Transponder

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No.3 Resilience

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About The Transponder

The Transponder is the Bertelsmann Foundation's biannual publication focusing on issues that impact the transatlantic relationship. The magazine features short-form and long-form articles, interviews, infographics and photo essays that explore topics related to democracy, technology and geopolitics through a transatlantic lens.

About the Bertelsmann Foundation

The Bertelsmann Foundation (North America), Inc., established in 2008, was created to promote and strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Through research, analysis, forums, audiovisual and multimedia content, we seek to educate and engage audiences on the most pressing economic, political and social challenges facing the United States and Europe. Based in Washington, DC, we are an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank and the U.S. branch of the Germany-based Bertelsmann Stiftung.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Resilience

At the close of this year, we reflect on the numerous challenges that have buffeted the transatlantic community. A war in Europe, a global energy crisis, and continued strains on economic and democratic systems have forced the United States and European Union to evaluate their strategic partnerships. Again and again, the transatlantic relationship has proved not only beneficial, but also necessary, for the future of democracy and global order.

But in the face of new and old challenges, what does it mean for the transatlantic community to be resilient? In this third issue of the Transponder Magazine, we present a collection of written and visual works that seek to answer this question.

Cyber threats, climate change, and Russian and Chinese aggression have posed new hurdles to the security of the community. Such hurdles have required unique and timely solutions, necessitating close cooperation among transatlantic partners. Simultaneously, countries are forced to grapple with much older, structural, domestic problems. How can liberal societies be bastions of democracy when they do not model inclusivity and liberalism at home?

To be resilient, the transatlantic community must rise and overcome all these challenges. They must establish new systems to confront current (and future) obstacles, while still facing problems arising from past mistakes. This is no easy feat, but it can be done through cooperation and innovation.

In the following pages, I hope you find that this message becomes clear.

Rylie Munn
Editor-in-Chief

Transponder

Diary *of* War

Vesna is 16 and has never left her country—though her consumption of American pop culture gives her words and thoughts a cosmopolitan flair. Oleksandr is about to turn 20—but he never imagined he'd do so under the sound of shelling and air raid sirens.

This is a story—based on the diary entries of and interviews with those who have survived the war in different parts of Ukraine—chronicling the swift and brutal destruction of people's lives and the country they call home. It is an ongoing story of bombs and silence, fire and snow, family and loss. It's a story they want to share with people who witnessed the war through TV screens and on news apps. It's a story chronicling the first month of a war that changed everything.

Day two

02.25.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

I've never been to a church that looked quite like this. Then again, everything around me looks, sounds and smells unlike anything I've ever experienced—and I've spent most of my life in this city.

We're in an unfinished basement. The floor is made of those boards made of leftover scraps of wood. They still smell like wood, too. I like the smell. There are a few blue chairs—the ones you'd expect in an office or a dentist's waiting room. There are mattresses, too, plastic bags with stuff spilling over their edges, and a bunch of coats. People spent the night here. Parents and teenagers now play board games and kids do somersaults on the mattresses.

I would have expected more from a church. More light, more colours. More silence, too. People are talking in hushed voices that make the hair on my arms stand up. I wish I could hear what they're saying. Do they know anything about what's going on? Do they have plans?

I'm just outside of the room, whispering to my friend. She's evangelical, and has known this church from before the war. What a crazy thing to say, "before the war." The war started years ago when I was in kindergarten. We live just 10 kilometers from Donetsk, and my father died defending it in 2015. We've all felt the tension for so long, but this time, it feels different. Even closer than before. Bigger.

Anyway, my friend's mum insisted they come here, but she forgot her phone charger and sent me a message on Snapchat. My mother insisted on staying in our flat, not wanting to show fear after Putin's war declaration. Still, I wasn't allowed to leave the house. I hope to sneak back in before she notices.

I know I'm doing something stupid. The streets are almost empty—anyone I pass has their eyes cast downward, hurrying along with some kind of controlled panic surrounding them like a bull-headed aura. The cars that pass are cramped with people and suitcases. But they drive slowly, and not one honks at the stray dogs running around.

I shouldn't walk these streets alone, but it's just one block. One there, one back. Feeling courageous, I Snap a quick picture and my phone rings. My friend is letting his dog out on the street east of the city. I guess he's as stupid as I am. The sound of sirens on his side of the line sings in canon with the ones surrounding me. Then, a whistle, a thunderous boom and the sound of shattering glass. It's so loud I drop my phone.

The phone is just there, on the ground next to my feet. So close to me. The line is still open—I can see the seconds adding to our call time on the screen. I can't move. I just can't pick it up. And then suddenly, Mom's next to me. She sweeps the phone off the ground and mumbles: "Who's this?"

"It's Sacha," I hear through the phone, 'I'm okay." I start to cry.

Day three

02.26.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

I wake up and—without a minute wasted—my mum and I pack up our stuff. We're leaving.

Aside from our emergency backpacks, I take my laptop to keep myself entertained and write this very diary. My mum's packing food, water and other supplies that I gladly carry on my shoulders.

We leave our lights on—there are looters in the area—and lock the door. It takes us an hour to reach my grandparents' country house on foot.

Car after car passes us. People are armed—I think they're from the territorial defense of Zaporizhzhia. They guard crucial infrastructure and buildings that might be targeted.

I don't film them or share the news with my friends—Russian troops might use these videos to find out when our troops are moving and where to.

The streets are empty. Each and every business is closed. Public transport has stopped bringing people to their destinations. It's eerie—the silence only interrupted by the wind.

Once we reach the country house, we make a deal with my grandparents. We stay together.

Tonight, I only hear distant explosions.

Day five

02.28.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

We're completely surrounded. From Donetsk in the east, tanks have crept up on us. From the Azov Sea, warships keep us in their crosshairs. It's weird how vehicles can be so slow yet so effective. We have nowhere to go. Even the sky is our enemy now.

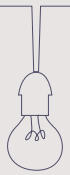
My older brother, Aleksey, used to love Pocahontas when we were kids. It used to be his big secret—apparently, it's not a very manly movie. But who cares about any of that now, right? "Steady as the beating drum," they sing in the movie's opening scene. Artillery hits my city now, steady as a beating drum. It's a rhythm that has taken over my life, reverberating in my bones, taking over my heartbeat.

My brother and our neighbor checked the roof of our building for Russian tags yesterday. They used to fight all the time, but now they're a team. On Telegram, we had read that undercover saboteurs earmark buildings with signs for fighter jets to zone in on the targets. I don't know if I should believe that or if the Russians are just bombing anything they feel like. My brother didn't find any tags, but no one feels safe anyway.

The constant bombardments have shaken my mother, too. We spend most of our time in the common corridor of our building, hoping it'll protect us from direct hits. The shelters are too far away. We have all brought food, blankets and emergency bags into the hallway. There are at least 20 of us here, a few cats and many children. I've never seen them this quiet.

As surreal as it sounds, I'm grounded for leaving the house last Friday. I guess Mum wants to keep some sense of normalcy, even though she hasn't yelled at me for leaving. She's taken away my phone and I'm not allowed to leave her side—though I don't know why I'd do that. The internet has been down most of the day anyway, and I have little else than a book to keep me busy while we shelter. It's about magic and demons—but for the first time, I'm unable to escape the world around me. I put down the book and stare at the ceiling.

A light bulb hangs there, unadorned. Its yellow light reveals the tiredness on everyone's face and casts shadows on the cold, humid walls. Then, the light goes out. No one screams like they do in the movies. There's just one collective sigh.



Day seven

03.02.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

We received a message from the mayor to turn off all heaters, refrigerators, kettles—anything electrical to save resources. From the window of our flat, I can see that the traffic lights are dark, too. Before the water got cut off, we filled up a third of our bathtub. Then, the tap sputtered and gurgled with a heartbreaking sound. Every two hours, we fill up a mug to drink a little.

Yesterday, the sound of shelling went on for 14 hours. Dead silence now reigns in Mariupol. Raindrops pound on the windows. I spend most of my time there, and every time I go into our flat, I listen for the telling whistle announcing a new strike.

I am dead tired and I nod off all the time. My brother stays close to Mum and me, watching me intently. He must miss Dad now more than ever, wondering how to keep us safe. I cannot decipher the look in his eyes, but then the corners of his mouth perk up a bit. "Go to sleep," he says, and offers the nook of his arm as a cushion.

Day eight

03.03.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

The roof is on fire. The second stairwell of our building is on fire, too. The smoke is spreading from floor to floor. We need to get out.

It's freezing outside and windy. One of my neighbours says it's -6 degrees. We don't know where to go, but at least we have our emergency bags with us. Aleksey's bag has a first aid kit, and he uses some eye drops to clear out the smoke from our eyes. We wash off the ashes in a puddle of melted snow on the street. It's the first time I've been out of the house in a week and there are dead bodies everywhere.

We need to go somewhere. A man is loading up his car. His partner is dragging possessions onto the street—I'm not sure if these are his or if they're looting.

An older woman holds onto the wall of a building, shuffling forward. She can barely walk. I freeze and think about what will happen to her. Someone tugs my sleeve—we can't stop. There's smoke and shelling, and we need to find a place to hide. We hold hands so we don't lose each other.

> "There's smoke and shelling, and we need to find a place to hide. We hold hands so we don't lose each other."

Day nine

03.04.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

My father's brother lives in Enerhodar, 50 kilometers from here. It's a nice town with beautiful parks, situated near the river Dnieper. It's also home to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant—the biggest nuclear plant in Ukraine and in Europe.

And today, it's in the hands of Russian forces. Initially, they were greeted by a large protest on the main road. "No need to worry," the Russians told the townspeople: they only wanted to take a picture in the power plant and send it to their high command. Then, they would leave.

A ridiculous thing to demand.

I contact my uncle. Luckily, he's not on duty today. I check my incoming messages and watch the news the whole day. At some point, the Russian forces leave—but they promise to come back. At 3pm, they show up again, start shooting at the protesters and throwing grenades, which secures their passage to the power plant itself. The plant sustains shelling, too, and a part of it catches fire.

My uncle hides in the basement with his family. Firefighters try to come into the power plant to extinguish the fire, but Russians won't stop shooting.

Looking at the news scares my whole family. The nuclear power plant is near our city! We would be the first to experience a tragedy far worse than Chernobyl.

Eventually, Russians breach, killing and injuring multiple people. Thankfully, a nuclear meltdown is avoided.

Next up in Russia's route would be Zaporizhzhia, my city.

Day eleven

03.06.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

Wow. I can't believe this is the second day without hearing sirens and freaking out over and over again. Though in all honesty, you get used to it. The sirens, the notifications about the sirens, our mayor asking us to go to the nearby shelters—it now seems routine to me.

Today, it's quiet. Really quiet. I'm sitting in my room, watching videos and chatting with my girlfriend to the background noise of my grandparents watching TV in the other room. Not being able to walk out and do whatever I want to do is slowly driving me crazy.

My mum is experiencing the war on a different level. She doesn't allow anyone to leave the house. She's afraid we could get killed or arrested for suspicious behavior just by being in the streets. It's understandable, I guess, but wouldn't it be awesome to just go out and have a little time to yourself outdoors?

I decide not to test her nerves further. She takes her medicine to keep it together during this time.

Yes, today, it's peaceful. But it's an anxious kind of peace.

Day twelve

03.07.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

We should have never left. Now, he's dead. Aleksey—my brother, my hero—is dead.

We tried to escape yesterday, or was it the day before? Aleksey had heard there was a ceasefire, and we would be able to get out if we could find a car. An older man sold us his beaten-up white Volvo. Well, he wanted to just give it to us, but his daughter asked for money. We gave her most of what we had on us—then she demanded Mom's wedding ring. It was all she had left from my father. She gave it anyway.

We scraped mud from the ground to write messages onto the car's roof. We weren't press, or doctors, and didn't have children in the car. What should we write? We kept it simple: "Help".

The ceasefire was a joke. We saw plumes of smoke from shelling all along the corridor. A huge column of cars was trying to get out, but they told us all to turn back. Aleksey had a plan, he said. A friend of his has a house on the outskirts of town. We could sleep there, stock up, and wait for the moment the corridor opened again.

We should have argued. We should have said no. Maybe we could have stayed in the column, maybe we should have gone on foot. But he promised us a shower and some cheese.

I never even heard the whistle. I never saw the fireball or the glass of our windshield shattering into tiny pieces. All I saw was Aleksey's open mouth, blood spilling out of it. It looked nothing like in the movies.

Day thirteen

03.08.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

Mum hasn't said a word since we crawled through the bushes, leaving Aleksey behind. Ironically, we found shelter at a hospital after hours of walking last night. I wonder if any of the people here could have saved my brother.

I wonder if I could call anyone. My cellphone has run out of battery, the electricity is out most of the time, and phone lines and internet connections have been dead for days now. The last time we watched the news, no one said a thing about Mariupol, as if we're all dead and buried already.

Now, we're subject to rumors passed on between airstrikes. They say the Ukrainian army will break through the siege. But the only radio station we can catch says that Ukrainians are holding Mariupol hostage, broadcasting: "Mariupol is surrounded. Surrender your weapons."

Day fourteen

03.09.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

Mum is going to the city. She wants to cash out all of the money we have. It's a good opportunity to visit our flat, rest and have a shower. God, it's been weeks since I've showered. Clean-washed, I feel like a new person. I've missed this.

And then I get a call. The call. "Oleksandr?" a man on the other end of the line asks me. I don't recognise the number or his voice. "Yes?"

"We ask you to come to the military commissariat where you're registered. Grab your documents. We'll see you at the mobilisation office between 8am and 5pm."

The sudden shock kicks me out of my bubble. I don't have any prior military experience or training. None of my friends have received the call. I'm anxious about what will happen tomorrow. But I feel courageous at the same time.

Mum tells me that we could just flee. But isn't that what cowards usually do? I'm a pacifist and have no interest in fighting. But I have promised that in case things go south, I'll do something. If they need my help, it's the right choice to make.

"I'm going to enlist tomorrow."

"Maybe I'll get drafted another day. But not today."

Day fifteen

03.10.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

Grandpa Sasha drives me to the commissariat where I've been summoned. On the way, he suggests I tell the drafting officer that I am a journalism student and that I speak English.

