

Media Highlights 2024 Q2



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BY THE NUMBERS

43



Languages

29 Billion

Global Impressions

108



Countries

5.74k

Media Mentions

\$250 Billion

Earned Media Value

OFF IN THE NEWS

**OSLO
FREEDOM
FORUM**

Produced by the Human Rights Foundation, the Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF) is a global conference series held annually in Oslo, Norway. At the 2024 OFF, the world's leading human rights advocates, industry leaders, artists, and journalists gathered to share their stories and brainstorm ways to reclaim democracy. OFF alone garnered over 2.3 billion media impressions.

EL NACIONAL

June 3, 2024



María Corina Machado en el Foro de la Libertad de Oslo

Nrk

June 3, 2024



Finnes det et Russland uten Putin? Ja, mener organisasjonen til Aleksej Navalnyj

Aftenposten

June 3, 2024



Håper på forandring

DN Dagens Næringsliv

June 4, 2024



- Dere kan ikke bøye kneet og kysse ringen



**The
New York
Times**

June 5, 2024

For Victims of Human Rights Violations, Family Matters

2

June 6, 2024



Frykter de blir "Asias Belarus": - Kina vil erobre verden

Forbes

June 9, 2024



Reclaiming Democracy With Bitcoin At The Oslo Freedom Forum

Aftenposten

June 3, 2024



Håper på forandring

DN Dagens Næringsliv

June 4, 2024



- Dere kan ikke bøye kneet og kysse ringen

**NATIONAL
REVIEW**

June 12, 2024



Cries for Freedom, against Tyranny

**The
Observer
Post**

June 13, 2024



Raqib Naik Delivers Keynote On 'India's Authoritarian Descent' At Oslo Freedom Forum

Russia's Opposition Needs More Than One Savior

Outlet
Op-Ed
Foreign Policy

Author
Casey Michel

Date
March 1, 2024



Flowers are seen placed around a portrait of late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny at a makeshift memorial in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, on Feb. 29. PHOTO BY AFP

The past few weeks have seen an outpouring of both grief and tributes following [the death of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny](#). And rightfully so. Navalny's death in a Siberian gulag effectively snuffed out what many viewed as the clearest path to Russia's eventual democratization.

No one had fooled themselves that Navalny would, somehow, win Russia's upcoming election, with President Vladimir Putin's reelection all but confirmed. But there were plenty, especially in the West, who still viewed Navalny as a figure [akin](#) to Nelson Mandela, emerging from a lengthy prison tenure to lead his nation into a bright, democratic future. Now, that dream is dead. And any potential for Russia's eventual democratization appears even more distant, and even less likely.

But while Russia's remaining opposition continues to look for new strategies to employ in the wake of

Navalny's death, one clear lesson has hopefully emerged for those in West. It is too risky to place all hopes of a nation's eventual democratization on a single person.

It's not just that a singular figure can, as seen with Navalny, be killed. It's also that for as much bravery as Navalny exhibited—and, to be clear, Navalny illustrated more bravery than most people will ever know—there were clear faults and frailties within his politics. While Navalny arguably proved to be Putin's most able political opponent, he also shared many of the same revanchist tendencies that propelled Russia into Ukraine in the first place—a reality that far too many in the West preferred to ignore or downplay.

But it is a reality that can no longer be overlooked. After all, if it is Russian nationalism that has unleashed Europe's most destructive conflict since the Second World War—and pushed the world closer to potential nuclear conflict than anything in decades—then anyone exhibiting these tendencies, as Navalny did for years, must be treated cautiously. And if the clearest lesson to emerge from Russia's invasion of Ukraine is that Western interlocutors need to listen more—far, far more—to warnings and analysis from former Russian colonies, then it's long past time to listen to what Ukrainians have been saying about

Navalny and other leading lights of Russia's anti-Putin opposition.

All of which points to one clear takeaway from the past few weeks: With Navalny's death, the time has come for the West to move beyond the idea that some Mandela-type figure will emerge in Russia. Instead of placing its hopes in a singular future leader, the West will be far better served by facing the threats of Russian irredentism head-on, and finally focusing on eliminating Russian nationalism as a political force, once and for all.

Ironically, the West's willingness to place all hopes on a single, conspicuous figure in Moscow—while turning the other way when that figure's imperialistic tendencies came to the fore—hardly began with Navalny. Such a phenomenon can be tracked all the way back to the late Soviet Union, when the administrations of both former Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush tacked hard toward supporting Mikhail Gorbachev and his domestic reforms.

Of course, Gorbachev's policy portfolio, including achievements such as *glasnost* (or "openness," which referred to increased transparency and the loosening of state censorship), was a sight better than that of any of his predecessors. But when Gorbachev's forces slaughtered

anti-regime protesters in places such as [Kazakhstan](#), [Georgia](#), and [Lithuania](#), the West hardly blinked, embracing Gorbachev ever closer—and blinding the West to the anti-colonial movements emerging across the Soviet Union. Those movements, which the United States actively tried to [tamp down](#), eventually toppled the Soviet empire entirely, catching Washington flat-footed and leaving Gorbachev as a man without a country.

Under the Clinton administration, Washington followed the Soviet collapse by heaving its hopes for Russian democratization onto newly elected President Boris Yeltsin. And understandably so; Yeltsin was, amidst the Soviet rubble, the clear leader of the emerging Russian Federation, and a man who at least gestured rhetorically toward democratic aspirations.

But then, in just his first term, Yeltsin's authoritarian nationalism roared

to the fore. Not only did he [shell parliament](#) and implement the super-presidential [system](#) that Putin later inherited, but Yeltsin also [refused](#) to remove Russian troops from eastern Moldova and [oversaw](#) armed interference efforts in northern Georgia—all while he [threatened](#) to redraw Russia's borders with both Ukraine and Kazakhstan if the former colonies didn't follow Moscow's writ. And most notoriously, after Chechens [voted](#) for independence from Moscow, Yeltsin launched a devastating campaign in 1994 to crush Chechen separatists—an invasion that he and Putin would reprise again toward the end of the decade, [leaving](#) hundreds of thousands dead.

All the while, U.S. officials' criticism of Yeltsin was effectively nonexistent. As one [academic analysis](#) of the era summed up, the "Clinton administration saw no alternatives to Yeltsin and was prepared to support him no matter what."

UAE once again tries to launder its image

Outlet
Op-Ed
Washington Times

Author
Michelle Gulino

Date
March 5, 2024



President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan smiles while posing for a photo prior to his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan made a surprise visit on Monday, Dec. 5, 2022, to Qatar as it is hosting the World Cup – his first since leading a yearslong four-nation boycott of Doha over a political dispute that poisoned regional relations. (Pavel Bednyakov, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP, File)

While the [United Arab Emirates](#) keeps up its farcical image-laundering – an attempt to look like a place that doesn't crack down on dissent and individual freedoms – it has found another façade to hide behind: International Women's Day.

Starting March 5, Know Your Value and Forbes' 30/50 Summit will gather lead governmental figures, journalists, celebrities, businesswomen, and even activists for a multi-day women's mentoring event in Abu Dhabi.

