

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought interesting. Read on for six comments and discussions I thought worth highlighting.

Militant suffragettes: morally justified, or just terrorists?

[Mairi Rowan](#) commented about gendered perceptions of violence, aggression and self-protection:

Does anyone ask how moral or justifiable all the acts of violence, destruction and civil disobedience were in the slow extensions of democracy, before women began on the militant path?

Does anyone ask how moral or justifiable were all the acts of violence and oppression of citizens by the aristocratic state?

Mostly, these are accepted as the inevitable acts of the historic struggles for freedom and democracy, and the role of the state in controlling subjects. The perpetrators are lauded or vilified in accord with the values and preferences of observers or participants, but rarely required to justify the acts themselves.

The Swing Riots, starvation marches, rick burning, machine smashing, are seen as the breaking out of desperate people, and the perpetrators as working class martyrs, often exported to the colonies.

Women were active participants in all these movements and rebellions. Do we ask whether they were justified? Did any of these increase or decrease the likelihood of adult suffrage? No one even asks the question.

Wellington is vilified for sending troops against unarmed subjects in the Peterloo Massacre, and the victims martyrs again. Impact on suffrage? It certainly increased the pressure from below, but even the Chartists had a long way to go still.

The asking of the question in relation to the Suffragettes seems to me to show just how gendered permission for aggression is, and continues to be. We cannot know whether their actions and their victimisation by the state, sped up or retarded women getting the vote in the UK, because so many other factors were in play, including immanent war.

Women are still denied the responsibility and right for self protection, self support and and self advancement, and men continue to have actual or implied threats of violence to enforce their superior status, and the power to exercise them. At least the Suffragettes claimed and exercised rights and responsibilities men had had sole claim on for millennia, and continue, if this story is to be taken seriously, to have as their prerogative.

If I think of them in the context of the long struggle for democracy, the Suffragettes fit just right. The Suffragettes had the same variety and dimensions of approach that working class men used. How shall I judge them from the safe heights they won for me? The government and many men made damned sure they paid the full price for their assumption and exercise of power, and I do not ask any further price. When men give up their monopoly on the right to use force to get their druthers, I will consider the role of militant Suffragettes anew, but in their time and place, they sit for me beside all the other heroines who asserted their rights, and took responsibility for their circumstances, and made me a place in the sun.

[Lessons from a would-be suicide bomber on how to defeat terrorism](#)

[Rachel Richardson](#) discussed the social causes of terrorism and how they may be overcome, if they can be at all:

Thanks, Andrew, for this commentary. Amidst all the posturing and 'badging' going on about the 'religious motivations' for the current run of suicide bombings, I think you are right to point out the more fundamental social and economic and political causes of these actions.

Acts of terrorism have been carried out for a very long time in human history, often with a basis - on close examination - of economic, social, and political grievance rather than purely (or even predominantly) 'religious' grounds. Your example of Amarah is a strong case in point.

I do fear that unless the root causes of these acts can be addressed through political, economic and social reform, that desperate people overwhelmed by their circumstances of extreme inequality and disenfranchisement will continue to undertake such acts of 'liberation' in the name of a 'better' future for them and their compatriots.

The seeming impossibility of achieving humane reform in economic, social, legal and political areas in many countries around the world does not bode well for an improvement in the life circumstances for a large portion of the world's population. The lack of such reform will surely add fuel to the fire of ideologues and fanatics wherever they may be.

Pregnant women and parents misled about dangers of living with lead pollution

Donna Green, the article's author, ran an Author Q&A with her readers. Here are a few highlights.

[Matthew Dornan](#) :

Any views on whether the source of lead matters for health outcomes? My understanding is that high lead levels in these 3 cities (and indeed, in many backyards in Sydney) are especially dangerous given their origins from mining/smelting/manufacturing processes. In contrast, many rural areas in the NSW southern tablelands (incl. suburbs in Canberra) have high lead levels due to naturally occurring gossans, but these are considered less dangerous due to lower bioavailability. Has your research looked at the source of lead?

[Donna Green](#) :

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

Yes Matthew, this is a good point. This is one argument that the companies try to make about these leaded cities, but research by Mark Taylor (and colleagues) has shown that this is not correct. If you check his articles in the Conversation, and peer reviewed literature (if you have access) you can see this is the case.

[Stephen Prowse](#) :

It would seem that clean up to reduce lead and eliminate exposure of pregnant women and children is almost impossible. Should they not be living in these cities? Would that mean the end of these cities?

[Donna Green](#) :

It's a good question that should be answered by the residents themselves.

Anyone planning a family living in a leaded city might have some serious concerns about staying. Unfortunately, some people get trapped if they can't sell their home for example, or feel they wouldn't be able to get work elsewhere.

From the government side, there is a national agreement that 'all Australians' should be equally protected from pollution (Australia's Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment, signed in 1992, which includes an objective that 'people enjoy the benefit of equivalent protection from air, water and soil pollution ... wherever they live'.)

It seems that some Australians are more 'equal' than others.

[Sarah Glass](#) :

Do we know whether, given we now mostly use unleaded petrol, there is any lead pollution in areas other than the three mentioned??

Is Diesel unleaded?? Is leaded petrol still in use??

A Catalyst program a few weeks ago outlined the stats in the US of violent crimes and showed how they had gone up and up through last century and then down and down after unleaded petrol was introduced. Very interesting.

[Donna Green](#) :

Yes, legacy lead - especially in inner city areas from leaded petrol is still certainly an issue. As with house paint. If you are concerned, you can get your soil tested for free. Check out: <http://research.science.mq.edu.au/vegesafe/>

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[Suffering for science: why I have insects sting me to create a pain index](#)

Finally, [Ben Marshall](#) commended the author for their work, posed a few questions and, most importantly, described the inner monologue of threatening ants:

Bravo, Justin, you magnificent mad bugger.

Because there is a cultural difference in behaviours surrounding pain, are those differences largely irrelevant in the case of sudden unexpected pain, like the bites or stings of insects?

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

Having only ever suffered, at most, a 2 point something from an ant I think was a bull ant, I noticed that when exposed over time to green ant bites when living in the tropics, my first bite I described as very painful, yet many bites later I became much more sanguine, and would call them mildly painful - even though, for the most part, the bites were unexpected. Psychological or physiological tolerance? (Disclosure: I'm a wimp with pain.)

Finally, on a related note, there is also a pre-bite / sting display in some insects. When walking the trails of far east Gippsland, I never fail to be impressed to see, walking up ahead a large ant that, when it realises a human is looming over it, turns, rears up, front legs spread and mandibles open and displayed. This admirable chutzpah doesn't stop, as the ant turns to continue facing you as you walk around it. I always imagine a tiny, ant-like voice yelling out 'u wot, m8? u wot? come 'ere, you bastard! i'll effin' take you any day of the bleedin' week'. And no, I don't know why it's Cockney. Do most biting insects attempt a pre-sting display before exercising the final sanction?

Cheers.

Read a comment you thought interesting? Let me know during the week. You can leave a comment below or send me an [email](#).

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