I show the guard my ID card and pass through the gates. The ask me to stay put and wait for further instructions. There are many people here—most wearing sports clothes and carrying duffel bags. They're waiting for their ride to the training camps.

I'm not one of them, at least not yet.

It's so cold I start to feel numb, but I'm called into the building after half an hour. The office is on the third floor, and again I must wait in line before entering the room.

"Good morning," I say as a sign of politeness. "State your age," the clerk responds rather strictly. "Um, 19," I mumble, leaving out that I'll turn 20 in a few days. "Goodbye," is the only response I get.

I'm guessing it means "Get out, we don't need you now." I can't hide my smirk and walk out of the building. I had resigned to my new fate to fight. I spent an hour in the queue, getting ready for mobilizations. And then—poof—I'm not eligible?

Well, at least my girlfriend Lisa will be happy. She is so upset I might get drafted that she's been crying tears of sadness the whole day. Telling her the good news brings new tears—this time of happiness.

"Damn, I messed up my makeup again." I can only laugh.

Maybe I'll get drafted another day. But not today.

Day twenty

03.15.22

Vesna (Mariupol)

Three days ago, Mum left the basement where we sheltered with dozens of strangers to find some food and water. She never came back.

I'm out of money, I'm hungry and I'm tired. I'm alone.

For the past two days, I have looked for her, turning around each body with even the vaguest resemblance. Was she wearing her long black skirt or trousers? We haven't changed clothes since we left our flat so many days ago, and still I can't remember. She cut her hand deep on a fence the day we lost Aleksey, so I focus on the hands of people scattered in the streets. There are so many bodies I lose count.

Finally, I notice that more and more cars pass me. I think the corridors are open again—I should talk to people and find out what's happening, but I haven't spoken to anyone in hours, if not days. My voice croaks when I approach a family packing up their car. I haven't drunk real water in a long time, sipping on snow and ice to keep going. They agree to take me with them for free—I don't even ask where they're going.

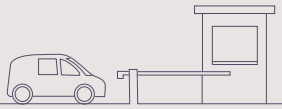
We're seven people crammed into a small Dacia car. The windows have been blown out and plastic wrap is now taped onto the bodywork as a replacement. It slowly unravels, blowing violently in the wind.

Every few minutes, an airstrike hits and the ground we drive on shakes so much the driver's forehead creases with lines of worry and stress. I don't know his name. They don't ask mine.

We cross over a dozen Russian checkpoints with heavily-armed soldiers. The girl next to me squeezes my hand to mush at each one. I don't necessarily like the contact, but I stay quiet. I make no sound, take up no space, afraid they'll kick me out for being a burden. One soldier spits on us as we pass. Another one sticks the butt of his gun through the plastic, hitting my jaw, before laughing and turning around.

It takes us hours before I finally hear Ukrainian voices at the last checkpoint. These are our guys. The mother sitting in front turns around, looks at me and finally asks: "Where's your mother?" "Gone," I answer. "How old are you?"—"16," I say.

"God bless you," she mumbles when they pull over. I get out of the car and walk away.



Day twenty-one

03.16.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

I'm having panic attacks. I wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, immediately check my newsfeed and then try to sleep again.

Until two months ago, I would sleep in until eight or nine in the morning. Now, I wake up at six each day. The artillery attacks, the sounds of sirens and tension in the city leave me grasping for the scattered bits of my mental health.

During the day, I fall asleep two or three times a day. It happens at any time, but I still don't feel refreshed afterwards. I always fall asleep in my clothes in case of an emergency, but there is another reason—it's ice-cold in the house.

February was somewhat warm, but March went down to -7 degrees Celsius. And my health isn't in the best condition right now. Even if this war ends, I might not believe it's over. I might wake up early and have panic attacks because of random sounds, like a balloon popping or exploding fireworks.

If Russian rockets don't kill me, my own mental and physical state might.

Day twenty-three

03.18.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

I wake up early again and begin browsing on my laptop. Believe me, my laptop is my only source of leisure in the cold country house.

At seven in the morning, I hear a massive explosion. A series of little explosions follow it.

The house shakes and our windows tremble—which means these explosions are closer to me than ever before. Sirens go off and we wait quietly, looking out for another hit.

After an hour, I hear the same explosion, again followed by little ones. Again, the whole house starts shaking.

It feels like the longest time before the sirens stop. Our mayor and community leaders on Telegram channels advise us not to share information about where and how the bombing happened. They don't want the intel to get picked up by the Russians.

Day twenty-four

03.19.22

Oleksandr (Zaporizhzhia)

Our mayor reports that the Russian invaders used a BM-30 Smerch, a modern multiple rocket launcher system dubbed "Whirlwind".

It's a truck with a large gun that can fit a lot of rockets. But these rockets contain smaller bombs that are released upon explosion and cover a much larger area, destroying it entirely.

Today, the aftermath of the bombing is clear.

Three sites now lay in ruins: a military base, a factory and a quarry where the manufacturer mines stone. Nine people died. 17 more are injured. Half of these victims were hit after the first rocket landed. When the rescuers arrived at the scene, another rocket hit them, resulting in a number of casualties. One rescuer died.

I have no words to describe the cruelty of Russian commanders who pushed a simple button to hurt civilians.

For 24 days, Zaporizhzhia was left alone. I'm devastated to report that we have now officially entered the list of cities where civilians have died due to Russia's "special operation". Special operation of what? Killing the innocent?

Day twenty-nine

03.24.22

Vesna (Chișinău, Moldova)

It's spring and sunlight shines through the blinds of my new home.

The war started exactly one month ago. Bombs continue to fall on Mariupol every 10 minutes, but I'm no longer there. I'm no longer in Ukraine, but in the Republic of Moldova. Once out of Mariupol, we got food and water from the Ukrainian army. They even allowed me to charge my phone at one of the shelters. A million messages and updates came in, mostly from my friends, some from distant relatives. None from my mother. I texted my aunts and uncles—even though I don't know them that well. That's how I ended up taking a bus to Chișinău to join my aunt Oksana. The city is nice enough, it almost looks a little bit like home. I doubt anything will ever really feel like home.

Everyone here is afraid Russia will target them next. They all have prepared their own go bag: big plastic bags with checkerboard patterns, the ones they sell at the market. They've had time to prepare here. The bags have money, heirlooms to trade, medicine, clothes, school diplomas, vaccination cards, knives and canned food. But I'm most jealous of the family pictures they've selected to put in there.

It's spring, and that's exactly what my name—Vesna—means. But my body and heart feel cold. What is spring if you can't share it with your loved ones? ●

The resilience of *truth*

Written by
Rylie Munn

The impetus for Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was built from the start upon fictional narratives of an exaggerated historical identity threatened by external forces. But before hostilities broke out on February 24, 2022, warnings of another Russian delusion emerged. The Kremlin was accused of planning a false-flag operation that it would blame on Ukraine and use as a pretense to launch the war. While no such attack occurred, Putin still said in a deceitful address to the Russian people, as rockets began descending on Kyiv, that he sought the "demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine".

Russia is known to use highly sophisticated systems of information manipulation, in part through the far-reaching international influence of state-owned media such as RT and Sputnik News. Domestically, the Kremlin also uses censorship and intimidation to promote its agenda. But despite the vast amount of broadcast and online Russian disinformation, Western audiences have been transfixed by the bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people. Ukraine has been waging its own information war, and it is winning in that arena.

Continued on p14 →

“Ukraine has been waging its own information war, and it is winning in that arena.”

Social Media and the War Effort

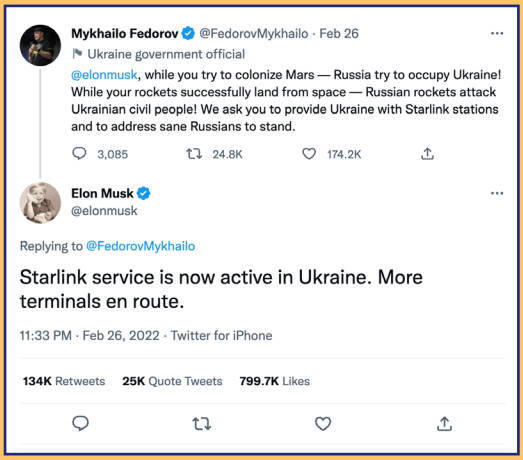
Social media has played an unprecedented, instrumental role in the conflict. Online platforms have proved foundational for the dissemination of information and for other purposes, including procurement of aid and resources for the Ukrainian military.

The war's outbreak also launched an overwhelmingly pro-Ukraine narrative on social media, and platforms made deliberate moves to minimize Russian disinformation. From Twitter to TikTok, images, stories and videos sympathetic to Ukraine inundated the internet. The New York Times' March 7, 2022 homepage featured an image of four dead Ukrainian civilians, killed as they attempted to flee. The image is one of many that came to symbolize the ruthlessness of Russian aggression, stirring the hearts of millions. The husband and father of three of the victims learned of his unbearable loss by seeing the image on Twitter.

Other stories, such as that of the 13 brave Ukrainians who defied a Russian warship and of the "Ghost of Kyiv", also trended on Twitter and were shared widely on Telegram. These, and other stories, contributed to the vast amount of pro-Ukraine information circulated online early in the conflict. Each image, video, personal story and meme reinforced the narrative that Ukrainians were fighting the good fight against a corrupt aggressor for their own preservation and for the future of democracy.

Social media has also been a powerful tool for securing aid and materiel. Meta's Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp hosted thousands of private fundraisers that have raised millions of dollars for Ukraine. Global Citizen, which is dedicated to eliminating poverty worldwide, has used the hashtag #StandUpForUkraine in a social media campaign to urge individuals to compel their leaders to provide financial aid. The campaign ended with a pledge of more than $10 billion in government grants and loans. An additional $530,000 came directly from individual citizens.

Social media has assisted Ukraine in other ways, too. Facebook is home to a number of groups dedicated to assisting the war effort. They include an association of more than 19,000 legal experts ready to provide pro bono advice to Ukrainian refugees. Private companies have also used social media as a means to connect with and deliver services to Ukrainians. Cybersecurity experts and VPN providers have offered free memberships, software and equipment to journalists and online activists. Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov used Twitter to petition Space-X CEO Elon Musk to send terminals to access the Starlink satellite internet system. Musk obliged.



Victory on the Digital Front

Much of the world may have only recently become aware of Russia's pervasive disinformation schemes, but Ukrainians are well versed in the tactics. Ukrainian journalists and activists have been at the forefront of the information war that began years before the outbreak of military conflict. The Kyiv Independent, an English-language news outlet, had just 20,000 followers on Twitter in early February 2022. Seven months later it had more than 2.1 million. Its journalists have worked tirelessly to provide accurate coverage of the war, at times without electricity and stable internet connections. The nature of their work also means they contend with being targets; Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reports that as many as five journalists were killed by gunfire in the war's first month.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also adopted an image of defiance. By demonstrating courage, reason, cunning and humor, he is seen as the personification of his country's war effort. He has aptly positioned himself as the antithesis of

Putin, who is perceived as detached from reality and humiliated by failures in a conflict that he assumed would end in a quick victory. The Russian leader maintained until recently that his country had seen no losses, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Even internal documents reportedly acknowledge steep economic decline.

Russia's greatest disinformation campaign is waged against its own people. Domestic media that does not toe the Kremlin line has been silenced. "[T]he government has taken complete control of news and information," says RSF, "by establishing extensive wartime censorship, blocking the media, and pursuing non-compliant journalists." News outlets continue to report that Ukraine is the aggressor and must be demilitarized and de-radicalized. Foreign media and social media platforms such as Facebook are banned outright. And, for those who do find a way around the restrictions, disseminating the content may be subject to harsh penalties. Spreading "misinformation", as the Russian government defines it, about the war in Ukraine could result in 15 years' imprisonment. Even using the word "war" to describe what Putin calls a "special military operation" is a crime.

While Russia has employed a constant strategy of disinformation and deception, Western audiences have still overwhelmingly sided with Ukraine. In the face of Russian aggression, Ukraine has carefully maintained an image of rectitude, strength and resilience. Ukrainians' composure and transparency has proved to be their greatest ammunition against Russian obfuscation.

The Two Faces of Online Information

The digital information space can be a dangerous weapon, especially in the fog of war. Polarization and disinformation abound, while social media algorithms ensure that the most explosive and divisive stories reach the most eyes. This coincides with an erosion of press freedoms and access to information in certain countries, including Russia, where independent war coverage is nonexistent.

However, the overall success of Ukraine online offers a reminder that there are forces stronger than disinformation. Ukraine has continually risen to the challenge, illustrating that transparency, truth and digital proficiency can weather the most sophisticated online deception storms. Ukrainians have used social media to their advantage, and have overcome numerous financial and resource obstacles by doing so. Social media companies have helped in this effort by prioritizing accurate posts, an effort to offset Russian bots and fake accounts. But this is just one measure in a needed global movement. For democracies to prevail against an onslaught of digital disinformation, they must be present and active in the online spaces where deception and conspiracy thrive. The truth needs to be just as accessible and engaging as the lies. ●

"In the face of Russian aggression... Ukrainians' composure and transparency has proved to be their greatest ammunition against Russian obfuscation."

