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Biden’s Campaign Is In Trouble. Will the Turnaround Plan Work?

Charlotte Alter is a senior correspondent at TIME. She covers politics, social movements, and generational change, and hosts TIME's Person of the Week podcast. She is also the author of *The Ones We've Been Waiting For: How a New Generation of Leaders Will Transform America*. Her work for TIME has won a Front Page Award from the Newswoman's Club of New York and has been nominated for a GLAAD Media award.

Brian Bennett is the senior White House correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He has covered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, interviewed world leaders, traveled across the globe with President Trump and President Biden, and written extensively about intelligence, immigration and the fallout of major disasters.

Philip Elliott is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau, where he covers national campaigns, elections, and government. He also writes TIME's politics newsletter, The D.C. Brief.

Last June, Barack Obama slipped into the White House to deliver a warning to Joe Biden. The state of Biden's re-election campaign was shaky, Obama told him over a private lunch, according to a Democrat briefed about the meeting. Defeating Donald Trump would be harder in 2024. The mood of the country was sour. Persuading unhappy voters was going to be difficult. Biden needed to move more aggressively to make the race a referendum on Trump, Obama advised.

The former President left believing the current one had gotten the memo. But over the next six months, Obama saw few signs of improvement. In December, he returned to the White House at Biden's invitation. This time, Obama's message was more urgent. He expressed concern the re-election campaign was behind schedule in building out its field operations, and bottlenecked by Biden's insistence on relying upon an insular group of advisers clustered in the West Wing, according to the same Democratic insider. Biden needed to get it together, or Trump would sweep the seven key battleground states in November, six of which Biden carried in 2020.

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Three months later, the 2024 general election is under way, and Biden is indeed in trouble. His stubbornly low approval ratings have sunk into the high 30s, worse than those of any other recent President seeking re-election. He's trailed or tied Trump in most head-to-head matchups for months. Voters express concerns about his policies, his leadership, his age, and his competency. The coalition that carried Biden to victory in 2020 has splintered; the Democrats' historic advantage with Black, Latino, and Asian American voters has dwindled to lows not seen since the civil rights movement. Despite an attempted insurrection, 88 felony charges, and a record that prompts former aides to warn of the dangers of reinstalling him in office, Trump has never, in three campaigns for the presidency, been in as strong a position to win

the White House as he is now. If the election were held tomorrow, more than 30 pollsters, strategists, and campaign veterans from both parties tell TIME, Biden would likely lose.

Read more: *Why Biden's Age Has Become a Bigger Deal Than Trump's*.

As a fog of dread descends on Democrats, Biden's inner circle is defiantly sanguine. They see a candidate with a strong economy, a sizable cash advantage, and a record of accomplishments on infrastructure, climate change, industrial policy, and consumer protections that will register for more voters as the campaign ramps up. They see a pattern of Democrats overperforming their polling in recent years, from the 2022 midterms to a spate of special elections and abortion referendums. Most of all, they see a historically unpopular opponent. And in the end, they believe, voters dissatisfied with the President will tally the stakes—from reproductive rights to the prospect of mass immigration roundups to the future of U.S. democracy—and pull the lever for Biden again. "Our biggest strength is that 80 million people sent him to the White House before," says Quentin Fulks, Biden's principal deputy campaign manager, who notes that Trump needs to find new voters to win. "Our challenge is winning people who have already cast a ballot for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris once."

Yet that may be a tall order in what's shaping up to be a contest of which candidate America dislikes less. After a slow start, Biden's campaign is charging forward, opening field offices, hiring staff, and launching an ad blitz painting Trump as a dangerous autocrat. But even if the President's sputtering bid finds a new gear, allies say, the country is so bitterly divided that his ability to affect the outcome in November may be limited. Both sides are digging in for a gloomy slugfest, marked by depressed turnout and apocalyptic warnings about the fate that awaits the nation should the other guy win. Publicly, Biden's brain trust is confident in their turnaround

plan. Privately, even some White House insiders admit that they're scared.

A lot has changed for Aidan Kohn-Murphy in four years, but at 20 years old, he looks the same as he did in 2020—a round smiling face beneath a mop of dark hair. Though he wasn't old enough to vote in that election, Kohn-Murphy was the main organizer of #TikTokforBiden, the largest and most effective Gen Z social media campaign in support of the Democratic nominee. In the years since, #TikTokforBiden has transformed into the youth activist collective Gen Z for Change. And Kohn-Murphy has cooled on the President he worked tirelessly to elect.

It has nothing to do, as many assume, with the President's age. With palpable frustration, Kohn-Murphy enumerates the list of perceived policy "betrayals" as though they were "tattooed on the back of my hand." He's upset about Biden's inability to block construction of sections of Trump's border wall. He's upset about the Willow project, an oil-drilling operation that is proceeding on Alaska's North Slope despite Biden's campaign pledge to ban drilling on federal lands. And he's upset about Biden's sustained support of Israel amid its military campaign in Gaza, a position that has incensed legions of young progressives. In 2020, Biden clobbered Trump by 24 points with voters under 30. A New York *Times*/Siena poll conducted in December showed Biden trailing Trump by 6 points among the youngest cohort of voters, although subsequent polls have shown modest improvement. Gen Z voters "don't understand why they should be compelled to cast their ballot for a candidate who has done so many things that are against their values," says Kohn-Murphy. While he plans to cast a grudging vote for Biden, he's worried that the threat of another Trump term won't be enough to change the minds of his peers.

Read more: *Young Progressive Activists Lay Out 'Roadmap' For Biden To Win Back Gen Z*.

Young voters are not the only collapsing pillar of the party's electoral coalition. Biden claims just 63% of Black voters, a sharp drop from the 87% he carried in 2020, according to polling by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University. After winning Hispanic votes by a ratio of 2 to 1 four years ago, he now trails Trump among that voting bloc. Biden's position on Israel amid the war in Gaza has tanked his standing with Muslim and Arab voters, particularly in must-win Michigan. Overall, Biden's advantage over Trump among nonwhite Americans has shrunk from almost 50 points in 2020 to 12, according to the latest *Times*/Siena poll. "It boils down to voters of color, and those voters are pissed," says one former Biden campaign and White House

official, who, like others interviewed for this story, was granted anonymity to make candid appraisals about the President's campaign. "I think it's very likely he'll lose."

Incumbent Presidents are typically considered favorites for re-election, particularly those who have overseen a solid economy, as Biden has. Biden has a record to run on, beyond the bipartisan infrastructure bill and historic investment addressing climate change: billions of dollars of student-debt forgiveness; lowering drug costs; passing bipartisan gun-safety legislation; and much more. To some allies, there's an obvious explanation for the gulf between the President's performance and political predicament: a White House and campaign team tasked with selling his success have fumbled the job.

In the key battleground state of Arizona, for example, at least two major semiconductor plants are being built thanks to the CHIPS Act, historic legislation Biden signed to invest more than $52 billion in U.S. semiconductor manufacturing. Intel and Taiwan's TSMC announced plans to create thousands of local tech and construction jobs, and the Greater Phoenix Economic Council estimates the investments will boost the regional economic output by billions. Yet only 25% of Arizona voters credit Biden for the new plants, according to polling from Noble Predictive Insights provided exclusively to TIME; 29% credit the companies, while 34% say they're "not sure" who's responsible.

Biden isn't getting credit for his wins because his message has been too "academic," argues Representative Bennie Thompson, the Mississippi Democrat who chaired the House select committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. "So much of what's been said is going over the heads of the average American citizen. It doesn't need to be a dissertation. It just has to be a clear message. He's going to have to work on that."

Nearly two dozen senior Democratic sources tell TIME that Biden's campaign mechanics, structure, and staffing over most of the past year are partly to blame as well. While Obama was marching to re-election over the summer of 2012, his campaign head count topped 900. Despite plans to hire 350 new staffers, the Biden campaign ended 2023 with only around 70 paid employees, according to campaign finance filings. His team says it is relying heavily on the network of staff that the Democratic National Committee has been bolstering for state races since 2021. (Trump also reported around 70 people on his campaign payroll, although that tally fails to account for the fact that much of his brain trust is spread across nominally independent super PACs and a think tank.)

As Biden defenders point out, bigger is not always better. "On the Kerry campaign, they had a Noah's Ark—two of everything," says a Democratic consultant involved in that losing 2004 team. Hillary Clinton's ill-fated 2016 campaign had about 800 staffers, with an additional 400 at the Democratic National Committee and subsidies for almost 3,000 more within state parties. The overhead kept Clinton and her inner circle busy wooing donors rather than meeting with voters in crucial states.

Read more: *How Biden Is Reviving His Midterm Playbook for 2024*.

For the critical role of campaign manager, Biden installed Julie Chavez Rodriguez, a White House senior adviser, who has never before run even a statewide race. Biden was slow to dispatch the architects of his 2020 victory over to the current effort; in January, he finally reassigned top aides Jen O'Malley Dillon and Mike Donilon from the White House to the campaign after a delay that left top Democrats, including Obama, bewildered. But major strategy decisions are still routinely held up waiting for West Wing approval, a half dozen Democrats say.

The campaign has also been slow to build a field operation in key battlegrounds. In Georgia, a state he carried by fewer than 12,000 votes, Biden has one staffer. In North Carolina, where he came about 75,000 votes short of winning in 2020 and which now may present a pickup opportunity, the campaign has hired just three.

The result is a winnable race that risks being frittered away, some allies say. “This isn’t that complicated. Call [Pennsylvania Governor] Josh Shapiro, [Michigan Governor] Gretchen Whitmer. Ask them who should be hired and what 20 things need to be done to win those states,” laments a veteran Democratic consultant with experience guiding presidential nominees. “Don’t assume what worked last time will work this one.”

This complaint is echoed by scores of Democratic strategists, who see Biden as a politician captive to the past and content reprising a strategy that worked in the last election but looks increasingly ill-suited to the current one. “This is just who Joe Biden is,” says another top Democratic strategist who worked for Biden and has grown frustrated by the candidate’s reliance on longtime aides who deride outside critics. “This is how he’s always run his campaigns. He and his insiders know better. Last time, it worked, so he didn’t learn any of the lessons, and thinks he can run 2020 again.”

As Air Force One flew through turbulence on the way back from a March 9 campaign rally in Atlanta, Chavez Rodriguez was upbeat. Sitting in a high-backed leather chair, a blue Biden-Harris T-shirt peeking from under her gray blazer, Chavez Rodriguez rattled off the reasons for optimism. A big one is money. The Biden machine has built a formidable war chest, with $155 million on hand. Trump's team hasn't released comparable numbers yet, but his campaign and the Republican National Committee had about $40 million in January.

Chavez Rodriguez and her team viewed Biden's fiery State of the Union speech as the starting gun of the campaign. Up next: a six-week, $30 million blitz of TV ads in battleground states that aim to define Trump as a threat to democracy and reproductive rights, while tackling the delicate issue of Biden's age. The campaign has also begun rolling out its field operation; in addition to the new staffers, it plans to open 100 campaign offices in states like Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. "It's about getting the boots on the ground," Chavez Rodriguez says, "and building the ground game that we need to in all of our battleground states."

A constellation of outside groups are also bringing cash and organizational clout to the fight. The 400,000-member-strong United Auto Workers has endorsed Biden, as have 18 other labor unions. At the Atlanta event, political action committees for Asian American, Black, and Latino voters—the AAPI Victory Fund, The Collective, and the Latino Victory Fund—together pledged $30 million toward boosting turnout for Biden. And a pro-Biden super PAC, Future Forward, has $250 million in fall advertising teed up in seven key states, which strategists say is the biggest single super PAC ad play in history.

The campaign is recruiting thousands of volunteers to connect with voters in their communities about Biden's record, including through a digital platform called Mobilize.us that helps volunteers

set up online events with friends. That multimillion-dollar push, which began in March, will run through the summer. In September, Fulks says, the campaign will shift gears to deliver supporters to the polls, employing everything from door-to-door canvassing to targeted social media, as well as the robust ground games of labor unions and abortion-rights groups.

Read more: *The Inside Story of How Biden Cleared the Field for His Re-Election Bid*.

The campaign is moving advertising dollars away from traditional broadcast channels and toward digital platforms like YouTube, Google search, Facebook, and online sports-streaming sites, where more voters spend their time, says Rob Flaherty, who oversees the campaign's digital strategy. Despite Biden's vowing to sign legislation that could ban TikTok if it doesn't divest from Chinese ownership, his campaign joined the platform in February, churning out clips with titles like "4 insane policies in a 2nd Trump term" and "What is Trump saying lol." As it works to court bold-faced names like Taylor Swift, Biden's digital staff plans to tap local influencers in key voting districts who may have only a few thousand followers, but can carry the message to targeted communities.

When it comes to the President's dismal numbers with young and nonwhite voters, the Biden brain trust recognizes the challenge but doesn't share the panic of the party brass. To their mind, people who have cast a ballot for Biden before can be persuaded to do so again. "We've reached out to this group of nonwhite and young voters earlier than any presidential campaign ever has," says senior adviser Becca Siegel. The campaign's internal polling has found that young and minority voters have not tuned in to the election yet and haven't thought about Trump in a while.

In the meantime, Biden's team has devised strategies to engage key voting blocs in different ways. To reach Black voters in Georgia,

the campaign plans to deploy surrogates like Senator Raphael Warnock, a pastor who preaches from Martin Luther King Jr.'s former pulpit, to juice turnout. Despite the sharp criticism of Biden coming from some voters of color, operatives predict Black voters in particular will stick with the President. "Black voters never loved Biden," says Nsé Ufot, an organizer who helped deliver Georgia in 2020 by driving up Black turnout. "As the pragmatic political actors they have proven themselves to be, they will make the best decision based on the choices they have."

Indeed, the biggest reason for optimism in Biden World may be the weakness of his opponent. As Election Day nears and Trump's speeches and ideas garner the kind of attention they haven't had since he left office, advisers expect fair-weather Biden supporters will remember how much they dislike his predecessor. "We know the work that we need to do to consolidate our base," says the campaign's communications director Michael Tyler. "The campaign is geared toward those efforts, while our opponent is still screaming into an echo chamber of MAGA extremism."

The cornerstones of the case against Trump will be the dual threat he presents to democracy and reproductive rights. Since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, 21 states have stricter abortion restrictions than they had under *Roe v. Wade*. Democrats see an opportunity to pummel Trump on abortion access, as well as concerns about access to in vitro fertilization after the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are legally children.

That push is designed to target women like Kelsey Lawrence, a 30-year-old mother of four living in Front Royal, Va. Lawrence thought of herself as having conservative and libertarian views before *Dobbs*. "I think every woman should have autonomy over her body," Lawrence explained as she waited for Biden and Harris to take the stage at a January rally in the Northern Virginia exurb of Manassas. Democrats plan to continue tying unpopular abortion restrictions to the GOP; in January, the Biden campaign released an

ad featuring a Texas doctor who was forced to leave the state to abort a nonviable pregnancy. In March, Harris became the first sitting Vice President to visit an abortion clinic.

The campaign is gaming out different paths to the 270 Electoral College votes it needs to win. One is to rebuild the Blue Wall, which includes the traditional Democratic strongholds of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and then capture another toss-up state. A second route cuts through the Sun Belt—Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina. Democrats are pushing to add an abortion-access measure to the ballot in Arizona that they believe would drive up turnout for Biden. The same may be said for a polarizing GOP nominee for governor in North Carolina. Some Democrats aren't ready to abandon hopes of Biden's putting Trump's current home state of Florida within reach. The paths to a win are varied enough that a major Democratic PAC is spending almost $4 million in the Omaha TV ad market, where Harris' husband Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff hosted political events in March in hopes of shaving off a single Electoral College vote in Nebraska's Second District.

For all their meticulous planning, Biden's team knows the race could hinge on factors outside their control. Four years ago this March, the sudden spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. shut down the economy and paralyzed the presidential campaigns. Without the pandemic, Trump could well have won. Any number of unpredictable events—the state of the war in the Middle East, foreign election interference, gas prices, persuasive AI-enabled deepfakes, the uncertain schedule of Trump's trials—could shape the outcome to a greater degree than what the candidates do between now and November.

Allies are still hopeful for a more forceful performance from the President himself. It's no secret that Biden, 81, is the oldest Commander in Chief in U.S. history, or that broad swaths of the country believe he's no longer up to the job. The White House has tried everything it can—perhaps to a fault—to cosset him. Aides tend to avoid scheduling events in the early morning and evenings, limit his interviews and press conferences, and have him ascend the short stairs when boarding Air Force One to avoid any more embarrassing stumbles arising from his stiff gait.

But for Biden to beat the 77-year-old Trump, some allies believe it's time to remove the bubble wrap. After campaigning successfully in 2020 on promises to restore the "soul of the nation," Biden still clings to a self-image as a champion of comity. It is a pitch calibrated for an idealized electorate, not the one he has to win over. "People say, 'I'm not going to vote for Trump, but I don't know if I can vote for Biden.' And everything they say has to do with his style: 'He doesn't seem to be fighting for us,'" says

Representative Jim Clyburn, the former House Democratic whip, who has stepped away from his caucus leadership role to help Biden sharpen his message, urging the campaign to underscore the direct economic benefits of the Biden presidency.

Michael LaRosa, a former press secretary to First Lady Jill Biden, says the President has the capacity to author a comeback if he starts throwing punches. “He can talk about all of the accomplishments, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and economic-growth reports he wants,” LaRosa says. “Trump is talking about illegal migrants killing gorgeous young students jogging on campus, or the price of groceries, and placing the blame for both at Biden’s doorstep. Does he want to win the argument, or win the election?”

Recent flashes of fight have cheered the President’s supporters. After the boisterous State of the Union speech, he hit the road for a two-week swing through seven battleground states. The first event was at a middle-school gym in the Philadelphia suburbs, where Biden said Trump “got his wish” when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* and states installed abortion restrictions. The President ticked through highlights of his record: limiting monthly insulin costs for seniors to $35; capping all Medicare prescription-drug costs at $2,000 a year; cutting credit-card late fees from $32 to $8; requiring corporations to pay a minimum of 15% in tax. When Biden called for an assault-weapons ban and stripping liability protections for gunmakers, the room erupted in cheers. After stepping off the stage, he shook hands and posed for selfies for 30 minutes, ignoring multiple announcements from his staff that it was time to leave.

When he finally did, the scene greeting him outside was a reminder of the challenge ahead. On the street in front of the school, dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters, holding signs reading Cease-Fire Now, erupted in chants of “Genocide Joe.” The protesters had camped there for hours as the sun set, waiting for their chance to get Biden’s attention. As his limousine pulled away, the crowd

increased the volume of their chants, hoping the President would hear them from inside his armored car. —*With reporting by* Leslie Dickstein, Simmone Shah, *and* Julia Zorthian

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How We Chose the 2024 TIME Earth Awards

When we introduced the Earth Awards last year, our goal was to highlight individuals whose actions have had an indelible impact on global efforts to address one of the most urgent crises facing our planet: climate change.

In the year since, the stakes have only become clearer—2023 was the hottest year the world has ever experienced since records began—and those who have dedicated themselves to this crucial work have doubled down on their dedication. This year's group of

honorees are being recognized for their influential leadership, whether on the runway or in the rain forest, in shaping a more sustainable future.

