for the Rest of Us](#), tackles these questions in the interview that follows. Epstein is professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Jerry, in your new book *Busting the Bankers' Club*, you describe the business model of commercial banks in the age of neoliberalism as “roaring banking” and you juxtapose it with that of “boring banking,” which prevailed from the New Deal era right through the Reagan era. Under “boring banking,” banks were prohibited from many of today’s financial engineering practices and financial shenanigans. The result was relative financial stability and economic growth. Obviously, bankers hated this business model, but what factors made possible the transition from “boring banking” to “roaring banking?” Was it simply because of the “logic” of the free-enterprise system at work, or did it happen because of actual intervention in the realm of policymaking?

*Gerald Epstein:* Like much historical change, the evolution from “boring banking” to “roaring banking” was the outcome of the underlying dynamics and pressures of the economic system and specific historical conjunctures, all with plenty of involvement of actual human beings and classes.

The major Wall Street bankers were never happy with the New Deal financial regulatory rules that made it harder for them to charge excessively high interest rates, make highly leveraged bets, or engineer fraudulent Ponzi or “pump and dump” frauds against customers. The numbers on Wall Street bankers’ incomes show why. As *The Bankers' Club* reports, prior to 1929, bankers scarfed down incomes almost twice as high as the average wage in the economy; but after the Depression and up until the late 1970s, their incomes were about average for the whole economy. As my colleague James Crotty put it, these bankers wanted to break out of their New Deal cages to restore their superior incomes and power.

So, starting in the 1960s the major Wall Street banks organized “the Bankers’ Club,” an army of politicians, lawyers, economists, regulators, and fellow business associates to incrementally poke holes, then ditches and finally massive canals through the wall of New Deal financial regulations. According to Robert Weissman, now president of [Public Citizen](#), these financial firms spent over [\\$5 billion](#), just counting from the early 80s, on the club and its activities. This effort led, most famously, to the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999 under the

Clinton administration, which then officially ended the separation of commercial from investment banking.

These efforts, carried out by real (mostly) men, were aided by underlying dynamic changes in the U.S. and world economies. The U.S. experienced phenomenal economic growth in the aftermath of World War II, and the world also witnessed the resurrection of the European and Asian economies. In due time, competition facing the U.S. in trade and finance intensified, leading to the demise of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and relatively stable interest rates. Massive military spending by the U.S. government on the war in Vietnam from 1964 to 1973 combined with the effects of the geopolitics of energy driven by the formation of OPEC led in the 1970s to large increases in commodity prices and inflation, again putting upward pressure on interest rates to keep up with inflation. Then-Fed Chair Paul Volcker jacked up interest rates in an attempt to break the inflationary pressure, once again destabilizing the interest rate structure in banking. All of these forces put enormous pressure on the New Deal framework, partly because the system depended on relatively stable interest rates. The New Deal model chose to stabilize interest rates in order to try to stabilize bank profits and promote borrowing and investment in non-speculative activities.

Thus, something had to give. In principle, the government could have reformed the system. But the Bankers' Club had a different idea: Tear down the New Deal model and usher in a new era in banking, the "roaring banking" system of mega financial institutions and high-risk banking strategies.

*CJP:* The neoliberal era is replete with financial crises and bank failures. In 2008, the world experienced the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression because of a financial crisis that originated in the U.S. There was a sharp decline in economic activity which led to a loss of more than \$2 trillion from the global economy while millions of people lost their homes and unemployment skyrocketed. Yet, the regulations that followed in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis were essentially cosmetic, as evidenced by the collapse of five major banks in 2023. What were the reasons that SVB, Signature Bank, and First Republic Bank failed, especially since the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System insisted at the time that the banking system was "sound and resilient"?

*GE*: It is good that you bring up the collapse of SVB and the failures of Signature Bank and First Republic, since we are about to reach the one-year anniversary of these important events which occurred in early March 2023.

The [Dodd-Frank](#) Act, signed into law by then-President Barack Obama in 2010, was supposed to bring about the end of the “too-big-to-fail” (TBTF) banks and government bailouts. But a year ago when these banks got into trouble, the turmoil threatened to spread panic into the broader U.S. financial markets, signaling a possible series of bank runs in *It’s a Wonderful Life* style throughout the system. The Dodd-Frank Act had tried to forestall these types of events by making larger banks (those with assets of at least \$50 billion) be subject to more careful monitoring by the Federal Reserve, requiring them to hold more capital of their own so that they could withstand larger shocks, and have greater liquidity (cash or cash-like assets) in order to help forestall bank runs. But during the Trump administration, these “medium-sized banks” lobbied to be exempt from the tougher rules. A major player in the fight was Silicon Valley Bank.

But on March 10, 2023, after a major bank run hit Silicon Valley Bank, it was forced to close. The Fed did not bail out the bank’s executives, but guaranteed the deposits of its remaining depositors even when these were far above the \$250,000 amount covered by Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insurance. When contagion spread to other banks in the U.S., the Fed guaranteed all deposits, no matter how big.