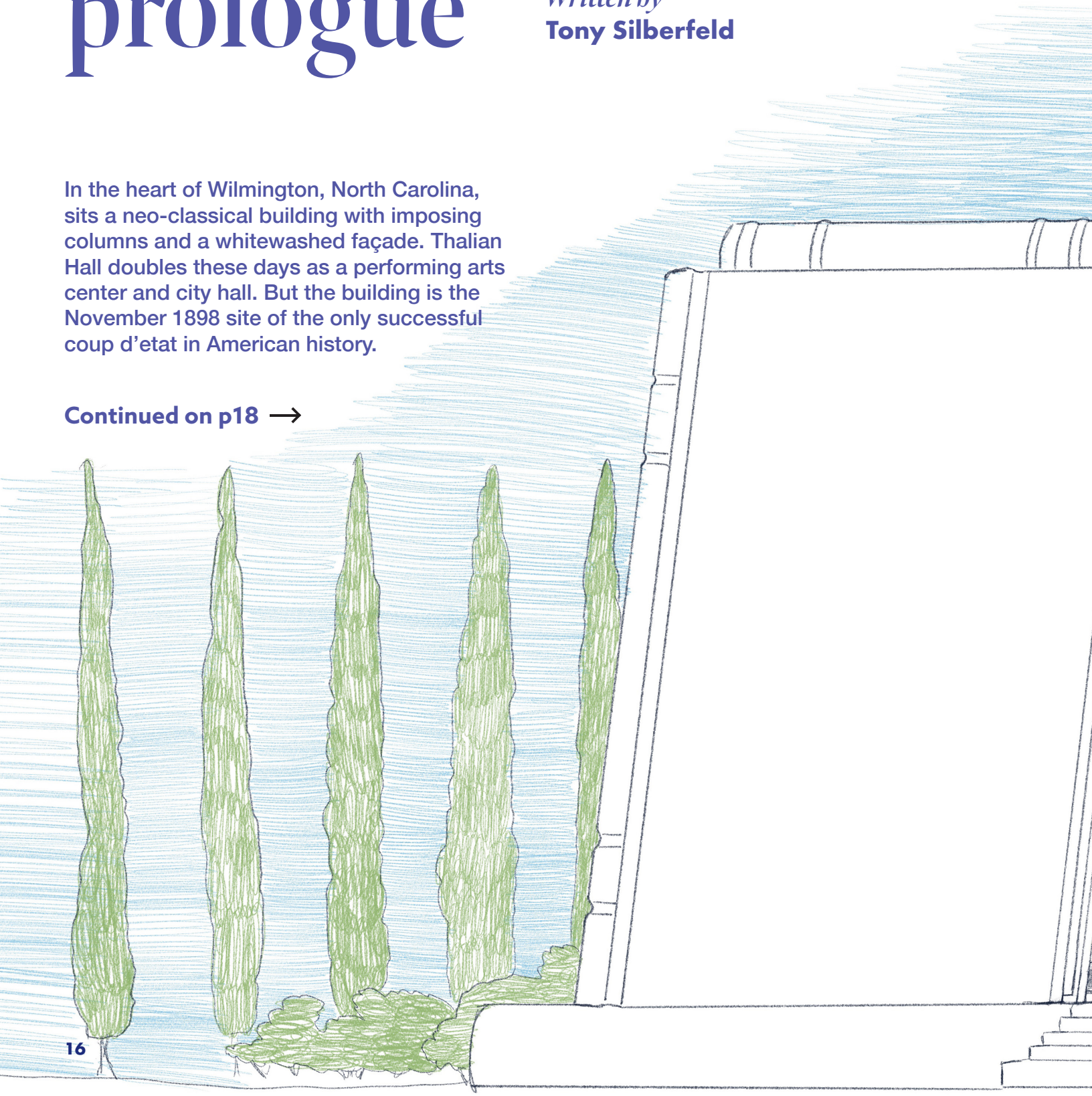
What's past is prologue

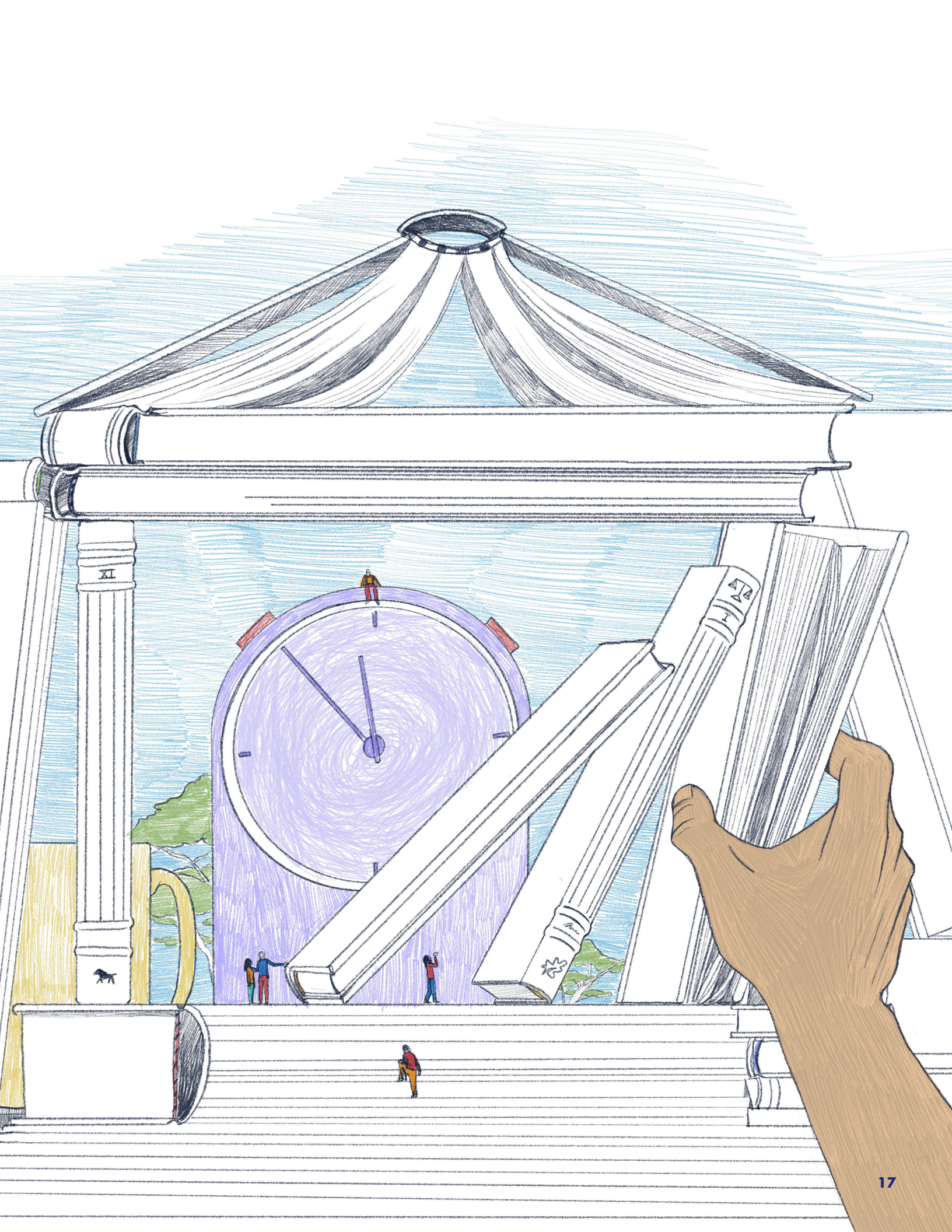
Teaching History to Strengthen Democracy

Written by
Tony Silberfeld

In the heart of Wilmington, North Carolina, sits a neo-classical building with imposing columns and a whitewashed façade. Thalian Hall doubles these days as a performing arts center and city hall. But the building is the November 1898 site of the only successful coup d'etat in American history.

Continued on p18 →





The beginning of the story coincides with the end of the Civil War in 1865. A defeated North Carolina, along with its Confederate brethren, needed to be brought back into the Union fold to begin the process of healing a broken nation. Slavery had been abolished, and millions of African Americans had become full citizens for the first time in the nation's history. With that freedom came political power. African American men in the Tar Heel state became an influential electoral force and scored victories on all levels of government. White supremacist Democrats posed the main threat to this new political landscape, and they spent much of Reconstruction biding their time until the moment came to reclaim power from Republicans and newly enfranchised Black men.

North Carolina became in the immediate post-war era a vision of America's full potential, a multi-racial, representative democracy, even if fragile, that lived up to the nation's ideals. The presence of Union troops maintained the peace until 1877, when Republicans and southern Democrats struck a deal to resolve the highly disputed 1876 presidential election. Federal troops would be withdrawn from the former rebellious states in return for the Democrats' recognizing Republican Rutherford B. Hayes' victory. The deal, however, would empower smoldering white supremacist elements to create a climate in which African Americans could again be persecuted and denied newly obtained rights.

In the years that followed, North Carolina's Democratic party, working hand in glove with white supremacist groups such as the Red Shirts, would terrorize and intimidate Black residents regularly. The tactics, especially blatant during election season, were replicated all across the American South. Street-level violence and new codifications of racism led to the enactment of Jim Crow laws in nearly every former Confederate state. The consequences were staggering. Lynchings of African Americans between 1877 and 1895 became commonplace, and Black voter turnout throughout the South plummeted from more than 90% to single-digit percentages.

As a bulwark against this disturbing trend and the economic calamity that accompanied it, North Carolina's poor, regardless of skin color, joined forces in the 1890s to create "Fusion". The movement had two goals: to raise living standards of the poor and to keep white supremacist Democrats out of power. Fusion succeeded in the 1896 election, winning races throughout the state, including the governorship. The coalition enacted progressive laws that made North Carolina a beacon of hope in a region noted for its regression. Democrats quickly realized that they had only one card left to play if they were to regain power in the next election in 1898.

The strategy was a clear and simple white supremacy campaign. The Democrats aimed to scare white voters by portraying African Americans as an existential threat to be neutralized. They also set out to suppress the Black vote through more intimidation and violence, including murder. The strategy worked. Democrats reclaimed the governorship and won a majority in the state's legislature. Still, one stronghold of progressive, biracial rule remained in North Carolina, and it was deeply rooted along the banks of the Cape Fear River.

Though the 1898 election was hotly contested elsewhere, it was an off-year for local elections in city of Wilmington, where a Fusion government presided over the state's most liberal and progressive city. Emboldened by the march towards victory for white supremacy elsewhere, local whites became increasingly impatient with the status quo in Wilmington and vowed to take action before their next opportunity at the ballot box in two years' time. The rising racial terror elsewhere in the South came to Wilmington as South Carolina Red Shirts under

> "American society remains reluctant to grapple with the darker periods of its history."

the leadership of U.S. Senator Ben Tillman made their way north to wreak havoc on the city's Black community.

Racial tension in Wilmington was already high following the publication in local newspapers of pre-election, anti-Black propaganda and advertisements for thugs to "patrol" African American communities. Alexander Manly, editor of The Daily Record, an African American newspaper, responded to the campaigns by writing columns denouncing the racist assault and calling on Black voters to turn out despite the mortal danger they might face. This act of defiance made Manly a target and provided the Red Shirts the pretense they needed to unleash violence on Wilmington.

On November 10, 1898, a white mob comprised of Red Shirts and local recruits descended on The Daily Record offices to seize Manly. Since he had already fled for his own safety, the mob attacked the paper's building and set it afire. The mob then marched into the city's African American neighborhood, shooting people indiscriminately, before going house to house and murdering residents. The death toll remains indeterminate since bodies were reportedly thrown into the Cape Fear River, but an estimated 60 to as many as 300 black Wilmingtonians are believed to have been murdered.

The killing spree over, the mob, led by former U.S. Congressman Alfred Waddell, went to the steps of Thalian Hall and issued what became known as the "White Declaration of Independence". It stated that those of African origin would never again "dominate" white people in Wilmington. The declaration wasn't rhetorical bluster. It threatened the biracial government, which was forced to resign. A roundup of elected officials, who were put on a train out of town, completed the coup. Waddell appointed himself mayor and led an unelected, municipal white supremacist government. No Black city official would be elected for the next 75 years.

History by Highlights

Ask Americans to recount the history they remember being taught in school and you're likely to hear about George Washington's chopping down a cherry tree, Abraham Lincoln's freeing the slaves, and Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of the bus. You're unlikely to hear about Ocoee, Hamburg, Rosewood, Elaine and Wilmington, or any of the dozens of other examples of racial atrocities committed against African American communities. American society remains reluctant to grapple with the darker periods of its history.

> "The strength of American democracy is inextricably linked with closing the gap between who we are and how we see ourselves."

There is no national U.S. standard for teaching history or civics. But the C3 Framework (college, career and civic life), which offers guidance on the four skills that social studies teachers should apply in class, is widely used. It speaks of developing questions and planning inquiries, applying disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluating sources and using evidence, and communicating conclusions and taking informed action. It offers, however, no guidance on the topics or events to be taught.

In the absence of federal standards, education is a state, if not county or municipal, responsibility. U.S. history curricula have long been controversial, but the current political polarization and culture wars have further inflamed the public and elected officials. A bill introduced in New Hampshire makes it illegal to promote a negative account or representation of the founding and history of the U.S. The College Board, which creates the curricula and tests for high-school advanced placement classes, was

forced in 2012 to revise coursework deemed to be insufficiently complimentary of American exceptionalism. Fourteen states have enacted legislation banning the teaching of critical race theory, which aims to give students multi-disciplinary perspectives on the social, racial and ethnic factors that have shaped the U.S. Critical race theory isn't actually taught in any primary or secondary school, but the movement to ban it exemplifies the extent to which perspectives have hardened.

The balkanized nature of teaching American history denies the country a collective memory and a shared understanding of the past. Instead, some red states offer a sanitized version of history while blue states may provide a more critical interpretation. Has our failure to teach a common and accurate history contributed to the erosion of American democracy and the fraying of the social fabric? Insights into that question may come from across the Atlantic.

Complex Word, Simple Concept

Germany is often cited, justifiably, as an example for countries confronting their histories. "Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung" is, in the German linguistic tradition, a long word packed with meaning. Many interpretations exist, but the concept is essentially one of analyzing and coming to terms with the past. Germany has spent decades applying the concept while investigating Nazi crimes and exposing the horrors of the Holocaust. Out of that meticulous work, the German federal and state (Land) governments incorporated the teaching of the Nazi era into its primary and secondary schools, socialized it through film and television, erected monuments to the genocide and preserved others around the country. Berlin alone offers many reminders of the crimes. From the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, symbolically placed in the center of the capital beside the Brandenburg Gate, to the plaques marking the former homes of Jewish residents sent to concentration camps to never return, the city does not allow the past to be forgotten. Neither do German schools.

High-school students are required to take a course in 20th-century German history, which covers both world wars. Many schools supplement the class with concentration camp visits, an experience that leaves an indelible mark on many young people. Opportunities for further study also exist at the more than 3,600 schools that participate in the "Schule Ohne Rassismus" (Schools Without Racism) program, which is dedicated to furthering human values and equality. These efforts allow the German education system to offer a nationally shared history and sense of accountability. This common understanding of the past serves as a critical guardrail against a reawakening of right-wing extremism and a reminder of the importance of democratic governance.

