

TIME

THE NEW ANTISEMITISM

by
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The New Antisemitism

Feldman, the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law at Harvard University, is the author of [To Be a Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the Jewish People](#)



Why won't antisemitism die, or at least die down? In the months following Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, antisemitic incidents increased substantially. The Anti-Defamation League, which keeps track, says they [tripled in the U.S.](#) over the previous year, although its criteria also changed to include anti-Zionism. But from 2019 to 2022, the amount of people with highly antisemitic attitudes in the U.S. had nearly doubled, [the ADL found](#). In Europe, Human Rights Watch warned in 2019 of [an “alarming” rise](#) in antisemitism, prompting the European Union to adopt a strategic plan for fighting it two years later.

No one can say definitively why the pre-Gaza War surge happened when it did. The salience of groups like the [neo-Nazis who marched](#) in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017 probably played a role, as did the influence of figures like the troubled [rapper turned designer](#) Kanye West. Historically, antisemitism has been a side effect of

populism, which traffics in us-vs.-them stereotypes. Social media allows antisemitic influencers to recruit and communicate directly to followers, getting around the filtering bottleneck of the legacy media. The [murder of 11 worshipers](#) at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, by a shooter enraged at Jewish groups providing aid to immigrants, was the painful lowlight of this era.



It can be hard to think clearly and reason calmly about antisemitism. For 15 million Jews around the world, its resilience engenders fear, pain, sadness, frustration, and intergenerational trauma going [back to the Holocaust](#) and beyond. The superficial sense of security that many Jews feel on a daily basis in the contemporary world turns out to be paper-thin. Jews know enough

of their own familial stories to realize that in historical terms, such moments of safety have often been fleeting, followed by renewed persecution. Sitting in my office in leafy Cambridge, Mass., a proud citizen of the freest country in the world, in which Jews have been safer than in any other country in history, I am not free of emotion on the topic. Nor could I be.

For many non-Jews, antisemitism matters deeply too. People everywhere who believe that all humans are created equal know that the [presence of antisemitism](#) in a society has often been the forerunner of other visceral, irrational hatreds, from racism to homophobia to Islamophobia. Worse, the persistence of antisemitism stands as a stubborn counterargument to [Martin Luther King Jr.'s hopeful faith](#) that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.

In the past, antisemites, whether medieval Crusaders or [20th century Nazis](#), were often proud of their views. Today, thankfully, almost no one wants to be accused of antisemitism.

That's a marker of human progress. It also means that the whole subject of antisemitism needs to be approached with charity and sensitivity. People who harbor no conscious negative ideas about Jews may unknowingly hold views that resonate with historical antisemitism.

Jews aren't exempt from this, and so, neither am I. In a world roiled by polarizing debate, my aim is to encourage introspection—to get you to ask, as I ask myself, whether your feelings and beliefs would be the same if seen through the lens of the history and [context of antisemitism](#). I come not to accuse anyone of antisemitism, but to explore the topic in a way that deepens our understanding of where it comes from, and where it's going.



The easiest way to explain why antisemitism is still with us is to blame religion. Scholars agree that what we call antisemitism today has its historical origins in [a strain of anti-Jewish thought](#) that grew out of early Christianity. The Gospels describe the Jews as complicit in the Roman crucifixion of Jesus. Paul's theology was read to depict the Jews as having been replaced or superseded as God's special favorites by the community of Christian believers. By failing to become Christians, Jews implicitly challenged the narrative of inevitable Christian triumph. For well over a thousand years, Jews in Christian Europe were subject to systemic, institutionalized oppression. Historical antisemitism took the form of discrimination, expulsion, and massacre.

The problem with blaming religion is that antisemitism today is no longer driven primarily by Christianity. Although antisemitism can still be found among Christians, in the U.S. and around the world, most contemporary believing Christians are not antisemites. The old theological condemnation of the Jews for killing Christ has been repudiated by nearly every Christian denomination.

Nor does antisemitism among Muslims primarily reflect the classical Islamic claims made against the Jews, such as the accusation that the Jews (and Christians) distorted Scripture,

resulting in discrepancies between the Bible and the Koran. Jews in Muslim lands mostly fared better than in Christian Europe. Until the 20th century, those Jews occupied a complex, second-class status, protected alongside Christians as “people of the book” and also simultaneously subject to special taxes and social subordination. The tropes of modern Europe’s antisemitism—of Jews’ power and avarice—mostly came to the Middle East late, through Nazi influence. Even the prevalence of antisemitism among Islamist groups like Hamas isn’t primarily driven by religion. Rather, it is part of their politically motivated effort to turn a struggle between two national groups for the same piece of land into a holy war.

Read More: *When Jews are Threatened, Why Can't Americans Condemn Antisemitism?*

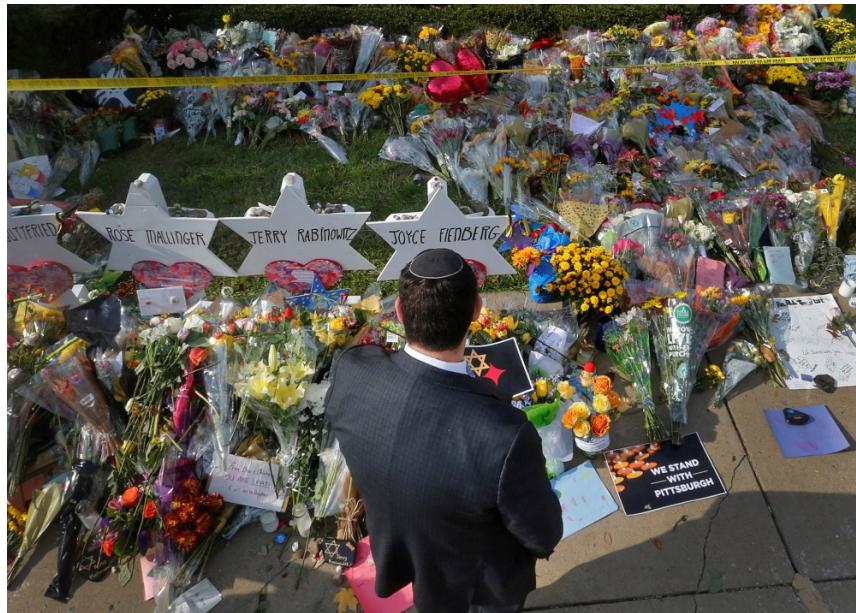
It emerges that far from being an unchanging set of ideas derived from ancient faiths, antisemitism is actually a shape-shifting, protean, creative force. Antisemitism has managed to reinvent itself multiple times throughout history, each time keeping some of the old tropes around, while simultaneously creating new ones adapted to present circumstances.

In each iteration, antisemitism reflects the ideological preoccupations of the moment. In antisemitic discourse, Jews are always made to exemplify what a given group of people considers to be the worst feature of the social order in which they live.

A crucial reason why is surely that Jews were the most salient minority group living among Christians for the bulk of European history—and Europe was the heartland of historical antisemitism. The practice of projecting immediate social fears and hatreds onto Jews grew from the human need to treat some nearby group of people as the Other. (Muslims and Asians eventually also became subject to projection and fantasy, a practice dubbed Orientalism by

the literary scholar Edward Said.) Once Jews had become the go-to targets for exemplifying societal ills, the habit stuck.

In this way, crucially, antisemitism is not and has never been about actual Jews so much as antisemites' imagination of them. Because [antisemitic ideology](#) isn't accountable to real-life facts, its content can be altered and changed as a society's worries and moral judgments shift. Antisemitism's capacity to keep its familiar character while also channeling new fears is what confers its stunning capacity to reinvent itself.



The first major reinvention of antisemitism took place as the Enlightenment gradually reduced the role of religion as the main source of Europeans' attitudes and beliefs. Nineteenth century antisemitism preserved the old belief that the Jews were unique, having once been God's chosen people and then uniquely punished for rejecting Christ. But it transformed this uniqueness to match the concerns of contemporary society.

Preoccupied with economic and social upheaval, antisemites depicted Jews as both uniquely capitalist and uniquely communist. Concerned about an unstable global power balance, antisemites claimed that Jews secretly controlled the world. Entranced by the

pseudoscience of race that flourished after Darwin, antisemites declared that Jews were racially inferior. The obvious contradictions—that far from running the world, most Jews were impoverished, or that capitalism and communism were warring ideologies—did not deter antisemites. They ignored the illogic, or fell back on conspiracy theory, like the myth that Jewish capitalists and Jewish communists were secretly in cahoots. Ultimately, in different ways, both Nazism and Marxism identified Jews as an enemy deserving liquidation. The virulent antisemitism that fueled the Holocaust was thus partly a descendant of Christian antisemitism and also the product of modern conditions.

Today, racial pseudoscience is an embarrassment and the struggle between capitalism and communism has become passé. Antielitist populism can still draw on old canards about Jewish power, and those still resonate with certain audiences, especially on the far right. But the most perniciously creative current in contemporary antisemitic thought is more likely to come from the left.

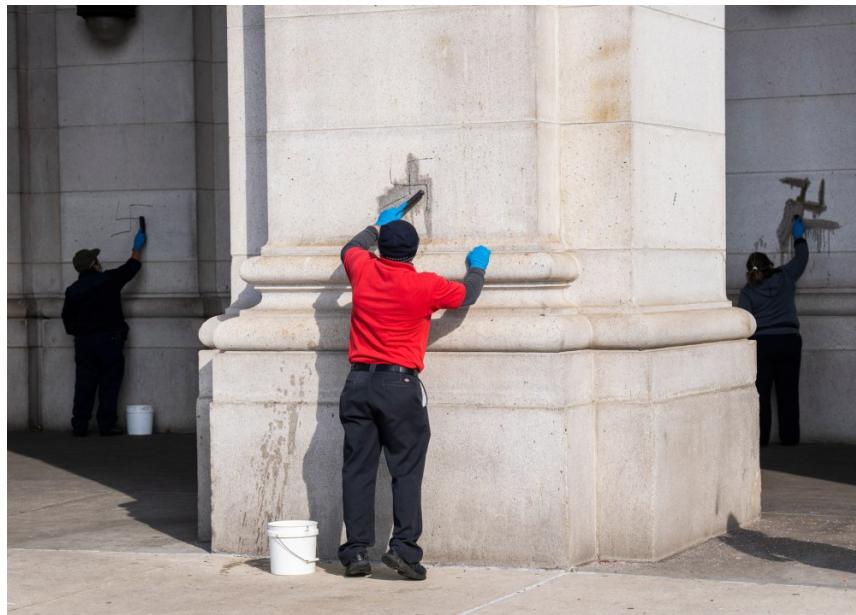
Instead of disappearing among people who would condemn neo-Nazis, antisemitism is morphing again, right now, before our very eyes.

The core of this new antisemitism lies in the idea that Jews are not a [historically oppressed people](#) seeking self-preservation but instead oppressors: imperialists, colonialists, and even white supremacists. This view preserves vestiges of the trope that Jews exercise vast power. It creatively updates that narrative to contemporary circumstances and current cultural preoccupations with the nature of power and injustice.

Concerns about power and justice are, in themselves, perfectly legitimate, much like past concerns about the effects of unfettered capitalism on working people—or for that matter, condemnations of elitism. So it is important to distinguish carefully between

critiques of power that deserve serious consideration and the antisemitic ways in which those critiques may be deployed.

That caution is especially important because Israel, the first Jewish state to exist in two millennia, plays a central role in the narrative of the new antisemitism. Israel is not an imaginary conspiracy but a real country with real citizens, a real history, a real military, and real political and social problems that concern relations between Jews and Palestinians. It is not inherently antisemitic to criticize Israel. Its power, like any national power, may be subject to legitimate, fair criticism.



It is also essential not to tar all critics of Israel with the brush of antisemitism, especially in wartime, when Israel, like any other war-waging power, is properly subject to the strictures of international humanitarian law. To deploy the charge of antisemitism for political reasons is morally wrong, undermining the horror of antisemitism itself. It is also likely to backfire, convincing critics of Israel that they are being unfairly silenced.

At the same time, Israel's history and current situation confound categories that are so often used today to make moral judgments—categories like imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy. And

because people's ideas about Israel typically draw on older, pre-Israel ideas about Jews, criticism of Israel can borrow, often unconsciously, from older antisemitic myths.

To understand the complicated, subtle character of the new antisemitism, notice that the concept of imperialism was developed to describe European powers that conquered, controlled, and exploited vast territories in the Global South and East. The theory of settler-colonial white supremacy was developed as a critical account of countries like Australia and the U.S., in which, according to the theory, the colonialists' aim was to displace the local population, not to extract value from its labor. The application of these categories to Israel is a secondary development.

These borrowed categories do not fit Israel's specificity very well. Israel is a regional Middle Eastern power with a tiny footprint, not a global or continental empire designed to extract resources and labor. It was brought into existence by a [1947 United Nations resolution](#) that would have created two states side by side, one Jewish and one Palestinian. Its purpose, as conceived by the U.N.'s member countries, was to house displaced Jews after 6 million were killed in the Holocaust.

The [Palestinian catastrophe](#), or *nakba*, of 1948 was that when the Arab invasion of Israel failed to destroy the nascent Jewish state, many Palestinians who had fled or been forced out of their homes by Israeli troops were unable to return. Those Palestinians became permanent refugees in neighboring countries. Instead of ending up in an independent Palestine [as proposed by the U.N.](#), those who had stayed in their homes found themselves living either in Israel or under Egyptian and Jordanian rule. Then, [in the 1967 war](#), the West Bank and Gaza were conquered by Israel. Palestinians in those places came under what Israel itself defines as an occupation. They have lived in that precarious legal status ever since despite the 1993–2001 peace process.

Notwithstanding undeniable Jewish prejudice and discrimination against Arabs in Israel, the paradigm of white supremacy also does not correspond easily to the Jews. Around half of Israel's Jewish citizens descend from European Jews, as do most [American Jews](#). But those Jews were not considered racially white in Europe, which is one reason they had to emigrate or be killed. Roughly half of Israel's Jews descend from Mizrahi, (literally, Eastern) origins. They are not ethnically European in any sense, much less racially "white." A meaningful number of Israeli Jews are of Ethiopian origin, and the small community of Black Hebrew Israelites in Israel are ethnically African American.



