

## A NEW KIND OF POLICING IN AN OLD WAR ON WOMEN: IRAN'S HIJAB CRACKDOWN GOES DIGITAL

Morgan Dinh

The eyes of the state have always been watching.

Once, they stood on street corners, stopping women in Tehran's public squares, checking if women defied the law by showing too much hair. Now, they watch from above—drones tracing silent paths in the sky—and from below, apps sifting through digital trails, algorithms searching for women who refuse to obey.

In Iran, wearing the hijab remains mandatory for all women. But there was a time when a woman could slip into a crowd and disappear. Now, no crowd can protect her. No act is unseen.

### Iran's New Technology

A UN report published on March 14th reveals the growing scale of Iran's surveillance, compiling 38,000 pieces of evidence and the testimonies of 285 victims over a two-year investigation. The findings reveal that the Islamic Republic has increasingly relied on cameras and drones to monitor women deemed "uncovered." At Amirkabir University in Tehran, facial recognition technology has been installed to detect students without their hijab.



Most alarmingly, the state has mobilized the public to enforce hijab laws through Nazer, a mobile app operated by Iran's police. Nazer allows users to report alleged hijab violations by uploading photos, license plate numbers, locations, and timestamps. Once a report is submitted, the authorities are alerted, vehicles are flagged, and the vehicle's owners are texted a message warning them of their illegal behavior. In September 2024, Nazer was expanded to track women in ambulances, taxis, and public transportation, extending the state's gaze into nearly every corner of public life.



But this system of control didn't appear overnight. Its roots run deeper, back to a revolution that promised something else.

### Veiling and Unveiling: The History of Hijab Law

For the past ninety years, Iran's secular and religious rulers arrived at the same conclusion: the ways women dress are symbols of state authority.

***Whether it was through forcing women to unveil or cover up, both rulers denied women choices.***

In 1936, Reza Shah Pahlavi ordered a sweeping ban on the hijab. He envisioned a modern Iran aligned with Western ideals—a society where women abandoned the veil. His "Kashf-e hijab" decree made it illegal for women to cover their hair in public. Although presented as liberation, it was another form of control, legally dictating women's choice in clothing. Following his abdication in 1941, mandatory unveiling was repealed. For nearly four decades, there was no official dress code imposed by law. Many women continued to wear their hijabs, whether it was for defiance of the monarchy or in adherence to patriarchal norms.



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Then, in 1979, things began to change. After decades of the Shah's authoritarianism, Iranians had had enough. United by a shared anger and common goal, the Iranian Revolution saw thousands take to the streets, chanting slogans that vouched for equality and justice. Both liberal and religious women hoped to secure and protect more rights. But while the revolution succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy, it failed the very women who helped bring it to life. Under Ayatollah Khomeini's rule, the new Islamic Republic stripped women of autonomy. One of his first acts of power was to lower the legal age of marriage for girls to just nine and reverse their rights in marriage, child custody, and divorce. The final blow came in 1983—every woman had to wear the hijab in public.

***In the 1990s, the government stepped up its enforcement of hijab laws, where penalties for not following the law included fines, imprisonment, and public humiliation.***

The morality police, Gasht-e Ershad, patrolled the streets to ensure women obeyed. Though the punishments for violations were harsh, the more dangerous problem lay in the vagueness of hijab laws themselves. Interpretations of what it meant to be improperly covered lay in the hands of court judges, making rulings wildly inconsistent. No woman could ever be certain that she was safe from scrutiny.

For ninety years, Iranian women have been trapped between two extremes: forced unveiling and forced veiling. Both systems stripped them of choice and used their appearance as a symbol of the state's authority. Despite slogans of freedom and justice associated with the Iranian Revolution, it has to be asked: who has truly been set free?

### The Hijab Law's Impact on Women

Ultimately, the impact of Iran's hijab laws cannot be measured solely by arrests or fines, but also by the toll they take on women's everyday lives and freedoms.

In an article analyzing the impact of Iran's hijab laws on women's rights, authors Sajid Ali and Mahsa Kayyal found that personal freedoms, as well as civil, political, religious, and economic rights, have been threatened. The coercive methods that force Iranian women to wear the hijab not only oppose international human rights laws but also contradict Iran's own commitments to these principles.

Politically, the Iran Wire reports that women without a hijab were prevented from entering polling stations, effectively silencing them in moments that are meant to give them a voice. Economically, hijab laws have excluded women from certain professions, stifling job opportunities and limiting financial independence. When women do secure jobs, heavy surveillance is employed to ensure compliance with hijab laws, creating tense environments that hinder the performance of female workers.





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***Tarlan, a marketing analyst in Tehran, reveals that authorities have forced businesses to shut down for allowing unveiled women onto their premises.***

The entertainment industry has been particularly affected, as legal dress codes regularly conflict with costume requirements. Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance has made the regime's stance clear: "we cannot allow those who have removed the hijab to attend art programs... anyone who acts outside the law will be dealt with". Several Iranian actors, including Fateme Motamedarya and Reza Kianian, have already been summoned to court, reinforcing the regime's strictness on hijab law enforcement.

Beyond the daily pervasiveness of hijab laws, the killing of Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish woman, has plagued Iran for years. During her visit to Tehran, Amini was stopped by Iran's morality police for allegedly not wearing her hijab to their liking. The situation quickly escalated as police dragged her into a van, viciously beating her on the way to Vozara detention center, where they planned to take her to an "educational" hijab reform class. Before they could arrive, Amini fell into a coma after sustaining repeated blows to the head. She would never regain consciousness.

A UN fact-finding mission concluded that Iran is solely responsible for the physical violence that led to Amini's death, based on patterns of violence caused by the morality police.

Amini was only 22 years old.

### **Resistance to Hijab Law**

Following Amini's death, crowds flooded the streets, protesting for justice and legal reforms. Anger and determination echoed through the Kurdish-adopted slogan "Women, Life, Freedom", honoring Amini's heritage and uniting Iranians across the country. A sea of Mahsa Amini posters, banners, and flags moved through Iran, as many courageous women protested without their hijabs. Some chanted "Death to the Dictator!". Some cut their hair. Some set fire to their hijabs. They all boldly displayed their rejection of a regime that had long used the hijab as a tool of control.



Despite the burning rage that powered protests, the state quickly responded with its own extinguishers. Iranian security forces shot unarmed demonstrators, often targeting their eyes, and carried out extrajudicial killings. After the protests, Iran reported 202 deaths, stating that many were "armed" and "propaganda-spreading terrorists". However, a UN fact-finding mission reported that 551 protestors were killed by security forces—a death toll higher than any protest since the Islamic Republic's beginning. Of the thousands of injured protestors, many refused to seek medical attention, as they feared detention and arrests. Amongst the 20,000 arrested, many were tortured, whilst others endured horrifying sexual violence at the hands of intelligence officers.



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Could there be a path to reform?

Hope blossomed in 2024, when Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran’s new president, promised to end morality patrols. However, when evaluating Iran’s use of technology for hijab enforcement, Pezeshkian’s words contradict his actions.

Amidst broken promises, Iranian resistance stands strong. Female journalists Nazila Maroufian and Sepideh Gholian continue to speak against the regime, despite multiple imprisonments. Actresses and athletes defy hijab laws, competing and performing unveiled. Iranian singer Mehdi Yarrahi was imprisoned after releasing his song “Roosarito”, which urged women to remove their hijabs. In everyday life, subtle acts of resistance are growing. Businesses and restaurants no longer warn women to wear hijabs or ask them to leave if they don’t.

*According to citizens, public dissatisfaction is at an all-time high, and the demand for freedom of choice grows stronger every day.*

If history has proven anything, it’s this: Iranian women will find ways to resist—even when the state is watching. They will keep moving, keep fighting, keep testing the limits of a system built to silence them. Until women are truly free to live and dress as they choose, the fight for freedom in Iran is long from over.

In memory of Mahsa Amini, and in solidarity with those still oppressed, the world will not forget: “Women, Life, Freedom”.



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## SDGS... ARE WE ON TRACK?

Minseo Kang

As a multilateral attempt to solve global crises and reach a just world, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call on governments across nations to contribute to a better cause. As a promise to reach a sustainable world, the 17 goals were adopted as targets by the members of the UN. They include addressing issues of poverty, gender inequality, and climate action. Under that vow, these 17 goals are meant to be fully achieved by 2030. As of this year, 2025,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the term has passed with only 5 years remaining. As ambitious as the 17 sustainable goals were, it is necessary to look back on the past decade to reflect upon the milestones the world has achieved.

In short, according to the 2024 UN report, only 16% of the SDGs are on the right track. According to the report, most goals have been stagnant since 2020, largely due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. These goals established by the UN include: Zero Hunger, Life on Land, Life Below Water, and Sustainable Cities and Communities. As the pandemic paralysed the global economy and collaboration across various levels of development, it made implementing policies and programs even more difficult. However, we cannot fully blame Covid as the reason why the world is behind schedule in achieving the SDGs. Some goals were shown to be in regression since 2015, the year of the initial announcement of these 17 goals, specifically obesity rates and press freedom. The numbers underscore the critical need for urgent course correction across various sectors to get the global agenda back on the appropriate track.



***“only 16 per cent of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one third has stalled or even regressed.” - The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024***

Let's break the numbers down, looking at some of the key data.

### Poverty & Hunger (SDG 1 & 2)

Poverty and hunger issues persist around the globe, with Covid creating a lot of backtrack on the progress towards change.

According to the statistics, from 2019 to 2020, the world's poverty rate rose from 8.9% to 9.7%. At the current global pace, 590 million people may still be in extreme poverty by 2030. For SDG 2, in 2023, there were still 733 million people living in extreme hunger, that is, one in eleven people globally. Since the pandemic though, the data shows that countries are bouncing back. However, despite this global trend, often low-income countries and nations of conflict are still struggling with the aftermath of Covid. This has contributed to the deepening of the global inequalities.

### Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3)

One of the goals that was the most influenced by the pandemic was SDG 3, with the virus reversing most achievements the world has made in regards to life expectancy and health, plummeting the average age gap expectancy from 73 years to 71 years during 2020 and 2021.

Before 2020, death due to communicable disease was at the low level of 18.2%, a major improvement from 2000 which was around 32%. However, since the pandemic, it increased to the 2005 level of 28.1%. However, this was largely due to the rapid rise of COVID-19, rather than the increase of death due to traditional infectious diseases. Access to affordable health care still remains an issue with 2 billion people ( $\frac{1}{4}$  of the human population) still facing struggles when it comes to the high cost of healthcare. This is mostly evident in poor, regional areas, where proper hospital systems are yet not established.



Among those 2 billion, nearly half are facing catastrophic healthcare expenditures exceeding 10% of the household income, leaving them undefended as ever. From a global perspective, improvements have been made in regards to overall physical well-being. However, the issue is that these improvements are not distributed equally across the globe, leaving certain groups behind.



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### Education (SDG 4)

During the pandemic, in order to prevent further infection through human contact, many countries went into lockdown. Consequently, this also meant moving the learning space from classrooms to online meetings. This caused major learning losses, especially in math and reading. This was largely due to the digital divide existing between nations and income classes, making remote learning environments difficult for many underprivileged children. There was a great decline in the global literacy rate from 58% in 2019.



Specialists say that in order to meet the new-scaled 2030 education target, countries must enroll 1.4 million more children into education and admit a new child to school every two seconds. Furthermore, globally, girls' completion rates exceeded boys' by 2 to 3% points. However, these rates differ from region to region, which underscores the necessity to invest in targeted projects to decrease education disparity. On a positive note, there has been an improvement in global school completion in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, with the numbers climbing from 63% to 74% from 2015 to 2023.

***“In order to meet the new-scaled 2023 education target, countries must enroll 1.4 million more children into education and admit a new child to school every two seconds.”***

### Gender Equality (SDG 5)

In our pursuit of gender equality by 2030, the rate of harmful practices such as domestic violence or gender discrimination has decreased, but not fast enough to keep up with the population growth. According to the UN Report, even today 1 in 5 girls are the victims of child marriage. 230 million women underwent genital mutilation and innumerable women are still uninformed of their reproductive rights. As there are many remnants of discriminatory gender biases and oppression in society, many women carry an unfair burden of domestic work, spending 2.5 times the number of hours as men.



At this current rate of change, it'll require another 176 years to achieve parity in the workplace. Legal protection for women is still lacking in many nations, with only 20% in 77 countries offering access to higher levels of protection against discrimination and domestic violence.

There is also a gap existing between nations in their gender-related legislative advancement as well. These shocking numbers are a wake-up call for all nations to commit to changing biased social norms and eliminating discrimination not just in the workplace, but in local communities as well.

***“Today 1 in 5 girls are the victims of child marriage. 230 million women underwent genital mutilation and innumerable women are still uninformed of their reproductive rights.”***

### The Climate Emergency (SDG 13, 14, & 15)

Despite the Paris Agreement on multilateral efforts to maintain the 1.5°C limit, 2024 is the hottest year ever recorded, which was the title 2023 formerly held. 90% of the world population has experienced extreme heat. According to data from 2023, global CO2 emissions hit a record of 36.8 billion metric tons, escalating this phenomenon even further. This has led to an increase in climate disasters, costing nations \$115 billion in economic losses in 2022. This number is expected to increase as unnatural environmental hazards such as the California wildfires intensify. According to statistics, due to an increase in global temperature, 60% of marine ecosystems have been damaged. 11 million hectares of forest, a size similar to that of Iceland, have been lost in 2022.