Still, a growing part of German society wonders aloud when Germany will be a "normal" country, rather than one defined by the Holocaust. The answer, for many, is never. But others use the question cynically, as a political weapon or to note other countries' hypocrisy in failing to recognize the shadows in their own histories. Poland recently passed a law prohibiting any accusation of its own culpability in the Holocaust. Violators face fines and/or imprisonment. And the U.S. itself only selectively takes responsibility for its own atrocities. The philosopher Susan Neiman once noted that "[t]here are more Holocaust museums in the U.S. than in Germany, Israel, and Poland combined – and almost none devoted to slavery." Many countries have a long way to go.

"If Americans are to continue to strive for a more perfect union, we need to come to terms with our past…

What Can Be Done?

University of New Brunswick Professor Alan Sears, reflecting on the intersection of history and democracy in Canada, and based on years of research, offers a useful roadmap for teaching history to strengthen democratic resilience. He offers **six** key points:

1. *Explaining how historians formulate the stories they tell is equally, if not more, important than the stories themselves*

2. *Recognizing the role of history in how we think about ourselves is critical to shaping a cohesive national identity*

3. *Learning history in a variety of settings including at museums, in schools and at home reinforces a common understanding of the past*

4. *Teaching students to present evidence about the past fosters a common conception of history*

5. *Researching evidence allows students to dissect the complex layers of historical figures and events*

6. *Hiring skilled teachers is essential to effective history instruction*

Sears' points comprise, in theory, a useful strategy for improving civic education and using it as a tool to strengthen a nation's democratic fundamentals. In practice, however, particularly in the U.S. context, his concepts face a daunting partisan wall. The contentiousness of the American debate, like that of the C3 Framework, is centered on what history to teach rather than how to teach it. The distinction is not trivial. The strength of American democracy is inextricably linked with closing the gap between who we are and how we see ourselves.

History and Democracy

In a July 2021 Pew Research Center survey, 75% of American respondents declared the U.S. to be either the world's greatest or one of the greatest countries, yet nearly 60% claimed to be dissatisfied with the way U.S. democracy is working. This contradiction reveals a fundamental problem directly connected to the teaching of American history. Americans are taught to regard their country as exceptional, a force for good, the land of the free and the home of the brave. That can lead to an unquestioning pride, which a deeper historical dive should temper. Racial tension, economic inequality and political polarization should spark questions of historical legacies. Racial tension arises out of forced African immigration. Economic inequality follows decades of Jim Crow laws, Black Codes, red lining and other race-based measures that robbed communities of hard-earned wealth or limited their ability to acquire it. Political polarization emerges from decades of fearmongering and disinformation.

From a successful coup to an unsuccessful one, the U.S. is defined, for better or worse, by events that precede Wilmington and the choices made after the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. If Americans are to continue to strive for a more perfect union, we need to come to terms with our past. All of it. ●

...all of it."

INTERVIEW

John Blackburn

Former Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force (Retired)

Prepared & edited by
Chloe Laird

The war in Ukraine has forced Europe to reassess its dependence on Russian energy and sparked intense conversation about its overall energy security. Shifting priorities in the face of the conflict, and natural and man-made disasters, are pushing the EU, and the U.S., to revisit their short- and long-term approaches to energy and climate policy.

Blackburn spoke with the Bertelsmann Foundation in August 2022 about the need to foster resilient societies in a time of geopolitical and environmental upheaval, and about possibilities for the transatlantic partnership to work with Australia on a green energy transition. He highlighted in the conversation military tools and frameworks that could help strengthen the resilience of civil society.

About John Blackburn

Air Vice-Marshal John Blackburn retired from the Royal Australian Air Force in 2008. He served as deputy chief of the air force after many years as an F/A-18 fighter pilot, test pilot and strategic planner. He has held since his retirement a number of consultancy positions, advising on issues including energy security. He became chairman of the Institute for Integrated Economic Research (IIER) – Australia in 2018 and has been an executive member of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group since 2021.

Let's start with the basics. What does it mean for a society to be resilient?

When you look at the formal definition, the United Nations says that resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of basic order.

There are some things we miss if we tie ourselves solely to that definition. What if we expanded our framework and looked at what the characteristics or attributes of a resilient society actually are? My organization, the Institute for Integrated Economic Research – Australia, looks at three characteristics.

The first is shared awareness and shared goals. If we're able to be honest and open about the risks that we face, and have an adult conversation with our population, we can define a shared goal. This is the most foundational step. In the military, we define this as a shared situational awareness. If we don't have this shared awareness and goals, then all we do is react to everything that happens.

If you have that awareness, the second characteristic you want is the ability to work as a team and to collaborate because you can't solve these sorts of problems in a piecemeal manner. So, you have to build a team approach within the nation, but also with neighboring countries and allies. In the military, we refer to this as integration.

The third characteristic of a resilient society is the ability to prepare and mobilize. There is no verb for resilience. We can resile. However, stoicism is not resilience. You have to prepare and then you have to mobilize, whether it's your country, your company, your team, whatever. You have to mobilize to get ready to deal with what happens rather than go, "There's a flood. Can somebody get out the inflatable boat or something?"

Defense has preparedness concepts. It has readiness. It has pre-planning that does not exist to the same degree in wider society. The definition by the UN is not bad, but it's mainly focused on natural disasters. We have to be equally ready for "unnatural" disasters. When we look at resilience, we address these three characteristics and ask how are we doing in these areas. And we can identify our weaknesses pretty quickly.

Do you see examples of these concepts in Europe or the U.S.? Are we building resilient societies?

The United Kingdom is a great example of the sheer lunacy of not having an honest conversation. It ends up with Brexit, a decision based on misinformation. Frankly, when I look at the United States, there seems to be an impossibility of having shared awareness or goals to collaborate given the state of the political divide in that country. In Europe, despite a somewhat naive historical approach to large-scale energy reliance on Russia, we can now see an ability and willingness for EU nations to address risks, and to plan and work together.

The discussion I see happening in Europe right now is about the immensity of the problem of the war in Ukraine, and the effect that dependency on Russia has had on energy security. I get the sense that Europe as a whole is looking at the system-level problem and is talking about how it could all cascade. That discussion is not happening enough in the Asia-Pacific.

Despite all the problems in the European Union, we can see some really good examples of how to work together to build resilience over time.

Are military operations good examples to use for introducing resilience to a civilian population?

We can learn some things from the military. Frankly, the military is good at the tactical level of operations, doing intelligence assessments, working on plans and contingencies, getting ready for them, and making sure they can be sustained in operations. But the bureaucracy layer that envelopes defense organizations, whether it's in the U.S. or Australia, is immense. It's not agile. The bureaucracy is not something you want to emulate.

All of the founders of IIER – Australia are ex-military. Our resilience work initially focused on our economy, energy systems and the environment as being three interlinked systems. When we came to the issue of environment, there was so much emotion and anger about climate. We decided to move the climate discussion out of IIER-A into a separate, climate-focused organization so as not to degrade our discussion of the wider national systems. We therefore created the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group. The ASLCG views climate change

in a national security framework. We target our message at conservative audiences to reframe the discussion away from emotional arguments into one that addresses how we must prepare for the impacts of climate change on our society and our region. We know from the science that the climate impacts are going to get worse. So, we argue for a military approach. We have to prepare and mobilize.

Australia has a huge amount of uranium. At the same time, Europe and the U.S. are discussing green energy. What are our future energy sources? Hydrogen? Nuclear?

The answer is all of these. We are going through a major global energy transition.

Professor Vaclav Smil of the University of Manitoba does a lot of work on energy transitions. He talks about how long it's taken to transition, and when you start thinking about how long new energies take to come on line, the idea that we could have an energy transition by 2030, or 2040, is not realistic. What we need is a complex mix of energies that will have to be integrated to provide a resilient and secure system.

Australia is committed to the acquisition of nuclear submarines, but we have no industry base to provide support. So, what we need to do is to have another discussion about a nuclear energy industry. We have around 30% of the world's uranium. We add no value to it whatsoever. We merely dig it up and export it. There is a cultural and political blindness that prevents us from having a rational discussion about nuclear power options. In my view, nuclear energy is an important component of a future energy system, perhaps in the mid- to late 2030s.

Another problem we have is the fight among energy advocates. Some nuclear power advocates denigrate solar and wind. Some electric vehicle advocates denigrate hydrogen vehicles. An integrated resilient system needs collaboration, not just competition.

I was a member of the advisory panel that supported the development of the Australian hydrogen strategy. I am also an investor in a green hydrogen company. What particularly interests me is that hydrogen allows you to do two things. One is temporal. It can be stored for use directly in industrial processes or to produce electricity through a hydrogen gas turbine. The second is transformational. It can be transformed into ammonia for transport and for industrial production of explosives and fertilizers. In this way it is a different type of energy.

Australia is experiencing an energy transition similar to that facing Europe and the U.S. Are conversations in Australia around a "just transition" equally prevalent? Are there ways we can learn from one another?

The energy transition is going to be full of compromises. It will take much longer than we originally assumed. It will be difficult, we will make mistakes, and it will be costly because transition costs money. The benefits, however, will eventually outweigh the costs.

What we're finding with coal in Australia is the argument that "we produce such a small percentage of global emissions that it doesn't matter." That's factually correct. But if we don't team up with the rest of the world in this energy transition it will never happen. Every country has to do its share.

Another important player is commercial investment. Economic and commercial realities will drive coal plants to close down as we try to address our emissions reduction challenge. We need to look at what Germany did to address the needs of coal industry workers and their communities as we plan our energy system transition.

Do you see Australia as a potential partner on energy issues for the EU and the U.S.?

We cannot solve the issues by ourselves. It's impossible. It has to be a team effort. And the more coherent thinking I've seen to date, despite the scale of the problems, is in the EU. It is facing up to reality and working as a team wherever possible.

The division in the U.S. has got to such a point that it will become more and more self-absorbed, and the risk is that we will lose the most powerful agent for collaboration that we've had in the past. That is my biggest worry. Australia needs to focus the relationship with Europe on being part of a global team trying to address global problems.

"We are so focused on reacting to what's currently happening that we're not preparing adequately for the **massive challenges** ahead.

We will have to deal with this with a society that has a short attention span."

What should EU, U.S. and Australian policymakers consider when planning the energy transition?

Our focus is always on how to meet growing demand by increasing supply. We don't ask ourselves how we reduce demand.

I will use transport fuels as an example. We need to reduce our fuel import dependence. Currently 90% of all transport fuels are imported. We need to reduce transport emissions. There's only one way you're going to do this at scale, and it's with electrification. That doesn't mean everything becomes an electric vehicle. Electrification can also mean producing hydrogen for large vehicles and trains, as has been started in Germany.

In addition to electrification, we've also got to change how we do logistics. In Australia, there's a predominant use of trucks. We need to change our logistics model to increase the use of train and ship transport to reduce energy consumption. There are significant challenges to doing this. We have a fragile electricity system that will need to grow by two or three times to be able to meet the demand. There is no coherent plan for this yet.

When we look at projected logistics growth, three constraints stand out: growing fuel import dependence, vehicle and component import dependence, and workforce. It does not appear feasible to recruit sufficient truck drivers to meet the projected increase in logistics demand if we maintain the current logistics mix.

What are the first steps to prepare for a more sustainable future?

We're sitting on a beach right now, with a number of … economic and environmental tsunamis approaching. We are so focused on reacting to what's currently happening that we're not preparing adequately for the massive challenges ahead. We will have to deal with this with a society that has a short attention span. We in Australia are not unique in this respect.

A lot of what is now being done is good. Nations are thinking more at the system level. The EU has now realized that some fundamental strategic mistakes have been made. However, we have a common structural problem. We need to build teams that can stand back from the immediate problem and look over the horizon at the next tsunami we will have to deal with.

In the military, we have different levels of command for a good reason. At the tactical level, the immediate fight is fought. At the operational level, the military looks at the next phase of the fight and prepares for it. At the strategic level, the military focuses more on what is over the horizon so it can prepare for that challenge. We all need to ensure that we have some of that last capability so that we can prepare as well as react. ●

How important is NATO?

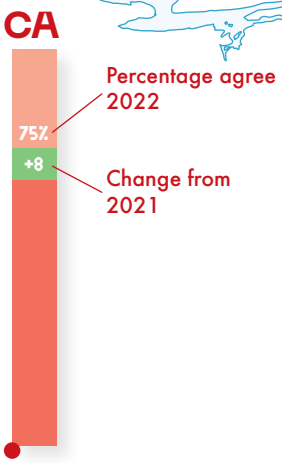
Data & analysis by
Brandon Bohrn

Data source
Transatlantic Trends 2022

STATEMENT

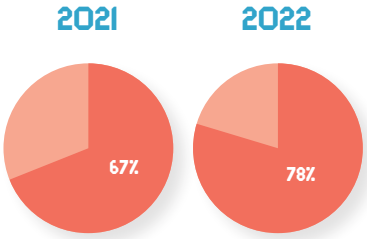
NATO plays an important role in the country's security