The only problem? It would be massively contradictory and, at best, very awkward to celebrate women's achievements in a country ruled by a regime that denies women the basic rights that would allow them to attain those very achievements.

While the [UAE's](#) constitution formally enshrines human rights in name, and the country has made some progress in this area, in practice, it enforces blatantly discriminatory legislation, including a male guardianship system, men's rights to discipline female relatives, and unequal rights in marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

The regime that rules the [UAE](#) marginalizes Emirati women into becoming repeated victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Marital rape isn't criminalized, and a woman who refuses sexual relations with her husband without a "lawful excuse" can lose her right to financial maintenance.

Other vulnerable groups are also routinely abused.

The death penalty may be imposed for individuals in the [UAE](#) who engage in same-sex sexual activity, and the government routinely arrests and deports LGBTQ+ individuals. Content that references LGBTQ+ persons is severely restricted; in 2022, the [UAE's](#) Media Regulatory Office banned the screening of the Disney-Pixar animated film "Lightyear" because it depicts a same-sex relationship and, the same month, threatened Amazon with penalties if it didn't block LGBTQ+-related products on its [UAE](#) website. Amazon caved to the pressure, directly breaching its self-proclaimed commitments.

Moreover, the Emirati government has repeatedly violated citizens' and foreigners' right to privacy through sophisticated surveillance technology, employing Pegasus spyware to target dissidents and journalists

For example, an international investigation confirmed that at least 12 journalists were targeted by the [United Arab Emirates'](#) government with Pegasus spyware, as was Hanan Elatr, the wife of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, just months before Mr. Khashoggi's murder.

Lastly, the [UAE](#) has ignored recommendations to protect freedom of expression, instead adopting a vague and overly broad federal law largely targeting political opposition leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, and their lawyers by criminalizing statements that "decrease public confidence in...state authorities."

These examples make clear that the significance of "Know Your Value" extends beyond women and that a regime that so flippantly strips away anyone's human rights is clearly uninterested in negotiating on terms meant to adopt a pro-human rights stance.

But what authoritarian regimes are interested in is whitewashing their abuses and building up their social capital by simply purchasing it. At the close of 2022, we saw Qatar host,

with great pomp and circumstance (and criticism), the premier football sporting event, the FIFA World Cup. Saudi Arabia, one of the world's biggest offenders of human rights and a country where women were not even allowed to set foot in a football stadium until recently, has engaged in one of the most extensive exercises in sportswashing: The Kingdom was named host of the 2023 Club World Cup and is set to host the 2034 World Cup, among numerous other global sports investments.

Given this reality, authoritarian regimes are obviously profitable allies for democracies and the organizations within them, which, in effect, all but endorse their actions. So, if events like the 30/50 Summit continue to be held in dictatorships like the [UAE](#), what is the incentive for such a regime to change its typically unchallenged conduct?

Allowing the [UAE](#) to play host to a major International Women's Day event contradicts a critical principle:

Authoritarian regimes must earn their seats at the table by making trackable efforts toward implementing change that does not severely restrict their citizens' agency.

Those who argue that engaging with dictatorships is the right way forward for progress miss the point: Dictators' very existence is fed by the suppression of basic human rights, and there is no such thing as a 'benevolent dictator.' If authoritarian regimes prove they are serious about not merely amending but reversing policy and protecting and promoting human rights, they can earn a seat at the table — without actually hosting the event.

Many women leading the 30/50 Summit are undoubtedly pioneers in their respective fields and would make superb mentors. But mentorship demands truth, and if they want to mentor, "lift each other up and pay it forward," they should lay bare the truth of the abuses taking place outside the Summit's doors.

5 Scenarios for Russia After Putin's Next Term

The dissident might still be alive if his countrymen showed the same courage that Ukrainians have.

Outlet
Op-Ed
Foreign Policy

Author
Casey Michel

Date
March 16, 2024



This weekend, Vladimir Putin will win another election as Russia's president. The election will, of course, be rigged in Putin's favor, just as all of his past elections have been, but Putin is all but assured to claim another six-year term, taking him to at least 2030.

Yet for all that inevitability, Putin's next term as president has been the focus of surprisingly little discussion, including what it is likely to mean both inside and outside Russia. And that's all the more surprising given that Putin's regime is arguably more destabilized now than it's ever been, with little end in sight for Russia's growing economic troubles or the spiraling deaths on the battlefields of Ukraine. Since last summer alone, Russia has seen a [sudden mutiny](#), led by a renegade militia that nearly marched on Moscow; [rampaging anti-Semitic riots](#), with security services nowhere to be found; and [protests erupt in normally placid places like Bashkortostan](#).

No one can say what these events portend. But it's clear that the war in Ukraine has helped make Russia's domestic situation more unstable than it's been in decades, and all kinds of potential future scenarios are no longer unthinkable.



While Alexei Navalny may have been the most prominent leader of democratic movements in Russia, killing him will hardly eliminate pro-democratic energies in the country. | Kirill Kudryavtsev/AFP via Getty Images

So it's a good time to think about them. In at least considering the paths below — and the likelihood of their arrival in the not-too-distant future — the West can begin preparing accordingly, especially in terms of strategy and policy. We know much about Russia's past and plenty about Russia's present. But what about Russia's future?

Below are five scenarios that Russia might (or might not) experience by the end of Putin's next term in 2030.

SCENARIO #1 Democracy Flowers LIKELIHOOD: 5-10%

Why It Might Happen: As the anti-communist, anti-colonial revolutions in 1989 across Eastern Europe illustrated, totalitarian regimes can rest on quicksand and quickly crumble in the face of democratic movements. Putin's disastrous decision-making in Ukraine has already had unforeseen knock-on effects, which will only continue to generate discontent moving forward — and more interest in potential alternatives, including outright democracy.

And that was true even before Alexei Navalny's suspicious death in prison. While Navalny may have been the most prominent leader of democratic movements in Russia, killing him has hardly eliminated pro-democratic energies in the country. With Navalny transformed from a campaigner into a martyr, such momentum for democratic reform — even democratic revolution — might actually begin building anew. As a prisoner, Navalny was out of sight, and largely out of mind for most Russians. But as a symbol of the lengths Putin's regime will go to snuff out any opposition, Navalny may now become something more.

Combined with the other protests still gurgling around Russia, not least those organized by [soldiers' mothers and wives](#), a sudden burst of democratic momentum around the country is now possible. Nothing would be more of a testament to Navalny's life, and to Navalny's legacy.

Why It Might Not Happen: As much as many in the West would like to see a full flourishing of democracy in Russia — whether led by Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, or someone else — the likelihood of such a scenario playing out before 2030 is minimal. And that was the case even before Navalny's death. Now, with the leader of Russian democratic hopes suddenly snuffed out, any chance at rallying Russians to a democratic cause has almost certainly died with him, at least for the foreseeable future.

Just look at where Russia is. Navalny is, in many ways, irreplaceable, just as jailed pro-democratic figures like Vaclav Havel or Nelson Mandela before him were irreplaceable, and whose countries' democratic transformations happened only after they were freed. The rest of Navalny's pro-democracy infrastructure has been effectively undone, stamped out by Putin's repression. And even with the shock of Navalny's death still settling, the Russian body politic has hardly evinced any interest in liberal democracy anyway. Rather than rallying to his cause, many have simply shrugged their shoulders at Navalny's demise, and gone on with their lives. The same goes for hopes of rising opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine; even two years into Putin's disastrous war, the majority of Russians are still [passively, if not actively, supportive of the unprovoked invasion](#).

