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The Coexistence of Governances: Recentralizing Ethics to Preserve Democracy

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Abstract: Democracy stands at a crossroads. Across the globe, we witness an unprecedented convergence of crises—ecological collapse, rampant financial criminality, systematic erosion of public discourse, and the deliberate dismantling of human solidarity. These are not isolated phenomena but symptoms of a deeper malaise: the failure of our governance structures¹ to coexist in ways that serve human dignity and collective well-being. The urgency of our moment demands nothing less than a fundamental recentralization of governance ethics, placing anti-corruption, truthful public discourse, solidarity, the valorization of human bonds, and the fight against financial crime at the heart of democratic preservation. Without this ethical recentralization of economics and politics, democracy risks becoming an empty shell—procedural forms persisting while substance evaporates.

Understanding Violence as Structure

Violence is not merely aberrant behavior but a deliberately constructed structure maintained by identifiable actors pursuing coherent civilizational projects.² This structural violence notably manifests in economic inequalities that concentrate wealth while impoverishing majorities,³ environmental destruction that treats nature as expendable resource, information manipulation that weaponizes truth itself, and corrupted democratic institutions that serve elite interests over public good. When billionaires traffic 52,000 animals for private zoos, leveraging organized crime networks and enjoying political protection from the highest authorities, we see violence as an

¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978 [1922]).

² Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007). See also: Naomi Klein & Astra Taylor, "End Times Fascism," *Laura Flanders Show*, 2023, <https://lauraflanders.org/naomi-klein-astra-taylor-interview-end-times-fascism/>.

³ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Oxfam International, "Survival of the Richest: How we must tax the super-rich now to fight inequality," *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, January 2023.



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integrated system combining extractive capitalism, transnational criminality, sophisticated propaganda, governance failure, and regulatory collapse—all working in concert.

Populist autocrats, Mafias, tech ultralibertarians and radical religious networks control essential power levers—politics, economics, information, technology, culture, law—but their strength lies beyond material resources. They excel at shaping reality itself, making their narratives credible and projects desirable. These actors have mastered rendering domination natural, brutality inevitable, and force the only measure of power.⁴ Yet recognizing violence as structure reveals a liberating truth: what is deliberately constructed can be deliberately deconstructed; what is systematically organized can be reorganized; what is imposed through power can be resisted through collective action. The violence we face is not fate but choice — their choice, which means it can become our choice to oppose it.

The Crisis of Governance Coexistence

Modern societies operate through overlapping governance systems—national governments with their bureaucracies, multilateral bodies like the European Union or United Nations, corporate structures wielding enormous economic power, civil society organizations attempting to serve public interest, and informal community networks that shape daily life. The crisis we face stems not from this multiplicity itself but from their profound failure to coexist ethically and effectively. In a context of geopolitical tensions, expansionist revisionism, or "predatory hegemonial behaviour", these governance layers have become competitive arenas for power accumulation, rent-seeking behavior, and the systematic extraction of value from both human communities and natural systems⁵.

The asymmetries between those who govern and those who are governed have reached unprecedented levels. Decision-makers increasingly operate in rarefied spheres where they never face the consequences of their choices—what Nassim Taleb powerfully terms lacking "skin in the game".⁶ When political leaders can destroy environmental commons without suffering the resulting pollution, when financial executives can crash entire economies without losing personal wealth, when technology oligarchs can reshape social reality without living in the communities they transform, governance becomes fundamentally divorced from accountability.⁷ This

⁴ Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* (London: Verso, 2021). See also: Andreas Malm, "How to Blow Up a Pipeline — Interview," *New York Times Magazine*, January 14, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/01/14/magazine/andreas-malm-interview>.

⁵ Walt, Stephen M. "The Predatory Hegemon." *Foreign Affairs*, Februar 3, 2026. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/predatory-hegemon-walt>.

⁶ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life* (New York: Random House, 2018).

⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, research reports on corruption and democratic



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decoupling from policy to reality breeds corruption not merely as individual malfeasance but as systemic design feature—a governance architecture that rewards extraction and punishes responsibility.

Recentralizing Ethical Governance

Democratic preservation requires recentralizing governance ethics—not a return to authoritarian centralization of power, but rather a deliberate refocusing of all governance layers around core ethical imperatives that serve collective flourishing. This recentralization must be built on five foundational pillars that work together as an integrated whole:

First, engaged anti-corruption measures recognizing corruption as violence against collective possibility and democratic legitimacy.⁸ Corruption is not merely the illegal exchange of favors but the systematic privatization of public goods, the monetization of access to power, and the transformation of governance into a marketplace where influence becomes the primary commodity.⁹ Fighting corruption demands transparent decision-making processes that expose how power operates, robust protection for whistleblowers who risk everything to reveal malfeasance, and most critically, genuine consequences for those who abuse public trust¹⁰. The impunity enjoyed by corrupt elites must end, replaced by accountability structures with real teeth.¹¹

Second, restoring truthful public discourse as a non-negotiable democratic imperative.¹² We inhabit an age of informational warfare where narrative manipulation has become a primary tool of domination and control. Social media algorithms amplify outrage and division for profit, state and non-state actors deploy sophisticated disinformation campaigns, and the very concept of

governance, 2020–2024. See also: Tom Carothers, Carnegie Europe, on the future of democracy support (November 2025); Olivia Lazard, "The New Geopolitics of the Anthropocene," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023; Olivia Lazard & Richard Youngs, "The EU and Climate Security: Toward Ecological Diplomacy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021.