Comparing 2021 vs 2022

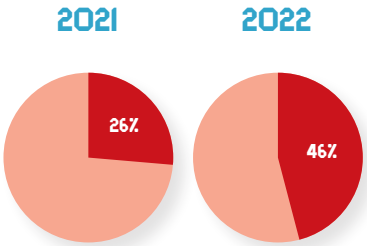


The bigger trends**

NATO plays an "important" role in the country's security***



NATO plays a "very important" role in the country's security



Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO

**Averages of all countries polled: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

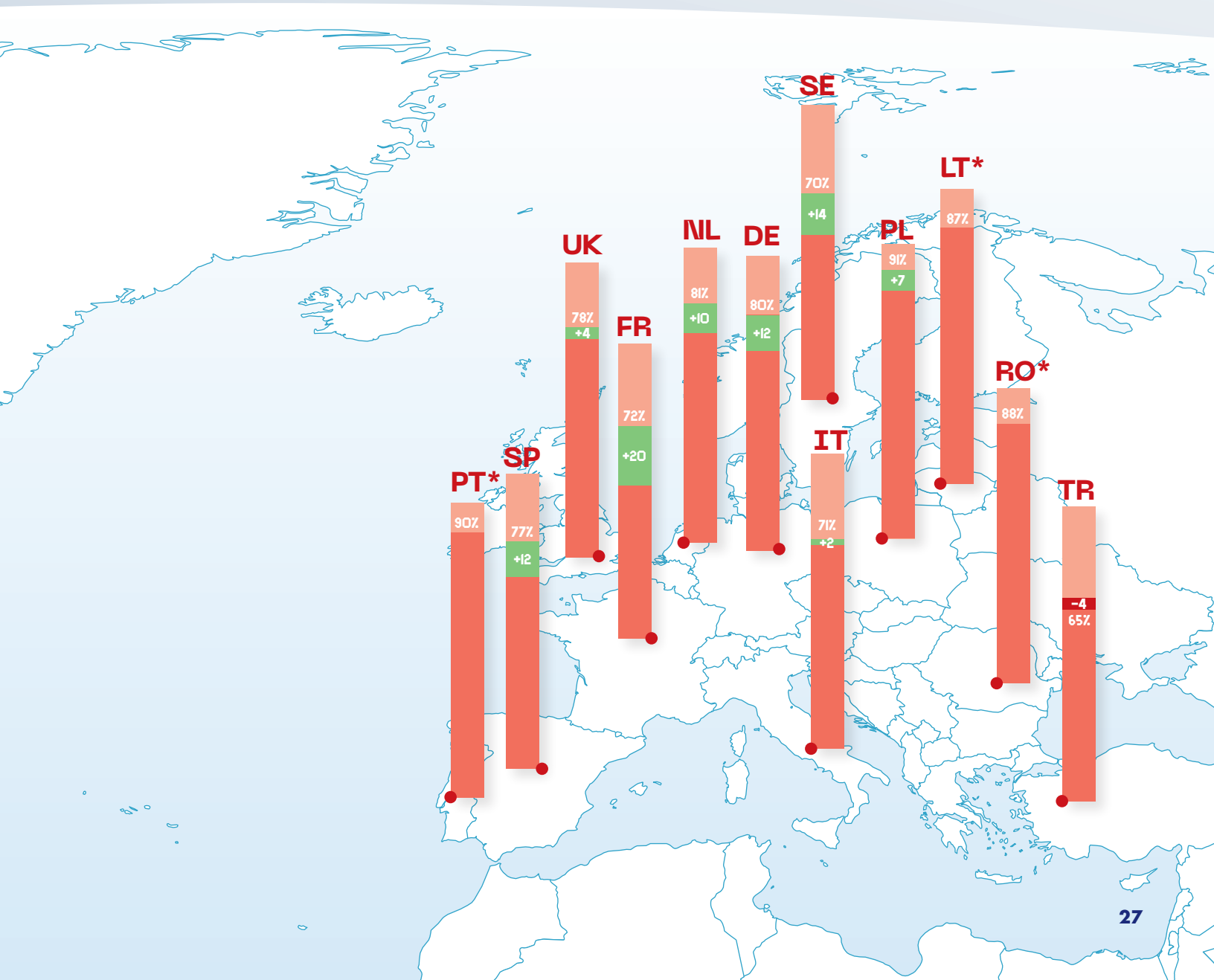
***total of somewhat important and very important

*No country data for 2021

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is arguably the most resilient fixture of the transatlantic community. Since its founding in 1949, the alliance has faced many challenges and identity crises that have sparked questions about the organization's relevance. Yet, time and time again, it has adapted to evolving security landscapes and geopolitical threats. In the wake of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, NATO's importance and resilience has again become clear.

NATO's importance is also reflected in public opinion. *Transatlantic Trends 2022*, the Bertelsmann Foundation's annual survey conducted in partnership with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, showed that 78% of those surveyed in 14 countries believe NATO is important to their country's national security. That's up from 67% in 2021. Furthermore, majorities in all countries surveyed, except for Turkey, support expanding NATO to include Sweden and Finland – 73% overall.

The Transatlantic Trends data reveal an increasing appetite and appreciation for NATO to counter the threats of Russia's ongoing aggression. Which countries show the greatest year-to-year increases? Does geography play a role in perceptions of NATO's importance? In this infographic, we explore those and other questions to better understand public views of transatlantic defense and security cooperation. ●



E-stonia Rewired

Written by
Sara Leming

A Nation Transformed from Cyberattack Victim to Cybersecurity Leader

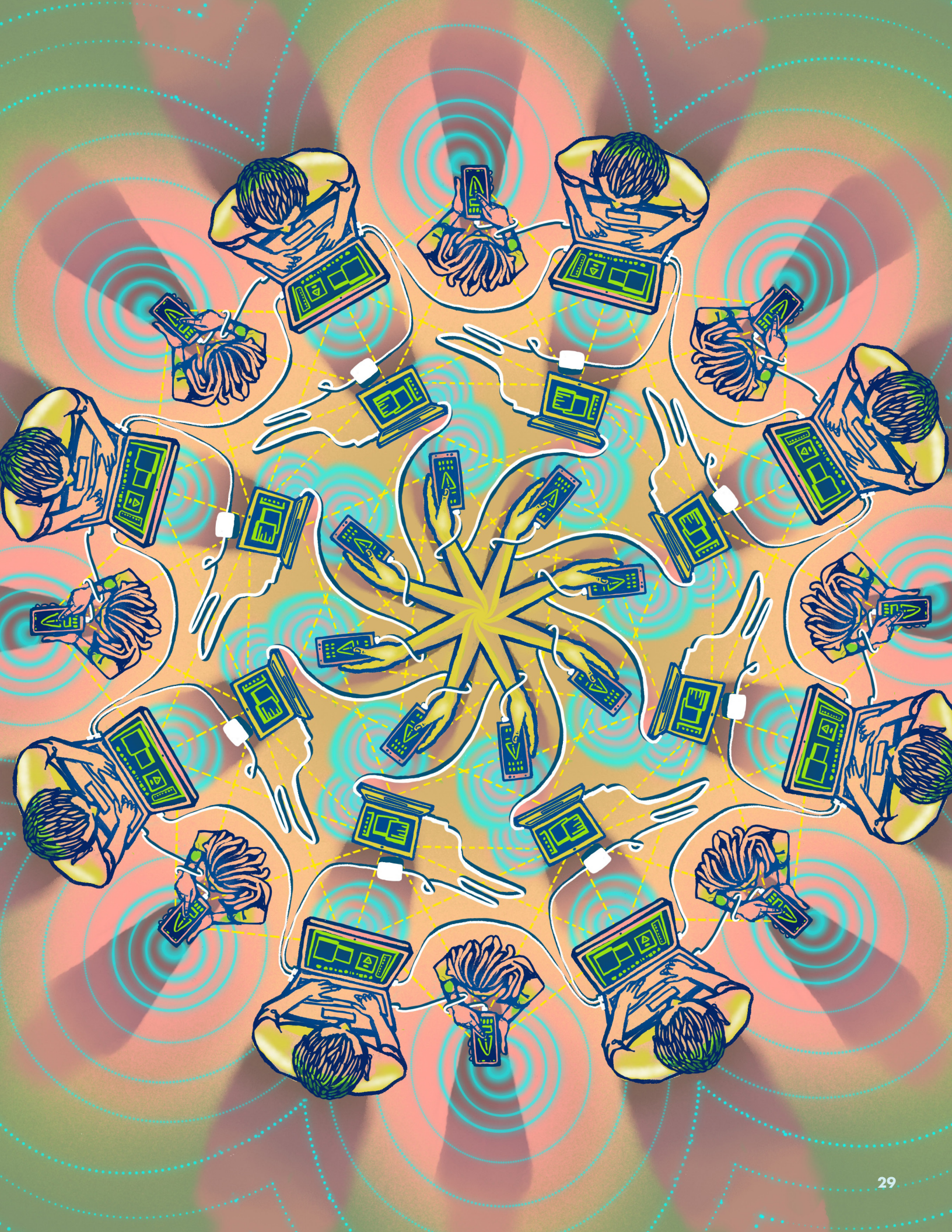
In April 2007, the Estonian government approved a controversial plan to relocate a statue from the center of its capital, Tallinn. Soviet authorities had unveiled the monument, a life-sized World War II Russian soldier with a clenched right fist and a bowed head, 60 years earlier, after their forces retook the city from Nazi Germany. For ethnic Russians, the statue, originally named "Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn", represented the victory over Nazism. For ethnic Estonians, it symbolized a half-century of painful Soviet oppression.

Violence quickly erupted as the public learned of the plan to move the monument to a military cemetery on Tallinn's outskirts. The government convened a middle-of-the-night emergency meeting to assess a rapidly escalating situation and, based on the recommendation of its security council, voted to transfer the statue immediately. Three hours later it was gone from its original location. The rioting and looting continued for another two days, resulting in more than 1,000 detentions, 156 injured and one death.

An outraged Kremlin called the decision to move the statue "sacrilegious". The Russian public also erupted in rage. Protesters stoned the Estonian embassy in Moscow and physically harassed the Estonian ambassador, Marina Kaljurand. Estonian products were boycotted, and one Russian restauranteur even posted a sign warning that "Estonians and dogs may not enter." Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov threatened serious repercussions, which soon followed. On the very evening of the statue's relocation on April 27, Estonian government, bank and media websites became inaccessible.

Estonia, having undergone a "digital revolution", was by then one of the world's most digitally advanced societies. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the government prioritized investing in digital infrastructure to become a global leader in this area. The small Baltic nation with a population of 1.3 million saw the strategy as a way to grow economically and, after acquiring EU and NATO membership in 2004, gain respect in both blocs. Estonians, with their exceptionally high digital literacy rate, relied on the internet as a main communication channel. The Estonian government went essentially paperless and stored online personal data that included election ballots, tax documents and electronic ID cards, making the inability to access the internet even more chaotic.

Estonia quickly consulted with its EU and NATO partners about how to handle the unprecedented cyberattack, which exposed the vulnerabilities of a modern, digital state. The country's authorities closed their digital borders and blocked international web traffic. The immediate aim was to stop the distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack, which Estonia quickly blamed on Russia. Moscow denied involvement, although hackers traced to a Russian IP address were behind the havoc. Their botnets had sent massive waves of spam while a huge number of automated online requests



flooded servers and overloaded bandwidth. Despite knowing the location of the hackers, EU and NATO technical experts could not prove a link directly to the Kremlin. However, they agreed that it would have been in the Kremlin's interest to organize the assault.

Recovery and the Path Forward

It took the Estonian government 22 days to fully mitigate the cyberattack. As the country recovered, officials recognized that their strong commitment to digitized public services required action to prevent more harmful attacks. They also saw the cyberattack as a moment to bolster Estonia's position in the EU and NATO.

The country seized the opportunity of being immersed in the digital spotlight to warn allies of their vulnerability and unpreparedness to respond to a similar crisis, and reinforced its call for NATO to enhance its cyberwar capabilities. This included launching a discussion on NATO's Article 5 collective defense guarantees, which at that time could be invoked only if an attack led to the loss of life. Additional debate swirled around the consequences of being unable to identify an attacker with certainty and, therefore, the implications for retaliating. Perhaps one of the few areas in which no ambiguity existed, however, was the recognition by policymakers and national defense agencies that cyberattacks presented rising security threats. Press coverage sympathetic to Estonia and subsequent public debate also reinforced the need for NATO allies to cooperate in combating these new threats.

Only a year later, in 2008, NATO opened its Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn. The agency, established by Estonia and six NATO partners, identifies and coordinates education and training needs in cyber defense for all alliance members. The CCDCOE is arguably best known for its Tallinn Manual, first published in 2013. The manual, whose third edition may be released in 2023, has become an influential resource for legal experts and policy advisers examining the applicability of international law to cyber warfare. The CCDCOE also hosts the world's largest cyber defense training simulations, and more than 2,000 participants from 32 countries participated in the tenth simulation in April 2022. The exercise required teams to defend a fictional island country, Berylia, where public unrest broke out after an attack on military and civilian IT systems. The simulation was intentionally

"On the very evening of the statue's relocation on April 27, 2007, Estonian government, bank and media websites became inaccessible."

"It took the Estonian government 22 days to fully mitigate the cyberattack."

similar to the cyberattack against Estonia in 2007. This year's gathering assumed, amid the war in Ukraine, even greater significance as cyber experts warn that additional, destructive Russian cyberattacks could occur at any time.

Estonia has continued to be at the forefront of advocating for more cyber defense. The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) helps member states organize, develop, implement and evaluate their national cybersecurity strategies (NCSS). Estonia's own 2014-2017 NCSS clearly reflected an ongoing national objective by stating that "[a]t the international level, the preservation of a free and secure cyberspace as well as Estonia's central role in guiding and developing international cybersecurity policy in international organizations as well as like-minded communities must be ensured." In 2017, Estonia held the rotating EU Council presidency and focused its priorities on digital transformation and the free movement of data. The result was greater comfort among less tech-savvy member states with the digital revolution.

Estonia has also been active on the domestic front. Thanks to an initiative launched just a year after the cyberattack, the government provides free computer literacy classes to citizens. Elementary-school children are even taught how to code. The country's other notable technological advancements include being home to many successful digital startups, such as Skype and ID.ME, and being a pioneer in using digital COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

Estonia has also been continually strengthening its own cybersecurity. It is the first country to place all critical information infrastructure onto a blockchain network that allows easy detection of cyberattacks. In an article in The New Yorker, Nathan Heller compares Estonia's blockchain network to a hand-knitted scarf in which each stitch depends on the previous one. The fabric is interwoven, just like a blockchain network in which any breach is traceable to the source. Estonia has also established an "e-Embassy" in Luxembourg, where duplicate government servers are located in case those in Estonia are compromised.

Public support for the government's initiatives is strong, and Estonians themselves also contribute to the effort to bolster digital defenses. A government-sponsored volunteer program, the Estonian Defense League, provides citizens with defense training in cyber simulation tournaments. The league is widely respected as an innovative and effective model for citizen involvement in enhancing cyber defense capabilities.

Resilience

The Estonian government considers data ownership a civic responsibility and computer education essential. Most Estonians, in turn, trust their government to keep personal data safe. This mutually reinforcing relationship increases government confidence in its digital resiliency, which is critical since 98% of Estonians have a digital ID-card, a majority of Estonian companies are established online and the entire country has broadband. Tanel Sepp, a defense ministry cybersecurity official, has said that "[t]he cyberattack in 2007 was a great security test. We just don't know who to send the bill to." Estonia emerged stronger from the cyberattack and more prepared for future threats. The country may be small, but it leads the way in cybersecurity and the larger digital world.