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Actor and activist Jane Fonda turned her energy towards the climate fight in 2019 with Fire Drill Fridays. Today, she is working to elect climate leaders in all levels of government. Robert D. Bullard is a distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University (TSU) and the founding director of the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at TSU. His tireless work over the past 45 years has, perhaps more than anyone else's, laid the groundwork for today's environmental justice movement. Nemonte Nenquimo, a Waorani leader and co-founder of Amazon Frontlines and Ceibo Alliance, is one of the most passionate voices for the rights of Indigenous communities and their lands. Last year, she successfully campaigned to halt oil drilling in Ecuador's Yasuní National Park. Uruguayan fashion designer Gabriela Hearst produced the first carbon-neutral runway show in 2019 under her own brand, which has been plastic-free since then. As the creative director for Chloé until September 2023, she also helped that brand become the first European luxury fashion house to achieve B Corp status. And from the White House to international climate negotiations, John Kerry, as U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, has shaped countless policies. Now, the veteran politician has left that role to galvanize the private sector in accelerating the clean energy transition.

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Jane Fonda Champions Climate Action for Every Generation

Stephanie Zacharek is the film critic at TIME. She is the recipient of a Newswomen's Club of New York award, and was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist.

Jane Fonda, at 86**,** is small-boned and elegant, her eyes like soft blue-gray flannel. Yet it’s startling how much energy shoots through her via a simple handshake: if a woodland creature could shake your hand, it might feel like this, the will of an entire forest ecosystem pouring through one being. She’s physically strong,

sitting up straight and tall for more than an hour on a backless ottoman, perched before a cozy sitting-room fireplace in her Los Angeles townhouse. But the message telegraphed by her handshake is less a matter of muscle tone than of pure urgency. If you could put it into words, it would be this: There's not much time left.

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Fonda has already lived many lives. The daughter of a much loved actor and a socialite, Henry Fonda and Frances Ford Seymour, she has built an astonishing acting career herself: In the space of just a few years, she shifted from the campy delights of *Barbarella* to career-defining performances in *Klute* and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Younger audiences know her from the *Book Club* movies and the hit TV series *Grace and Frankie*. And although it's now common for actors to support causes they care about, vocally and financially, Fonda is the OG actor-activist. In the early 1970s she supported Native American causes and spoke out on behalf of the Black Panthers. She's fought for civil rights and issues directly affecting women's welfare, though she may be best known for her anti–Vietnam War stance in the 1970s—in particular, a photograph of her perched on an anti-aircraft gun taken during a 1972 trip to Hanoi. Fonda has apologized repeatedly and profusely over the years for that photo, knowing how hurtful it was to GIs and veterans. She knows what it's like to be embattled, and to go to battle for principles she believes in. But in 2019 Fonda had a breakthrough that, as she describes it, was bigger than any revelation she's had in decades of both acting and activism.

She'd felt a growing sense of alarm a year earlier, during the 2018 California wildfires. "The skies here were orange-brown," she recalls. "I read that birds were dropping dead out of the sky over New Mexico and Arizona. They couldn't make their normal migratory journey over the coast because of the wildfires. So they were flying over the deserts, and they were dying of dehydration and hunger." Fonda spent her early years in the hills of California in the 1940s when there were no freeways and no smog. She remembers the sounds of meadow-larks, nightingales, mourning doves. "You don't hear them anymore. I went into a downward spiral. I realized, it's happening now. This isn't something in the future. I've marched, I've protested. But given my platform, I'm

not doing what I can do. And this could be the end. I have to commit myself more."

Read More: *It May Not Be Long Before We're All Suffering from Climate Trauma*

Fonda's resolve intensified when the galleys for Naomi Klein's 2019 Green New Deal manifesto *On Fire* landed on her doorstep, just as she was heading off to Big Sur for Labor Day weekend. She was so shaken by Klein's book that she immediately called Annie Leonard, then head of Greenpeace USA. "This was not a cause," says Fonda. "This was not a specific war in a specific place, or a specific group of people fighting for rights. This was human civilization we're talking about. I just realized it in the core of my body. This is the moment I have to completely show up with everything I have." We're the first generation to experience the climate crisis, she says, and we're the last that can do anything about it. "I want to be part of the generation that does something about it, because this is it."

Feelings of despair are understandable in the face of imminent climate disaster. But they can also be a retreat, a means of leaving the hard work of changemaking to someone else. It's not in Fonda's nature to feel that kind of helplessness: "I've never despaired before. I'm not a despairing person." But not even she knew exactly what she ought to be doing, which is why she called Leonard, who promptly set up a call with Klein, climate activist Bill McKibben, and environmental lawyer Jay Halfon. "I wanted to raise a ruckus," Fonda says. So together, the group came up with the idea of planning an act of civil disobedience every Friday, inspired by protests like Randall Robinson's 1980s antiapartheid sit-ins outside the South African embassy, as well as by the actions of Fridays for Future, the youth movement organized by Greta Thunberg in 2018. Young people, Fonda says, "were asking for us. They were saying, 'We didn't create this crisis, but it's our future

that’s going to be destroyed. Where are the older people to join us?’ So I said, ‘I’m here. I volunteer.’”

The first Fire Drill Friday was held on Oct. 11, 2019, with Fonda appearing on the steps of the Capitol in a black-and-white houndstooth newsboy cap and a three-alarm-red coat. Only about 50 people showed up to hear the speakers and experts who’d been scheduled to appear, though that number would swell in the coming weeks. Fonda was arrested that day—photos show her holding her zip-tied wrists high, a badge of honor. And although this wasn’t her first arrest (she’d been arrested once in 1970, at the behest of the Nixon White House on suspicion of drug possession, and several times by military police during anti–Vietnam War protests), it was the first time she’d been detained for civil disobedience. She would be arrested a total of five times—spending one night in jail—across the 14 Fire Drill Friday protests held in D.C. through Jan. 10, 2020.

The pandemic forced Fire Drill Fridays to move its protests and educational sessions online, and though the last virtual event was held on Jan. 5, the movement’s momentum continues. One thing Fonda learned from the experience is that Americans do care about climate issues. Data collected by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in autumn 2023 show that an estimated 72% of Americans believe climate change is happening, and some 70% believe it will harm plants and animals as well as future generations of humans. The whole point, Fonda says, is to let people know they’re needed. As attendance at Fire Drill Fridays grew, it was, Fonda says, mostly older women who showed up, “women who’d never been to a rally before.” When people are asked why they haven’t taken any action in response to the climate crisis, the answer, Fonda says, is often simply that nobody asked them. “So I say the great unasked is our target. Let’s turn that concern into action.”

When you spend an hour or two with a person who cares passionately about a particular issue, their idealism tends to fill the air, sometimes to the point of crowding out the human being sitting in front of you. This is even somewhat true of Fonda, not because there's anything recessive about her, but because her mission seems to have set every molecule of her being ablaze. She's the same Jane Fonda we think we all know—and yet more. She speaks of how the climate crisis affects women more negatively than men, particularly in the Global South. She makes a brief reference to her own recent cancer diagnosis—she was treated for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2022 and is now in remission—as a springboard to talk about the prevalence of cancer in communities located near refineries, oil wells, and fracking facilities, not to mention the fossil-fuel pollution that surrounds us all. She speaks with urgency about the upcoming election, whose outcome could determine the

fate of the planet. In 2022, she and a small board of advisers established the Jane Fonda Climate PAC to help elect "climate champions," particularly down ballot, where, she says, "the robust work on climate is happening. Mayors, city councils, boards of supervisors, county executives … are the people that can create a whole climate plan, make it more resilient in your city or community."

Read More: Column: *You Can't Have Healthy People On a Sick Planet*

The political action committee is already in high gear for this year's elections. Candidates are begging for its endorsement, and Fonda says they go through a rigorous vetting process—and they absolutely cannot take money from the fossil-fuel industry. "This is probably the most important election. The problem is we say this all the time, only this time it's really true. Who gets elected in the United States in November is going to greatly determine whether there's a future."

But even Fonda, whose passion and commitment are so exemplary, is more than just the sum of the issues she cares about. In her book *What Can I Do? My Path From Climate Despair to Action*, she writes of being in that jail cell and wondering what the late Tom Hayden, a brilliant activist and one of her three ex-husbands, would think of her. He was a great strategist. How would he advise her and her compatriots to proceed? In the next paragraph, though, she wonders if she would have had the nerve to move to D.C. and launch a project as ambitious as Fire Drill Fridays if Hayden were still alive. When I ask her about this moment of self-questioning, she replies, more mischievously than evasively, "Did I say that? Hmm." Then she elaborates.

"I was in awe of Tom. His intellect, the depth of his understanding of what needed to happen and how to make it happen. I was always kind of in the student role with him. And I don't think he respected

me very much, or at least he made me feel that I was stupid. And so I think he would have probably tried to talk me out of it. Or I would have been afraid that he wouldn't have approved." The point of this story isn't to paint self-doubt as weakness, but to show how getting beyond it is often what pushes any of us to leap further and higher than we ever thought we could go. "I guess one of the reasons I'm so involved is, I'm 86 years old. I have a feeling that people can say, 'Look at what she's doing at her age! If she can do it, I can do it.'"

Read More: *From 'Hanoi Jane' to the Workout: A Brief History of Jane Fonda's Activism*

The first step out of despair is simply showing up. We've already had brief moments last year where global average temperatures surpassed the 1.5°C temperature increase that scientists say we must avoid, she says. "But we can go back again—we can reduce it. It's going to require incredibly brave and bold actions. And we can be brave and bold."

—

Set design by Ali Gallagher and Zoran Radanovich; styled by Cristina Ehrlich; hair by Jonathan Hanousek; make-up by David DeLeon at ASM

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Nemonte Nenquimo on Respecting the Amazon and What is Owed to the Planet

Nenquimo, co-founder of Ceibo Alliance and Amazon Frontlines, is a Waorani leader who has won the Goldman Environmental Prize and a co-author of the upcoming book We Will Be Jaguars *with Mitch Anderson*

Someone recently asked me why it was important to protect the Amazon rainforest from oil drilling. The question made me angry. Can you imagine being questioned about the importance of protecting your home from being destroyed in a fire? Or about protecting your home, your extended family's homes, and all your people's homes from demolition? Can you imagine being asked: Why is it important to protect your country from nuclear devastation?

Those questions seem absurd only when you take the existence of your home and your people for granted. Western civilization has always taken the destruction of my home and my people for granted. And now, this well-meaning question assumes that I must offer a defense of my existence. It also presents a false innocence about the asker's complicity in the continued destruction of my home.

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As a Waorani leader tasked with communicating beyond our territorial borders to safeguard our land, I often face questions like this. Answering is part of the resistance, and it is not easy. Yet, with Ecuador's government now pushing to ignore our hard-won ban on oil drilling in one of our most biodiverse forests, it remains an urgent question to answer. What I long for, and what the Amazon and Mother Earth demand, can be summed up in what is missing in the questions and policies so often pointed at me and my people: respect.

Why is it important to protect the Amazon rainforest from oil drilling?

We Waorani like to walk. When we need to think, we head off walking in the forest. When we want to express our emotions, we walk and sing: our songs too are fruits of the forest. Wherever we walk, we are in communication with everything around us. We

know the plants and the birds in the way city dwellers know the names of streets and the logos of stores. But streets do not breathe and stores do not take flight.

Read More: *These Indigenous Women Are Fighting Big Oil—And Winning*

The forest is our grocer, our pharmacy, our hardware store, our theater, our gym, our park. We cultivate our small orchards and walk the forest to hunt and to gather food, medicine, tools, and beauty and art supplies. Politicians and oil executives think that we are idiots, that we plod among the trees picking things up that look yummy. They say that we don't even know the value of the resources beneath the ground. But that is how they show their own ignorance. The oil deep in the earth is the blood of our ancestors. And we know better than to dig up a grave.

Why pillage a grave when life is all around us? We don't need oil. The forest is life itself. We know which plants can heal and which songs to sing to ask permission for cutting them and using their cures. We know that the *petomo* palm fruits in January and February and that its oil is excellent for maintaining long, shiny hair and healthy skin. We know that the monkeys and the tapirs time their reproductive cycles to coincide with fruit abundance. We know that the peach palm makes the best spears. We know not to use more than we need.

The first Europeans to enter the Amazon wanted only gold and power. They brought disease and murder. It is no wonder that all their tales of adventure describe the forest as a site of danger. I have had dreams of great dangers to come. Unrestrained industrialization has poisoned the atmosphere. Burning down the Amazon will accelerate climate change beyond a point of no return. Uncontrolled warming will imperil life on earth.

Mother Earth will not be saved. She does not need you or anyone to save her. She demands respect. And she will punish humanity for failing to give it. And yet, time and again, people in positions of governmental and industrial power refuse to do so; they insist on destruction.

They've had so many opportunities to respect us, and they've squandered them all. Just in recent years, Ecuador's political class could have upheld Indigenous peoples' rights to free, prior, and informed consent—the right to decide what happens in their territories, as enshrined in international law by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But they didn't. They made us fight. In 2019, my people achieved a historic legal victory protecting a half-million acres of Waorani territory, and setting a legal precedent to protect millions more. The government could have respected that court victory and complied with the ruling, but instead, it has failed to respect it, and continues to have its eye on drilling oil from our lands.

They could have respected our demands to stop all oil drilling and pumping in Yasuní National Park, one of the most biodiverse places in the world, but they didn't. Again, they made us fight, this time joined by allies across the country. Just last year, the people of Ecuador again made history by voting in a national referendum to stop and permanently ban all oil exploitation in Yasuní. We won. We should be celebrating and coordinating with people in other regions and other countries to help devise strategies to protect their forests. Instead, we are forced to keep fighting: newly elected Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa has called for an illegitimate "moratorium" on complying with the results of the referendum.

Read More: *The Fight to Save Ecuador's Sacred River*

Why can't they respect us? Why can't they even respect their own laws? How many times do we have to use the tools of the civilization that wants to destroy us, its courts and elections, to stop

their destruction? Where is the rule of law when the rulers change the laws whenever they feel inconvenienced? Is it really so much to ask for respect?

I often feel heartbroken when I travel abroad to speak about our struggle. I see how many possessions and luxuries people have and how they only want more. Their greed fuels the burning of the Amazon. Some people on those trips tell me I'm a hero. No, I'm not. I'm just trying to do something. This is resistance.

Why is it important to protect the Amazon from oil exploitation? My life, the lives of my family and people, our homes, our culture, our language, the lives of myriad plant and animal species, many of which are endemic to the Amazon, the life of the forest itself, and the lives of millions of people, perhaps even yours, all depend on it. Is that good enough?

Nenquimo, co-founder of Ceibo Alliance and Amazon Frontlines, is a Waorani leader who has won the Goldman Environmental Prize and a co-author of the upcoming book We Will Be Jaguars *with Mitch Anderson*

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Robert D. Bullard Writes to the Next Environmental-Justice Leaders

Bullard is a distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University, and the director of the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at TSU.

I am a proud boomer and Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran. I am also an environmental-justice fighter. When I began this work in 1979, environmental justice was a footnote. Through our efforts, it is now a headline. But these days, millennials, Generation X,

Generation Y, and Generation Z combined far outnumber my generation. So we must equip future generations with the tools and resources to take our plight across the finish line to build climate-resilient communities. Environmental justice embraces the principle that all communities are entitled to equal protection and equal enforcement, along with access to housing, transportation, food security, water, health, and clean energy. Everyone deserves to live in pollution-free neighborhoods where kids can play outside and on playgrounds that chemical plants and landfills do not surround.

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It is heartening to see so many young people and students working on these critical issues without the wedges that would have previously driven us apart. Environmentalism is now seen across disciplines through this intergenerational movement. Anyone can be a part of it, and everyone's skills are needed. One does not need to be an expert to join. Mentors, centers, and networks always look for young minds, volunteers, and innovators from all academic areas, from public health to graphic design. Reducing environmental, health, economic, and racial disparities remains a priority of the environmental-justice movement. We must continue this work with the next generations, with science, with data, and with people who understand we do not need false solutions. By gathering community-level air-monitoring data, for example, local advocacy groups petitioned the Texas commission on environmental quality for regular pollution-monitoring. But having data, science, and facts is not enough. We must marry this information with action to make transformative and lasting change. And to solve many environmental problems, we must also solve inequality issues. Avoiding, for example, placing industrial facilities in low-wealth communities of color in the first place.

Read More: *These Black Icons Have a Novel Idea to Save the Ocean*

More important, we cannot continue without “righteous investments” that support the communities most in need. This includes the Justice40 Initiative, which in 2021 formalized President Biden’s commitment to make environmental justice a part of tackling climate change. It directs federal agencies to work with states and local communities to deliver on the Administration’s promise that at least 40% of the overall benefits from federal climate and clean-energy investments go to disadvantaged communities.

Many progressive social movements that have been successful in the U.S. had young people and students pushing hard at the front. This includes the civil rights movement, peace and justice, women’s rights, anti-war movements, and now environmental justice. We are powerful and unstoppable when we work together. The quest for environmental justice is an ongoing “marathon relay.” You run your 26.2 miles, and then the next generation begin their leg of the race. I am driven by, and I am happy to be able to pass the baton to, the up-and-coming generations of environmental-justice advocates who will continue with the same resilience that so many involved in the journey have already shown.

In this next era, my hope is for policy and action to be swift. Climate change does not have 40 more years to wait. Young people, you are valued. I want to see you in rooms involved in the global discussions of change and policy with the opportunity to share the stories of the environmental and climate impacts on our communities. Let us continue to work together and learn from each other so that money can follow need and not power.

Bullard is a distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University, and the director of the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at TSU.

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John Kerry’s Four Decades of Raising Climate Awareness on the World Stage

Justin Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He received Covering Climate Now's inaugural Climate Journalist of the Year award in 2022, among other awards. He is the Outrider Foundation fellow at TIME.

Sitting in a taxi in Munich in February, stuck in traffic, John Kerry wrestled with an idea. The U.S. climate envoy was in southern Germany to attend an annual security conference, spending his days pushing world leaders to work together to fight global warming. But in a few hours, the former Secretary of State would receive an award named in honor of a well-known Nazi resister, Ewald von Kleist. As he ruminated on his remarks, he worked to connect what he called the “echoes of the 1930s” in today’s geopolitics with the need for unity on climate action.

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By the time he took the stage to accept the award that night, Kerry had found the words to make the connection in a blunt speech

lasting less than 15 minutes. “On climate, on Ukraine, and on so much more, the whole world needs to come together,” he told the dignitaries gathered in the ornate Bavarian palace where the ceremony was being held. “I hate to say it, and it’s not an exaggeration—but we do stand next to another abyss. It is the test of our own times, a test as acute and as existential as any previous one.”

Read More: *It’s a New Era of Climate Geopolitics. And It’s Not Just For Policy Wonks*

Over the past 40 years, Kerry has used his positions as U.S. Senator, Democratic nominee for President, and top American diplomat to bring climate action to the highest levels of international relations, using his stature and knack for persuasion to push the issue at home and abroad. As a Senator, he showed up at global climate meetings to keep the U.S. engaged. He would eventually piece together a bold, if ultimately unsuccessful, congressional effort to price carbon. Running for President, he leaned into the climate message with a commitment unlike any major-party nominee before him. And as Secretary of State he made the issue a State Department priority, created a global oceans conference that continues to this day, and helped broker the landmark Paris Agreement.

As the issue has risen on the global agenda in recent years, Kerry has been among the most influential voices shaping the tone and substance of the conversation. And despite the dark overtones of his Munich speech, devotees and critics alike often say Kerry’s defining characteristic is his optimism. He is able to look at the most dire situations, from climate change to the Middle East, and identify a path for everyone to come to their senses—often against the odds.

Read More: *John Kerry’s Next Move*

That optimism was tested from the start in his role as President Joe Biden's climate envoy. Kerry entered the job in the middle of the pandemic and in the wake of an Administration that had effectively withdrawn the U.S. from international climate discussions. He immediately began hopping around the world calling on Presidents and princes to deliver the message that the U.S. could be trusted. By the end of the first year, he was launching coalitions and helping broker key international climate deals. "I know that people criticize the optimism," says Amos Hochstein, a key international energy adviser to Biden who worked closely with Kerry. "I think it's his superpower."

