

# [***Opinion: One man who stood up to a dictatorship***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BC3-9Y41-JBSS-S11R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; In the closing days of World War II, Soviet agents arrested artillery officer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for derisively calling dictator Joseph Stalin "the man with the mustache" in a letter to a friend. He would spend eight years in prisons and labor camps, an experience he channeled to the world through his novels about the USSR's Gulag, its vast apparatus of repression that silenced intellectuals and dissidents.

"You only have power over people as long as you don't take everything away from them," he wrote in "The First Circle," published in 1968. "But when you've robbed a man of everything he's no longer in your power - he's free again."

By that standard, Alexey Navalny died a spiritually free man, even though he was imprisoned in IK-3, a prison colony above the Arctic Circle, which [*according to*](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/25/ik-3-what-we-know-about-navalnys-new-prison-facility-in-the-arctic-a83564) the Moscow Times, "was founded in 1961 on the site of a former Soviet gulag forced labor camp."

The most prominent of Russian President Vladimir Putin's critics, Navalny showed remarkable courage in 2021, when he opted to return to his country from Germany after recovering from a poisoning that he and others attributed to Russian security forces, who denied responsibility. He was detained, prosecuted and imprisoned, but Navalny's persistence in calling out corruption and speaking fearlessly won him support around the world, even as Putin clamped down on dissent amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"In his courageous and too short life," wrote Russia scholar **Daniel Treisman**, "Navalny became a symbol of hope for the younger generations of his compatriots. Understated, witty, often self-mocking, he had the style and presence to inspire a broad cross-section of followers."

"His team's drone videos of the pleasure palaces of Kremlin insiders made it impossible for anyone to deny the accusations of corruption at the regime's core. (Except, that is, for Kremlin spokesmen, who dismissed Navalny's claims as "propaganda rants" and "a bunch of nonsense.") Navalny led mass protests against corruption on multiple occasions.

[*"He never gave up on the prospect of what he called 'the beautiful Russia of the future,'"*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/17/opinions/best-tribute-we-can-pay-to-navalny-treisman/index.html) Treisman noted. "For a 'beautiful Russia of the future' to emerge in coming years, Putin must lose the war he started. Navalny understood this."

"[*Navalny's death represents the extinguishing of all hope for Russia's turnaround*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/17/opinions/navalny-death-putin-prison-hope-vasilyuk/index.html)," wrote **Sasha Vasilyuk**. "When I met him in 2012, some Russians believed in their country's potential to choose an alternative path to the autocracy offered by Putin. That sense has been gone for a while. And yet, throughout the country Friday, some brave people laid flowers despite the fear of arrest. That speaks of Navalny's power to inspire small acts of courage, even if they won't bring any real change in the face of overriding fear," she added.

"We don't yet know the exact details of jailed Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny's death, as reported Friday by the Russian prison service - and we may never find the precise truth," wrote **Peter Bergen**. But "[*what better way to communicate that the Russian opposition is effectively dead*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/opinions/navalny-dead-putin-russia-stalin-bergen/index.html), than by silencing its most prominent leader, Navalny, who is as much a well-known dissident in the West as physicist Andrei Sakharov and author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn were during the Soviet era."

Putin famously grieved the collapse of the Soviet regime and seems to be styling his own reign along the lines of Stalin's, who "ruled with an iron fist" Bergen noted.

"After all, Putin has essentially fixed the Russian constitution so he can continue seeking election as the country's leader until 2036."

President Joe Biden blamed Putin for Navalny's death and expressed outrage that House Republican leaders launched the chamber on a nearly two-week vacation without passing Ukraine aid approved by the Senate. Former President Donald Trump, who opposes more aid to Ukraine, said last weekend that he wouldn't abide by NATO's mutual-defense obligations for countries that fail to spend enough on their militaries. What if Russia attacks such a country? "No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want."

At a time when he is battling an array of prosecutors and plaintiffs in New York, Washington and Georgia, Trump is running a campaign focused on loyalty to him as a strongman leader, choosing to express more affinity for authoritarians like Putin than for freedom fighters.

Former US Defense Secretary James Mattis called NATO the "most successful and powerful military alliance in modern history," **PeterBergen** noted. [*"Why a newly elected Trump would choose to try to undercut such a successful alliance or even break it up is a confounding mystery."*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/13/opinions/trump-pull-out-nato-bergen/index.html)

**For more:**

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Two winners run up the middle

With the Super Bowl on the line and his team just short of a first down, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes ran up the middle for a pivotal 19-yard gain in overtime last Sunday. It was just one of the clutch plays that enabled the Chiefs to nab yet another Super Bowl victory and further talk of a football dynasty, thanks to coach Andy "Reid's strategic coaching prowess [*and Mahomes's steady and methodical ability to move the ball down the field*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/opinions/super-bowl-lviiii-kansas-city-chiefs-taylor-swift-bass)," noted **Amy Bass**.