Read More: [*Europe's Jews Are Resisting a Rising Tide of Anti-Semitism*](#)

Whether early Zionist settlers should be conceived as colonialists is a hotly disputed question. Were they stateless, oppressed people seeking refuge in their ancient homeland, where some Jews had always lived? That is certainly how they saw themselves. Or were early Zionists agents of the very European states they were seeking to flee, aiming to buy as much territory in Palestine as they could to create their own state? That is the view of critics, who emphasize the [1917 Balfour Declaration](#), in which Britain, still very much an

empire, announced that it looked “with favor” on the creation of a national Jewish home in Palestine.

The upshot is that while a well-meaning person, free of antisemitism, could describe Israel as colonialist, the narrative of Israel as a settler-colonial oppressor on par with or worse than the U.S., Canada, and Australia is fundamentally misleading. Those who advance it run the risk of perpetuating antisemitism by condemning the Jewish state despite its basic differences from these other global examples—most important, Israel’s status as the only homeland for a historically oppressed people who have nowhere else to call their own.

To emphasize the narrative of Jews as oppressors, the new antisemitism must also somehow sidestep not only two millennia of Jewish oppression, but also the Holocaust, the largest organized, institutionalized murder of any ethnic group in human history. On the right, antisemites either [deny the Holocaust](#) ever happened or claim its scope has been overstated. On the left, one line is that Jews are weaponizing the Holocaust to legitimize the oppression of Palestinians.

During the Gaza War, some have argued that Israel, having suffered the trauma of the Holocaust, is now itself perpetrating a genocide against the Palestinian people. Like other criticisms of Israel, the accusation of genocide isn’t inherently antisemitic. Yet the genocide charge is especially prone to veering into antisemitism because the Holocaust is the archetypal example of the crime of genocide. Genocide was recognized as a crime by the international community after the Holocaust. Accusing Israel of genocide can function, intentionally or otherwise, as a way of erasing the memory of the Holocaust and transforming Jews from victims into oppressors.

It is, of course, logically possible for an oppressed group to become oppressors over time. Allegations of genocide have been [brought](#)

[against Israel by South Africa](#) in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), charges Israel has wisely chosen to contest rather than ignore. The charges are based on the numbers of civilians killed, the tactics that led to the deaths, and statements by Israeli officials. This evidence is supposed to prove Israel intends to destroy the Palestinian people, in whole or in part, which is the legal definition of genocide.

The number of Palestinian dead, [over 29,000](#) as of this writing, is heartbreaking. The rhetoric of some individual Israeli government officials cited by South Africa is particularly appalling, both in its dehumanizing character and in referring to Palestinians as Amalekites, a group whom the God of the Bible called on the ancient Israelites to “erase.” Retired Israeli Chief Justice Aharon Barak, who serves on the ICJ panel considering the genocide charges, joined a part of the court’s provisional measures that directed Israel to “take all measures within its power to prevent ... public incitement to commit genocide” in Gaza.

The U.S. government has itself condemned far-right members of Israel’s Cabinet who called for Gazans to be pushed into Egypt. The repugnant policy of ethnic cleansing urged by the extremists would violate international law, even if it would arguably not count as genocide under the legal meaning of the term.



Notwithstanding these serious concerns, Israel's efforts to defend itself against Hamas, even if found to involve killing disproportionate number of civilians, do not turn Israel into a genocidal actor comparable to the Nazis or the [Hutu regime in Rwanda](#). The genocide charge depends on intent. And Israel, as a state, is not fighting the Gaza War with the intent to destroy the Palestinian people.

Israel's stated war aims are to hold Hamas accountable for the Oct. 7 attack on Israel and to get back its citizens who are still being held captive. These aims are lawful in themselves.

The means Israel has used are subject to legitimate criticism for killing too many civilians as collateral damage. But Israel's military campaign has been conducted pursuant to Israel's interpretation of the international laws of war. There is no single, definitive international-law answer to the question of how much collateral damage renders a strike disproportionate to its concrete military objective. Israel's approach resembles campaigns fought by the U.S. and its coalition partners in Iraq in Afghanistan, and by the international coalition in the battle against ISIS for control of Mosul. Even if the numbers of civilian deaths from the air seem to be higher, it is important to recognize that Israel is also confronting miles of tunnels intentionally connected to civilian facilities by Hamas.

To be clear: as a matter of human worth, a child who dies at the hands of a genocidal murderer is no different from one who dies as collateral damage in a lawful attack. The child is equally innocent, and the parents' sorrow equally profound. As a matter of international law, however, the difference is decisive. During the Hamas attack, terrorists intentionally murdered children and raped women. Its charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. Yet the accusation of genocide is being made against Israel.

These relevant facts matter for putting the genocide charge into the context of potential antisemitism. Neither South Africa nor other states have brought a genocide case against China for its [conduct in Tibet or Xinjiang](#), or against Russia for its [invasion of Ukraine](#).

There is something specifically noteworthy about leveling the charge at the Jewish state—something intertwined with the new narrative of the Jews as archetypal oppressors rather than archetypal victims. Call it the genocide sleight of hand: if the Jews are depicted as genocidal—if Israel becomes the very archetype of a genocidal state—then Jews are much less likely to be conceived as a historically oppressed people engaged in self-defense.

The new narrative of Jews as oppressors is, in the end, far too close for comfort to the antisemitic tradition of singling out Jews as uniquely deserving of condemnation and punishment, whether in its old religious form or its Nazi iteration. Like those earlier forms of antisemitism, the new kind is not ultimately about the Jews, but about the human impulse to point the finger at someone who can be made to carry the weight of our social ills. Oppression is real. Power can be exercised without justice. Israel should not be immune from criticism when it acts wrongfully. Yet the horrific history and undefeated resilience of antisemitism mean that modes of rhetorical attack on Israel and on Jews should be subject to careful scrutiny.

Just because antisemitism is a cyclical, recurring phenomenon does not mean that it is inevitable nor that it cannot be ameliorated. Like any form of irrational hate, antisemitism can in principle be overcome. The best way to start climbing out of the abyss of antisemitism is to self-examine our impulses, our stories about power and injustice, and our beliefs.

Feldman, a professor at Harvard Law School, is the author of the new book [To Be a Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the](#)

Jewish People

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Inside the White House Program to Share America's Secrets

Massimo Calabresi is TIME's Washington bureau chief.



On the afternoon of Sept. 27, a Balkans expert at the White House got a disturbing call from a U.S. intelligence agency. Serbian forces were massing along the length of their country's border with Kosovo, where NATO has kept an uneasy peace since a bloody war of secession in 1999. Three days earlier, more than two dozen armed Serbs had killed a Kosovar police officer in an attack. Now Serbia was deploying heavy weapons and troops. "We were very worried that Serbia could be preparing to launch a military invasion," says one National Security Council (NSC) official.

The question was what to do about it. Months of mounting tensions in a remote corner of southeastern Europe had not received much attention in the media. Diplomatic efforts by the U.K., Italy, and other countries with troops on the ground in Kosovo had failed to calm the situation. In Washington, attention was focused on chaos in Congress; in much of Europe, the top priority was marshaling continued support for Ukraine. So as part of an effort to pressure

Serbia to back down, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan approved a request from his Europe team to declassify elements of the Serbian buildup for public release.

The NSC Intelligence Directorate edited the secret details of the buildup to obscure the sources and methods behind the intelligence. Then it shipped the request to the office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) in Northern Virginia via classified email. On Sept. 29, after a two-day scramble to clear the declassification, NSC spokesperson John Kirby convened an unscheduled Zoom call with members of the White House press corps. Kirby gave new information about the Sept. 24 attack on the Kosovar police officer and broke the news of the latest Serbian deployment, revealing that it included advanced artillery, tanks, and mechanized infantry units. As coverage spiked, European countries joined the U.S. in applying new diplomatic pressure on the Serbs, and the U.K. announced an additional troop deployment to Kosovo. Within days, Serbian troops were pulling back.

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The declassification and release of the Serbian troop movements is one example of a novel White House approach to using intelligence that has grown out of the U.S. response to the [war in Ukraine](#).

Starting in the fall of 2021, as U.S. spies became convinced Russia was preparing to invade, Sullivan worked with Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and CIA Director William Burns to “downgrade” classified details of Moscow’s moves. “We were sitting on this troubling information,” says Maher Bitar, NSC coordinator for intelligence and defense policy, “and we needed to get ahead of what the Russians were going to do.”

More than two years later, the White House has built a broad program to share secrets when it serves strategic goals. About once

a week, White House officials see intelligence that they want to make public and get approval from Sullivan to try, more than a dozen current and former White House and national-security officials tell TIME. Intelligence officials at the NSC send requests to the ODNI, which processes them, agreeing on cleared language with those who created the secrets to begin with. “The ultimate decision on whether to green-light or red-light a given piece of information rests with the professionals in the [intelligence](#) community,” Sullivan says.

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The motivation behind the program, the officials say, is that it works. Strategic declassification has denied Russian President Vladimir Putin “false narratives,” Burns said in a speech last summer, “putting him in the uncomfortable and unaccustomed position of being on his back foot.” The effort has expanded beyond Russia. The U.S. has declassified intelligence to blunt Chinese saber-rattling in the [Taiwan Strait](#), to pressure Iran to stop supplying weapons to the [Houthis](#) attacking shipping vessels in the Red Sea, and to counter Hamas’ false claims about Israeli strikes. “This is a game changer,” says Kirby. “I hope they never put it back in the bottle.”



The U.S. has selectively declassified and leaked intelligence for as long as it has collected it, but the [Biden Administration](#)'s secret-sharing program is new in several ways, current and former intelligence officials say. Where once the ODNI received one or two downgrade requests a month, it now sometimes receives many more than that in a day. While other agencies have jumped into the declassification game, much of the work is driven out of the White House. Rather than leaking one-off intelligence scoops, NSC officials combine multiple secrets with open-source intelligence from commercial-satellite imagery, battlefield bloggers, and news reports, distributing packages that echo the finished intelligence reports they receive every morning. "It's been done piecemeal over the years," says former CIA spokesman Bill Harlow. "It's more strategic and orchestrated this time."

Not everyone thinks that's a good thing. Skeptics point to the U.S. government's history of cherry-picking intelligence to [deceive](#) foreigners, and Americans, during the Cold War and to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Members of the U.S. intel community, ever protective of their secrets, want to limit the program to the conflict in Ukraine. Some in both parties worry a White House-run propaganda effort could be used for personal or political advantage. "Now we've got this declassification weapon that, put in the wrong hands, is very dangerous," says a former CIA official.

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But the world of secrets is changing, and America is scrambling to adapt. Russia has refined its [social media propaganda](#) operation so aggressively [since 2016](#) that it believes only 1% of its bot army is detected on platforms like X and TikTok, according to a U.S. intelligence document published last year by the *Washington Post*. China is using advanced AI in its propaganda operations, the Rand Corp. said in a recent report. Sharing America's secrets with the world before enemies try to influence and undermine democracies,

advocates say, is one of the best ways to fight back. “We’ve learned you can beat a lie to the punch if you know it’s coming,” says Kirby. “We’re getting out ahead of them.”

At the same time, the proliferation of classified information means that America’s secrets are worth less than they used to be—and are harder to keep. The U.S. intelligence community sucks up the equivalent of 29 petabytes or 500 billion pages worth of information every day, classifies tens of millions of documents a year, and produces an estimated 50,000 classified reports annually, according to the National Security Agency, the National Archives, and public reporting. Accused mass leakers Edward Snowden and Airman First Class Jack Teixeira were both IT workers hired to manage that ocean of intel. Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump have faced special-counsel investigations for their [sloppy handling](#) of [classified](#) information. America’s attempt to safely warehouse billions of secrets is failing from the top of the intel chain to the bottom. As Justice Potter Stewart said in the [Pentagon Papers case](#), “When everything is classified, then nothing is classified, and the system becomes one to be disregarded by the cynical or the careless, and to be manipulated by those intent on self-protection or self-promotion.”

The result is a toxic mix of public skepticism and diminished security. The share of Americans who believe the intelligence community respects their privacy and civil liberties dropped from 52% in 2020 to 44% in 2022, according to a University of Texas survey. After revelations of abuse by the FBI, Congress is struggling to renew the controversial Section 702 mass-surveillance program that the government says is crucial to fighting everything from [fentanyl](#) trafficking to terrorism to Chinese spies.

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In its declassification program, the White House thinks it has the start of an answer to all three problems: [disinformation](#), overclassification, and public distrust. “That’s a pretty good 1, 2, 3 from my perspective,” Sullivan tells TIME. He adds, “Obviously, this approach will have to evolve over time as we learn more.” The story of how the Biden Administration developed its secret-sharing program, and the search for how to use it safely, shows how far the U.S. government still has to go.



The first target of the American secret sharers’ efforts was [Vladimir Putin](#). In mid

-October 2021, senior national-security leaders briefed the President, Sullivan, and other White House officials that Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine. Sullivan’s first reaction was surprise. The second was to come up with a way to deter it. Biden decided to send Burns, a seasoned diplomat and former ambassador to Russia, to confront Putin. “We wanted to demonstrate to the Russians that we were aware of their planning to launch an invasion of [Ukraine](#) in order to disabuse them of the idea that they could have the element of surprise,” says Eric Green, then the senior director for Russia and Central Asia at the NSC. “But we also wanted to make sure what [Bill Burns](#) said was not burning sources and methods.” The result was a “downgrade,” or partial

declassification, of the briefing Sullivan and the senior U.S. officials had received, Green recalls.

