

## U.S. VIRUS DEATHS NEARING 500,000 IN JUST ONE YEAR

### MORE THAN IN 3 WARS

#### Empty Spaces in Cities, Towns, Restaurants, Homes and Hearts

By JULIE BOSMAN

CHICAGO — A nation numbed by misery and loss is confronting a number that still has the power to shock: 500,000.

Roughly one year since the first known death by the coronavirus in the United States, an unfathomable toll is nearing — the loss of half a million people.

No other country has counted so many deaths in the pandemic. More Americans have perished from Covid-19 than on the battlefields of World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War combined.

The milestone comes at a hopeful moment: New virus cases are down sharply, deaths are slowing and vaccines are steadily being administered.

But there is concern about emerging variants of the virus, and it may be months before the pandemic is contained.

Each death has left untold numbers of mourners, a ripple effect of loss that has swept over towns and cities. Each death has left an empty space in communities across America: a bar stool where a regular used to sit, one side of a bed unslept in, a home kitchen without its cook.

The living find themselves amid vacant places once occupied by their spouses, parents, neighbors and friends — the nearly 500,000 coronavirus dead.

In Chicago, the Rev. Ezra Jones stands at his pulpit on Sundays, letting his eyes wander to the back row. That spot belonged to Moses Jones, his 83-year-old uncle, who liked to drive to church in his green Chevy Malibu, arrive early and chat everybody up before settling into his seat by the door. He died of the coronavirus in April.

"I can still see him there," said Mr. Jones, the pastor. "It never goes away."

There is a street corner in Plano, Texas, that was occupied

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## Russia Fears But Can't Quit Open Internet

By ANTON TROIANOVSKI

MOSCOW — Margarita Simonyan, the editor in chief of the Kremlin-controlled RT television network, recently called on the government to block access to Western social media.

She wrote: "Foreign platforms in Russia must be shut down."

Her choice of social network for sending that message: Twitter.

While the Kremlin fears an open internet shaped by American companies, it just can't quit it.

Russia's winter of discontent, waves of nationwide protests set off by the return of the opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny, has been enabled by the country's free and open internet. The state controls the television airwaves, but online Mr. Navalny's dramatic arrest upon arrival in Moscow, his investigation into President Vladimir V. Putin's purported secret palace and his supporters' calls for protest were all broadcast to an audience of many millions.

For years, the Russian government has been putting in place the technological and legal infrastructure to clamp down on freedom of speech online, leading to frequent predictions that the country could be heading toward internet censorship akin to China's great firewall.

But even as Mr. Putin faced the biggest protests in years last month, his government appeared unwilling — and, to some degree, unable — to block websites or take other drastic measures to limit the spread of digital dissent.

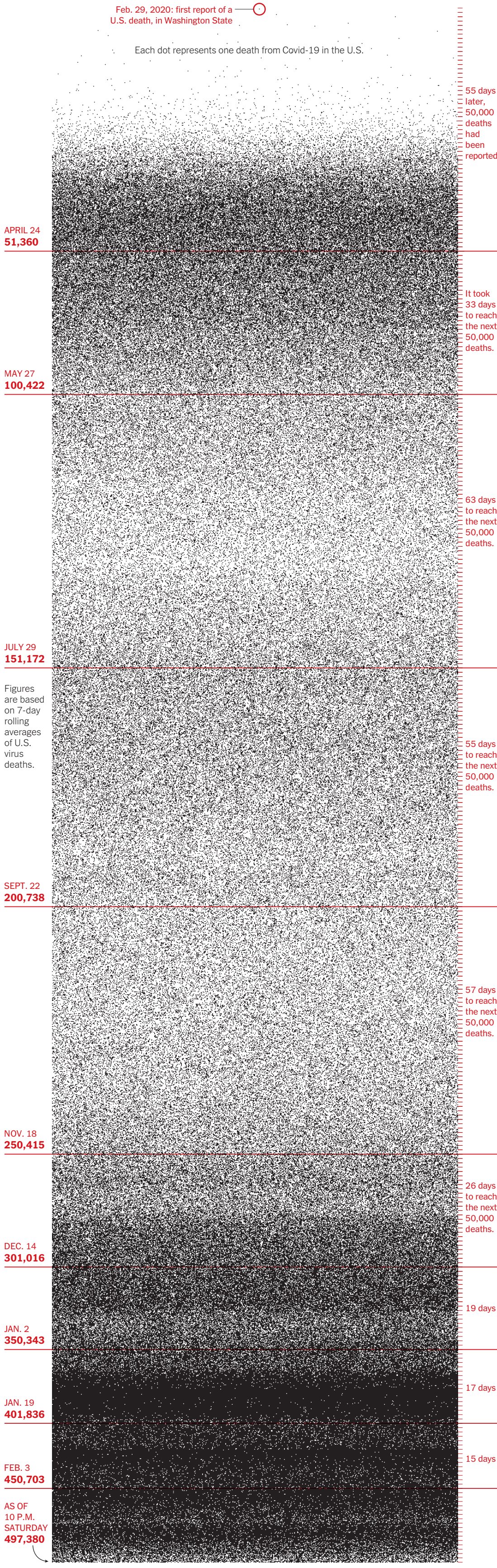
The hesitation has underscored the challenge Mr. Putin faces as he tries to blunt the political implications of cheap high-speed internet

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### The Toll: America Approaches Half a Million Covid Deaths

Feb. 29, 2020: first report of a U.S. death, in Washington State

Each dot represents one death from Covid-19 in the U.S.



Source: Reports from state and local health agencies.

