

# Fair Observer

Monthly



March 2022

Fair Observer<sup>o</sup>



---

# Fair Observer Monthly



March 2022

---

Fair Observer | 237 Hamilton Ave | Mountain View | CA 94043 | USA  
www.fairobserver.com | info@fairobserver.com

**The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.**

Copyright © 2022 Fair Observer  
Photo Credit: Iurii Osadchi / Shutterstock

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

---

# CONTENTS

<b>About Fair Observer</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Share Your Perspective</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Unthinkable: War Returns to Europe</b> Gary Grappo	<b>8</b>
<b>Is Ukraine Likely to Join the EU Anytime Soon?</b> Sandra Bandemer	<b>10</b>
<b>Should We Lift the Ban on Russian Sport?</b> Ellis Cashmore	<b>13</b>
<b>South Africa’s Enforced Race Classification Mirrors Apartheid</b> Martin Plaut	<b>15</b>
<b>No, the Ban on Russian Athletes Should Not Be Lifted</b> Hans-Georg Betz	<b>17</b>
<b>Industrialization and Innovation Could Make the Indian Economy Takeoff</b> Aashish Chandorkar	<b>19</b>
<b>COVID-19 Policies Carry Implications for South Korea’s Presidential Election</b> Timothy Rich, Andi Dahmer & Madelynn Einhorn	<b>21</b>
<b>Fellow White Women, It’s Time to Talk About Feminism</b> Colleen Wynn & Elizabeth Ziff	<b>22</b>
<b>Colombia Takes First Step in Joining Latin America’s Left Turn</b> Christoph Sponsel	<b>24</b>
<b>Are Tamil Brahmins Finally Shifting Their Outlook on Caste?</b> S. Suresh	<b>26</b>

---

# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a nonprofit media organization that engages in citizen journalism and civic education.

Our digital media platform has more than 2,500 contributors from 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

As a nonprofit, we are free from owners and advertisers. When there are six jobs in public relations for every job in journalism, we rely on your donations to achieve our mission.

---

# PUBLISH

Join our network of 2,500+ contributors to publish your perspective, share your story and shape the global conversation. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we are a digital media platform and welcome content in all forms: articles, podcasts, video, vlogs, photo essays, infographics and interactive features. We work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential. Think of us as a community that believes in diversity and debate.

We have a reputation for being thoughtful and insightful. The US Library of Congress recognizes us as a journal with ISSN 2372-9112 and publishing with us puts you in a select circle.

For further information, please visit [www.fairobsver.com/publish](http://www.fairobsver.com/publish) or contact us at [submissions@fairobsver.com](mailto:submissions@fairobsver.com).

---

# The Unthinkable: War Returns to Europe

Gary Grappo  
March 1, 2022

---

**The future of democracy in the world now depends on the courage and endurance of Ukrainian defenders and on the economic and financial power of the West.**

**W**ar has returned to the European continent. President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is more than a Russian war on one nation.

It is a war on the West and everything the West represents — its democracy, rule of law, liberty and the rules-based international world order it has established, largely as a result of America's military power and the combined economic might of the United States, the European Union and various like-minded nations.

Superficially, one might look at the start date of this war as February 24, when Russian forces invaded Ukraine. In fact, President Putin declared his war on the West 15 years ago, when he addressed the Munich Security Conference, lambasting the US and its allies for overstepping boundaries, unsettling global order and threatening Russia itself. He was especially sharp in his criticism of the US invasion of Iraq and NATO expansion to include the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

## **Putin's Long-Declared War Against the West**

One year later, in the summer of 2008, Putin launched his first military campaign. Russian forces invaded Georgia, another aspiring democracy, following its (and Ukraine's) application to NATO. He had drawn his line and made clear he was prepared to resist. In 2014, following the ouster of the pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich during the Maidan Revolution (aka Euromaidan and Revolution of

Dignity), Russian forces — disguised by the absence of uniform — invaded and captured the Crimea region in southern Ukraine, subsequently annexing it.

Shortly afterward, Putin threw his support behind Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Donbas in eastern Ukraine, on the border with Russia. That conflict continued to fester through last week's invasion.

As he rationalized in Munich, NATO was advancing east, encircling and threatening Russia. In fact, it was the nations of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus moving West, adopting the Western model of democracy and free economy, and electing to formally associate with them.

Their rationale has been made ever clearer now: They feared Russian aggression and sought the security of NATO and the prosperity of the EU. Russia and Putin's model of one-man rule, fear and intimidation, repression and stymied economic opportunity held no attraction, and even less under some misguided, fever-dream version of a resurrected Russian empire.

It may have been easy to compartmentalize Putin's antagonism as directed solely at former eastern bloc states on Russia's periphery. But Ukraine and Georgia have always been merely the staging grounds of Putin's assault on the West.

His calculation was that a seemingly enfeebled US, weakened abroad and divided at home, and a fractious and divisive NATO would not respond. They would acquiesce to his vision of a neo-Russian empire and the recently resurgent notion — also supported by China — of the spheres of influence of great powers. He also calculated that Ukraine, after its failure to defend Crimea or defeat the Russian-backed separatists in Donbas, would fold in the face of Russia's superior military might.

Putin doubtlessly also realized that Russia is a declining power. The base for its economy, oil and natural gas, while still much in demand, is facing a declining shelf life as advanced countries turn rapidly to renewable energy technologies.



---

Enormously rich in natural resources and even richer in human ingenuity, it is a one-dimensional economy, making it dependent on the vagaries of commodity markets to keep its budget in balance. Its population has been declining over the last decades and is aging. Russia's status in the global power alignment is fading, and Putin knows it. Now was the time to strike.

Putin's whining aside, the invasion of Ukraine was never about the West's threat to Russia. Democracies go to war only when threatened. In fact, Putin was crystal clear in his purpose when he belittled Ukraine and dismissed its independence in a speech on February 21, a nakedly transparent declaration of Russian expansionism. Holding up NATO as the aggressive villain and Ukraine as an inherent and natural part of greater Russia was a red herring that earned no perch outside his most ardent apologists.

### **Calculating Putin Miscalculates**

The reputedly calculating Putin underestimated his immediate enemy, the Ukrainian people, and his ultimate enemy, the West. Nor did he grasp the dimensions of the new kind of war that would result when great powers enter the fray in an overwhelmingly interdependent world. His war has all the signs not only of a hot war but also the Cold War, an economic war, an exponentially more expansive information war than he could have imagined, and a cyberwar.

All will claim causalities across the map, most especially in his own country and Ukraine. Importantly, Russia's vaunted propaganda engine may prove no match for the millions of Ukrainians with cell phones and the hundreds of millions cell phone users around the world supporting them.

But the economic disruption of the unprecedented sanctions imposed by the rest of the world's economic powers, save China, suggests that people everywhere will suffer to some degree. Financial flows are massively displaced, most seriously for a Russia that has been effectively cut out of global financial

markets. Note the massive falls in Russian financial markets and the Russian ruble, the clearest signs of an economy in freefall as investors and consumers rush to cash out and then run for the exits.

Even the massive \$630 billion in reserves Putin had thought he was so clever in amassing to blunt the anticipated sanctions have become a dead asset. No one will take his dollars, euros, yen or Swiss francs, not even his gold; they're all toxic now.

Oil and grain markets have been colossally disrupted. Import-dependent nations, both developed as well as poor, will pay much higher prices, leading to increased inflation and hardship. We should also expect other secondary effects from the war and sanctions.

Ukraine has become the proving ground for democracy. Can the immense financial and economic powers amassed by the world's democracies counter the brute force military power of one country? Nine of the 10 largest economies in the world are democracies, China the lone exception; Russia ranks 12th.