That approach panned out at last year's U.N. climate conference in Dubai, where Kerry held firm in his support of the oil CEO charged with leading the summit even as many climate advocates called for the executive to step down. "He sticks with his convictions," says Sue Biniaz, a longtime adviser who served as his deputy climate envoy.

Kerry now begins a new chapter. He resigned from his role as climate envoy on March 6, but at the age of 80, after nearly 40 years in government, he is not retiring. Instead, he plans to join the private sector, drumming up money to finance climate efforts in the places that need it the most. It's a fitting move. Kerry named his memoir *Every Day Is Extra* after a saying he and his buddies used as a touchstone during the Vietnam War. It's a reminder to himself —and everyone else—not to sit on the sidelines when problems need solving.

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Why Gabriela Hearst Considers Sustainable Fashion to Be the Ultimate Luxury

Cady Lang is a staff writer at TIME. She covers culture, focusing on identity, celebrity, and fashion.

When Gabriela Hearst launched her namesake brand in 2015, one of the pillars of her design was a resolute commitment to sustainability. It was a decision that came in the wake of a clarion call from her past. Following the death of her father in 2011, the fashion designer inherited Santa Isabel, her family's 17,000-acre ranch, where she grew up in Paysandú, Uruguay. Revisiting her remote childhood home reminded Hearst how they made their own

blankets and furniture, drawing on precious resources from the ranch to construct pieces that would last—a stark contrast to the waste-filled practices of the fashion industry where she had been working for more than a decade. “I started to see the discrepancy between what I was doing in New York and what I was taking care of in Uruguay,” she says. “That’s when I started being very concerned about climate change.”

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In the nine years since she founded her label, Hearst has helped redefine her industry, making the case that knowing where clothing materials come from and who crafts them is the truest form of luxury. Her designs, which favor sleek silhouettes, expert tailoring, and meticulous craftsmanship, have become wardrobe staples for the thinking woman. She counts Angelina Jolie, Greta Thunberg, and Jill Biden, who wore one of her dresses to the 2020 presidential Inauguration, among her fans. In addition to heading up Gabriela Hearst, she also served from 2020 to 2023 as the creative director of the French brand Chloé, which she helped become the first European luxury fashion house to receive a B Corp certification. But while Hearst’s profile has risen, her mission remains the same: to create beautiful clothing with care and entice people to join the climate fight. “They have the desire for beauty, so I have to bring consciousness to the product,” she says. “You can’t deny the catastrophes that are constantly happening worldwide that are climate-related. It’s here and it’s happening and we’re all going to pay a price.”

Read More: *How Small Businesses Can Have a Big Impact in the Climate Fight*

Every step of Hearst’s design process is an opportunity to honor climate commitment. She breathes new life into the remnants of Turkish rugs and cashmere scraps, which are reincarnated as colorful overcoats and sharp blazers. Her handbags have a waiting

list—not because of a desire for exclusivity, but because she makes them in limited quantities or to order, which helps curtail waste. In 2019, she produced the first carbon-neutral runway show and announced her brand was plastic-free for both front and back of house. She's also refreshingly unconcerned with having her customers buying more. "I'm very happy with my clients just finding one good sweater," she says. "I grew up with that kind of mentality on the farm; if it's good quality, it will last you for years. So we wanted to have a product that was well designed and timeless, using the nicest materials in the world and making it at the highest level."

But Hearst's vision for a more sustainable future extends beyond fashion. She's a vocal advocate for developing nuclear fusion, dedicating her Chloé Spring/Summer '23 collection to the clean-energy solution. She believes her advocacy is as vital to her brand as its more creative aspect. "Your legacy is your value system," she says. "We know that we're going to be one of the brands of the future. I am willing to put in the time and dedication because I can see the long-term view. I know exactly where we're going."

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Why Trump Flipped on TikTok

Eric Cortellessa is a staff writer at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He covers Congress, Donald Trump, and national politics.

As Congress moves ahead with legislation that could ban TikTok, the popular platform has found an unlikely ally in Washington: Donald Trump.

Over the last week, Trump has railed against a bill that would remove TikTok from U.S. app stores unless its Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, sells its stake. To many, the move came out of left field. As President, Trump signed an executive order to ban TikTok unless it was acquired by an American company, alleging the Chinese government was using the video-sharing service to surveil millions of Americans. The order never went into effect after it was challenged in federal court.

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But now Trump sees some utility in helping to keep TikTok around, especially after President Joe Biden said he would sign the bill into law. “Frankly, there are a lot of people on TikTok that love it,” he told CNBC. “There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it.”

The former President’s flip-flop has sparked allegations that he’s doing the bidding of a powerful donor with a stake in ByteDance. But part of his calculus, multiple sources familiar with Trump’s thinking tell TIME, is the opportunity to make gains with younger voters by protecting their beloved platform.

“He realizes that a lot of people would be upset if it were banned,” says a Trump operative working on the re-election effort. “Now Trump and Biden are on opposite sides of an issue where younger voters are clearly in favor of not banning TikTok.”

Trump has other reasons for the reversal. He struck a rapprochement this month with the anti-tax group Club for Growth, which opposes the bill. Earlier this year, the organization admitted defeat in an expensive effort to keep Trump from winning the GOP nomination. “We’re back in love,” Trump recently told a gathering of its donors, according to Politico. The group opposes the bill, mirroring the position of one of its benefactors, billionaire Jeff Yass, whose investment company owns 15% of ByteDance. To boost the effort, Club for Growth hired longtime Trump loyalist Kellyanne Conway to advocate for TikTok on Capitol Hill.

At the same time, Trump fears the legislation would strengthen one of his nemeses: Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram. The former President resents the social media company’s founder, Mark Zuckerberg, for donating $400 million in 2020 to help state and local governments run their elections amid a pandemic by facilitating mail voting, the system Trump baselessly maligns as rife with fraud.

Trump and his allies also accuse the company of suppressing conservative content and news stories damaging to Democrats. “Zuckerberg’s censorship of the Hunter Biden laptop story helped the Democrats dramatically in 2020,” says Alex Bruesewitz, a Trump ally and GOP consultant.

After a House committee voted 50-0 last week for the bill that could lead to a TikTok ban in the U.S., lobbyists and TikTok users bombarded lawmakers in a bid to thwart the measure. Biden’s support and Trump’s opposition have created surprising fault lines on the Hill. The full House chamber is expected to pass the legislation on Wednesday, but it faces an uphill climb in the Senate.

Read more: What to Know About the Bill That Could Get TikTok Banned in the U.S.

Biden’s 2020 victory was powered by the youth vote, according to an analysis by Tufts University researchers that found young voters favored Biden over Trump by a 25-point margin. But recent polls show that gap to be shrinking. An Axios-Generation Lab survey of voters under 35 last month found Biden leading by just four percentage points.

It’s not clear whether that trend will last. Young progressives have rebelled against Biden for supporting Israel’s war against Hamas, contributing to the lowest approval ratings of his presidency. But Democratic operatives are betting that most young voters will flock to Biden come November, fearing what a second Trump term would mean for abortion rights and the future of democracy.

Many of those young voters are on TikTok. A Pew Research survey last year found that one-third of American adults under 30 regularly scroll TikTok for news. Several polls show the social media platform to be the number one source for news and information among Gen Z.

That doesn’t mean TikTok is exclusively a haven for socially progressive content. It’s also a popular platform for Trump supporters. The Nelk Boys, whose podcast Trump has appeared on twice, have 4.6 million followers on TikTok. The former Fox News host Tucker Carlson has 1.3 million. Time and again, it’s a venue where pro-Trump content has gone viral. The right-wing American Wire News account amassed more than 6.5 million views on a recent clip of Trump bringing on stage a supporter who kicked out a heckler at one of his rallies.

Social media experts say that TikTok can be a useful mobilizing tool for the MAGA faithful. “It has an extremely personalized algorithm,” says Ashley Johnson, a policy analyst for the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation in Washington. “It can amplify these filter bubbles we create for ourselves in terms of primarily or even only seeing political content that we agree with.”

The strategy has worked. TikTok grew by 12% from 2021 to 2023. It’s now used by more than 150,000 million Americans, making it one of the most popular apps in the country. That runaway growth, members of Trump’s inner circle say, helps to explain why Trump went from trying to ban it to becoming its most prominent defender. “TikTok is more relevant now than when that executive order was written,” says the Trump operative.

Some of his allies expect him to turn it into a campaign wedge issue. “This is Biden’s ban now,” says Bruesewitz, “and tens of millions of young voters know it.”

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Why India’s Next Election Will Last 44 Days

Astha Rajvanshi is a staff writer at TIME based in the London bureau. She covers international news and affairs with an eye on India and neighboring countries. She received the Matthew Power Literary Reporting Award and a Fellowship from the Institute of Current World Affairs.

India, the world’s most populous democracy, is set to hold its next general election over a seven-phase period that will last 44 days. On March 16, the Indian Election Commission announced that Indians will head to the polls between April 19 and June 1, with the results declared June 4.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third term in power after his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP, won a staggering 303 seats in the 2019 election. Recent findings from the “Mood of the Nation Poll” by India Today suggest that voters continue to see Modi as a popular leader (though such polls often have a mixed record for accuracy). To take on the BJP, India’s main opposition Congress party has formed a coalition bloc with more than two

dozen other opposition parties called the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or INDIA.

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India's elections are the largest democratic exercise in the world, with nearly 970 million registered voters—of which 470 million are women—turning out to cast a ballot. This year, 18 million first-time voters will also be eligible to cast a vote.

Read More: *Why India's Supreme Court Eliminated Anonymous Political Donations*

The voter turnout in India's elections is historically high—the last election held in 2019 drew a 67% turnout, according to the Election Commission, or ECI. (In comparison, the U.S. saw a 66% voter turnout in the 2022 presidential election.) India is also known for having the world's most expensive election, with political parties spending more than $7 billion in 2019, compared to $6.5 billion spent in the U.S. during the 2016 election. That number is only expected to double in this year's elections.

Under the country's parliamentary system, the party that wins the majority of the 543 seats in the more powerful Lok Sabha, or the lower house of Parliament, forms a government and appoints its candidate as prime minister.

What is the schedule for the Indian election?

India holds its elections in sequential phases by regions carefully staggered by the ECI. The dates of polling announced by ECI across the seven phases will be April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25, and June 1. In some states like Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, voting will take place on all seven days; in others, like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, it will only take place on one day.

This election will be the second longest polling exercise in India's electoral history, after the country's first-ever election, which was held over a five-month period between September 1951 and February 1952.

Electoral rules also mandate that a polling station must be within 1.2 miles of every home, and nearly every vote is cast electronically. In 2019, 1.74 million electronic voting machines were used across more than 1 million polling stations. Nearly 15 million polling officials and security personnel will be tasked with manning polling stations during balloting. To reach every voter, they travel to all parts of the country, including by trekking through glaciers in the Himalayas or wading through deep forested valleys in remote states like Arunachal Pradesh.

Why does India's election take so long?

The regional phases of India's elections are determined based on how populated—as well as how contentious—the vote might be in each state. For example, the most densely populated state of Uttar Pradesh, which is also notorious for political intimidation and electoral influence, is broken up into seven phases.

The roving group of electoral and security personnel typically need time to get from one part of the country to another, especially in remote regions, to publicize and administer the vote, as well as protect the ballot boxes from getting stuffed or stolen. Sometimes, the ECI takes public holidays and religious festivals into account when extending the polling period.

All of the votes are then counted and announced on a single day, which means that no one—including the Prime Minister—knows who won any given seat until the results are announced.

Since India's independence in 1947, the Indian Election Commission has determined that these elaborate structures allow

for the slow and steady pace necessary to oversee free and fair elections in a country of nearly 1.4 billion people. But internal rifts, as well as criticism from opposition parties about insufficient action taken over the violation of rules, has seen the official electoral watchdog lose its storied reputation in recent years.

The election is coming at a time when India is grappling with the challenge of ensuring voter participation, free speech, and electoral independence while authoritarianism is on the rise. During Modi's second term, Freedom House downgraded India's democracy rating from "free" to "partly free" because of the government's discriminatory policies against Muslims, as well as its targeting of critics and the media.

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A Man Has Received the First Pig-Kidney Transplant

Alice Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics, and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club, and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of *The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*.

The first reported person in the world has received a genetically modified pig kidney. A transplant surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital successfully performed the groundbreaking, four-hour procedure on Richard Slayman, a 62-year-old manager at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, on March 16. His doctors report he is doing well and expect him to leave the hospital soon.

The surgery was the culmination of years of work transplanting kidneys from a specially bred group of pigs—which had been genetically modified to more closely resemble those of humans—into primates. Encouraged by those results, the team at Mass General Brigham—the health system to which the hospital belongs—was confident it was time to test the pig organs in the first patient.

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Slayman had received a human kidney transplant five years ago, but like so many people with kidney disease, the organ began to fail and he continued to need dialysis. Even those frequent efforts to replenish his kidney function weren't enough, however, and his health progressively worsened. "At one point, he literally said, I just cannot go on like this," said Dr. Winfred Williams, Slayman's physician and associate chair of nephrology at Massachusetts General Hospital, during a March 21 briefing.

Dr. Tatsuo Kawai, director of the Massachusetts General Hospital's Legorreta Center for Clinical Transplant Tolerance, was Slayman's kidney transplant surgeon five years ago, and he also performed the pig-kidney surgery. While more than a dozen people in the operating room watched, Kawai carefully connected the pig kidney to Slayman's circulatory system—not an easy task, given the patient's history of diabetes and hypertension, which had weakened his blood vessels. "The size of the pig kidney was exactly the same as the human kidney," Kawai said during the briefing. "Upon restoration of blood flow into the kidney, the kidney pinked up immediately and started to make urine. When we saw the first urine output, everyone in the operating room burst into applause. It was truly the most beautiful kidney I have ever seen."

The pig donor

The kidney came from a special group of pigs bred to produce human-like kidneys. eGenesis, a biotech company that has been studying ways to make animal tissues as human as possible, worked closely with the research team at Mass General Brigham to come up with the right genetic animal donors that would make their organs safe enough to transplant into people, and effective enough to take over their kidney function.

Several genetic innovations over the past few decades made such a feat possible. The pigs' cells were treated with the gene-editing technology CRISPR, which allows scientists to make very precise genetic changes in cells. These CRISPR-ed cells were then used to create pig clones so the pigs would have identical and consistent genetic changes. Their kidneys were then transplanted first into primates, and finally into Slayman.

All told, the pig kidneys contained 69 genetic changes in three major categories. The scientists knocked out or eliminated three pig genes that trigger immediate rejection by the human immune system, added seven human genes to make the pig tissue appear more human to the immune cells, and inactivated viral genes in pig cells that could cause infections. They also used a unique cocktail of antibody treatments to further dampen the immune reaction and give the transplanted kidney the best chance of surviving in the patient.

Next steps

eGenesis is working on other pig organs as well. In January, the company partnered with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania to transplant a genetically modified pig liver into a brain-dead patient. That work, along with Slayman's experience, is making a strong case for the role of pig organs in addressing the shortage of organs for thousands of patients on waiting lists. More

than 100,000 people are placed on the kidney transplant waiting list in the U.S. each year, while only 20,000 kidneys are available.

The Mass General Brigham team hopes to perform more of these transplants to get a better idea of how long the pig kidneys can function and whether they can meaningfully extend the length and quality of patients' lives. For now, says Williams, patients on the waiting list or dialysis could potentially benefit from receiving a pig kidney temporarily as they wait for a human one. Even such bridging can be critical for patients like Slayman; while he had been on dialysis, he experienced clotting issues that compromised the blood flow required to make it effective and required dozens of surgeries to improve his circulation. Pig kidneys could become a realistic option for people like him for whom dialysis becomes too challenging.

The long-term hope is that pig kidneys may even become a substitute for human organs if they prove up to the task. "We never anticipated dialysis would become a lifelong solution for kidney failure," said Dr. Leonardo Riella, medial director of kidney transplantation at Mass General Brigham and lead investigator of the trial. "Yet this is the stark reality for over 600,000 patients in the U.S.; dialysis has sadly become their last resort for managing their disease. Now picture a different narrative, one where healthy kidneys are readily available for transplantation. Today we are offering a glimmer of hope that may one day be possible for many more patients."

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Kate Middleton Reveals She Was Diagnosed With Cancer

Solcyré (Sol) Burga is a general assignment reporter at TIME. She covers U.S. news with a focus on student loans and LGBTQ+ issues.

Simmone Shah is a reporter at TIME. She covers international and tech news.

Kate Middleton announced on Friday that she was diagnosed with cancer following a planned abdominal surgery earlier this year and is undergoing what she called “preventative” chemotherapy.

In a video message released by Kensington Palace, the Princess of Wales thanked the public for their messages of support during her recovery from surgery, sharing that while doctors thought her condition, which required her to get abdominal surgery, was non-cancerous, “tests after the operation found cancer had been present.” Kate said she is still in the early stages of treatment. “I am well and getting stronger every day,” she said.

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A Kensington Palace spokesperson said that Kate began treatment in late February, but added that they will not be sharing more information about her medical condition.

Read More: *An Updated Timeline of Recent Events Involving Kate Middleton and the Royal Family*

Kate said that the news had come as a “huge shock” and that she and Prince William had been doing their best to process and manage the news privately.

The announcement comes amid Kate’s father-in-law, King Charles III, undergoing treatment for an undisclosed type of cancer. Per a statement released by Buckingham Palace on Feb. 5, His Majesty “has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties” as he maintains a “schedule of regular treatments.” On Thursday, Queen Camilla said Charles is “doing very well” as she met well-wishers during a royal visit to Belfast.

King Charles is “proud of Catherine for her courage in speaking as she did,” saying that their time in the hospital together has allowed him to remain “in the closest contact with his beloved daughter-in-law throughout the past weeks,” according to a Buckingham Palace spokesperson.

> A message from Catherine, The Princess of Wales
> pic.twitter.com/5LQT1qGarK
>
> — The Prince and Princess of Wales (@KensingtonRoyal)
> March 22, 2024

In the video of her announcement, Kate said that she stayed silent on the matter in part to have an opportunity to privately explain her diagnosis to her three children. “It has taken time for me to recover

from major surgery in order to start my treatment," she said. "But most importantly it has taken us time to explain everything to George, Charlotte, and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them and to reassure them that I am going to be O.K."

Read More: *Archbishop of Canterbury Issues Warning as Kate Middleton Conspiracy Theories Escalate*

Kensington Palace announced on Jan. 17 that the Princess underwent a "planned abdominal surgery" and would likely not participate in any public engagements until after Easter, on March 31. Kate was last seen publicly on Christmas Day, as she attended church services with her family.

But in the weeks following the announcement, speculation swirled in the British press and online, as the public wondered what was behind such a prolonged absence from royal duties.

On March 10, Kate posted a photo on social media to commemorate U.K. Mother's Day, marking the first official photo shared of her since her January surgery. But the photo was quickly pulled from circulation after news wire agencies determined that it had been manipulated.

Kensington Palace's social media accounts later released a statement attributed to Kate in which she admitted to editing the photo and apologized "for any confusion" the photograph caused.

Most recently, after the British tabloid The *Sun* released a video it claimed showed Prince William and Princess Kate out shopping on Saturday, March 16, social media users quickly expressed disbelief that it was the future queen in the video.

Read More: *The Royal Family Has a Trust Problem*

In her video message released Friday, Kate made an appeal for continued privacy. “We hope that you’ll understand that as a family we now need some time, space, and privacy while I complete my treatment,” she said. “My work has always brought me a deep sense of joy, and I look forward to being back when I am able. But for now, I must focus on making a full recovery.”

