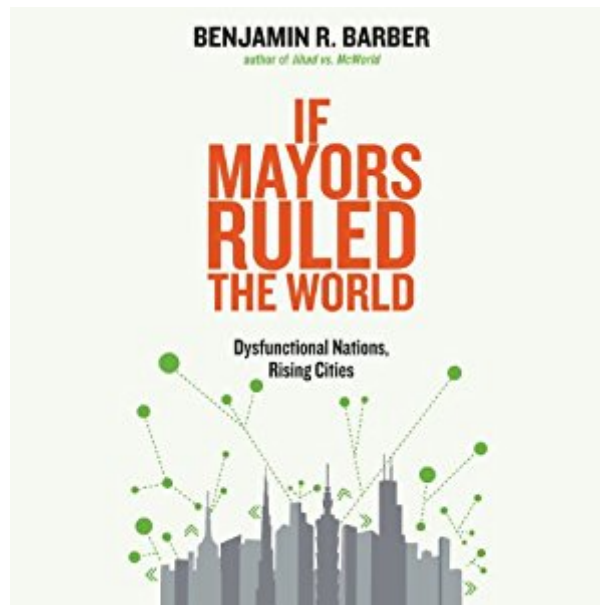


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# If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities



## Synopsis

In the face of the most perilous challenges of our time—climate change, terrorism, poverty, and trafficking of drugs, guns, and people—the nations of the world seem paralyzed. The problems are too big, too interdependent, too divisive for the nation-state. Is the nation-state, once democracy's best hope, today democratically dysfunctional? Obsolete? The answer, says Benjamin Barber in this highly provocative and original book, is yes. Cities and the mayors who run them can do and are doing a better job. Barber cites the unique qualities cities worldwide share: Pragmatism, civic trust, participation, indifference to borders and sovereignty, and a democratic penchant for networking, creativity, innovation, and cooperation. He demonstrates how city mayors, singly and jointly, are responding to transnational problems more effectively than nation-states mired in ideological infighting and sovereign rivalries. Featuring profiles of a dozen mayors around the world—courageous, eccentric, or both at once—*If Mayors Ruled the World* presents a compelling new vision of governance for the coming century. Barber makes a persuasive case that the city is democracy's best hope in a globalizing world, and great mayors are already proving that this is so.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Benjamin Barber hits upon a very interesting and potentially revolutionary idea in his latest book, "If Mayors Ruled the World." Barber argues that cities seem to provide better governance than most national governance and therefore we should look more to mayors to solve governance challenges in the future. Unfortunately, I don't think this book makes his case all that well. Upon first reading the

book, it's clear Barber is enthusiastic about his idea. In fact, if anything, he's so enthusiastic that he quickly becomes melodramatic. The book is filled with platitudes and unmeasured praise for cities with hardly any nuance mixed in (e.g., "cities can save the world!", "cities can be occupied and sacked, but their liberties cannot be annulled as long as their citizens breathe.", etc.). The problem is that Barber rushes through his argument with such platitudes rather than providing careful and reasoned arguments and addressing even basic counterarguments. For example, one of the reasons why nation-states seem unable to act is because they have to deal with a much more diverse set of interests over a larger territory and population than most mayors. This becomes clear when Barber praises Bloomberg and other mayors for liberal policies, and then lambasts anybody who disagrees (for the record, I agree with much of Bloomberg's policies and politics, but also try to respect that people with whom I disagree might have legitimate reasons for doing so). You'll find few solutions for how to deal with mayors who engage in corruption or violate the rights of their citizens. Barber is also quite selective in his use of evidence.

You cannot act an idea...but an idea can motivate a great deal of action. Dr. Barber has shed light on a Big Idea - Interdependence - which he titled a yearly event founded by himself and others in the wake of 9/11: Interdependence Day.[...] Now he takes another step in asking an essential question in his new work, *If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*, and that question is whether or not the nation/state is obsolete and therefore requiring our global society to pay attention to a new way of thinking, speaking and doing when it comes to global governance. Barber argues that the nation/state paradigm IS obsolete. Not only are new ways of addressing its demise emerging in accordance within the "productive struggle" of democracy throughout the world but also as a result of city-based, "glocal", collaboration among mega cities. Cities that, no matter your allegiance, bias or loyalties (all with distinct borders of one kind or another) have no time to be confused about the "rules" of nation/states because in cities sewers need to run, fires need to be put out, traffic jams need to be unclogged and people need to feel safe in an increasingly complex and insecure world and any number of problems need to be solved "on-the-spot" as they do present themselves in myriad ways that demand immediate resolution. Nation/states can hem and haw; posture and pose, emit a lot of sound and fury signifying either nothing or a great deal of confusion...or most deadly...nurture a culture of fear, threat and attack throughout the land. Cities have to DEAL with life on life's terms and their mayors do too.

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