Democracies run the world's financial systems from SWIFT to the global financial institutions that fall under the UN, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. The US dollar dominates global financial transactions and national reserves. Money has often determined wars' winners in the past, but never one on the scale of this one, especially when the antagonists wield nuclear weapons.

### **Courage and Resilience**

It may all fall to the courage and resilience of the valiant Ukrainians. The longer they can hold out against Russia's onslaught, already fraught with unanticipated planning, logistical and tactical problems and questionable troop morale, the more unbearable the economic costs will become for Russia.

Ukraine possesses some of the world's largest areas of super-rich and fertile black earth. The

---

world is hoping it may also prove to be the perfect soil for democracy to flourish.

---

**\*Gary Grappo** is a former US ambassador and a distinguished fellow at the Center for Middle East Studies at the Korbel School for International Studies, University of Denver.

---

## Is Ukraine Likely to Join the EU Anytime Soon?

Sandra Bandemer  
March 8, 2022

---

**The current shift in discourse lays the foundation for consolidating and popularizing the demand for Ukraine’s EU accession.**

**F**ollowing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, speaking of Kyiv’s ties with the EU, said that “they are one of us, they belong to us and we want them in.” These public remarks sparked a major debate on Ukraine’s accession prospects and represent a discursive shift in the European Union’s stance regarding potential membership. A change in discourse will not automatically lead to Ukraine’s dreams of accession being immediately fulfilled, but it strengthens the legitimacy of its bid, which is increasingly perceived as a valid policy option.

After Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed his country’s application for candidate status, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling “for the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Ukraine.” In this vein, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola confirmed that “we recognize Ukraine’s European perspective.” In addition, a group of eight member states expressed support for EU

institutions to “conduct steps to immediately grant Ukraine [an] EU candidate country status and open the process of negotiations” as they “strongly believe that Ukraine deserves receiving an immediate EU accession perspective.”

### No Direct Path

Ukraine’s path toward the EU was never a straight line leading up to this point. While former President Leonid Kuchma formulated Ukraine’s wish to join the EU throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the bloc was initially reserved with regard to these aspirations. A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Ukraine entered into force in March 1998, but a lack of implementation, as well as the upsurge of autocratic tendencies in Ukrainian domestic politics, led former European Commission President Romano Prodi to formulate the “sharing everything with the Union but institutions” paradigm.

In 2002, Prodi declared that we “cannot simply ignore what is happening beyond our borders. Neither can we solve problems with our new neighbours simply by letting them join the Union.” He was referring to endemic corruption, severe impediments to the rule of law or lack of freedom and independence of the media that continue to plague the country. Freedom House still labels Ukraine as only “partly free.”

Despite this, EU–Ukraine cooperation intensified throughout the years with the adoption of an EU–Ukraine Action Plan and Kyiv joining the Eastern Partnership within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) framework. While the ENP establishes a “special relationship with 16 of its closest neighbours who are currently not considered potential candidates for joining the EU,” Ukraine maintained its rhetoric of a pro-EU membership course.

The aftermath of the Euromaidan protests, the inauguration of a new Ukrainian government and the signing of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement in June 2014 were accompanied by contradictory statements on the question of Ukrainian membership aspirations on the part of

---

the EU. Stefan Fule, the EU commissioner for enlargement and European neighborhood policy, argued in favor of Ukraine's admission in the long term.

Additionally, from 2014 onward, the European Parliament repeatedly stated in its resolutions that Ukraine has "a European perspective" and that "pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine — like any other European state — have a European perspective and may apply to become members of the Union provided that they adhere to the principles of democracy, respect fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights and ensure the rule of law."

In contrast, then German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasized in 2015 that the Eastern Partnership shall not be understood as an "instrument for EU-accession" and that "Ukraine must first meet all the envisaged conditions." Even more explicitly, former EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker maintained that "Ukraine will definitely not be able to become a member of the EU in the next 20 to 25 years, and not of NATO either."

### **Drawing Closer**

Juncker's position and the EU's more cautious reactions regarding Ukraine's membership aspirations mark a considerable contrast to the current discourse within the bloc. But while von der Leyen's address to the European Parliament is a positive step forward, it does not mean that the discursive shift on the subject will necessarily lead to Ukraine's accession. Instead, such rhetoric contributes to rendering this policy option more appropriate and legitimate.

In order to open this "policy space," as Lene Hansen, professor of international relations at the University of Copenhagen, put it in 2006, Ukraine's drawing closer to the bloc must be presented as a course of action that conforms with the EU's identity.

Following this line of thought, in her speech, von der Leyen highlighted Ukraine's European character. Not only did she declare that the

outbreak of war in Ukraine means that "War has returned to Europe" (even though war has been ongoing in Eastern Ukraine since 2014), she also refers to Kyiv as a "European capital" and argues that "the European Union and Ukraine are already closer than ever before." Von der Leyen also emphasized that "Nobody in this hemicycle can doubt that a people that stands up so bravely for our European values belongs in our European family."

References to values do not only function as a means to construct a sense of community with Ukraine. They also establish a clear line of difference to Russia. In this respect, von der Leyen cites a Ukrainian newspaper stating that Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks "a clash of two worlds, two polar sets of values." Von der Leyen builds on this quote and argues that "this is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun; between democracies and autocracies; between a rules-based order and a world of naked aggression."

She draws a clear line not only between the EU itself but also other actors who share these values and Russia on the diametrically opposed side. That Ukraine continues to struggle with corruption, restricted political rights and civil liberties as well as a weak rule of law does not fit into this discourse and so is no longer relevant.

Von der Leyen holds that "If Putin was seeking to divide the European Union, to weaken NATO, and to break the international community, he has achieved exactly the opposite. We are more united than ever." Indeed, this perfectly reflects what Australian political scientist David Campbell pointed out already in the beginning of the 1990s, namely that foreign policy discourses lend themselves particularly well to the establishment of an understanding of the inside as opposed to the (threatening) outside — that is, to construct identity through difference.

In that sense, the EU does not only have to "stand up against this cruel aggression" due to the values that it shares with Ukraine and deems attacked by the actions of Russian President

---

Vladimir Putin, but also because “The destiny of Ukraine is at stake, but our own fate also lies in the balance,” as von der Leyen states. Thus, the EU’s own security and freedom are closely linked to the situation in Ukraine.

### **Diplomatic Tightrope**

While von der Leyen’s address to the European Parliament perfectly supports the discursive shift that is currently taking place within the EU regarding closer cooperation with Ukraine, she emphasizes that “There is still a long path ahead.” It remains unlikely that the EU will admit Ukraine via an accelerated procedure in the midst of an ongoing war; this would override the Copenhagen Criteria that determine whether a state is eligible to accede to the EU.

Nevertheless, the current discourse lays the foundation for consolidating and popularizing the demand for Ukraine’s accession. Hence, it is now up to the EU to find ways to reconcile this discourse with Russian concerns and to de-escalate the ongoing conflict.

According to Hiski Haukkala, a professor of International Relations at the University of Tampere, from 2014 onward, the EU has tried to perform a balancing act between showing solidarity with Ukraine and condemning Russia’s attempts to deter Kyiv from following a pro-European path while simultaneously trying to allay Moscow’s unease regarding these developments.

Similar to Ukraine’s aspiration to join NATO, Haukkala foresaw in 2015 “that both EU–Russia relations and the wider European security order will be in for a wider and longer disruption than has currently been witnessed” due to this increasing collision. This is exactly the situation we find ourselves in at the moment.