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The environmental injustice is evident, as the climate finance gap is growing. In 2022, \$4 trillion is needed per year for developing nations to appropriately combat climate change. However, fossil fuel subsidies still far exceed funding for renewables, and COP 28's promise of going completely fossil fuel neutral has not been enacted yet.



### Conflict & Displacement (SDG 16)

Due to rising conflicts and violent crimes, 120 million forced displacements occurred in 2024, with civilian casualties in the middle of crossfire surging by 72% in 2023. Since the establishment of the SDGs, many governments continue to divert resources from sustainable development with bribery and weak justice systems surging. All goals depend on establishing lasting peace on an international scale. The numbers underscore the need to combat corruption and organized crime, strengthen the legal system, and build an effective government system to protect fundamental rights.

***“120 million forced displacements occurred in 2024, with civilian casualties in the middle of crossfire surging by 72% in 2023.”***

Though there are improvements in certain sectors, these numbers are limited to specific areas and regions. It is also evident that the extent to which SDGs are being implemented is limited to the economic advancement of each nation. With very few goals of the 17 SDG on track, and only 5 years remaining, the world doesn't have enough time. These staggering numbers paint a sobering picture of the dark future that awaits if the world doesn't change the way we perceive these 17 ambitious goals. Radical policies and multilateral collaboration are more essential than ever before. Now that we have 1/3 of the term left, we need to pitch in our entire power to ensure that these goals that we've set for ourselves are achieved.

### Economic & Energy Inequality (SDG 7& 8& 9& 10)

Despite ambitious plans, economic disparity still exists with 241 million workers living in extreme poverty. Developing nations still lack access to the global financial decision-making process, exacerbating the economic gaps between nations. Thus, these countries are struggling with debt from the pandemic, as well as with conflicts and geopolitical strains. These factors all threaten global economic growth. Though the global GDP has rebounded in 2021, its development is slow. Regardless, global unemployment achieved a historic low of 5%. However, women and youth still face higher unemployment, with one in five young people not in education, employment, or training. This clearly indicates that there is a need for policy support to create opportunities and occupations for the younger generation.

The agreement in COP 28, where all nations agreed to cut their fossil fuel reliance, has not been duly implemented. Renewable energy investment is increasing though. However, this is not enough to reduce carbon emission rates unless countries manage to separate themselves from a dependence on traditional energy.



***“Economic disparity still exists with 241 million workers living in extreme poverty.... global unemployment achieved a historic low of 5%.”***

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IS THE GENDER PAY GAP STILL PREVALENT IN THE UK?

Lucie Kealey

For many decades, it has been universally acknowledged that there is a strong presence of disparities relating to gender in society; whilst these can pertain to issues such as education and many professional fields, a key area where inequalities lie is in the gender pay gap. For context, the latter can briefly be defined as: “a global economic issue affecting women in every country”, with recent statistics suggesting that “women earn on average 16% less than their male counterparts.”

Gender Pay Gap in the UK

This is a global issue, and this article will highlight the detrimental pay gap seen even in just the UK over the last few years. The recent 2025 Gender Pay Gap Report (GPGR) identified crucial disparities that remain and have increased, between now and last year. Whilst the controlled gender pay gap has remained consistent over the last two years, still being 99 cents, a stark contrast lies in the movement of Equal Pay Day, shifting back two weeks, which has resulted in women having to work for a longer period of time than their male counterparts in order to match the same earnings. This alone illustrates the inconsistencies in the workplace in promoting gender equality, leaving room for the gender pay gap to increase exponentially and for women to be at least doubling their workload to achieve the same income as males in the professional field.

City	Gender pay pap in %	Salary amount less than men £	Number of free days worked
London	30.40	£8,303	71
Birmingham	17.80	£4,862	41
Leeds	16.30	£4,452	40
Liverpool	15.60	£4,261	38
Bristol	14.80	£4,402	41
Manchester	14.70	£4,015	39
Glasgow	14.20	£3,878	37
Nottingham	12.30	£3,359	31
Newcastle	11.50	£3,414	32
Sheffield	11.30	£3,086	30

The GPGR highlighted a few instances relating to women that continue to harm gender pay equity:

- Working parents
- Job seeking
- Higher education
- Leadership and career progress
- Gender norms
- Location

Each of these sociological factors intensify inequalities in the gender economic state today, resulting in women being unable to progress in their careers and financial state, despite having put in the academic work and being of the same, or even higher, calibre as their male counterparts.



Variation by Occupation

When studying the gender pay gap, there is often confusion as to which professional industries produce the highest degree of inequality. Observing statistical data, it has been reported that those who are enrolled in top professional roles experience the highest rate of a gender pay gap; this includes occupations such as those in the legal field and accounting.

*In fact, it has been noted that the gender pay gap in legal professions stands at 42.86% (or roughly £31,200), with the annual salary of males (£104,00) and females (£72,800) differing substantially.*

This, however, differs from those in less corporate professions. For example, those working as library clerks and assistants only experience a 2.22% gender pay gap, calculating to a £520 difference in annual salary between men (£23,920) and women (£23,400).



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Some occupations are exempt entirely from the gender pay gap; for instance, human resources and industrial relations officers, as well as pharmacy and other dispensing assistants have a 0% gender pay gap rate.

This indicates the attention that needs to be given to financial gender inequalities within the workplace on a more micro-scale, focusing on how this is variable by occupation and what measures can be implemented to eradicate these imbalances.

What is Being Done to Combat These Inequalities?

With the number of inequalities in the workplace relating to wages being so large, it is not surprising to wonder what measures are being initiated to reduce this gender pay gap.

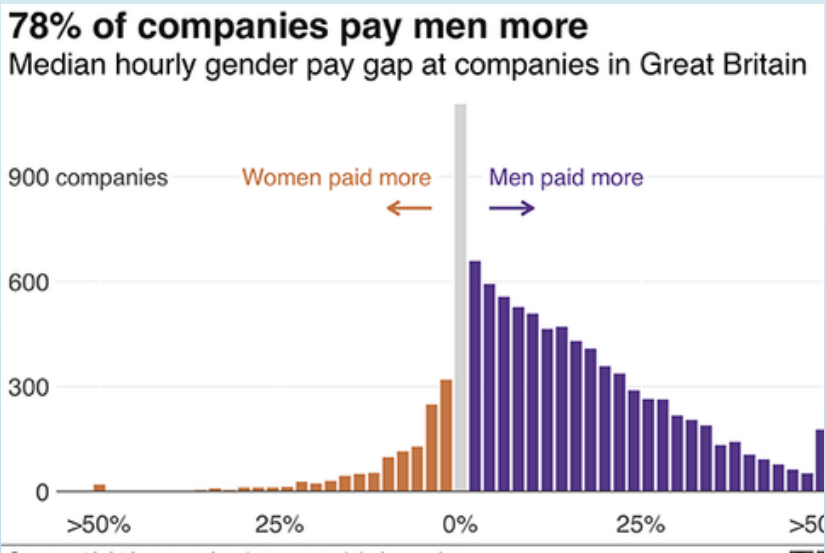
*Gov UK emphasised how the process of closing this socioeconomic gap is not only relevant to staff that are currently working for a specific company, but also applies during the employee recruitment process.*

Notably, the government outlined key actions that should be implemented during the recruitment stage, these include: selecting multiple women for promotions, using assessment processes that target skills, standardising the interview process, and ensuring that selection panels are diverse. Accordingly, taking the time to ensure that the recruitment stage promotes equity and inclusion will set the tone for making sure that the gender pay gap becomes narrower.



Applicable to the time when an employee is enrolled within a company, Gov UK also listed key actions to improve inclusivity within the workplace, ensuring that supporting staff members is seen as a priority. This included measures such as ensuring that there is transparency in promotion, pay, and reward services, as well as improving flexibility in the workplace (e.g. by senior colleagues encouraging this in the workplace). In prioritising a more equal and inclusive workplace, employers will be encouraged to understand the recognition that should be placed on the work of both men and women, ensuring that both parties are paid and treated adequately in the workplace.

Overall, adequate attention needs to be given to gender inequalities regarding the gender pay gap, ensuring that this is targeted in all professions, during the time an employee is enrolled in the institution, as well as when they are in the recruitment stage. Effectively overcoming these common issues will allow the gender pay gap to be ameliorated, ensuring greater inclusivity and equity within the working environment.



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## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DEPARTS, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Ken-Nhat Hoang

March 20, 2025—with the stroke of a pen, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to dismantle the Department of Education (DOE), achieving the goal of many Republicans: to bring education to the state and local level instead of being “dictated” by blanket federal rules. Yet, uncertainty persists in the future of US education.

***The DOE’s dismantlement has been an uncompleted decade-long goal for many Republicans.***

Trump’s plan to dismantle the department dates back to his election campaigns when he stated his intent to quickly close the DOE, giving states the responsibility for educational policy. It tops the education section of his list outlining conservative proposals for the US (Project2025).



The Department of Education massively downsized by slashing half of its positions, from over 4000 employees to only around 2000, just before the signing of Trump’s executive order. The department’s minimum number of employees is unclear, making employee cuts a risky business, but non-mandatory programs like grants can be canceled more easily.



The executive order’s signing ceremony took place in the East Room of the White House, with children sitting on classroom desks surrounding Trump. The President affirmed that the department’s useful functions (Pell grants, student loans management, Title I funding, programs for students with disabilities, etc.) will still be preserved through “full redistribution to various other agencies and departments”, although it was unclear which departments he was referring to. He also pointed out the US’s inefficiency when at the bottom of the list on educational standards despite being among the top spenders. As the ceremony ended, Trump commended Linda McMahon, who was appointed by him to be the leader of the department, and likely the last Secretary of Education.

Democrats unsurprisingly opposed the action; many took to the streets to protest, expressing concern about a future without proper education funding for their children. Randi Weingarten, American Federation of Teachers President, told the Trump Administration, “See you in court”. As clear as day, such actions against the department will result in legal battles involving various stakeholders challenging them in court.

Although 64% of them had negative views on the Department of Education and public schools, not all Republicans support Trump’s controversial move. “...I don’t want to overstate the possibility. It’s going to be hard,” said Professor of Education Policy Cowen, claiming that the Department’s complete closure is unlikely to be acceptable to some legislators of the party, despite Republicans’ current control in Congress and the presidency. Three states (two of which Trump won the majority vote in during the election) rejected ballot measures allocating money away from public education, and voters denounced efforts in Kentucky, Colorado, and Nebraska to increase school autonomy and voucher programs. Cowen emphasized that rural Republicans have been denying school choice plans, especially vouchers, due to the lack of their districts’ private schools. Politicians serving rural school districts are also against lowering education funding.



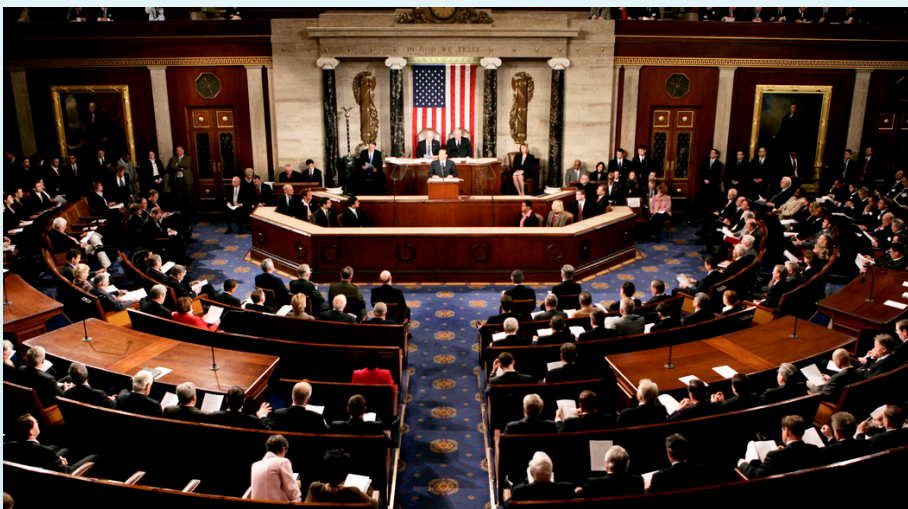
## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DEPARTS, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Ken-Nhat Hoang

### Possible?

Apart from heated debates and strong backlash from many, the act of dismantling a department fundamentally requires Congressional approval, irrespective of how hard Trump and his administration try to avoid it. In Congress, Republicans are already proceeding with legislation to dismantle the department, which is strongly resisted by Democrats.

*As Al Jazeera notes, the introduction of such legislation is unlikely to be supported by 60 out of the 100-seat Senate, because Republicans only make up a 53-seat majority.*



### What to expect?

#### + Pros

The question is: What are the differences between state autonomy and federal oversight? Eliminating the department reduces federal overreach through implementing blanket rules that fail to consider the nuances of students and schools. It would instead grant parents and schools greater control over their children's education, in tandem with saving taxpayers billions and enhancing bureaucratic efficiency, so that funding reaches students directly without being eaten by administrative costs.