Since the Russian invasion, Estonia has demonstrated great solidarity with Ukraine and a willingness to continue standing up to Moscow. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas announced in August 2022 that her country would remove all Soviet-era war monuments from public spaces. Given the country's past experience, this was a controversial decision, but the prime minister expressed confidence. "The Estonian government will not afford Russia the opportunity the use the past to disturb the peace in Estonia," she stated firmly. One month later Tallinn reached an agreement with Kyiv to support its digital transformation, including boosting Ukrainian cyber resilience against Russia. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov noted that Estonia was an inspiration whose example his country will follow.

The small Baltic nation has evolved from cyberattack victim to a digitally resilient state whose strong sense of leadership is now aimed at helping its allies undergo a similar transformation. ●

Democracy Needs Tech Support

Written by
Daniela Rojas Medina

Technological development offers seemingly endless benefits and convenience. Internet connectivity was critical for personal and professional interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, and, more broadly, everyday emerging technology is saving lives, whether by 3D printed organs or automatic brakes in vehicles. At the same time, the rise of technology creates new issues that threaten social and democratic stability.

Disinformation, especially during election cycles, is rampant on social media, cyberattacks are common practice in transnational conflict, and some governments struggle to protect consumers' online privacy in an age when personal data is worth billions of dollars. Other governments, however, exploit technology to deprive people of fundamental rights. China uses artificial intelligence for mass surveillance of its citizens, and Iran exercises strict internet censorship policies that have forced 80% of its citizens to rely on tools such as virtual private networks (VPNs).

More than ever before, the transatlantic partners must address these issues by determining ways to promote responsible development and use of technology. Fortunately, this process has already begun. The EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was founded to strengthen transatlantic technological cooperation, boost innovation, and ensure development and deployment of new technologies based on shared democratic values and respect for human rights.

The TTC is one of the most significant transatlantic initiatives on technology issues, but it meets only twice per year. Between TTC sessions, other institutions and civil society organizations are furthering global dialogue aimed at cementing the digital world's democratic principles. One such effort from the Danish government is worthy of special attention.

Copenhagen leads the way

Denmark prioritizes proactive policymaking that ensures alignment with, if not anticipation of, technological developments. It is, therefore, unsurprising

"If we don't find a way to safeguard and further develop democracy in a digital age...

that the country is among the EU's most digitalized member states. The 2022 Digital Economy and Society Index ranks it first in connectivity and second in integrating digital technologies. In 2017, Denmark became the first country to appoint a technology ambassador.

As part of its TechPlomacy concept, the Danish foreign ministry launched in November 2021 an initiative that brings together representatives from governments, multilateral organizations, the technology industry and civil society to explore ways of using technology to promote democracy and human rights. This initiative, Tech for Democracy, is based on the Copenhagen Pledge, a commitment from stakeholders to make digital technologies work for, not against, democracy and human rights.

In an interview with the Transponder, Denmark's current technology ambassador, Anne Marie Engtoft Larsen, summarized the rationale for the government's initiative:

"Tech for Democracy started as a Danish initiative. It has now truly become a global, multi-stakeholder initiative that involves many governments and tech companies ultimately trying to come up with a solution to the dire truth we are facing, which is that democracy is shrinking. There are less people living in democracies today than there were 10 years ago. Democratic values are under intense pressure. ... [A]s a European, [I am] seeing this on European soil, how the fundamental values that people gave their life for fighting in the 20th century are under attack again in the 21st century. But it's [also in] countries around the world. At the same time, we recognize, not least prompted by COVID, that everything in our world is digital. Technology is omnipresent. It is with us from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed. If we don't find a way to safeguard, to protect, and even to promote and further develop democracy in a digital age, we will simply go into a technological future where democracy and human rights are not going to be the values that our society, our institutions and our communities are built around. Tech for Democracy is an attempt to say, 'If we are to make sure that democracy prevails in a digital future, so far, we can't regulate that entirely.'

"There's a lot of regulation and legislation that needs to be done, in terms of making technology work for democracy. Some of it comes from fundamentally believing in the same values, whether you are developing tech products, whether you are a citizen using them, or whether you are government whose jurisdiction and markets [tech companies] are operating in. …

"I think what the Tech for Democracy Copenhagen Pledge has is quite strong language on not only election integrity, not only supporting human rights, but thinking about that slow undermining of democracy between elections, when we lose trust in one another, when we lose trust in our institutions. The positive aspects of technology giving everyone a voice are outweighed by how [technology] is also making us numb. In that vein, it's a pretty strong commitment. The 150 signatories now, including the largest tech companies in the world, U.N. agencies, a lot of the really big and influential civil society partners, a number of countries, from Ghana to the U.S. to Australia, [are] coming together to say, 'What is it that we need to solve together that's not an easy fix?'"

Among Tech for Democracy's accomplishments, Ambassador Engtoft Larsen notes, are "Action Coalitions" that target relevant issues.

"On twelve different issues, we've seen partners come together, and try to solve them. [For] transparency in algorithms, we have a collaboration with think tanks and a few tech companies. There's a collaboration on gender-based harassment and violence online. How are we actually going to tackle this huge issue that is keeping half of the planet's population away from using digital platforms? We have [another collaboration] on trustworthy information online, a collaboration between Wikimedia [and] Salesforce, among others, that is looking at countering the mis- and disinformation that is slowly eroding trust in society, how we actually make trustworthy information more available."

Ambassador Engtoft Larsen also provided two examples of the initiative's work to promote democracy worldwide. In August 2022, Tech for Democracy worked with the Kenyan government, ahead of a

...we will simply go into a technological future where democracy and human rights are not going to be the values that our society is built around."

national general election, to protect women during campaigning. Few women were involved in the election, but misogyny on social media was rampant. Tech for Democracy responded by launching consultations with parliamentarians, candidates and technology companies.

Tech for Democracy also worked with Ukrainian civil society at the start of the Russian invasion to counter Kremlin mis- and disinformation.

"While steps have been taken, such as [Russian state broadcaster RT's] being closed on Google and YouTube, we still see a lot of state-affiliated media and individuals really undermining trust in what's happening [in Ukraine] by spreading mis- and disinformation. We've set up a closed-door roundtable group with representatives from the largest tech platforms and Ukrainian civil society and, over a number of meetings, established direct links at an operational level. As soon as something appears online, it can be taken down directly by engaging [with companies' headquarters] in California. Saying there's disinformation and flagging it via traditional channels doesn't necessarily mean that it will be taken down. You need to act much more swiftly on this."

Ambassador Engtoft Larsen hopes that Tech for Democracy elevates the collective commitment of all the stakeholders.

"This is the time for all of us to recognize we have this problem and figure out what we each have to do to solve it. [I hope] that [Tech for Democracy] keeps that ambition and momentum. Secondly, [it is time] that we [collaborate with] other initiatives, whether it is working with the Christchurch Call on how to address issues of terrorism online, the Freedom Online Coalition or the new U.N. Tech Envoy. It's important that we are not siloed and not doing this work in competition, but in close collaboration. Thirdly, it's our hope that, by the Biden Summit for Democracy next year, [we can] actually show we can solve aspects of systemic challenges and figure out how might we scale those. The example from Ukraine … can that actually change the behavior [of] government [and] tech companies, and [spur] engagement with civil society? …

"As an EU member state, Denmark has been leading efforts to [launch] tech diplomacy for the EU and digital foreign policy. That has now been ratified and is a new strand of work. Simply regulating technology for the good of the 350 million plus Europeans can be seen as selfish if we don't think about how to elevate human rights protections, human-centric inclusion, transparency, accountability, how to use those values and approaches, and our experience studying global norms and standards, particularly on global governance of technology.

"The work that we've been leading on — tech diplomacy — means that the EU can actually play a more proactive role, whether it's in U.N. processes, global governance forums, like the [Internet Governance Forum, or] working with digital partnerships. Closing the digital divide, and supporting that much more people come online, and have meaningful participation, [is key]. At the same time [we are] saying, as we're building out critical digital infrastructure, you can do [all this] with the right type of governance that is privacy enforcing, empowering for individuals, transparent and accountable."

The transatlantic role

Technological threats to democracy, and the geopolitical challenges that arise from technological competition, have forced governments, civil society and even tech companies themselves to recognize the need for collaboration and transnational dialogue to confront these potentially existential dangers. The next step is bringing stakeholders together and ensuring that they share an understanding of the sources of these dangers and the needed elements of a solution in which, as Ambassador Engtoft Larsen acknowledged, they themselves must be invested.

Close global cooperation is crucial if such an effort is to succeed. Greater technology policy coordination between Washington and Brussels can set a precedent for others to emulate. ●

This is (not) our war

For Belarusians, the regime of President Aleksandr Lukashenko leaves few options but to flee the country if they want to stand with Ukraine

Written by
Bazhena Gurlenia

I'm writing this text while the Tbilisi-Yerevan train carries me forward to an unknown future. After each paragraph, I stare out of the window and try to make up my mind, looking at fast-changing nightscapes—almost toylike and too peaceful. Mountains covered with unexpected spring snow, tiny distant houses with brightly lit windows, and hundreds of little lives behind them, dreaming their dreams. Like many others running from war or severe repression, I no longer have a home. But there is a vast difference between me, who had a choice, and those who woke up to bombs. What unites us is a great fear of, a long struggle with, and an intense hatred for those who have dared to claim our freedom and happiness.

“Wake up! The war has just begun! Russia has invaded Ukraine at night!” I woke up in the early hours of February 24 to my husband’s voice. Still trying to understand what he was saying, I stretched and sat on my bed. War? Like real war? A first thought came to mind: “How are my friends in Ukraine? Are they safe? Are they alive?” Then, a second thought: “Is Lukashenko involved?” Lastly: “What’s going to happen next?”

Many things have happened in the last 24 hours. A meeting at my husband’s work, where the employees were told to grab their belongings, documents and family members, and leave the country within the day. A visit to our parents to tell them we’re moving away. Buying tickets for the train from Minsk to Moscow. The struggle to fit two lives into one suitcase, all done in just four hours. There were no tears, no goodbyes—just cold-headed decisions because we had to. Then the trip to the Domodedovo airport in Moscow, a night at the airport hotel before the plane, and several hours of flying to reach Antalya, Turkey. I only let myself break into tears when we found a small hotel, put our suitcase on the floor, and I suddenly understood: there would be no home for me anymore. I could smell the sea crawling through the curtains of our room and hear the calls to prayer—all while crying so hard, it was as if a colossal lake had popped up inside my head.

Opposing a dictator

I’ve been asking myself “What’s next?” for almost one and a half years now. It started when the pandemic hit and the government lied to us about the preventive measures, infection and death rates—about simply everything. That was the first time I understood the very spirit of Belarusians: we’re always here for each other. Honest doctors started to share accurate information, the independent press gathered it and shared it with the broader public. Meanwhile, the officials just kept falsifying the statistics—undermining the efforts of civil society.

At this time, President Aleksandr Lukashenko had been ruling over Belarus for 26 years, and every election had been fraudulent with a lack of robust opposition. With such malicious ignorance towards life, Lukashenko had lost the last of his supporters. For the first time in over two decades, we had strong politicians who could become democratically elected presidents.

But my voice, along with the voices of thousands of fellow Belarusians, was viciously stolen in the 2020 elections. Lukashenko stated that 80.1% voted for him, despite the strong evidence of independent watchers. Hundreds of thousands of people rushed to the streets to say “no” to the self-elected dictator. First, the police and special task forces started detaining people at protests, then they came to people’s homes early in the morning, kicking the door in, beating them, and filing fake lawsuits. Thousands were arrested, detained, beaten, raped and tortured. Each more or less politically active person became a nervous PTSD-driven one, waiting for their turn to go to jail—sent there because they acted on their right to protest. As of March 26 2022, Belarus has 1,104 people that are recognized political prisoners. Behind each name, date and sentence, there are unique human experiences and everyday brave deeds.

My colleague’s now 22-year-old sister was arrested and sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for being a secretary in a student political union. The police unexpectedly showed up at her flat, declared her a suspect, searched the house inside out, and took the young woman into custody, where she spent half a year before a trial began.

Another friend spent the whole year writing letters and postcards to political prisoners. But being a pen pal is in no way safe, and the police track people down who sympathize with activists. When an acquaintance of hers got detained for the same reason, she became nervous and sleepless, jumped at every sound and became suspicious of strangers and phone calls. I haven’t been able to recognize her since.

A representative of the Belarusian anarcho-movement and his flatmates were dragged out of bed, put on the floor, beaten and choked with a plastic bag to make them give up their passwords. After the torture, one of the men was taken into custody. He is still waiting to be brought to court, but the sentence on the charges he is falsely accused of can be up to six years.

A Georgian welcome

Since February 24, we have a situation one thousand times worse than it was. Without notice, Lukashenko let Russian troops enter our territory and fire missiles from our land towards Ukraine. At the beginning of the year, the non-elected president had stated that Belarus and Russia were holding combined military exercises. Russian tanks, missile launchers, and troops were brought to Belarus. And then the war started. Belarusian border guards let them pass through to invade Ukraine, causing shame and pain.

We spent two weeks in Turkey trying to decide where to go. We settled on Georgia. Though extremely overcrowded, it looked like a great new home with a strong diaspora of Belarusians helping each other. Fellow members of the diaspora gather for demonstrations and festivities, share resources and information, look after one another and welcome new people with heartiness and warmth. Of course, the attitude among locals in Georgia is different now. Belarusians are refused visas and new bank accounts, denied flat rentals, or simply cursed at for their passports or preferred language of communication.

We knew that already—so we tried to prepare mentally.

On our first evening in Tbilisi, we went outside searching for something to eat and found a place with traditional cuisine. As we entered, two elderly Georgian men approached us. "Are you from Russia?" they asked us on the spot. "No, from Belarus," I replied, trying not to shake in anticipation of their reaction. "Oh, well," they shrugged, "It doesn't matter. We're all humans. We were planning to go home, but now you're our guests, and we will play music for you."