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U.S. Falls Out of Top 20 Happiest Countries for the First Time Ever

Solcyré (Sol) Burga is a general assignment reporter at TIME. She covers U.S. news with a focus on student loans and LGBTQ+ issues.

For the first time in the World Happiness Report's dozen-year history, the U.S. did not rank in the top 20 of the world's happiest countries.

Out of the more than 140 nations surveyed, the U.S. landed in 23rd place, compared to 15th place in 2023. While the U.S. is still in the top 10 happiest countries for those 60 years old and above, its overall ranking fell due to a significant decline in the reported well-being of Americans under 30.

Finland ranked at the top of the list for the seventh year in a row. Lithuania is the happiest country in the world if you only look at those under the age of 30, while Denmark is the happiest country for people who are 60 and older.

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This was the first year the report, released March 20 to mark the UN’s International Day of Happiness, analyzed rates of happiness by age group. “We found some pretty striking results,” said John F. Helliwell, professor at the Vancouver School of Economics and founding editor of the World Happiness Report. “There is a great variety among countries in the relative happiness of the younger, older, and in-between populations. Hence the global happiness rankings are quite different for the young and the old, to an extent that has changed a lot over the last dozen years.”

The findings were developed through a partnership between Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the World Happiness Report’s editorial board, and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Countries are ranked based on a “three-year average of each population’s average assessment of their quality of life,” the press release said.

The most recent report relies on data that was collected after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with survey respondents answering questions from 2021-2023.

According to the report, people born before 1965 are, on average, happier than people born after 1980. Millennials report drops in their life satisfaction with every year they grow older, while boomers’ happiness increases the older they get.

Globally, people between the ages of 15 and 24 typically report greater life satisfaction than older adults. But the 2024 report finds that the gap is shrinking in Europe, and has reversed in North America. The data contrasts with reports of life satisfaction between 2006 and 2010, when the younger generation in North America were just as happy as older folks.

“Social connections could be one factor explaining the generational happiness differences,” says Ilana Ron Levey, Gallup Managing Director. “Different generations have different levels of social connections and we know social support and loneliness affect happiness. The quality of interpersonal relationships may affect the young and the old differently.”

In Central and Eastern Europe, Ron Levey notes, younger people tended to report higher levels of happiness than older people, in part because of social connection. But the data differs elsewhere in the world, including in the U.S. Last May, the U.S. Surgeon General brought attention to the public health crisis of loneliness and isolation, calling it an epidemic. A previous report by the American Psychological Association found that Gen Z adults reported higher stress levels than older generations, with health and finances cited as top concerns.

Across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, the wellbeing of 15-to-24-year-olds has also fallen since 2019.

“Piecing together the available data on the wellbeing of children and adolescents around the world, we documented disconcerting drops especially in North America and Western Europe,” said Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, the director of Oxford’s Wellbeing Research Centre and an editor of the report. “To think that, in some parts of the world, children are already experiencing the equivalent of a mid-life crisis demands immediate policy action.”

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The Woman Fighting to Free Her Husband—and All Political Prisoners—in Russia

Yasmeen Serhan is a staff writer at TIME, based in the London Bureau. She covers foreign affairs with an emphasis on the future of democracies and rising authoritarianism around the world.

For many Russians, March 1 was a day of mourning. The memorial service for Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who perished weeks earlier in a remote Arctic penal colony, was being held in a small church on the outskirts of Moscow. Despite the heavy police presence and in defiance of the Russian government's warnings against unauthorized gatherings, tens of thousands of people turned out for the funeral, with many chanting "Putin is a killer!" and "No to war!" It was the largest protest Russia had seen since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago—a fitting tribute for a man best known for his ability to draw Russians onto the streets to demonstrate against Russian President Vladimir Putin's rule. Several of those people have since faced arrest.

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Thousands of miles away, in a bright conference room overlooking London's Finsbury Square, Evgenia Kara-Murza is appalled. "It's so grotesque, so Kafkaesque," she tells TIME of the Kremlin's handling of Navalny's funeral and the crackdown on those who have tried to pay their respects. In an alternate universe, perhaps she would have been among them. The service, after all, was being held just a stone's throw from her parents' home in Moscow. Like the scores of people lining up around the church that day, she saw Navalny as a key leader in the fight for a free and democratic Russia—or, as he called it, "the beautiful Russia of the future." But sitting here in London, Evgenia doesn't have time to mourn. Later this afternoon, she will meet British Foreign Secretary David Cameron about another enemy of the Kremlin: Her husband, the prominent Russian opposition politician and journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza, who has been languishing in a Siberian penal colony since 2022.

With Navalny dead, Vladimir is now Russia's most high-profile political prisoner—and perhaps its most vulnerable too. Back-to-back assassination attempts have deteriorated his health, and many now fear that if Navalny could be killed (the Kremlin claims the 47-year-old died of natural causes; his family and most other observers say the responsibility for his death lies squarely with Putin), Vladimir could be next.

Though Evgenia's meeting with Cameron was scheduled weeks in advance, Navalny's death has injected greater urgency into her appeals for the U.K. and other countries to take quicker and more proactive steps to free political prisoners like her husband—efforts that, at least in Britain, have been derided by both the families of those detained and British lawmaker alike as woefully inadequate. Just days after news of Navalny's death broke, a U.K. Foreign Office minister ruled out the possibility of a prisoner swap to secure the release of Vladimir, a dual Russian-British national. But if there's any lessons to be taken from Navalny's death, it's that

“just saying that we do not engage is not acceptable anymore,” Evgenia says. “We see that whether governments engage or not, the number of hostages and political prisoners is on the rise.”

More specifically, Evgenia wants the U.K. government to establish a dedicated office to deal with its arbitrarily detained citizens abroad akin to the U.S.’s Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs. She also wants Western countries to automatically deploy punitive measures laid out in the Global Magnitsky Act, a sanctions regime adopted by the U.S. and other countries to target human rights violators and corrupt actors. Vladimir was one of the key campaigners behind the legislation, which was adopted by the U.S. in 2012. Still, Evgenia says she had to campaign for months for the U.S. to sanction those involved in his detention. “Such instruments should be used automatically,” she says, snapping her fingers, “without anyone having to campaign for it for months and years.”

Read More: *The Fight to Free Evan Gershkovich*

As Russia prepares to hold its presidential election this week, Putin is all but guaranteed to secure an absolute victory. With the electoral system heavily skewed in his favor and all significant opponents disqualified, jailed, or dead, the vote itself is almost entirely pro forma. Still, the Russian opposition lives on—not just

in would-be leaders behind bars such as Vladimir, but in the spouses like Evgenia who take up their advocacy when they're no longer able to do it themselves.

"She basically stepped into his shoes and took over from his work as a member of the Russian opposition, speaking not just about his situation, but about the situation of other political prisoners," Bill Browder, a British American anti-corruption campaigner and close friend of the Kara-Murza family, tells TIME. "She feels it's her duty to be the best possible representative of him when he's unable to represent himself."

When TIME first sat down with Evgenia last year, on the sidelines of the 15th Annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, she stressed that unlike many of the other attendees, she was no politician. "I never wanted to be a public figure," she said at the time. "I never wanted to be a public speaker." Yet there she was, delivering speeches and giving interviews about the plight of political prisoners, the need for Magnitsky sanctions, and the importance of supporting Ukraine against Russia's ongoing invasion. Since taking up the mantle of her husband's activism following his arrest in Moscow in April 2022 for criticizing the war in Ukraine, she spends most of her days traveling the world to meet with foreign dignitaries, testify before committees, accept awards, and talk to journalists—all in a bid to bring her husband, and the scores of other political prisoners in Russia, home.

Though being away from her family isn’t easy, Evgenia is used to a nomadic lifestyle. While she was born on the Kuril Islands in Russia’s far east, her father’s coast guard career took her family all over the Soviet Union during her childhood, from Sevastopol to St. Petersburg to Tallinn in modern-day Estonia. The frequent travel “made me a bit of a cosmopolitan,” she says. “I can build my nest anywhere—I just need the people I love around me, and I build my nest around the people I love.”

Before long, her family decided to settle in Moscow (young Evgenia needed stability, her mother argued), where at the age of 11 she would meet Vladimir Kara-Murza, one of her classmates. Though they would ultimately go down different paths—at 14, Vladimir moved with his mother to Britain, where he remained until he graduated from Cambridge University; Evgenia finished her schooling in Moscow, where she pursued a degree at Moscow State Linguistic University—they reconnected in their 20s and have been together ever since.

Evgenia says she always supported her husband’s pro-democracy work, even as the space for him to do it within Russia began to shrink. In 2003, Vladimir stood in Russia’s parliamentary elections, becoming not just the youngest candidate, but the only one to be

backed by two opposition parties, the Union of Right Forces and the social-liberal Yabloko. This on its own was a feat: The Russian opposition has long been ridden with division. “He was this rare case when the Russian opposition actually came together and agreed on something,” Evgenia says. “They agreed on Vladimir.” But the 2003 elections, while ostensibly free, were far from fair. Evegenia says that while Vladimir was permitted to participate in televised debates, his mic was turned off whenever he spoke. And while he was permitted to put up billboards promoting his candidacy, she says that the lights illuminating them after nightfall—which, during the Russian winter, was as early as 4 p.m.—were shut off. In the end, Vladimir came in second to a candidate from the ruling United Russia party.

“He was feeling very down,” says Evgenia, who at the time was working as a translator and interpreter for a French firm seeking to help Russia implement key judicial and civil service reforms. But those reforms never materialized, and a year later Putin canceled gubernatorial elections. It was around that time that the independent Russian broadcaster RTVI offered Vladimir the job of Washington bureau chief, based in Washington, D.C. “We thought it would be for a year or two, just to look around,” Evgenia says. That year turned into a decade, during which time the political situation in Russia continued to deteriorate. “The kids were born and it became apparent that if Vladimir were to continue with his work as he saw fit, the kids needed to be in a safe place,” she says. “So I mostly stayed with the kids working from home and Vladimir traveled the world, trying to bring change, to open the world’s eyes to the nature of Vladimir Putin’s regime.”

But it wouldn’t be long before Vladimir faced the consequences of his activism. In May 2015, years after the assassination of Sergei Magnitsky (the namesake of the Magnitsky Act who uncovered $230 million in Russian state corruption) and two months after the assassination of Boris Nemtsov (the liberal Russian politician and mentor of Vladimir), he was poisoned for the first time. The second would come two years later. In both cases, he fell into a coma resulting from what doctors described as “severe intoxication with an unknown substance.” Both times, Evgenia nursed him back to health, helping him relearn how to walk, to talk, and even how to eat.

“I believe this is what marriage is about,” Evgenia told TIME in Geneva. “Whenever Vladimir was in a difficult situation, I was there for him. And whenever I fell apart, he was always there for me, to pick up the pieces and put them together. … You share everything and you’re there for each other. That’s the only way to me.”

As much as Evgenia eschews the label of politician (as of 2022, her official title is advocacy director of the Free Russia Foundation, a nonprofit international organization supporting civil society and

democratic development in Russia), her friends are the first to acknowledge that necessity has forced her to become one—and a good one, at that.

“I’ve worked on a lot of different advocacy over the last 15 years, and I’ve never seen somebody, including Vladimir, who’s as effective as her at convincing people to take action,” Browder says, noting that despite her stated desire to retire from politics once Vladimir is released, “Given what she’s done and what she’s accomplished and how she’s conducted herself, I think the people of Russia will need her as much as they need Vladimir in the future.”

Evgenia isn’t the only spouse who has come to politics in this way. In the aftermath of Navalny’s death, his wife Yulia Navalnaya has vowed to take up his fight. (Vladimir Ashurkov, the executive director of Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, told journalists on Feb. 28 that “the exact details of her new public rule will emerge over time as the situation is very fresh and painful.”) Sviatlana Tsikhanousakaya, the leader of Belarus’s exiled opposition, rose to prominence in 2020 when she challenged Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko for the country’s presidency in the place of her husband, the jailed presidential candidate and pro-democracy activist Sergei Tsikhanouski. (A

longtime Putin crony, Lukashenko overcame the democratic mobilization against his rule with Kremlin support.)

All three women represent an increasingly pronounced feminine face of anti-Kremlin activism—one that has emerged within a political culture where politicians' wives are rarely seen, much less heard. The circumstances notwithstanding, Evgenia welcomes this change, noting that women stand to inject more values back into politics. But she also stresses that there are others, including ethnic minorities and members of the LGBTQ community, who are changing the face of the pro-democracy and anti-war movements in Russia. "It's becoming so diverse, and it's interesting that it's happening under these impossible circumstances," she says. "To me, this is a very important change because I believe that actual sustainable change should come from the bottom up, from the grassroots movement up, from people realizing their strength, from people realizing that they're a force to be reckoned with, from people finding their voices."

Strongmen leaders have a habit of underestimating women. Lukashenko notably dismissed the political threat posed by Tsikhanouskaya on the basis that women are simply too fragile for the presidency. If Putin views Evgenia with similar apathy, he hasn't made it known. "In Russia, there is a very sexist culture and because of that I think that they underestimate women, and they certainly underestimate her," Browder says. "The pressure she's under is unimaginable. To hold it all together and to successfully carry on as she's done is a feat of unbelievable heroism and stoicism."

Indeed, if Evgenia has any fears for her own safety or that of her husband or family, she doesn't show it. Throughout our conversation, she speaks with a steely, cool-headed resolve—the kind that Browder attributes both to the justness of her cause and to her being "just a really decent human being." It's perhaps because that cause is bigger than just her husband and her family that Evgenia never comes across as just a worried spouse. The last thing she wants is pity. "I *hate* condolences and expressions of sympathy because that's not what I need," she says. "I'm a strong girl. I can push forward. I need action."

Still, there are times during our conversation where the toll of Vladimir's imprisonment creeps to the surface. "I'm very bad with dates," she confesses at one point. "There's a cliché that men always forget dates, anniversaries, all of that. I'm this person in the family. Vladimir always keeps track, he always remembers everyone's birthday, every year, every little thing. I cannot remember anything! If not for him, I'd be lost completely."

When asked where she gets her strength, Evgenia quotes Eleanor Roosevelt: "A woman is like a tea bag," the former First Lady said. "You never know how strong she is until she's in hot water." Next month will mark two years since Vladimir's arrest, and two years

since Evgenia was plunged into her current role. The longer she's in it, the stronger she seems to get. And the angrier, too.

"That rage that I feel because this murderous government has been trying to destroy my family for so many years, is currently trying to destroy the neighboring country and all chances for a normal future for our country—that rage, you know," she says, before letting out a deep exhale. "A woman is like a tea bag."

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A 5-Minute Quiz Revealed Olivia Munn’s Breast Cancer Risk. You Can Take It Too

Alice Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics, and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club, and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of *The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*.

Olivia Munn recently revealed in an Instagram post that a free, easy tool saved her life. Her ob-gyn used a questionnaire designed to calculate a person's risk of breast cancer, which revealed Munn had an increased chance of developing the disease. That led to further tests and an early diagnosis of Luminal B cancer in both breasts and quick treatment.

The Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool, which her doctor used, isn't new. It doesn't involve any high-tech gadgets, doesn't require a doctor, and doesn't even cost anything. Experts say more women should know about it and complete it after they turn 35. Here's what to know.

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What is the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool?

Released in 1989 by the National Cancer Institute, the online questionnaire takes less than five minutes to complete and pretty accurately predicts a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. "This calculator is a great first step that women can do on their own and discuss the results with their primary care doctor or gynecologist," says Dr. Jennifer Litton, professor of breast medical oncology at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

It relies on a model built from many aspects of women's health data including their age, their race and ethnicity, their family history of breast cancer, when they began their periods, and, if they have children, how old they were when they had their first one. The model matches these and other features with breast-cancer outcomes of women with similar characteristics and provides two risk assessments: a woman's five-year risk of developing breast cancer, and her lifetime risk of the disease.

Read More: *The Race to Make a Breast Cancer Vaccine*

The questionnaire—also known as the Gail Model after its developer Dr. Mitchell Gail at the National Cancer Institute—is about 98% accurate in predicting risk of breast cancer in most women. It's less accurate in women of color, who were less represented in the original model's database, but the model is constantly updated and increasingly includes more information on a more diverse group of people. Overall, scores of 1.7% or above for five-year risk, and 20% or above for lifetime risk, indicate a higher risk that women should discuss with their doctors.

Who should take it?

Any woman between age 35 and 74 can take it to learn her risk, and about half a million women use it annually, according to the

National Cancer Institute. It's especially helpful for those who have a family history of breast cancer or for people who don't know their genetic risk for the disease or don't have major genes for breast cancer such as BRCA1 or BRCA2—which was the case with Munn. For women who fall into these categories, the tool can detect whether there are other factors that increase their risk.

"The vast majority of breast cancers aren't related to BRCA mutations," Litton says. "There are other environmental factors and lesser genes that, together with a perfect storm of other exposures, could lead to breast cancer. Breast cancer is the endpoint and there are millions of different ways to get there."

Read More: The Women Most Likely to Die of Breast Cancer Get the Least Attention

The tool was built on data from the Breast Cancer Demonstration Project, a screening study conducted in the 1970s involving 280,000 white women, and cancer data from the NCI Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results Program (SEER). Additional data, including from Black women, were added from the Women's Contraceptive and Reproductive Experiences Study collected in the 1990s, and for Asian women from the Asian American Breast Cancer Study conducted in the 1980s, along with updated cancer incidence rates. Breast cancer data involving Hispanic women came from the San Francisco Bay Area Breast Cancer Study that collected data from 1995 to 2004.

People who want to learn more about their breast-cancer risk can also try another free online risk calculator called the Tyrer-Cuzick model, which relies on more recent data and provides similar predictions. At Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC), doctors often use both and go with the higher score to advise women. "We're getting better and better at risk assessment," says Dr. Larry Norton, medical director of the Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center at MSKCC.

Where do mammograms fit in?

These questionnaires are not a substitute for regular mammograms, which women should start at age 40. But using them in addition to mammograms helps doctors to better advise women about the best ways of reducing their risk and ultimately helping them to avoid the more aggressive forms of the disease that are harder to treat, Norton says. “The object of these scores is to estimate a healthy woman’s risk of developing disease,” he says. “If that leads to earlier diagnosis, then that has [treatment] implications. Dealing with a small cancer”—one that doesn’t involve the lymph nodes—”is much simpler than dealing with a larger cancer that involves multiple lymph nodes.”

Read More: *The Unique Hell of Getting Cancer as a Young Adult*

Depending on what the scores reveal, doctors could make a number of changes, such as adding an MRI to the regular mammogram to enhance monitoring for potential tumors, or adding anti-estrogen medications to further lower a woman’s risk. In addition, “if they see higher risk, that might lead to a conversation that might include things like genetic counseling or genetic testing,” says Litton. Such testing could reveal additional genetic factors, other than BRCA, that might be contributing to a higher risk of breast cancer. Depending on which genes are involved, certain targeted therapies could lower the chances that those mutations could lead to advanced breast cancer.

Future innovations

Other risk-assessment tools are on the horizon. Machine-learning models are further refining the information gleaned from mammograms, and some are getting sophisticated enough to predict which currently normal scans show signs of potentially turning into malignant tissue in the future.

Even after a woman is diagnosed, tests such as OncotypeDx can predict whether she will benefit from adding chemotherapy, or whether her chances of remission are just as good using only anti-estrogen therapy. “It’s a very useful tool for helping some women avoid chemotherapy that they just don’t need,” says Litton.

But none of these tools are useful if women, and their doctors, don’t take advantage of them. “Roughly half of people are not getting any screening [with mammograms] at all,” says Norton. “The first step is to get what we currently have available to the general population. And then the ability to do risk-adjusted screening will further improve prognosis for patients.”