Undeniably, faraway Washington bureaucrats cannot manage education as well as the state and local school systems; thus, shutting down the Department translates into more tailored policies by schools free of federal mandates, improving education. Furthermore, the DOE's annual discretionary budget of \$90 billion is optimized by direct distribution into schools, not into unnecessary oversight. At the end of the day, everything the DOE can do can be done by other departments or Congress itself. The role of the DOE in supervising funding is unimportant. Lastly, the DOE interferes with parents and local authorities in education decision-making, thereby its elimination goes hand in hand with greater autonomy for parents to make decisions on their children's education. The educational system's purpose is to serve parents and children.

#### - Cons

The earliest version of the department was born in 1867. The Department of Education was founded in 1979 by Jimmy Carter, with its role to oversee, enforce civil rights laws, provide funding for low-income students and those with disabilities, and manage student loans and applications for financial aid. Countless children rely on this funding for their education. Without assistance or federal oversight, it is unclear whether the school, state, or other departments will fund children's needs properly. For example, the Department of the Treasury, which Trump suggested take over the job of managing student loans, has no actual experience doing so; rather, it is responsible for managing national finances like tax collection. It is likely that student loans would be treated economically, not from an educational perspective, making loan repayment stricter and loan forgiveness rarer.



## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DEPARTS, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Ken-Nhat Hoang

*Oversight is crucial in identifying abuse and discrimination, or setting standards for states; without it there will come inconsistencies and chaos, potentially requiring more bureaucracy or costs.*

Finally, mismanagement of such responsibilities affects students, especially in the context of student loans and Pell grants (financial subsidies provided to undergraduate students). Shifting burdens delay funding or granting, forcing students to take on costly alternatives like higher-interest loans.

### The Future

While Trump's incentives behind his ambitious plan are appreciable, its feasibility and harms must still be taken into consideration. Maybe block grants will replace DOE funding, or inequality will increase. Whether the American future of education is good or bad remains uncertain.



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## AN ANALYSIS OF THE 'I'M JUST A GIRL' TREND: BENEFICIAL OR DEGRADING?

Le Hoang Khang



Ever since the rise of trends like 'Girl Math' and 'Girl Dinner,' which promote overconsumption and eating disorders, there has been a new agenda adopted by the female demographic in social media. The 'I'm just a girl' trend highlights women making mistakes and sharing the same behavioral traits, which include hoarding makeup and scrolling on a social media platform all day.

This article will explore the multifaceted nature of the 'I'm just a girl' trend.

### The Origins of 'I'm just a girl': History and Societal Norms:

The phrase 'I'm just a girl' first issued from the song 'Just A Girl' by the band No Doubt. Writers Gwen Stefani and Tom Dumont initially wanted to comment on society's incapability of separating the stereotypes of being 'inferior, emotional and vulnerable' from women.

The notion of women being emotional and vulnerable was reflected in character archetypes such as the 'Dumb Blonde' (ex: Marilyn Monroe, Movie: shown in the picture below), the 'Damsel in Distress,' and the role of women in nuclear families being heavily intertwined with being the caregiver.

So, it came as no surprise that these societal norms transcended from real life to pop culture.

During the postwar era and the boom of nuclear families of the 50s, women returned to their original positions as caretakers, yet, decades later, society saw a boom in women participating in the workforce. This boom revolutionized certain societal norms, and women were supposedly finally recognized in the working industry.

It turns out the patriarchal system didn't react well to the sudden boom of female workers and subjected them to a myriad of stereotypes and unequal pay in the same jobs, and from that treatment bloomed the second wave of feminism, challenging societal roles and fighting for equal pay.

***Stefani's song 'Just A Girl' was a byproduct of this surge in feminist activity.***

### The Continuation of the 'I'm just a girl' trend: 21st Century:

The initial surge of the trend began around 2022, where it found its place as a microtrend of social media. At first, it was a wholesome trend where women shared things they related to, like having to wear extra clothing in public spaces, tips and tricks to make your hair look good, and the like.

It was a sort of 'safety net' for women on the internet, often strengthening healthy communities of women and giving them general tips to navigate the increasingly chaotic society of our day and age.

That was until some interpreted the trend differently. That alone shifted the trend's trajectory. The second wave of the 'I'm just a girl' trend saw the infantilization and celebration of the incompetence of women, seen in the lack of crucial life skills and behavioral traits consisting of hoarding makeup and refusal to labor.

With time, the phrase 'I'm just a girl' no longer was a mockery of the societal perception of women; it became a mockery of themselves. Videos portraying acts such as a car accident, "accidentally" spending hundreds on cosmetics, and complaining about maths were wrapped in a pretty pink bow named 'girly ignorance'.

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE 'I'M JUST A GIRL' TREND: BENEFICIAL OR DEGRADING?

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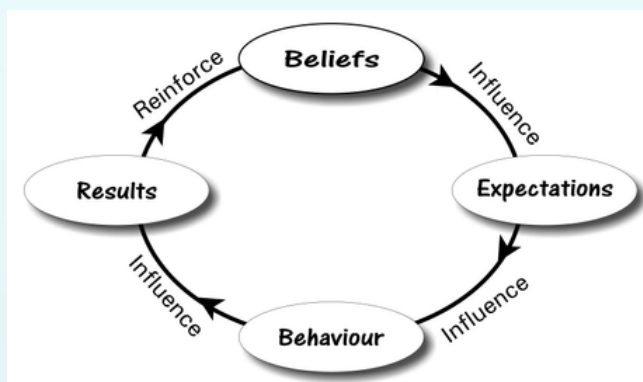
### The 'Gray Area' of the 'I'm Just a Girl' Trend:

The 'I'm just a girl' trend reinforced plenty of negative stereotypes of women, including the overconsumption of cosmetics and irresponsibly planned shopping.

Many of these industries that women stereotypically buy from rely on workers living on minimum wage and disregard the environment, leading to resource depletion and environmental damage. The trend normalizes women haphazardly using their cash on the same products that damage the environment and feed the corporate monopoly just to join the zeitgeist.

Furthermore, studies show that children learn and identify especially with adults of the same gender. The 'I'm just a girl' trend frequently talks about female underperformance in math-related domains. Seeing their role models and creators complain about their mathematical performance creates a powerful subconscious effect that influences young girls to think that they perform worse in maths than in other subjects.

Moreover, the effect of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' also applies to this trend. The frequent mention of incapability to perform essential skills in life results in one's actions being influenced by that belief, thus turning it into reality. The drawing below encapsulates this psychological phenomenon.



However, according to the words of editor and professor Aviva Dove-Viebahn, who has hosted several courses on women and media, the trend is a way of shrinking responsibilities in an inherently chaotic world and acts as a therapeutic coping mechanism in these trying times.

***"On an individual level, it makes sense that women or anyone really would have these feelings, right?" Dove-Viebahn says.***

"[They think] the world is too much. It's too crazy. 'I don't wanna have to deal with it, so I'm going to just say I'm not responsible because 'I'm just a girl' and I don't want to have to think about these things.'"

The trend acts as a method to establish a sense of community within women,

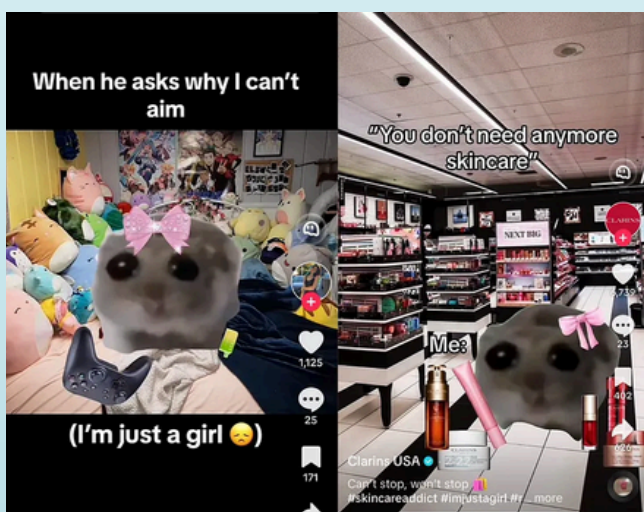
whether it be by sharing personal anecdotes that they experience in everyday life, or a relatable struggle that they face.

In summary, the 'I'm just a girl' trend, like any other trend, has many layers and nuances, which can be either beneficial or denigrating for women. Some users see it as an excuse for their ignorance of basic life skills, while others use it as a way to fortify their community during a time when women still face heavy prejudice and are burdened by societal pressures.



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## THE 2007 ESTONIA CYBERATTACKS: A WAKE-UP CALL FOR CYBERSECURITY IN EUROPE AND NATO

Tran Ngo Minh Khang



It was the year 2007 when the then tiny but highly digitalized nation of Estonia witnessed a cyber crisis that would forever change the world's perception of cybersecurity. Government websites, banking systems, and media outlets in the nation were besieged by gangs of cyberattacks that brought the entire country to a standstill. While these assaults were politically motivated in response to the controversial relocation of a Soviet-era Bronze Soldier war memorial, their impact was international in scope and far beyond Estonia's borders.

***The assault would be a turning point for global defense policy, specifically for bodies like NATO and the European Union (EU).***

### **The 2007 Cyberattacks: A New Frontier of Warfare**

What happened in Estonia in 2007 was not a series of technical outages but a glimpse into the future of warfare. The attacks, which had largely been attributed to Russia (but officially denied by Moscow), followed the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue from Tallinn by the Estonian government. This stirred protests among Estonia's Russian minority and soon developed into an all-out cyberattack.

The attacks were primarily Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks, overloading Estonian digital infrastructure. Sites of government agencies, banks, and media were similarly targeted, as was the critical infrastructure that relied on the internet to function. As a forerunner in digital government—Estonia had initiated e-government services decades ago when most nations did not even have them in thought—Estonia was sadly ill-prepared for such a massive cyberattack.

Most alarming about the attacks was their political motive. Unlike traditional war, cyberattacks are difficult to assign to a specific nation-state, and the target consequently remains unclear on how to respond. Estonia's experience revealed a new face of war where geopolitics and cyberspace meet. When state-sponsored cyber attacks escalated, it became clear that defending against such attacks required a new security paradigm.

### **NATO's Response: Enhancing Cyber Defense**

The 2007 cyberattacks served as an eye-opener for NATO, compelling the alliance to change its strategy toward cybersecurity. The attacks illustrated the extent to which technologically superior nations could be exposed to cyberattacks. It became clear that the cyber sphere had to be given the same importance as conventional military defense.

In return, NATO took a historic step at its 2014 Wales Summit by formally recognizing cyberattacks as a potential trigger for Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty—the collective defense article. This made a cyberattack against one member state of NATO now considered an attack against all members, similar to a military attack. It was a revolutionary shift, acknowledging the growing importance of cyberspace in modern defense policy.



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NATO also took tangible steps to strengthen its cyber defense. In 2008, a year following the Estonia attacks, NATO launched the Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn. The center was established to foster cooperation between NATO allies and partners to fight cyber threats, provide training, and develop best practices in cybersecurity.

### The European Union's Response: Building Resilience Across Borders

The European Union also took significant steps to improve its cybersecurity position following the 2007 attacks. Already aware of the importance of digital security, the EU recognized the need for a more integrated and coordinated approach to cybersecurity. In 2013, the EU launched its Cybersecurity Strategy, with the aim of protecting the EU's digital infrastructure and developing resilience against digital assaults.



The Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive of 2013 was a core element of this strategy. It mandated binding cybersecurity regulations on major sectors, such as energy, transport, and healthcare, and facilitated increased cooperation between EU member states. By setting up a system for the sharing of information about cyber threats, the EU wanted to make its member states better equipped to cope with the rising threats in cyberspace.



Estonia, as the victim of the 2007 electronic strike, was most suited to lead the charge. Estonia's cyber resilience experience put it ahead in defining national cybersecurity policies and advising the EU on best practices.

*Estonia, as it were, moved from victimhood to leadership in shaping the future of European cybersecurity.*

### From Victim to Leader: Estonia's Cybersecurity Renaissance

Though the 2007 attacks laid waste to Estonia, the crisis ended up inspiring the country into a position of leadership in the world of cybersecurity. The crisis itself gave birth to the frameworks that have made possible innovations like X-Road, Estonia's secure online environment that facilitates e-government services and online payments. Now, the platform is the foundation of Estonia's digital society, where everything from voting to medical records is conducted securely online.

Estonia also ventured itself as the world's first country to provide e-residency to people around the globe, allowing anyone on the planet to register an online presence and take advantage of Estonian e-services. It not only added to cross-cultural online entrepreneurship but also pushed Estonia into global cybersecurity discussion leader status.



## THE 2007 ESTONIA CYBERATTACKS: A WAKE-UP CALL FOR CYBERSECURITY IN EUROPE AND NATO

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Estonia's modern evolution from a cyberattack victim to a global cybersecurity leader today serves as a model for the rest of the world. Its innovative approach to cybersecurity, accompanied by its understanding of digital leadership, is the global model of how a nation can turn adversity into the power of potential and leadership.

