

January 16, 2024



Future Trends

Brought to you by



Institute for
Economics
& Peace



Alliance for
Peacebuilding

Introducing another week of Future Trends — *tracking current global news stories that provide insight into the future.*

Welcome to this week's Future Trends—the must-read weekly briefing covering the changing face of global politics, economics, development, social factors, and conflict.

Here's what you need to know this week:

- 2024 is the biggest election year in history
- Ecuador president says country is at war as gangs hold prison staff hostage
- Maldives upgrades ties with China amid pivot from India
- US to coordinate defence supply chains with Indo-Pacific partners
- Call to overturn false fraud convictions of 900 UK postal workers

POLITICS

2024 is the biggest election year in history - 60% of world's population goes to elections. Over [four billion people across more than 40 countries](#) will go to the polls this year, including elections in the US, India, Indonesia, Russia, the UK, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Mexico, South Africa and the European Union.

Somaliland's defense minister resigns over deal to give Ethiopia access to coastline. The agreement triggered protests across Somaliland, with citizens divided over [the deal](#). Some see potential economic benefits. Others fear compromising their sovereignty.

Myanmar rebel alliance agrees to ceasefire with ruling military. Myanmar's military has reached a [ceasefire agreement](#) with an alliance of ethnic minority guerilla groups it has been battling in the country's north-east, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

Taiwan voters rebuff China in election win for independence-seeking party. Taiwanese voters voted the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP)

presidential candidate, [Lai Ching-te](#), into power, strongly rejecting Chinese pressure to spurn him, as China said it would not give up on achieving "reunification".

Nauru cuts diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favour of China. Nauru's government said it would "no longer recognise Taiwan as a separate country but rather as an inalienable part of China's territory," leaving [only 11 countries with diplomatic ties to Taipei](#).

CONFLICT

Ecuador president says country is at war as gangs hold prison staff hostage. President Noboa said his [country was "at war" with drug gangs](#) who are holding more than 130 prison guards and other staff hostage, after also briefly capturing a TV station live on air, in a surge of violence that has left city streets deserted.

Ukraine producing more drones than state can purchase. Ukrainian manufacturers have ramped up output of [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles](#) to the extent that Kyiv's current budgets are not sufficient to buy everything being produced, Ukraine's technology minister said.

PNG capital hit by arson, looting as police strike over missing pay. Shops and businesses in Port Moresby were attacked and set on fire and people had been killed, the governor said, after [police went on strike](#) over pay.

Drug trade violence rises in some of Latin America's safest countries. [Crime rates have risen sharply](#) in many South American countries in the past year via kidnappings, extortion, murder and gang related violence. Ecuador is in a state of emergency, Chile's gang violence is exploding and Costa Rica's homicide rate jumped by 50% in 2023.

Israel-Hamas war at 100 days: the conflict by numbers. [Number](#) of Palestinians killed in Gaza: 23,708. Number of people killed in Israel: Over 1,300. Number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank: 347.

UN sets December deadline for its peacekeepers in Congo to withdraw. The [UN peacekeeping mission in Congo](#) will complete its withdrawal by the end of 2024 after the government asked them to leave. The government has also directed an East African regional force, deployed last year to help end the fighting, to leave the country.

ECONOMICS

Maldives upgrades ties with China amid pivot from India. China and the Maldives upgraded their relationship during newly elected [President Muizzu's first state visit to Beijing](#), following a campaign in which he cast China's regional rival India as a threat to its sovereignty. Maldives has asked India to remove the small number of soldiers they have in the country.

World Bank predicts global economy will slow for a third straight year. The World Bank forecast [the world economy will expand just 2.4% this year](#), down from 2.6% growth in 2023, 3% in 2022 and 6.2% in 2021, reflecting the robust recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020.

China regulator vows regulation 'with teeth and thorns' to defuse financial risk. China's financial regulator plans to increase punishment for financial crimes and speed up the time it takes to prosecute them using regulation it calls "with teeth and thorns", which aims to quickly [identify problems before they grow into a regional, or systemic risk](#).

US approves first Bitcoin ETFs. The Securities and Exchange Commission approved the [first bitcoin exchange-traded funds](#) (ETF) in the US, a historic move for investors looking for exposure to the world's largest digital asset.

Argentina's annual inflation hits 211%, highest in 32 years. The data reflects the [strong impact of a series of shock measures](#), including a 50% devaluation of the nation's currency, implemented by right-wing President Javier Milei in hopes of bringing the country's roaring inflation under control.