What the West Should Do: The best hopes for a democratic Russia lie, perhaps ironically, not in Russia itself, but in Ukraine. Just as colonial failures in places like Angola and Algeria led to democratic, post-imperial reforms in places like Portugal and France, so too could a Ukrainian victory kill off Russian nationalism and Russian revanchism — and finally spur the kind of democratic flourishing Navalny called for.

If this scenario does come to pass, it's incumbent on the West to return to an old strategic staple: [trust, but verify](#). Don't get overexcited about Russia's democratic prospects — a mistake far too many in the West made in the 1990s — but encourage what you can. Be open to lifting sanctions and [hydrocarbon price caps](#), but only in return for concrete reforms and prosecutions of Putin-era officials. All the while, keep building out relations with Russia's neighbors and former colonies, places like Moldova and Armenia.

Perhaps above all else — and as sacrilegious as it may sound right now — don't put your hopes in a single leader. Navalny was the clear lode-star for Russian democratic hopes, but even he had his nationalist weaknesses, claiming, for instance, [that Crimea is rightfully Russian](#). If nothing else, Navalny should be the last singular Russian figure so many in the West place hopes of democratic

reform on — a belief that has [burned the West in the past](#) and that led the West to miss just how ingrained Russian imperialism still is.



A Dagestan officer kicks the body of a Chechen fighter in the village of Pervomaiskaya after the Russian grueling assault on Jan. 19, 1996. | Serguey Chirkov/AFP via Getty Images

SCENARIO #2 Russia Disintegrates LIKELIHOOD: 10-15%

Why It Might Happen: Picture this: on the back of a devastating war, with hundreds of thousands of Moscow's troops slaughtered in a meaningless fight, Russians turn out to protest en masse, and overthrow an aging, doddering regime. Long-buried frictions and frustrations ripple across the country and a nation supposedly united under the steady hand of Moscow suddenly splinters along ethnonationalist lines. Chaos sprints across the nation, which collapses into a mixture of anarchy, territorial fragmentation, and violence that leaves no region, and no family, untouched.

Sound farfetched? Think again.

This is, after all, precisely what happened in Russia in the late 1910s and early 1920s, when the tsarist collapse ripped apart the Russian Empire, with peoples and polities across Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and northern Asia all declaring independence — only for most to eventually be gobbled up by a rising Soviet regime.

This is also what we saw following the Soviet collapse (albeit with far less violence), when new nations claimed their sovereignty following the USSR's collapse — and not just in places like Ukraine or Kazakhstan. Residents in [Chechnya voted for clear independence](#), while those in [Tatarstan voted for equal footing with the Russian Federation](#). Residents in places like the Siberian nation of Sakha [signed agreements for an independent army](#), while residents in the Buddhist nation of Tuva [unleashed anti-Russian violence that bordered on outright pogroms](#). State fracture — and independence for nations long colonized by Moscow, but still largely unfamiliar to the West — stalked the Russian Federation.

Could it happen again? Perhaps not immediately. But Russia remains a conglomerate of 21 republics, dozens more regions, and even more nationalities with uncountable grievances against Moscow. The longer the war continues — and the more these colonized minorities are tossed into Putin's meat grinder, slaughtered at

[far higher rates than ethnic Russians](#)

– the likelihood of such a scenario increases. Perhaps in the republic of Chechnya, its leader – an increasingly unhealthy Ramzan Kadyrov – dies in office and infighting over a successor spirals into a third Chechen War. Perhaps in Muslim-majority Tatarstan, veterans' committees and local students gather to protest both Moscow's recruitment of Tatar infantry and [smothering of Tatar identity](#) – and the Kremlin, in a fit of failed strategy, opens fire on the protesters, sparking a broader anti-colonial movement. Or perhaps, in Sakha, the unemployed storm and seize control of Russian hydrocarbon infrastructure, demanding the funds be returned to their colonized nation, and demanding the sovereignty they agreed to in the early 1990s.

Why It Might Not Happen: Many Russian analysts still view this scenario as farfetched, given Putin's grip on power. And they're not necessarily wrong; aside from Chechnya, no clear thirst for outright independence is evident, even in those nations watching their men be massacred in Ukraine. Recent protests in places like Dagestan and Bashkortostan, for instance, weren't solely about independence but included economic and environmental grievances as well.

Still, dismissing this scenario out of hand would be unwise. All it takes is a spark, and the tinder that Putin

has built up over his quarter-century in power could go up in flames – a likelihood that only grows alongside Putin's disaster in Ukraine.

What the West Should Do: The West should stay flexible and remain mindful that the Russian Federation is hardly a homogenous entity. It should encourage democratic forces around the country, including in those that emerge in nations long colonized by Moscow, while training far more speakers of languages like Chechen, Sakha and Tatar. It should also lean on those who successfully safeguarded the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal during the Soviet collapse, making sure their expertise is implemented yet again. And it should prepare to be comfortable with territorial reorganization across the Russian Federation – a country that still refuses to recognize its own colonial legacies, which are only going to become more trenchant as the years pass.



While Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group never quite reached Moscow, that wasn't for lack of opportunity; if anything, the path was wide open. [Vasily Deryugin/Kommersant Publishing House via AP

SCENARIO #3 Nationalists Rising LIKELIHOOD: 15-20%

Why It Might Happen: A year ago, the idea that a renegade militia led by a frothing nationalist could nearly march on Moscow, sending Russian officials scurrying for cover, was fantasy. Not that it hadn't been done before; the [so-called](#) "Kornilov Affair" of 1917, and even the [failed hardliner coup](#) of 1991, showed what a move could potentially look like. But under Putin, the idea that Russian nationalists might congeal and storm Moscow long seemed laughable.

And then, last June, militia head Yevgeny Prigozhin did just that. And while Prigozhin's Wagner Group never quite reached Moscow, that wasn't for lack of opportunity; if anything, the path was wide open. If Prigozhin accomplished anything, it was that he made Putin look like a tsar with no clothes.

Of course, Prigozhin is no longer around – his plane exploded over Russian airspace a few months later, killing him and much of his inner circle in what is widely assumed to be Putin's retribution. But all of the ingredients that fueled Prigozhin's rebellion are still there: frustration with Putin's bungled invasion; the ongoing stripping of Russia of men and material in order to continue a quagmire; and the kind of spiraling wealth inequality that's launched

populists and revolutionaries around the world before.

For those reasons, this appears to be one of the likelier scenarios facing a post-Putin Russia. The flames of nationalism, stoked by Putin, will hardly subside anytime soon.

Why It Might Not Happen: Still, a scenario like this is hardly inevitable. Prigozhin himself was almost one-of-a-kind – a chef-turned-oligarch willing to publicly break with Putin's cabinet, and even insult the president himself, all while building out a globe-spanning militia from Ukraine to central Africa. At the moment, there's no other force that can compare to Prigozhin's Wagner Group, much of which has been dismantled and subsumed by the state.

