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DIGITAL DEMOCRACY FROM BELOW

RESISTING AI AND
TECHNO-SOLUTIONISM

COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

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Resisting AI and Techno-solutionism

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IS CELESTIAL RESISTANCE POSSIBLE?

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What was originally a laughable idea—deploying data centers in space—appears to be a less ludicrous proposition these days. Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are both intent on pursuing the development of technology for orbital data centers through their companies SpaceX and Blue Origin, respectively.¹ Google, too, has launched its Project Suncatcher.² These ventures seek to capitalize on the perceived limitlessness of the heavens to drive increasingly zealous AI ambitions.

Why is space so attractive to AI companies and their data infrastructure needs? For one, the prospect of free and unlimited solar power is a huge draw, especially as the energy requirements of data centers continue to raise concerns.³ In its January 2026 filing to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, SpaceX emphasized the “transformative” potential of “directly harnessing near-constant solar power with little operating or maintenance cost”. It also stressed the environmental advantages of these satellites over terrestrial sites.⁴

The passive cooling that space provides is also appealing given how much heat is generated by data centers, though experts argue that it would be difficult for heat to dissipate in a vacuum like space. As well, developers argue that the apparent abundance of space in orbit means that the physical constraints of terrestrial builds are no longer relevant. More pertinently perhaps, space-based data centers might have the escape velocity to evade the local politics that attend construction projects and the growing resistance to data centers here on Earth.

Could space be the next frontier for data center development? While experts have serious doubts about the feasibility of these plans, the prospect raises hard questions about the possibilities for social organizing and resistance to AI infrastructure projects. Is celestial resistance possible?

Tech companies are facing some of their strongest headwinds yet as broad-based resistance to data centers has begun to gain traction globally. In the U.S, research group Data Center Watch has mapped \$156 billion of blocked or stalled investments across 48 projects as a result of coordinated local opposition in 2025.⁵ This public pushback is translating into a new wave of political and legal resistance including a proposed federal moratorium advanced by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the potential elimination of lucrative tax breaks in

1 Micah Maidenberger and Merrill Sherman, “Data Centers in Space: A Pipe Dream, or AI’s Next Big Thing?” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/data-centers-in-space-a-pipe-dream-or-ais-next-big-thing-c13bb184/>.

2 Travis Beals, “Exploring a space-based, scalable AI infrastructure system design,” *Google Research*, November 4, 2025, <https://research.google/blog/exploring-a-space-based-scalable-ai-infrastructure-system-design/>.

3 Ketan Joshi, *The AI Climate Hoax: Behind the Curtain of How Big Tech Greenwashes Impacts* (Friends of the Earth, 2026).

4 Jeff Foust, “SpaceX Files Plans for Million-Satellite Orbital Data Center Constellation,” *SpaceNews*, January 31, 2026, <https://spacenews.com/spacex-files-plans-for-million-satellite-orbital-data-center-constellation/>.

5 Lydia DePillis, “Local Opposition Is Slowing A.I. Data Centers. Wall Street Has Noticed,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/26/business/economy/ai-data-centers-construction-local-opposition.html>.



Virginia (the data center capital of the world), and restrictions on permitting across the country. Outside the U.S., similar movements have emerged in Chile, Ireland, and Mexico to contest the energy and environmental impacts of these projects.⁶

For the U.S, the coalition-based objection to data centers contrasts sharply with a wider political climate marked by apathy and, in some cases, enmity. What marks these efforts as especially unusual is their frequently cross-cutting nature—an expression of shared democratic will many argue is rooted in the material nature of data centers. Unlike less tangible forms of digital incursion (surveillance, facial recognition, digital identity and the like), data centers have palpable impacts that communities directly experience: rising utility bills, negative consequences on property values, and the noxious effects of air, noise, and water pollution. Meanwhile promises of a job boom have failed to manifest, leaving little to show for the material fallout of data center operations. This visceral experience has made the calculus of the generative AI boom concrete.

Though not all of this resistance can be read through the lens of AI skepticism, anti-AI sentiment is growing. Community refusal is beginning to extend beyond the proximate impacts of data center development, and towards a consideration of the applications they power. Communities are starting to connect their local data centers to the sprawling ecosystems that these tools are embedded within. When Ypsilanti Township in Michigan says ‘no’ to hosting a data center that will power nuclear research at Los Alamos,⁷ they are spurning more than just the bad economic or environmental deal—they are also surfacing moral, ethical and even existential concerns.

Can these social justice movements then be sustained when the energy needs of space-based data centers no longer hurt our utility bills in the same way as their terrestrial counterparts? Will earthly publics become indifferent to infrastructural politics once data centers are put into orbit? While environmental and scientific groups have started to petition the FCC to halt the processing of orbital data center applications on the grounds that the agency must first conduct a thorough environmental review before moving forward with licenses,⁸ the apparent disappearance of the “local” continues to pose pressing questions of the social organizing behind ongoing resistance movements. And resistance movements need to find answers: the desire for space-based data centers is evocative of a wider shift in power—one that relocates agency away from people and toward the tech sector.

Whether or not data centers make it to space, the possibility itself exposes the limitations of resistance hinged only on local material experience. A wider and deeper movement is needed to ensure local data center resistance does not merely transfer harm to communities less equipped to protest. The current moment gives vital impetus to the possibilities for a critical consciousness to take root, and ensure that, if need be, mobilization from below can reach the heights of orbit.⁹

6 Diego Mendoza, “Google Bows to Pressure on Data Center in Chile,” *Semafor*, September 17, 2024, <https://www.semafor.com/article/09/17/2024/google-bows-to-pressure-in-chile>; Paul Mozur et al., “From Mexico to Ireland, Fury Mounts Over a Global A.I. Frenzy,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/20/technology/ai-data-center-backlash-mexico-ireland.html>; Pablo Medina Uribe et al., “Many Latin Americans Living Near Data Centers Don’t Feel Welcome in the Future,” *Tech Policy Press*, September 12, 2025, <https://techpolicy.press/many-latin-americans-living-near-data-centers-do-not-feel-welcome-in-the-future>.

7 Matthew Gault, “Community Votes to Deny Water to Nuclear Weapons Data Center,” *404 Media*, April 23, 2026, <https://www.404media.co/community-votes-to-deny-water-to-nuclear-weapons-data-center/>.

8 Jason Rainbow, “Environmental Groups Urge FCC to Pause Orbital Data Center Applications,” *Space News*, July 9, 2026, <https://spacenews.com/environmental-groups-urge-fcc-pause-on-orbital-data-center-constellations/>.

9 An earlier version of this article was published as: Quito Tsui and Aaron Martin, “The Earthly Limits of Data Centre Resistance,” *Internet Policy Review*, June 10, 2026, <https://policyreview.info/articles/news/data-centre-resistance/2102>.