Two days later on a different field, New York Democrat Tom Suozzi seized the political middle, flipping the New York seat formerly held by ousted Rep. George Santos. "This race was fought amidst a closely divided electorate, much like our whole country," Suozzi told cheering supporters. "This race was centered on immigration and the economy, much like the issues all across our country. We won this race. We, you, won this race because we addressed the issues and we found a way to bind our divisions."

While the party primaries and partisan media lavish attention on the extreme voices, the middle is where the votes are. [*Forty-one percent*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/467897/party-preferences-evenly-split-2022-shift-gop.aspx) of Americans consider themselves independents, a far larger slice of the electorate than either the Democrats or Republicans can command.

Suozzi didn't hesitate to dissociate himself from Biden and, as **SE Cupp** pointed out, to criticize, "the progressive wing of his party, which he believes isn't getting it when it comes to issues that are high priorities for many voters."

"That includes immigration, crime, and the economy, [*three issues about which Democrats have at times painted a far rosier picture than many voters are feeling*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/opinions/2024/02/15/se-cupp-unfiltered-tom-suozzi-new-york-election-democrats-crime-immigration-2024-vpx.cnn/)."

Suozzi began his political career as mayor of the small city of Glen Cove, on Long Island's north shore. It was atown with a large working-class population and many immigrants.His father and his uncle were among Suozzi's predecessors as mayor, and his cousin would later be elected to that post, practicing a form of ***politics*** that was more about family than ideology.

"Democrats don't need to worry they can't win in this environment," wrote **Max Burns**, a Democratic strategist. "It likely didn't hurt that the Republicans in power now have been making headlines for infighting, gridlock and dysfunction."

"Significantly, after hammering away about a crisis at the southern border, the House GOP followed Trump's command to kill the Senate's bipartisan compromise on immigration, instead impeaching Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas by the narrowest of margins. It's a move sure to be defeated in the Senate and leave Congress without any accomplishments on immigration."

"[*Suozzi staked his campaign on the theory that voters would blame Republicans for two years of incompetence in Congress*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/13/opinions/tom-suozzi-new-york-election-results-burns/index.html) and the growing extremism of Trump's rhetoric," wrote Burns.

Biden's memory

The Democrats' victory in the special election came as welcome relief to a party that had been thrown off kilter by special counsel Robert Hur's report on Biden's handling of classified documents.

**Norm Eisen, Richard Painter** and **Joshua Kolb** took "exception to comments in Hur's report that gratuitously attack Biden's age and memory beyond what is necessary in our view for a prosecutorial assessment. In what has already become the most quoted line in the report, Hur characterized Biden as 'a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.'"

"[*That statement and others like it contravene longstanding Justice Department principles*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/opinions/hur-report-biden-classified-documents-eisen-painter-kolb/index.html) about what prosecutors can and should say publicly when they decide not to bring charges. Hur showed terrible judgment in making these comments, which will only exacerbate the political firestorm around Biden's age."

**For more on *politics*:**

**Lawrence C. Levy:** [*George Santos was a disaster. Here's what the race to succeed him looks like*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/opinions/ny-special-election-tom-suozzi-mazi-pilip-levy/index.html)

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**Dean Obeidallah:** [*Trump does the impossible. He sinks even lower*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/11/opinions/trump-nato-comments-michael-haley-obeidallah/index.html)

Shots rang out

Days after a woman fired an AR-15 in Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, shots rang out at the end of a joyous rally celebrating the Super Bowl champions in Kansas City, killing one and injuring more than 20 people.

"[*To live in America is to seek out moments of celebration and community while balancing the inner fear that a horrifying act of gun violence could occur at any time*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/opinions/kansas-city-chiefs-super-bowl-parade-shooting-dent/index.html) - on a parade route, at a July Fourth celebration, or on a completely ordinary day at a school filled with high school students," wrote **Mark Dent**. "Nothing is unthinkable anymore when it comes to gun violence in this country."

In Kansas City, Dent added, the Chiefs are seen as "an equalizer, a conversation topic that bridges divides of ***politics***, class and race. The team also provided a respite, a refuge from the cares of daily life - like crime and gun violence."

"Going forward and perhaps forever after, the boundless joy (Kansas Citians) felt will be tempered by a twinge of fear, as they recall the shock and violence of this saddest and most tragic Super Bowl celebration."

Trump's legal marathon

Trying to follow the blizzard of legal moves in the civil and criminal cases involving Donald Trump is an epic challenge.