Plus, if anything, Putin is only getting *more* nationalistic as the war drags on, [leaning further and further into outright fascism](#). Outflanking Putin from the right is only going to get more difficult, especially as he continues descending into the [world of nationalistic conspiracies](#).

What the West Should Do: If and when a more nationalistic figure or cadre replaces Putin, the West should continue to strengthen and expand sanctions, lower the hydrocarbon price caps, build out diplomatic and security relations with Russia's neighbors, especially those (like Ukraine) directly targeted by

Russian nationalists — all of it part of a broader package of policies. Call it, if you will, containment — a policy that helped hem in Soviet expansionism and could once more help to rein in an expansionist Moscow.



Smoke rises from a building in Bakhmut, site of the heaviest battles with the Russian troops in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. | Libkos/AP

SCENARIO #4

A Technocratic Reset

LIKELIHOOD: 20-25%

Why it might happen: We're now two years into Moscow's failed invasion of Ukraine, and the impact in Russia is already obvious. And those costs, whether in terms of a sagging economy or spiraling body counts, will continue piling up. Which is why the idea of an inner circle of Kremlin officials meeting with Putin and informing him that they appreciate his service, and that they wish him well in retirement — a redux of [Nikita Khrushchev's 1964 ouster](#), in other words — is a scenario only rising in likelihood as time goes on.

Indeed, there's a distinct likelihood that by 2030, a new regime will

emerge in Russia. (Not that it needs to lead an internal conspiracy against Putin; the aging dictator could, of course, just die in office, and save us all the trouble.) The new government wouldn't be democratic, necessarily. But it would be headed by a small number of Western-trained, technocratic elites, who would start out saying many of the things Western officials and businessmen, eager to get back to a kind of *status quo ante-bellum*, love to hear. They would put much of the blame for the war on Putin alone, promising a return to a sense of normalcy in Moscow. They might go so far as to free certain political prisoners and opposition politicians, or even rescind Putin's 2022 announcement of annexations in eastern Ukraine (though not Crimea).

All the while, they would call for something that many Western politicians would welcome: "reset." A chance to start over. To start fresh. And to pledge a new Russia moving forward.

Why It Might Not Happen: With apologies to Isaac Newton, there's an iron law of authoritarianism: a dictator in power tends to stay in power. In other words, wresting control from a dictator like Putin always requires significantly more planning, energy and resources than the incumbent leader needs to thwart

any internal conspiracy. It's not that surprising, when you think about it, given that a dictator like Putin still holds all the levers of the state — and cultivates competition among his underlings, who would be eager to rat out any anti-Putin plotting. Toss in the fact that Putin still appears to have wide support among Russian officialdom — not least because, given the state of the war in Ukraine, Russia might actually win — and hopes of a Khrushchev-style ouster are hardly a safe bet.

What the West Should Do: If this actually were to happen — if a new, technocratic elite manages to wrest control from Putin — the West's policy formula should be a flip of the strategy for actual democratic transition. That is, the West must distrust, but verify. If nothing else, Western officials should remember that every time a "reset" approach with Russia has been pursued, the West ended up appearing foolish, myopic, or both. For that reason, any calls for a renewed "reset" should be treated with severe skepticism. And while democratic reforms should obviously be encouraged and incentivized — especially as it pertains to lifting restrictions on civil society or Russia paying reparations for Ukraine — any improvements should be treated as temporary. After all, we've seen this story before, and we've seen how, time and again, it ends.

SCENARIO #5

Long Live President Putin

LIKELIHOOD: 45-40%

Why it might happen: This was always going to be the likeliest scenario, wasn't it? Barring unforeseen health events, and especially given the U.S.'s newfound squeamishness on backing Ukraine, Putin can look at his new presidential term as something that he will likely serve out entirely, and potentially far beyond.


And understandably so. With the death of Navalny, the democratic opposition is in shambles. The Russian economy, despite a barrage of Western sanctions, has hardly collapsed, even if it's turned sluggish. Although Putin hasn't conquered Kyiv, the worst of the Ukrainian war may yet be behind him, especially given the U.S.'s reticence to arm Ukraine. And compared to American presidents, at just 71, Putin's still got (relative) youth on his side.

He's already become one of Russia's longest ruling leaders, with plenty of presidential terms behind him. Looking ahead to 2030, why would anything change?

Why It Might Not Happen: Putin's grip on power still appears strong — but there are plenty of factors that will make his next term far different, and potentially far more difficult, than anything he's seen previously.

The West should use every tool it can find to force Russians — both those in the Kremlin and the broader populace itself — to realize how much better off they, and the rest of us, will be when Putin is no longer in power.

– Casey Michel, Foreign Policy

Vladimir Putin's grip on power still appears strong — but there are plenty of factors that will make his next term far different, and potentially far more difficult, than anything he's seen previously. 

Take the economy. While Putin's managed to ride out the sanctions against Russia thus far, the economy as a whole is clearly heading for both stagnation and rising inflation. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Putin's missteps have already resulted in staggering casualty numbers. Either ingredient would be enough to threaten any leader, no matter how authoritarian. Escaping the vise of both is going to stretch Putin's dictatorial toolkit further than ever before.

What the West Should Do: Ratchet up the pressure, wherever and however it can. [Continue and enhance the sanctions](#), including against third parties in places like [the United Arab Emirates](#) that are helping Moscow skirt sanctions. Strengthen the hydrocarbon price caps, which have already drained revenue to the Russian state, and [seize outright](#)

[all of the frozen Russian Central Bank assets](#). Deepen partnerships with those on Russia's periphery, especially as it pertains to encouraging democratic developments.

And, perhaps most of all, recognize that so long as Putin remains in power, Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine will continue, with threats of far broader warfare hanging in the offing. The West should use every tool it can find to force Russians – both those in the Kremlin and the broader populace itself – to realize how much better off they, and the rest of us, will be when Putin is no longer in power.

Casey Michel is author of the forthcoming book [Foreign Agents: How American Lobbyists and Lawmakers Threaten Democracy Around the World](#), and is currently the director of the [Human Rights Foundation's Combating Kleptocracy Program](#).

Empowering Human Rights Through Bitcoin And Open Source Software

Outlet
Forbes

Author
**Brianna Honkawa
d'Estries**

Date
March 17, 2024



Bitcoin and Open Source Software are tools for financial liberation. BRIANNA HONKAWA D'ESTRIES

To many, bitcoin is simply a deflationary store of value, an investment, or a "digital gold." To many more, bitcoin represents freedom from tyranny, financial empowerment, and hope. The cryptocurrency has enabled activists from all around the world to raise funds, escape their tyrannical governments, and bank themselves when they have no other alternative.

[The Human Rights Foundation](#) established the [Bitcoin Development Fund](#) in 2020, channeling over \$2.7 million into more than 100 nonprofit projects worldwide. This initiative highlights HRF's conviction that bitcoin is not merely a digital currency or an investment, but a critical human rights issue. As a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for human rights globally, especially in closed societies,

HRF strategically positions bitcoin as a pivotal tool for advancing financial freedom, resisting censorship, and fostering empowerment through open source technology.