“Knowledge is power, he adds. “The more you know about yourself, and the more you engage with medical professionals, the better you can get answers that are appropriate for you.”

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How Animals and Nature React to an Eclipse

Jeffrey Kluger is an editor at large at TIME. He covers space, climate, and science. He is the author of 12 books, including *Apollo 13*, which served as the basis for the 1995 film, and was nominated for an Emmy Award for TIME's series A Year in Space.

Of all of the animals worth observing during a total solar eclipse, some of the most intriguing are humans. They stop what they're doing; they stare skyward; they lower their voices to a hush. Some may gather their young close. Some may even shed tears. If you've ever witnessed a solar eclipse yourself, none of this comes as a surprise; indeed, you've surely exhibited some of these behaviors too. Other species of animals display other kinds of behavioral changes, as the weather and lighting and nature itself seem to turn on their axes. So what should you expect to experience on April 8, as a total eclipse crosses the U.S. from the southwestern edge of Texas to the northern tip of New England?

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Some of the greatest changes will occur far above us, in the ionosphere, the band of atmosphere that ranges from an altitude of 60 to 300 km (37 to 190 mi.). Defined by the abundant presence of electrically charged particles, or ions, the ionosphere is denser during the day, turbocharged by incoming radiation from the sun.

As NASA explains, that means that during an eclipse, the overall concentration of ions in the ionosphere falls. This reduction can lead to a cooling of the upper atmosphere, which in turn can cause local depletions known as "ionospheric holes." That has an impact on populations on the ground as those cavities may disrupt the transmission of radio signals and lead to anomalies in GPS navigation systems. As researchers at Embry-Riddle University and Clemson University determined after the 2017 total eclipse, however, in most cases the GPS disruption is transitory and too mild for users to notice.

Read More: *How Cities Around the U.S. Are Celebrating the Eclipse*

[video id=MOMY0Lpx]

Other natural changes are more universally detectable, not least the steady dimming of sunlight. The arc of totality across North America measures just 185-km (115 mi.) wide. In this band, a sort of deep dusk descends, with a much subtler darkening the farther you move from that central point. In 2017, a team from TIME traveled to Casper, Wyo. to record and report that year's eclipse from a hillside overlooking the bowl of the city. Streetlights and headlights flicked on as the sunlight rapidly retreated.

If you're outside during totality, it may pay to have a sweater or a jacket with you. Temperatures can drop by anywhere from 2.8°C to 8.4°C (5°F to 15° F) as the sunlight retreats, according to the Weather Channel. Falling temperatures near the earth's surface also may cause what's known as an "eclipse wind," or a slowing of the

winds. That's the result of low-level air becoming cooler than the higher level air above it—what's known as a temperature inversion—which makes it harder for that more-elevated atmosphere to mix with the air closer to the ground, eliminating the temperature and density differences that lead to breezes and gusts. As totality ends, the winds pick back up.

Another effect falling temperatures may have will be the appearance of a fleeting thunderstorm, as cooler air closer to the ground pushes warmer more humid air upward, where moisture then condenses and rains out. The process is similar to the way ocean breezes can cause brief storms in the summer.

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All of this affects non-human animals in multiple ways. Insects, bats, and birds that feed at night emerge as the sky darkens, sometimes in sufficient numbers to be detectable on radar, says the Weather Channel. Birdsong tends to grow quieter as darkness descends, rising back up as the light reappears. Crows, gulls, and sparrows that are in flight have been observed alighting on trees or on the ground and silencing any chirps, calls, or caws. Dogs may cower or exhibit other fearful behavior. Bees may return to their hives and domestic horses and cows may move to their stables, reports Liz Aguilar, a PhD candidate in biology in the University of Indiana's evolution, ecology, and behavior program. In wild herds or in distant paddocks away from their barns, horses may also cluster and begin shaking their heads and tails—though it's not entirely clear why they engage in these movements. Head-shaking and tail-swishing are far more common as an agitated response to flies, or to resistance to or discomfort from being ridden. So-called "photic head-shaking" actually occurs when horses are exposed to bright sunlight—precisely the opposite to what happens during an eclipse.

In a 2020 paper in the journal *Animals*, researchers observed both domesticated and zoo animals and recorded a range of eclipse-related behaviors. The cowering and other expressions of anxiety seen in dogs were also observed in baboons, gorillas, giraffes, and flamingos, as well as in parrots and other species of lorikeets. Tortoises, Komodo dragons, and other forms of reptiles, which already may be lying largely unmoving in the sun, grow more stationary still.

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Perhaps most striking though, was the behavior of a captive troop of chimpanzees at the Yerkes Primate Research Center on the campus of Emory University in Georgia, during an annular eclipse on May 30, 1984. As researchers reported in the *American Journal of Primatology*, the animals moved to the highest point of a climbing structure in their enclosure and turned their faces upward in the direction of the sun and the moon. One juvenile gestured toward the slowly vanishing sun. The chimps remained that way until the skies began to brighten, when they descended from the structure. No one can ever say with certainty how they were experiencing what they were seeing—whether they felt their own form of curiosity or wonder or even reverence. Clearly, though, they were captivated by it all. It is a reaction that is very much of a piece with what humans feel—one we may share with untold numbers of other species as the great solar sky show unfolds.

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How to Respond to an Insult, According to Therapists

Angela Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.

Have you ever been stunned into silence by an insult—only to think of the perfect witty comeback two hours too late?

Of course you have, and there's a physiological reason why. "When someone says something offensive or harmful that hurts us or hurts a member of a community that's really important to us, our nervous system can get activated," says Kerry McBroome, a psychologist in Brooklyn. "The parts of the brain that are responsible for coming up with clever or witty things to say are just not online—they're nervous and sensing a threat."

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That's why planning ahead is essential. "There's something really life-affirming about having something to say ready to go in your

back pocket," McBroome says. Pulling off a sharp response can boost your confidence and "be such a source of pride."

We asked therapists to share their favorite comebacks that either invite additional dialogue or shut down the conversation.

"Hey, flag on the play."

When Ajita Robinson, a therapist in Bethesda, Md., is taken aback or confused by the words that just rolled out of someone's mouth, she pulls out a sports term: "Hey, flag on the play." In football, a flag indicates that an official believes a player committed a penalty, like pass interference or roughing the kicker. By flagging what someone just said, Robinson is making it clear that their words were out of bounds or require further clarification. "Folks usually respond pretty well, like, 'What are you noticing?'" she says.

One of Robinson's clients, for example, recently went on a date with a man she thought was too sexually suggestive. The woman said, "Hey, flag on the play," and he understood that he'd crossed a line. "I thought that was pretty cool, because she used it as a way to express that this was something she was uncomfortable with," Robinson says. "It's lighthearted, but sends a signal that the comment or interaction crossed a boundary."

"Thanks, but I'm not accepting unsolicited feedback."

There's a sub-zero chance that you want to hear your great-uncle's opinions on your pants size, reproductive choices, or dating life. The odds are much greater that he'll express them anyway. In such cases, Robinson suggests replying: "Thanks, but I'm not accepting unsolicited feedback on [fill in the blank]."

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“People are surprised to hear someone push back,” she says. “It reminds them that even though they might be well-intentioned, it’s still unsolicited. It stops it in its tracks.” Plus, she adds, the response isn’t disrespectful—so you can keep the peace while sticking up for yourself.

“Are you okay?”

These three simple words pack a punch, says Melanie Williams, a psychotherapist in Baltimore. “There’s so much packed in this short comeback,” she says. Imagine that a colleague just made a sexist remark. If you ask them if they’re okay, they might look at you strangely and reply in the affirmative. Then, Williams notes, you can follow-up with a quick observation: “Just checking, because that was completely inappropriate.”

Asking someone if they’re okay immediately lets them know that the spotlight is on them, rather than on whomever or whatever they were talking about, she points out; plus, it signals that what they said was problematic and opens the door to self-reflection.

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“Could you repeat that? I don’t think I heard you correctly.”

This line is particularly effective when you’re in a group of people, or when someone mumbles something under their breath, says Amanda Stemen, a Los Angeles-based therapist who teaches mindful communication skills. “A lot of times when people say something rude, it’s really impulsive, and they’re not thinking about whether it’s the wisest thing they can say in that situation.” By asking them to repeat themself—even if you had no trouble

hearing them—you're extending an opportunity to rethink and rephrase what they said. "Often, they'll realize there are a bunch of people around, and they don't want to say it louder, because the shame is going to kick in," Stemen says. "It deescalates the situation."

"What a wild thing to say out loud."

McBroome's favorite comeback is useful when someone says something prejudiced or outright bigoted. She smiles and brightly responds: "Wow, what a wild thing to say out loud."

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"They don't see it coming, and by throwing them off their rhythm or startling them, they're able to question something they previously hadn't questioned," she says. She's found that people often realize they need to examine their bias and reflect on why something they thought was acceptable to say didn't go over well.

"What was your intention with that comment?"

This comeback is both effective and therapeutic, says Jessica Good, a therapist in St. Louis. She suggests using it with people who are trying to insult someone else: critical or judgmental family members, toxic coworkers, frenemies. "It makes them say the quiet part out loud," she says. At best, someone might pause and reflect on their statement. Or they could deny any ill-intent—in which case they'll still learn that they can't get away with such behavior, because you'll call them out on it. Either way, Good says, it will curb passive-aggressive or demeaning comments. She recommends delivering the line in a calm voice with a curious tone, while making direct eye contact that signals your confidence.

“I know you’re likely threatened by an educated woman, but…”

Kaytee Gillis, a psychotherapist in Lansing, Mich., used this retort during a holiday gathering when a male relative tried to explain a certain mental-health diagnosis to her, despite the fact that she had far more expertise than he did. She recommends following the “but” with whatever you’re being challenged on. For example, if you’re sharing your professional experience and someone thinks they know better, you could say: “I know you’re likely threatened by an educated woman, but this is something I have a degree in.”

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You can replace “educated woman” with whatever the situation calls for, Gillis says. “In my experience, it shuts down the conversation,” she adds. “It can be a gentle but assertive reminder for them to be respectful, or, when it’s said with a stronger tone, it can put the person in their place.”

“I wonder why you feel comfortable saying that to me.”

If somebody makes an inappropriate comment about a group of people—maybe it’s racist, homophobic, or misogynistic—use this line to call them out on it, advises Kristen Suleman, a therapist in Houston. “It makes it clear that you’re not engaging in the conversation in the way they expected you to,” she says. “It’s effective because it’s direct, respectful, and factual.” You probably do feel genuine curiosity about why your conversation partner made such an ignorant statement; here’s an opportunity to dig into the why and encourage self-reflection and critical thinking. Aim to speak in a calm, curious tone of voice, Suleman suggests.

“You should come with a warning label!”

Your cousin keeps bringing up politics at a kid's birthday party. A friend's sense of humor makes the group feel uncomfortable. Aunt Gladys has decided it's a good time to dispense diet tips. To handle these unwanted conversations, Gillis sometimes opts for a lighthearted response: "You should come with a warning label!" It makes people laugh, she's found—diffusing a potentially tense situation while letting them know they're crossing into inappropriate territory. Most people successfully get the message that they should change their tone.

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"I don't get it. Can you explain the joke?"

Perhaps you're eager to shut down the conversation, especially around an inappropriate "joke." Asking the person to explain what's so funny is a terrific way to hold them accountable for their behavior, Suleman says: "They might think twice next time." She recommends delivering your question with genuine interest while trying to maintain compassion. The goal isn't to humiliate the other person or appear holier than thou, Suleman clarifies—it's to create curiosity about the purpose of their comment.

When all else fails: let silence speak louder than words.

Sometimes, there's simply no reason to dignify a difficult person with a response, Stemen says. That's especially true if you've already tried other comebacks that failed. "Go straight to silence," she advises. Look at the other person, and maybe raise an eyebrow, but don't speak. "Without even having to say anything, it communicates to them that you're not going to engage," she says. "If you feed into it in any way, it will fuel the fire. But for the most part, if you don't add to that drama, it will fizzle out."

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‘We’ve Been Fasting Since October.’ The Horror of Ramadan in Gaza

Abeer Barakat is a Ph.D. candidate in English, mother of four teenagers, and an activist for the welfare of Palestinian women and children.

The holy month of Ramadan started early for Muslims in Gaza this year. In some sense, we’ve been fasting since October. But for tragic reasons.

Ramadan has a special place in every Muslim’s heart. We wait for it all year. As a small child, I remember my excitement at hanging colorful lanterns on the house. My parents taught my siblings and me to abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk, instilling in us that the idea of fasting is to train yourself to be patient, to elevate your soul from mundane desires, and to try to free your mind from evil impulses, and do good deeds for people around us.

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Nothing could have prepared me for Ramadan this year. I wasn't sure I would even survive until Ramadan—at least 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed since Oct. 7, and 80% of the population has been displaced. For those of us lucky to still be alive, fleeing from place to place, we have undergone a partial fast for months, not wanting to eat the scant food of the families kind enough to shelter us, unable to find food to purchase in the markets, or to afford what can be found.

Since Ramadan last year, my life has been turned upside down. My home in Gaza City, where my children and I used to hang Ramadan lights, is now destroyed and my family scattered.

I woke Monday, the first day of fasting, an hour before dawn to prepare the pre-fast meal known as *suhour*. This is usually a moment of profound joy and spirituality but this year I could not hold back my tears. The mosques lie in ruins, so neighbors all around performed the call to prayer on their own initiative. *Suhour* consisted of stone-hard bread, which I baked from barley, corn, soy, and even bird feed that we managed to find and ground together. The sand-like taste was tempered by the fact that we were able to dip it in the olive oil that we pressed from our own olive trees before the war, which I found in my father's deserted home in Gaza City. It pained me to not be able to offer food from a plentiful table to our neighbors, as is customary, and instructed by the Prophet Muhammad.

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For our first meal after fasting, I had saved two small bags of pasta. Though it was infested with weevils, I managed to clean and boil the pasta, and serve it with tomato sauce for *iftar*. I used to partially prepare the next day's *iftar* the night before, so that my fasting hours could be focused on worship. With so much scarcity, this is now a faraway dream.

In years past, after *iftar*, we would pray in the mosque and then visit our close relatives, sharing *qatayef*, a fried Ramadan dessert drenched in syrup. These visits would present an opportunity to forgive those who may have wronged us, strengthening our social fabric. With so many mosques destroyed, and no *qatayef* amid a dearth of food and essential items, I cannot celebrate with my parents, siblings, and their spouses and children. There are 20 of them all crammed into a one-bedroom apartment in Nuseirat in central Gaza.

Instead, my family and the friends we are staying with, prayed together, 16 of us packed into the small apartment in Gaza City. All of us keenly feel the absence of friends and family seeking refuge elsewhere. Though many of them are less than 10 mi. away, we are separated by Israeli tanks and soldiers who make the journey impossible, or too dangerous to attempt. But we also have extended family members killed by Israeli airstrikes, tanks, or snipers.

Yesterday, my 18-year-old daughter Rana had a crying fit. When she finally calmed down, she asked, “Mom, for how long do we have to live in this nightmare? I want to go home. I want to sleep in my bed and have my things around me.” Rana has been strong throughout, telling jokes to lift our spirits and keep us calm through the bombardments. But starting a Ramadan filled with violence and sorrow, she said, finally pushed her over the edge.

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It would be easy to lose faith when inhumanity surrounds us. It may sound strange but, after surviving five months of brutal war, the start of the holy month has in some ways deepened my faith.

I wish this year that fasting was only about purifying our souls from the body's mundane desires. But, for us Gazans, it has also meant learning to live without many people we love. I hope that they are in a better place now.

For those of us who live on, we also think of the homes and communities we have built with love and care that no longer exist. Even if, after Ramadan, the war ends, as we are all fervently praying for, everyone in Gaza knows nothing will ever be as it was again.

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An Expert on Trust Says We're Thinking About It All Wrong

Edward Felsenthal is the Executive Chairman and former Editor-in-Chief of TIME.

It's always tempting for journalists to search for threads that connect disparate news stories, and easy to overstate their significance. But it's remarkable how much one such thread—declining trust in the institutions that once dominated public life—ties together so many of today's major headlines, from our deeply polarized politics to the proliferation of crazy conspiracy theories. This decline, sometimes called a "crisis of trust" or a "trust deficit," has of course become an increasingly common topic in newsrooms and think tanks and global conferences that conjure a world without trust and search for solutions.

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But Rachel Botsman, an author, teacher and Substacker who is considered one of the leading experts on the topic, argues we're thinking about trust wrong. I met Botsman earlier this year at the

World Economic Forum at Davos (theme: “Rebuilding Trust”). Because we’re asking many of the wrong questions about trust at places like Davos and elsewhere, she says, we’re missing some of the solutions. Below, condensed and edited for clarity, is our conversation about why that is, and how to fix it.

We hear a lot that trust is in decline. But that’s not really your view, is it? It’s more that it’s in a state of redirection or fragmentation?

Trust is like energy—it doesn’t get destroyed; it changes form. It’s not a question of whether you trust; it’s where you place your trust. In society today, trust is shifting from institutional trust to “distributed trust.” Trust used to flow *upwards* to leaders and experts, to referees and regulators. Networks, platforms and marketplaces change that flow *sideways* to peers, strangers and crowds, creating a dispersion of authority and fracturing of trust.

A lack of acceptance that the trust dynamics have changed, I think, is a systemic problem. We’re trying to solve trust issues in the distributed world through an institutional mindset.

And if I’m a leader of an institution or a company, then I can learn from that.

Yes. It’s like, “Oh, my trust went over there. That’s where it’s gone.” That’s how they’re being influenced. “That’s where I’ve got to be.”

You’ve said that crucial context is missing from a lot of conversations about trust.

Talking in general terms about trust is not helpful because trust is a belief, and like all beliefs, it is highly subjective and contextual. Whenever we ask the question, “Do you trust *fill in the blank?”* we should follow with “to do what?”

If you think about trust in AI in education versus trust in AI in healthcare, these are very different applications with different trust needs. Trusting these systems to do what? Talking about trust is problematic unless you get to the context.

So how do you define trust?

The way I define trust is “a confident relationship with the unknown.” The greater the unknown, the more uncertainty, the more trust that you need.

This perspective runs counter to many social scientists who claim trust is knowing another person will do what is expected or knowing how things will turn out. But this has always struck me as odd: If you know the outcome or how things will end, why do you need trust?

If you take AI, think of all the complexities and unknowns; you need a lot of trust. When most leaders talk about trust in new technologies, they are often talking about mitigating risk. They are focused on governance and controls, and guardrails and mitigating the unknown. And then of course there is the belief that you can increase trust through transparency. This is a big misconception. You can reduce the need for trust through transparency and through these risk controls. Or you can increase people’s confidence in the unknown.

So if we want to increase trust in society, we have to do more than mitigate risks.

Yes. I find it quite unsettling that when pressed for solutions, the default is often transparency. Let's make the media transparent. Let's make the algorithms more transparent. Let's make the inner workings of government more transparent. But if that's the way we head, we've kind of given up on trust. You're actually lowering the need for trust. You're saying, "This is how this thing works. You can be certain about the processes. Therefore, you don't really need as much trust."

So what does your research say about the right way to build trust, in our institutions and in each other?

Deep trust forms based on how people behave. Above all, I think, it comes from integrity. How do you realign the public's belief and confidence that whatever this institution is is serving their best interests?

It's around changing our behavior rather than guardrails?

You need both, don't get me wrong. But if we're talking about restoring trust, regulatory guardrails don't always restore people's confidence. People's confidence comes more from a belief that you know what you're doing–capability, and I know why you are doing it——character. Put simply, it comes from not just doing things but doing the right things.

So we need to have more discussion of solutions as a way of building confidence in the notion that we can get from here to there?