Burns ended up confronting [Putin](#) remotely in early November, reaching him by phone in the resort town of Sochi from the Moscow office of the Russian President's foreign policy adviser. The U.S. spy chief left Russia feeling he had made no progress. The next step was to try to unite America's allies behind the effort to deter an invasion. On the way back from Russia, the U.S. team briefed E.U. and NATO partners with a more detailed presentation of the intelligence. The Europeans were skeptical. "The French and the Germans and others were like, 'You guys always overreact to these things. Russia's got too much to lose,'" says a senior U.S. intelligence official. After hearing the European doubts, Haines recalled in a 2023 interview with Politico, Biden said, "OK, you need to get out there. We need to start sharing intelligence."

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At the head of the effort were Sullivan and his deputy at the NSC, Jon Finer. Former journalists, they appreciate more than some the value of being first. "There was a sense that by doing it proactively we would have more influence over the [narrative](#)," says Green, who also saw a moral component to the decision: "This was such a monumental possibility that we had a duty to inform the public." And, Green adds, "If we kept it under wraps, and then it came out that we knew, that would be an untenable situation."

The group decided to declassify evidence that [Russian troops](#) were massing near Ukraine's borders. They found commercial-satellite photos that showed the same troop buildups they had seen on the U.S. spy platforms. They combined those images with some of the details from the briefing that had surprised them, as well as with news reports and other public information, and worked with the intelligence community to produce a declassified version. They then gave the package to Shane Harris, a veteran *Washington Post*

intelligence reporter. On Dec. 3, the *Post* ran the story. Other news outlets jumped to cover the troop buildup. Though the Russians denied they were preparing for war, the public conversation about the possibility of an invasion shifted. By the NSC's lights, the move was a success.



They decided to do more. In January, U.S. intelligence saw mounting preparations for a false-flag operation that Moscow intended to use as a justification for an invasion. Russia was preparing to stage an attack in separatist eastern Ukraine, complete with film of fake victims, the intelligence community reported. After issuing a general warning, the NSC prepared a more detailed package and got it cleared for release. On Feb. 3, then White House press secretary Jen Psaki and then State Department spokesperson Ned Price briefed reporters on the plot.

Not everyone was convinced. “What evidence do you have to support the idea that there is some propaganda film in the making?” asked Matt Lee, the State Department correspondent at AP. Price, sticking to his talking points, repeated the allegation without providing further evidence. The exchange went viral and highlighted the challenges to the approach. Declassification would only work, the NSC concluded, if it had enough credibility to

overcome the U.S. history of bad intelligence and propaganda abuse.

As it turned out, the Russians ran the false-flag play anyway. On Feb. 18, an explosion rocked the pro-Russia-separatist [region of Donetsk](#), and local leaders there called on Moscow to intervene militarily. But against the backdrop of the White House briefings, the Russian pretext provided no diplomatic cover. By some accounts, the pre-bunking delayed the Russian invasion. “We know it bought at least a week,” Kirby says.

But it didn’t prevent it. Russian tanks rolled across [Ukraine’s borders in late February](#) 2022, grabbing swaths of territory in the east of the country and coming within miles of the presidential palace in [Kyiv](#). Back in Washington, the secret sharers expanded their efforts.



The Office of the Director of National Intelligence is headquartered in a suburban complex in northern Virginia known as Liberty Crossing. Two large steel-and-glass buildings in the shapes of an L and an X are hidden up a drive behind an embankment, a stand of trees, and security checkpoints. Since 2008, the complex has housed the intelligence community’s umbrella organization, created

after 9/11 to manage the 18 sometimes competing, often territorial, agencies that collect and analyze America's secrets.

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In the two-story lobby of the L-shaped building, rows of security turnstiles and low-ceilinged elevator banks lead up to the office that handles information management for the intelligence community. It is not large: fewer than 10 officials are assigned to the job. The declassification requests they fielded in the run-up to the [Russian invasion](#) started out as emails over the classified network, primarily from Biden, Sullivan, and the White House, and grew to include petitions from other agencies and departments. ODNI declined to say how many of the downgrade requests are for nonpublic or covert purposes, and how many are for full declassification and official public release.

To help deal with the spiking number of requests, the NSC organized its process. Proposed downgrades had to meet certain strategic objectives. In the case of [Ukraine](#), says Kirby, those were to support Kyiv's success on the battlefield, bolster NATO, and avoid drawing the U.S. directly into the war. The requested intelligence had to be based on high-confidence assessments, not the low- or medium-ones that had proved false in [Iraq](#). Sullivan approves these requests about two-thirds of the time, according to Kirby and other White House officials.

Not everyone was eager to help. Intelligence officers who had classified secrets to begin with were loath to declassify them, officials on all sides of the process say. But in Haines, Sullivan had an ally. A lawyer and physicist who once owned an indie bookstore in Baltimore and had a hobby of rebuilding everything from TVs to twin-engine planes, she rose to be deputy head of the CIA in 2013. "Having a system that can facilitate such sharing," she said in

January 2023, “and ultimately having the resources to review and downgrade, or declassify what can be released, is critical.”

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Over time, the ODNI created a system to speed response and create records both of the request to declassify the [intelligence](#) and of its authorization. The template includes the date of the request, the deadline, who’s asking for the downgrade, who’s going to use it, what the cleared language would be, where the intelligence came from, and the justification for declassification. Usually such requests take weeks to process. Now the speed depends in part on how sensitive the intelligence is, says one official involved in the process.

In some cases, approval went all the way up to Burns or the heads of other intelligence agencies. The biggest concern was protecting sources and methods. The [White House](#) learned not to ask for the [declassification](#) of full, finished reports, instead targeting individual facts, or maps and graphics. “Strategic downgrades had to mean strategic, it just couldn’t be every tactical piece of intelligence we came across,” says Sullivan. Over time, those involved say, program runners in the intelligence community saw how their sanitized information was used publicly, and bought in.

That meant more and more declassification. From March 2022 on, the U.S. released intelligence about potential Chinese support for Russia, Russian attacks against Ukrainian storage facilities, Russia’s naval blockade in the Black Sea, and Iranian and North Korean support for the war. The secrets were combined with publicly available information, according to senior White House officials, including naval maritime data, commercial-satellite imagery, and social media activity.

Along the way, the NSC team began expanding the use of declassified material. Ahead of then House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#)'s visit to Taiwan in August 2022, Kirby briefed a declassified intelligence-community analysis of the steps China might take in response, including military provocations like firing missiles in the Taiwan Strait. The goal was to diminish the shock value of any retaliation by Beijing for Pelosi's trip, a senior White House official says.



The U.S. has also used declassification in the [Israel-Hamas War](#). The White House twice downgraded intelligence about what they said was Hamas' use of [al-Shifa Hospital](#) in Gaza as a military command center "to help explain to people how [Hamas fighters] have deeply embedded themselves within the civilian population," says an NSC official familiar with the decision. In late December, the White House released downgraded intelligence claiming Iran had transferred drones and cruise missiles to Houthi militants in Yemen that were being used to attack ships in the Red Sea.

Read More: [Human Rights Watch Accuses Israel of Blocking Aid to Gaza](#)

Even the program's most enthusiastic backers admit the results are mixed. Finer, Sullivan's deputy, told an intelligence conference in July that the U.S. had used it to successfully deter Russian arms

deals with China and Iran, and to build support for war-crimes charges at the Hague. Yet months of downgrades intended to forestall arms transfers from North Korea to Russia failed, as have attempts to pressure Iran to cut off military support for the [Houthis](#).

In late January 2023, Kirby received a letter via courier that was postmarked st. petersburg. Having grown up in St. Petersburg, Fla., he thought the letter might have something to do with the home he still owns there. But on closer examination, he discovered it had come not from the southeastern U.S. but from northwestern Russia. Inside the envelope was a typed note. “Dear Mr Kirby, Could you please clarify what crime was committed by PMC Wagner?” It was hand-signed: “[Yevgeny Prigozhin](#).”

The moment was something of a milestone in the U.S.-Russia propaganda battle: a direct exchange between adversaries in the information space. Prigozhin was the head of the [Wagner Group](#), which ran a key mercenary force on the ground in Ukraine. Just days before receiving Prigozhin’s letter, Kirby had announced at a White House press briefing that the U.S. was designating Wagner as a transnational criminal organization and imposing sanctions on the group.

Read More: [*Inside the Little-Known U.S. Arms Control Center in Daily Contact With Russia*](#)

Before leading the mercenary group, one of Prigozhin’s claims to fame was as a global disinformation operator. In [2016](#), he organized the main Russian troll farms that infiltrated U.S. social media during the [presidential election](#), part of a campaign that pushed propaganda to 126 million people on Facebook, according to the company. The Justice Department indicted Prigozhin for his role in the scheme. Prigozhin’s personalized response to Wagner’s criminal designation bolstered the White House’s sense that declassification had given the U.S. a new weapon in the running

battle against Russia's propagandists. "It showed we were getting inside his head," says Kirby.

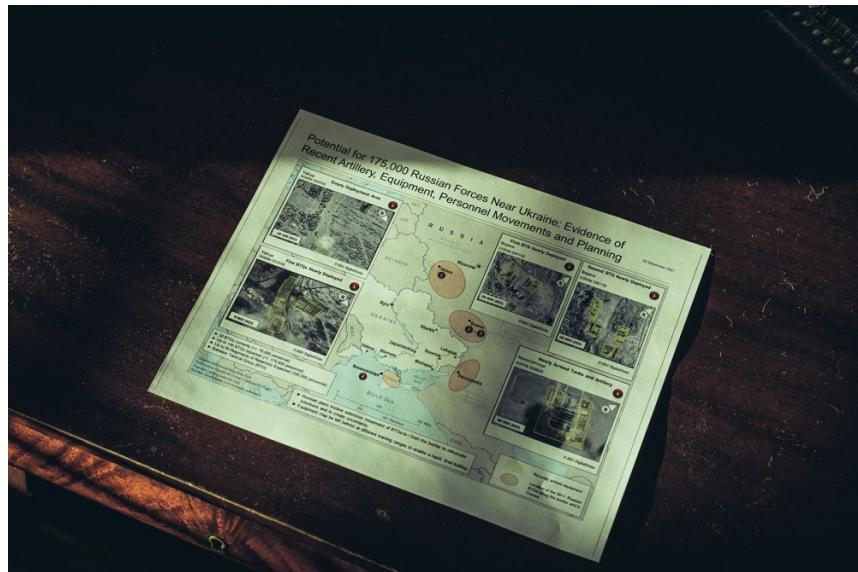
In other ways, the episode highlights how far behind the U.S. has fallen in the [propaganda wars](#). Since 2016, Moscow has expanded and refined its efforts to control the "information environment" through automated propaganda. In late 2022, Russia's "Main Scientific Research Computing Center" was improving its network of hundreds of thousands of [social media bots](#) to the point that they were detected on X, YouTube and TikTok less than 1% of the time, according to a top-secret document leaked by Teixeira.

To hear America's information warriors tell it, the danger is only growing. Autocracies like Iran, North Korea, and China have gotten in the game. China's leader, Xi Jinping, has called for expanded use of technology in controlling international public opinion, and the Chinese military has researched the use of [generative AI](#) and large language models to automate propaganda at scale, according to a Rand study released in September. The result, write the researchers, may be "a massive bot network that looks and acts human."

Read More: Tech Companies Are Taking Action on AI Election Misinformation. Will It Matter?

No one knows how effective this AI-enhanced propaganda may be. "I don't think it's changing a lot of people's minds, it's just reinforcing what people already think," says James Steinberg, former Deputy National Security Adviser and dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Others are more alarmed. "As AI's role in defining and shaping the 'information space' grows," wrote former Google CEO [Eric Schmidt](#), former National Security Adviser [Henry Kissinger](#), and MIT dean Daniel Huttenlocher in a recent book, "the prospects for free society, even free will, may be altered."

For students of government intelligence abuse, the true danger is in overreacting. While Sullivan, Burns, and Haines tout the power of declassification in the fight against autocratic disinformation, others worry about a coordinated secret-exploiting operation at the White House. “We don’t want to chill declassification,” says Mark Zaid, a lawyer who specializes in national-security cases, “but the politicization or weaponization of intelligence is worse than at any point in our lifetime.”



History supports such concerns. In the Cold War, the U.S. used declassified intelligence to mislead adversaries and Americans alike, including when officials asserted that Russian forces knew they were shooting at a civilian aircraft when they downed Korean Air Lines Flight 007 in 1983. In the early 2000s, the U.S. declassified what turned out to be bogus intelligence about Saddam Hussein’s weapons-of-mass-destruction program to justify the [invasion of Iraq](#). Most recently, U.S. counter-intelligence operatives at the FBI gave credence to an unreliable dossier collected on Trump, then briefed him on it, paving the way for its publication.

Trump has his own ideas about the uses of declassification. He started his term by allegedly revealing secrets—reportedly collected by Israeli intelligence services—to two Russian officials,

for reasons that never became clear. In 2019, he tweeted high-resolution photos, reportedly taken by a multibillion-dollar KH-11 spy satellite, showing a damaged Iranian missile site. Accused of taking secrets to his [Mar-a-Lago resort](#) in Florida, Trump falsely claimed he could declassify documents just by [thinking them unsecret](#).

What has gotten both [Trump](#) and Biden in the most trouble, however, isn't misuse of declassification, but failing to safeguard the secrets to which they have access. Special counsel Robert Hur concluded Biden willfully took secret papers to his home in Wilmington and to offices elsewhere in Delaware and in Pennsylvania. Hur declined to bring charges. The FBI found secret documents strewn around Mar-a-Lago, and special counsel Jack Smith has charged Trump with blocking government attempts to get them back.

Experts say such breaches are as much a product of America's industrial creation of secrets as they are carelessness in handling them. No one knows how many secrets America creates a year: the number grew from more than 5 million in 2006 to more than 95 million in 2012, and eventually the government just stopped counting. Former Defense Department officials estimate that anywhere from 50% to 90% of them shouldn't be classified at all. The cheapening of American secrets has grown so extreme that the organizers of a popular online video game, *War Thunder*, which crowd-sources scenarios between real-world militaries, have repeatedly warned participants to stop trying to make the game more accurate by sharing classified details about the weapons systems it features.