⁸ On corruption as a form of structural violence against democratic legitimacy, see: Johann Graf Lambsdorff, *The Institutional Economics of Corruption and Reform: Theory, Evidence and Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Donatella della Porta & Alberto Vannucci, *Corrupt Exchanges: Actors, Resources, and Mechanisms of Political Corruption* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999).

⁹ Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power, and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Martin Kreutner (ed.), *The Anatomy of Corruption: From Cultural Roots to Good Governance* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2009).

¹¹ Paul Heywood (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Political Corruption* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

¹² Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).



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shared truth faces existential threat. Democracy requires reclaiming information as commons—investing substantially in independent journalism, developing media literacy as a fundamental civic skill, regulating platform accountability without enabling state censorship, and creating protected spaces where citizens can deliberate based on verifiable facts rather than manufactured realities designed to manipulate them.¹³

Third, systematic valorization of active fraternity as both principle and practice of democratic life.¹⁴ Recent decades of governance have celebrated individualism, competition, and market logic, systematically corroding social bonds necessary for democratic flourishing. Communities atomize, trust erodes, collective action becomes difficult. Recentralizing solidarity means recognizing interdependence as fundamental—building mutual aid networks that support vulnerable members, supporting cooperative economic structures that distribute power equitably, protecting collective bargaining rights that give workers genuine voice, and designing policies that strengthen rather than fracture community ties. Solidarity is not nostalgia but necessity.¹⁵

Fourth, preserving human connections against forces of alienation.¹⁶ Modern governance structures manifest violence through separating people: precarious employment destroying work-life balance and community engagement, alienating urban planning eliminating public space, technology mediating every interaction and commodifying relationships, and economic pressures forcing migration and displacement.¹⁷ Democratic governance must actively protect spaces for authentic human encounter—public squares where people gather, community centers fostering local bonds, participatory forums enabling democratic voice, cultural institutions preserving shared heritage, and critically, the time necessary for meaningful civic participation.

¹³ See EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory), <https://edmo.eu/>; UNESCO initiative to establish information integrity as a Global Public Good; EU Free Media Toolkit; Deutsche Welle Academy; Laura Moore, *The State of Media Development Report 2025*; *Media Viability Manifesto*.

¹⁴ Naomi Klein, *Doppelgänger: A Trip into the Mirror World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023). On counter-narrative tactics, see also: Brian Martin, "Tactics for Challenging Dominant Narratives on Climate Change," *Journal of Public Narratives*, 2024, <https://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/24jpn.pdf>.

¹⁵ Charles Rojzman, *La Thérapie Sociale: Pour soigner la coopération* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020). On the real social value of labour: New Economics Foundation, "A Bit Rich," 2009, <https://neweconomics.org/2009/12/a-bit-rich/>.

¹⁶ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

¹⁷ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994 [1939]). See also: "Civilizing Process," *ScienceDirect Topics in Social Sciences*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/civilizing-process>.



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Fifth, enhanced prosecution of financial criminality as structural violence with devastating consequences.¹⁸ Money laundering, tax evasion, fraud, and predatory practices undermine democratic foundations¹⁹. When the wealthy hide trillions offshore while public services collapse, when corporations externalize environmental costs while privatizing profits, when institutions gamble with public savings without bearing risk, governance becomes fiction²⁰. Fighting financial crime demands international cooperation, elite accountability, and corporate tax justice. The World Bank's StAR Initiative shows that recovering stolen assets requires cross-border intelligence sharing and closing the secrecy loopholes—exposed by the Panama and Pandora Papers—that wealthy nations provide to kleptocrats^{21,22}. Iceland's post-2008 banker prosecutions demonstrate that holding financial elites accountable is essential, not optional²³.

Creating New Collective Narratives

Transforming governance requires more than institutional reform—it demands new collective narratives, "egregors" in their original sense: thought-forms born from convergent intention toward shared objectives.²⁴ These are concrete practices transforming reality where narratives, support structures, and ground-level action converge.

Dominant violence actors have mastered narrative construction, naturalizing inequality, valorizing extraction, and presenting alternatives as impossible. In countering, we must develop and leverage actionable narratives with concrete projections and federated capacity. We must

¹⁸ Tax Justice Network, "Taxation as Climate Reparations: Who Should Pay for the Crisis?", November 2025, <https://taxjustice.net/2025/11/12/taxation-as-climate-reparations-who-shouldpay-for-the-crisis/>; Oxfam International, "Survival of the Richest," January 2023; World Bank StAR Initiative on asset recovery and cross-border intelligence sharing.