They offered us a table, took out their instruments—a violin and a synthesiser—and started to play music from old French movies. I sobbed into my plate of soup. The tears fell because of the sensual, sad melodies, because of this awful and wicked war, because of the worries for my loved ones, and because of my personal angst—being here without a plan. I expected to be treated as a traitor, hated and despised. But these musicians smiled at us, fed us and kept playing until we finished our food. Now I know that there will still be music, human love, and kindness—even when everything falls apart.

Helping in silence

Many people all over the world assume that Belarusians are collaborating with Russia. As I scroll through my newsfeed, I see hundreds of banners from private advertising campaigns with a similar message: "Belarusian people, we are your brothers, please, stop this aggression towards us, stop supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin." Even Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy recorded a video addressing Belarusians, suggesting that we make the right choice and refuse to collaborate with the occupying army. But we already made a choice—almost two years ago. We raised our voices and declared that Lukashenko was an illegitimate president and that his decisions were not ours. In Belarus, I was a hostage. And a person forcefully silenced cannot be accused of keeping quiet. As a nation, we are heartbroken but full of love, forsaken but hopeful, tortured but determined to help others. Our government is not our nation. We knew what Lukashenko was capable of and have been screaming in protest for years, but all we've gotten back is the "deepest concern" of Western politicians.

We keep on helping and fighting as much as we can, as fiercely as ever, though we could be prosecuted for a Facebook post. The stakes are high as hell. Now, it's not just about our one mad dictator and his death grip on our society. It's about a devastating war with our neighbours, the people of Ukraine, who we deeply love. During the first days of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, more than one thousand Belarusians were detained for their participation in anti-war protests. And those people already knew how they'd be treated in jail: beaten, hungry, cold and even sexually abused.

And so here I am, fleeing my country although the war is going on in Ukraine, not Belarus. My reasons to do so are simple: if you don't speak up, you're a coward. But if you do—you'll end up in custody.

Can a person help Ukrainian people while thrown in jail? Obviously not. My friends and acquaintances from the Belarusian diaspora work day and night as volunteers at the Polish, Hungarian and Moldovan borders, in refugee camps, kitchens and humanitarian aid points. People from my homeland donate money, bring food, clothes, and medicine, and host refugees in their homes. Belarusian men enrolled in the Ukrainian territorial defence and created a special Belarusian squadron named Kastuś Kalinoŭski, after the leader of the January Uprisings of 1864, which aimed to liberate the Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish people from Russian occupation. So, we speak up. We fight. But we can only do so because we managed to flee the dangers at home and are now in a position to help.

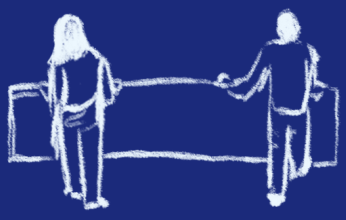
I am not the only one undertaking this journey. Many of us are fleeing, mostly to Poland, Lithuania, Turkey, Georgia and Uzbekistan. 15,777 Belarusian citizens entered Georgia alone from February 24 to March 16. And the exodus continues. Of my 14 closest friends, only three are still in Minsk. The others have fled. Some of them carried children, and some brought pets. They've waited in queues at border checkpoints for 35 long hours.

As Lukashenko endorses Putin's atrocities, economic and political sanctions from the West pile up. Belarusian people, who have already suffered tremendously from the vindictive regime, are now losing jobs, money, stability and opportunities.

Some adult men are trying to get away as soon as possible out of fear that Lukashenko will declare general mobilization and send Belarusian men to fight alongside the Russian invaders. People are ready to dive into the unknown and leave everything behind rather than become pawns in a war of brother against brother. But as we try to rebuild ourselves abroad, we enter our new lives with the stigma of being "aggressors".

Even if we're hated and being spat at—we must keep helping in silence, not waiting for gratitude. It's crucial to focus on helping those in danger, instead of proving who's right.

Both beautiful, strong Ukraine and my dear motherland, Belarus, will one day be free. Our friends and loved ones will return to rebuild their homes from the ashes. We will gather to celebrate and never be separated again by any malicious, militant dictator. Together we stand. Together we fight. And together, we will win. ●



100,000+ people attended the protests in Minsk*, a city of two million inhabitants.

3,000 people were arrested on the second day of the protest.

435 people faced prosecution.

1,406+ protesters were injured.

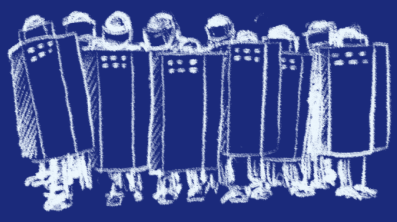
>50% of the injuries took place in police vans, police stations and detention centers.

40 injuries were caused by rubber bullets.

200 people received head trauma and concussions.

25+ people went to hospitals with broken bones and serious injuries.

At least 3 detainees received injuries consistent with sexual violence.



0 criminal investigations have been opened into the actions of Belarusian law enforcement during the protests.

**While there were multiple protests in different cities, we have only (limited) data on the protests in Minsk. The actual numbers of injuries are likely much higher. The protests went on for months, but we have only data from August 10 to September 13, when official reports stop. Data for later protests, including anti-war protests in 2022, have yet to be uncovered.*

Local Environmental A

In the current era of globalization, international financial decisions are often made by powerful companies and governments without significant input from impacted communities.

Over the last year, the documentarian Sam George has been working on a film investigating the impact of Chinese investment in the Balkans. Such investments help China secure access to commodities, and they fill the coffers of the Balkan governments. But the projects can put significant stress on locals, who often feel voiceless. For example, the rapid increase of mining activities in Bor, Serbia—a district already facing environmental

Activists in Bor, Serbia

challenges—has rendered the region one of Europe's most polluted.

However, a group of locals have emerged as leaders, creating networks and demanding improved environmental conditions and oversight. Their efforts demonstrate the resilience of activists who make their voices heard, even against steep odds.

This photo essay, created during the making of the forthcoming Bertelsmann Foundation documentary investigating international investment in the Balkans, shares a glimpse of the impact of Chinese investment on local Serbs.

Bor, a district in Eastern Serbia, has long been mined for gold and copper.

In 2018, the Chinese state-owned enterprise Zinjin purchased the RTB Bor copper mine and began to rapidly expand excavation.

Pollution in the region, bad to begin with, worsened.

Irena Živković decided to get involved politically, running for office on a platform of improved environmental oversight.

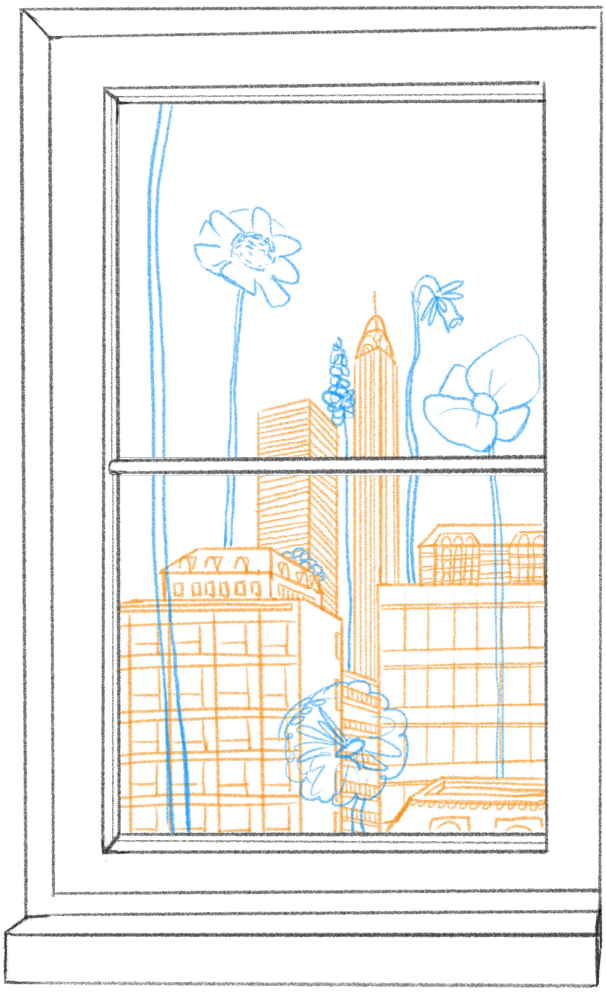
Goran Jakovljević has worked to connect villagers from different parts of the impacted region and to amplify their voices.

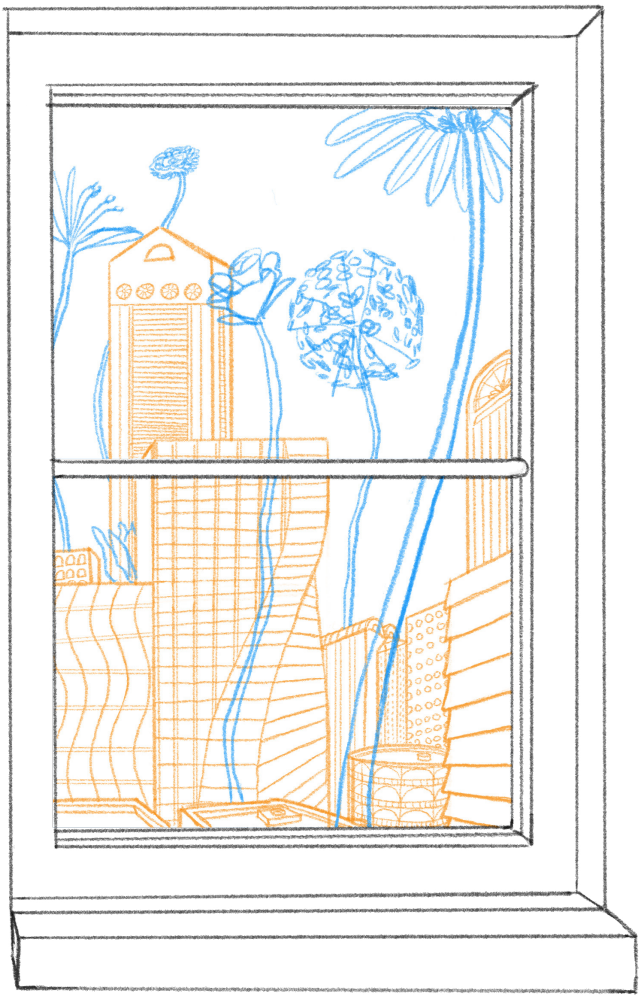
Milorad Živković, from the small town of Slatina, has emerged as a leader, rallying locals to demand improved conditions.

The work of activists shows the resilience of locals in Bor, people just hoping to live decent lives in a safe environment.

What's a City Worth?

Written by
Kenny Martin





On July 1, 2018, I arrived in Warsaw for a month-long fellowship with Humanity in Action, co-sponsor (with the Bertelsmann Foundation) of the "How to Fix Democracy" interview series. The program brought together 24 young people from a handful of countries to a small hostel on historic Długa Street, barely a block away from the Polish supreme court building and the Warsaw Uprising Monument. Our purpose was to learn about human rights, pluralism and democracy. These are not abstract concepts in Poland, where two days after our arrival, the ruling Law and Justice party passed legislation severely limiting judicial independence, one of the guiding principles of liberal democracy.

Protests erupted, and thousands of Poles descended on Monument square to protest against the new law. After long days spent discussing the erosion of Polish democracy, we encountered a vivid, real-life demonstration of the people's, and the city's, response to that erosion. Some might have called it a classic example of democracy in action. Democracy can be a quiet, private matter: discreetly casting a ballot, writing polite letters to elected officials. But it is also the thunderous roar of thousands chanting the words "democracy" and "constitution" loud enough to be heard by an authoritarian president in his palace halfway across town. Democracy may afford us the peace and security to sleep at night, but as I learned during my month in Warsaw, it can also keep you awake.

"Democracy can be a quiet, private matter.

Inevitably, I joined the crowd. Some nights I was unable to force my way through the throng of protesters and reach the hostel, so I took up a spot and did my best to join in the chants. I managed to snag a poster that has since become a symbol of the fight for liberal democracy in Poland—a fight that has only become more urgent. The poster, illustrated by Luka Rayski, proclaims the word KONSTYTUCJA ("constitution") in bold lettering. Within that word, two smaller ones are highlighted: ty and ja—you and I. The poster is a clear defense of the 1997 constitution, the foundation of contemporary Polish democracy. But it's also an entreaty, an invitation. It reminds people of their duty to fellow citizens; it emphasizes that we are all in this together, for better or worse. Like Walt Whitman, who proclaimed in his poem "Song of Myself" that "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you", the Polish protesters were sending a message of fellowship, recognition and profound belief in the human capacity for togetherness. The poster asks those who see it to join hands in the eternal human struggle for liberty and happiness.

But it is also the **thunderous roar** of thousands chanting the words **"democracy"** and **"constitution"** loud enough to be heard by an authoritarian president in his palace halfway across town."

Those two little words also encapsulate the central tension that exists in any democracy, and in any city. It's no secret that you and I—people in

general—don't always get along. In all societies, disagreement is inevitable. Balancing individual freedom with the collective interest is one of the reasons we need democracy in the first place. Under the freedoms guaranteed by liberal democracy, my right to swing my fist ends at your face, and vice versa. It's up to democracy to establish the laws, customs and institutions that, if they are successful, ensure no noses get broken in the course of the tumultuous business we call human civilization. But democracy works only if both you and I are allowed to participate fully and make our voices heard. One of the chief tests of any democracy is its ability to allow—indeed, to encourage—a wide range of perspectives, a whole host of voices speaking their own needs, desires and ideas.

In December 2021, the Bertelsmann Foundation and Humanity in Action published a book based on the "How to Fix Democracy" interview series, now in its fourth season. When crafting the book, we sought to embrace the messiness and beauty of the polyphony that is inherent in democracy, its cityscape of sonic potential. By bringing together a wide range of voices—economists, writers, professors, politicians, activists and others—we aimed to spark the thoughts, conversations and debates that will be essential to fixing our breaking and broken democracies. From a rich cornucopia of recorded interviews (all available online), we chose the most compelling snippets and arranged them in a way that, we hoped, would let them play with and against each other. Just like citizens of a democracy—or denizens of a bustling city—the interviewees quoted in the book sometimes agree. Perhaps more often, they do not. By crystallizing some of their most provocative and insightful words on the printed page, we hoped to stimulate similar moments of productive agreement and disagreement out in the world.