How can the EU preserve its credibility after stating that Ukraine “belongs to the European family” and that its “own fate also lies in the balance” without adding fuel to the fire of Russia’s security concerns? What the EU needs now is a clear strategy regarding a sustainable postwar European security order that must be,

whether we like it or not, coordinated with Moscow. This does not mean that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is justified by supposed Russian security concerns.

### **War Must End**

Nevertheless, this war must end immediately in order to avert an immense humanitarian crisis and to prevent the war from spilling to neighboring countries.

Considering that Georgia and Moldova are reported to be waiting to hand in their EU membership application any minute now, the union needs a more robust, diplomatically sensitive strategy toward the eastern countries with which it maintains association agreements. The EU urgently needs to provide answers to the question of how it could strive for further eastern enlargement without it being met with Russian aggression.

When asked about the earliest possible date for Ukrainian accession, von der Leyen replied that “This is hard to say. ... Reforms have to be done, processes have to be set up.” This indicates that a clear approach toward Europe’s eastern neighborhood and to Russia in particular is still wanting.

In her speech, Ursula von der Leyen adopted the phrase “Slava Ukraini” — “Glory to Ukraine” — used by President Zelenskyy during his address to the European Parliament. The phrase is a greeting that became closely connected to the Euromaidan protests in contemporary Ukrainian public consciousness. It conveys the vision of an independent and free Ukraine seeking cooperation with the EU.

While the European Union’s discourse demonstrates that this vision already resonates more strongly than ever before, it seems unlikely that Ukraine will be able to join the EU anytime soon.

The European Council has to unanimously approve a country’s application, which will remain unrealistic as long as the core problem of overcoming the dividing line between the West

---

and the EU on the one hand and Russia on the other remains unresolved.

---

\***Sandra J. Bandemer** is a master's student in peace research and international politics at the University of Tübingen.

---

## **Should We Lift the Ban on Russian Sport?**

Ellis Cashmore  
March 9, 2022

---

**Will the sports boycott and other prohibitions actually hasten a cease to the hostilities in Ukraine or will they instead have a paradoxical effect?**

**S**ir Alex Ferguson, who managed Manchester United between 1986 and 2013, the Premier League club's most successful period, employed an age-old trick to motivate his players. He convinced them that the whole world, including the referees, was against them and wanted them to lose. It worked. The siege mentality gave his teams a belligerent defiance, a restless energy and the never-say-die attitude that characterized Ferguson's managerial reign.

I have no idea whether Russian President Vladimir Putin is familiar with Ferguson's motivational strategies nor whether he has even heard of him (though I suspect he has). Yet they are improbable kindred spirits. Putin seems to share with Ferguson a defensive or paranoid attitude predicated on the conviction that they are surrounded by enemies. It's possible to imagine Putin addressing his aides with the kind of blistering, expletive-fueled tirade that used to be known in football circles as the hairdryer treatment.

## **Sweeping Russophobia**

The siege mentality that was integral to Ferguson's success is easy for Putin: The rest of the world actually is against him and his subjects. I'll exclude Belarus (and, for the time being, China), but pretty much everywhere else has decided that the seemingly obsessive Putin is leading his country maniacally toward self-destruction, probably taking a good portion of the rest of the world along for the ride.

Let me define Russophobia as a strong and irrational dislike of Russia and all things Russian, especially the political system of the former Soviet Union as well as its current leader. In Ukraine, ruling parties have pursued a nationalist Russophobic agenda at least since 2018. The sharp increase in worldwide Russophobia since the invasion — or liberation, depending on your perspective — of Ukraine is unprecedented, at least in my experience.

The collective punishment of all Russians, whatever their status, affiliation or political outlook for what appears to be Putin's war, is going to have effects, an unintended one being that it will probably encourage national solidarity in Russia. It's unlikely to turn people against the man in the Kremlin and is much more likely to encourage the kind of paranoid mentality that would make Sir Alex envious.

Russian oligarchs, like Chelsea Football Club's owner (for the time being) Roman Abramovich, will no doubt be angry, particularly at having to dispose of his £150 million London home. But they are not going to renounce Putin: A new home like the one Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's former oil tycoon, was given at the YaG-14/10 penal colony in Siberia for 10 years might await.

Consumer brands such as Apple, Nike and Ikea have pulled out of Russia, followed by PayPal, Visa and MasterCard. Sales of certain Russian vodkas outside Russia have stopped. The broadcaster RT has been removed from British, American and other platforms, presumably to protect guileless viewers becoming brainwashed by Putin's propaganda.

---

## **Sports Boycott**

The Russophobic blizzard has swept into sport too. Football's governing organization FIFA has suspended Russia from international games, thus eliminating the country from the forthcoming World Cup (Russia is currently appealing this). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has recommended to sports organizations that they deny the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes, even as representatives of the Russian Olympic Team or any other spurious denomination.

Formula 1 has terminated its contract with the Russian Grand Prix. The International Paralympic Committee has banned Russians from the Winter Olympics (again subject to appeal.) A full-scale sports boycott of Russia is in the air, probably affecting all athletes, even professional tennis players like Daniil Medvedev, who currently lives in Monaco. The question is, will the sports boycott and other prohibitions actually hasten a cease to the hostilities in Ukraine or will they instead have a paradoxical effect?

The only comparable precedent we have is in South Africa under apartheid. The IOC withdrew its invitation to South Africa to the 1964 Summer Olympics when the country's interior minister Jan de Klerk insisted that the national team would not be integrated. It would, he said, reflect the segregation of South African society — in other words, the team would be white. Other sports followed the IOC's example until, in 1977, the embargo was enshrined formally in the Gleneagles Agreement, which effectively turned South Africa into a sports outcast.

Countries that kept their sporting links with South Africa were themselves ostracized, or blacklisted, as it was known. Individual athletes were forced to compete outside South Africa. Zola Budd and Sydney Maree were notable examples, Budd moving to the UK, Maree to the US. The boycott was eventually removed when apartheid fell in 1990, its total disappearance celebrated in the 1995 Rugby World Cup that which took place in South Africa and was won by an ethnically diverse home team.

We often look back and think the much-publicized sports boycott was a determining factor in ending apartheid, and it's satisfying to imagine that the fusion of sport and politics produced a joyous and wonderful culmination. Certainly, the sports prohibition was an awareness-raiser and effectively signaled the rest of the world's abhorrence of constitutional racism.

But it dragged on over two decades and there is, inconveniently, no conclusive evidence that it had any impact on President F. W. de Klerk's decision to lift the ban on the African National Congress and other black liberation parties, allowing freedom of the media and releasing political prisoners. Nelson Mandela was freed from prison after 27 years, on February 11, 1990.

## **Money And Morals**

The sports boycott embarrassed South Africa as the current cold-shoulder will embarrass Russia. It may also have also have persuaded South Africans, in particular white South Africans, that their prolonged period of misfortune was the result of the antipathy of the outside world. That is probably what will happen in Russia. Citizens will be exasperated when their access to consumables is strangled and they can't use credit cards to purchase whatever products are left. They'll probably resent being restricted to Russians-only sport.

But it won't make a scrap of difference to the wider conflict and might in fact strengthen the resolve of the Russian people. This is not the narrative we are offered by the media, of course.

The longer Russia is starved of international sport, the more credible the siege theory will become. In any case, the boycott will be fractured. Money often strains morals, especially in professional sports. For all the proscriptions and threats of blacklisting, South Africa was still able to offer enough filthy lucre to attract world-class cricketers, including Geoff Boycott, footballers such as Bobby Moore, boxers like Santos Laciari and other athletes. Even the African American promoter, Don King, a staunch

---

critic of apartheid, had agreements with South African boxing, revealed by The New York Times in 1984.