¹⁹ Christensen, J., & Murphy, R. (2004). "The Social Irresponsibility of Corporate Tax Avoidance: Taking CSR to the Bottom Line." *Development*, 47(3), 37–44.

²⁰ Alstadsæter, A., Johannesen, N., & Zucman, G. (2019). "Tax Evasion and Inequality." *American Economic Review*, 109(6), 2073–2103.

²¹ World Bank & UNODC (2007). *Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative: Challenges, Opportunities, and Action Plan*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://star.worldbank.org>.

²² International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) (2016). *The Panama Papers: Exposing the Rogue Offshore Finance Industry*. Washington: ICIJ & ICIJ (2021). *Pandora Papers: An Offshore Data Tsunami*. Washington: ICIJ.

²³ Gylfason, T. (2018). *Ten Years After: Iceland's Unfinished Business*. Center for Financial Stability. Available at: https://centerforfinancialstability.org/iceland/gylfason_paper.pdf.

²⁴ Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). On the concept of egregors as collective thought-forms with transformative civic potential, see also Joel Hoegl, "Deep Structure of Intercultural Conflict," NSM Blog, under "Governance."



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create common playgrounds where diverse actors can project together, cooperate with confidence in collective strength.

Indigenous thinking offers crucial insights.²⁵ "Good stories" restore connections, value complexity, recognize interdependencies; "bad stories" simplify, impose singular visions, sever relationships. Connecting social violence to violence against Earth becomes indispensable — degradation of ecosystems and human communities stems from identical extractive logic.

From Cognitive Dissonance to Collective Action

We face a paradox: scientific models predict 70% of Earth's land uninhabitable at four degrees warming,²⁶ yet we cannot psychologically integrate this. Our destructive capacity has outpaced our emotional capacity to measure its scope. Centuries of apocalyptic predictions created saturation rendering new alerts inaudible.²⁷ This cognitive dissonance, combined with depoliticizing eco-anxiety,²⁸ threatens paralysis precisely when action is most urgent.

Breaking this requires concrete experiences of possibility. When innovators demonstrate alternatives, when communities defend commons, when institutions deliver justice—these stories restore belief in collective agency. Hope is born from tangible realizations; systemic change emerges from micro-local interventions scaling through replication rather than centralized imposition. Dark Matter Labs offers two compelling proof-of-concepts that systemic change can emerge from micro-local institutional invention. In Glasgow, their TreesAI platform reframes urban forests as financial infrastructure—making trees investable alongside roads and sewers, and letting the city's own hydrology generate its economic logic. In Daegu, their Re:Permissioning initiative hands communities direct governance over vacant urban land through lightweight digital tools, bypassing centralized approval entirely. Both demonstrate the same principle: collective agency is not declared from above but grown from the ground up, and once proven, it replicates.

²⁵ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2020); Tyson Yunkaporta, *Right Story, Wrong Story: Adventures in Indigenous Thinking* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2023). See also: Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

²⁶ James Hansen et al., "Global warming in the pipeline," *Oxford Open Climate Change*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023. See also: Xu, C. et al., "Future of the human climate niche," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(21), 2020, pp. 11350–11355.

²⁷ Iberdrola Foundation, "What is Eco-anxiety? Definition, Symptoms and How to Cope With It," *Social Commitment*, 2024, <https://www.iberdrola.com/social-commitment/what-is-ecoanxiety/>; James Dyke et al., "Climate scientists: concept of net zero is a dangerous trap," *The Conversation*, April 22, 2021.

²⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).



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The Path Forward

Preserving democracy requires recognizing that governance coexistence must be deliberately constructed around ethical foundations. The violence confronting us — ecological, economic, social, political—has been demonstrated before, is organized and purposeful, meaning it can be disorganized and opposed. We possess the knowledge and technical solutions; what we lack is organized collective will and spaces for collective transformation.

Creating egregors — deliberately, methodically, obstinately — means fabricating these spaces. It means refusing fatalism, powerlessness, and atomization. It means building sparks of cooperation, solidarity, and imagination within structural violence. These islands can grow, connect, become archipelagos of resistance and continents of possibility.

The urgency is material, political, and existential. Recentralizing governance ethics around anti-corruption, truthful discourse, solidarity, human connection, and fighting financial criminality is not utopian but practical necessity for democratic survival. The question is not whether these transformations are possible but whether we possess the courage and clarity to pursue them.

Democracy's preservation depends on governance systems learning to coexist ethically, serving the common good rather than private accumulation. This requires confronting uncomfortable truths about power, accepting that transformation involves conflictuality, and committing to the patient work of building alternative institutions and narratives. The actors of violence have demonstrated remarkable consistency and patience in advancing their projects; defending democracy demands nothing less from those who believe in human dignity, ecological integrity, and collective flourishing. The choice is stark: recentralize ethics in governance or watch democracy dissolve into the violence it can no longer contain.



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