In April, the Federal Reserve published a major exercise of “self-crit” in its handling of SVB, prior to and after the crisis. It’s pretty accurate assessment included the following four problems:

1. SVB’s board of directors and management failed to manage their risks.
2. Federal Reserve supervisors did not understand SVB’s vulnerabilities.
3. When the Fed supervisors did understand risks, they did not take sufficient steps to prevent a crisis.
4. The Fed should not have allowed SVB to fly under the radar even though Congress had raised the threshold bank size in order to strictly monitor and regulate banks.

Though accurate as far as they go, these criticisms miss a crucial point: These are essentially the same problems that allowed bigger banks to instigate the Great

Financial Crisis in 2008-2009. The Fed itself had done much to block more fundamental reforms during the Dodd-Frank negotiations and afterward as the rules were finalized. And the Fed under Jerome Powell supported the weakening of rules for the medium-sized banks.

In other words, the Fed was still acting as chairman of the Bankers' Club rather than steward of the public interest. This, the Fed's post-mortem would not admit.

*CJP:* Speaking of the Federal Reserve, in your book you do label it as the "chairman" of the Bankers' Club. Briefly explain what you mean by that, and does the Fed actually have any input in regulatory reforms proposed by lawmakers?

*GE:* The Federal Reserve, the central bank of the United States, has two main functions. It is in charge of U.S. monetary policy, which includes trying to manage short-term interest rates and the overall supply of money and credit in the economy. And it also has a major role to play in regulating and supervising banks, including the mega banks or what I call the "roaring banks." The Federal Reserve has been delegated these powers by the U.S. Congress, which, along with the president, establishes the mandates, or major goals, which the Federal Reserve is supposed to try to achieve. The question of the Fed's mandates or goals has been a subject of long-term political fights in the United States, which explains why the Federal Reserve is a "contested terrain." I say that the Fed is the "chairman" of the Bankers' Club because history shows that, for most of the time, the big banks and the capitalist class at large win the contest for dominance of the Fed, both with respect to its monetary policy and regulatory policy. For example, after a long political battle, the Federal Reserve was given by Congress a dual mandate: to achieve high employment and stable prices (steady and low inflation). In addition, more recently, the Federal Reserve was given a mandate to maintain financial stability. But if one studies the Fed's record, we find that when there is a conflict between keeping inflation very low (which finance normally prefers) and achieving full employment (which workers tend to prefer) the Fed almost always chooses low inflation. And when it comes to regulating banks tightly in order to maintain financial stability, or bailing them out after they get into trouble, the Fed has preferred to simply bail them out. More generally, the Fed offers significant favors to the banks, and in return expects the banks to protect its operations from the intrusive hands of Congress and the president.

To answer your question more directly, the Fed has a big influence on the regulations that Congress eventually passes, as one can see from the inordinate

influence that Alan Greenspan had in the legislation to gut Glass-Steagall, and the inordinate role that Ben Bernanke and the Fed had in ensuring that Dodd-Frank regulations were riddled with loopholes.

*CJP:* The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act has been treated as one of the most significant U.S. regulatory reforms since the Great Depression. But it does remain a highly flawed regulatory framework, and even plugging all the holes in it won't do the job, you argue in your book. What are the strategic shortcomings of the Dodd-Frank approach to financial regulation?

*GE:* To identify the flaws in Dodd-Frank, one can start by identifying the causes of the major financial crises we have experienced as well as the rocks and hard places the regulators found themselves between in responding to these crises. These causes are:

- Financial institutions that were allowed to become too big to fail, to manage, to regulate, and to jail.
- Lack of accountability for bad actors who took on excessive risk, even engaged in fraudulent activities, and were left free after the crash to take the money and run and hit the restart button on their next gig.
- Insufficient limits on the debt that these financial institutions could take on and the interconnectedness they could create between themselves and other financial institutions so that when one financial institution got into trouble it could threaten to bring down others like a house of cards.
- Insufficient controls on the short-term financing of long-term or excessively risky financial investments.
- Leaving dark holes in the financial system, that is, institutions and markets that are subject to little or no monitoring, much less regulation. These include hedge funds, private equity firms, and others. Post-crisis problems often emerged from these dark corners of the financial markets.
- Lack of precaution in the implementation of new financial products, so that dangerous products could infect the financial system before sufficient controls could be fashioned.
- No quid pro quos for government support: for example, bailouts with no strings attached.

Dodd-Frank did not really address these problems, and the Trump administration weakened the Dodd-Frank rules even further. As such, these problems are still

very much with us.

*CJP:* What measures do you propose for improving financial regulation, so we won't have bank failures and severe recessions triggered by financial crises?