### A New Era of Cyber Defense

The 2007 cyberattacks on Estonia were an eye-opener, a reminder that the future of war is not only tanks, bombs, and troops but also a war for control of cyberspace. For both the EU and NATO, the attacks served to illustrate the necessity of upgrading their cyber defense systems. The two have made significant progress since the attack in developing their cybersecurity framework so that countries would be better placed to defend themselves against the increasing risk of cyberattacks.

But as cyber threats continue to grow, the world cannot become complacent. Cybersecurity is more than a tech problem—it's a national and global security need.



*Estonia's experience serves as a cold wake-up call: proactive defense, international coordination, and an existential commitment to the development of safe digital infrastructure are necessary.*



In a more networked world than ever before, cybersecurity is no longer about protecting networks—it's about protecting the future of our societies, economies, and even our liberty. The Estonia crisis in 2007 should not be forgotten, because the next cyber crisis could arrive at any given moment.

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## ARE DIGITAL CURRENCIES THE KEY TO REVOLUTIONIZING TRADITIONAL FINANCE OR ITS GREATEST DISRUPTOR?

Riddhima Sahu



Imagine a world where your wallet is not made of leather but rather is in your smartphone. A world where money is not on paper and plastic but in the form of encrypted digital codes. It may seem futuristic, but the future has now become the present. We can order groceries online, stream our favorite movies, and book our flight in just one tap. The world has transformed from centralized banks, standing in long queues to deposit and withdraw money, to now managing your finances and assets from the comfort of your home. Digital currency could avoid the opportunity cost of our time and energy.

Digital currencies offer various advantages. They are very convenient in carrying out transactions, especially remittance which is the sending of money overseas through cryptocurrency. This is not only a quick alternative but also cheaper than traditional banking methods. It is further decentralized and reduces the need for intermediaries. It makes use of blockchain technology where transactions are recorded in blocks which are closed and encrypted when verified, making it a safer option. Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC) have become a hybrid solution to bring stability to traditional financial systems.

***The well-known case studies of China's Digital Yuan and the digital euro of the Central Bank of Europe showcase the use of CBDC in modernized payments and improving monetary policies' implementation in nations.***

However, every coin has two sides, and digital currency comes with its share of challenges as it is well-known for its tendency to be volatile. Volatility can cause significant losses to investors. Taking down the servers supporting the central bank digital-wallet system is catastrophic enough to shut down economies, making it inherently riskier than traditional payment methods. Digital currencies can also increase the potential of state intervention in everyday transactions.

As digital currencies continue to grow in importance, the traditional financial systems have started learning to adapt to such changes, rather than resist. Roughly 90% of commercial banks are engaged in central bank digital currency projects. (Olivier Denecker, 2022,1). Banks are increasingly incorporating blockchain technologies to fulfill people's concerns, namely security and efficiency. Central banks in partnership with digital currency have proved to cater to a broader user base than before.

Digital currencies have been inevitable as a force of transformation in the world of finance, offering benefits such as speed and decentralization; Supporters of CBDC claim they could lead to a world where more people have more access to financial services. However, it also poses challenges like volatility, regulatory risk, and vulnerability to fraud. These types of innovations could also disrupt the financial equilibrium and give governments far greater control over their citizens' money and lives. The importance of robust regulations and the adoption of digital currencies by banks cannot be overstated. Digital currencies like bitcoin and cryptocurrency have profoundly changed the world, but their long-term growth and success can be made possible by encouraging collaboration with innovations and traditional financial institutions.

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## FROM KABUL TO CALIFORNIA - LIVING UNDER THE TALIBAN'S RULE FOR 3 YEARS

Mohaddesa Hassani

Today, I spent my day on a farm, dancing, having marshmallows, driving a truck, petting the horses, and feeling the wind blowing my hair. During all of those moments, I was thinking about the last time I felt this free and happy, but I wasn't able to remember.

After August 15th, 2021, I really didn't have a chance to live. As a 15-year-old girl, I was suddenly forced to become frightened, quiet, and antisocial. I've been that way for the past 3 years.

***The day when the Taliban took over Kabul, I had a history and a geography test. At that time, I was so busy studying for my exams that I had no time to watch the news or to understand what was going on in my country.***



I was so absorbed in my little world, and the real world came as a shock. I was kicked out of the classroom, and August 15th became my last day of school and of having a normal life.

At first, I was confused; I had no idea what was happening, but little by little, I realized that the Taliban, those terrifying creatures that were in the books and news, were the new government of my country. Despite living my whole life in Afghanistan, I had no idea about the Taliban. I had lived in Kabul since I was born.

Each day of these last 3 years was like a million years for me; I was deprived of all the rights I had for 15 years of my life. I wasn't able to go to school anymore, couldn't wear what I liked, couldn't ride a bike, couldn't even dance or laugh loudly. The only thing we were allowed to do was breathe, but not too loudly because that wouldn't be pleasant for them. As a teenage girl, I felt lonely, like I was the last person on the earth who had nobody to talk to. Yet, I wasn't taught to give up or to believe in bad fate and do nothing; my parents raised a girl who was trying her best to make everything better. So, I started taking online classes, and it became the only thing that connected me with people and the world. After some time, my laptop and my online classes became the reason I was still breathing, an inspiration for me to keep surviving because I was seeing a light in the future.



## FROM KABUL TO CALIFORNIA - LIVING UNDER THE TALIBAN'S RULE FOR 3 YEARS

Mohaddesa Hassani



Days were passing, and there I was, in the little room I shared with my two sisters, facing my computer from the time I got up to when I went to sleep. I knew that it wasn't only me who wasn't able to go out and study; we were a country of girls and women who were banned from everything. I needed to do something for all the girls who were feeling the depression and loneliness I was feeling. That's why I started Daricha Online Tutoring for Girls in Afghanistan, an initiative that connects students from around the world to the girls in Afghanistan.

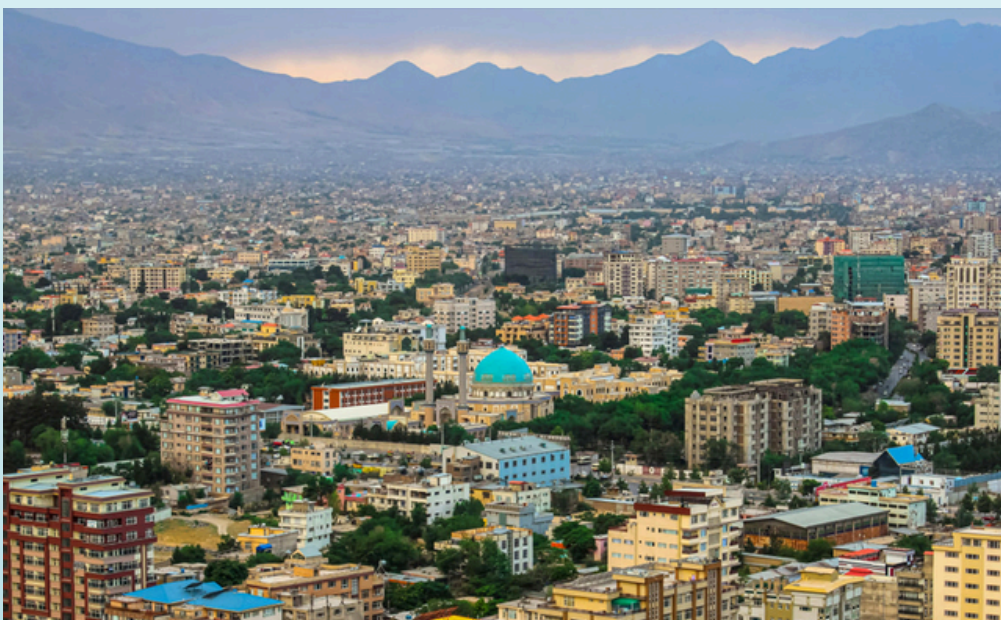
Although I was doing well with all my online classes and Daricha, there was still something missing, and it was the real world.

***I was afraid to go out and I hated to wear long black dresses so I didn't leave my home at all, but I needed to see the real world and real people.***

That's one of the main reasons I started applying for colleges in the United States, because it would give me a chance to be real and feel a reason for existing in this world.

And now here I am, in the United States of America. Still, I am not able to feel the happiness I lost; I can't look at my classmates at college without questioning myself. Why not us? What was our fault? What did we do to deserve this?

***I am thousands of miles away from home now, but my heart is in Kabul, with my sister, who is just 15, and all of the other girls in Afghanistan.***



But as much as I feel sad for what they are going through, I believe in our strength. I witnessed, for 3 years, how we passed all the bad days and still didn't lose our hope. I am sure all of us will find the light.

So to my sister Zainab and all the girls who are in Afghanistan who wake up every day and try to live: you are the strongest people I have ever seen. You passed many sleepless nights and cried a lot for losing nearly every single right that we have as human beings, but you never gave up. You are the future. The Taliban can close all the schools and educational centers, but as we proved during these 3 years, they can't stop us from learning. So just keep trying, because in the end, we will be the future.



CRIME, DEATH, AND THE FASCINATION WITH FORENSICS

Adwaith R. Nair

Whether it be true crime documentaries or forensic dramas, there seems to be a fascination with crime, death, and the science behind solving mysteries. TV shows such as CSI, Dexter, and Mindhunter delve into the field of forensic science where blood, fingerprints, and autopsies are all pieces of a bigger puzzle. But why is there a fascination with crime and death? What is so appealing about the uncomfortable details of murder and the precision of forensics?

The Excitement of Crime and Suspense

As it rightly stands, forensic science transforms crime into an enigmatic conundrum, which we, as an audience, are all primed to decipher. Whether it is a detective examining the scene for fingerprints, a forensic pathologist doing an autopsy, or a profiler delving into the mind of a murderer, we are always captivated by the intellectual game that is crime.

*Whereas in real-life some cases are never resolved, crime dramas showcase the enforcement of law and order, the closing of the case, and the unveiling of the truth.*

This formulaic method of solving crime feeds directly into our appreciation of logic and reasoning. Rather than just concentrating on the grotesque act of murder, forensic science reframes it as a systematic investigation, which is much more palatable, making it seem less as a brutal crime and more like a complex enigma.



The Attraction of Gore and its Supernatural Appeal

Forensic media portrays gore more as an art form that is utterly shocking yet equally enthralling at the same time. For example, the meticulous dissection of an autopsy, the precise detailing that goes into recreating a crime scene, or the careful analysis of a putrefied corpse—all of these are displayed with a type of scientific beauty.

Additionally, cinematic television series like Hannibal capture gore so well that it emerges as stunning art, where violence is portrayed in such an elegant way that it seems almost tasteful.

As eye-catching as it is, that dissonance, or blurring of lines between beauty and horror, breathes life into the very existence of forensic media. While we may be horrified witnessing a crime scene, the minute details of the scene have the power to enthrall and capture our attention. Forensic professionals, through the magic of science, manage to explain the unexplainable and bring order to chaos which is stunning.

The Satisfaction of Justice and Emotion

Forensic documentaries give us effortless closure and accomplish what is often impossible in the real world: justice and order. These shows make us feel better as the killer in the show is caught, order is restored, and the mystery is solved. This method of storytelling allows us to never lose faith in science and law enforcement no matter how brutal a crime is.



Forensics in media do not only appeal to our curiosity. They also give us control over chaos. The world may be troublesome, but in these shows, the truth is bound to surfaces no matter what.

Conclusion

The reason why we remain fascinated with forensics and crime media is because crime embodies curiosity, logic, and humanity's darker impulses. Whether it is the mystery needing to be solved, the science that is almost poetry, or the overwhelming sense of justice, there will always be a bone chilling fascination with crime and violence.

Next time you find yourself binge watching investigative crime documentaries at night, there is no need to feel alarmed. You are unleashing an age old human instinct relating to our morbid curiosity about life and death.

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## THE YOUTH ACTIVISM PARADOX: TOKENS OR CHANGEMAKERS?

Huwayda El Zain

Now that youth-led movements are changing the narratives of the world, young activists have become influential agents of change. They have mobilized millions, disrupted political apathy, and demanded action from their leaders on issues ranging from human rights to climate justice. Youth bring fresh perspectives, a digital fluency, and an unswerving sense of urgency, making them irreplaceable. Despite their influence, however, young activists are often faced with the challenging burden of being the face of change while still being marginalized in decision-making.



### The Power of Youth in Activism

Youth involvement in activism cannot be said to be a new phenomenon. Young people have always stood on the frontlines of monumental movements. From civil rights protests in the United States to the Sudanese revolution, young voices have been consistently there to push for change, and it is in this digital era that they have been able to use social media to magnify their voices for advocacy purposes. Movements from Fridays for Future to Arab Spring have then gained international prominence.

Young activists remain deeply affected by the issues for which they fight. Climate change threatens their future, systemic inequity limits opportunities for their partners, and wars and displacement uproot their very own lives. Hence, they base their activism not on abstract concepts of policies but on concrete, lived experiences. This makes youth activism incredibly potent and uncompromising; they have a direct stake in the future.

### Tokenism in Youth Engagement Spaces

Young activists are seldom treated with respect, often relegated to symbolic status rather than real decision-making power. Institutions seeking a progressive facade invite youth to panels, summits, and advisory boards without granting them real influence. Ironically, organizations that laud youth engagement simultaneously restrict them from participating in policy discussions and setting funding limits or relegate them to mere performative roles by putting them in front of the cameras rather than at the negotiation tables.