The same will happen in Russia. If it prevails in Ukraine, the probability is that there will be some form of state under the full or partial political control of Moscow, meaning no softening on the various debarments. The sports boycott will expand. This will leave major sports organizations with a new question: Do they recognize Ukraine as an independent sporting nation as it has been since 1991, or as a Russian colony, dependency or protectorate? Ukrainian athletes so far haven't been excluded from international competitions. If they were, the cruelty would be redoubled. It would be a repugnant collision of injustices.

Perhaps justice would be better served if the block on Russian sport were lifted. I know this sounds counterintuitive and might appear to reward, or at least accept, an aggressive act. But I take counsel from the adage that two wrongs don't make a right. An action, no matter how heinous, is never a justification for wrongful behavior.

Many readers will not interpret a sports boycott as wrongful behavior, merely a reaction to provocation. Perhaps. But it would be foolish to hyperbolize the importance of sport; obviously it is not as serious as war, or a million other things. So, why hurt people who are not responsible for the original sin? Anyway, in a practical sense, it would serve to show that while the leadership in Moscow may indeed be execrated, the 144 million Russian people are not.

---

**\*Ellis Cashmore** is co-editor of "Studying Football."

---

## South Africa's Enforced Race Classification Mirrors Apartheid

Martin Plaut  
March 11, 2022

---

**Despite white rule being eliminated in 1994, every South African is still racially classified by law.**

**T**he inability of the African National Congress (ANC) to provide a clean, effective government for South Africans comes as little surprise to anyone who has followed the story. Yet two figures are so astonishing that they really stand out.

The first is 1.2 trillion rand (\$85 billion). It is the estimate of how much money has been lost to corruption. The government's commission, chaired by Justice Ray Zondo, has been unearthing corruption on an industrial scale.

Nelson Mandela himself pointed to this scourge back in 2001, when he remarked: "Little did we suspect that our own people, when they got a chance, would be as corrupt as the apartheid regime. That is one of the things that has really hurt us."

Yet the graft revealed by Zondo has been eye-watering. This is how The Washington Post reported the key finding: "[G]raft and mismanagement reached new heights during the 2009-2018 presidency of Jacob Zuma. While details remain murky, observers estimate that some 1.2 trillion rand (\$85 billion) was plundered from government coffers during Zuma's tenure."

This is a sum that no middle-income country can afford to squander. Many hoped that President Cyril Ramaphosa could rectify the situation, but the glacial pace of his reforms has disappointed many who believed in him.

The other figure is 75%. It is the percentage of youths who are unemployed. While the ANC, and the well-connected elite that run the

---

government, help themselves to taxpayers' cash at will, the young languish without jobs.

Little surprise that the ANC's appeal is fading. The party won fewer than half all votes for the first time when the municipal elections were held in November last year.

### **Racial Classification in South Africa**

Bad as this tale is, at least one could assure friends that state-enforced racial classification is a thing of the past. Gone is the notorious apartheid system that divided every man, woman and child into four racial subdivisions: "African," "Indian," "colored," "white." One might have assumed that this madness was scrapped when white rule was eliminated in 1994 — or so one might have thought. Yet every South African is still racially classified by law.

Take one case. Anyone wanting to lease a state farm in August 2021 would be warned that: "Applicants must be Africans, Indians or Coloureds who are South African citizens. 'Africans' in this context includes persons from the first nations of South Africa." No "white" South African — no matter how impoverished — would have the right to apply. Poverty is not a criterion; only race is considered. Even young men and women born years after the end of apartheid are excluded.

A complex system known as "broad-based black economic empowerment" (BBBEE) was introduced. Every South African is racially categorized and a system of incentives is applied across government and the private sector. White men face the greatest discrimination, African women the least.

Here is an example of how it applies in one sector. The Amended Marketing, Advertising and Communications Sector Code of 1 April 2016 specifies a black ownership "target of 45% (30% is reserved for black women ownership) which should be achieved as of 31 March 2018. The 45% black ownership target is higher than the 25% target of the Generic Code." To win tenders or contracts, all enterprises must comply with the regulations.

### **Race Hate**

At the same time, South Africa's ethnic minorities face racial abuse and racial threats unchecked by the state. The radical populist Julius Malema made singing "Kill the Boers" a trademark of his rallies. In this context, the term "Boer," or farmer, is about as toxic as the n-word is in the American South.

Malema is now on trial. Yet far from the state prosecuting him for stirring up race hate (a crime in South Africa), it was left to an Afrikaans trade union to take him to court. Asked whether he would call for whites to be killed, all Malema would say was that, "we are not calling for the slaughtering of white people ... at least for now."

The trial has had to be postponed because the prosecutor was so fearful of being ladled a "racist" for bringing the case that she resigned.

Nor are whites Malema's only target. Malema has attacked South African "Indians" as an ethnic group, accusing them of failing to treat their African employees fairly. "Indians are worse than Afrikaners," he declared in 2017. In another context, he referred to Indians as "coolies" — possibly the most derogatory term he might have used. Yet the state fails to prosecute him.

One final example. When President Ramaphosa was asked to pick the country's next chief justice, the public submitted some 500 names. The final four were Justice Mbuyiseli Madlanga, President of the Supreme Court of Appeal Mandisa Maya, Gauteng Judge President Dunstan Mlambo, and Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. All are fine legal minds. Not one of them is from among the country's ethnic minorities.

This, despite the fact that some of the most eminent lawyers South Africa ever produced, who fought racial discrimination for years were not African. Men like George Bizos, Joel Joffe, Sydney Kentridge, Ismail Ayob, Edwin Cameron and Bram Fischer would probably not be selected today. Even Arthur Chaskalson, who defended the ANC at the Rivonia trial of 1963 and was chief justice of South Africa from 2001 to 2005, would probably be excluded.



---

## Fighting Back

Glen Snyman — himself a “colored” or a mixed-race South African — has founded People Against Racial Classification to campaign against discrimination. “The government and private sector should deliver to all South Africans equally and not discriminate on identity,” he argues.

But racial classification has its supporters. Kganki Matabane, who heads the Black Business Council, says that even though “democratic rule is nearly 27 years old, it is still too soon to ditch the old categories,” the BBC reports. “We need to ask: Have we managed to correct those imbalances? If we have not, which is the case — if you look at the top 100 Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed companies, 75% or more of the CEOs are white males — then we have to continue with them.”

The ANC’s most celebrated document was the Freedom Charter of 1955. It was the statement of core principles of the ANC and its allies and memorably promised that: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.” With South Africa’s ethnic minorities continuing to face racial discrimination and exclusion from top jobs in government and even in the private sector, it is a promise more honored in the breach than the observance.

---

\***Martin Plaut** is the former Africa editor at BBC World Service. Born in South Africa, he is currently senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and holds the same post with King’s College London.

---

## No, the Ban on Russian Athletes Should Not Be Lifted

Hans-Georg Betz  
March 15, 2022

---

**International competitions are sources of national pride and national prestige, particularly for countries with autocratic regimes.**

In a recent article, Ellis Cashmore raised the provocative question of whether or not we should lift the ban on Russian sport instituted as a result of the invasion of Ukraine. Cashmore advances a number of sensible arguments, most importantly that this ban might turn out to be counterproductive. Instead of coaxing the Russian population to question the neo-imperialist delusions of its “great leader,” President Vladimir Putin, it might provoke an in-your-face backlash, reinforcing rather than weakening the despot’s grip on the minds of his subjects.

