



## Community Assembly: The Financial Time's 25 Most Influential Women of 2021



The FT's annual Women of the Year has long celebrated achievement and influence. With the same objective in mind, we've expanded the list for 2021 and asked some of the most influential women in the world to write the entries, including Jane Fraser, Christine Lagarde, Elizabeth Warren, Billie Jean King, Malala and Greta Thunberg. Women of the Year is a celebration, of course. But it is also a lens through which to understand the dynamic nature of leadership and power. To ask "Who was influential in 2021?", you must grapple with "What is influence?" and "How is it changing?" We put the list together in collaboration with FT journalists from dozens of international bureaus, former women of the year and readers. Across continents, industries and issues, all of these remarkable women have shaped this tumultuous year. Each of them is sure to help shape the better ones to come.

Roula Khalaf, editor of the Financial Times

*\*NB: This is an unranked list.*

## Heroes



**Frances Haugen, Data scientist and whistleblower**

BY SHOSHANA ZUBOFF

Frances Haugen is a daughter of the American prairie whose courageous gift to the world has been an ice-cold shower of incontestable facts smuggled from the heart of the Facebook empire, written in the words of its people and shining an unflinching light on the destructive powers of its supreme leader, Mark Zuckerberg. Despite her Harvard MBA and career in Silicon Valley, Frances retained the humanity, common sense and moral bearings to feel outrage at Facebook's economic logic that pits profits against "what was good for the public". Facebook reached trillion-dollar status in a decade by applying surveillance capitalism – a system built on the secret extraction and manipulation of data – to Zuckerberg's vision of total human connection.

Frances's revelations delivered shock and awe precisely because surveillance capitalism is secret. Its success relies upon hidden machine operations and corporate rhetoric designed to conceal its trail of social wreckage: the destruction of privacy, poisoned social discourse, defactualised information and weakened institutions.

While democracy was lulled into complacency, Facebook and a handful of surveillance capitalist giants achieved control over global information flows and communication, unconstrained by public law. A dedicated cadre of scholars and journalists relying on informants, leaked documents and painstaking research has documented this web of deceit. Now Frances has delivered the ledger books and personal witness that cannot be ignored. She undertook substantial risk to stir the world from slumber. The question is whether lawmakers will respond with the seriousness of purpose required to restore public governance to our information and communication realm.

*Shoshana Zuboff is the author of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" and the Charles Edward Wilson professor emerita at Harvard Business School*



### **Naomi Osaka, Athlete**

BY BILLIE JEAN KING

Sports are a microcosm of society. We have seen this concept play out in real time recently with Naomi Osaka's important effort to spotlight the mental health challenges that people from all walks of life face daily. Naomi is one of the most successful businesswomen in sports, an advocate for racial justice and she transcends sports – most recently by using her platform to prioritise health and wellbeing. In doing so, she has inspired individuals around the world and ignited a conversation about mental health that applies not only to athletes but to all human beings. So often athletes have a persona, a brand and an image that they feel forced to uphold. Naomi is charting her own path and being celebrated for showing us that “it's OK to not be OK”. She is a true champion in sport and in life.

*Billie King is a sports icon and champion of equality*



### **Elisa Loncón Antileo, President, Chile's Constitutional Convention**

BY KIRSTEN SEHNBRUCH

When the Chilean electorate voted for a constituent assembly in May this year, 60 per cent of the seats went to independent candidates not affiliated to political parties. The task facing the assembly, of writing a new constitution to replace the one written during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, was never going to be easy. But it is particularly difficult after a long period of political turmoil and social protests, in which the establishment was effectively voted out of the process. In this complex situation, Elisa Loncón Antileo was elected president of the constituent assembly.

Her election was nothing short of remarkable. An indigenous woman from a remote Mapuche community in the south of Chile now presided over one of the most important and complex tasks in recent Chilean history. She has exercised this leadership with an emphasis on the inclusive nature of the assembly and its role as a means of channelling social dialogue. Her challenges included setting up the working procedures and agenda of the assembly as well as managing the competing demands of the groups represented there. But she has brought a calm, grounded leadership to the task, and has generally avoided becoming involved in the polarising conflicts surrounding her.

*Kirsten Sehnbruch is a British Academy global professor, distinguished policy fellow at the LSE and a former research fellow at the Universidad de Chile*



## **Agnes Chow, Democracy activist**

BY PRIMROSE RIORDAN

When Agnes Chow was just 15, she joined protests against the Hong Kong government's plans to implement "moral and national education" in public schools, which activists had labelled "brainwashing". The government backed down, and that victory helped pave the way for Chow's subsequent political career as a high-profile advocate for democracy. But now the tables have turned after China's crackdown in Hong Kong. Her former political ally Joshua Wong is in jail and faces a series of court cases.