*GE:* At a minimum, we must address these "causes" of the problems that I identified above:

- Cut down the size of the mega banks. For example, implement a modern Glass-Steagall Act that would reduce the maximum size of these banks and separate core banking functions from riskier, more speculative ones.
- Make traders and CEOs responsible for the steps and missteps they take. For example, implement "clawbacks" so that the incomes they are promised to receive from trades or decisions are held in escrow and only paid out when the investment pays off, without the need for government support. These bankers also need stricter legal consequences for breaking the law, including jail time for egregious offenses.
- Strict capital, leverage, and liquidity requirements for all banks that have significance for the overall economy, including "medium-sized banks" on the order of Silicon Valley Bank.
- Comprehensive monitoring and regulation of all financial institutions, markets, and products; no dark holes in the financial system.
- A precautionary principle for new financial innovations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) cryptocurrencies. Rules should ensure that these are safe and effective before they are allowed to be introduced into the core financial system. If anything, they should first be tested on the fringes where they cannot do significant harm.
- Support from the Federal Reserve or the U.S. Department of the Treasury in the case of a crisis should only be forthcoming as a last resort and should only come with strict strings (and quid pro quos) attached: Those responsible should be held accountable; the bank should have to change its business model to a safer form; the bank should engage in social services for the community, much like an individual legal offender, at least until it has paid back its bailout funds in full. A more reasonable quid pro quo is that the bank should always have to engage in more socially responsible behaviors simply by virtue of benefiting from this implicit insurance policy from the Federal Reserve or the U.S. government.

This last point touches on an important and more general issue. Financial

regulation, at least since the New Deal, has been a negative screen: a list of things banks should NOT do. However, we have many crucial societal problems that the financial system should be taking a more proactive role to help solve. These include, for example, helping to build a green energy economy and ending our reliance on fossil fuels. Also, and this is equally important, contributing to the economic development of marginalized communities. Financial institutions that get government support—and that means ALL of them—should not only avoid crashing our economy but also contribute to our society's important needs.

*CJP:* In *Busting the Bankers' Club*, you advocate the establishment of banks without bankers because financial regulation alone will not be sufficient to address the plethora of problems (poverty, inequality, discrimination, climate change) facing the contemporary United States. How far can public banking go in addressing these problems, and how do we overcome the resistance of the political system to radical proposals that aim toward the making of a democratic economy?

*GE:* Yes. Private banks, no matter how regulated, or how incentivized to do socially useful activities, will not be sufficiently motivated to provide many of the key long-term social goods that we need: green energy, healthy communities for all, sufficient financial resources for the development of our rural areas. The reason is that these banks focus on maximizing profits in the short to medium term. Many of these other activities are socially profitable but might not be sufficiently privately profitable, at least in the short to medium term. As a result, we need more publicly oriented financial institutions, such as public banks that are dedicated to broader social goals.

There are activist groups in more than 20 states across the U.S. who are pushing for public banks of various kinds. The most successful ones so far are located in [California](#), but [New Jersey](#) is also moving closer to establishing a public bank and there is a strong public bank campaign underway in [Massachusetts](#).

Still, there are several general obstacles to implementing an ecosystem of public banks adequate to face the problems we have. One is the intense opposition of the Bankers' Club even though most of these public bank initiatives are structured to minimize competition with the private banks. For example, they do not take deposits; they do not lend directly to customers but rather to other banks who then lend to final customers, etc. Apparently, the Bankers' Club simply does not want to legitimize any competitive sources of finance that could undercut their power.

Moreover, even if you add up all the public banking initiatives, they would still not be large enough or widespread enough to make a huge dent in the problems we are facing. What we need are national public banking institutions. For example, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) created a small Green Development Bank that, with support, could grow and thrive. A more activist and socially oriented Federal Reserve could play an important role here. The Federal Reserve should give the same level of support to public banking organizations as it has to private banks. And it should broaden its tools to promote key social goals: For example, the Fed could buy Green Bonds. It has already bought asset backed securities to bailout the banks.

How do we overcome resistance from the Bankers' Club and right-wingers to these kinds of reforms? Two things: Join the Club Busters, those activists who are trying to block the Bankers' Club and promote more socially useful institutions; and protect democracy by helping to get money out of the financial system (eg. repeal *Citizen's United*), expand voting rights, and fight against fascism.

In the last chapter of my book, I suggest that we all bite off what we can chew. Look around and join others who are fighting one of more of these battles. Join them and pitch in. As our forces gather, we will have impacts that build on each other. If some of our initiatives get blocked, other initiatives will move forward.

There are many Club Busters around the country, and indeed the world. In the U.S. we have public banking organizations, [Americans for Financial Reform](#), [Better Markets](#), [Rainforest Action Network](#), and many others. Support politicians who fight for these issues, including [Elizabeth Warren](#), Sherrod Brown, Jeff Merkley, and [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#).