Could the White House's willingness to declassify intelligence for strategic purposes help with overclassification? Advocates say it's harder for agencies to justify keeping secrets from the 1950s when today's spies are being more flexible with theirs. In theory, AI could be used to compare the billions of government secrets with

what is publicly available. The Public Intelligence Declassification Board, an office of the National Archives tasked with fighting overclassification, argued for using new tech in a 2020 report, and Haines has endorsed some of its ideas.

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There will always be secrets of such great value or delicate provenance that they must be protected. “While the amount of publicly available information has essentially exploded, that doesn’t mean the age of big secrets is over,” Haines tells TIME. But mass collection and social media have changed the economy of secrecy. Once, classified intelligence that gave decision-makers an advantage over their opponents was so hard to come by that it was genuinely precious for national security. Now, intelligence that once took months to collect and process can make it around the world in minutes. “Open source” groups like [Bellingcat](#) have shown the value of posting facts online to contradict an autocrat’s false narrative before it can take root. To extract value from at least some of its billions of secrets, argue proponents of declassification, the U.S. government needs to make them public.

That might also help with what has become a crisis of public trust in the intelligence community. In a 2019 report, Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz found the FBI abused the process of applying for warrants to spy on Americans 17 times as it went after former Trump campaign official Carter Page. As recently as 2021, the FBI performed more than 3 million searches on [data](#) collected on Americans, including those involved in the Jan. 6 riot and Black Lives Matter protests, without warrants, according to an ODNI report. It’s perhaps not surprising that some Americans give credence to conspiracy theories, from Trump’s fulminations about a sinister “deep state” to presidential candidate [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s claims](#) that the CIA killed his uncle.

Read More: *How Housewives Played a Critical Role in the CIA*

Sullivan believes that responsible declassification can help reverse this crisis of trust. “Being able to look the American people in the eye and say, ‘We’re tracking this threat, we’re taking it seriously, we’re doing something about it,’” he says, “creates trust with a sense that one’s government is on top of the problem.” Some intelligence experts propose doing more to ensure transparency and oversight, like empowering bipartisan committees on [Capitol Hill](#), enacting tougher protections for whistle-blowers, and imposing rules at ODNI and Executive Orders from the White House on what gets declassified and how it is downgraded.

But ultimately, the broad authority to declassify secrets rests with the President. Which means the Commander in Chief’s credibility is central to any attempt to use secret-sharing as a tool to fight disinformation and rebuild public trust. “What sets us apart is the way we do it, and what we’re doing it for,” says the NSC’s Bitar. Or, as the CBS News correspondent turned government broadcaster Edward R. Murrow told Congress in 1963: “[Truth](#) is the best propaganda.”

—With reporting by Leslie Dickstein and Simmone Shah/New York and Lissa August/Washington

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How We Chose the 2024 Women of the Year

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[Taraji P. Henson](#) knows what it means to be undervalued—and she wants to fix that. In a December [interview](#), the actor made headlines with an uncompromising critique of [pay inequality in Hollywood](#), saying that after more than 20 years in the industry, she is still compensated with only a fraction of what her white and male counterparts are paid. Henson spoke out in the hopes of leveling the playing field for future generations: “If I can’t fight for them coming up behind me, then what the f-ck am I doing?”

That sense of urgency thrums through this year's edition of [Women of the Year](#), TIME's annual list of trailblazers who are breaking new ground and fighting for a more equitable future. The 12 women on our 2024 list are pivotal figures from across the globe who have dedicated themselves to lifting up others as they rise.

Economist [Claudia Goldin](#) was awarded a Nobel Prize in 2023 for her research on women in the workforce—research that has helped shape our understanding of the gender wage gap and, by extension, how it may one day be closed. She began her work decades ago by taking an interest in the role of married women in society, who had long been ignored: “Her story was unfolding through the 20th century,” Goldin tells TIME, “and it was a story that someone should tell in a manner that was big and bold and that dug deep into the history.”

Human-rights activist [Nadia Murad](#), another recent Nobel laureate, was honored in 2018 for her work to [eliminate the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war](#). Murad has since become one of the world’s most visible advocates for survivors of genocide, and in December became the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit aimed at holding to account companies with financial ties to perpetrators of terrorism. Reem Hajajreh and Yael Admi are also organizing for peace, as key leaders of Palestinian and Israeli women’s groups that have partnered to advocate for [nonviolent resolutions](#) to the conflict. They believe women’s participation will be key to any agreements brokered.

Our list also speaks to the women who are using their personal experiences to fuel advancements across male-dominated fields. Geneticist [Marlena Fejzo](#) was dismissed by her doctor despite experiencing such extreme gastrointestinal distress during a pregnancy that she lost her fetus, so she took on the project of studying the underlying cause herself. In December, Fejzo co-authored a paper identifying a gene linked to severe morning sickness, a breakthrough that will aid future treatment.

There are also stories that celebrate the dazzling achievements of women in sports and the arts. Tennis champion [Coco Gauff](#) has been a serious contender since she showed up in the fourth round of Wimbledon at the age of 15. She reached a new high when she [won the U.S. Open in 2023](#) and became the highest-paid female athlete in the world, according to one major ranking.

And there were few creative achievements more impactful over the past year than [Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*](#), the film that—while [subverting long-standing gendered tropes](#)—grossed more than \$1.4 billion at the box office and made her the only director ever to have her first three solo films nominated for [Best Picture at the Oscars](#). Gerwig, who appears on the Women of the Year cover, says she doesn't want an “asterisk” by her name, a perspective many of our honorees share—that their identities as women, while powerful and in many ways unifying, do not wholly define their work. “You don’t think to yourself, ‘I have to love this because it’s by a woman, for a woman,’” Gerwig says. “You love it because it’s great.”

Gerwig and more 2024 Women of the Year will join us at our annual gala in Los Angeles in early March to kick off Women’s History Month. This is one of our favorite nights of the year—it’s a celebration of progress and an inspiring call for perseverance. “Whatever happens,” Gerwig says, “good or bad, you’ve got to keep going.”

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Trump's Criminal Trials Likely to Start With the One Some Take Least Seriously

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.

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



When Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg [indicted](#) Donald Trump last April, the first criminal indictment of a former President in history, the case drew some derision. Prosecuting a former President over hush-money payments to a porn star seemed trivial and relied on a legal technicality to bump the charges up to felonies, some said. Given that three other cases were targeting Trump for trying to overthrow the 2020 election and refusing to

return national security secrets, Bragg's case seemed like weak sauce.

Ten months later, the New York case has become less of an afterthought. In fact, it might end up being the main show. As the other three cases find themselves facing various legal roadblocks, Bragg may be the best positioned to hand Donald Trump a felony conviction before the November election.

Bragg is gearing up to bring Trump to trial in late March, according to a person familiar with the case, hopscotching over a federal case focused on the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol that had been previously seen as likely to be the first of Trump's four criminal trials. While Trump's inner circle says it would prefer none of the criminal trials happen before Election Day, some see a trial on the New York case as the next best outcome for the former President. "It is the goofiest of all cases," says a Republican strategist close to the Trump campaign. "If Trump beats this case, it sets the tone and feeds into his narrative that all of these cases are a witch hunt."

The Bragg case hinges on the timing of Trump's efforts to cover up a sex scandal—weeks before the 2016 election. Trump is charged with 34 counts of faking business records to hide payments to actress Stormy Daniels intended to stop her from publicly describing a sexual encounter. Bragg has argued that the charges should be bumped up to felonies from misdemeanors because the payments were covering up a federal crime: election interference.

The core of the case "is not money for sex," Bragg said in a Dec. 22 interview on WNYC New York Public Radio. "We would say it's about conspiring to corrupt a presidential election and then lying in New York business records to cover it up," Bragg said.

Bragg's office is watching closely for New York state judge Juan Merchan to rule as early as next week on an effort by Trump to get the case tossed out, according to a person familiar with the case.

Trump has argued the indictment should be thrown out on grounds that state laws don't affect federal elections and that the case was politically motivated. Bragg and his staff see signs that point to Merchan rejecting that argument, further bolstering their legal theory that charging Trump with felonies because of how the hush-money payments impacted the presidential election is valid.

Merchan's ruling will follow one in July from Judge Alvin Hellerstein in the Southern District of New York, who kept the case in state court and affirmed the prosecution's assertion that "Trump can be convicted of a felony even if he did not commit any crime beyond the falsification, so long as he intended to do so or to conceal such a crime."



Within Bragg's office, staff are operating under the assumption that the case will move to jury selection on March 25. The prosecution believes it could present its case in 3 to 4 weeks, which could pave the way for a verdict by the summer, well before the November election. If convicted, Trump could face a sentence up to four years in prison.

Bragg's recently bulked up the team handling the case by adding one of the city's most experienced trial attorneys, Joshua Steinglass, who has tried high-profile gruesome homicides in front

of New York juries. He also worked on the white collar case that convicted the Trump Organization of tax fraud last year. Steinglass joins the chief of the investigative division, Susan Hoffinger, Chris Conroy, who has been in the district attorney's office for two decades, and former senior Justice Department official Matthew Colangelo.

"Which is the most viable, which is the one that could actually go?" says the person familiar with Bragg's preparations on the case. "All signs are pointing to" Bragg's case, the person says.

The New York case comes as the other three criminal cases against Trump—two in federal court and one out of Georgia—hit delays and potential roadblocks.

- The Jan. 6 case: Special Prosecutor Jack Smith charged Trump with four counts related to his actions leading up to the Jan. 6, 2021 attacks on the Capitol. That trial was scheduled to start March 4 but has been postponed while Trump's claim that he has immunity from prosecution winds its way through the courts. An appeals court ruled Tuesday that Trump is not immune from prosecution for actions he took while in office. Trump plans to appeal that decision to the Supreme Court. "President Trump respectfully disagrees with the D.C. Circuit Court's decision and will appeal it in order to safeguard the Presidency and the Constitution," says Steven Cheung, a Trump campaign spokesperson.
- The classified documents case: Smith's case dealing with Trump's refusal to return classified documents from Mar-a-Lago is scheduled for trial in May, but will likely be pushed back over Trump's pretrial motions and other legal maneuvers.
- The Georgia case: The case charging Trump with interfering in Georgia's election results is snarled for now in legal challenges over Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis' personal relationship with the lawyer she appointed to lead the

investigation into Trump. While the trial might still begin this year, it is not expected to be completed before Election Day.

If Trump wins the election, he could stop the Justice Department from pursuing the federal cases against him, as well as try to pardon himself from federal charges. As the Georgia and New York cases deal with state crimes, a President's pardoning power would not apply.



Bragg has said that he won't stand in the way if one of the other cases is ready to move first. "We're not going to stand on ceremony. There's other dockets here, broader justice may warrant another case going first, but we stand at the ready," Bragg said during a Jan. 8 interview with NY1. At this point, the New York case seems best positioned to go to trial first.

Trump's camp thinks his legal woes won't cripple his election chances, despite polls that suggest he could lose significant support if convicted of a felony. "Even with a conviction in any of these cases, President Trump is still neck and neck with Joe Biden," says a source close to Trump. "That should scare the hell out of the Democrats."

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How South Korea Is Tackling Its Demographic Crisis

Koh Ewe (Koyu) is a reporter for TIME based in Singapore. She covers the Asia-Pacific region and global overnight news.



Some 24.5% of South Koreans aged 70 and above were still working as of January, local media [reported](#) Monday, as officials increasingly look to keep more elderly in the workforce to address a demographic crisis.

Elderly employment figures [have seen a steady increase](#) since the country's statistics authority started to collect the data in 2005.

Among these workers, half of whom are aged 75 and above, 42.1% are considered “simple laborers” by authorities, referring to workers with jobs that are not specialized and require just a few hours of training. Some 30% of them are working in the agriculture, fishing, and forestry industry, while 22.8% work in the social affairs and service industry.

South Korea is projected to become the [world's most aged by 2044](#) and the number of people in their 70s exceeded those in their 20s for the first time ever last year. Authorities are scrambling to address the country's aging population, including efforts to [encourage employment among youth](#) as well as the elderly and boost [low fertility rates](#).

To entice couples to grow bigger families, the South Korean government has even mulled [granting military exemption](#) to men who have three or more babies.

Read More: *[Inside South Korea's Harsh Alternative to Military Service](#)*

An aging population comes has wideranging effects, including [increased healthcare and welfare costs](#). The country's retirement age of 60—already raised from 58 in 2017—was first set at a time when life expectancies were shorter. Longer life spans today—and consequently longer time spent in retirement without income—have sparked economic fears within both the workforce and government. Labor unions in the country are [urging companies to raise the retirement age again](#) so workers can earn wages for a few more years.

South Korean authorities are welcoming the growing number of elderly workers as a solution to labor shortages caused by the demographic shift—a problem faced by several economies around Asia.

In neighboring Japan, which has found itself in the throes of an even bigger demographic crisis, [one in every 10 people is aged 80 or older](#)—making it the country with the highest proportion of elderly in the world.

Those aged 65 and older accounted for 13.6% of Japan's workforce in 2022. Japan's Prime Minister [Fumio Kishida](#) warned last year

that the country was “on the brink” of social dysfunction over the demographic crisis.

China, which is considered a “super-aged society” by the World Bank, has also been trying to get more seniors working. People over 60 account for about 20% of China’s population and make up 8.8% of its workforce.