Chow was arrested in August 2020 under Beijing's tough national security law and served almost seven months in prison earlier this year on a separate charge relating to her role in an unauthorised assembly in 2019. Nationalist education, focused on a new security law that has crushed dissent, has been rolled out to children as young as six. I write this from a courtroom where 47 other democracy activists are on trial in part for trying to win an election. Silenced, Chow is hardly forgotten. Scared of doorbells and doorknocks after multiple arrests, she left prison in June to the chants of her supporters yelling "Jia you!" or "Come on!" On her T-shirt were the words: "You are doing so great".

*Primrose Riordan is the FT's South China correspondent based in Hong Kong*



**Liz Cheney, Congresswoman, United States House of Representatives**

BY CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN

Liz Cheney is unique in Washington today. She demonstrates what is traditionally called “leadership”, although it has been sadly lacking in recent years. In spite of her lifetime 80 per cent conservative voting record in Congress, the Wyoming congresswoman unabashedly stood up to Trump’s attempts to undermine American democracy through his rhetoric and actions leading up to and on January 6. She voted for the second impeachment and called for a committee to investigate the insurrection, which caused her to lose her leadership role as Republican conference chair. While many men in the Republican party do a lot of talking about “strength”, Cheney is the one walking the walk. Beyond the labels of “Never Trump” or “RINO”, she has carried the most important mantle: “Never Coup”. She has fought for what is right, at great personal cost – the truest definition of leadership there is.

*Christine Todd Whitman was the 50th governor of New Jersey and is the former head of the Environmental Protection Agency*



**Vanessa Nakate, Justice advocate**

BY GRETA THUNBERG

Vanessa's voice in the climate debate is absolutely essential. In these times, when it feels like people are more focused on what they should say to be perceived as polite, rather than what actually needs to be said, Vanessa speaks truth to power. And she speaks for so many. She's saying we need to listen to science, and we need to listen to the most-affected people in the most-affected areas. We cannot drink oil, we cannot eat coal, we cannot adapt to extinction.

Vanessa has said that she saw how the climate crisis was starting to affect the people in her surroundings, people she knew, so she took matters into her own hands and started to strike. I've gotten to know Vanessa better recently and, even though she inspires me every day to do more, I see her above all as a friend who I really enjoy being with and care about. But of course she is much more than that, and listening to her has broadened my perspective. Vanessa is humble and kind. She is also very determined and you can see that when meeting with her. She knows where she wants to go.

*Great Thunberg is an environmental activist*



### **Sotooda Forotan, Student and activist**

BY MALALA YOUSAFZAI

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, they forced millions of girls out of school. In the darkened days that followed, I have met and spoken to many Afghan women and girls. But one young woman stood out to me: Sotooda Forotan. In September, the Taliban announced a return to school for boys but did not mention girls. In many provinces, girls are not allowed to go back to their secondary schools. Fifteen-year-old Sotooda feared for her future – the thought of never returning to school.

When she received an opportunity to speak at a local event, she spoke from the heart for herself and millions of girls and young women in Afghanistan. She protested against the Taliban's actions and demanded schools reopen for girls in Herat. Her fearlessness and strength pushed Taliban leaders in Herat to allow girls to return to secondary school. I was lucky to speak to Sotooda and her classmates shortly after her return to school. That day, she spoke to me from a classroom. Sotooda dared to stand up for girls' right to education. The world must listen to her voice and girls' voices around the world.

*Mala Yousafzai is a Nobel Peace Prize winner and co-founder of the Malala Fund*





## **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader, Co-ordination Council of Belarus**

BY CHRYSTIA FREELAND

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is a fierce leader and an ardent defender of democracy. A political novice, Tsikhanouskaya entered the presidential race in her native Belarus when her husband, activist and blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, was arrested in May 2020. Tsikhanouskaya was a stay-at-home mother when she stepped up to take her husband's place.

Alexander Lukashenko, the authoritarian ruler of Belarus, underestimated both this determined woman and his own battered country's desire for change. Soon, tens of thousands of Belarusians were rallying alongside Tsikhanouskaya, coming together in the country's largest opposition movement in decades and, perhaps, in modern history. Tsikhanouskaya was forced to flee Belarus after what was widely denounced as the fraudulent re-election of Lukashenko. Even in exile, she remains a symbol of strength and hope for Belarusians.

*Chrystia Freeland is Canada's deputy prime minister and minister of finance*

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