There are plenty of places to join others and take a stand. That's how we fight the Bankers' Club.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/bust-the-bankers-club>

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# Prabowo Subianto: Indonesia's Defense Minister Poised For Presidency Amid Allegations Of Controversial Past



*Prabowo Subianto - Source:  
nl.wikipedia.org*

*02-28-2024 ~ As preliminary results hint at Prabowo Subianto's victory in Indonesia's presidential race, political tension rises with Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan seeking an inquiry into alleged irregularities. Beyond the election drama, Indonesia grapples with persistent issues from economic struggles to foreign relations.*

Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's defense minister and a former army general, is poised to become the next president of the country. Although the official results are due next month, preliminary figures indicate that Prabowo will secure close to 60 percent of the vote.

Two unsuccessful presidential candidates in Indonesia are calling for an official inquiry into the recent election. Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan have alleged widespread irregularities in the February 14 election, including instances of vote-buying and intimidation.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy and the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, shifted from a 32-year dictatorship to a democracy about 25 years ago. Despite progress, challenges persist like poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, and ethnic and religious divisions.

With vast natural resources, Indonesia actively seeks foreign investment for infrastructure and resource extraction and has strengthened commercial ties with China even while avoiding taking an active position in the escalating U.S.-China rivalry. In this regard, Prabowo will likely continue the policy of his predecessor outgoing President Joko Widodo.

#### *Position by Candidate*

The contest for the presidency saw a three-way race between Subianto and former governors Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Subianto, representing the Advanced Indonesia Coalition, is expected to get over [58.84 percent of the votes](#). Baswedan is likely to come in second with around 24.46 percent, while Pranowo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) will come in third with around 16.7 percent of the votes.

Elections were also held for parliament in which [18 parties](#) took part. Parties need to garner a minimum of 4 percent of the total national vote to obtain representation in parliament. In the 2019 elections, 20 parties were in the running, yet only eight successfully secured seats in the House. In this election, while results are yet to be finalized, far-right Islamist groups have suffered a setback.

This is the third time that 72-year-old Subianto, a 72-year-old military general and the son-in-law of dictator Suharto, contested for the presidency. In his earlier attempts in 2014 and 2019, he was defeated by Joko Widodo. This election, however, saw the old rivals coming together with Widodo's son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, contesting as Subianto's vice-presidential candidate. While Widodo, who remains immensely popular, did not explicitly back Subianto, the widespread perception was that the ticket had his support and there are

allegations that state agencies backed the candidacy of the defense minister.

Subianto was in the thick of military affairs during the brutal Suharto dictatorship. He was a commander of the notorious Kopassus, the special forces unit of the Indonesian Army set up in 1952. The unit has been accused of involvement in torture, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights violations, particularly during periods of political unrest and conflict. Kopassus was alleged to have participated in rights violations in Timor-Leste where an independence movement culminated in its gaining independence in 2002 following UN intervention.

Prabowo himself was for a while barred from travel to the United States due to accusations of human rights violations. He was discharged from the military following similar accusations. In 2023, activists launched a campaign called 'Don't Vote for a Kidnapper' highlighting his alleged involvement in the detention and disappearance of 13 activists who were active in the campaign against the Suharto dictatorship.

Critics have expressed concerns about Subianto's record during this campaign considering the repression over the years in West Papua where protests have been met with arrests and internet shutdowns. For decades, the people of West Papua have fought against Indonesian occupation, advocating for the right to self-determination. [In 2019](#), the region witnessed widespread protests against racism, intensifying tensions between Papuan demonstrators and security forces.

This election saw a concerted effort to whitewash Subianto's image with the former general being rebranded as a genial elder. An entire generation has grown up with few memories of the horrors of the Suharto era and Subianto's role. He also benefited from being seen as the candidate continuing the legacy of Widodo. The outgoing president had contested the previous two elections as the candidate of the center-left Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

The political realignment in this election was one of the reasons for a campaign marked by the absence of any major policy alternatives. While some of Widodo's decisions, such as the plan to shift the capital from Jakarta, saw much debate, there was little opposition to aspects of his economic legacy, such as the widely opposed [Omnibus Bill](#) and other issues raised by labor movements and environmental groups.

Subianto's main rival was Anies Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta, who was perhaps the candidate diverging the most from Widodo's legacy. He was a key opponent of the plan to shift the capital and headed the right-wing Coalition of Change for Unity, garnering support from conservative Islamic groups. The other candidate, Ganjar Pranowo, the former governor of Central Java province who was once seen as a potential successor to Widodo, sought to highlight the PDI-P's traditional welfarist agenda.

### *Economic Challenges and Ongoing Struggles*

Indonesia has faced tough economic times in its history. There was the [Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s](#), which caused a severe recession, social unrest, and the fall of the authoritarian regime led by Suharto. Then, in 2008-09, the global financial crisis brought a slowdown in growth, a bigger current account deficit, and a drop in the value of the country's currency, the rupiah. The most recent challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. It made the [economy shrink](#), more people became poor and jobless, and public health and the [value of the rupiah](#) fell further. In 2021, the poverty rate in Indonesia stood at [10.15 percent](#), impacting 27.5 million people. Additionally, the unemployment rate for youth, as a percentage of the total labor force aged 15-24, remains at [14.1 percent](#).