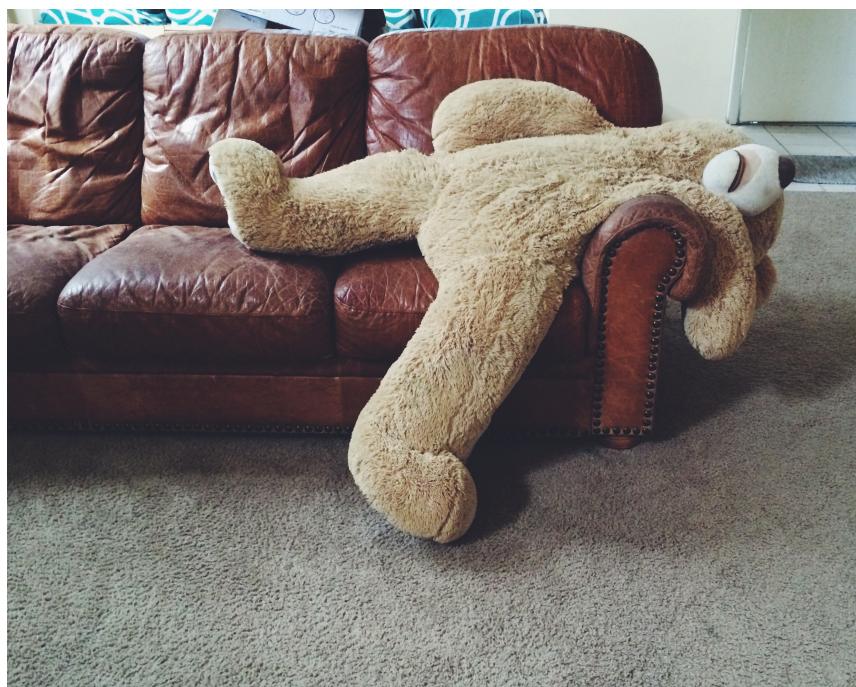
As China’s state media [calls on retirees to re-enter the workforce](#), there are also discussions of raising the country’s mandatory retirement age, which is among the youngest in the world. Last month, Beijing released a [silver economy plan](#) promising to reorient its economy around the expanding elderly population, including investments in elderly products and services.

In Singapore, set to [become “super-aged” by 2026](#), authorities are looking at further incentives to get more seniors in the workforce. The workforce participation rate among residents aged 65 and over, which has steadily increased over the past decade, stood at [31% in 2022](#).

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Why We're More Exhausted Than Ever

Ballesteros holds a master's degree in industrial-organizational psychology and worked in corporate training and development before launching her burnout management coaching business. She is the author of *The Cure for Burnout: How to Find Balance and Reclaim Your Life*



People are tired. Like, really tired. As evidenced by recent trends such as [Quiet Quitting](#), [Coffee Badging](#), [Bare Minimum Mondays](#), and most of all, [The Great Resignation](#)—when over 47 million Americans voluntarily resigned from their positions—people are feeling a strain on more than just their work calendars; they’re feeling it on their spirits. We’re now in the era of “[The Great Exhaustion](#),” what writer and computer science professor Cal Newport has called a time when people are looking to reestablish their relationship with work in order to reduce their pervasive sense of drain.

Most people aren't surprised to hear about "The Great Exhaustion." We know that we are tired, and we see it in the choices we make every day: ordering dinner because we don't have the energy to make it, trying to find ways to work from home so we don't have to add a two-hour commute to our day, infrequent social outings because it is impossible to coordinate busy adult schedules, complete de-prioritization of hobbies—the list goes on and on. People feel so fatigued that they are cutting out activities that used to be commonplace and low stress, like working out and going to the supermarket. Factor in recovering from the pandemic, inflation, and global stressors, and you've got a recipe for complete physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion.

So why are levels of exhaustion increasing? I speak with burned out professionals for a living, and I have heard countless unique reasons for exhaustion. The three factors that are commonly overlooked but that I believe are contributing the most are unsustainable lifestyles, exposure to stress outside of our control, and financial insecurity. These are facets of our lives that we have managed to normalize. But this normalization has caused us to disregard their impact on our physical and mental wellbeing.

Unsustainable lifestyles

What is the opposite of feeling exhausted? Feeling energized. But what, exactly, helps us to feel energized?

New York Times-bestselling author and researcher Dan Buettner spent his career studying "blue zones," areas in the world where people live longer, healthier lives than anywhere else. In his work, he explains that people who live in blue zones have one thing in common: they live a human-needs-first lifestyle, in which the things that we *need* as human beings are prioritized. That means eating whole foods, having rich social lives, getting regular

movement, and working with a purpose rather than for the sake of maximizing productivity.

This is a stark contrast to most people's realities. Outside of these "blue zones," most people eat processed foods, strategically plan activities to socialize and get movement, and treat work like it comes before everything else. Unfortunately, prioritizing elements found in blue zones requires spare time, energy, and money—things the average (tired) person does not have. An objective look at how most people are living day-to-day doesn't paint a picture of human needs being met; it paints a picture of enduring our demands. We have not built a human-needs-first society; we have built a [business-needs-first society](#), and it is starting to show.

Stress that is out of our control

Stress within our control (a big project we're working on, balancing a demanding job and childcare, doing something that scares us) can be mitigated and builds confidence when addressed. Stress outside our control (violence in our cities, [climate disasters](#), tragedy around the world, and inflation) makes us feel helpless. While it is important that we aren't ignorant to what is going on in the world, it also weighs on us to take in so many stressors without the possibility of resolution.

That stress causes exhaustion is not revolutionary, but it is exposure to stress outside of our control that makes us lose hope. Hope is a powerful counter to exhaustion and burnout. We can endure difficulties with much higher morale when we retain hope that things will get better. When everywhere we turn there is news making us feel like things aren't getting better, we begin to break down.

Read More: [Feeling Off? It Could Be 'Ambient' Stress](#)

The **biological effect** of exposure to these types of stressors cannot be overstated. Scrolling on our phone and watching a troubling two-minute video **triggers a stress response** in our body that can impact the rest of our day. A stress response each day for years damages our physical and mental health in ways that we often overlook.

Financial Insecurity

Fifty years ago, a single income could afford you a house, car, wife, and kids. Nowadays, you're lucky if a dual income can afford you *some* of those things. Having a hard job that supports your lifestyle is one thing; having a hard job that barely pays the bills is another. Much of the exhaustion we are seeing is frustration that working full-time (or more) doesn't translate to the same security and buying power it used to. Why are we working if not to afford the lifestyle we desire?

When that lifestyle (going to a restaurant on special occasions, going to a concert with friends, getting your kids the Christmas gifts they want) becomes unaffordable, frustration is understandable. Frustration over time turns into defeat, and defeat looks an awful lot like exhaustion. We have been a work-centered society for generations; however, it is becoming increasingly harder to convince people to live a busy, work-centered life when it doesn't translate to the quality of life that it used to.

The confluence of unsustainable lifestyles, stress out of our control, and financial insecurity creates a very tired group of people. The good news is that there are things within our control that can improve our quality of life and reduce exhaustion. Consider what augments your quality of life and makes you feel energized. Then consider what lowers your quality of life and makes you weary.

At the end of the day, how we feel is determined by small decisions we make. How much sleep we get, prioritizing a morning walk

with a friend, consuming media thoughtfully, refusing to discuss work and work stress when we are off the clock—these small things make a big difference, but we must do them consistently and relentlessly. We can't wait for changes to come from the top down; we must address the factors of exhaustion within our control to ensure we live healthy, peaceful, and satisfying lives.

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Alexei Navalny Is With Us Forever Now

Zygar is a journalist and writer who was editor-in-chief of Dozhd, Russia's only independent news channel. His books include *All the Kremlin's Men* (2015) and *The Empire Must Die* (2017). His new book is [War and Punishment: Putin, Zelensky and the Path to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine](#)



It was on New Year's Day. On January 1, 2015, [Alexei Navalny](#) called me. "Well, you and us have no one else left but you and us. Let's work together," he said.

It was indeed probably the hardest time for both him and me. I was editor-in-chief of the Dozhd TV channel at the time, and we were almost destroyed: we were cut off from all cable and satellite operators, and we were kicked out of our studio. But Navalny faced much worse: the criminal case, which was invented only to force him to stop his political activities, came to an end with Alexei himself given a suspended sentence, but his brother was imprisoned. Well, the main thing is that all of us, both Dozhd and Navalny, were not sure if we were still needed—in 2014 Putin occupied Crimea, Russia was overwhelmed by a wave of jingoism.

Dozhd stopped being the most influential TV channel and Navalny stopped being the most popular politician. “Well, you and us have no one else left but you and us.”

We really started working together then—we helped his team, [Anti-Corruption Foundation](#) (ACF), to make the first high-profile investigative movie: about [Prosecutor General Chaika](#). That movie has 26 million views today. By now ACF released dozens more great investigative films. And I’m proud to have been around at the very beginning.

In late 2015, I wrote a book called [All the Kremlin’s Men. Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin](#). One chapter in that book was about Alexei—although he never belonged to that court. However, he was always its main enemy.

Each chapter began with a portrait of the character, and I described Navalny then as follows:

“Alexei Navalny is an alien. At first glance he looks like an ordinary person, and watching him walk the streets or ride public transportation, you might inadvertently think that he is an ordinary man. In short, he does everything that ordinary people do and which top government officials and superstars do not. But appearances are deceptive. Navalny wears a human mask, like an extraterrestrial in a sci-fi movie, to hide his real identity—that of a politician.

Navalny’s life is hard. The state machine is out to get him, and he has to deal with that somehow. For instance, he does not drive for fear that a “provocateur” might jump in front of his car, whereupon he, Navalny, could be prosecuted.

Navalny is certainly aware that he is a superstar. Jail is perhaps the last place Putin wants him to be, since that would make him a martyr and increase his popularity. Navalny understands his

exclusivity. He is probably the only real politician out of Russia's 143 million inhabitants...

But Navalny is a unique person who made a conscious choice. As yet he has no power, and may never have. But he has certainly sacrificed the chance to lead a normal life, although he describes it as an opportunity to change Russia for the better.

If Russia had an open political system, Navalny would probably not be alone. But because it does not, there seems to be no one else crazy enough to trade in life for politics. Why does Navalny continue to believe that his time will come and that one day he could succeed Putin as president? There's only one rational explanation—he's an alien."

I was naive at that time—all of us, including Alexei, were naive. We would never believe that Putin wanted him dead. Because we thought that he didn't want Navalny to be a martyr. We were wrong. We are people and people are often wrong.

When Putin poisoned Navalny in 2020, I knew he would survive. I don't know why. Maybe I was too naive again. I always thought that Alexei is very morally strong, he is a historical figure, he cannot die. And he survived, exposed his assassins and made Putin a laughing stock. And for me there was not even a question whether he would stay in Europe or go back. I've described it all before: if he were an ordinary human being, he would stay to live. But he's an alien. He had already made his choice to devote himself to politics. And that's why he had to come back.

About a week ago, I received an email from Alexei. It was, of course, incredibly funny and energetic. He wrote that he was sitting in a cell from which you can't see a blade of grass or a leaf, and even to take a walk he was taken only to a neighboring cell, but he wrote it so cheerfully and dashingly that there was no doubt that everything was all right with him, nothing would break him.

He also wrote about the collapse of the USSR and what a unique chance Russia had in the 90s, and how it was lost, and how important it is not to miss the chance that will appear during the upcoming collapse of Putin's Russia.

He also wrote about Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nabokov, Solzhenitsyn, and Vysotsky. He was glad that in the new colony he was able to reread *Crime and Punishment*—because the library there is very small, there are only books from the Russian school program, but Dostoevsky, of course, is there. His letter ends with his traditional joke: “Be like Nabokov and better!”, he writes.

Now I don't know if he had time to receive my reply, where I tell him why I don't like Dostoevsky. And also describe some important moments from my future book. And at the end I write: “Hope to see you soon.”

I never doubted that I would see him again. I was always sure that Navalny is a supernatural person, he can't die, aliens don't die so easily.

I think many of us thought he was a magician. Everyone knew that it cannot be like that: at some point he casts some sort of spell, Putin disappears and Alexei becomes the Russian president. Everyone knew it would be long and difficult. But, somehow Alexei will manage to survive it. And then, after all, some sort of spell—and, pop, he is the president of Russia.

But it turns out it won't be like that. He won't be the president of future Russia, he'll have to be the founding father of the future Russia. He is with us now forever as a perfect example. As a messiah. As a superhero for many generations, on whose story children will grow up. It is not Putin they will look up to.

He will remain in history as a man who believed that Russia could be a normal democratic country, believed in values, and despised

the nonsense about a unique Russian path and doom to be an empire. He was always an idealist. He was not a cynic, did not believe that everything could be sold and bought.

For many years Russia was a very cynical country. Nobody believed in anything. Many people seriously believed that there was no democracy in the world, and there was no freedom of speech, only propaganda everywhere, and there was no such thing as fair justice. But Alexei believed in all those values. And he gave his life for it. So now we all have to believe. And the next generations will grow up and learn by looking at him—and they will also believe.

Now it seems to many people that Russia no longer has a future. But in fact, its future is precisely those people who are mourning Alexei Navalny all over the world. He united us and asked us not to give up. “You and us have no one else left but you and us. Let’s work together.”

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As the Ice Melts, Polar Bears Are Failing to Find Enough Food on Land

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*.



It's not easy to swim 175 km (109 mi.) when you're starving to death. It's not easy either to try to survive when you're shedding body weight at a rate of 1 kg (2.2 lbs.) a day. And it might be hardest—or at least most tragic—of all if you're a nursing mom and your calorie intake has dropped so low that you can no longer produce the milk you need to care for your young. As [a new paper](#) in *Nature Communications* reveals, all of those challenges and more are facing the world's polar bears, thanks to vanishing sea ice in our [warming world](#), denying the animals a platform that they need to hunt for seals. If the trend isn't reversed soon, the estimated [26,000 polar bears](#) in the wild could start to lose their hold on survival before the middle of this century.

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The researchers were less interested in establishing the fact of the bears' food plight; scientists are already aware of that problem. What they were more focused on learning was both how gravely the nutritional loss is affecting the animals' health and the alternative food sources they're scrounging for on land. To do their work, the scientists followed 20 different polar bears in Manitoba, Canada, from 2019 to 2022, fitting them with GPS trackers and video collars and periodically tranquilizing them and analyzing their blood, body mass, daily energy expenditure—basically a measure of calories coming in versus calories going out—and more.