Insights gleaned from [Alex Gladstein](#), the chief strategy officer of HRF, and the founders of various bitcoin nonprofits supported by HRF further reinforce the consensus on bitcoin's essential role in promoting human rights.

HRF's Commitment To Bitcoin As A Human Rights Issue

HRF promotes liberal democracy in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. The organization believes that bitcoin can serve as a superior financial tool for activists globally due to the currency's private, decentralized, and resilient properties. Gladstein explains that the reason HRF began to support bitcoin projects is because it's aligned with activism. "It's collaborative, decentralized, and aligns really well with the human rights movement."

Bitcoin lays the foundation for a peer-to-peer financial system where payment processing occurs through global competition. It embodies the essence of people's empowerment,

offering a pathway out of tyranny. In a thriving bitcoin ecosystem, individuals would possess a currency resistant to censorship by authorities, immune to devaluation by governments, free from monopolization by corporations, impervious to mass surveillance, unimpeded by borders, and accessible to all.

Gladstein emphasizes that "dictators and governments control the financial system globally and continuously deplatform people they don't like." Bitcoin solves this problem because no single entity controls it.

HRF's Impact On Bitcoin Nonprofit Organizations

HRF focuses on deploying capital to open source initiatives that help advance the bitcoin protocol as well as usability of bitcoin worldwide. Gladstein explains the importance of supporting free and open source software initiatives because "it is aligned with activism and it is software for the people." FOSS is not in the business of creating closed, proprietary software - it's about the spirit of collaboration.

The influence of HRF's support on nonprofit initiatives in the bitcoin space is profound, as evidenced by five grantees focused on making bitcoin better, [Lucas Ferreira of Vinteum](#), [Lisa Neigut of bitcoin++](#), [Brandon](#)

[Iglesias of TABConf](#), [Rockstar Dev of BTCPay Server](#), as well as [Bernard Parah](#) and [Abubakar Nur Khalil](#) of [BTrust Builders](#).

Lucas Ferreira, Co-Founder Of Vinteum

Lucas Ferreira, co-founder and executive director of Vinteum, a nonprofit bitcoin research and development center focusing on supporting developers in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, shares how he's working to improve bitcoin for the LATAM community.

HRF has donated over \$50,000 to Vinteum, which has used the money to support bitcoin core developers, fund all six monthly [bitcoin developer meetups](#) across Brazil, train and mentor upcoming Brazilian engineers, and set up the first bitcoin community space in Brazil, CASA21. All of these local community-based initiatives help foster important conversation and innovation.

One of their grantees, [Davidson Souza](#), is leading the development of [Utreexo/Floresta](#), which aims to allow almost any device to run a full bitcoin node without the need for a large amount of bandwidth or expensive hardware.

Because internet bandwidth is so expensive due to monopolies in emerging markets, Utreexo/

Floresta aims to make running bitcoin nodes as lightweight and affordable as accessing a website. Developments like these make running and accessing bitcoin much easier for those in emerging markets, where bitcoin is needed the most.

Lisa Neigut, Founder Of Bitcoin++

Lisa Neigut, founder of bitcoin++, a developer-centric nonprofit conference series, underscores the importance of developer education to improve human rights. Through HRF's grants, bitcoin++ has been able to facilitate developer participation in global conferences for expert knowledge exchange. These grants have enabled the organization to host conferences globally, fostering collaboration among experts and new developers wanting to improve the bitcoin protocol.

Notably, developers from Argentina, El Salvador, and India were able to attend the bitcoin++ event in Berlin in October 2023 thanks to HRF's backing. Technical conferences enable important conversations around how to work together to improve bitcoin for real people, and that is exactly what bitcoin++ continues to foster.

Brandon Iglesias, Co-Founder Of TABConf

Brandon Iglesias, co-founder of TABConf, a technical nonprofit bitcoin conference that I also volunteer for, highlights the importance of HRF's contributions beyond their monetary donations.

"By bringing attendees from diverse regions worldwide to TABConf, including those who may not have had access otherwise, HRF has significantly expanded the conference's reach," Iglesias said.

Through HRF's support, TABConf has been able to offer grants to activists from Brazil and Africa to bring in the perspective of folks in emerging markets, enriching technical discussions with real-world problems that can be solved with bitcoin.

Rockstar Dev, Core Contributor At BTCPay Server

Rockstar Dev, a Core Contributor at BTCPay Server, a self-hosted and open-source cryptocurrency payment processor, explains that HRF's support has directly helped activists and NGOs accept "uncensorable and unfreezable" global payments using bitcoin.

Through HRF, Rockstar Dev has been able to connect with activists that rely on the BTCPay Server software to accept donations and payments to their causes.

One example of this is [EndSars](#), a movement in Nigeria against police brutality. These activists were shut out of their payments platform, [Flutterwave](#), and could no longer receive donations. Bitcoin was the only way to receive any kind of donation, and in the end, they successfully used BTCPay Server to receive donations safely, securely, and without any censorship resistance. Now, BTCPay Server is used by HRF to receive [bitcoin donations](#) from anywhere in the world.

Bernard Parah and Abubakar Nur Khalil, Co-Founders Of BTrust Builders

BTrust Builders (formerly Qala), a fellowship program that trains the next generation of African bitcoin and lightning network developers, received a [\\$100,000 grant](#) from HRF in 2023. The grant allowed BTrust Builders to continue its 13-week fellowship program, as well as sponsor six of its fellows to attend HRF's [Oslo Freedom Forum](#), a conference that brings industry experts and activists together to foster collaboration.

Bernard Parah and her Co-Founder Abubakar Nur Khalil, who is a Forbes Contributor, explain that HRF has helped their builders consider the human rights perspective when building, giving them the context to understand how these tools are being used in the real world. More

directly, HRF has made it possible for BTrust Builders to start bitcoin developer meetups across the African continent in Abuja, Lagos, Accra, Nairobi, and Kampala, which makes bitcoin educational resources available to all of these communities. One of the most impactful initiatives that Parah discusses is the [AfroBitcoin conference hackathon](#), which is geared toward building tools and products for Africa by Africans to increase adoption and solve practical use cases of bitcoin to address African-specific challenges.

Why Bitcoin?

Bitcoin's distinctive attributes position it as a crucial tool for individuals confronting oppressive regimes. Each of these founders have a different perspective on the "why bitcoin" question, however they all agreed that bitcoin is the only cryptocurrency that inherently promotes human rights.

According to Ferreira, bitcoin's essence lies in being "owned by no one, global, community-driven, and accessible to everyone."

Iglesias echoes this sentiment, highlighting bitcoin's immunity to singular control or influence that could sway its trajectory, a feature not shared by other cryptocurrencies.

Neigut emphasizes that bitcoin's resilience sets it apart, noting its extensive reach, diverse toolkit, and historical trend of appreciating in value over time, distinguishing it as a robust network unparalleled in modern currency systems. She also makes the point that, "it's the only currency that's typically worth more tomorrow than it is worth today."

Parah makes the point that bitcoin has an unmatched record in serving as money for the financially marginalized, restoring their economic freedom and empowering them to "continue fighting the good fight."