Now, as Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine stretches into its tenth month, it would be easy to think our aim inconsequential, or even foolish. But I do not think that way. Any attempt at conversation and the happy embrace of friction—any attempt at memory—is worth it, especially when the moral strength of the metropolis seems uncertain. Cities have long been engines of democratic advancement, but it seems reasonable now to ask: Where is democracy, and where is the city?

Particiopating, in a small way, as an oustider in Warsaw's democratic struggle made me think hard about cities and their importance to democracy. Each morning, I traced a path along what, in not-too-distant memory, was the edge was the edge of the Warsaw Ghetto. I knew the significance of my steps, but it would've been easy to forget or not realize, given the way the city has built over and around its own history. Cities hold riches of memory, but they are also wonders of forgetting. This paradox is key to their magic, the endless possibility they promise to those who seek it and to the democracies they push to evolve.

"Cities hold riches of memory, but they are also wonders of forgetting.

This paradox is key to their magic, the endless possibility they promise to those who seek it and to the democracies they push to evolve."

I'm from the conservative suburbs of Dallas, Texas, where some people don't much care for cities, whether Big D or New York City or Washington, DC, much less foreign cities such as London, Warsaw or Kyiv. And it isn't just conservative suburbanites who doubt the wisdom and goodness of cities. Progressives see them, sometimes rightly, as hotbeds of inequality and neoliberalism. Thomas Jefferson favored an agrarian, rather than a cosmopolitan, vision of America. The COVID-19 pandemic weakened many cities and caused even lifelong residents to pack up and leave, perhaps never to return. What good is a city, these people might ask. What's a city worth?

I would answer: an awful lot. City-states, most famously Athens, gave birth to democracy. As several interviewees, however, note in the book, Athens wasn't the only place to do so, and its slave-based society was profoundly unequal. Several Native American peoples embraced democratic forms in a wildly more inclusive manner. We should also remember that Montesquieu considered small nations, and especially self-contained city-states, the most viable long-term platforms for democracy. He was wrong—the continued success of the United States, despite ongoing threats to its democratic stability, proves as much—but he was also on to something. Of course, cities don't guarantee anything. Visitors to Majdanek can't help but be shocked by the death camp's proximity to Lublin. So much for the city's civilizing effects. And wide-open space, agricultural potential, plenty of room for people to live how they choose are stabilizing elements worth, perhaps, as much to democracies as the potentially destabilizing yet socializing ferment of cities.

Cities bring you and me into intoclose, sometimes uncomfortably close, quarters—in the streets and subways, in bars and cafés, in apartment buildings, in parks, at protests. More than anything else, the democratic strength of cities is their ability to make cohabiting with perfect strangers seem, as if by magic, perfectly natural and even pleasant. To say "city" is to say "possibility", and perhaps even to say "love": the teeming and toiling, wearied and rejoicing city a beautiful mess of experiment, improvisation, friction, spark, jazz. Those of us who are drawn to cities know this thrill, which is at least as vital to a country's democratic flourishing as the peace, quiet and security of open, agrarian space. At the least, democracy without the city would be slower to change (and democracy, by design, is slow to change anyway!), less tolerant and more suspicious of itself. It would also be boring, and bored people generally don't make for happily democratic people.

In the January 3, 2022 and January 10, 2022 issues of The New Yorker, a poem by the Polish poet Tadeusz Dąbrowski shocked me with its loveliness and its striking yet unassuming political valence. "Bouquet" (translated by the stalwart Antonia Lloyd-Jones) is 13 lines: six unrhymed couplets and a final, singleton line. The poem is about a girl, "Paulina, the gardener's daughter", who "cares / about flowers doomed to die." Caring Paulina receives a bouquet and "gently places it in the hospice / of a vase". As the flowers wilt and weaken, she trims them, removes the dead ones and makes what seems like a new bouquet out of what remains. By the end of the poem, we are told that Paulina's love for, and belief in, flowers is so strong that she "sees a bouquet in the vase / even when it's not there anymore".

I would humbly suggest that thinking, talking, writing about—chasing after, desperately grasping for!—democracy is an exercise in belief no less arduous, miraculous and perfectly natural than Paulina's. Unlike Putin's deranged and feeble autocracy, which like all autocracies depends on force and coercion, democracy depends on belief, even when it's not there anymore. In a strange way, so does the strength and energy of cities. Witness the resilience of New York and other cities throughout the pandemic. People, like Paulina's flowers, are doomed to die, but perhaps democracy, and the city, too, is not.

A dear friend in Kyiv tells me that now the fighting has shifted, and her beloved city (which she refused to leave all along, instead staying behind and organizing relief efforts for the elderly) has blossoming trees and flowers. Shops and cafes are reopening, and people are walking around and attempting something like normal life again. Through it all has been the belief of people like my friend that their democracy was still there, would always be there, and will always be worth fighting for. Where is democracy? In Kyiv, if anywhere—always, always in the great city. Belief seems like a simple thing, but it's desperately hard to make it happen on a large scale. It's difficult, but not impossible, for everyone at once to see a bouquet in the vase even when it's not there anymore, not there yet.

For a long time, the possibility inherent in cities, the belief in their power to make things move in new and better ways, has found an especially strong foothold in the young—those who have always been drawn to the city by dreams of making their own way, doing their own thing and perhaps making their world a better place. Even as I write this, I am preparing to move to New York, the city of Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, Amy Clampitt and so many others, the city of rife inequality coupled with infinite, indeed somehow democratic, possibility.

Of course, youth has no monopoly on the revolutionary spirit that has always pushed democracy to evolve, the spirit that makes its most enduring and powerful home in cities around the world. During that summer of protest in Warsaw, the thousands of people in the crowd ranged from frustrated teenagers to equally frustrated grandfathers, from businesspeople carrying briefcases to mothers carrying newborns, the youngest generation who will one day, we can only hope, demand the dignity and freedom that democracy bestows on the people who are prepared to protect it. ●

Professor Carol Anderson

Edited by
Tony Silberfeld

On September 7, 2022, the Bertelsmann Foundation, Humanity in Action and Emory University hosted the premiere of the Foundation's new documentary, "I, Too", at the Carter Center in Atlanta. The film, which features New York Times best-selling author and renowned African American studies scholar Professor Carol Anderson, focuses on the intersection of race and history to help explain the erosion of American democracy. Following the screening, Rose Scott of WABE, NPR's Atlanta affiliate, spoke with Anderson, and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Jericho Brown, to discuss the film and U.S. political polarization.

This is an excerpt of the conversation. It has been edited for length and clarity.

Rose Scott (RS): What do people get wrong about defining democracy?

Carol Anderson (CA): It's the battle that we're having right now in this nation, where you have legislators forbidding the teaching of real American history because what they want is a myth. What they want is this really clean, clear, sanitized narrative that has these heroic founding fathers who are basically demigods, if not gods, who just — like BOOM! — came up with the idea of democracy, wrote this flawless constitution, and then created this incredible nation all by themselves.

When you have this historical narrative that has greatness … and then you have … this nation built only primarily by white men, then that becomes foundational for the kinds of warped policies and views that we deal with today that [make you ask], "Well, who built this? Who are the makers? Who are the takers? Who is deserving, and who is unworthy?" ... [Y]ou get this sanitized history that doesn't want to make people feel uncomfortable. Well, history is uncomfortable.

RS: Folks talk about who our founding fathers are … what they had in mind in terms of a vision for this nation. … [Y]ou've heard these words: liberty and equality. The reality is that [that] did not happen for everyone in this nation.

CA: Right. And so, part of what makes this nation this nation is that language of liberty and equality [is] in the language … of justice. It means that this is an aspirational nation. Part of the problem is that you get these folks who try to treat those aspirations as achievements, as if we've already got democracy, as if we already have liberty and equality and justice, and they don't treat it as aspirational. But it is in those aspirations where you see folks fighting for their freedom. And that is the part that is, to me, a key element in American democracy. It's watching African Americans fight for their equality. Watching women fight for their equality. Watching indigenous folk fight for their equality. Watching immigrants fight for their equality. Watching Latinos fight for their equality. Watching Asian Americans fight for their equality. Watching the LGBTQ community fight for their equality. That is American history, not the sanitized crap that they tried to stuff down our throats.

RS: Something that's always intriguing to me is the mindset of the voter right before a big election. And I ask a lot of political science professors [questions [about] the characteristics, the mindset of a voter. And [these professors] always talk about how it's

strategic, it's been building up. Whether it was in 2016 or in even all of these periods … [mentioned] in your film, it's building into the mindset of these folks — mostly, obviously, white here — that democracy, their democracy, is going to be taken from them.

CA: It will push out whites from having political power. It will push out whites from having economic power. It will push out whites from having socio-cultural dominance. And where we are right now in America is in a battle with these two visions of what American democracy could be. One vision is where you have a small strat[um] of whites with enormous power. But part of the trick is that you convince a larger share of whites that they, too, will benefit from having all of those resources. Then you have the other vision, and that vision is [of a] multiracial, multiethnic, multi-religious democracy that is vibrant, that sees a place for all of us, that sees that there are resources for all of us.

RS: What should people know about what democracy looks like?

CA: [F]reedom dreams. When you begin to really think through what it would be like to be in a society where you're not worried when the cops pull in behind you. Where, when you get sick, you can actually afford to get well. When you go to vote, you could actually vote. … It could be what you imagine. In terms of being able to live to your fullness and hav[e] a society around you that values your fullness. That's what we can be.

And that is also part of what this fight is about. African Americans have consistently been asking themselves, "What is my place here?" And you have … different answers. You have … an answer to not leave the United States and go to Africa or go to the Caribbean. You have … answers that deal with finding your own segregated space and building that community there and trying to keep it … a safe zone. You have seen, as well, the push to integrate into America. What I see is that after hundreds of years of unpaid labor and building this incredible space, we don't abdicate from that.

This is as much our [place] as anyone else's. And the real history is knowing that and fighting for it. Envisioning what it could be. Figuring out where the crooked spaces are and straightening them out. We've come this far, and I know sometimes it feels like — Lord! — but we have come this far because of that unrelenting struggle.

"Where we are right now in America is in a battle with these two visions of what American democracy could be.

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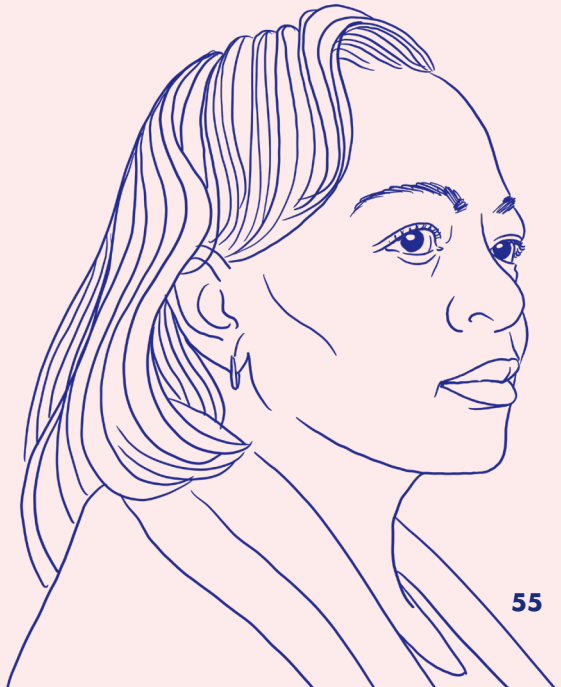
—Prof. Carol Anderson



Take the story of my great-grandfather. My great-grandfather was enslaved on a plantation in Tennessee. He fell in love with a woman next door, and my [great-]grandfather wanted to be married to her. And so, he told his master that he was not going to do any work until he could be with the woman he loved. Now, that is some hardheadedness. You've got to think about this. I'm not working until I can be with the woman I love. And so, his master bought her. They married. And then my great-grandfather worked extra to buy his freedom and hers. And then they got the hell out of Tennessee. When we abdicate, bad things happen.

When I used to go out on the road and give talks on white rage, my audiences were overwhelmingly white. And what I discerned from that was that many whites aren't comfortable with the way that this nation is going. They know something's not quite right, and they are seeking knowledge. You have another core that refused to be educated, refused to learn, refused to engage. …

You've got to know you got a problem first before you can get some help. You got to acknowledge you've got a problem. We have a core of folks who will not acknowledge that, evidence be damned. They are living in a world where you have alternative facts. But the good news is that I really believe that the vast majority of Americans want to know good history. They want to know how we got here. They want to engage. They want a nation where you don't have this kind of destabilizing crap that's going on. Crap is the scholarly term, and I can't give you a better prescription than that.

… [W]e have been dealing with a bunch of myths about a key piece of that mess [that] happened in 2010, in the 2010 midterms. Where folks were disappointed that Obama had not parted the Red Sea, walked on water and fed the multitude. And so, you have a large number of folks [who] just stay[ed] home. You have this massive takeover of state legislatures where they began to implement laws, and gerrymandering, and voter suppression laws, and bathroom … laws, and you just name it. And we have been fighting that rearguard action from what happened in 2010 for this entire doggone decade. That's what … abdication looks like.

"In terms of being able to live into to your fullness and having a society around you that values your fullness.

That's what we can be."

Jericho Brown: Hey, Carol. Story well told. Thank you so much for that. … [W]e all have … questions, and we have … friends in the family who are teetering on the outskirts of the other side. So, not when you're across the table from [former President Donald] Trump, but when you're across the table from your cousins and brothers, what has been one of the most successful talking points that got them to stop in their tracks and say, "Oh, I never thought about that."?

CA: It has been the storytelling. … I talk about how, for instance, in Mississippi in the 1950s, in the 1960s, that was hard. When Fannie Lou Hamer was determined to register to vote, and what she received was a nasty beating. Kicked off of the land and forcibly sterilized for daring to fight for her citizenship. And she kept fighting.

What you all are doing is so important in terms of not just simply disseminating information like what I do every day, but equipping the future [generation] with the necessary tools they need. So that maybe 100 years from now … we don't have to have another screening to talk about what democracy looks like. ●

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