Indonesia faces several ongoing challenges. One significant issue is the large number of people without jobs or with low-quality jobs, particularly those engaged in low-skilled and informal work. These individuals face difficulties when unexpected events occur, and they lack sufficient social protection. Additionally, Indonesia struggles with competitiveness and productivity due to insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of well-trained individuals, a lack of innovation, and governance issues. This is likely to lead to a decline in the manufacturing sector, a significant contributor to employment. In the long term, it is expected to contribute to a higher unemployment rate and a decline in the standard of living.

Another pressing concern is environmental degradation and climate change, posing risks to the country's natural resources, biodiversity, and its ability to handle disasters. A survey by [Bath University](#) found that 89 percent of Indonesian participants were worried about the potential impact of climate change on their lives, with 66 percent believing they would be directly affected. The highest levels of concern were reported in disaster-prone provinces like Jakarta, South Sumatra, and North Sumatra.

The endorsement of a former Suharto-era general by significant factions of the Indonesian ruling class carries considerable weight. This support is notable in the midst of widespread [protests sweeping across Indonesia](#), where millions are expressing opposition to Israel's brutal actions in Gaza. Simultaneously, internal social tensions are on the rise due to declining living standards, adding a layer of complexity to the country's political landscape. The official results and subsequent actions by the incoming administration will determine how Indonesia addresses its multifaceted problems and charts its course in the global arena.

*By Pranjali Pandey*

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Pranjali Pandey, a journalist and editor located in Delhi, has edited seven books covering a range of issues available at [LeftWord](#). You can explore his journalistic contributions on [NewsClick.in](#).

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**Outdated Narratives Have  
Humanity In A Downward  
Spiral—It's Time To Tell 'Stories  
for Life'**



*April M. Short*

02-24-2024 ~ A short film and narratives project "*Stories for Life*" seeks to bring about the shift in culture that humanity needs to survive.

The stories we do and don't tell about ourselves and these times in which we're living shape the direction of our lives and our cultures. Stories have the power to alter how we interact and relate. Those who study cultural anthropology and the origins of humanity are [finding](#) that cultural stories—the things people collectively believe about ourselves and our capacities—have forever shaped human societies, going back to our early hominid ancestors. In shifting those narratives now, they argue, we have the realistic potential to evolve on purpose as a species. Given the dire, [multifront crises](#) of our times—from climate disaster to war to poverty—this kind of cultural and social evolution is desperately needed.

An animated short film, which screened between acts on the big screens of each of the four main stages at the Glastonbury Music Festival in 2022, delves into the idea of story as a means for change. It is titled, "[Stories for Life](#)," and it opens with scenes of fire, a child digging through a pile of trash, plastic rubble floating in the water, and smoke billowing from an industrial tower. A narrator's voice speaks over the imagery: "Life is in trouble. As a species, we are facing multiple crises that we can no longer ignore. At the root of them all is our economy; an economy designed to destroy life; an economy designed by us."

As the narration continues, a series of illustrated signs seem to lay out the challenges of our world, one by one: "Capitalism is crashing. Society is dividing. Democracy is degrading. Climate is tipping. Ecology is vanishing. Disease is spreading. Inequity is rising. Protest is pervading."

The film takes viewers through a brief history of humanity's relationship with the Earth. It delves into the problems of our current ways of living, then offers the

potential to rewrite the story of our values, and begin to create livable systems in which value is based on the well-being of all life.

Over animations of cave paintings, constellations, and wildlife, the film reminds viewers that “our ancestors lived in intimate relationship with the more-than-human world” and told stories about, “nature as our family, our guardian, our guide. But then some of... [our ancestors] imagined and created ways to control the natural world. This made them feel more powerful and superior to nature. Separate from it. The more powerful they felt the more disconnected from nature they became. And so they began to tell new stories. Stories that normalized domination, control, and the oppression of life. About how nature is our slave, there to be captured and exploited. They began to scorch, spoil, and suffocate our world. And as they did so, these stories spread, and became common sense.”

This narration comes with animations of the industrialization and commodification of resources: factories, men in suits and wigs, ships with cargo. The film goes on to explain that such stories have led people down the path of greed, grand, hustle, and blind progress, and made people “feel separate, not only from nature but from each other, in constant competition and conflict.”

### *Horror Stories, Love Stories*

The narrator notes that these stories then became horror stories of ruined lives and a ruined world, as images of refugee camps, rubble heaps, and melting ice caps show on screen. “But, it doesn’t have to go on like this,” the narrator says. “We can choose to live by different stories: Love stories about interconnection and interdependence. Love stories that measure success by well-being—the well-being of all life including our own. Love stories about interconnection and interdependence.” Now, the scene is blooming flowers, mycelial networks, collaborative groups of people, and brightly colored animal life.

The film outlines how these “love stories” will lead us to reconnection, so that we can regenerate our relationships with nature and each other, and create a steam that nourishes and supports the life we all want to live rather than destroying life. It closes with the reminder that “we all have the power to tell these stories,” and that many people are already doing so.