There is a crisis of confidence in our society that the people in charge actually know how to get out of this mess and chaos. I often hear, “Oh, we need to lower expectations of what we think we’re going to get from political leaders.” I find it incredibly disconcerting that we’ve come to accept things unimaginable even five years ago regarding the erosion of trust. We’ve entered an age of information and content where it’s no longer “trust, but verify” but “verify, then trust.”

You recently wrote that, “Owning our uncertainty makes us kinder, more creative, and more alive.” It seems to me we are seeing some of this in a positive way around AI, at least as compared to social media, do you agree? An acknowledgement that there’s plenty we don’t know.

What I’m struck by is what I would describe as a push-pull between fear of joining in and fear of missing out. Business leaders need to innovate with AI because they’re scared of being left behind. At the same time, there is extreme caution not to move too fast because they understand the unintended consequences if they get it wrong.

The fear, the hesitation, is good for trust. It creates a trust pause, where people slow down and think, “How do I trust these systems?” For example, I trust it for input and information, but I don’t trust it yet to make decisions about my health or money.

I was impressed, I have to say, by the humility of Sam Altman when he said, the sign above his desk says “no one knows what happens next.” The next generation of AI leaders may have the humility to admit they don’t know. They may program that into the technology so that it says, “I don’t know the factual answer to that. Ask a human being or find another source.”

Is there an example in your research or work of an institution or a field that has turned it around, that has rebuilt trust?

It always comes down to an individual. It's often a very low-tech intervention. Take schools. Sometimes, kids have a very low propensity to trust others. They've never experienced being trusted, so they don't know or find it incredibly difficult to trust others. And then you have these remarkable teachers who slowly earn their trust over time.

One of the things that always strikes me is that the teachers never go into these situations with the assumption that the children will give their trust back. They assume these kids will not trust them. Earning trust is through small gestures over time. It's how you treat people day in, day out. It's how you make them feel, especially on tough days. Can you scale that type of human trust through technology? Do we want to? We'll see.

Does that make you a pessimist?

Or a realist. Or a humanist! I'm hopeful in many ways because AI will make us think more carefully about human connection and why humanness will become a differentiator.

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The Fight for Same-Sex Marriage Isn't Over. Far From It.

Philip Elliott is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau, where he covers national campaigns, elections, and government. He also writes TIME's politics newsletter, The D.C. Brief.

This article is part of The D.C. Brief, TIME's politics newsletter. Sign up here to get stories like this sent to your inbox.

When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* two years ago, Kelley Robinson was running the political shop at Planned Parenthood. Like so many abortion advocates and activists, she had seen the moment looming insidiously for so long. Even still, its arrival felt like both a personal and professional thwacking. It was a moment meriting despondency, but even taking the time for that seemed like an indulgence.

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“Up until *Roe* was overturned—even after the leak that they planned to overturn *Roe* came out—we polled folks across the country and they still did not believe it was true,” Robinson tells me. “They just would not believe that the Supreme Court in our lifetime would actually overturn such a fundamental right that had been the law of the land for over 40 years.”

Robinson is now president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest LGBTQ civil rights organization, and fears she’s watching the same slow-moving car crash all over again. The most glaring sign of many came about on the day *Roe* fell.

“In Clarence Thomas’ dissent, he says the quiet part out loud: next they are coming for *Windsor* and *Obergefell* and *Lawrence*,” she says, citing three rulings that unlocked a national right to same-sex marriage.

Put another way: the foundational underpinning of LGBTQ rights is up there on conservatives’ list of targets, and they’re not exactly announcing it in a whisper.

Before 2015, whether a same-sex couple could marry varied by state. With its 5-4 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court extended the federal right to marry to same-sex couples. It was a reflection of how much the country’s views of same-sex relationships had already shifted, and would continue to do so in the years that followed. But while the polls have moved one way, the composition of the Court has shifted in the other direction. If *Roe* could fall after 49 years in a 6-3 ruling in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case, there’s no reason to think *Obergefell* is any safer after less than a decade in action.

It’s the legal earthquake that people like the lawyers at the Human Rights Campaign’s headquarters in Dupont Circle argue could come as soon as next year. Yet even some of those who worked for years to help secure a right now enjoyed by hundreds of thousands

of couples refuse to believe it could be taken away. Same-sex marriage, they argue, is too popular, too engrained and accepted in American society. The Court wouldn't dare.

Or would they? A clear-eyed examination of the political and legal landscape makes it impossible to dismiss out of hand. The threats are as real now to *Obergefell* as they were to *Roe*, whose durability was largely taken as an article of faith until it was too late. The legal breadcrumbs are not difficult to find for those looking hard enough. Justice Samuel Alito in particular has been sprinkling swipes at *Obergefell* in concurrences and dissents since 2020. And then there are the smattering of cases—mostly to do with trans rights—working their way through courts in red states. Any one of those reaching the nation's highest court could give the 6-3 conservative majority a chance to undermine *Obergefell*, or wipe it out entirely, and with it, the other rulings that cite it as precedent. And it must be noted: only two Justices who voted in favor of *Obergefell* remain on the bench—Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

Here, you may be hitting a bump. *Didn't Congress fix this?* They'd like to think so. But there are enormous shortcomings in the 2022 Respect For Marriage Act that ordered states to respect marriage licenses, adoption orders, and divorce decrees issued in other states. It also gave a buffer to earlier rulings that allowed interracial couples to wed.

But it did not codify *Obergefell*. Instead, it scrapped the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which would have snapped back into effect if the Court were to spike *Obergefell.* The law has so many loopholes that even the conservative Mormon church endorsed it, as its leaders understood that it might someday empower states like Utah, which roughly 133,000 LGBT residents call home, to tell gay couples to go elsewhere to get a marriage license.

“People think that marriage equality is a *fait accompli*,” says Rebecca Buckwalter-Poza, a former spokeswoman for the Democratic National Committee and Yale Law graduate who is on the board of LPAC, which raises money to help lesbians and their allies win elections. “They think that not just because of *Obergefell* but because of the Respect for Marriage Act. They’re wrong—dangerously wrong.”

If the red-blue divide in this country that emerged for abortion rights is any guide, we would likely to see a similar geographical split on access to same-sex marriage in a post-*Obergefell* legal environment. But that would just be the start. Many Republican-controlled states would likely take steps to not just ditch marriage licenses for same-sex couples, but also ignore scores of anti-discrimination rules and regulations that federal agencies promulgated based on rights some say are justified through *Obergefell*. The ripple effects would be massive and, for potentially millions of members of the LGBTQ community, heart-wrenching.

It’s why Robinson is among those pushing Democrats to make the case more forcefully that same-sex marriage, and LGBTQ rights more broadly, are on the ballot just as much as abortion.

“What we are seeing is similar to what we saw in the abortion fight, right?” says Robinson. “They didn’t go after *Roe* first. They came at us with death by a thousand cuts, but always with the same goal of undermining abortion access. That’s what’s happening here.”

Here, it's worth another pause and a reminder. Public opinion—and law—has changed so rapidly during the last decade on LGBTQ rights that it can be easy to forget that the legal scaffolding upholding much of it is disturbingly fragile. The big breakthrough came in a 2013 ruling about inheritance laws, *United States v. Windsor.* Later that year came *Hollingsworth v. Perry* and *Prop 8*, which restored same-sex marriage in California, yielding a neck-breaking *Obergefell* in 2015. It was a joyous march for LGBTQ community and their allies, but activists were warning me only months later to not be fooled into thinking a Golden Age of Gay had arrived.

They were right. Onward came the Bathroom Bills. And bans on transgender athletes. And potential child-separation laws in places like Texas that allow the state to take trans children away from their parents. For those who may think trans rights are a separate issue from broadly accepted gay rights like same-sex marriage, you are missing how nearly all of these rights are anchored on an LBGTQ-inclusive reading of the 14th Amendment's provision that says all Americans have the same protections. For most of the current era, race and sex were considered parts of an American's identity, while their sexuality and gender identity were not.

To be sure, it's not clear if the votes are there at the moment to end the constitutional right to same-sex marriage. But at least two Justices, Alito and Thomas, appear to be itching to overturn *Obergefell*. And it's immensely clear that they are fairly immune to public opinion, political pressure, or demographics.

In 2020, when presented an appeal from a Kentucky county clerk who refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples after *Obergefell*, the duo said that the case record wasn't the best version of a precedent-reversing action and indicated that they'd wait for a better one. "Until then, *Obergefell* will continue to have ruinous consequences for religious liberty," Alito and Thomas wrote.

A year later, a unanimous Supreme Court ruled that Philadelphia's Catholic Social Services could refuse to work with same-sex couples on foster care in defiance of the city's non-discrimination laws. But Alito issued a concurring opinion arguing for a deeper review of precedent that does not require states to set aside laws to accommodate religious beliefs. Alito has long argued that religious beliefs can trump civil laws. "As long as it remains on the books, it threatens a fundamental freedom," Alito wrote in the Philadelphia case.

All of which has LGBTQ court-watchers nervous on any number of cases that are winding—albeit some more slowly than others—toward Washington.

"The distillation of the crisis we face to whether *Obergefell* falls is apt and, in a way, an inversion of a familiar problem: the conflation of marriage equality with what it takes to protect LGBTQ+ people in day-to-day life," says Buckwalter-Poza. "We didn't win civil rights for queer and trans folks across the board just by winning *Obergefell*, but we absolutely do stand to lose everything if we lose *Obergefell*."

No massive, sweeping anti-LGBTQ case is in the offing this term, which ends this summer, according to those who are tracking every utterance from the Court. But narrower ones are inching forward and could be consequential.

The most proximate seems to be a case coming out of Tennessee, where the state passed a ban on doctors providing gender-affirming surgeries, administrating puberty blocking drugs or prescribing hormone therapies on minors. A Memphis doctor and three families are trying to keep the minors enrolled in treatment that could be ordered to be ended by March 31. An appeals court upheld the state's case against the trans teens; the Supreme Court hasn't decided if it would join this state-by-state anti-transcare bingo landscape.

Other cases potentially coming from Florida and Utah stem from public-accommodation needs, including school bathrooms and locker rooms. (Such laws require visitors of certain public buildings use facilities that match the gender on birth certificates that were issued before the families left the hospitals.)

But federal judges in Richmond, Va. seemed sympathetic last year to a transgender girl from West Virginia looking to compete on the girls' track team in her middle school, but blocked by state law. (The court has yet to rule on the case.)

And much of Washington is awaiting a potential Title IX case that more than a dozen Republican attorneys general are bringing against the Education Department's proposal that simultaneously goes too far and not far enough in protecting transgender student athletes. Those AGs say the proposal—which would allow schools and colleges to define sport-by-sport rules for athletes—guts the very core of Title IX, which is best known for boosting opportunities for women to participate in college sports. LGBTQ lawyers, meanwhile, maintain that the framework creates an

unequal system, where some team buses will be inclusive and others will be allowed to be harbors of anti-trans rhetoric.

Not everyone is convinced that this legal environment means *Obergefell* is at risk.

“It’s very easy to see where one or two votes would come from on the Court for this based on Thomas’ opinions and Alito’s,” says Sasha Issenberg, a journalist whose study of same-sex marriage politics and law, *The Engagement*, is a must-read volume about the era. “Showing me where the third, fourth, or fifth vote is becomes very difficult with this Court.”

Yet even a skeptic like Issenberg agrees that the concern isn’t completely unfounded.

“The fact is there are a lot of other terrible things that Republicans are doing to members of the LGBTQ community now, and you don’t have to reach that far for speculative stuff,” he says.

For Robinson, this is all feeling awfully familiar. She spent a good part of her career fighting liberal complacency about the sturdiness of a popular constitutional right, only to see the *Dobbs* decision burn it to the ground.

She and many of her colleagues watched as the groundwork was being laid decades earlier with President George W. Bush's addition of John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court. Those were no accidental nominees, but the building blocks to eventually overturning *Roe*. And Bush was hardly alone in his Republican Party. Even someone seen as a moderate maverick like Sen. John McCain, the GOP's presidential nominee in 2008, made no secret of his desire to nominate Justices who had already ruled favorably toward abortion limits.

Yet so comfortable were Democrats with *Roe*'s resiliency that they did not panic when, just five months into his presidency, Barack Obama went to Notre Dame to deliver a commencement address that spoke of working to reduce the number of abortions in the nation. Throughout his eight years in office, Obama's faith-based advisers spent considerable time looking for areas of mutual agreement, only to find zero-sum partisanship motivated voters more than compromise.

In 2016, Donald Trump did little to conceal his overt pandering to the anti-abortion rights crowd. His defeat over Hillary Clinton came about in part because the majority of Americans who supported access to abortion didn't believe *Roe* could ever be overturned.

Nonetheless, there were still plenty of abortion rights supporters concerned about restrictions being pushed in statehouses and in Congress to fuel a massive expansion of Planned Parenthood footprint in the political space. Robinson witnessed the group's supporter roster grow from 6.5 million to 18 million during her on-and-off, decade-long tenure at the group's political arm.

Like 2016, the 2020 presidential campaign never hinged on abortion. The economy drew the most important billing for 35% of Americans and 20% cited racial inequality. Still, Robinson helmed

a $45 million electoral machine for Planned Parenthood Action Fund that year.

Then came *Dobbs*, and what had been an afterthought in 2008—abortion access—rocketed in 2022 to being second only to inflation as a deciding factor in people's vote. A full 27% of all voters pointed to abortion as their top deciding factor, and Democrats were about three-times as motivated on the issue than Republicans.

For decades, presidential candidates often spoke about the Supreme Court in the context of *Roe*. Now *Obergefell* might be a better barometer. Even if a majority of justices aren't ready to rule that same-sex marriage is no longer protected under the 14th amendment, whoever is sitting in the Oval Office over the next four years could find themselves replacing enough members to shift that dynamic fairly quickly.

Yet strategists in both parties have advised campaigns against elevating LGBTQ rights too highly on their agenda, saying abortion is the more animating tool, both for activists and donors.

That kind of thinking ignores how many voters have a vested interest in preserving *Obergefell* and other LGBTQ gains. New data released Wednesday from Gallup shows 7.6% of Americans identify as LGBTQ—twice the level as when Gallup first asked the question in 2012. Among GenZ—folks who were ages 18 to 26 when reached by Gallup—that number is 22.3%. And Millennials in the next grouping above them and up to age 42, the figure stands at 9.8%.

Put another way, one-third of LGBTQ Americans are under the age of 43 and stand to be voting for many, many elections to come.

On top of this, an average of 2,200 LGBTQ individuals turn 18 every single day.

President Joe Biden clearly gets it. As he addressed a packed lawn of Washington's LGBTQ insiders gathered in December of 2022 to watch him sign the Respect For Marriage Act, he drew a direct line from *Roe* to *Obergefell*.

"An extreme Supreme Court has stripped away the right important to millions of Americans that existed for half a century. [With] the *Dobbs* decision, the Court's extreme conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* and the right to choose," Biden said, specifically noting Thomas' opinion that cited precedent on contraception, sexual conduct, and marriage. Biden's re-election campaign has made the Court's move on abortion central to his pitch to on-the-fence voters, and he often adds in an occasional reference to LGBTQ rights for good measure. He specifically made a nod to transgender rights in his State of the Union last week: "I have your back."

For his part, Trump has been more vague when it comes to LGBTQ rights. At his 2016 nominating convention, billionaire Peter Thiel became the first openly gay speaker at a GOP convention to acknowledge their sexual orientation. But as President, Trump also put in place three Supreme Court Justices—among the 234 federal judges confirmed on his watch—who have been transparently hostile to LGBTQ rights. A Trump campaign spokesman did not return a query about the former President's position these days.

While the fall of *Roe* is reality, and *Obergefell's* remains theoretical, both issues warrant better attention by the candidates and voters. "This isn't just some sort of fantasy. This could actually be our reality unless we do something," says Robinson. "It's why 2024 matters so much."

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The UAE Is on a Mission to Become an AI Power

Billy Perrigo is a correspondent at TIME based in the London bureau. He covers the tech industry, focusing the companies reshaping our world in strange and unexpected ways. His investigation ‘Inside Facebook’s African Sweatshop’ was shortlisted for the 2022 Orwell Prize.

At an AI research lab on the edges of Abu Dhabi last year, an international team of 25 computer scientists were putting the finishing touches on a deep learning algorithm before sending it to be trained on 4,000 powerful computer chips. The AI system, which cost several million dollars to train, was funded by an arm of the Abu Dhabi government called the Advanced Technology Research Council (ATRC).

Despite the government’s substantial investment, ATRC secretary general Faisal Al Bannai decided to release the finished model online for free. If it was as good as the team believed, the boost to the United Arab Emirates’ reputation would be all the return the government needed on its investment, he reasoned. The plan worked. When the AI, named Falcon after the UAE’s national bird,

was publicly released last September, it became a sensation. By some measures it was the best open-source large language model (LLM) available in the world at that point, outperforming top offerings from Meta and Google. Before Falcon's release, "we were not on the map," says Al Bannai. But "with 25 people, we did that. And it really created a surprise."

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Around the world, computer scientists took notice. "The UAE was not well known, before, for training models," says Philipp Schmid, an AI researcher at the machine-learning platform Hugging Face based in Germany. "But then, by more or less the next day, we knew that they can train models, they open-source their models, they publish research around it, which benefits all."

Falcon seemed to be the first sign of the UAE's rapid rise in the world of AI. In this realm, the U.S. and China are the world's undisputed heavyweights. But, sandwiched between the two superpowers, the United Arab Emirates is beginning to punch above its weight. The tiny Gulf nation of some 10 million, which appointed the world's first AI minister in 2017, is betting big on the technology as an engine for diversifying its economy away from oil, and for projecting geopolitical influence beyond its borders. In recent months, some of Silicon Valley's most powerful CEOs have visited the UAE, from Microsoft's Satya Nadella to Nvidia's Jensen Huang.

But while solidifying the Emirati government's belief that it has what it takes to become an AI power, Falcon also made a larger point: if this powerful new technology is indeed to usher in a new world, it will be shaped by those with the greatest wealth and power in the one that currently exists.

Read More: *The UAE's New Leader Is Turning the Tiny Kingdom Into a Major Power Player*

Emirati officials point to their advantages: Huge cash reserves to pay for top-tier “compute,” or computing hardware. Enough electricity—powered by oil, natural gas, and solar—not only to power that hardware, but also to make building new data centers more attractive than in Europe and other parts of Asia, where grids are battling energy bottlenecks. And though most of the 88% of the foreigners who populate the UAE toil at low-wage jobs, officials express confidence that year-round sun and the absence of income tax can attract the world’s top AI researchers, who are in high demand.

If they come, it would be to join an effort unhindered by internal critics, or other essentials of democracy. The Emirati state has spent the past two decades digitizing government services, and authorities here have a more permissive attitude than those in many Western countries to using citizens’ anonymized data for training AI. In fact, the UAE casts its autocratic, state-capitalist government as a plus—giving it the ability to quickly marshal its significant resources to achieve what it sees as an epochal project. “What we have in the UAE that’s going to give us an advantage is the decision-making power to make it happen,” says Al Bannai, the official in charge of the ATRC. “Yes, you need some checks and balances. But in many places it is overdone.”

Abu Dhabi's ruling family controls several of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, worth a combined total of some $1.5 trillion. Those funds have historically been used as vehicles to diversify the UAE's oil wealth into growth industries, making them a perfect match for leaders of AI companies seeking the capital necessary to participate in the AI race. The country is also emerging as a player to watch in the world of difficult-to-produce computer chips used to train powerful AI systems. In February, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman met with investors seeking up to $7 trillion to build an AI chipmaker that could compete with market leader Nvidia, the *Wall Street Journal* reported. Prospective investors included Sheik Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who controls Abu Dhabi's main sovereign wealth fund and is a brother of the UAE President.