Furthermore, Cashmore maintains, experience shows that sports bans largely failed to have a significant impact on regime policies in the past. South Africa is a case in point. There are good reasons to believe that the bans and boycotts the country was subjected to did little to hasten the collapse of apartheid. The same could, of course, be said about sanctions in general, as Peter Isackson has recently noted in these pages. Cuba is probably the most prominent example of the failure of prolonged sanctions to undermine a regime; Iran is another.

This could also be said about resolutions passed by the United Nations General Assembly condemning acts of aggression. The most recent vote following Russia’s attack on Ukraine has demonstrated once again the futility of symbolic gestures, even if supported by the vast majority of the international community. The reality is that for despots and autocrats, the only thing that

---

counts is brute force. After all, what brought Nazi Germany to heel was not boycotts and sanctions but the overwhelming military might of the allies.

### **The Importance of Sport**

Should we, then, lift the ban on Russian sport? In fact, should we lift all sanctions imposed on Russia, given the fact that, empirically, sanctions more often than not turn out to be counterproductive? The answer to the second question is obvious, at least to me. Sanctions might not be particularly effective in their impact on regime behavior, but they serve as an expression of moral revulsion, a signal that we don't want to have anything to do with you, or at least as little as possible. This involves all areas, not only economics — and particularly sport.

It is easy to state, as Cashmore does, that “it would be foolish to hyperbolize the importance of sport; obviously it is not as serious as war, or a million other things. So, why hurt people who are not responsible for the original sin?” Anyone who has ever watched Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film “Olympia,” which documented the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, is likely to get a sense of the importance of sport to autocratic regimes.

The Berlin Games were supposed to demonstrate the superiority of Adolf Hitler's Aryan race. But a black athlete from the United States, Jesse Owens, had the audacity to steal the show, making Hitler's sport warriors — “swift as greyhounds, tough as leather, hard as Krupp steel” — literally eat dust. The Führer was not amused; he hastily left the stadium so not to have to bear witness to the Aryan humiliation.

A famous German strategist once characterized diplomacy as war by other means. The same could be said about sport, particularly during the Cold War period. This was certainly true in the case of the SED regime in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). For the regime, sport was more than a competition, it was a Systemfrage — a question of system, socialism vs. capitalism. Sport victories, particularly against West German athletes, meant confirmation of the superiority of the socialist

system and, of course, of the Socialist Unity Party.

At the same time, sport provided the regime with the international visibility it so desperately craved. For this, no price was high enough, including the health of the athletes. Starting in the early 1970s, the regime embarked on a broad-based systematic doping program. Already at a young age, promising athletes were pumped full of drugs, designed to enhance their performance and competitiveness. Many of them still suffer from the long-term consequences.

The East German case is extreme but hardly exceptional. Anyone who has ever visited Rome can attest to that. Rome hosts an Olympic stadium that dates back to the late 1920s, initially forming part of the larger Foro Mussolini. In the 1930s, the stadium was expanded, in preparation for the 1940 Olympics. The games were ultimately canceled because of the war, depriving Mussolini of the opportunity to showcase his Fascist revolution: the massive obelisk at the entrance of the Foro, with its “Mussolini Dux” inscription, the mosaics leading up to the stadium, glorifying the Fascist takeover, the granite blocs bearing excerpts of Mussolini's speeches.

Mussolini's reign ended in April 1945 at a gas station in Milan's Piazzale Loreto. Yet at the centennial of Mussolini's March on Rome, later on this year, the obelisk is still there, in Rome, in front of the Olympic stadium, together with the mosaics and the granite blocs — a silent testimony to a dictator's hubris and the role of sport in it.

### **Get Real**

One of the most often heard arguments these days on the subject of the sport ban is that it is the “innocent” athletes who are most directly affected by it. “I only feel sorry for the athletes” has been an often repeated mantra by those commenting on the ban. Let's get real. Compared to the suffering and anxieties of millions of Ukrainian civilians subjected to Russian terror bombing, the chagrin of Russian athletes

---

deprived of the opportunity to compete internationally is of little consequence — except, of course, for those, like Daniil Medvedev, who lose money. But then, the ATP has so far refused to follow other sports and ban Russian players.

Finally, one last thought. Before FIFA banned Russia from its World Cup competition, Poland, followed by Sweden and the Czech Republic, made it clear that they would not play Russia in the playoffs for the World Cup at the end of this year. Robert Lewandowski, Bayern München's star forward and winner of the Best FIFA Men's Player title two years in a row, was particularly adamant in his refusal to play against Russia.

I am quite curious to know what would have happened had FIFA not banned Russia. Would Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic have been sanctioned for refusing to play the Russian national team? What would have it done to FIFA's already dismal image if, as a result, Vladimir Putin's aggression against his neighbor had been compensated with Russia's automatic World Cup qualification?

The reality is that international competitions in certain sports, such as football and ice hockey, are more than just sports. They are sources of national pride and national prestige, particularly for countries with autocratic regimes, with star athletes as national icons who are more often than not close to the regime. Alexander Ovechkin, arguably the best hockey player at the moment, has a long history of supporting Putin, including the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

As Czech hockey great Dominik Hasek has put it, this is not a personal matter: "Every athlete represents not only himself and his club, but also his country and its values and actions. That is a fact." It is for this reason that the ban on Russian sport was imposed. It should not be lifted.

---

\***Hans-Georg Betz** is an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Zurich.

---

## **Industrialization and Innovation Could Make the Indian Economy Takeoff**

Aashish Chandorkar  
March 16, 2022

---

**India missed the previous industrial revolutions but can finally industrialize because of global tailwinds, cost-advantages and improvement in domestic innovation.**

**L**abor-intensive manufacturing has historically been the best-known recipe for driving economy-wide productivity enhancement. Over time, several countries, notably those in East Asia, managed to move unskilled workers from farms in rural areas to factories in urban settings. This transition increased both individual incomes and national GDPs, ultimately boosting productivity.

Not all countries have taken to manufacturing, though. Some of them have experienced premature deindustrialization, which economist Dani Rodrik has analyzed extensively. India's manufacturing sector never reached full potential because of this phenomenon.

Instead, India ended up with the "premature servicization" of its economy. This diminished its capacity to create enough well-paying jobs for its large population and did not allow for increased productivity.

### **India's Drive to Industrialization and Innovation**

Services now comprise more than half of India's GDP. As alluded to above, services do not deliver productivity growth in the same way as industry. Those who argue for free trade believe this does not matter. India can import industrial goods like cars and cellphones while exporting software writing and call center services.

Such arguments for a trade-based economy fail to recognize, or in many cases deliberately

---

omit, increasing trade deficits when a country has poor manufacturing. In a volatile and uncertain world, these deficits can become a geopolitical liability for any nation because manufacturers can shut off access to the most basic of goods. Manufacturing does not only increase productivity and enhance security, but it also creates jobs and lowers inequality. For these reasons, India has recently embarked on a reindustrialization program.

The new Production Linked Incentives (PLIs) seek to attract the more reputed global manufacturers, the best brains in industry and high-quality, long-term investments to India. Under PLIs, participants can manufacture for the domestic and/or export markets. The government applied these incentives to 14 sectors, of which telecoms, cellphones, electronic equipment and automobiles are benefiting already.

Many manufacturers station their Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India, which has become a global base for services operations. A June 2021 report by Deloitte and NASSCOM states that 1,300 GCCs employed more than 1.3 million professionals and generated \$33.8 billion in annual revenues in the financial year starting April 1, 2020, and ending March 31, 2021. Another report estimates that GCCs are likely to grow by 6-7% per year and rise to over 1,900 by 2025. It also says that these GCCs are evolving from back-office destinations to global hubs of innovation.