To Rockstar Dev, bitcoin represents a unique form of money that's completely non-discriminatory and a currency which all humans can freely opt into. Gladstein points out that every other currency has someone controlling it at the top, with decisions made without your control. Bitcoin is not controlled by any central authority, therefore distinguishing itself from all other currencies.

Future Collaboration Between Nonprofits And HRF

HRF is bullish on the future of the Bitcoin Development Fund, planning to give out over \$500,000 every quarter this year. The focus this year is to double down on non-KYC infrastructure, like noncusto-

dial wallets such as [Sparrow](#) and [Muun](#). HRF is also excited to support more educational initiatives such as the [Anita Posch](#) podcast, [Mi Primer Bitcoin](#), and more conferences in emerging markets, such as [Bitcoin 4 India](#), [Africa Bitcoin Conference](#), and the [Bitcoin Atlantis](#).

HRF also plans to continue to support more development on the bitcoin protocol level as well as the lightning network, the bitcoin scaling protocol. Examples of grantees working on these projects are developers like [Gloria Zhao](#), who is working on privacy on the network level or Calvin Kim making bitcoin more efficient on the network level. HRF plans to expand support for all of these initiatives.

According to Neigut, HRF focuses on the human aspect of freedom and bitcoin++ is focused on celebrating and bringing together the human aspect of open source software, built on a bitcoin standard. Neigut looks forward to more developers learning how to improve bitcoin so that everyone in the world benefits.

Iglesias emphasizes that TABConf is a place for how technical changes to bitcoin affect its usage and accessibility to folks around the world. It's a place where activists and developers can work together to address their pain points that can be prioritized and solved by bitcoin. Iglesias looks forward to

making technical discussions around bitcoin more accessible to a global audience in order to hone these discussions on the most pressing issues people face today.

Ferreira notes that Vinteum's focus for the past couple of years has been to expand their reach throughout Brazil, but with HRF's continued support, hopes to expand to other regions in LATAM, emulating the success seen in Brazil. The goal for Vinteum is to become a prominent body throughout all of LATAM that defends the interests of emerging markets in the bitcoin space.

Rockstar Dev is excited about their [newfound partnership](#) with [Voltage](#) to facilitate the integration of BTCPay Server into the web presence of dissidents and NGOs so that accepting bitcoin is easier, faster, and more secure for these entities.

Parah and Nur Khalil look forward to more of BTrust Builders' grantees attending and engaging in the Oslo Freedom Forum each year. Working with HRF has strengthened their developers' understanding that people's lives are in the hands of the products and services they build. By attending the Oslo Freedom Forum, these builders benefit massively "from hearing firsthand from leading activists using bitcoin as a lifeline."

The partnership between HRF and bitcoin nonprofits focused on FOSS

showcases the transformative power of financial technology in advancing human rights causes.

Bitcoin is so much more than a store of wealth, it is being used by real people throughout the world every day. It is a currency that is aligned with activism and has the potential to transform so many people's lives, especially in emerging markets where through grants and support, these initiatives are not only shaping the future of bitcoin development but also contributing to a more inclusive and empowered global economy.

As we navigate the intersection of technology and human rights, it is evident that collaborative efforts like these are essential in driving meaningful change and fostering innovation globally.

Iran's death sentence for rapper shows how far it'll go to squelch dissents

Outlet
Op-Ed
New York Post

Author
Claudia Bennett

Date
April 29, 2024



A protester holds a sign calling to free Toomaj Salehi during a protest in solidarity with the Iranian rapper, who was sentenced to death by courts in Iran for supporting the anti-government protest movement in Washington Square Park. Ron Adar/Shutterstock

There's no length Iran won't go to [in order to quash dissent](#). Murder included.

Last week, the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Court of Isfahan sentenced rapper Toomaj Salehi to death over songs that criticized the government.

Salehi's primary charge was "corruption on earth," which is punishable by death in Iran.

The ruling goes against an Iranian Supreme Court decision that said the 33-year-old rapper's case qualified for amnesty.

Salehi's lawyer said they'd be appealing the ruling. They have 20 days to do so.

Salehi was first arrested and arbitrarily detained in October 2023, after he released a song supporting the protesters of the Women, Life, Freedom movement following Mahsa Amini's September 2022 murder at the hands of Iran's morality police.

His lyrics were simply: "Someone's crime was that her hair was flowing in the wind. Someone's crime was that he or she was brave and [was] outspoken."

Roughly a year later, he was released on bail, after being sentenced to six years, yet 12 days later, he was arrested again – this time for posting a video detailing his torture and the conditions of his detention.

Those are just two of his unjust run-ins with Iran's "justice" system.

To date, he has endured two arrests without a warrant, three sham trials and four charges that are routinely used against dissidents – "corruption on earth," "spreading propaganda," "cooperating with a hostile government" and "incitement to violence."

Salehi has spent 528 days in arbitrary detention, at least 400 of which were in solitary confinement or incommunicado.

During all of that time, he wasn't allowed access to his lawyer or contact with his family and was repeatedly tortured.

All for a song, basically.

Imagine Jay-Z or Eminem being sentenced to death for exercising one of the most basic of human rights: the freedom of expression.

For people everywhere, throughout all of time, music has reflected culture, faith, political views and values.

Artists detail their personal tragedies through lyrics, bring people together through catchy beats and unite us.

Not so for the roughly 72% of the world's population living under authoritarian regimes, like Salehi.

That's because dictators around the world also understand the power of song.

And just as they abuse the media, courts and electoral systems to manipulate public opinion and prolong their rule, authoritarians also view controlling music as yet another weapon in their arsenal for oppression.

The Islamic Republic is no exception.

We at the Human Rights Foundation are acutely aware of this, which

is why our litigation work is so essential to what we do.

We routinely submit petitions for prisoners of conscience in authoritarian regimes to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

For Salehi, too: In fact, we had been in the process of submitting one for Salehi, hoping to beat the Iranian court to the punch, when he was sentenced.

His case is emblematic of an authoritarian regime's extreme fear of dissent.

The Islamic Republic did not invoke a legal basis for his arrest. His lawyer was not given access to his case files and his trials were never made public, and, therefore, were unfair. He was repeatedly charged with any sentence the Islamic Republic could think

of to keep him in prison arbitrarily, violating the principle of legality.

Salehi's case reveals, yet again, just how scared the Islamic Republic is of those who are willing to speak out.

Let's not forget: The ongoing revolution against the regime started because a 22-year-old woman dared to show a few strands of hair.

We are at a crucial intersection of the arts and human rights. Dictators are slowly recognizing the influence artists have over people.

Creativity is a form of dissent, and an extremely powerful one.

So powerful, it seems, dictators like those in Iran are quick to murder anyone who dares to resort to it.

Claudia Bennett is a legal and program officer at the Human Rights Foundation.

There is still a lawful way to seize Russia's assets to rebuild Ukraine

Outlet
 Op-Ed
 The Hill

Author
 Sergei Korotkov

Date
 May 15, 2024



Mikhail Svetlov/Getty Images

In a move aimed at redirecting funds to support Ukraine, Congress adopted the [REPO Act](#) last month, granting the Biden administration powers to seize frozen Russian assets within US control.