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If successful, the efforts could catapult the UAE to a position of outsize influence in the world of AI. (The country will have competition. Saudi Arabia, its larger neighbor, is earmarking $40 billion for a push into AI, a sum that would make it one of the largest investors in the space, the New York Times reported on March 19, citing unnamed sources.) The UAE has already found itself caught in geopolitical crosswinds, especially as tensions rise between the U.S. and China over advanced semiconductors, the chips Washington is trying to keep from Beijing. "It's the transfer of technology, information, and intelligence to China that the U.S. is really concerned about," says Neil Quilliam, an expert on Gulf geopolitics based at the London international-affairs think tank Chatham House. "The U.S. has basically been saying to the UAE: Don't go down that path. That's going to cross the line with us."

At a research and development lab in Dubai on a rare rainy evening in February, the UAE's AI Minister Omar Al Olama sits

down to discuss the nation's AI ambitions. On the other side of a glass wall separating the meeting room from the lab floor, an autonomous delivery robot designed by government-funded researchers lies dormant, the same bright white as the minister's *thobe*.

The 34-year-old Al Olama reels off a list of ways AI could improve the quality of life in the Gulf nation: reducing road traffic, improving hospital capacity, cutting down on state bureaucracy, even creating an AI-enabled tour guide for tourists. Increasing quality of life, Al Olama insists, is the main driver of the UAE's ambitions here. Economic growth is an incentive too. "We do believe that through artificial intelligence, we'll be able to expand our economic footprint and really become one of the big players in certain domains," he says.

Al Olama was just 27 when he was appointed to his role in 2017, and given the task of turning the UAE into a leading nation in AI by 2031. "Omar has unique credibility as the first AI minister on the global stage," says Amandeep Singh Gill, the U.N. Secretary-General's envoy on technology, who has worked closely with Al Olama on a U.N. effort to build global consensus on AI. "He's very personable. Without airs, he moves in and makes friends with people. His youth is an essential part of that charisma."

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Al Olama has friendly relationships with diplomats and businessmen alike. Pacing the stage at the World Governments Summit (WGS) in Dubai in February, he joked with Altman, who appeared on the screen behind him via video call. "I'm looking to raise $7 trillion, if you're interested in joining," Al Olama said, referring in jest to headlines that had broken the previous week. "If you figure out how to do that, please let me know," Altman replied with a smile. "I'd be very curious." (WGS, where Al Olama is vice chair, is a media and event partner of TIME.)

Offstage, Al Olama is coy about the reports that Altman had attempted to raise funds equal to almost a third of U.S. GDP from investors including the UAE. "I'm not sure, to be honest, how real that is, the $7 trillion project. I think someone might have misquoted either Sam or the UAE government on that. Seven trillion is an audacious number, to say the least."

Still, Al Olama says, the UAE has the "ambition to proceed" in the direction of playing a bigger role in global semiconductor manufacturing. The world, he says, "is looking for a decentralization of semiconductor production" beyond Taiwan, the geopolitical flash point in China's backyard where most high-end chips are currently manufactured. The UAE's working with the U.S. to expand that bottleneck "is going to be a win-win situation for everyone, because it ensures stability, it ensures economic cohesion between the UAE and the U.S.," he says.

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But Al Olama is most animated while discussing not hardware, but software. Falcon was released under an open-source license, and in February the ATRC committed $300 million toward the Falcon Foundation, a nonprofit body to oversee the continued open-source development of the LLM series. The UAE's commitment to open-

sourcing AI has been a diplomatic success, winning it friends in Global South countries that would otherwise be shut out of costly AI development. “Part of the motivation is obviously finding a niche for the UAE, and national competitiveness,” Gill says. But “the UAE is interested in helping other countries access compute, access these open-source models, so that they can develop AI applications in their own contexts.”

A big part of the thinking behind the UAE’s open-source commitment, according to Al Olama, is to attract top AI researchers away from lucrative jobs at Silicon Valley tech companies by giving them a sense of purpose. “If you bring a person who is the top scientist in this field, and you tell him you have two options: either work for-profit, closed-source, and just benefit yourself, or work on something that’s open-source that will really change the lives of people, what would you decide?” Al Olama says. “We realized that the attraction of talent is much better when people actually believe this is for the greater good.”

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The number of AI workers in the UAE quadrupled to 120,000 from 2021 to 2023, Al Olama recently told Bloomberg. “It is a place made out of heaven for researchers in AI,” says Al Bannai, the head of the Abu Dhabi government’s ATRC. “You have the compute, you have access to data, and you have the commitment to fund the research you’re doing. There aren’t many places that have all of this under one roof.”

But the UAE also faces challenges when attracting top researchers. For all its low taxes, sunshine, and glamour, civil liberties and internet freedoms in the UAE are subject to “significant” restrictions, according to Freedom House, which rates the country as “not free.” LGTBQ+ activity is criminalized, and labor abuses among the migrant workers brought in to support the UAE’s service and construction industries are well documented. The

country is not listed among the top six where most elite AI researchers work, according to an analysis by researchers at the Paulson Institute think tank. Of the 14 authors named on the Falcon research paper, eight have LinkedIn profiles indicating that they are not based in the UAE. “Are they going to be able to attract talent to move to the UAE who can make a million-plus dollars anywhere?” says Dylan Patel, chief analyst at SemiAnalysis, an AI-industry monitor. “I’m skeptical.”

Still, officials in Abu Dhabi, the capital, remain bullish. Al Bannai says Falcon’s successors will be even more powerful—and not only because the government is willing to commit more money and computing power to the effort. “We have a third asset which we have not [yet] utilized,” he says. He is referring to private data that is not normally available on the internet, such as records held by hospitals and state-backed industries. “Try to go to some countries and get access to data to train,” Al Bannai says. “OK. Good luck.”

The UAE, he says, has permitted AI companies to train models on citizens’ medical data stripped of names and identifying information. Similar efforts in countries like Britain have run into legal challenges and opposition in the press—just the kind of obstacles that, in the UAE, are easier to brush aside. “You can either debate forever or you can move,” Al Bannai says. “We have decided to move.”

Last summer, OpenAI CEO Altman traveled to the UAE as part of a global tour capitalizing on the success of ChatGPT. “I am hopeful that the region can play a central role in this global conversation,” he told the crowd, praising the attendees who he said had been discussing AI since “before it was cool.”

Four months later, the UAE’s top AI firm, G42, announced a partnership with OpenAI. The companies would collaborate “to deliver cutting-edge AI solutions to the UAE and regional

markets," a post on G42's website said, without disclosing specifics. At the top of the page, the post was illustrated with a photograph of a smiling Altman shaking hands with G42's CEO Peng Xiao, apparently taken during Altman's trip to the Gulf earlier that summer. It was another illustrious partnership for the state-linked Emirati firm, which in 2023 signed a $100 million deal with the California company Cerebras to build what it calls "the world's largest supercomputer for AI training."

Shortly after G42 announced its partnership with OpenAI, geopolitical tensions burst into the open. In November, the New York *Times* published a report detailing concerns within the U.S. intelligence agencies about G42's ties to China. National-security officials, the report said, were concerned that advanced American technologies and sensitive data of U.S. citizens could make their way to China via G42, which had relationships with Chinese companies including Huawei. In a high-level meeting at the White House just days before Altman's trip to Abu Dhabi, the Biden Administration had pushed the UAE to sever its links to Beijing, according to the *Times*. Two months later, it tightened rules on chip exports to an undisclosed list of Middle Eastern countries, amid concerns over the chips ultimately reaching China.

G42's agreement with OpenAI may have been less than it appeared. The Emirati firm had simply signed up to become one of OpenAI's many enterprise clients, according to a person with knowledge of the matter. The agreement granted G42 access to OpenAI's application programming interface, a tool that allows companies to integrate ChatGPT and GPT-4's capabilities into their own apps. G42 is not an investor in OpenAI, and is bound by OpenAI's usage policies, the person added. An OpenAI spokesperson declined to comment on the record.

Still, it was an example of the kind of relationships with foreign tech firms that the UAE government has long encouraged its domestic companies to enter into, according to Alexis Serfaty, director of geotechnology at the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group. "The idea there is to expand links into the global value chain and enable as much technology transfer as possible."

In the months that followed the White House meeting, G42 began cutting its ties to China. The company said it was phasing out Huawei gear and had sold its roughly $100 million stake in ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company. "We cannot work with both sides," Peng told the *FT.* G42 did not respond to requests for comment.

Today, Emirati officials are keen to stress their closeness to Washington. "The UAE has been a strategic partner to the U.S. since our founding, we've gone through a lot," says Al Olama. According to Serfaty, the UAE moved quickly to distance its tech industry from China's because officials considered it crucial to retain access to the high-end semiconductors subject to American sanctions. "Even if [the UAE is] uncomfortable removing themselves from Chinese hardware, ultimately, they want to ensure access to U.S. chips."

When it comes to building new semiconductor factories, Altman has not denied that he is seeking funds for a new chipmaking

venture. But he has urged skepticism of the $7 trillion price tag reported by the *Journal.* “You shouldn’t believe everything you read in the press,” Altman said at an event on Feb. 21. “The kernel of truth is that we do think investing a lot of money in AI compute, energy, and data centers is going to be important to deliver the amount of services people want.”

The question is where the investment will happen. Taiwan, which dominates chip production now, is a democracy that’s vulnerable to China militarily. Gulf kingdoms share China’s autocratic model for governance but historically fall in line with Washington on security. “If they are able to diversify the existing supply chain, make it more resilient, that could certainly benefit the U.S.,” says Serfaty. “On the other hand, it depends on which foreign government [Altman] and his partners ultimately partner with, and that could very well conflict with U.S. national-security strategy.”

In the end, the U.S. government may have effective veto power over the UAE’s ambitions. Semiconductors are at the core of the Biden Administration’s CHIPS and Science Act, which includes billions in incentives for the onshoring of semiconductor manufacturing to the U.S. itself. Altman has reportedly met with U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo to seek her blessing for his project to create an Nvidia competitor, and has reportedly said he would not proceed without U.S. government approval. (The Commerce Department declined to comment.) Even if the UAE does stump up the money for new semiconductor factories, those factories may end up being located on U.S. soil.

Back in the government-funded R&D lab, Al Olama projects an air of confidence about the UAE’s future role in the AI landscape. “We always gravitate toward ambition as a country,” he says with a smile. “We are very ambitious people.”

—*With reporting by Leslie Dickstein*

Correction, March 22: *The original version of this story misstated the title of Faisal Al Bannai. He is secretary general of the ATRC, not director.*

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How The Sympathizer Counters 50 Years of Hollywood Vietnam War Narratives

Andrew R. Chow is a technology correspondent at TIME. His covers crypto, AI, tech regulation, and culture.

When the author Viet Thanh Nguyen was growing up in California as a refugee from the Vietnam War, depictions of that conflict were omnipresent in American culture. *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and many other films portrayed American heroes fighting their way through a dystopian backwater and then dealing with the psychic toll of defeat back home. Very few of those films gave much thought to the experiences of the Vietnamese—who themselves refer to the conflict as the American War.

It's been 51 years since the last American combat troops departed Vietnam. Nguyen now teaches a class on the war at the University of Southern California, and finds that most of his students—who were born after 2000—haven't seen those movies. But their perspective and themes linger in the air, irrevocably molding the collective memory. "Hollywood has so radically shaped the global understanding of this war and its aftermath," Nguyen says.

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Nguyen offered a counternarrative with *The Sympathizer*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2015 novel that follows a North Vietnamese spy during and after the war. Now, that book is getting the Hollywood treatment, a miniseries adaptation premiering on HBO on April 14. The A24 production features a mix of big stars, including Robert Downey Jr., Sandra Oh, and John Cho, and ethnically Vietnamese newcomers, most notably Hoa Xuande in the lead role. Nguyen, who is an executive producer, and the creative team hope the series will force viewers to center the Vietnamese perspective of the conflict while rethinking fundamental American myths, including about how the country still wields its geopolitical power in a fractured world today. "Everything that the United States was doing in 1975 are things that are still happening now," Nguyen says.

The Sympathizer tells the story of a half-Vietnamese, half-French communist agent who infiltrates the South Vietnamese military and then embeds in California after the war, hoping to sniff out gestating plots upon his homeland. The novel could hardly have been better received: it won the Pulitzer for fiction and landed on over 30 best-of-2015 lists for its biting wit and ambitious shifts in tone, from thriller to screenplay to satire. But Nguyen, now 53, harbored even grander dreams for his debut novel. "A successful novel might sell tens or hundreds of thousands of copies. But even a bad television series or bad movie would reach millions of people," he says.

Hollywood didn't immediately understand his vision. Nguyen says that in early meetings, producers were uneasy about his insistence that the show center Vietnamese people speaking Vietnamese. But the tone shifted following the political unrest during the Trump era, and the murders of George Floyd in 2020 and of six Asian American women in Atlanta in 2021. "Hollywood's liberalism was

challenged," Nguyen says. "It took a while for the people with the capacity to make this kind of thing to catch up."

The adaptation was further boosted by the sign-on of co-showrunner Park Chan-wook, the revered South Korean filmmaker behind *Oldboy* and *The Handmaiden*, who read *The Sympathizer* and understood how it connected to his own country's history. As in Vietnam, Korea endured a proxy war between the U.S. and the USSR. South Korean soldiers fought alongside Americans and the South Vietnamese in Vietnam. Their involvement in the war spurred an American economic injection that propelled the South Korean economy toward becoming the juggernaut it is today.

Nguyen was thrilled by Park's involvement, as *The Sympathizer* was inspired by *Oldboy* in its darkly funny exploration of violence, memory, and revenge. Park, in turn, recognized a kindred spirit. "The way he went about using humor in such an absurd and dire situation, that was very my style," Park says through a translator.

Nguyen displayed his dark humor one day on set, during the filming of a movie-within-a-movie that skewers Hollywood's one-dimensional depictions of the war. Nguyen asked to be cast as a nameless Vietnamese villager who gets blown up by the inner movie's American heroes, as a symbol for how casually Hollywood

treated mangled Asian bodies. “I just thought it would be appropriate for the author to be killed,” Nguyen told me, wryly. Instead, he was inserted into the show as a photographer at a party.

The adaptation is fairly faithful to the novel. Park and co-showrunner Don McKellar punched up the spy elements, making Xuande’s protagonist, referred to only as the Captain, into more of a noir action hero. That tweak meant that while the character is by no means an angel, he is slightly less brutal than in the novel. A scene in which he wields homophobic tactics to force a confession was altered, for example. “If you make him like Steve McQueen, he’s going to be very charming and sexy,” McKellar says. “It wasn’t to soften him. It just felt natural that in the visual medium, we had to lean into the movie-star appeal more.”

Another key decision that Park made was to have several of the white American characters—a Congressman, a filmmaker, a professor, a CIA agent—be played by one single actor. Park hoped to drive home a conceit central to *The Sympathizer*: that imperialist systems of power are entwined and overlapping. Park’s top choice was Robert Downey Jr., who agreed to take on the multifaceted challenge and serve as an executive producer with his wife Susan Downey, under the banner of their production company Team Downey. Downey Jr.’s presence also adds a meta layer of meaning.

Many viewers, especially younger ones, know him best as Iron Man, whom Marvel's Stan Lee envisioned as the "quintessential capitalist": a billionaire fighting communism and supplying arms to the U.S. military. Iron Man was first introduced in a 1963 comic, fighting in Vietnam alongside Americans against the racist caricature Wong-Chu, the "red guerrilla tyrant."

But Nguyen and Park make clear that *The Sympathizer* is neither pro-North Vietnam nor anti-America. Some of the novel's searing condemnations are aimed at the Vietnamese government, which led to roadblocks in getting the book published in the country, Nguyen says. McKellar says they tried hard to film in Vietnam—sending hundreds of letters to the censor board—but did not get permission. (They ended up using Thailand as a substitute.) "I expect that [the Vietnamese government] will be pretty unhappy," McKellar says.

While *The Sympathizer* spares no faction from criticism, both the book and series also harbor overt ideological aims. Nguyen is something of a progressive firebrand on social media and in public speaking appearances, and doesn't hide his political goals for the show. Chief among these is challenging audiences to reckon with the corrosive global effects of American power and racism. "There's a general allergy to this idea that literature or art can have any didactic or political function," he says. "I think that's wrong."

Nguyen hopes the show will reveal the war's place in American history and its relevance to conflicts still unfolding today. "Americans want to understand their wars as discrete things," Nguyen says. "But if we're talking about these wars in Asia, what we're really talking about is an extension of America's campaign from its very earliest settlement to continue expanding westwards, all the way to China. It's all part of the same history."

That history, Nguyen argues, extends to the U.S.'s support of Israel's prolonged assault on Gaza. In October, a week after

Hamas' attack on Israel, Nguyen signed a letter criticizing Israel's retaliatory attack on Gaza. The Manhattan venue 92NY pulled Nguyen from a book talk promoting his memoir, *A Man of Two Faces*. Nguyen says that despite potential repercussions, he was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., who stumped against the Vietnam War and its "deadly Western arrogance" in 1967. Nguyen penned a foreword to a reprint of that speech this year. "Here was a man who extended his principles from the cause of Black liberation to the cause of being against American imperialism and what he saw as a racist war in Asia and in Vietnam," Nguyen says. "I see Israel's war on Gaza as an opportunity in the same way for moral and political clarity."

Nguyen risks drawing the ire of right-wing ideologues—who might dismiss *The Sympathizer* as the epitome of a liberal Hollywood indoctrination campaign—and of Hollywood itself, which promised greater representation and creative freedom after 2020 but has become increasingly cautious in a moment of corporate consolidation. "I think the show is quite provocative in ways that are pretty unusual in American popular culture," says McKellar. "I keep wondering if HBO understands exactly the land mines that they're walking through here."

First and foremost, *The Sympathizer* aims to succeed as a work of art: to thrill via its haphazard assassination attempts, clandestine romances, and games of cat-and-mouse. But Nguyen also hopes it stirs uncomfortable introspection and helps shift long-standing narratives. "It's gonna be unsettling," he says. "But it's worth the risk if it could be a lever to affect the mass understanding of the war and its impact on Vietnamese people."

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How Alex Garland and His Cast Created the Sobering Dystopia of Civil War

Outside of Atlanta, a creaky white van weaved down a highway lined with abandoned cars. A helicopter sat in the parking lot of a charred JCPenney. Armed guards in military fatigues patrolled checkpoints. A death squad dumped corpses into a mass grave. Artillery boomed in the offing.

It was all part of a movie set, but to the actors starring in *Civil War,* felt all too real. The new film, opening in theaters April 12, takes place in a near-future United States ravaged by conflict. California and Texas, which make up the so-called Western Forces, have seceded from the union in response to an authoritarian third-term President who has jettisoned the Constitution, disbanded the FBI, authorized airstrikes on his own citizens, and now aims to “eliminate the final pockets of resistance.” To create as credible a dystopia as possible, director Alex Garland and the crew turned parts of the Atlanta region into a soberingly plausible hot spot.

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“It felt very disturbing,” says Kirsten Dunst, one of the leads, of the film’s blurring with reality. “Toward the end, it was all the noise and the gunfire, and then just looking at the news and seeing that there’s another school shooting.”

By the time *Civil War* premiered at the South by Southwest Film & TV Festival in mid-March, it had already generated some heat online. Reddit commenters debated whether invoking such severe domestic turbulence is irresponsible at a time when the nation’s political divisions have reached a fever pitch. One person worried it “might be interpreted as a role model to MAGA groups if not portrayed carefully.” Garland, the British science-fiction ace who made *Ex Machina* and *Annihilation*, anticipated polarized reactions. In a sense, they’re why he made *Civil War* in the first place. “It’s really a film about why polarization is not a great thing,” he says. “It’s trying to have a conversation. It’s trying to find common ground.”