“The polar bears in Hudson Bay [Canada] are probably at the edge of the range at which they can survive right now,” says Anthony Pagano, a research biologist with the [U.S. Geological Survey](#) and the lead author of the paper. “Most of the modeling work suggests that around 2050, they are going to be on land and away from their primary habitat [on the ice].” The contraction in range of the Hudson Bay community is likely to be reflected in the ranges of the [18 other polar bear subpopulations](#) scattered throughout the Arctic as well.

Read more: [*The Arctic is Heating Up, Disrupting the Planet and Local Communities*](#)

Across the arc of the study, the data Pagano and his colleagues gathered was troubling. Weight loss varied from bear to bear, with the daily loss of 1 kg representing just an average; some of the subject animals dropped up to 1.7 kg (3.75 lbs) every 24 hours. That may not seem like much when an adult male polar bear can tip the scales at 550 kg (1,200 lbs) and a female at 320 kg (700 lbs), but it can add up fast. And with less available to eat, the hungry bears have to travel farther and farther distances to find their next meal. The individual that swam 175 km—a young female—set the record among the bears studied, but another, older female also covered 120 km (75 mi). The endurance swims in search of food are energy-intensive and often fruitless for the bears. They are efficient hunters when they've got the purchase of ice beneath them, Pagano and his colleagues explain, but they are clumsy when they are going after seals and trying to swim at the same time.



That leaves them scavenging on land for foods they would not ordinarily eat—and getting little payoff for their efforts. “Polar bears are feeding on ducks and geese—catching them when they’re flightless and molting—as well as on their eggs,” Pagano says. Other foods on the desperate bears’ menus included berries and other vegetation, bones, antlers and, in one case, a beluga whale carcass. None of that fare is as calorie-rich as a steady diet of live, blubber-packed seals. Some of the bears vigorously sought out

these alternative sources of nutrition; others opted for a different strategy: resting and conserving the energy contained in their body mass. The latter approach costs stored calories, but so does the former, as all of the plodding and searching burns through energy too.

“The amount of body tissue they were burning to try and find those terrestrial foods was basically the same as what they’d get from *eating* those terrestrial foods,” Pagano says. “So there’s no actual benefit.”

The researchers were surprised to find that the bears were going through not just fat stores to compensate for the poor rations, but lean muscle tissue too. Pagano is not certain why their metabolisms would adopt that strategy, but he has some ideas. “There’s some thought that burning lean body mass might be more energetically efficient in some respects relative to burning body fats,” he says. “Also, conserving their body fat might provide them better thermal regulation once the winter and the ice return.”

Read more: [*After Visiting Both Ends of the Earth, I Realized How Much Trouble We’re In*](#)

That seasonal freeze-over is shorter than it used to be—though not by a lot. In the 1980s, polar bears were on land for about 110 days out of the year, with no need to eat terrestrial foods since the fat deposits they’d accumulate thanks to wintertime seal-hunting was enough to carry them the rest of the year. Now they’re off the ice for 130 days on average. It’s a measure of the nutritional knife’s-edge on which the bears operate that just 20 days can make the difference between whether they live and thrive or starve and die.

The individuals most likely to perish when food supplies are poor are young adults—due to their less-developed hunting skills—and cubs, whose principal source of nutrition, their mother’s milk, can

vanish in lean times. “If females are fasting for extended periods, they will actually stop lactating,” says Pagano.



Full-grown bears are by no means immune to danger, however. The authors cite earlier research predicting that the adult male population could decrease by 24% if the ice-free summer season increases to 180 days. This is especially so given the enormous energy intake—about 22,500 calories per day—that the big males need to maintain their body weight.

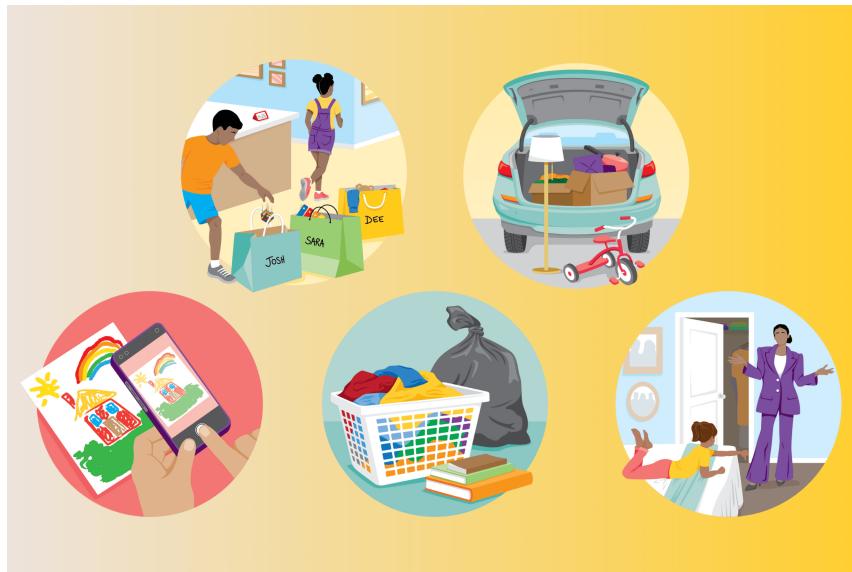
Polar bears aren’t the only species menaced by these findings. Humans are in harm’s way too. The more time bears spend off the ice and on land, the greater the likelihood they will wander into cities and towns in search of something to eat—and residents could easily be hurt or attacked if they get in the way of the hungry animals. People might also even be seen as sources of prey.

“When polar bears are on land, they act like other bears and become omnivores,” says Pagano. “It does raise the potential for human-bear interactions.”

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7 Low-Stress Ways to Start Decluttering

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



None of the tidying clichés ever really clicked with KC Davis, a therapist in Houston and mom to two young kids. “I’ve always been a messy person,” she says. “I’ve never been able to ‘clean as I go.’” Davis knew there were plenty of people just like her: those who wanted a serene space but lacked the time and energy to get started. After finding bite-size strategies that worked for her, Davis wrote *[How to Keep House While Drowning: A Gentle Approach to Cleaning and Organizing](#)*.

A messy house can feel overwhelming to tackle, and progress may seem incremental at first. But there’s good reason to work on building a healthier relationship with your home. Research suggests that clutter increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and that cleanliness is associated with [better self-rated health](#). Other studies have found that being surrounded by lots of excess stuff [contributes to procrastination, diminishes focus](#), and leads to [decreased life satisfaction](#).

We asked Davis and other experts to share their favorite strategies to kickstart a realistic decluttering routine.

Tackle one category at a time.

One day, Davis looked at her messy room and realized that every item could be sorted into one of five categories: trash, dishes, laundry, items that have a place (like books that belong on the shelf), and odds and ends that don't. She started cleaning up by category (and then found a home for her random objects). "I would get a trash bag and pick up all my trash, and then I'd get my laundry basket and pick up all my laundry," she says. "It provided a really simple roadmap for my brain."

Edit your wardrobe automatically.

Every New Year's Eve, Matt Paxton turns all the hangers in his closet around so they're hanging backward on the rod. "When you wear the item, you turn the hanger the other way," says the host of the PBS show *Legacy List with Matt Paxton*—which helps people unearth hidden treasures in their homes—and author of *Keep the Memories, Lose the Stuff*. The hanger trick gives Paxton visual proof of what he actually wore that year and which clothes languished in the closet. "You can't argue with it," he says, even if he did love that pink shirt he never got around to wearing. Anything he didn't wear, he donates. If a year feels too long, test out the exercise for three or six months, and then make a trip to the donation center or consignment shop.

Another way to thin out your wardrobe, Paxton suggests, is to host a fashion show—wearing whatever your kids or grandkids select from your closet. "If you can't put it on or if it doesn't fit, there's your answer," he says. "Everyone will laugh."

Change your environment.

Instead of dwelling on how to fix your own messy habits, consider adjusting your environment. Davis isn't good about taking the trash out every day, so she got a bigger trash can that takes longer to fill up. She even wheels it from room to room when she cleans up. To address another pain point—piles of dirty clothes—she put a laundry basket in every room. “I want to be able to put away trash and laundry with four steps no matter where I am in my house,” she says. “That cut down a lot on how messy I was.”

Scan your stuff.

One of the most frequent questions people ask Paxton is what to do with all their old photos. First, he advises, get rid of the negatives, any duplicates, generic landscape shots, and pictures of people you don't know or don't like. Then, digitize the remaining, more manageable pile by scanning copies with your computer or phone. The free app [Google PhotoScan](#), for example, allows users to scan photos with their smartphone, saving them in their cloud-based photo library.

Another app, [Artifcts](#), help preserve memories through a combination of images, audio, video, and text. If your grandmother has a lot of vintage jewelry, you could take a picture of each ring or necklace and record her telling a story about its significance. “Now you've got her words, her voice, her story, and it's forever,” he says —yet the objects cluttering up the closet can go.

Paxton also uses Artifcts to digitize his seven kids' artwork. Every Friday before dinner, he spends five minutes taking a photo of their latest creation and then records them talking about their work. Each kid chooses one piece of art to keep per year, and the rest live on in digital form.

Make donating part of your routine.

When Paxton starts helping a new family clean their house, he asks where they want to donate belongings they no longer need that might be valuable to someone else. There are lots of options, depending where you live and what causes you support: [Dress for Success](#) provides used professional attire to low-income women; [One Warm Coat](#) provides free coats to people in need; and [Soles4Souls](#) distributes footwear to people with limited resources, for example.

If you're donating to a local thrift store, like Goodwill or the Salvation Army, get in the habit of keeping a donation box in the trunk of your car. Otherwise, the pile might sit in your house for weeks. Then, once a week, swing by the donation center. Doing so "has become a normal Saturday for me," Paxton says.

Gamify the purge.

It can be hard to get the kids to pitch in as good citizens of the house. That's why Deborah Gilman, a psychologist based in Pittsburgh, coaches her clients on ways to make cleaning up fun. You could play what she calls the "20-things game"—setting a timer for 20 minutes and challenging each member of the family to find 20 items to donate, sell, or throw away. "I tell people to do this a couple times a year, like when the seasons are changing," she says. Make it a race to see who collects their items first; the prize could be choosing what movie to watch together that night.

Another idea, she says, is to launch a room redesign challenge. Each family member gets to choose one room or area they want to revamp—but first, everyone spends time decluttering the space together. "It gets everybody involved and excited to clear out unnecessary items to make way for the new," she says.

Look for the stories.

Many people struggle to declutter because they don't want to part with items that remind them of someone or something they love, Paxton says. A simple mindset shift can make a big difference: Think of getting rid of stuff as a way of unearthing your family's history. Ask each person to choose five items from your house that mean a lot to them—maybe a set of dishes from their wedding, a 50-year-old ball gown, or an antique typewriter. Then, have them tell a story explaining why they treasure each one so much. Record it, if you can, as a way of preserving their past for the future. The exercise usually proves liberating, Paxton says. "If you tell the stories, then you can let go of the items."

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Ukraine Can't Win the War

Anatol Lieven directs the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and is co-author of *The Diplomatic Path to a Secure Ukraine*, to be published in late February 2024.



The long-awaited counteroffensive last year failed. Russia has recaptured [Avdiivka](#), its biggest war gain in nine months. President Volodymyr Zelensky has been forced to [quietly acknowledge](#) the new military reality. The Biden Administration's strategy is now to sustain Ukrainian defense until after the U.S. presidential elections, in the hope of wearing down Russian forces in a long war of attrition.

This strategy seems sensible enough, but contains one crucially important [implication](#) and one potentially disastrous flaw, which are not yet being seriously addressed in public debates in the West or Ukraine. The implication of Ukraine standing indefinitely on the defensive—even if it does so successfully—is that the territories currently occupied by Russia are lost. Russia will never agree at the negotiating table to surrender land that it has managed to hold on the battlefield.

Read More: *How Ukraine Is Really Doing*

This does not mean that Ukraine should be asked to formally surrender these lands, for that would be impossible for any Ukrainian government. But it does mean that—as Zelensky proposed early in the war with regard to Crimea and the eastern Donbas—the territorial issue will have to be shelved for future talks.

As we know from Cyprus, which has been divided between the internationally recognized Greek Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus since 1974, such negotiations can continue for decades without a solution or renewed conflict. A situation in which Ukraine retains its independence, its freedom to develop as a Western democracy, and 82% of its legal territory (including all its core historic lands) would have been regarded by previous generations of Ukrainians as a real victory, though not a complete one.

As I found in Ukraine last year, many Ukrainians in private were prepared to accept the loss of some territories as the price of peace if Ukraine failed to win them back on the battlefield and if the alternative was years of bloody war with little prospect of success. The Biden Administration needs to get America on board too.

Yet supporters of complete Ukrainian victory have engaged in hopes that range from the overly optimistic to the magical. At the magical end of the spectrum is the notion, set out by retired U.S. Army General Ben Hodges among others, that Russia can be defeated, and even driven from Crimea, by long-range missile bombardment.

This is folly. Ukrainians have scored some notable successes against the Russian Black Sea Fleet, but to take back Crimea they would need to be able to launch a massive amphibious landing, an exceptionally difficult operation far beyond their capabilities in

terms of ships and men. Attacks on Russian infrastructure are pinpricks given Russia's size and resources.

More realistic is the suggestion that by standing on the defensive this year, Ukrainians can inflict such losses on the Russians that—if supplied with more Western weaponry—they can counterattack successfully in 2025. However, this depends on the Russians playing the game the way Kyiv and Washington want to play it.

The Russian strategy at present appears to be different. They have drawn Ukrainians into prolonged battles for small amounts of territory like Avdiivka, where they have relied on Russian [superiority](#) in artillery and munitions to wear them down through constant [bombardment](#). They are [firing](#) three shells to every one Ukrainian; and thanks in part to help from Iran, Russia has now been able to deploy very large numbers of [drones](#).

For Ukrainians to stand a chance, military history suggests that they would need a 3-to-2 advantage in manpower and considerably more firepower. Ukraine enjoyed these [advantages](#) in the first year of the war, but they now lie with Russia, and it is very difficult to see how Ukraine can recover them.