Digitization is aiding this transformation of GCCs. Now, industrial design is no longer a monopoly of a headquarters in Michigan or Munich. Thanks to fast-speed internet and powerful computers, research, design and development of new machines, goods and consumption articles can take place anywhere in the world. Software is playing an increasingly bigger role in creating new hardware, driving additive manufacturing and automating factories. A process of disintermediation of manufacturing is under full swing, leading to what can be called a “servicization of manufacturing.”

This trend gives India a unique opportunity. Global businesses need rapid, at-scale and cost-effective innovation. With its cost advantages and services ecosystem, India can provide that innovation to the world. Conventionally, innovation is associated with creating something new such as an iPhone or a Tesla. However, innovation occurs in less flamboyant ways as well. Any change in design or development that creates new value for the firm or provides an operational competitive advantage is an innovation too.

### **A Unique Opportunity to Takeoff**

Global companies aiming to operate faster, cheaper and better are increasingly operating in India. The country has become more innovative over the years. India granted 28,391 patents in the financial year 2020-21, up from 9,847 in 2016-17 and 7,509 in 2010-11. Last year, the press reported that India registered as many trademarks in the past four years as in the previous 75. India’s rank on the global innovation index has moved up from 81 in 2015 to 46 in 2021. The World Intellectual Property Organization also recognized India as the second most innovative low and middle-income economy after Vietnam.

India missed out on the first and second industrial revolutions. The first one took place in Europe between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries when India was fragmented and undergoing colonization by the British East India Company. The Second Industrial Revolution occurred in the 20th century, but India was ruled by the British government directly, which had no interest in industrialization. London’s incentive was to use India as a provider of raw materials and as a captive market for finished British industrial goods.

After independence in 1947, India failed to industrialize unlike its East Asian counterparts. It chose a Soviet-style planned economy that was closed and protectionist. Only in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed did India embrace market reforms and liberalized its economy.

---

Today, India is growing at 9% and its GDP is about to touch the \$3-trillion mark. With strong global tailwinds, India can embrace industrialization and innovation, and finally enter what American economist Walt Rostow has termed the takeoff stage of economic growth.

---

\***Aashish Chandorkar** works as counselor in the Permanent Mission of India to the World Trade Organization in Geneva.

---

## **COVID-19 Policies Carry Implications for South Korea's Presidential Election**

Timothy Rich, Andi Dahmer & Madelynn Einhorn  
March 18, 2022

---

**President-elect Yoon will need to address a changing COVID-19 environment amid a fatigued and divided Korean public.**

**O**n top of a highly contested presidential race and the election of People Power Party (PPP) candidate Yoon Suk-yeol on March 9, South Korea's COVID-19 numbers are rapidly rising, with the country experiencing over 300,000 infections a day and record rates of COVID-related deaths. Despite the increase in cases, the South Korean government has removed several COVID-19 policies, including extending business closing times and removing the vaccine or negative test requirement to enter many public spaces.

Although South Korea has reduced its prior strict contact tracing policies, the percentage of critically ill patients is less than the country's last peak in December 2021. The key question now is what the South Korean public thinks about the government's COVID-19 response.

South Korea's 2020 national assembly election was internationally praised for balancing ease of voting amid pandemic restrictions and provided a blueprint for other countries, with President Moon Jae-in's administration largely praised for its efficient response to the pandemic. South Korea even allowed citizens who have tested positive to cast a ballot at the polls once they recovered, even if voting had officially ended.

However, with cases rising in late 2021, evaluations of the Moon administration's handling have soured, although still hovering around 40% — the highest in the country's democratic history for an outgoing president and similar to his vote share in 2017. Yet Yoon and the Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung, both polling under 40% in the run-up to the election, declined to outline any pandemic response plan until November, when there was already a shortage of hospital beds — likely a result of the government's "living with COVID" plan.

Similarly, minor candidates have not presented clear COVID-19 policies. Even beyond the "living with COVID" strategies, candidates have not shared concrete plans to build back infrastructure after the public health crisis.

To understand South Korean evolving perceptions of COVID-19 policies, we conducted a pre-election web survey of 945 South Koreans on February 18-22 via Macromill Embrain using quota sampling on gender, region and age. We asked respondents to evaluate on a five-point Likert scale the following statement: "I am satisfied with the South Korean government's response to the coronavirus outbreak."

We found, at best, mixed support for the government's response, with overall disagreement outpacing agreement — 43.6% versus 35.8%. As before, perceptions deviate on party identification, with supporters of the ruling Democratic Party (DP) largely satisfied with the response (64.8%), while supporters of the main conservative party, the PPP, are largely dissatisfied (71.4%).

---

Supporters of the two smaller parties, the progressive Justice Party and the center-right People's Party, showed responses that were more mixed, perhaps because candidates had not emphasized COVID-19 policies in campaign rhetoric. Regression analysis finds that women and older respondents are more supportive of COVID-19 policies, while after controlling for age, gender, education, income and political ideology, supporters of the DP were still more likely to evaluate pandemic policies favorably while PPP supporters were less likely to do so.

Noting this partisan divergence, we next wanted to identify whether views on COVID policy may have indirectly influenced support for one candidate over another. Regression analysis finds that even after controlling for demographic factors and party identification, satisfaction with COVID-19 policies negatively corresponds with voting for Yoon and positively for Lee.

However, we also found that views of COVID-19 policies largely correspond with evaluations of President Moon's job performance, questioning whether these measures were driving evaluations of Moon or whether perceptions now may simply be picking up sentiments regarding Moon irrespective of the actual policies. Further analysis shows that including evaluations of Moon's performance in our earlier statistical models results in the COVID-19 evaluation failing to reach statistical significance.

Whereas COVID-19 policies helped Moon Jae-in's party in 2020 win a clear majority in the national assembly, our evidence suggests evaluations now may have contributed to an anti-incumbency vote even as both of the major candidates lack clear policy prescriptions related to the pandemic. Regardless, President-elect Yoon will need to address a changing COVID-19 environment amid a fatigued and divided Korean public.

---

\***Timothy S. Rich** is an associate professor of political science at Western Kentucky University

and director of the International Public Opinion Lab (IPOL). **Andi Dahmer** is the international Exchange Program Manager at the World Affairs Council of Kentucky. **Madelynn Einhorn** is an honors undergraduate researcher at Western Kentucky University.

---

## Fellow White Women, It's Time to Talk About Feminism

Colleen Wynn & Elizabeth Ziff  
March 18, 2022

**When the broad range of women's experiences is not acknowledged, the feminist movement remains incomplete.**

---

**I**n March, as part of Women's History Month, we rightfully celebrate women's achievements and the strides toward equity we have made collectively. Yet we need to be honest about how we got here and how far we still have to go. Women's History Month should have an intersectional lens and be a celebration of all women and their lived experiences, but it is often the voices of white women that dominate the narrative.

The first official Women's History Month was inaugurated in 1980 and has been celebrated every year since. There are indeed many milestones and accomplishments to celebrate, including the strides women have made in education and the economy, the increased representation of women in government, and the hard-won legal and social equality. At the same time, white women have leveraged their relative racial privilege to make these gains at the expense of women of color.

### Incomplete Picture

While it feels empowering to think of women as a collective group, this category is not a monolith. Failing to consider women and

---

women's history from an intersectional perspective leaves out the range of experiences and needs of women who do not fit into the white middle-class mold. In short, when the broad range of women's experiences is not acknowledged, the movement remains incomplete.

Because historical and contemporary women's movements have willfully and strategically omitted racial justice, there is a legacy of isolating racism from sexism. This ignores the lived experience of everyone except white women. It has ensured that white women see a competition between issues of racism and sexism, and feel that they lose if the conversation centers around the former.