The manifestations of tokenism are numerous. Young activists are assumed to provide rather than hold discussions. Their inclusion is a facade for an insignificant role. Many youth activists have reported that they were invited to global events where they were given very short speaking slots and very little time to interact with decision-makers. Others have been asked to volunteer, reinforcing the perception that youth labor is valuable for appearances' sake but not worth any investment or compensation.

### The Double Standard: Experience vs. Impact

Ageism remains a persistent impediment to young activism. While young people are expected to lead grassroots movements and rally communities, they are viewed as too young and inexperienced to argue for structural change at the highest levels. The contradiction is profound: teenagers are credible enough to mobilize protests but not knowledgeable enough to design policy.

This double standard puts a tremendous burden on young activists. They repeatedly demonstrate their competence, work twice as hard to earn respect, and bear the obligations of representing the "youth voice", rather than being recognized as distinct individuals with various viewpoints and abilities.

### Moving Beyond Performative Youth Engagement

Engaging the youth goes beyond vague objectives, and real inclusivity must be practiced by institutions and organizations aiming for substantial youth leadership participation. Young activists must be offered more than just publicity; they must be provided with decision-making authority. Youth engagement as an undertaking should not be a singular activity but rather an integration into the organizational culture. Young activists should be paid for the labor they do, and empowerment should be acquired through mentoring and capacity-building instead of just the aid coming from the West. In addition, young people have to be identified as part and parcel of a heterogeneous population since their opinions, experiences, and knowledge are three-dimensional and impossible to downsize into one binary representative's voice.

### Conclusion

Youth activism is not just something that is going to last for a short while but is truly a crucial force that is responsible for shaping the future. For young changemakers to enter global decision-making more seriously, they need to have an equal status in society to succeed, not just be mere symbols. Institutional mechanisms that are declaring to voice the needs and concerns of youth should entirely fulfill their promises, ensuring that young activists are not only heard but are provided fully with the authority to act if necessary.

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## SELFISHNESS - A SURVIVAL INSTINCT OR A LETHAL GAME

Chi Anh (Amber) Ta

In modern society, for most, the concept of competitiveness and selfishness is interpreted merely as a trait that drives the human race towards survival; being equipped with the strong impulses to compete for resources and accumulate power and possessions is inherent. This is evident in many real cases, whether it be the desire to climb the ranks in one's career or simply to have an attractive partner.

This matter could be perceived by some as a mechanism where we humans are equipped with the urge to ruthlessly survive and battle our way through life, pushing ourselves to reach for the better, to reach for things nobody else could or would. In that sense, selfishness could technically be seen as a relatively positive feature, if not vital for life.

A notable exemplification of this can be seen during the prehistoric times, when selfishness, aggression, and brutality were characteristics invaluable to hunter-gatherer groups. The ability to fight and compete for rudimentary necessities such as shelter, food, and water was no short of critical. Such needs were prized more than anything else, so communities became ever more competitive.

Nonetheless, selfishness, like all other parts of life, is a double-edged sword. Selfishness is the innate human characteristic that naturally envelops us with the urge to want the most quality and quantity in aspects of life for ourselves—and often ourselves only. This could give one a rather unappealing image and impression, which certainly puts them at an unwanted disadvantage in various cases.

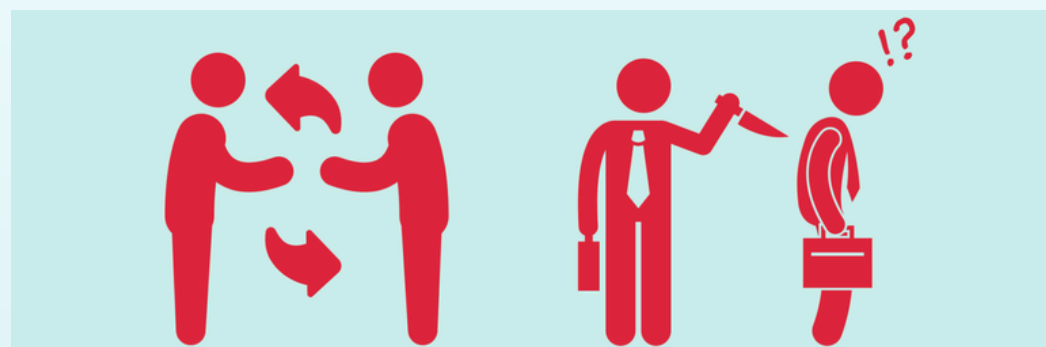
Empirical evidence has also highlighted a crucial point, demonstrating how cooperation and collaboration are indeed prerequisites to selfishness' benefits. Focusing on selfishness' impact on evolution, in a 2013 BBC news article, professor Andrew Coleman of Leicester University noted that despite the assumption that natural selection may favor those who display exploitative and selfish behaviors, decades of research have proven that that is an oversimplified perspective, especially if you consider the selfish gene feature of evolution. This thereby means that so-called "selfish genes" only benefit from their cooperative counterparts.



Another factor that ought to be stated is that after a research team from Michigan State University tested a model of "the prisoner's dilemma", a scenario of game theory, professor Christoph Adami concluded:

***"Being mean can give you an advantage on a short timescale but certainly not in the long run - you would go extinct."***

This statement contradicted a 2012 study conducted by PNAS.



Associating with data mentioned earlier in regards to prehistoric times, the assumption that prehistoric life was a brutal battle for survival is flawed. Scientists and anthropologists have remarked that hunter-gatherers were actually characterized by political and sexual egalitarianism. For example, the !Kung people of South Africa had an arrow-swapping custom: when prey was killed, the acclaim went to the arrow's possessor and not its firer. Additionally, in typical communities, females would benefit from much autonomy and independence in marriage, child rights, and work.

In brief, having discussed selfishness as a multifaceted and complex notion, it seems that while such a quality is deemed by a wide array of consensuses ranging from the general public to those specializing in particularly biological and anthropological fields, selfishness and cooperation are two attributes that hold a truly instrumental and profound connection with one another. It is without a doubt that "the selfish gene" will continue to allow researchers to unravel the perplexing behavioral and strategic mindsets that nature has gifted the living creatures on planet Earth and beyond.

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## CYBERSECURITY AND ITS CURRENT THREATS

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Every 39 seconds, a hacker attacks a computer in the United States. As shocking as it may seem, this statement has been supported by a study conducted by Michel Cukier at the Clark School of mechanical engineering. Specifically, the study delved deeper into which kinds of passwords and usernames are frequently tried and what hackers intend to do once they have gained access to a person's computer system. This study has been significant in helping us understand how we as internet users can use non-secure usernames and passwords, which ultimately give hackers more of a chance to break into our computer systems. It is therefore a possibility that your devices could be targeted, highlighting the necessity of robust cybersecurity measures.



### What is Cybersecurity?

Cybersecurity refers to any type of practice, advanced technology, or policy being used to mitigate the potential negative consequences of cyberattacks. This involves the protection of computer systems, servers, mobile devices, electronic systems, and networks against unauthorized access, damage, or theft.

Cybersecurity aims to protect all sectors regarding information technology and computer systems. These include AI security, critical infrastructure security, network security, mobile security, etc. Each of these types of security serves a different purpose, all ensuring a guarded and sheltered network for online users. For instance, critical infrastructure security focuses on a nation's economy, public health, and overall societal safety. It mainly concentrates on the protection of vital computer systems, digital assets, and global networks that a whole society often relies on.

### The Growing Nature of Cyberattacks and Why Cybersecurity is Needed:

In order to have a complete understanding of why cybersecurity has been an increasingly pressing topic, one must acknowledge the rising concern of cyber attacks. According to International Business Machines, "A cyberattack is a malicious effort to access computer systems without authorization with the intent to steal, expose, modify, disable or eradicate information." There could be numerous motives behind a cyberattack, but according to Royster from Southern New Hampshire University (UNHS), political motivations or those related to revenge are some of the most common reasons.



On a bigger scale, cyber attacks can lead to the disruption of businesses, the shutdown of essential services, leakages of sensitive information and data, and overall financial losses. The Facebook Data Breach Fallout accurately exemplifies the above claim. According to Forbes, "The 2019 breach exposed the personal information of 533 million Facebook users across 157 countries through a technique known as scraping." The scraping technique, also known as web scraping or data scraping, involves importing large amounts of data from various websites and saving them into your files or spreadsheets on your computer. However, in the context of cyber attacks, this information can be exploited for malicious purposes, such as creating fake accounts or websites and even stealing sensitive information from Internet users, which exactly matches the case of the Facebook cyber attack. The NASA cyber attack is another example that has precisely shown the severity of this issue. From June 29th to 30th, 1999, a fifteen-year-old teenager named James Jonathan was reported to have breached NASA's security barriers, accessing 13 computers and stealing software and important information worth up to \$1.7 million. This resulted in NASA's shutdown for the following 21 days.

***"The 2019 breach exposed the personal information of 533 million Facebook users across 157 countries through a technique known as scraping." - Forbes***



CYBERSECURITY AND ITS CURRENT THREATS

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Cybersecurity is an indispensable part of cyberspace since cybercrime and cyberattacks have the power to disrupt and destroy a person’s reputation, business, and even their lives.

The Threat to Cybersecurity is Growing

The truth is, cybersecurity doesn’t always work effectively, as technology is considered an ever-evolving industry; cyber threats are being continually perfected, and hackers are forever seeking new ways to attack and breach defenses. Moreover, with the development of the information technology landscape, cybersecurity professionals must adapt to new technologies and methods daily. Many advanced technologies that offer tremendous advantages to businesses and corporations also raise concerning questions about the potential threats from cybercriminals, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence. Therefore, as worldwide attacks continue to expand, cybersecurity teams are finding it hard to keep pace. Research by the World Economic Forum stated the intensity of the problem: “The global cybersecurity worker gap—the gap between cybersecurity workers and jobs that need to be filled—might reach 85 million workers by 2030.”



*“The global cybersecurity worker gap—the gap between cybersecurity workers and jobs that need to be filled—might reach 85 million workers by 2030.” World Economic Forum*

The Future of Cybersecurity: The Role of AI in Cybersecurity

The future of cybersecurity is unpredictable and unforeseeable. However, in 2025, one can see tremendous changes in the industry, particularly with the alternating landscape of IT. One of the principal changes would be in the field of AI and machine learning. AI and machine learning will likely play an integral part in cyber defense, specifically in detecting threats or even predicting them before they happen. Moreover, these machine learning models will be able to assist SOC (Security Operation Centers) with important tasks. SOC’s work to enhance companies’ threat detection and diminish attacks from across the globe. With the assistance of AI, SOC’s will be able to handle more complex computer systems by identifying, synthesizing, and analyzing vast amounts of data and patterns more rapidly, as well as responding to computer errors or cybercrime faster than the naked human eye. It is expected that by 2030 the artificial intelligence market will potentially exceed 826 billion US dollars. Therefore, it’s possible that the development of cybernation and large language models (LLMs) will have the power to change cybersecurity for the better in many years to come. However, this can also be seen as a “double-edged sword,” especially for cyber attackers, since they can utilize these tools to bring in their “A-game” with more complicated threats.

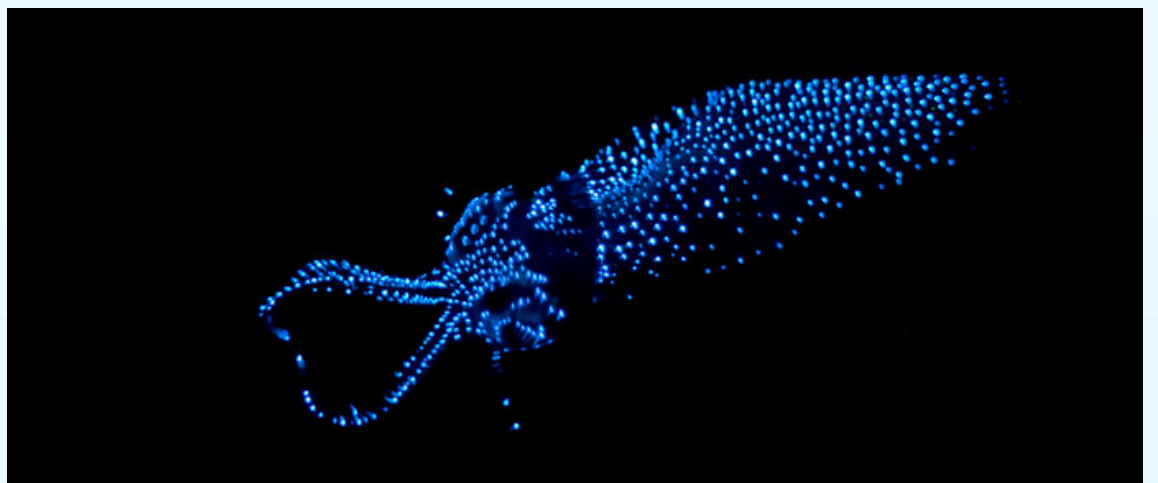
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## REWINDING THE CLOCK: DISCOVERING THE WORLD'S FIRST BIOLUMINESCENT ORGANISM

Truong Bao Ngoc

Have you ever seen a firefly, wondering how it could glow? From fireflies to glow worms, algae to squid, a dazzling array of organisms can do something that may seem like magic: generating their own light through a process known as bioluminescence. This isn't just a one-off phenomenon. In fact, it has evolved independently at least 100 times in nature and has dozens of diverse uses, including luring in prey, throwing off predators, and finding a potential mate.



