

Catch up: CDU/CSU lead German exit polls; Zelensky's plea for NATO membership



The centre-right Christian Democratic alliance, led by [Friedrich Merz](#), won 29% of the vote in **Germany's** election, according to an exit poll for a public broadcaster. The hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) received 19.5% of the vote, its best ever result. The Social Democrats, led by the incumbent chancellor, Olaf Scholz, trailed in third place with 16%, with the Greens fourth on 13.5%. Mr Merz will have to [form a coalition](#) with at least one other party in order to govern. He has ruled out governing with the AfD.

[Volodymyr Zelensky](#), **Ukraine's** president, offered to “leave my post” in exchange for the country's admission to NATO. Speaking at a press conference the day before the third anniversary of Russia's invasion, Mr Zelensky also dismissed the insults of Donald Trump, America's president, who called him “a dictator without elections”. Earlier Russia launched a “record” 267 drones at Ukraine, according to Ukraine's air force.

Elon Musk gave all federal employees just over 48 hours to explain what they had worked on in the past week or face dismissal, hours after Mr Trump pushed the **DOGE** boss to “get more aggressive”. In his effort to make deep cuts in government spending, Mr Musk has already offered federal employees the chance to resign if they do not want to return to the office full-time.

The **Vatican** said that **Pope Francis** had spent a “tranquil” night in hospital and “rested” after suffering a long asthmatic respiratory crisis on Saturday. The 88-year-old pontiff is also receiving oxygen via the nose, according to the Vatican. Francis was admitted to hospital on February 14th. He has pneumonia in both lungs, one of which was partly removed by surgeons when he was young.

Police from **Cambodia** and **Thailand** freed 215 foreign nationals from a **scam centre** in north-western Cambodia. Thailand’s government said that the foreigners, who had been forced to work at the centre, would be returned to their home countries. Thailand has been cracking down on scams after its citizens lost some 60bn baht (\$1.8bn) to the schemes over the past two years.

Hamas released six hostages on Saturday, but Israel did not hand over more than 600 Palestinians it was expected to free in return. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel’s prime minister, blamed “**Hamas’s** repeated violations” such as “the cynical use of hostages for propaganda”. Officials said the prisoners would not be freed “until the release of the next hostages is guaranteed”.

Piers Litherland, a British archaeologist who announced on February 22nd that he had discovered the first rock-cut **pharaoh’s** tomb since Tutankhamun’s was identified in 1922, told the *Observer* that he had found a second tomb. Mr Litherland suggested that it probably contains the remains of Thutmose II, a young pharaoh who died in 1479BC and who also owned the tomb discovered earlier this month.

Word of the week: *guang gun*, a Chinese term meaning “bare branches”, used to describe unmarried men who are unable to continue their family line. [Read the full story.](#)

Could Pope Francis resign?



Pope Francis remains in critical condition, after suffering a long asthma-like respiratory crisis on Saturday morning. The Vatican said he was “in more pain” than in previous days, and will not appear in public to lead Sunday prayer for the second consecutive week. He was admitted to hospital on February 14th. The 88-year-old pontiff has pneumonia in both lungs, one of which was partly removed by surgeons when he was young.

If the pontiff is discharged, it is not clear whether he will be able to cope with the workload of a pope. This year he will have a busier schedule than usual: 2025 is a jubilee year for the Roman Catholic church. More than 30m pilgrims are expected at the Vatican. Gianfranco Ravasi, an Italian cardinal, has aired the possibility of a resignation like that of the pope’s predecessor, Benedict XVI. Francis will want to see out the jubilee. But it may prove too demanding.

Humanitarian crises multiply across Colombia



Violence is tearing across Colombia as armed groups fight for control of territory with coca leaf and gold. In the southern region of Putumayo, for instance, the Border Command, an armed group, has been coercing residents in an attempt to sway Sunday's election of a new governor. In a bid to keep control, the government has sealed the region's borders with Ecuador and Peru for 24 hours.