The suffragettes made the deliberate decision to fight for the right of white — not all — women to vote, choosing not to collaborate with black female activists. More recently, the 2017 Women's March organizers faced criticism for focusing primarily on white women's issues.

And in the peak of the #MeToo movement, celebrities like Alyssa Milano, who said that she felt blessed to be the vessel for the movement, and Rose McGowan, who professed annoyance at not being credited with initiating the movement, have by and large been associated with the inception of #MeToo. In reality, Tarana Burke, a black female activist and advocate, coined the phrase and spearheaded the movement to raise awareness of sexual violence against working-class women and women of color a whole decade earlier.

As sociologists and white women, we argue that the discomfort regarding engaging with racism in both the society in general as well as in women-centered movements stems from the idea that white people don't have to talk about race and racism because they aren't "our issues." But, because we live in a racialized society, everyone has a racial identity.

Another way to think about this is by acknowledging that race is socially constructed, meaning that it carries a social, not biological categorization. However, the fact that it is

socially constructed doesn't mean it isn't real. In a racist society, race has very real consequences for people.

### **Real Change**

To avoid injury and to build a more equitable and just society, white women must become better at talking about race and racism, and recognize that while we experience sexism, we benefit from racial privilege in society. These benefits range from not having to navigate racism when dating to more frequent promotions in the workplace compared to minority women to extensive media coverage when a white woman goes missing, among others.

Real change will mean giving up some of our comfort and power. Making these changes may not feel nice to us as individuals, but will have life-saving consequences for black people and other people of color.

Second, we must recognize racism is a structural problem that is embedded into the fabric of American society. Dismantling it will require supporting anti-racist policies and politicians, and advocating for laws such as the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021, which aims to "improve maternal health, particularly among racial and ethnic minority groups, veterans, and other vulnerable populations. It also addresses maternal health issues related to COVID-19."

To ensure that political leaders truly represent the American public, everyone must have a seat at the table. While there have been four women on the Supreme Court, this month, we have the opportunity to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who would be the first black woman on the court.

Finally, we cannot begin to address racism without a shared knowledge of the truth. Ideally, this means casting a wide net and engaging with people from different backgrounds. Black activists and authors can show us the social world through their eyes. But even so, we can't expect anyone to tell us what "good" white people we are. In the words of the late scholar and activist

---

bell hooks, there is no gold star for “challenging white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal values.”

What’s more, since racism is structural, we will all say and do racist things at times. But if we care about making the world a better place, we must listen, learn, apologize and continue to improve. Of course, self-knowledge is not enough. As white women, we must simultaneously work to improve ourselves and engage in the difficult work of dismantling white supremacy. This won’t be easy work, but it’s work that is worth doing.

---

\***Colleen E. Wynn** is an assistant professor of sociology, co-director of the Community Research Center, and director of the Master of Arts in Applied Sociology at the University of Indianapolis. **Elizabeth Ziff** is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Indianapolis.

---

## **Colombia Takes First Step in Joining Latin America’s Left Turn**

Christoph Sponsel  
March 23, 2022

---

**Before a first round of presidential elections in May, Colombia has elected a new Congress, indicating that the country is joining Latin America's turn to the left.**

**C**olombia, Latin America’s third most populous country, held congressional and presidential primary elections on March 13. Citizens had a chance to vote for candidates to be elected to the two houses of Congress and in primary elections for presidential candidates of three political coalitions from the political left, center and right.

The elections have provided a crucial first indication of which direction Colombia is heading ahead of the presidential elections in May and June. According to preliminary results, Colombia remains with a highly fragmented Congress; none of the parties has achieved more than 16%. Yet the results are historic. The big winner of the elections is the Pacto Historico, a group of several left-of-center parties campaigning on a platform of social equality. The group won 19 out of 108 seats in the Senate and 28 out of 172 in the House of Representatives, up from nine and seven in 2018.

Other parties performing well were Colombia’s traditional liberal and conservative parties, which had lost influence in recent years after dominating the country until 1991 when a new constitution opened the political space for other political contenders.

In Colombia, which many observers consider one of Latin America’s most conservative societies, left-leaning politics never managed to gain much ground. Therefore, the results indicate a potentially historic shift since a party with a distinct leftist platform and identity performed strongest for the first time.

### **The Electoral Prospects of Gustavo Petro**

The results emphasize the chances of Gustavo Petro, the leader of the Pacto Historico, to become Colombia’s next president since he won the group’s primary elections with 80.5%. Over the last two years, Petro has been the consistent front runner in all presidential election polls.

He was a member of the urban revolutionary guerilla group M-19, which demobilized in the early 1990s, and later became a senator and mayor of Bogota, Colombia’s capital, from 2012 to 2015. In 2018, Petro was a presidential candidate but lost in the second round to Ivan Duque from the right-wing Democratic Center party.

However, the recent results and Pacto Historico’s strong performance show that a win of the left is more likely this time. Many Colombians feel it is time for political change



---

after decades of right-leaning governments. Two waves of nationwide protests swept the country in 2019 and 2021, demanding, amongst others, wide-reaching social and economic reforms and intensified state protection against the killings of social activists. In the climate of national outrage, a president from the left suddenly seems not so out of place anymore.

While no one doubts that Petro will gain sufficient votes to reach the second round of presidential elections, the recent results show that he will need to convince Colombians from the center to vote for him too. Petro has already indicated after the election his move toward the center, claiming to “invite all the democratic forces that are not yet in the Pacto ... we must give way to a large, broad and democratic front.”

The primary elections have also revealed Petro’s contenders. Although some presidential candidates decided to remain outside of the primaries, Petro’s key rivals will be the winners of the rightist and, to a lesser extent, of the centrist primary elections.

Both centrist Sergio Fajardo and right-leaning Federico “Fico” Gutierrez have been mayors of Medellin, Colombia’s second-largest city in the past. While Fajardo draws support from the wealthy and well-educated urban middle and upper classes, Gutierrez relies on the votes from Colombia’s large conservative sectors and its stronghold, the department of Antioquia.

### **The End of Uribism?**

The elections also showed that the influence of Uribismo, a right-wing populist political movement named after Alvaro Uribe, Colombia’s president from 2002 to 2010, is vanishing. Uribe’s presidency was most known for the military regaining ground against several leftist guerrilla groups and alliances between state and right-wing paramilitary forces resulting in severe human rights violations. Uribe was for the last decade seen as the most influential politician in Colombia, leading a campaign against the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the

FARC guerrilla group, and a key mentor of President Duque.

Uribe himself, who in 2018 received most votes of any elected senator, did not run again amidst a judicial process against him for bribing witnesses and procedural fraud. The political party associated with the movement, the Democratic Center, which in the previous Congress was the strongest, came fourth in the recent elections.

The party suffered from the notorious unpopularity of the Duque administration, which has disapproval ratings of over 75%. “I am the main person responsible [for the loss of seats] due to my damage to [the party’s] reputation,” Uribe declared last week.

The party’s presidential candidate, Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, who did not participate in the primary elections of the rightist coalition, has halted his campaign and is supporting Gutierrez instead.

### **A Similar Trend Across Latin America**

Should Colombia vote for Petro, the result would confirm recent trends across Latin America. Since 2018, leftist presidential candidates have won elections in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Peru.

Likewise, current polls for Brazil’s elections in October this year predict a landslide win of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a former president from the Workers’ Party, over far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro.

Over the following weeks, campaigning will become more intensified. In the highly polarized country, many participants in large-scale protests during recent years feel that with Petro, a politician addressing their needs could potentially assume power for the first time. Should their hopes amount to nothing and Colombia remain with a right-wing government, a reemergence of mass-scale protests is likely, which in the past resulted in severe police brutality and human rights violations.