DEVELOPMENT

US to coordinate defence supply chains with Indo-Pacific partners. The US will explore a [new multilateral defence industry arrangement](#) in the Indo-Pacific to prepare for possible conflicts in the region, according to the Pentagon's new strategy document.

Morocco wins vote to lead the UN Human Rights Council. This comes after a heated showdown with South Africa, which said [Morocco's human rights record made it unfit](#) to preside over the body. The vote marks a rare public dispute in the African group whose turn it was to lead the 47-member council.

Major breakthrough in cost and efficiency of solar cells. Perovskite is a material that can absorb light very efficiently, while silicon is a material that can maintain its performance for a long time. By stacking them together, researchers have achieved [record-breaking efficiency levels](#), surpassing previous limits of single-material solar cells.

Philippines to develop islands in South China Sea. Manila's military chief Brawner said it will develop [islands in the South China Sea](#) that it considers part of its territory to make them more habitable for troops, amid heightened tensions between the Philippines and China.

US carbon emissions fell in 2023 as coal use tumbled to new lows. America's greenhouse gas emissions fell 1.9% in 2023, in large part because the burning of coal to produce electricity plummeted to its lowest level in half a century. US [emissions have now fallen 17.2%](#) since 2005.

SOCIAL

Bid to overturn fraud convictions of 900 UK postal workers. Britain's Prime Minister Sunak said he will introduce measures to overturn the convictions of more than 900 post office branch managers who were [wrongly accused](#) of theft or fraud between 1999-2015 because of a faulty computer system.

The largest great ape to ever live went extinct because of climate change. An [ancient species](#) of 3 metre high apes was likely driven to extinction hundreds of thousands of years ago when climate change put their favourite fruits out of reach during dry seasons.

Remote workers less likely to receive promotions. Over the past year, [remote workers were promoted 31% less](#) frequently than people who worked in an office, either

full-time or on a hybrid basis, according to an analysis of two million white-collar workers.

Cluster of lost cities in Ecuadorian Amazon that lasted 1,000 years has been mapped. The settlements were occupied by the [Upano people](#) between around 500 B.C. and 300 to 600 AD, around the same period as the Roman Empire, and consisted of farming with drainage and an elaborate road network.

North Korea is set to allow the first tourist visit in about four years. A group of [Russian tourists](#) is expected to enter the country in February for a trip that includes time in the capital Pyongyang and a ski resort, according to a major travel agency for North Korea.

PEACEBUILDING

[Rotary](#) and the [United Nations Environment Program](#) have launched a new collaboration, [Community Action for Fresh Water](#). The program encourages Rotary clubs to [clean up, protect, and monitor their local waterways](#) by organizing river cleanup days, raising awareness about the importance of healthy waterways, conducting water quality tests, and reporting their findings. This partnership builds on a pilot program, *Adopt a River for Sustainable Development*, begun in 2020 by UNEP and Rotary District 9212 (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan) as well as the work Rotary and Rotaract clubs around the world have done independently to clean up freshwater ecosystems.

US neurosurgeon Dr. Ali Rezai has begun to use ultrasound to try to delay the progression of Alzheimer's disease and to employ a brain implant to fight addiction, so far for small numbers of patients. He has received FDA approval to attempt both new treatments. Dr. Rezai, executive director of the Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute in Morgantown, West Virginia, was among the first to implant a pacemaker-type device in the brain which stopped uncontrollable movements suffered by Parkinson's patients, according to [CBS' 60 Minutes](#).

The Binational School of Psychotherapy trains Jewish Israeli, Arab Israeli and Palestinian postgraduate students to care for traumatized children. The Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Arab Israeli co-directors launched the program about seven years ago, and even during the current war, [they are continuing it remotely](#) and working within their communities to provide group intervention, parent guidance and some crisis intervention.

The Blue Team, a group of ten young artists near Aleppo, Syria, are using their art as a self-healing practice and a form of resilience and resistance. As one of the young artists explained, “Art is an instrument of peace amid the flames of war. It may not extinguish the burning fire, but it relieves the pain of the wound.” The [Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding](#) highlighted their work in an article that is part of a series on [*Local Voices at a Crossroads*](#). The series emerged from a collaboration with the [Political Settlements Research Programme, based at the University of Edinburgh](#).