The only catch, as the adopted act [acknowledges](#), is that most of the Russian assets are frozen in Belgium, which has already said it wouldn't take any similar action without G7 support. And that [support isn't there](#).

Opponents fear the confiscation of Russian sovereign assets could undermine the foundational principles of international law. Unable to reach a consensus, the G7 is now said to be exploring less controversial alternatives to aid Ukraine, shifting focus from direct asset seizure.

But this shouldn't mark the end of the conversation about channeling Russian assets to aid Ukrainians, as

there are still some legal avenues available, and these assets can still serve for the betterment of Ukraine.

The main legal challenge in seizing Russian assets is the principle of sovereign immunity under international law. This principle protects state-owned property on foreign soil from seizure for state's sovereign actions, including military aggression – [a rule confirmed](#) by the International Court of Justice.

This legal norm has endured for decades because states, owning substantial property abroad, want to protect these assets from foreign confiscation. As a result, this principle [shields Russian assets](#) as well.

Like most rules, however, this one has its exceptions, one of which could potentially turn the tide in the fight for Russian assets.

Sovereign immunity can be waived by a state either explicitly or implicitly. Most states do so by expressing their waiver through international legal instruments like treaties or specific declarations. Russia, too, has exercised this waiver in the past.

Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia ratified a [bilateral investment treaty](#) with Ukraine. It was intended to encourage foreign investment by providing investors with certainty and protection for their investments in a foreign coun-

try. This agreement, while seemingly unrelated, could be highly relevant in addressing Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The treaty [contains a provision](#) that offers a dispute resolution mechanism for conflicts between a foreign investor and the host country. This mechanism allows an investors to pursue international arbitration if they believe the host country has breached their guaranteed protections.

By agreeing to be sued, Russia effectively [waived](#) its immunity in all related disputes under its bilateral treaty with Ukraine.

In other words, if a Ukrainian investor's rights are violated by Russia, the investor can seek redress through arbitration. Should the claim succeed, the investor can then enforce the awarded decision against Russia in a country where Russian assets are located, without being barred by sovereign immunity.

Despite being unprecedented, seeking compensation for war damages [is therefore possible](#) through the existing treaty between Ukraine and Russia. The agreement covers investments in areas deemed "territory" of a host country, which can extend to territories not legally acquired but effectively controlled by an occupying force. In cases related to Crimea, several arbitral tribunals

[have ruled](#) that Russia, by annexing occupied regions and maintaining effective control, takes on legal responsibilities for these territories under the Russia-Ukraine bilateral investment treaty.

As a result, Ukrainian citizens and companies with assets in these [occupied areas](#) can sue Russia for expropriating their property and for damages caused by its military actions in regions under Russian control, including parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts.

Proving Russia's violation of its obligations under the bilateral treaty should be straightforward, given the clear evidence of destruction suffered by Ukrainians and their businesses. [A comprehensive assessment](#) released a year ago estimated the damages suffered by Ukraine at \$411 billion. The treaty's protections are comprehensive enough to cover both direct damage and indirect loss of value, providing a robust basis for claims.

After securing a favorable decision from the arbitrators, a Ukrainian claimant can pursue enforcement in countries that recognize the arbitral awards as binding and where Russian assets are located. Belgium, which holds a significant portion of Russian sovereign assets, [explicitly prohibits](#) invoking sovereign immunity as a defense to the

enforcement of arbitral awards against a state. Thus, there is a good prospect of securing Russia's assets frozen in Belgium through arbitration under the Russia-Ukraine bilateral investment treaty.

Still, investment arbitration remains a complex and challenging process, especially for victims of military aggression. Bilateral investment treaties, originally designed to facilitate peaceful investments, are not naturally equipped to handle scenarios involving war and occupation. Applying these treaties to such contexts involves significant challenges.

First, arbitration proceedings can be prohibitively expensive and lengthy, potentially excluding small households and companies from suing the Russian state. However, legal society and policymakers can address this challenge by establishing avenues for [third-party funding](#) to assist those challenging Russia's actions, as well as facilitating [mass claims](#).

Second, victims of Russian aggression can only sue Russia for damages occurring in territories effectively controlled by the Russian state, excluding the pain and destruction caused outside of the occupied areas of Ukraine. Despite this, arbitration remains a valuable option, [as there are numerous instances](#) of forcible expropriation of [Ukrainian property](#) and [businesses](#),

as well as destruction caused by the occupying forces.

Third, although Ukraine plans to terminate its investment treaty with Russia by Jan. 2025, this decision [should not hinder](#) efforts to seek compensation for Russia's actions in occupied territories. Under the "sunset provision" of the treaty, the investments already made will be protected under the treaty until Jan. 2035. Thus, claims related to damages incurred by Ukrainians in occupied territories can still be pursued for a decade after the bilateral treaty's termination.

In summary, while there are numerous challenges in using arbitration to secure Russian sovereign assets and compensate victims of Russian aggression, the potential benefits far outweigh these difficulties.

Arbitration can also ensure due process in establishing Russia's responsibility and seizing its assets, preventing Russia from disputing the confiscation's legality. And while the assets recovered through investment arbitration wouldn't be directed to support the war efforts, they could offer some relief to the ordinary Ukrainians who have borne the brunt of this conflict.

The next step is for the international community to decide whether to facilitate arbitration efforts, thus enabling the lawful seizure of Russian sovereign assets to assist victims of aggression, or to wait for changes in international law that could potentially strip those assets of sovereign immunity altogether. However, with the G7 nations showing little support for such changes, this "[Grotian moment](#)" may not arrive at all.

The rise of central bank digital currencies is not a path the US should follow

Outlet
Op-Ed
The Hill

Author
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Date
June 16, 2024



Photo taken on July 15, 2021 shows the U.S. Federal Reserve in Washington, D.C., the United States. U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Thursday that he was "legitimately undecided" on the benefits and costs of issuing a U.S. central bank digital currency CBDC. "I think our obligation is to explore both the technology and the policy issues over the next couple of years. That's what we're going to do so that we're in a position to make an informed recommendation," Powell said during a hearing before the Senate Banking Committee when asked to clarify his position on the CBDC. (Photo by Liu Jie/Xinhua via Getty Images)

From Algeria to Zimbabwe, governments are pushing forward with [central bank digital currencies](#), or CBDCs. In fact, it's even occurring here in the United States. According to the Human Rights Foundation's [CBDC Tracker](#), over 125 different jurisdictions ranging from territories to currency unions are researching, piloting and launching CBDCs.

But what has this effort meant in practice? On one side, it seems to have been a waste of taxpayer money. On the other side, it has also signaled a [troubling future](#). As

I explain at length in my [new book](#), "Digital Currency or Digital Control?," neither side looks good.

Consider the experiences in [The Bahamas](#), [Jamaica](#) and the [Eastern Caribbean Currency Union](#). Despite having launched CBDCs that are available to the public, these Caribbean governments have struggled to encourage adoption. To combat that, their governments have tried to spur adoption through [incentives programs](#) and [giveaways](#).