Read More: *[The Peril of Ukraine's Ammo Shortage](#)*

The Biden Administration is entirely correct to [warn](#) that without further massive U.S. military aid, Ukrainian resistance is likely to collapse this year. But U.S. officials also need to recognize that even if this aid continues, there is no realistic chance of total Ukrainian victory next year, or the year after that. Even if the Ukrainians can build up their forces, Russia can deepen its defenses even more.

The Biden Administration has a strong incentive to test President Vladimir Putin on the sincerity or insincerity of his [statements](#) that Russia is ready for peace talks. A successful peace process would

undoubtedly involve some painful concessions by Ukraine and the West. Yet the pain would be more emotional than practical, and a peace settlement would have to involve Putin giving up the plan with which he began the war, to turn the whole of Ukraine into a Russian vassal state, and recognizing the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its de facto present borders.

For the lost Ukrainian territories are lost, and NATO membership is pointless if the alliance is not prepared to send its own troops to fight for Ukraine against Russia. Above all, however painful a peace agreement would be today, it will be infinitely more so if the war continues and Ukraine is defeated.

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The CDC Dropped Its COVID-19 Isolation Guidelines. Experts Are Split

Jamie Ducharme is a health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, Long COVID, mental health, vaping, psychedelics, and more. Her work for TIME has won awards from the Deadline Club, the New York Press Club, and the Newswomen's Club of New York. Additionally, she is the author of *[Big Vape: The Incendiary Rise of Juul](#)*, which was adapted for a forthcoming Netflix docuseries.



On March 1, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dropped its long-standing recommendation that people with COVID-19 [should isolate themselves](#) for at least five days to avoid spreading the disease.

Instead of the five-day rule, the CDC now recommends that people stay home until they've been fever-free for at least 24 hours without medication and their symptoms are generally improving. Once they're feeling better, they can resume normal life—though the agency recommends taking extra precautions for five days after leaving home, including limiting close contact with others, moving

activities outside, and wearing a mask around others. If someone's symptoms worsen or their fever returns, they should revert to staying home.

That shift, which echoes [similar moves in California and Oregon](#), streamlines the CDC's recommendations for COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. The agency's [website now lists](#) the same advice for people sick with respiratory illnesses including COVID-19, the flu, and RSV, and its page on COVID-19-specific isolation has been archived.

Even before the shift in guidance became official, experts predicted that 2024 would bring a further relaxation of COVID-19 policy. "The guidance becomes lighter and lighter over time, and that actually makes sense as people build up more immunity," Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health and the Biden Administration's former COVID-19 response coordinator, said in a January interview with TIME.

Read More: [*We're In a Major COVID-19 Surge. It's Our New Normal*](#)

The virus itself has not evolved to become less contagious. But people's tolerance for public-health precautions has plummeted. Many people in the U.S. haven't paid attention to COVID-19 guidance in a long time, says Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. "You have to face reality," he says.

Meeting people where they are may encourage them to take at least some precautions, he says. Some people who are unwilling or unable to isolate for five full days might be open to staying home for a shorter period of time when they're acutely ill, for example.

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Not all experts are as optimistic. Lucky Tran, a science communicator at Columbia University, called the end of five-day isolation periods “a reckless anti-public-health policy that goes against science, encourages disease spread, and puts everyone at risk. The bare minimum we should have learned from this devastating pandemic that has killed and disabled millions is that **we should stay home when sick.**” Loosening isolation recommendations “ignores the continued suffering” of people who are immunocompromised, chronically ill, disabled, or otherwise at heightened risk of severe COVID-19, Tran adds.

Eleanor Murray, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the Boston University School of Public Health, says it’s “really strange” for the CDC to relax its guidance, given that even a five-day isolation period isn’t always long enough to stop the spread. **Studies have shown** that a significant portion of people who catch COVID-19 test positive, and **thus potentially remain contagious**, for longer than five days.

The absence of symptoms also isn’t a guarantee that someone is no longer infectious, Murray says. Research has long suggested that pre-symptomatic or **asymptomatic people can spread the virus**, although they **may not be as contagious as people who are sicker**. At-home tests aren’t a perfect measure either, although they can **provide some information about potential contagiousness**.

Even still, Dr. Tara Bouton, an assistant professor at the Boston University Chobanian and Avedisian School of Medicine who has **researched COVID-19 isolation periods**, feels it’s reasonable to loosen isolation guidance at this stage of the pandemic, when fewer people who get infected die or become hospitalized. That’s in large part because lengthy isolation periods disproportionately penalize people whose income depends on working in person, Bouton says. “The ability to isolate is a privilege,” Bouton says, and public-

health policy needs to balance the costs and benefits of asking people to do it.

Murray, however, fears that relaxing isolation guidance will make it easier for [businesses to deny their employees time off to recover](#). Ending the five-day guidance equates to “providing information that is not evidence-based and is not going to help people make informed decisions, but will probably be used to limit paid leave,” Murray says.

So what would the experts do now if they got sick with COVID-19?

Even though Bouton feels that a blanket five-day isolation recommendation is no longer necessary, she says she would stay home around that long because she’s able to—and because working as an infectious-disease doctor puts her in contact with lots of immunocompromised patients, who remain at increased risk of severe disease if they get infected.

Murray says she would stay home until her symptoms cleared up and wait until she’d gotten two consecutive negative test results, spaced out by at least a day, before exiting isolation. (Often, that approach requires more than five days of isolation, since people can test positive on at-home rapid tests for more than a week.)

Tran says he’d go even further: he’d stay home for 10 days, self-test multiple times before ending isolation, and wear a mask—as he usually does anyway—upon returning to public spaces.

Osterholm, too, says he’d stay home for five days and continue to wear an N95 in the immediate aftermath of his illness. Efforts like those are important, he says—but they’re also not everything. He’d like the public-health community to devote more attention to encouraging vaccination among vulnerable older adults, [many of](#)

[whom have not gotten the latest shot](#), and streamlining Paxlovid access for high-risk patients.

Those efforts, Osterholm says, could save lives at a time when [most COVID-19 deaths occur among people who are elderly](#) or otherwise at high risk—and at a time when Americans are moving on from COVID-19.

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How Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Became One of Joe Biden's Most Valuable Boosters

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 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez erupted on the national stage back in 2018 in a stunner of a Democratic primary, a lot of Establishment Washington braced for the arrival of a Tea Party-style troublemaker from the Left. Six years later, that assessment wasn't so much wrong as undercooked. While the former bartender remains a key ally to the Left, AOC's main job in 2024 may be President Joe Biden's most valuable pinch-hitter.

As mainstream Democrats were tearing their hair out over new questions about the President's mental acuity, there was Ocasio-Cortez on Tuesday not only reaffirming her backing of Biden, but

not-so-subtly slapping down those in her wing of the party screaming for him to step aside. “I know who I’m going to choose. It’s going to be one of the most successful Presidents in modern American history,” she told CNN.

The boosterism comes days after a special counsel released a damning [report](#) that blasted Biden as a forgetful figure who would be impossible to convict on charges he mishandled classified information because he is so obviously aged. The White House and its allies called the report hackish and a hit job, but nonetheless Democratic insiders [dispatched](#) all available surrogates to spin reporters that Robert Hur’s disclosures about Biden’s alleged “diminished faculties” were misleading and inappropriate. And, when needed the most, those allies include Ocasio-Cortez as part of the Establishment defense.

That turn of events is deeply frustrating to many of those who first helped Ocasio-Cortez, a self-described democratic socialist, get to Washington by toppling a 10-term Democratic incumbent. In the six years since, she has found the solid footing of a pragmatic disruptor. She’ll cause trouble—as she did last year in [opposing](#) a must-pass spending bill—but not [needlessly](#) or at a [real cost](#) to her party.

And pragmatism, in this case, means understanding that, absent a health emergency, Biden is the Democratic nominee. While most Americans—86% in the most recent ABC News poll—say Biden is too old for another term (compared to 62% saying the same for a 77-year-old Trump), this truth also holds: Democrats are on track to nominate Biden and there is no plausible off-ramp for that outcome at this moment.

Ocasio-Cortez saw this coming all this way back in July, when she announced her [endorsement](#) of Biden for a second term. “I think he’s done quite well, given the limitations that we have,” Ocasio-Cortez [said](#) of Biden on “Pod Save America,” a podcast helmed by

first-wave insiders of the Obama political machine. But she did allow: “I do think that there are ebbs and flows.”

Democrats are now in a two-legged race to simultaneously cast Biden as a vigorous incumbent who is up to the task while also saying former President Donald Trump is just as old. That tension was clear as Ocasio-Cortez made her defense of Biden this week as she resorted to Republicans’ favorite tactic: [WhatAboutism](#). “I think right now, when it comes to the president’s age, folks are talking about how he’s 81,” she said. “But we have to look at—first of all—Donald Trump is around the same age. They could have gone to high school together. And beyond that, Donald Trump has 91 indictments.”

Ocasio-Cortez has been a case study of how a perceived radical can be useful for a national party in the middle of a branding crisis. National Democrats for years have [struggled](#) to define their agenda, swinging unpredictably between the fevers of Bernie Sanders’ socialist-sympathizing campaigns and the lulls of Pete Buttigieg’s technocratic lesson that surprisingly carried him to victory in Iowa’s 2020 caucuses. A tent that holds not just billionaire Mike Bloomberg but also plain-spoken Midwesterner Amy Klobuchar, contrarians like Joe Manchin and instigators known as The Squad is of questionable durability.

And then there’s Ocasio-Cortez, who has shrewdly figured out how to stand apart from the Establishment while also being a key component to the party’s successes. Her aspirational [Green New Deal](#) became a [boogeyman](#) for conservatives but helped to shape much of Biden’s ambitious Covid-19 relief efforts that [doubled](#) as the biggest environmental agenda in history. While a critic of long-standing power structures in Washington, she never voted against making Nancy Pelosi the Speaker. She has meddled in plenty of primaries with mixed success, but even her detractors say her [endorsement](#) of Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts helped him survive a threat from Rep. Joe Kennedy.

Ocasio-Cortez won her first primary—and, really, the election that followed—despite being outspent 7-to-1 by the fourth-ranking Democrat in the House. She got to Washington with a stated indifference to the Establishment and cast votes that put her opposite most of her colleagues. She blew-off party meetings and messaging dictates. But over time, she has found ways to work across the aisle, to be part of the team on must-pass pieces of legislation, and to turn from a one-time aide to liberals like Ted Kennedy and Sanders into a Biden backer. Her performances during committee hearings have been well prepared and highly useful in distilling the actual topics at hand.

“I had to prove to this world of Washington that I was serious and skilled, and that I wasn’t just here to make a headline, but that I was here to engage in this process in a skilled and sophisticated way,” she [said](#) last year. And for national Democrats, she could be a useful guarantor for the rising Left that is going to be crucial if the party has any hope of stopping Trump’s return to power.

Stylistically, Ocasio-Cortez remains as sharp as ever—and as triggering to her critics. Yes, she [wore](#) a dress emblazoned with the message “Tax the Rich” to a gala full of such rich people. Yes, she was a cover subject for *Vanity Fair*, posing in clothes conservatives [said](#) cost \$14,000. And, no, she was not going to apologize for being a successful woman who may rival only Pelosi in being an avatar for the Democratic Party. “I mean, I think I’m kind of at the point where no matter what I do, if I wake up in the morning, there’s going to be someone who has something to say about that,” she [said](#) on the red carpet of the Met Gala.

All of which helps to explain why Ocasio-Cortez may be more important to Biden’s re-election than many in Washington realize. For the very voters who are [feeling](#) left out of Biden’s to-do list—young voters, voters of color, women—Ocasio-Cortez may be what salves those worries. She’s never going to persuade the exurban country-club set to shelve their worries about Biden and his age,

but she can amp up turnout in groups that may remain cool to his re-election. Ocasio-Cortez understands this and Biden's team understands this. Which is to say, as his campaign weighs how to deploy the army of surrogates ready to shore up his support over the next nine months, one of the most powerful VIPs may be AOC.

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Meet the Sailor Who Thinks His Sport Is the Next Formula 1

Sean Gregory is a senior sports correspondent at TIME. His work has been cited in the annual Best American Sports Writing anthology nine times. His stories have won awards from the U.S. Basketball Writers Association, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, and his work was named a finalist for Deadline Club and Mirror awards for excellence in magazine writing and reporting on media, respectively.



First, [Formula 1](#) got hot in the United States and beyond, thanks in large part to a Netflix series, *Drive to Survive*, that showcased the circuit's personalities, rivalries, and some really fast cars. Then there's the [pickleball](#) craze, which started during the pandemic and hasn't lost much momentum.

What niche sport will get hot next?

[Russell Coutts](#), the CEO of the upstart professional racing organization SailGP, is making his case for sailing, that genteel elitist country club pastime which is indeed gaining some

momentum in the U.S. Coutts, the five-time America's Cup winner, 1984 Olympic gold medalist and two-time world sailor of the year, co-founded SailGP in 2018, along with Oracle founder and chairman [Larry Ellison](#). Currently in its fourth season, SailGP features teams representing 10 different countries, including the U.S., New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain, and is holding 13 events across the globe. The next races take place in Sydney Harbour, on Feb. 24 to 25; the season concludes with events in New York and San Francisco in June and July, respectively.

According to SailGP, the worldwide broadcast audience per event through the first half of this season is up nearly 24% over season three, reaching 13.6 million. The league's social following has grown by 56%, and in November of 2023, 1.784 million viewers tuned into the CBS broadcast of a race in Spain, a SailGP record for an American audience. That was the most-watched sailing race in the U.S. since 1992. It outrated the Formula 1 race that day, from Brazil, which drew some 909,000 viewers on ESPN2. That month, a group of investors led by Avenue Capital Group CEO Marc Lasry, former owner of the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks, purchased SailGP's U.S. team in the largest transaction in league history. The group also includes actress and producer [Issa Rae](#), world champion heavyweight boxer Deontay Wilder, and ex U.S. soccer player Jozy Altidore.