LAZARO GAMIO, LAUREN LEATHERBY, BILL MARSH AND ANDREW SONDERN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Garland Faces Resurgent Peril Of Extremism

### Oklahoma City Attack Shaped His Views

By MARK LEIBOVICH

WASHINGTON — Judge Merrick B. Garland always made a point of wearing a coat and tie when he surveyed the wreckage at the site of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the worst domestic terrorist attack in American history.

He had been dispatched from Washington to oversee the case for the Justice Department, and he told colleagues that he viewed his daily uniform as a gesture of respect for a community left devastated after Timothy J. McVeigh placed a 7,000-pound bomb in a Ryder truck and blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people, including 19 children.

"It really looked like a war zone," Judge Garland said in recalling the destroyed and still-smoldering building, part of an oral history he participated in for the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. "The site was lit up like a sun, like the middle of the day." The worst part, he said, was seeing the demolished day care center. "There was nothing there," he said. "It was just a big empty concave." His own daughters were 4 and 2 at the time.

The Oklahoma City case, he later said, was "the most important thing I have ever done in my life."

When President Biden nominated Judge Garland last month to be attorney general, the news conjured up his ordeal in 2016 as President Barack Obama's thwarted nominee to the Supreme Court. But Judge Garland's experience prosecuting domestic terrorism cases in the 1990s was the formative work of his career, from the nuances of federal statutes down to the feeling of broken glass crunching beneath his dress shoes.

The man has now met the moment. At his Senate confirmation hearings starting on Monday, he will almost certainly be asked about the Department of Homeland Security's warning that the United States faces a growing threat from "violent domestic ex-

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## STORMS EXPOSING A NATION PRIMED FOR CATASTROPHE

### CLIMATE CHANGE WRATH

#### Unprepared for Threats Facing Power Grids, Water and Roads

This article is by Christopher Flavelle, Brad Plumer and Hiroko Tabuchi.

Even as Texas struggled to restore electricity and water over the past week, signs of the risks posed by increasingly extreme weather to America's aging infrastructure were cropping up across the country.

The continent-spanning winter storms triggered blackouts in Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi and several other states. One-third of oil production in the nation was halted. Drinking-water systems in Ohio were knocked offline. Road networks nationwide were paralyzed and vaccination efforts in 20 states were disrupted.

The crisis carries a profound warning. As climate change brings more frequent and intense storms, floods, heat waves, wildfires and other extreme events, it is placing growing stress on the foundations of the country's economy: Its network of roads and railways, drinking-water systems, power plants, electrical grids, industrial waste sites and even homes. Failures in just one sector can set off a domino effect of breakdowns in hard-to-predict ways.

Much of this infrastructure was built decades ago, under the expectation that the environment around it would remain stable, or at least fluctuate within predictable bounds. Now climate change is upending that assumption.

"We are colliding with a future of extremes," said Alice Hill, who oversaw planning for climate risks on the National Security Council during the Obama administration. "We base all our choices

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A \$16,752 BILL Texans have reported soaring electric fees during a winter storm. PAGE 24



Johanna Guzmán with two of her six children in northern Venezuela, where contraceptives are difficult to find, let alone afford.

## Lack of Birth Control Deepens Women's Burden in Venezuela

By JULIE TURKEWITZ and ISAYEN HERRERA

SAN DIEGO DE LOS ALTOS, Venezuela — The moment Johanna Guzmán, 25, discovered she was going to have her sixth child she began to sob, crushed by the idea of bringing another life into a nation in such decay.

For years, as Venezuela spiraled deeper into an economic crisis, she and her husband had scoured clinics and pharmacies for any kind of birth control, usually in vain. They had a third child. A fourth. A fifth.

Already, Ms. Guzmán was cooking meager dinners over a wood fire, washing clothing without soap, teaching lessons without paper. Already, she was stalked by a fear that she could not feed them all.

And now, another child? "I felt like I was drowning," she said.

As Venezuela enters its eighth

year of economic crisis, a deeply personal drama is playing out inside the home: Millions of women are no longer able to find or afford birth control, pushing many into unplanned pregnancies at a time when they can barely feed the children they already have.

Around Caracas, the capital, a pack of three condoms costs \$4.40 — three times Venezuela's monthly minimum wage of \$1.50.

Birth control pills cost more than twice as much, roughly \$11 a month, while an IUD, or intrauterine device, can cost more than \$40 — more than 25 times the minimum wage. And that does not include a doctor's fee to have the device put in.

With the cost of contraception so far out of reach, women are increasingly resorting to abortions, which are illegal and in the worst

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### TRACKING AN OUTBREAK 4-9

#### Israel Funds Vaccines for Syria

To secure the release of an Israeli civilian, Israel secretly agreed to finance a supply of Russian-made Covid-19 vaccines for Syria, an official said. PAGE 9

### SPORTS 35-37

#### Osaka Wins Australian Open

Naomi Osaka, 23, is now 4 for 4 in Grand Slam finals after a straight-set victory over Jennifer Brady, 25, who was in her first Slam final. PAGE 35

### SUNDAY STYLES

#### Sit. Roll Over. Wait Your Turn.

Dog trainers are overwhelmed, thanks to a boom in pet adoptions and sales, spurred by work-from-home policies and social isolation. PAGE 1

### SUNDAY BUSINESS

#### Boredom Is Making Us Buy

Yet another pandemic side effect: consumers who are eager to make online purchases, and not just of groceries. Witness sales of Miracle-Gro. PAGE 1

### SUNDAY REVIEW

#### Katie Engelhart