Yet, as the [Central Bank of The Bahamas has reported](#), use of its CBDC has still fallen dramatically. Bank of Jamaica deputy governor Natalie Haynes similarly [acknowledged that merchants simply were not interested](#) in taking on another payment system.

This problem is not unique to the Caribbean. China boasts that over [261 million](#) CBDC accounts have been opened, but few people appear to be using the CBDC to make regular payments. Even government employees paid in the Chinese CBDC [have said](#), "I prefer not to keep the money in the [CBDC] app, because there's no interest if I leave it there. There are also not so many places, online or offline, where I can use the [CBDC]."

With that said, the lack of adoption may have a silver lining. The creation of CBDCs [endangers financial privacy, freedom, and markets](#) by giving governments complete surveillance

and control over money, but the impact of those risks is limited so long as adoption remains low or non-existent. The only open question is how long that will remain to be the case.

Around the world, governments have launched CBDCs in tandem with prohibitions on alternatives like cryptocurrency. China, India, Iran, Russia and Nigeria have all introduced varying bans on cryptocurrency. In fact, shooting itself in the foot, Nigeria even went so far to limit alternatives that it orchestrated a [cash shortage](#). And [many other](#) officials have openly said that introducing a CBDC will help to eliminate cash.

So, whether the lack of adoption is allowed to persist is indeed an open question, and one people should pay close attention to.

Much of the rise of CBDCs has occurred abroad, but Americans should pay close attention too. President [Joe Biden](#) issued [Executive Order 14067](#) in 2022 to place "the highest urgency on research and development efforts into the potential design and deployment options of a United States CBDC," but the Federal Reserve had already been working on CBDC development [for years](#) at this point.

For example, the Board of Governors has published several [updates](#), [speeches](#) and [studies](#)

[on CBDC over the years](#). Likewise, the [regional Federal Reserve banks have tested](#) a hypothetical CBDC platform, [developed the technical framework](#) for a wholesale CBDC, and [built a proof-of-concept project](#).

To be clear, research and experiments are not a problem.

What is a problem, however, is if those programs veer beyond theoretical models or closed experiments. For example, despite there being over 261 million CBDC accounts opened under the Chinese CBDC, the Chinese government still refers to itself as being in the "pilot" phase. While the motivations are unclear, several countries have blurred the lines with similar practices.

These developments were partly what inspired the House of Representatives to pass Rep. Tom Emmer's (R-Minn.) [bill to prohibit](#) both the Federal Reserve and the Treasury from creating a CBDC without congressional authorization.

During the debates around the bill, some tried to argue that it's unthinkable for the United States to lose the "CBDC race." For example, prior to joining the White House as one of President Biden's economic advisors, [Lael Brainard said](#), "If you have the other major jurisdictions in the world with a digital curren-

cy, a CBDC offering, and the U.S. doesn't have one, I just, I can't wrap my head around that." Yet, as Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) [countered during these debates](#), the idea of America carving its own independent path is a welcome one.

[Roger Huang](#) said it best at the Oslo Freedom Forum when he noted, "The more control you give a government, the more they will exert that control." As we head into election season, Congress would be wise to remember that power may sound appealing when you're in charge, but who is in charge can change swiftly and dramatically.

Given the risk of abuse is so high with the sweeping powers a CBDC can offer governments and yet there are little to no benefits to help citizens, the rise of CBDCs is a path the United States should not follow.

Dissident Iranian rapper Toomaj has death sentence overturned

Outlet
CNN

Author
Niamh Kennedy,
Rosa Rahimi
and Artemis
Moshtaghian

Date
June 22, 2024



Protesters in Berlin, Germany, in April 2024 rally against the death sentence handed down by Iranian courts to rapper Toomaj Salehi. Babak Bordbar/Middle East Images/AFP/Getty Images

Iranian dissident rapper Toomaj Salehi had his [death sentence](#) overturned by the Iranian Supreme Court this week in what his lawyers have deemed a victory for human rights in Iran.

Salehi had become a key voice of [anti-government dissent](#) in Iran, strongly criticizing the repressive nature of the Iranian regime through his musical output and social media posts. In October 2022, as fervent demonstrations gripped Iran following the death of a young girl, Mahsa Amini in morality police custody, Salehi threw his support behind the protest movement.

Salehi has claimed he was tortured and placed in solitary detention after being initially arrested in October 2022 for his involvement in the protest movement. After being briefly released from prison in 2023, Salehi was re-arrested for "making false claims and spreading

lies," according to Iranian judiciary news agency Mizan. He was then sentenced to death in May this year. A lower court in the central city of Isfahan found him guilty of the crime of "corruption on earth," issuing the maximum punishment of death.

On Saturday, his lawyer Amir Raesian broke the news of the reversal in a post on X, saying that the Iranian Supreme Court had "avoided irreparable judicial error" and overturned Salehi's death sentence this week. In its judgment, Iran's highest court found previous prison sentences handed down to Salehi to be "in excess of legal punishment."

The news was welcomed by the campaign group Index on Censorship which has lobbied strongly for the rapper's release and worked closely with a team of international human rights lawyers based in London's Doughty Street Chambers to reverse his death sentence.

"It [the judgment] is a clear demonstration of the injustice of the lower court decision, and we are delighted that Salehi no longer faces the threat of execution. The Supreme Court found that the death sentence delivered to Salehi was excessive and failed to comply with Iranian law," the group said in a statement Saturday.

Salehi's case will now be referred back to the lower court in Isfahan for

re-sentencing, Index On Censorship said, decriing the prospect of any further jail time for the rapper.

"Even a shorter period of imprisonment would be an injustice: Salehi has done nothing other than to call for his, and other Iranians', fundamental rights to be respected," the group added.

London-based human rights lawyer Caoilfhionn Gallagher who is the international counsel for the Salehi family said it was "not enough" that his life had been "spared" by the Iranian authorities. Gallagher who alongside a team of colleagues filed an urgent appeal to the UN regarding Salehi's case back in May, called once again for his "unconditional" release.

"We urge the international community to keep the pressure up at this critical time, to secure Salehi's freedom and hold Iran to account for its egregious violations of international human rights law," Gallagher said in the Index On Censorship statement.

The campaign to secure Salehi's release has won support from high-profile voices across the globe. The Recording Academy which organises the Grammy Awards, put out a statement in April saying it was "deeply troubled by the recent news regarding Toomaj Salehi."

"No artist anywhere should have to fear for their life or livelihood when expressing themselves through their art," the statement added.

British business magnate Richard Branson was also among those to call for Salehi's release, calling it "impossible to listen to Toomaj's music, read his lyrics, and not be deeply touched by his message."

At home in Iran, over 300 Iranian musicians signed a collective statement conveying their opposition to the rapper's death sentence, describing him as "a champion of the righteous aspirations of an entire generation of Iranians."

Index on Censorship CEO Jemimah Steinfeld said she hoped the

decision would allow Salehi to "seek the medical treatment he needs and continue his vital work."

Claudia Bennett, a legal and programs officer at the Human Rights Foundation, called the rapper's case "emblematic of the brutality of dictatorships."

"They use arbitrary detention to silence dissidents and those advocating for democracy and human rights. Toomaj's crime was singing a song and posting on social media. Something that we in democracies take for granted," she added.