For a long time, the first glow-in-the-dark creatures were thought to be small marine crustaceans called ostracods which lived around 267 million years ago. However, a recent study by a team of American researchers has said otherwise. By studying an oft-bioluminescent group of deep-sea critters named octocorals, the scientists found that they shared a primeval light-bearing ancestor of deep-sea soft corals which suggests that the phenomenon may have evolved in the sea more than 500 million years ago—thereby making its first known emergence more than twice as old as previously calculated.

“Light signaling is one of the earliest forms of communication that we know of—it’s very important in deep waters,” said Andrea Quattrini, a co-author of the study. For animals, especially those that live deeper in the ocean than sunlight can reach, bioluminescence can make the difference between dinner and having dinner. For example, it can lure prey and deter predators. “Bioluminescence, and light signaling in general, could be one of the oldest forms of communication that we have evidence of, which was not what we were originally expecting,” says Danielle DeLeo.

Today, marine creatures that glimmer include some fish, squid, octopuses, jellyfish, and even sharks—all the result of a cold light chemical reaction, one that requires the presence of luciferin—a light-making compound. Cold light means less than 20% of the light generates thermal radiation or heat. The luciferin chemicals that animals use to create light may come from their bodies, from their diets, or from storing a special kind of bacteria in their bodies. Fireflies, for instance, can produce luciferin, while Hawaiian bobtail squids rely on *fisheri* bacteria in their light organs, and jellyfish obtain the chemicals through their diet of smaller marine animals.

Many deep-sea soft coral species light up briefly when bumped, or stimulated with a brush in the laboratory. That’s what scientists used, attached to a remote-controlled underwater rover, to identify and study luminous species, said Steven Haddock, a study co-author and marine biologist at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute. Zoologist Andrea Quattrini, curator of corals at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., and her colleagues were determined to understand how—and when—bioluminescence may have developed in octocorals. Quattrini has spent about a decade testing living octocorals collected from the ocean by sequestering the creatures under a blanket or in a dark room and nudging them with a pair of laboratory tweezers, looking for signs of light.

Quattrini’s team mapped such results in an evolutionary tree that shows how different modern octocorals are related to one another, letting the scientists look for patterns in which branches can and can’t create light. A recent, detailed octocoral evolutionary tree using genetic data from almost 200 species gave them that chance. First, they placed additional octocoral fossils with known ages on that tree to better illuminate how various lineages are related. They also mapped out the tree branches that featured living bioluminescent species.

Ultimately, the analysis suggests that the first known evolution of bioluminescence in a marine environment occurred some 540 million years ago—much longer ago than previous estimates of 267 million years.



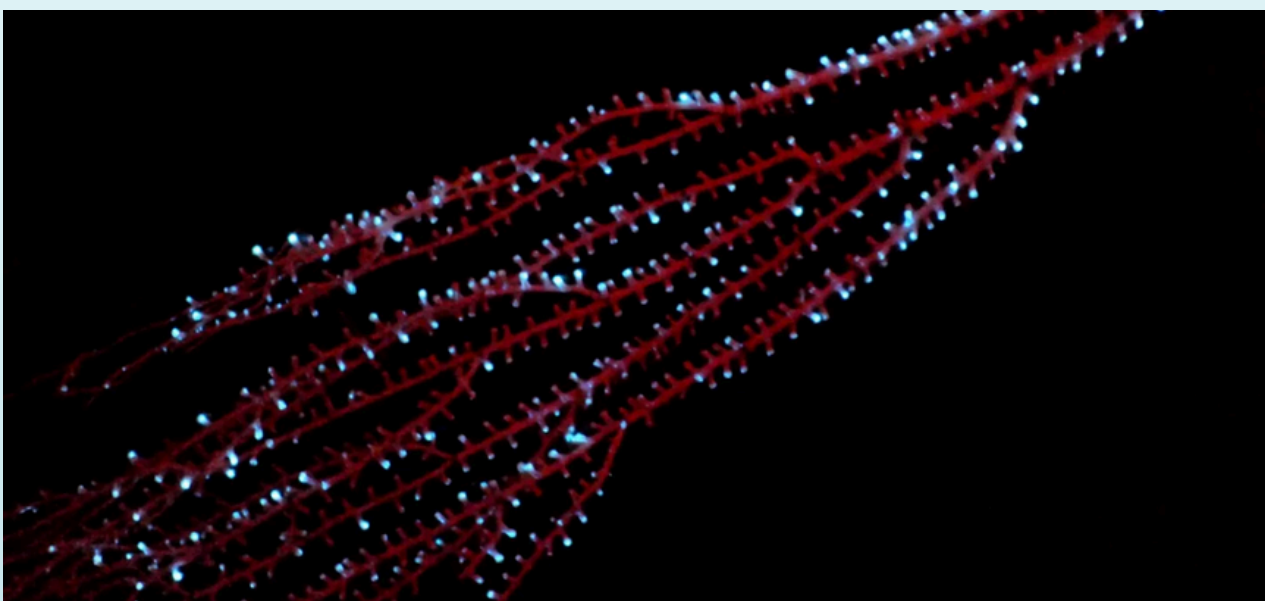
## REWINDING THE CLOCK: DISCOVERING THE WORLD'S FIRST BIOLUMINESCENT ORGANISM

Truong Bao Ngoc

The fact that the proposed date falls just before or during an event paleontologists have dubbed the Cambrian explosion, when a burst of biological diversification occurred, was a very elegant and interesting finding indeed. "It is the time that we knew that eyes were taking off," says Copley, referring to animals that evolved the ability to detect light. It makes sense that bioluminescence would emerge around the same time. "I don't think it's a coincidence at all." In other words, the seas and oceans of the world are generally dark places. But almost as long as complex animals have existed, so too have there been lights flickering in the darkness.

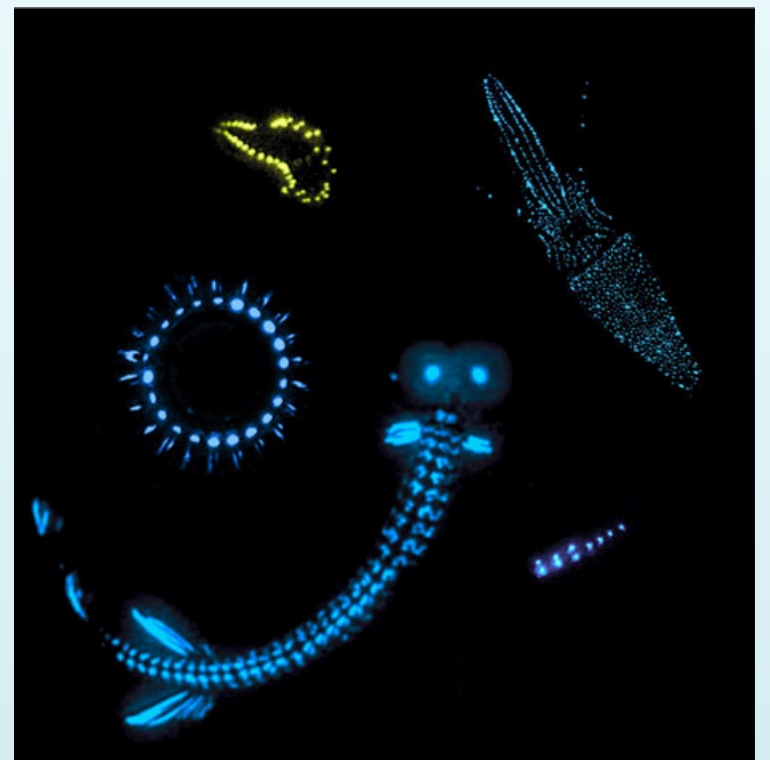
The ocean houses by far the most organisms that utilize bioluminescence. This is probably because the oceans have much more area of land deprived entirely of sunlight. Just about 200 meters below the surface, existing creatures already develop bioluminescence to glow in the dark. "It's so diverse and variable," says DeLeo. In some cases, bioluminescence can lead the way of an animal's quest for a potential dinner. Predators with rumbling stomachs can use the process to blind and stun their dinner, draw gullible prey into their maws, or act as a searchlight to spy on a swimming snack.

Octocorals can also shine in the dark. Although superficially similar to the stony-housed polyp colonies that make up coral reefs we see, these wiggly animals have a soft structure, along with a few other morphological oddities. Seeing their soft bodies and immobility, many scientists have suggested that their bioluminescence may have been used as a "burglar alarm", as recent research has shown them glowing brightest when being prodded with. Perhaps a bright shine is the best way to frighten off a hungry predator.



Other scientists disagree, suggesting that glowing was probably not used for today's burglar alarm-like purpose. "We think this light production was more of a secondary byproduct," says DeLeo—an inadvertent brilliance triggered by another biochemical reaction. But over time, the bioluminescent reactions "were kept because they started serving this really important function of communication, or light signaling."

Debates about its uses aside, scientists are still trying to exactly pinpoint the actual primal ancestors of bioluminescence organisms. It's highly possible that the ancestors of these bioluminescent beings may go back even further than the Cambrian era. Unfortunately, due to a paucity of fossils older than this period, scientists may never conclusively find out when this underwater starlight first appeared. One thing is certain: thanks to that initial ignition, an abundance of lifeforms today can light up their surroundings—giving researchers countless opportunities to study this remarkable ability.



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## FROM GLOBAL PROTECTORS TO PREDATORS: THE CRISIS OF ABUSE WITHIN UN PEACEKEEPING

Chaewon Ida Joung

*"They put a few coins in your hands to drop a baby in you."*



These words, uttered by a Haitian teenager, are not the words of a girl captured by enemy soldiers or at the mercy of the vicious gangs that have taken her country hostage. Tragically, these are the words of a girl describing the United Nations peacekeepers that have been deployed to her country to protect her. Instead, they have raped her and left her pregnant and alone in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Her story is not an anomaly, but rather part of a troubling pattern that has played out across the globe over the last several decades, as UN peacekeepers have repeatedly perpetuated the genocide, sexual violence, and other human rights abuses they are ostensibly there to prevent, with long-lasting consequences for highly vulnerable populations and little accountability for offenders. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches for reform are urgently needed, including widespread judicial reform, funding adjustments, and empowerment of local communities to report and respond to abuse.

United Nations peacekeeping began in 1948, when military officials were deployed to the Middle East to promote stability between Israel and its neighbors. Over three-quarters of a century later, the UN has organized over 70 such missions and sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers, police officers, and civilians around the globe to protect vulnerable people, monitor ceasefires, and facilitate political processes in countries as varied as Cyprus, El Salvador, and Mozambique.

A systematic review of 16 UN peacekeeping operations found the vast majority have achieved their goal of ending war and collectively saved millions of lives, and peacekeepers even won a Nobel Prize in 1988 for their work “towards the realization of one of the fundamental tenets of the United Nations”. In light of this recognition, it is not surprising that peacekeepers, known as “blue helmets” due to their distinct uniforms, are heroized by many around the world.

But despite their operational successes and international accolades, investigations have increasingly exposed how “peacekeeping” might be one of the world’s most tragic misnomers. As the dust has settled following genocide in nations thousands of miles apart, it has come to light that UN peacekeepers allowed, and even perpetuated, violence in Bosnia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Amidst the Bosnian War in 1995, peacekeepers stood idly by and watched as Bosnian Serbs massacred over 8,000 Bosniak boys and men in a UN-designated safe haven. Nearly 25 years later in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN peacekeepers withdrew from a town just hours-





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before an armed group massacred over 100 civilians. This willful inaction in the face of grave human rights abuse represents a profound abdication of the peacekeepers' very purpose. Moreover, the consequences of their neglect are often catastrophic, leaving already imperiled communities to face the unmitigated brutality of warring factions without the safeguards they were promised. The psychological toll on survivors, who feel abandoned by the international community that pledged to keep them safe, is immense.

***This endemic issue of peacekeepers turning a blind eye to violence and failing to uphold their mandates speaks to deep-seated structural and cultural problems within UN operations.***

Even more egregious and widespread among UN peacekeepers than dereliction of duty is sexual violence and exploitation. In 2017, an extensive investigation by the Associated Press uncovered a disturbing pattern of sexual abuse by peacekeepers that had been deployed to Haiti to address the tumult that followed the ouster of the country's president in 2004. The report found that over the course of several years, at least 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers engaged in various forms of sexual misconduct, including the rape of Haitian women, girls, and boys as young as 12 years old, one of whom described being assaulted by over 100 peacekeepers over the course of their mission.

Tragically, sexual violence at the hands of peacekeepers is by no means limited to Haiti. In the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2004, there was an epidemic of pre-teen and teenage girls receiving food in exchange for "survival sex" with members of MONUC, the peacekeeping force that had been deployed to the country following the Second Congo War. And despite the UN's promise of systemic change following these reports, in just three months in 2015, eight women and girls living in the Central African Republic reported being raped or sexually exploited by peacekeepers, several at gunpoint.



Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence of these crimes, the perpetrators have faced little to no consequences due to the systemic impunity granted to peacekeepers. Under international law, peacekeepers are afforded broad legal immunity from prosecution in the host countries where they are deployed. This shields them from accountability in local courts, even in the most egregious cases of abuse.

This pervasive issue of sexual violence by UN peacekeepers not only violates the human rights of vulnerable populations, but fundamentally undermines the credibility and purpose of peacekeeping missions worldwide.

***The impunity afforded to perpetrators erodes public trust and undermines the very principles of protection and security that peacekeepers are meant to uphold.***

A key component of reforming UN peacekeeping operations must be addressing the culture of impunity that has allowed grave abuse to persist. Removing the broad legal immunity currently shielding peacekeepers from prosecution in host countries is crucial. A 2021 study found that only 53 out of 2,000 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel from 2010 to 2019 resulted in criminal accountability. Establishing independent investigative bodies with the authority to pursue perpetrators in international courts would help deter future crimes and provide justice for victims. This deterrence-based approach is essential to restoring the credibility and moral authority of peacekeeping missions.



## FROM GLOBAL PROTECTORS TO PREDATORS: THE CRISIS OF ABUSE WITHIN UN PEACEKEEPING

Chaewon Ida Joung



In addition, adequate and appropriately allocated funding is essential to ensuring peacekeepers can fulfill their mandate to protect vulnerable populations.

***Currently, peacekeeping budgets are often stretched thin, undermining the ability of missions to maintain security and provide basic services.***

For instance, several peacekeeping operations in Yemen were forced to close due to inadequate resources. Increasing resources to improve infrastructure, equipment, and logistical support would enable peacekeepers to more effectively monitor and intervene in conflict zones.

Beyond reform from powers of authority, collaborating closely with local grassroots groups and NGOs deeply embedded in the context can provide essential guidance on navigating cultural nuances, conflict dynamics, and the specific vulnerabilities of populations. A 2018 study found that missions collaborating with civil society organizations were 30% more effective at protecting civilians. Centering local ownership in the design and implementation of peacekeeping strategies is not only more ethical, but also more likely to yield sustainable solutions that address the root causes of violence and insecurity. By building genuine partnerships, the UN can leverage the insights and resilience of those most impacted to reshape peacekeeping into a force that truly serves the people.

The sight of a line of blue helmets on the horizon should inspire feelings of hope and promises of safety to people devastated by conflict. But until systemic reform is made to systems of global funding, international law, and community collaboration, the arrival of UN peacekeepers may as well just represent another phase of war.

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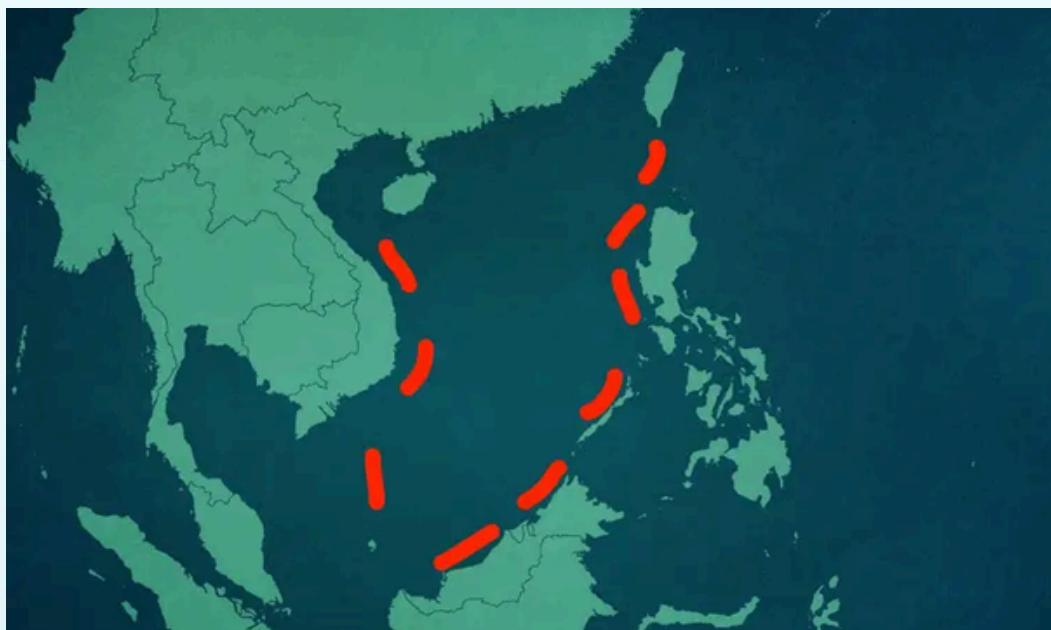


## CONTROVERSY AS EXPANDING TERRITORY IMAGERY IS SHOWN ON TOYS

Nguyen Ngoc Linh Chi

### Definition:

The cow's tongue line (also known as the "nine-dash line" or "U-shaped line") refers to a geographical line that China uses on its maps to demonstrate its sovereignty claim over a large part of the South China Sea. This area includes the sea and islands under the official sovereignty of many countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia.



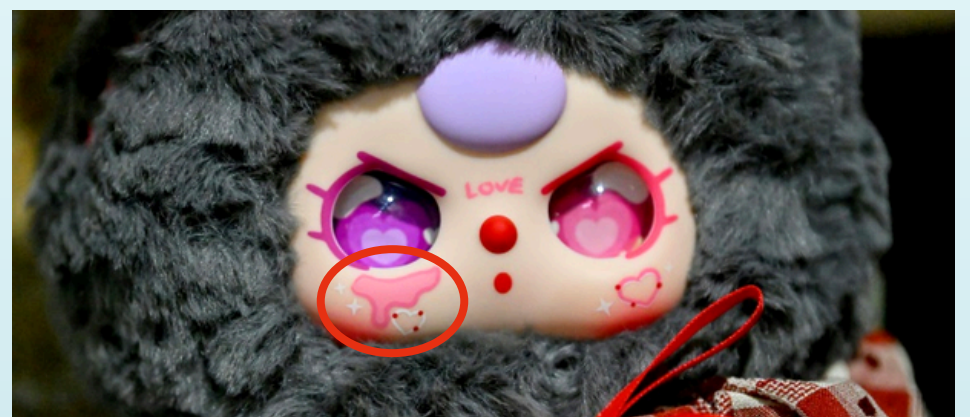
Baby Three—a very popular toy for both adults and children in Vietnam—is produced in China. They are highly sought after and they are very expensive as a result. On the 5th of March, 2025, it was discovered that Baby Three (specifically Town Rabbit version 2) may have used some images that relate to the nine-dash line. Since then, this kind of toy has received lots of criticism from Vietnamese social media communities.

On the night of the 5th of March, an argument began across social media in Vietnam. Thousands of people and experts pointed out the image that relates to the island sovereignty of Vietnam on Baby Three. In particular, there was a picture of a cow's tongue line on the doll's cheeks. ViRusS, a well-known streamer and content creator, strongly reacted on his social media page. He announced that he would stop importing and distributing the product in Thailand after discovering the offensive images in the design around the eyes of the character. Although the product brings him significant income, ViRusS insisted that national interests must take priority. His actions have received a lot of support from the Vietnamese people.

For this case, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Trade announced a ban on Baby Three in Vietnamese trade markets.

Furthermore, in response to the backlash on social media in Vietnam, the brand announced that it had conducted a comprehensive investigation, and claimed that the face of Baby Three Town Rabbit version 2 was a completely random gothic graffiti drawing. Nevertheless, there is not enough evidence to confirm either side of the story. By banning Baby Three from Vietnamese markets, the Vietnam-China relationship is negatively impacted. Although Vietnam and China have quite a good relationship with each other at the moment, through this toy and the suspected nine-dash picture, Vietnamese people are worried that beneath the surface of the relationship lies China's desire to invade Vietnam. They view it as a threat to Vietnamese people's lives in the 21st century.

Awareness education is very important as Vietnam doesn't want misinformation about territories in the South China Sea to be spread. The future generation has a right to awareness about a country's sovereignty. Vietnam claims that the Paracel (Hoang Sa) and Spratly (Truong Sa) archipelagoes belong to it. The cow's tongue line not only has no legal basis but also shows China's desire for taking over maritime lands. These details on Baby Three can also remind us about the relationship between China and Vietnam.



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## THE MAKING OF MARKETING: HOW GLOBAL CORPORATE GIANTS DEVELOPED CLOSE-KNIT CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS

Andrew Huynh

### Introduction To Marketing

Marketing isn't just the art and science of connecting people to products made by companies of all sizes, but rather a strategic way of presenting experiences that add value to each viewer's life. It's more than just selling; it's about building relationships, telling stories, and understanding the ever-changing dynamics of human behavior. In a world where attention is an extremely valuable currency, effective marketing strategies transform ordinary companies and monotone brands into unforgettable ones, creating trust, loyalty, and boosts in sales. Whether through a carefully crafted campaign to connect with a certain audience in the form of a social media post or a heartfelt partnership with a community, marketing bridges the gap between needs and solutions, turning aspirations into reality.

### The Emergence of Marketing

In many unconventional ways, marketing has existed since humankind had things to sell. It dates back to 3,000 BC when the first evidence of marketing practices was recorded on clay tablets in ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform writings. However, according to renowned marketing professor and author Dr. Phillip Kotler:

***"Marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential."***

***- Kotler Marketing Group***

Referencing this definition, the practice and usage of marketing isn't necessarily marketing if it doesn't take place in an identified market or is unable to bring profit to the marketer. Taking this into account, the earliest form of design and marketing likely came after the Gutenberg printing press—invented in 1490—in the form of print handouts. In 1741, the first magazine was printed in Philadelphia, and with it, print advertisements. By then, posters started emerging in the 1840s and evolved into a popular form of advertising for a variety of events. About twenty years later, in 1867, the first recorded renting of a billboard arrived. Of course, as new technology developed, so did new forms of marketing. The groundbreaking invention of the radio in 1922 made advertisements more accessible and radio advertisements soon became a normal occurrence. The first televised advertisement for Bulova clocks came in 1941. The real growth of marketing as we know it today in the twenty-first century and its evolution into a global and profitable industry has only happened due to linear growth in the period between the 50s and 70s—a period known as the Golden Era of Marketing.

### What Marketing Looks Like Today

In today's marketing field, brands are increasingly leveraging humor and social media to engage audiences. Duolingo, for instance, has transformed its green owl mascot, "Duo," into a social media sensation by personifying it in humorous (and sometimes unhinged) scenarios. This approach has led to videos consistently garnering millions of likes, as the company keeps up with trends by using popular audio segments or partnering with influencers. By taking advantage of viral memes and trending topics, Duolingo maintains brand relevance and entertains its audience, making the language learning process much more fun and engaging compared to its competitors. Their strategy includes regular trendjacking, prioritizing entertainment, personifying their mascot, using engaging storytelling, and implementing direct audience engagement. This multifaceted approach has significantly contributed to their massive user base and rapid growth. Most recently, their mascot "died," in a move that pressured users to return to their daily language lessons, not only garnering more users but also making users engage with and talk about the app more than a traditional ad campaign ever could.





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Similarly, brands like Burger King have employed humor to address serious topics. In their “Whopper Neutrality” campaign, Burger King used a humorous approach to explain net neutrality by intentionally slowing down service for Whopper orders, leading to customer frustration and highlighting the potential impact of internet speed regulations.

*This blend of humor and social commentary not only entertains but also educates consumers on important issues, demonstrating how modern marketing can be both engaging and thought-provoking.*



### So Why Does This All Matter?

A common thread among all successful marketing campaigns is their ability to build strong emotional connections with their consumers. Whether through humor, storytelling, or social advocacy, brands create relatable and engaging content that fosters a sense of loyalty and trust. As showcased above, Duolingo is just one of the MILLIONS of companies that employ entertainment and cultural relevance to make the messages memorable, ensuring that audiences feel personally connected to their brand and overall company. By leveraging social media, humor, and interactive experiences, businesses not only capture customer attention but also cultivate long-term relationships with their consumers. This approach transforms marketing from a one-time advertisement strategy into an ongoing dialogue, making customers feel valued and heard. Ultimately, the most effective campaigns are those that go beyond selling a product—they create a community where consumers feel invested in the brand's identity and mission.



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SUNRISE ON THE REAPING: A MASTERCLASS COMMENTARY  
INTO PROPAGANDA AND AI

Ingrid Tang

Sunrise on the Reaping (SOTR), the highly-anticipated prequel to the Hunger Games Trilogy by Suzanna Collins, was released March 18th, 2025. Though the surface-level theme is an exploration of the second Quarter Quell in which Haymich Abernathy, Katniss Everdeen’s mentor in the original book, fights to the death with 41 other “tributes” within a seemingly utopian arena, there are also themes of media manipulation, AI, and propaganda that resonate increasingly in the modern era.

Collins said that her inspiration for Panem and the Hunger Games came from channel surfing between reality television and coverage of the Iraq War. Due to this, Collins comments on marketing already in the original trilogy, particularly when Katniss and Peete Mellark, the protagonists, first brand themselves as star-crossed lovers, then rebel leaders by opposing sides.