In Chocó, in the north-west, the National Liberation Army (ELN), a guerrilla group, imposed an armed lockdown on thousands of people on Tuesday. The ELN's war against rival rebels in [Catatumbo](#), close to the border with Venezuela, has displaced more than 50,000 people. The simultaneous crises have blindsided the government, which has so far not come up with a coherent security policy. When Gustavo Petro, the left-wing president, took office in 2022, he promised "[total peace](#)". Many Colombians are instead facing calamity once again.

The rise of American soccer



Major League Soccer begins its 30th season this weekend. The mood in America's premier football competition is ebullient. Football has been around there for decades: such greats of the game as Pelé, Johan Cruyff and Franz Beckenbauer played for American clubs in the 1970s. But the MLS is now firmly established. Commercial income has risen thanks to a broadcasting deal with Apple, while in-game attendances also continue to grow.

Among the forces behind these trends was the arrival of Lionel Messi at Inter Miami in 2023. The 37-year-old Argentine playmaker will probably stay in the MLS until at least the end of the upcoming season. In 2026, when America co-hosts the World Cup with Canada and Mexico, his national team will attempt to defend the trophy they won in Qatar in 2022; three MLS grounds will stage matches. When America last hosted a World Cup in 1994, it did not yet have its own place in the football world. It does now.

Tapping fog in the urban desert



In even the driest places there is moisture in the air. Fog-harvesting can collect it. The technology is low-cost and low-maintenance: mesh panels suspended in the air collect droplets, which drip into guttering. Although fog-harvesting was pioneered in the 1980s, attempts to deploy it beyond rural settings have so far been limited.

Research published in *Frontiers in Environmental Science* calculates fog-harvesting potential in Alto Hospicio, in Chile's Atacama Desert. The city has nearly tripled in two decades. Demand for water has risen as a result. Climate change will make matters worse. Many families in Alto Hospicio are unconnected to the municipal water supply. Around 17,000 square metres of fog-harvesting mesh could meet the water demand of these urban slums.

Fog-harvesting will not wash away the world's water woes alone: it is seasonal and requires the right geography. But it could help quench the thirst of arid areas as urban sprawl and rainfall patterns fluctuate into the future.

Weekly crossword



We now publish an interactive edition of our crossword, allowing you to enter and check the answers, and see explanations, instantly. Try it [here](#). Or, if you prefer to do things the old-fashioned way, use the grid below.

Our crossword has two sets of clues, one for seasoned cruciverbalists and the other for less experienced solvers. Both give the same answers, all of which feature in articles in this week's edition of *The Economist*.

Cryptic clues

1 down Crazy: a hostile man has an enigmatic smile (3,4,4)

1 across Thanks, I want endless state (6)

2 across Impossible to get right country (6)

3 across Any fool remembers Irvine starts Californian continent (6)

Factual clues

1 down What most of the Louvre's visitors are there to see (3,4,4)

1 across Disputed island state (6)

2 across One of the countries which saw a large increase in the price of food in January (6)

3 across The continent that's home to "Generation Hustle" (6)

Email all four answers, along with your home city and country, by 9am GMT on Monday to crossword@economist.com. We will pick randomly from those with the right answers and crown three winners in next week's edition. And please send any thoughts you may have about the new interactive version to the same address.

The winners of this week's quiz



The Economist

Thank you to everyone who took part in this week's quiz. The winners, chosen at random, were:

David Harris, Powell River, Canada

Anand Mahajan, Mumbai, India

Jan van der Burg, Delft, The Netherlands

They all gave the correct answers of James Madison, "Africa" (by Toto), "Iron Man", Lieutenant, and Stanley Kramer.

The theme is films for which Meryl Streep received an Oscar nomination: "The Bridges of Madison County", "Out of Africa", "The Iron Lady", "The French Lieutenant's Woman" and "Kramer vs Kramer".

The questions were:

Monday: Which future US President wrote the Federalist Papers, along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay?

Tuesday: Which 1980s soft rock hit features the line “Sure as Kilimanjaro rises like Olympus above the Serengeti”?

Wednesday: Tony Stark is the real name of which Marvel super hero?

Thursday: What rank did Columbo, played by Peter Falk, hold in the Los Angeles police force?

Friday: “The Defiant Ones” and “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”, two of the earliest Hollywood movies to tackle racial issues, were directed by which person?

Art is anything you can get away with.

Andy Warhol