The concept behind the film is part of a larger website project launched in 2020, also called *Stories for Life*, aimed at highlighting stories that support ways

forward for humanity and all life. It began as a collaboration between the [Green Economy Coalition](#), [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#), and the [Spaceship Earth](#), and as its [website](#) states: “This project was inspired by the question ‘how do we tell the story of a new economy?’”

The eventual Stories for Life project was co-created by Dan Burgess and Paddy Loughman with the purpose of helping to “create stories that contribute to the re-design of a healthier economy. To bring forth new and ancient stories into our culture, which weave a narrative of interconnection and help us design a new type of economy,” as [notes](#) the Stories for Life website.

Co-creator Dan Burgess—a writer, podcast host, and learning guide—says his work centers on supporting the growth of regenerative cultures and creative activism, all aimed at cultural shifts that may “help people remember we are part of a living Earth.” He says in addition to himself and Loughman, there have been [many](#) collaborators and supporters, and that Stories for Life’s creators ultimately wanted to help make more readily accessible and clear “the relationship between everyday stories and how they shape cultural narratives, and how those things shape the design of human systems—in this case, the economic system,” he says. “We wanted to help more people understand that and see that in these times, stories are very powerful and we’re all carrying them. So in that sense we all have the ability to make an impact.”

He adds that another aim was to weave together thinking around how cultural stories are currently shaping westernized economic systems, and the destruction those systems are responsible for.

“What we were trying to do [from the outset] is explore the role of stories in either maintaining and perpetuating these destructive economic designs,” he says.

Stories for Life eventually [published eight chapters](#), each referencing the stories of many people. As the Overview chapter states, “There is a better narrative. A healthier narrative that has been carried by cultures around the world for thousands of years, and is now being recognised by the latest scientific breakthroughs. A narrative grounded in the recognition that we are all entangled, integrated, dependent on each other and the more-than-human world around us.”



Burgess shares that the Stories for Life film and concept are being shared by a number of groups and organizations around the world, as a means of inspiration and provocation.

“Our Indigenous brothers and sisters have always known what our ancestors knew, and what modern science now tells us is true: that we are all entangled and wrapped up with life,” he says, adding that Stories for Life was an opportunity to bring together a lifetime of experiences and learning, in a package that seeks to make these concepts more accessible.

### *Learning Journeys*

Burgess suggests the Stories For Life project is a way of giving permission to people to explore new ways of looking at our world—himself included. On his podcast, the [Spaceship Earth](#) podcast, which started in 2018, he began to offer what he calls peer-supported learning journeys, for creative activists and regenerative change-makers.

“It’s a kind of action learning,” he says. “We work as a group and we explore, quite deeply, our connection with the natural world. We support each other to cultivate our creative courage to start to point our creative energies at trying to offer something to these times which is going to slow down the destruction of our living Earth and start to bring people back together.”

Out of this exploration, a collaboration between Stories for Life and Burgess’s learning platform, [Becoming Crew](#), launched a three-month learning journey offering in 2023, for people looking to work with stories in this way.

“It’s this idea of becoming [crew on Spaceship Earth](#), like stepping up in service and becoming active participants in the changes we need,” he says. The learning journey brought together a group of 40 different practitioners from nine countries who work with concepts of story and narrative in our culture, who had been on the podcast.

“We deeply explored some of the Stories for Life work, building practices to help people explore the natural world around them in much more intimate, relational ways—and use that re-entanglement with nature as a way of exploring their creativity, and how stories are evolving for them.”

He says there are two major story themes that Stories for Life is working to shift.

One centers on how people can, at the micro and macro levels, steer the stories of our relationship to the natural world away from those that frame it as a commodity resource that is separate from ourselves.

“There are millions of stories every day that people are working with, which keep perpetuating that view of the living world as resource,” he says. “You’ve only got to look at the pollution of the oceans, rivers, the air we’re breathing—the toxicity: We treat the living world as a slave to human progress.”

The other major theme with which Stories for Life is working involves shifting people’s conceptions of what is realistic and possible.

“Can we help people imagine a world where we’ve shifted the dominant story of how we measure success away from productivity, accumulation, and growth to a story of the well-being of all life?” he asks. This is a reframing of value, which measures success by the health and well-being of fellow humans and the ecosystems we are a part of.

Burgess says Stories for Life’s narratives are a way of birthing and seeding new stories that may “bring us back together and help people recognize that we’re entangled with all life... and begin to see cultural stories that completely help us, reframe what success is all about in this culture, what it is to be human, what is our relationship with the natural world.”

*By April M. Short*

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*Source:* Local Peace Economy

*Credit Line:* This article was produced by [Local Peace Economy](#).