On top of everything else, *Civil War* is also an intimate character study. Dunst plays Lee, a jaded photojournalist traveling with three colleagues—two reporters (Wagner Moura of *Narcos* fame and *Lady Bird*’s Stephen McKinley Henderson) and a novice photographer (*Priscilla*’s Cailee Spaeny)—from New York City to Washington, D.C., which Moura’s grizzled ringleader predicts is on

the cusp of falling. There, they hope to question a President (Nick Offerman) who hasn't given an interview in more than a year. The journey through a nation at war with itself is a circuitous, 857-mile odyssey, much like a video game in which the hero must evade death or capture by antagonists. In this case, those foes are power-hungry goons wielding carbines. Garland based these threats and detours (which, if you're doing math, nearly quadrupled the length of the journey) on real-world analogues, like a thug, played by Jesse Plemons, whose MO is loosely inspired by the Khmer Rouge, the totalitarian movement that took over Cambodia in 1975.

Budgeted at $50 million, *Civil War* is the most expensive movie A24 has released, teeing up a more commercial era for the trendy indie studio that built its renown on auteur-driven projects like *The Zone of Interest*, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, and *Moonlight*. But unlike some sweeping apocalyptic blockbuster or *The Last of Us*–style genre hybrid, its psychodrama doesn't incorporate fantasy tropes. You won't find any zombies here. Lee becomes a reluctant mentor to Spaeny's Jessie, who quickly notes that she shares a name with distinguished World War II photojournalist Lee Miller (soon to be portrayed by Kate Winslet in a biopic).

Garland drafted the film during 2020's COVID-19 lockdowns. He'd contracted the disease early on. Upon emerging from quarantine in Gloucestershire, England, he stepped into what he calls a "reverse Narnia." The world around him felt strange, paranoid, and divided. He wrote the script that spring, anticipating a future further riven by sectarian strife. He mapped out a fictional backstory to the film's events but omits most of it from the screen. The year *Civil War* takes place is unspecified, and although the President seems to have a Trumpian view of the Constitution's impermanence, there is no firm left-vs.-right ideology at play. Even the actors say they weren't given much context. "We kind of built what happened before in our own minds," Moura recalls. "We

never really spoke about it." Even though *Civil War* forgoes Garland's usual sci-fi lens, it shares with his previous work a sense that life has spiraled beyond our control. Withholding the how and why is kind of the Garland way.

De-emphasizing the political ticktock lets *Civil War* home in on its conflict's human toll. As the quartet gets closer to D.C., their steely exteriors crack—and yet their pursuit remains steadfast, even if it could result in death. It's a higher calling, and perhaps an adrenaline addiction. Garland made the arduous choice to shoot the movie chronologically, so the intensity the actors experienced was constantly mounting. "I've never been scared like that before, and I've never felt more alive," Jessie declares after an especially harrowing chapter.

Garland's crew bolted eight small cameras to the protagonists' van. Because so many scenes occurred in the car, the production felt profoundly intimate. Spaeny likens the road scenes to a play. But unlike theater, or even a typical movie shoot, *Civil War* changed locations every few days as the characters' trek progressed, introducing constant logistical puzzles for the producers and craftspeople to solve.

The third act, filmed at Tyler Perry's 330-acre Atlanta studio, which contains a replica of the White House, is explosive—literally. Choppers drop bombs, buildings catch fire, Humvees roll in, smoke clogs the night sky. Garland used visual effects to blow up the Lincoln Memorial as the journalists face guerrillas closing in on the capital. To prepare, the cast watched the 2018 documentary *Under the Wire*, which chronicles war correspondents in Syria. Dunst and Spaeny trained with photographers to master camera functions so they'd seem seasoned even as chaos erupted. "That was my biggest fear: not looking comfortable or like this is something that's a part of my body," says Dunst, who studied under Austin-based shutterbug Greg Giannukos. Garland also enlisted Ray Mendoza, a

former Navy SEAL, as a military adviser; Mendoza choreographed the final sequence and hired veterans as extras.

The movie's verisimilitude is what got the internet commentariat buzzing when *Civil War*'s trailer debuted in December. Some, upon learning the conflict's origins aren't more explicit, might accuse the movie of pulling punches. But Garland sought to avoid a "lecture" about the state of the nation. "If you're honest, you don't need to be told because you already know," at least vaguely, what caused the turmoil, he says. "There's a lot of films that tell everything to everyone and make everything completely digestible. I'm not particularly interested in doing it because it feels oppositional to engagement. 'Left vs. right' closes down the conversation. That is the problem with polarization."

Even the idea that Texas and California, which rarely agree on anything, would both secede is a rebuttal to the disunity that *Civil War* critiques. Why, Garland asks, is it so hard to believe that two disparate states would rebel against a fascist government remaking America in the President's image? Secession movements in both Texas (dubbed "Texit") and California ("CalExit") have sprung up recently, with the latter conceptualizing an "alternative to potential civil violence and civil war in the country."

If the movie preaches anything, it's a pacifist gospel. Hollywood sometimes struggles to separate the repugnance of war from the glorification of it. Here, the thesis is unmistakable. "It's an antiwar film, which is problematic to do because cinema doesn't necessarily want to be antiwar," Garland says, reflecting a not-uncommon concern among pundits that the thrill of seeing warfare on a big screen numbs audiences. But from where Garland sits, at least, it demands to be seen. As the subhead on *Rolling Stone*'s SXSW review blared, "No, it's not a documentary—yet."

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Monkey Man Is a Jumbled Parable Made With Heart

Stephanie Zacharek is the film critic at TIME. She is the recipient of a Newswomen's Club of New York award, and was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist.

Even when a movie is far from perfect, you can tell when a director has poured his soul into it. Dev Patel's directorial debut *Monkey Man*—he's also the movie's star—is trying too hard, and for too much. It wants to be a political allegory, a somber study of a man haunted by childhood trauma, a clarion blast of inspiration for downtrodden humans seeking to summon strength, and last but hardly least, a brutally exhilarating action entertainment. It succeeds at some of those things, some of the time. But Patel's conviction, both as a fledgling director and an intensely likable actor, has a blurring effect on the movie's flaws. Just when you realize you're confused by the somewhat muddled story, or lost in its myriad references, his solemn warmth draws you back in. The movie wouldn't work with another star. It's Patel's show through and through.

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His character has a generic name, Kid, that marks him as a man who’s never been able to find his center. He lives in the fictional city of Yatana—with its mix of obscene wealth and abject poverty, its views of tuk-tuks slashing down the road and street dwellers huddled under newspapers, it’s like a cross between Mumbai and Gotham City. Kid makes a meager living as a wrestler at an underground fight club, his haunted visage hidden by an ape mask. A sleazy promoter (Sharlto Copley) pays him to lose to his opponents, and every night he’s surrounded by spectators howling for his blood. He’s the classic underdog who’s ready to burst out of his skin.

We get Kid’s backstory bits at a time, in shardlike flashbacks. He was raised in an idyllic forest setting by a mother (Adithi Kalkunte) who clearly adores him. They play hide-and-seek in their leafy paradise; she regales him with inspiring but somewhat terrifying tales of the Hindu monkey god Hanuman. We come to learn that Kid later witnessed his mother’s rape and murder at the hands of a crooked cop, Rana (Sikander Kher), during a monstrous invasion of the family’s tranquil village. (The authorities launch their attack, mercilessly, while the local kids are gathered for a puppet show, one of whose star figures happens to be a paper-mache Hanuman.)

Back in the present, Kid manages to land a menial job in a glitzy brothel, where the sneering, preening Rana is a regular. He’s still moonlighting in that wrestling ring, but his diffuse rage has a new

focus: he will avenge his mother's murder by bringing Rana down, an elaborate process that begins with a cocaine vial filled with bleach. What follows is an extended and choppily edited sequence of bone-jarring violence, during which Kid reinvents himself as an action figure, a ruthless fighter who tumbles, leaps, and kicks his way out of his own internal prison, emerging battered and bloody though not yet victorious. That victory will have to wait; this elaborate showdown hits barely halfway through the movie.

There's a lot going on in *Monkey Man*, including a subplot involving a charismatic guru and political schemer (Makarand Deshpande) who's gearing up for certain victory in an upcoming election. His role in Kid's story emerges, shakily, in the last section of the film, but until then, his phony radiance and pious pronouncements mark him as a power-mad serpent who can't be trusted. The movie's gears are further churned by a rotating crew of supporting characters—including a group of exiled hijra, people identifying as a third gender—whose roles aren't always as fleshed out as they could be. Patel, who co-wrote the script with Paul Angunawela and John Collee, seems to want *Monkey Man* to serve numerous purposes, and his intentions collide in a muddy swirl. His targets include racism and religious intolerance in modern India and the indifference of the ruling class toward the poor, but the movie skitters across this surface of ideas like a stone skipping over water.

It's often hard to know exactly what *Monkey Man* is trying to say, and its self-serious tone doesn't help. Patel began filming before

the pandemic, and finishing the movie was a trial; it was fated for a streaming release until filmmaker and producer Jordan Peele intervened on its behalf. (The picture is being released in theaters by Universal.) As a young actor, Patel broke through in the role of a downtrodden Muslim Indian in Danny Boyle's 2008 *Slumdog Millionaire*; more recently, he played the lackadaisical-turned-brave Gawain in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*, and made a marvelous Dickensian hero in Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History of David Copperfield*. Patel is an Englishman, the son of first-generation immigrants (his parents are Gujarati Indians from Nairobi); his identity is his to shape as he chooses, and *Monkey Man* appears to be a step toward that defining of the self.

There is much eye-gouging, throat-stabbing, and calf-slashing along the way; this movie is not for the faint of heart, and most of its violence is grimly humorless. But Patel, even playing a character hell-bent on revenge, is so filled with light that he sometimes seems to have whirled in from another movie. In addition to being a jumbled parable, *Monkey Man* is an ode to the action movies Patel has always loved—Bruce Lee is one of his heroes—and as a performer, he's so sure-footed that he almost single-handedly makes you believe in this movie's mission, whatever it is. Kid, speaking in a language of balletic jetés and boxer-like jabs, is on the side of right, not might, and Patel pushes that idea across with both body and spirit. Whatever Patel is going for, he's at least singing out with conviction—not just from the diaphragm but also from the muscle better known as the heart.

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Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show Makes Reality TV—Hilariously, Painfully—Real Again

Judy Berman is the TV critic at TIME. Along with reviewing current television, she writes about the ways in which entertainment and pop culture intersect with our larger social and political realities. Her TIME essay on *Ted Lasso* and modern masculinity won a New York Press Club award in 2022.

Jerrod Carmichael had been a famous comedian for almost a decade, with an eponymous NBC sitcom and a couple of stand-up specials under his belt, when he dropped his average-dude persona and started telling the truth about himself. In his Emmy-winning 2022 special, *Rothaniel*, Carmichael came out as gay, speaking openly, with plenty of rueful humor, about internalized homophobia and his fractured relationship with his devoutly Christian mother. It was a creative turning point as well as a personal one. In place of polished jokes, he offered earnest reflection, expressed genuine confusion, and had spontaneous conversations with the audience.

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As its utilitarian title suggests, *Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show* continues his experiment in radical honesty. Framed—and deepened as much as it's leavened—by co-creator Carmichael's onstage monologues, the perceptive eight-part HBO series, which premieres March 29, is disarmingly frank about not only his personal life, but also about its own constructedness. We watch the comedian produce as the camera rolls, persuading family and friends to discuss hard topics on camera as crew members swarm. By making us privy to these contrivances, he establishes authenticity within a notoriously artificial genre.

Reality Show teems with uncomfortable exchanges that couldn't be more different from the table-flipping theatrics of docusoaps like *The Real Housewives*. In the premiere, Carmichael confronts his best friend, rapper Tyler, the Creator, about how Tyler has been avoiding him since Carmichael confessed to being in love with him. It doesn't go well. Neither does Carmichael's attempt to talk with his father about the older man's infidelity—a pattern of betrayal he sees mirrored in his own cheating on his first serious boyfriend. Or a conversation in which his mom says "I love you just the way you are" but also implies that being gay is like being a murderer.

Yet Carmichael is hardest on himself, constantly questioning whether he can become a good friend, a faithful boyfriend, a person who doesn't need cameras in the room to hold himself accountable.

Which is not to say that *Reality Show* is a self-serious slog; the half-hour episodes are funny, if often darkly so, because their protagonist and the people around him are funny. At a moment when most comedians brand themselves as either iconoclastic truth tellers or righteous arbiters of virtue, it's refreshing to see Carmichael take such pains to be perceived precisely as he is.

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Retired Admiral William McRaven on Why U.S. Leadership Matters

Vera Bergengruen is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau. She covers the overlap of national security, politics, and technology. Her work at TIME has won the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award and a New York Press Club Award.

Retired Navy Adm. William McRaven’s nearly 40-year career in the U.S. military has spanned everything from deployments as a Navy SEAL, hunting down high-value targets overseas, commanding U.S Special Operations forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and advising Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

But McRaven is best known for planning and overseeing the 2011 raid that ended with the death of Osama bin Laden. In December that year, McRaven was named as a runner-up for TIME’s Person of the Year for his role in the operation. “There is nobody in the U.S. government that thinks we can kill our way to victory, certainly not the special-operations guys,” he told TIME in 2011,

“but what happens is, by capturing and killing some of these high-value targets, we buy space and time for the rest of the government to work.”

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After retiring from the U.S. military in 2014, McRaven served as the chancellor of the University of Texas System and has written several books on leadership. Now, he has been awarded $50 million to use for charity from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and his fiancé Lauren Sánchez. He tells TIME he intends to use the Bezos Courage and Civility Award to support the children of fallen servicemembers and advocate for veteran mental health issues and education. His conversation with TIME has been edited for clarity and length.

You recently received the Bezos Courage and Civility Award, with $50 million to give to charities of your choice. How are you planning to use it?

Almost all of this is going to be focused on veterans and their families, and I’m working through how best to use this money and leverage [it] so that we can maximize the impact. I will definitely be focusing on the children of the fallen, the Gold Star children who’ve lost fathers and mothers in combat. I’ve been working with an organization for many years called the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. Since 1980, in the Special Operations community we’ve lost over 1,300 that have been either killed in action or in training, and they’ve left behind about 1,700 children. The Special Operations Warrior Foundation takes care of educating those children. Then I’ll see what other programs are available out there for the children of the fallen. And then the other area, of course, is mental health for servicemen. The Veterans Administration, they do great work helping veterans and their families on mental health issues. So this will be an area where I’m

going to look and say, well, what don't the VA and the military healthcare system cover?

The U.S. military is seeing record-low recruitment numbers. Last year, the military services missed recruiting goals by about 41,000 recruits. How big of a concern is this?

What we found in talking to senior leaders is that some of this was exacerbated by COVID. Our pipeline for young men and women coming into the military is generally through the high schools, and because of COVID, the military recruiters didn't have an opportunity to get in. So you know, not having an opportunity to show the value of being in the military I think is having an impact on recruiting numbers. But I saw after 9/11 how these young men and women stepped up. They knew they were going off to war and they volunteered in droves. Anytime people are losing a little bit of hope in the United States, I say, spend some time with these young kids and you'll regain your hope because they're a great generation. So the military, of course, is working through this. And I think we'll come back and we'll find in a couple years that our recruiting numbers get back up to where we need them to be.

How are you thinking about the challenges, and the opportunities, of AI when it comes to national security?

The military has always been an organization that will adopt new technology on the battlefield in hopes of gaining some advantage over the enemy. As we begin to look at AI and machine learning, its ability to discriminate between good guys and bad guys is important. Nobody in the military wants to inadvertently kill civilians. So your ability to differentiate between who's good and who's bad, by using AI and machine learning, I think is going to help us be more surgical on the battlefield. But the other part about AI that is important to us is how rapidly can you make decisions. The key in the battlefield environment as the commander is [whether] you can make a decision faster than the enemy can. [AI]

will help us diagnose problems quicker, it will help us resolve problems quicker. So the military will always look forward to new technology to figure out how it can make us better soldiers, sailors, Marines, and how it will improve our lethality without inadvertently killing civilians.

What about concerns that the U.S. may risk losing its technological edge to adversaries like China unless it moves more quickly?

We are still decades ahead of the Chinese in terms of our creativity, our entrepreneurial approach…our AI and machine learning is fundamentally better. So from that standpoint, we still have an edge on China. But that doesn't mean you don't need to turn your head around and see how quickly they're progressing. Whether it's China or other competitors out there we need to make sure we have a technological advantage. This is why it's important for the military to be working with Silicon Valley…and stay engaged.

Ahead of the 2024 election, a lot of America's allies are anxious about the prospect of another Trump presidency that could withdraw the U.S. from the global stage. Do you think domestic politics is harmful to U.S. leadership abroad?

The fact of matter is, the world needs U.S. leadership. Even people that disagree with our politics understand that U.S. leadership is the most important leadership in the world, because who else is going to lead if we don't? Nobody of any consequence really wants Russia or China leading, certainly not our allies. So we need to continue to make sure that we…keep those alliances strong, whether it's in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, or building alliances in the Middle East. At the end of the day, it's a little bit like the old Churchill saying: "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them." And so whoever the next president is needs to continue to reinforce these alliances.

You were recently in Ukraine. What was the sense there about U.S. support at this critical point in the war?

I've traveled all throughout Ukraine, and I've had a chance to talk to a lot of their military leaders. And you can't help but be impressed by their resilience, by their determination, by their patriotism, and I think we need to continue to stand behind Ukraine. This is a fight that they are fighting not only for their own homeland, but frankly for the Western values that we hold pretty dear. They were certainly anxious about whether or not the U.S. would continue to supply arms and ammunition for their flank. And, obviously, their concerns were founded as Capitol Hill has been slow on moving towards support. So, again, my position has been we need to continue to support Ukraine. And I hope the folks on Capitol Hill move towards providing the resources they need.

Looking at the war in Gaza, what do you think of the criticism that the U.S. is not leveraging its leadership effectively?

I think Secretary Tony Blinken kind of understood early on that the U.S. needed to lead and this is an incredibly challenging situation. Obviously the attacks on Oct. 7 were about as vile and as heinous and as barbaric as any attacks we've seen in modern time. So you have to understand and appreciate the IDF's position, the Israelis' position, on striking back [and] striking Hamas. But at the same time, of course, there are a lot of innocent Palestinians that have gotten caught up in this war. And this is where we do need U.S. leadership to step up and to do what they can to help the innocent Palestinians. Having spent a lot of time in conflict zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, no soldier wants to inadvertently kill innocent civilians. You absolutely want to take out the terrorists, you want to do what you can to make sure that Hamas never has the opportunity to strike back again. But at the same time, you have to be cognizant of the civilian population, you have to do everything you can to make sure that you're not inadvertently killing civilians.

And from what I've seen, the U.S. is making a strong case now to the Israelis that they need to take this very, very seriously.

We've covered a lot, but given your decades of experience in national security and the military, what is the thing that keeps you up at night now, in 2024?

When I was chancellor of the University of Texas System, I was often asked what I thought the number one national security problem was. And people always thought that I would answer something like North Korea or Iran. But my answer was always the same: K-12 education. Because if we're not educating the young men and women in this country to have the STEM skills that they're going to need, to be able to think critically, to understand other cultures, then 20 years from now, they're not going to be the national security leaders we need to be able to deal with complex issues that are out there. So as we continue to approach the elections in 2024, I'd like to see one of the candidates talk about the importance of education.

Speaking of leadership, your name comes up fairly regularly in election cycles. Would you ever run for office?

I have absolutely no plans to run for office. I've been married for 45 years, and if I want to make it to 46 I'm gonna have to stay here in Austin.

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