In the space of just five days, the former president:

Asked the Supreme Court to pause an appeal court's ruling rejecting his claim of absolute immunity from criminal charges in the federal election interference case.

Learned that he will stand trial in his New York "hush-money" criminal case in March.

Saw the prosecutor in his Georgia election interference case take the stand to rebut charges of impropriety in her relationship with a special prosecutor she hired to assist with the sprawling case.

Suffered the biggest immediate blow when a New York judge in a civil fraud case fined Trump and his businesses $355 million and barred him for three years from holding top roles in NY companies including the industry where he made his name: the New York real estate business.

"It is essential to hold Trump accountable for his misconduct," wrote law professor **David Orentlicher**, "and he may ultimately serve time in prison once courts decide his four criminal cases. [*But so far, public officials have done more damage to the law than to Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/opinions/trump-ny-fraud-ruling-355-million-orentlicher/index.html), pushing too far in their efforts to punish the former president. Instead of leading many voters to distrust Trump, the legal cases are leading voters to distrust the legal system..."

"It is not surprising that Trump seems to be benefiting from his legal troubles. Trump regularly mobilizes his constituency by claiming that his prosecutions are politically motivated and designed to shut him and his supporters down," Orentlicher added.

In the Georgia case, wrote **Will Cooper**, "The current evidence in the public domain does not establish that either (District Attorney Fani) Willis or (special prosecutor Nathan) Wade committed any crimes or violated their ethical obligations as licensed attorneys. And both lawyers vehemently deny any improprieties. ... But if Wade did inflate his bills or if Willis did benefit from any of Wade's earnings, those activities would be unethical if not unlawful. And they could lead to disqualification by the judge."

"[*Willis and Wade should recuse themselves*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/15/opinions/fani-willis-nathan-wade-trump-georgia-election-cooper/index.html) because these controversies and even the appearance of corruption simply cannot be allowed to reach the jury and infect the trial."

Gaza

**Rajaie Batniji** is a physician, entrepreneur and political scientist who was born in Gaza and now lives in San Francisco. He chose to be among those meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, unlike some other Palestinian Americans who boycotted the meeting in protest of US policy.

Batniji says 65 of his relatives were killed in the past four months in the Israel-Hamas war and others are homeless. In a piece addressed to Blinken, he wrote, "[*I ask you to use your power, which can stop the killing of our families, to call for an immediate ceasefire and to stop sending weapons to Israel.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/14/opinions/palestinian-american-blinken-gaza-batniji/index.html) You and the president may be the only two people with the power to make this stop."

**Frida Ghitis** observed that Hamas' October 7 terrorist attack on Israel created "unwinnable moral dilemmas ... By launching a brutal attack on Israel, committing large scale sexual violence, and taking hundreds of hostages, it ensured that Israel would counteract with overwhelming force. By embedding itself in the population, it guaranteed that Israel's response would bring enormous suffering to Palestinians, knowing that Israel would take the blame and Hamas's support would surge, particularly in the West Bank, where Fatah, its Palestinian rival, dominates."

"The crux of the matter remains how to make Hamas relinquish power in Gaza. If Hamas leaders leave, surrender, or lay down their arms, the war could end."

[*"Israel's critics demanding an immediate ceasefire may believe Israel should accept Hamas's continuing control of Gaza, but Israelis, divided on political and social issues, are convinced of the justness of their cause."*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/15/opinions/israel-offensive-rafah-gaza-ghitis/index.html)

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**Mark Dent**: [*What it says about America when Jackie Robinson's statue is destroyed*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/14/opinions/jackie-robinson-statue-destroyed-baseball-arrest-dent/index.html)

AND...

Jon Stewart's return

In his much-anticipated return to "The Daily Show" Monday, Jon Stewart skewered Trump and Biden over the age issue, wrote **Bill Carter**. But the host didn't spare himself.

"The mutual assured destruction of the candidates over their age focus, which Stewart defended as totally fair because voters have the right to question the acuity of candidates, reached a high point when he stressed that these two men are by far the oldest people ever to run for president, 'breaking, by only four years, the record that they set!'"

"[*As a visual exclamation point, Stewart brought the camera in tight, pointing to his own more-lined face, gray hair and beard*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/13/opinions/jon-stewart-daily-show-return-carter/index.html), saying, 'Look at me: Look what time hath wrought.' He noted that he is about 20 years younger than the two candidates and they could only wish to look only as old as he does. (He's 61.)"

"Stewart was greeted by a wildly enthusiastic standing ovation from the studio audience, which looked younger than most late-night audiences, one reason perhaps for the heavy commercial load and extra length, coming in at about 50 minutes rather than 30. The show was a big draw for advertiser-coveted younger viewers during Stewart's previous run."

Opinion by Richard Galant, CNN

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