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# Understanding Iran's Non-State Network



*John P. Ruehl - Source:  
Independent Media  
Institute*

*02-22-2024 ~ Recent months have brought sharper focus to Iran's network of non-state actors across the Middle East. While useful for military projection, Tehran has also cultivated them as political entities for decades.*

During a three-day period in January 2024, Iranian-supported militant groups [employed an anti-ship missile](#) to attack an oil tanker in the Red Sea, [launched rockets](#) into northern Israel from Lebanon, and [used a drone strike](#) to kill three U.S. soldiers in Jordan. These incidents marked the extension of attacks by Iranian-backed groups in the Middle East into the fourth straight month since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, 2023.

[Largely diplomatically isolated](#) since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, unable to challenge U.S. military power, and lacking the nuclear brinkmanship card held by North Korea, Iran has evolved its strategy of utilizing militant groups for decades.

[Iran's Quds Force](#) has provided training, funding, and weapons assistance to various militant groups in the region, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. This strategy has advanced Iran's geopolitical interests and afforded it plausible deniability, but not all of its associates march in lockstep with Tehran.

Part of Iran's approach involves transforming militant forces into powerful political actors. Hamas, [founded in 1987](#) as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, gained prominence during the First Intifada against Israeli forces. [Hamas grew closer to Iran](#) during the early 1990s after the Oslo Accords initiated an ultimately failed peace process, with Iran providing financial and weapons support [during the Second Intifada](#) from 2000 to 2005. When Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas established administrative control over the territory after [winning elections](#) the following year, and has forbade elections since.

Consolidating armed Palestinian opposition under Hamas allows Tehran to challenge Israel directly. But as a Persian and Shia Muslim country operating in a predominantly Arab and Sunni Muslim peninsula, Iran has offset its diplomatic and [cultural isolation](#) by using the Palestinian cause to [criticize](#) Arab governments growing closer to Israel in recent years. Supporting Hamas against perceived inaction from Arab leaders has been a [constant feature](#) of Iranian public messaging. Further normalization between Israel and Arab states is [now paused](#) due to the Israel-Hamas war.

While Iran denied prior knowledge of the October 7 attack, it has [expressed public support for Hamas since](#) . Hamas's leader Ismail Haniyeh has meanwhile stated that Iran provides [\\$70 million annually to the group](#) in addition to ongoing logistical and weapons assistance, largely through [smuggling operations](#) . However, relations between Iran and Hamas are largely limited to opposition to Israel and the West, and Hamas also receives financial support from [Turkey](#), [Qatar](#), and [other sources](#).

Instead, Hezbollah has emerged as Iran's most important non-state ally. Established as a Shia militia [in 1982](#) during the Lebanese Civil War, Hezbollah's significant military forces have been utilized to target Israeli and Western forces in the Middle East. Since the recent conflict's onset, Hezbollah has [launched hundreds of missiles](#) into northern Israel, but the destruction caused by the 2006 Lebanon War against Israel has made it [cautious of further escalation](#).

Hezbollah is also strategically valuable in its role as an envoy to other militant groups. Hezbollah has historically trained Hamas militants in weapons systems and military exercises [in Lebanon and Syria](#). Like Iran, Hezbollah also denied knowledge of the Hamas attack on October 7, but Iranian, Hezbollah, and Hamas officials have since [met regularly](#) to discuss strategy and cooperation.

Beyond its military role, Hezbollah has evolved into Lebanon's political powerbroker. Eight of its members were first elected to the Lebanese parliament in 1992, it joined the government for the first time [in 2005, and in 2018](#) , a Hezbollah-led coalition gained the majority of Lebanese parliamentary seats. Despite [losing its majority](#) in 2022, its lingering influence over [Lebanese politics](#) indicates that Iran remains close to a state capture-like situation, where external forces and interest groups gain systematic control over a country's decision-making process.

Additionally, [Hezbollah operates](#) clinics, schools, banks, businesses, and other entities that have shielded it from Lebanon's economic collapse and political stagnation since 2019, maintaining its "state-within-a-state" structure. In addition to weapons and logistical support, Iran is believed to [provide \\$700 million](#) to Hezbollah every year. And when sanctions diminish [Iranian assistance](#), Hezbollah also secures funding from [legal businesses](#) to [criminal enterprises](#), activities which span across the Middle East, [Africa](#), [Europe](#), [Latin America](#), and [the U.S.](#)

Iran's militant network in Syria meanwhile [surged after the civil war broke out](#) in 2011, threatening Iran's long-term ally President Bashar al-Assad. Hezbollah and Iran recruited from Syria's Shia community to form groups like the Mahdi Army and al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi Brigade, as well as some Sunni groups like [Liwa al-Quds](#), to aid the Syrian armed forces against ISIS and pro-Western forces. The [Zainabiyoun Brigade](#) and [Fatemiyoun Brigade](#), largely consisting of Shia Muslims from Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been used by Iran in Syria.

As the Syrian government's position has stabilized, Iran has attempted to integrate pro-Iranian militant groups into the Syrian armed forces and has used them to [increase Iran's political and economic influence](#) in Syria as it [competes with Russia](#) . Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, they have [launched numerous strikes](#) against U.S. and allied forces within Syria.

Pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia militant groups have similarly [increased rocket attacks](#)

against U.S. forces in Iraq since October 7. Their growing strength goes back to the U.S.-led occupation after 2003 that allowed Iran to bring groups like the Badr Organization, funded and trained in Iran, [back into Iraq](#). Iran also organized with other developing “[Special Groups](#)” of Shia militias to attack U.S. forces.

After the departure of most U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, Iranian-backed groups sought political integration into Iraq’s fragile democracy. Alongside the Badr Organization, Kata’ib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba in Iraq (both distinct from Lebanese Hezbollah), and Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) became some of Iraq’s [most prominent political and militant forces](#). In 2014, numerous pro-Iranian militant groups in Iraq were consolidated into the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) [to combat ISIS](#), playing a crucial role in liberating much of the country and elevating their status.

In Iraq’s 2018 parliamentary elections, the PMF became the second-biggest bloc and “[achieved one element of state capture](#)” by securing government funding for itself the following year. PMF members now directly or indirectly control crucial government institutions like the Interior Ministry and Supreme Court, and [December 2023 elections](#) saw the coalition win 101 out of 285 provincial council seats.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI), a [leading group of PMF militias](#), has taken the initiative in attempting to push remaining U.S. forces out of the country. Their attacks since October 7 have [intensified discussions](#) within Washington over whether to do so, while Iran denied knowledge of the drone attack [which killed three U.S. soldiers](#) in January 2024.

Washington has similarly been confronted by the Houthis since October 7. Emerging in Yemen in the early 1990s as a Shia Islamist group amid the country’s civil war, the Houthi movement [initially focused](#) on religious and cultural revivalism and combating corruption. Hezbollah [performed early outreach](#) to the Houthis before Iran increased its financial, logistical, and weapons support in the 2010s as Yemen’s civil strife escalated. Iranian support increased further after Saudi Arabia invaded Yemen to fight the Houthis in 2015 until Saudi forces pulled out of the country in defeat [in 2023](#).

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, the Houthis have fired several missiles [into southern Israel](#). But their principal distraction has been [attacks on shipping](#)

in the Red Sea in support of Hamas and the Palestinians. Acting in coordination with Iranian and Hezbollah officials, the Houthis have [completely disrupted global trade](#) and raised doubts over the U.S. ability to ensure open sea lanes.

Doing so has [enhanced their domestic support](#) and expedited Yemen's peace process, the conclusion of which would give the Houthis significant political control over the country. Iran has continued to offer support, [providing data](#) from an Iranian surveillance vessel to direct Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and [ongoing weapons shipments](#) to the group.

While the more prominent pro-Iranian militias have been mentioned, smaller cells also exist. The [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#) complements Iranian influence in Gaza. In Bahrain, the [Al-Ashtar Brigades](#) and [Saraya al-Mukhtar](#) have been responsible for numerous attacks on security and government targets in promotion of Shia interests, and Kuwait has witnessed several scandals involving the surfacing of pro-Iranian Shia militant cells [over the last decade](#).

But Iran's cultivation of militant groups and political exploitation is not without risk. The ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict has put Hamas's rule in Gaza to the test, potentially undoing decades of investment. And Iran has only varying degrees of control over all these groups. Hamas's open support for Sunni militant groups in the Syrian civil war conflicted with Iran's support for Syria's Shia-dominated government, resulting in a [temporary withdrawal of Iranian funding](#). Despite resuming in 2017, the affair highlighted Hamas's and Tehran's ideological divisions.

Iran is also alleged to have advised against the Houthis seizure of Yemen's capital [in 2014](#) and Iraqi militia leader Qais al-Khazali's attack on U.S. forces [in 2020](#). Control over Iraqi militants has similarly weakened [since 2020](#), and even Hezbollah military officials have reportedly [refused orders from Iran](#) in Syria. Yet voicing public dissatisfaction with these groups would undermine Iran's portrayal of leadership and unity against Israel and Western powers, limiting its ability to rebuke them or reign them in.

Iraq's Iran-aligned groups meanwhile have "[fierce internal rivalries](#)" that inhibit greater coordination, and Iran's interference in Iraq has resulted in significant consequences. In the 1980s, Iran's support for Iraq's Kurds [saw Iraq support Kurdish separatists](#) in Iran, which continue to attack Iran from Iraq [to this day](#).

The January 2024 exchange of fire between Iranian forces and [Balochistan militants](#) in Pakistan, followed by retaliatory strikes by Pakistan against groups in Iran, revealed the challenges Iran faces in managing militant groups both internally and with its neighbors.

Iran, however, will likely persist with its strategy, even if it obtains nuclear weapons. Its proxy groups' amassed military and political power have helped Iran challenge its enemies and inch close to state capture (or state failure) in several countries. As the U.S. continues its gradual pullout from the Middle East, there is no telling how these groups may continue to evolve—with or without Iranian assistance.

*By John P. Ruehl*

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