With the probable outcomes being Colombia’s first leftist government or nationwide protests,

---

the country faces some truly historic elections ahead.

---

\***Christoph Sponsel** is a doctoral student in political science at the University of Oxford.

---

## **Are Tamil Brahmins Finally Shifting Their Outlook on Caste?**

S. Suresh  
March 25, 2022

---

### **Are we seeing signs of change among the traditionally conservative Tamil Brahmin community?**

**S**eeing Devi, our servant maid, brew a cup of hot filter coffee for my mother, thoroughly shook me up. Devi? Enjoying free access to that sacrosanct location in a Tamil Brahmin home, its kitchen? Free to light the stove, boil the milk, prepare a south Indian decoction, make a steaming hot cup of filter coffee? That too, for my nonagenarian mother?

Evidently, Devi has free access to every part of the house, including the kitchen, once considered inviolable by Brahmins. Four or five decades ago, an act like this would have been utterly inconceivable. Growing up, I remember servant maids barely had permission to walk inside our home, let alone enjoy unfettered access to the kitchen. When they did come inside, it was only to sweep and mop the floor, spending the minimal amount of time necessary to accomplish those chores.

The rest of their tasks, such as cleaning the vessels, washing the clothes and drying them on a clothesline, would be done in the backyard. Taking their sense of cleanliness to a new height, vessels cleaned by the servant maid would be rinsed once again with water untouched by the

servant before they eventually found their way into the kitchen.

I couldn't help but reflect on the dramatic shift in attitude I observed in my family, belonging to the elite Tamil Brahmin upper caste, toward Devi, belonging to one of the lower castes. Is this experience unique to me and my family? Or is it something that is a reflection of the changing times in the traditionally conservative Tamil Brahmin community?

I knew scientific evidence based on facts regarding the social change I was ruminating on would be hard to come by. But I was convinced that if I tried, I would find anecdotal evidence of this shift toward a more liberal way of life among other Tamil Brahmin — or colloquially, Tam Brahm — families.

### **A Liberal Infusion**

Every parent desires upward mobility and better quality of life for their offspring. Not surprisingly, Tam Brahm also subscribed to the same sentiment. This quest for upward mobility among Tam Brahm resulted in a generational shift in the type of career they aimed for. Gone was their desire to secure a steady job in a bank, central government organization or, as a distant consolation prize, in a state government organization. Instead, they set their eyes on professional careers, armed with degrees in engineering or medicine. Some sought to become entrepreneurs, a rarity in the past.

Securing professional degrees did not come easy for Tam Brahm youngsters. The Tamil Nadu state's 69% caste-based reservation system in higher educational institutions meant many had to leave the comfort of their home and their home state in pursuit of those credentials. They may have left with apprehension, but that provided them an exposure to the outside world that was erstwhile impossible in the cocooned Tam Brahm way of life.

At a recent high school reunion, I had the opportunity to meet several of my childhood friends after a gap of more than 30 years. While many had spread their wings and flown far and

---

wide, there were few who had stayed their entire life in Madurai, the town where I spent the bulk of my childhood. Conversations rarely went beyond the friendly banter befitting a reunion among childhood friends, but there were clear indications on where one stood on the conservative-liberal divide.

A scientific survey, had one been done, would have corroborated the following hypothesis: Those who had the opportunity to explore the outside world, especially at the defining moment immediately following high school, typically subscribed to more liberal views.

### **Aging and Necessity**

Decades ago, living in the rural towns of Tamil Nadu, my parents were steeped in caste-based hierarchical distinctions. Being young, they had little reason to question their belief system or modify their core values. Surely, views and beliefs passed down through generations wouldn't crumble with the nascent liberal perceptions of their youngest children? They did not.

During the phase when they were still strong and able, and I was behaving like an insufferable know-it-all, there were many occasions we simply had to agree to disagree. The shift I allude to started happening only as my parents started aging and developing a dependency on others. That shift accelerated when their primary caregivers, my older brother and sister-in-law, also entered the post-retirement phase of their life.

Most interestingly, the interactions I shared with my parents played out in a slightly modified form among my brother's own family. Dispelling my doubts that this could be unique to my immediate circle, Purushothaman and Sathesh, two Tam Brahm friends of mine, corroborated very similar developments in their respective families.

Sathesh remarked that his mom started yielding gracefully once she realized that resistance was futile. Puru concurred, albeit, in a less colorful, non-Star Trek language, saying that

his mom is not where he is (on the conservative-liberal social spectrum), but that she is far more tolerant compared to her past self.

As my mother entered her 90s, the demands on the care she needed increased. This set the perfect scenario for Devi to start playing an increasingly prominent role in the household work in order to ease the pressure on my brother and sister-in-law. It was not before the sexagenarian couple started embracing the help from their servant maid from an entirely different angle, while the nonagenarian matriarch was forced to let go of her deeply entrenched hierarchical distinctions.

Far from reluctant tolerance, Devi's presence has found grateful acceptance among my family members.

### **Altruism?**

In the past, Brahmins asserted their superiority by employing a variety of oppressive techniques. While many of them involved dehumanizing and stripping away the agency of those beneath them, withholding knowledge was by far the most effective technique they employed to stay on top of the caste totem pole. It is no surprise that the caste-based reservation system targets this very aspect in higher educational institutions, offering preferential treatment to a staggering number of non-Brahmin caste and communities.

This is not an article on the caste system in India, but I would unequivocally recommend "Annihilation of Caste," a speech Dr. B. R. Ambedkar wrote in 1936, as a must-read for anyone interested in understanding this woeful practice.

In a dramatic U-turn from the behavior of withholding knowledge, it is now commonplace to see Tam Brahm households sponsoring the education of their servant maid's children. Not only does this act guarantee upward mobility for those kids, but it also effectively reduces the supply of future maids.

I asked Puru if this isn't akin to shooting yourself in the foot. Puru, who had sponsored the school education not just of his servant maid's

---

children but also that of his neighborhood vegetable vendor's son, commented succinctly, "It is the right thing to do."

### **A Glimpse Into the Future?**

If I thought I am liberal in my outlook, my children effortlessly put me to shame. The extent to which their ideas challenge the social status quo is more than evolutionary. They are downright revolutionary. But that is a topic for another article.

What is important here is the concept of identity. While I still acknowledge and accept my Tam Brahmin identity, to my children, it would hardly be a matter of significance. Sathesh wholeheartedly agreed, remarking that, while growing up, and even now, he was proud of his Tamil Brahmin heritage, but he sees that it makes absolutely no difference to his kids. Thinking about his older son who is a trained classical Carnatic musician, Puru chimed in, saying that despite the rigorous traditional gurukul education, his son espouses far more liberal views than him.

The reshaping of this identity has many ramifications, the most prominent one being the number of inter-cultural and inter-caste marriages involving Tam Brahmins. In the last decade, we have welcomed Gujarati, Malayalam and Punjabi grooms into our family. What was once unthinkable is now so commonplace that it has found broad social acceptance.

Tamil Brahmins, who account for less than 3% of the state's population, may already be an endangered species as the pendulum of poetic justice swings hard to the other side. The threat to their identity from within and without causes many to lament about the future of Tam Brahmins as a community. Particularly concerning is the plight of the learned priests, whose profession it is to administer and uphold the rituals and practices in Tamil Brahmin homes, temples and elsewhere.

Me? I am simply glad that my family has embraced humanity over conservative traditionalism — and hope that the anecdotal evidence I have observed in my small circle of

friends and family is a harbinger of things to come.

---

**\*S. Suresh** is a product executive with more than 25 years of experience in enterprise software and also a writer.

---