With SOTR, Collins focuses more on media manipulation and literacy. The story delves further into Plutarch Heavensbee's character, who we learn was in charge of videoing television coverage for District 12’s (Haymich’s) tributes for the games. When the reaping (choosing of the tributes) goes haywire, Plutarch is able to edit, or “card stack”, the footage to make the tributes look good. To quote him, “Stress the positive, ignore the negative.” This is remarkably similar to how in our world, we are able to shift other’s perspectives of us, whether through selective quoting (as done with Luigi Mangione’s manifesto), social media filters, or political slogans. Particularly, Mangione’s manifesto was omitted except for the quote, “these parasites had it coming,” in PEOPLE, removing any context and framing him as a heartless killer. Videos are constantly edited to lie through omission to fit an agenda, as seen with Kendrick Lamar’s Super Bowl halftime show being cut to remove the dancer who waved a Palestinian flag in protest of Israeli military action.



Before the tributes are entered into the arena for the games, District 12 is taught by Plutarch how to brand themselves in a way that would get them gifts (AKA sponsors). Plutarch says that: “when people have an emotional response to something... they come up with a reason why it logically makes sense.” The tributes then brainstorm ways to make themselves look better and stronger, or make more skilled opponents look ridiculous. One way they do so is through simple name-calling, which is also a method used by politicians such as Donald Trump where he referred to Senator Elizabeth Warren as ‘Pocahontas’ and Kamala Harris as “Laffin’ Kamala Harris”.

Throughout the book, Haymich’s narrating frames the aforementioned branding as “painting a poster.” His objective is to try and control how he is painting it. As his father puts it to another tribute, they must not let the Capitol “paint their posters in [her] blood”.





## SUNRISE ON THE REAPING: A MASTERCLASS COMMENTARY INTO PROPAGANDA AND AI

Ingrid Tang



Haymitch, however, fails to change his narrative. When watching his victory replay, he notes that the Capitol has edited much of the footage to make him seem villainous and to cover any aspects of his behaviour they deem as potentially rebellious. This is resonated in *Catching Fire*, book two of the series, where Katniss watched the compilation of Haymitch's clips and mistakenly believed the Capitol's plot. We, as the readers, carried this misconception until *SOTR* directly proved it incorrect. This is a quite poignant example of how the difference in the narration of our experiences drastically shifts the events we deem as truth.

More explicitly, Collins prefaces the book with the George Orwell quote, "All propaganda is lies, even when one is telling the truth. I don't think this matters so long as one knows what one is doing, and why." It is also stated that the arena for the second Quarter Quell was in the shape of the eye.

In online discourse, this has been said to be distinctly similar to the world of 1984 by George Orwell, where the image of an eye is to represent that Big Brother is always watching with his constant surveillance and control. On one hand, this may represent the Capitol's grip over Panem, but may also be an insight into Collins' thoughts on our current world, considering mass global censorship.

Collins also touches on AI and how the characters view it as either uncanny or destructively useful for their purposes. Plutarch views AI, or what we can presume to be, as the latter:

"Plutarch seems genuinely happy, saying he's going to be able to edit the clips together into some fine propos. He sighs when he mentions the tools that were abolished and incapacitated in the past, ones deemed fated to destroy humanity because of their ability to replicate any scenario using any person. 'And in mere seconds!' He snaps his fingers to emphasize their speed. 'I guess it was the right thing to do, given our natures. We almost wiped ourselves out even without them, so you can imagine. But oh, the possibilities!'" (Collins 201)

Plutarch directly states that AI was "deemed fated to destroy humanity." Through this, Collins explicitly reflects her own thoughts on the dangers of AI. Collins provides a case where her characters view a deepfake of a tribute, presumably dead, brought back to "life" through the hijacking of another child. We can liken such deepfakes to AI videos and photos made of Korean girls and women in over 500 schools in sexual positions, just that in this specific case, it's physical. Collins' intention in this is not to refer to this situation but is to refer to AI's dangers in a way that is not so explicit and is therefore more accessible.

To conclude, *Sunrise on the Reaping* presents innuendos of dangerous and relevant political and social concerns as a commentary into the possibilities that they could devolve into, such as spiraling into a world similar to those of the *Hunger Games* Universe.

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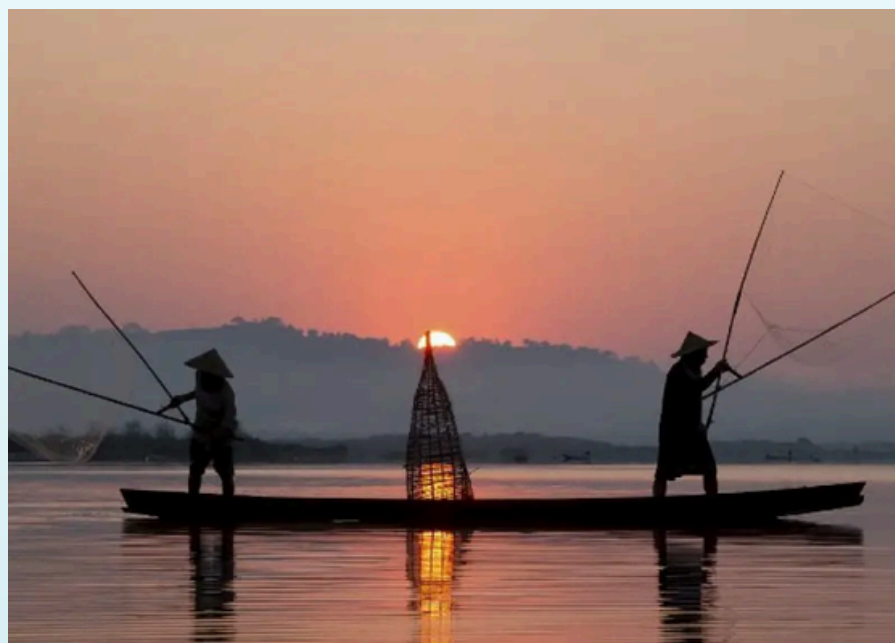
## DESTRUCTIVE FISHING IN VIETNAM: A CURSE FROM THE SEA OR A CRIME OF HUMANITY?

Trinh Nguyen

Fish farm villages have been diminishing every year in coastal areas, including in Vietnam. People have switched to other careers and moved back to their homeland to find other means of living.

Growing up in a beautiful village in Vietnam, I used to see countless fishing boats arriving at harbors. My mom once told me that our Quang Nam province was endowed with plenty of marine life. A few years later, I left my hometown to study in Australia, but those rustic images of my village are still attached in my head. However, I have had a chance to visit my province recently, and I have found out a painful truth: those fishing boats are gone. The villagers revealed to me that seafood was disappearing. People began to set up praying rituals, which meant that they prayed for their ancestors and sea gods to fill their boats with fish and shrimp. Yet, the reality came from their ignorance as well as their avarice, which has led to the depletion of food and them facing the wrath from the very sea which they once thrived upon.

Vietnam's marine resources are invaluable, providing livelihoods to thousands of fishermen. However, in recent years, destructive fishing has severely affected marine ecosystems and has had far-reaching consequences, not only for people but also for the economy. Overfishing for even small fish and sea creatures through electric currents, explosives, and small mesh nets dwindles great amounts of aquatic resources.



### 2. Understanding Destructive Fishing

"Destructive fishing" is a method to exploit seafood unsystematically without distinguishing the species or their sizes, causing the resources to be depleted at an alarming rate. This is a popular method in many coastal regions in Vietnam, where people use destructive methods such as electric currents, explosives, or mesh nets to catch a bountiful amount of seafood in a short period. These practices not only kill mature sea creatures but also eliminate the reproductive opportunities of these marine animals, disrupting the marine ecosystem balance.

### 3. Alarming Statistics and Consequences

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, on average annually, the production of harvested seafood has declined by 2-5%, including valuable fish such as tuna and red snapper, whose numbers have diminished by 50% compared to 10 years ago. Additionally, coastal areas like the Gulf of Tonkin, Quang Ngai's Sea, and Ca Mau's Sea are undergoing resource depletion. Biological destruction could lead to a domino effect, decreasing the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> by algae, seaweeds, or corals, contributing to climate change. Small fishing villages in Vietnam are struggling because they lack sustainable practices. The impact of annual storms, exacerbated by climate change, has destroyed countless homes and claimed many lives. Worse still, their livelihood is based on the richness of marine life which has diminished, and they have no choice but to pray.



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### 4. Lesson from global efforts

Several countries across the globe have implemented strict rules to preserve marine resources. For example, the USA has a clear regulation about the maximum size of lobsters that one is allowed to catch. Fishermen are required to release undersized lobsters to maintain the population. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, destructive fishing is ongoing, and sea creatures are harvested before they have a chance to grow, resulting in fisheries' resource depletion.

In Norway, the government has enforced a harsh fishing quota system, controlling the amount of fish collected for every season, combined with building protective marine areas to facilitate fish stock recovery. Japan also has the same system, requiring fishing boats to have a license and comply with the rules about harvesting marine animals.

***If Vietnam doesn't implement similar measures, marine resource depletion will continue to worsen, forcing villagers and fishermen into poverty and wiping out the sustainable fishing industry.***

### 5. A dark future or a chance for a change?

If destructive fishing continues, 10-20 years in the future, marine resources in Vietnam could face serious depletion, resulting in greater economic and social consequences. However, change is still possible. By exacting stricter controls, educating fishermen about other sustainable methods, and creating protected marine areas, Vietnam can have a chance to restore its marine resources.

With hope, I dream of the fishing boats returning, once again laden with fish and the bright smiles of the fishermen. But this time, they will understand and respect the ocean—not only as a source of income but also as a provider of food and life. And so, the boats will set sail again, bringing not only fish but also happiness and prosperity to my homeland.

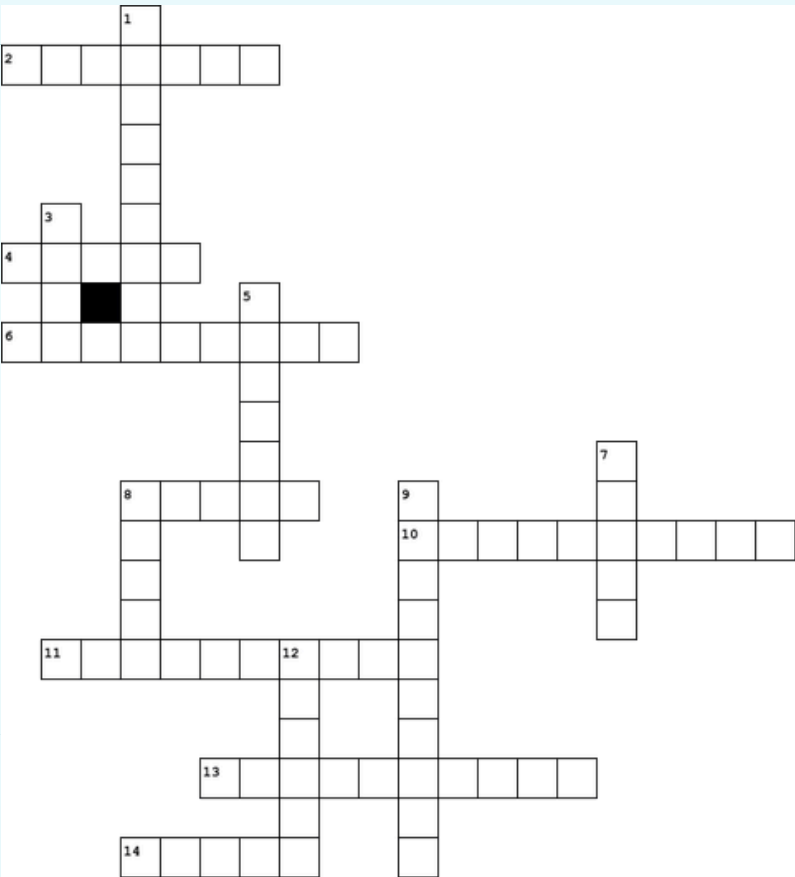


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Crossword: This or That



Across:

- 2. What the first D in DDS stands for.
- 4. "The \_\_\_\_": Those who haven't reached adulthood yet.
- 6. What slowly happens to your pokemon cards if you touch them without gloves.
- 8. Pattern.
- 10. Being able to do a task with less waste.
- 11. Helpful.
- 13. e.g. that all birds are drones.
- 14. What you may do when you stub your toe.

Down:

- 1. Children who throw things in the classroom are an example of this.
- 3. A meme that originates from a misspelling of the word dog.
- 5. A past-time that requires one to spend hours sitting in a boat.
- 7. "Be gay do \_\_\_\_."
- 8. A common arcade currency.
- 9. America's occurred in 1775.
- 12. Modification

Word Search: Digital Danger



Word Bank:

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| attack   | password |
| cyber    | risk     |
| estonia  | security |
| european | threat   |
| hack     | union    |

Crypto-Quote: Necessary Niceties

“CQJUY DQTU BTU YEXQ IRO  
TU TZXTUSTYQ RU T AWRPS  
SEDQABTKQ COS BQPSTEUKI  
URS EU SWQ KRUY POU”  
-- BWPEASRVW TZTDE

Rules:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFFRFLP = SYNNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.