Coutts met with TIME in New York City in mid-January to discuss the trajectory of SailGP, the circuit's high-tech catamarans and the challenges facing the sport.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

For those who are not familiar, what is SailGP?

The sport of sailing did not have a regular annual championship that was professionally televised and marketed before SailGP. We

have [fast, hydrofoiling boats](#). Other people have referred to it as a Formula -style championship on water. The difference between what we are doing and what other sports, like motor sports, are doing is our boats are identical. Even though they are evolving constantly and we're introducing new tech, other teams get to access that new technology together. We're a centrally managed organization. The teams actually lease the assets from us, so that ensures that they really are identical. This is really about who the best athletes are, rather than who has the best resources.

They certainly don't look like how you'd picture traditional sailboats.

When you look into the cockpit of one of these boats, it is like looking into an aircraft. You've got all the control panels. It looks like a Formula 1 steering wheel. You've got various control switches on the steering wheel. If there was anything like medium wind and upwards, a club sailor would probably hurt himself.

What are some of the key metrics that seem to show that SailGP is on the right path?

We started out with six teams in year one. Now we've got 10. All six of those teams were funded by the league. Now, five of the 10 teams are funded by investors who bought rights to those teams. And we're closing in on two more sales now. So seven of the 10 will be funded from the outside. And we're going to add two more teams in season five.

We started out with five events in season one. Now we've got 13. We want to try to get to 20-plus events a season. We want to get to the stage where there are events every two weeks or so. That's roughly what Formula 1 has.

Why do you have faith that SailGP can become the next Formula 1?

Audience growth is the first thing. Second, the commercial model is strong. We started selling teams between \$5 million and \$10 million. Now you can't buy a team without \$35 million. We know we've got demand for teams. We can't build boats fast enough. We didn't think we'd be in this position before the end of season five. So the fact that we're already in that position is pretty encouraging.

Similarly, with venues, in season one didn't charge anything. We basically pleaded with venues to let us host a race. Whereas now, there is competition. We accept venue fees from most venues. That's becoming quite a big component of our commercial model.

With [sponsor] Rolex, we did a five-year agreement in our first year. They came back to us, between seasons two and three, with a new proposal, extending the partnership out 10 years. The value is easily measurable. The data doesn't lie. Our partners see that data. That is why we have great confidence.

Do you think the “Drive to Survive” effect has carried over to SailGP, where more people are interested in watching any kind of racing?

We think somewhere between 30% and 40% of our audience has some connection with sailing. Most of them are racing fans or general sports fans. They also like personalities. And we haven't really developed that side of it yet. We do our own sort of little YouTube video series, which had about 2.1 million viewership last season. That's sort of a behind-the-scenes docuseries. But now we've got real interest from major players to do a full on documentary. I think that's how we take our personalities to the next level.

Is there anyone you have now who could be a standout in such a series?

We've got [Phil Robertson](#). [who races for the Canada SailGP team]. Some high-profile people in our organization have described him as the Mad Max of SailGP. You don't know what the hell is going to happen. There's moments of brilliance. And moments of, not so brilliant.

Is Robertson sort of a [Nick Kyrgios](#)-type?

That might be exaggerating, but it's definitely towards that. He's always fighting with the umpires and arguing with other competitors, which is gold dust for us.

Sorry to introduce some skepticism to the Formula 1 comparison, but why would a fan prefer watching SailGP catamarans topping out at speeds of 60 miles per hour on water, when F1 cars exceed 200 miles per hour?

It's the same people watching. The learning we're having is that as long as it's a good race, they will watch. The Aussies have won the first three championships by skill. Now, only two teams have yet to win an event. All teams except one, Germany, have won a race. We need that to make those teams commercially viable.

Is there anything you learned from your career as a skipper that you've brought to running SailGP?

Anyone who gets to the top of their sport, you don't get there with talent alone. I got there by outworking the opposition. We're going

to be better just by doing more. Doing more, but doing it smarter. So that work ethic has really helped me in my business career.

When I was in the early days of working with Larry Ellison, I actually asked him one time, “what’s the secret to success in the business?” He started by giving a long-winded answer and I think he saw my eyes glaze over. I probably wasn’t following as closely as I should have. And he actually stopped and said, “you know what the most important thing is? Not giving up.” He’s right. In the face of so many challenges, particularly with new staff, things aren’t going to go right. And it’s a matter of, how are you adapting to it?

Sailing has a reputation as an elite, white sport.

Absolutely. We don’t shy away from that. We say that’s a problem. And we want to change it.

Having high-profile Black investors, like Issa Rae, can help change that perception. How else do you build diversity?

We go to a place like the [Middle East](#), which some people say conflicts with your environmental objectives. I disagree. I absolutely disagree with that approach. To me, it’s an exciting new territory where hopefully we can add some value. Particularly with the younger generation. I’m really excited about those sorts of places. We shouldn’t be close-minded. We should be connecting with people. That makes us much more likely to understand each other.

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20-Somethings Lost Something in the Pandemic. They Still Haven't Found It

Klinenberg, the Helen Gould Shepard Professor in the Social Sciences and director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University, is the author of [2020: One City, Seven People, and the Year Everything Changed](#).



In January, 2020, Luis was 21 and beginning the second semester of his junior year at a public university in New York City. He lived with family in Queens, and everyone pitched in to make ends meet. His father was retired. His mother collected disability insurance. His older sister, with whom he shared a bedroom, was a veterinary technician. Luis worked at a law firm. The apartment was crowded, loud, and sometimes crazy. But in New York City, what isn't? Luis was usually out in the world, anyway, because when you're in your twenties, the world is yours.

When COVID hit, Luis's universe suddenly narrowed. No school. No job. No parties. No friends. He went grocery shopping and was stunned to find the shelves nearly empty. "People were just hoarding," he recalled. "There was nothing." A few days later, he

lost his sense of smell. Soon, his whole family had the virus. It was scary, because by then Queens was one of the most dangerous places on the planet. Ambulance sirens blared around the clock. Local hospitals were filled to capacity, with so many dead bodies that they needed refrigerated trucks to store the remains. Luis experienced all this as a shock to his system. A few weeks earlier, he was looking at graduate schools and thinking about a new life in a new city. Now his main goal was to survive.

In February, I was teaching an undergraduate course on the sociology of climate change at NYU, lecturing about how crises can spark major transformations in states, societies, and individual lives, too. My example was the Great Depression, which not only contributed to the rise of fascism in Europe and the New Deal in the U.S., but also—as all of us with penny-pinching grandparents who insisted we save up instead of buying that shiny new thing remember—shaped the habits and beliefs of a generation. When I used the phrase, “depression era mentality,” everyone knew what I meant.

Back then, in the Before Times, the class was focused on the prospect of an ecological catastrophe; only one student was concerned about the new coronavirus, and he had just arrived from China. By March the US was plunging into a pandemic emergency. Campuses closed everywhere. Classrooms went remote. Jobs disappeared. NYU undergraduates, like those at most residential colleges, were forced out of their dorms and sent home. In the years that followed, millions of young adults who had planned to spend their twenties immersed in social life, searching for new opportunities, and prying the world open, found themselves, instead, hunkering down.

How the sustained disruptions of the pandemic years changed America’s twenty-somethings is a question we’ve failed to answer. It’s not even one we’ve seriously examined. In recent years, scientists and policy makers have been consumed with the

problems of other cohorts: children suffering from learning loss; overworked parents; old people with elevated risks of COVID death and disease. But this year, as young adults who came of age in 2020 have become swing voters in the presidential election—with pollsters noting their surprisingly [high levels of disengagement](#) and an unexpected [surge of support](#) for Donald Trump—there’s an urgent need to understand how the pandemic shaped them. Our future may be in their hands.

Luis was one of the 33 college students and recent graduates whom Isabelle Caraluzzi (an NYU doctoral student) and I interviewed for [a book about the year 2020](#). They were a diverse group, from dramatically different universities, with a wide range of interests and ambitions, so it was striking to find so many commonalities in their pandemic experience: Stress, anxiety, and a generalized insecurity from which they have yet to be relieved. Deep uncertainty about the nature of the post-pandemic world. Feeling obligated to make enormous sacrifices for the good of others, despite no one in power ever naming, recognizing, honoring, or compensating them for their losses. Being disillusioned. Losing faith—not only in the core institutions that anchor society, but in the idea of society itself.

By summer, 2020, Luis had fully recovered his sense of smell and taste. “But I lost everything,” he reported. His family, once stable, was now impoverished. They relied on food pantries, which helped with the basics but satisfied no one. “It was just repetitive, the basic food you get. Eating crackers and cheese every day.” Luis looked for government programs that could help them with rent, food, jobs, dignity. There wasn’t much on offer. “So I ended up just going into stores to shoplift. I used to do it when I was younger, because I had no source of income. I was kind of going back to those days.” Luis lied to his parents, making up stories about odd jobs or gift cards he’d picked up. “It was harrowing,” he recalled,

and not great for his pride or dignity, either. “But I didn’t get caught.”

As the year dragged on, Luis found himself feeling trapped by the pandemic and its many burdens. The apartment was confining. The food insecurity, the problem of paying rent, the joblessness, the small businesses closing, the desperation that was suddenly visible across the city, the anxiety that lingered everywhere—all of it weighed on Luis. There were also bright spots. In the absence of reliable public assistance, New Yorkers started mutual aid networks and neighbors helped each other like they had never done before. He got a job as a COVID-19 contact tracer, though that also involved getting bombarded with sad stories from people who’d gotten sick and were afraid of what would happen next. In May, after the Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd, Luis joined thousands of New Yorkers in protests that lasted through the summer. “It was connected to the pandemic,” Luis said. “It was boiling over at that point, this kind of mistreatment. And the reason I went was because it kind of showed that, yeah, we’ve lost our jobs, we lost all our money. People are gonna do what they need to survive.”

Read More: [Pandemics Don’t End. They Echo](#)

Some things, though, got lost or put on hold. Luis gave up on graduate school, for fear of condemning himself to years of online classes. His social life remained nonexistent – not for lack of events and parties, but because “I worry about my family and not getting really sick.” Like millions of his contemporaries, Luis “distanced myself from hanging out this year, haven’t really socialized at all.” The toll of this deprivation was unmistakable. In some ways, the pandemic had stalled his development; in others, it aged him. “I grew up like ten years in the pandemic,” he told us. A remarkable number of the twenty-somethings we interviewed expressed this same sentiment.

So much happened while no one did anything and time stood still. Inevitably, young adults came out in a different place.

Active, dynamic, and, occasionally, experimental or boundary-crossing social relationships are key features of what social scientists call the “extended adolescence” stage of character development. During ordinary times, most young American adults enjoy an open, freewheeling, permissive cultural environment, one that encourages and rewards the formation of social ties. The psychologist Jeffrey Arnett emphasizes the optimism and emergent sense of possibility that people in their twenties often feel during this period. Young people use this life stage to build up their personal and professional networks, setting up support systems and friendship groups that will nourish them even if they put off marriage. The pandemic produced a social famine, and its after effects persist.

“Instead of processing what we went through, we’ve largely repressed our collective traumas and neglected to recognize what it took to survive.”

During 2020, young adults who had always been relatively carefree in their social lives quickly became circumspect and judgmental. Everyone’s behavior was loaded with new significance: wearing masks, attending parties, taking risky jobs, or eating indoors became emblems of politics and personal values. Everyone became a judge. Some became angry and disappointed by friends who violated health guidelines, or at those who followed the rules too closely, or at those who just didn’t seem to be paying attention. Others discovered that they were now outcasts, sanctioned and estranged from friends who deemed them irresponsible or untrustworthy about COVID.

According to a [2023 Gallup poll](#), Americans between 12 and 26 express strikingly low levels of trust in our political and social

institutions, and those 18-26 are considerably more cynical than their slightly younger peers. The distrust extends from civic life into their social networks, making everyone a bit more defensive, lest another toxic personality piece their friend group.

“I definitely have categories of friends now that I didn’t have before,” said Jamie, a 25-year-old actor. “Most of my close friends are [behaving] how I am behaving, trying to be a ‘good person’ I guess.” But some, he said, “I might never hang out with again because they behaved so poorly.” The young adults we spoke with saw their friend groups fracture due to sharp differences in values or the sense that seemingly good people were, in fact, selfish or dishonest. People revealed themselves in 2020. Society did, too. For most of the young adults we spoke with, the ugly things were hard to put out of sight.

The coronavirus arrived in America just as local universities were beginning the winter semester. When campuses closed, the disruption was both acute and long-lasting, and the consequences included mental health problems, food and housing insecurity, and problems keeping up with school work. At first, the shift required adjusting to a new way of learning: distanced, digital, impersonal, and individual. There were no more office hours with professors, no more study sessions in libraries or dorms; no impromptu get-togethers after class discussions or debates at cafeterias and coffee shops.



Some never made the transition to remote education; they stopped “attending” or missed assignments and wound up failing classes. Others simply lost interest and motivation. Subjects that had always fascinated them seemed irrelevant as the pandemic set in and their social worlds collapsed. Their performance slipped. When the semester concluded, a second set of problems emerged, and these had more durable significance. Was college really worth it? Should they change their course of study and do something to increase their odds of financial success? Drop out and help support their family instead?

It’s not surprising that the pandemic altered and, in some cases, prematurely terminated the educational paths of young adults. “The COVID-19 pandemic created [the largest disruption of education systems in human history](#), affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries,” write Sumitra Pokhrel and Roshan Chhetri. Young adults in the U.S. higher education system faced a specific set of challenges, including the steep cost of tuition, the burden of substantial student debt, and the expectation of graduating into a tight labor market without a strong safety net.

Read More: [Why Do I Keep COVID-19 When Those Around Me Don't](#)

Fear, disorientation, and self-doubt were common themes in our conversations. So, too, was uncertainty—not simply about how to get through the pandemic, but about whether a good life would be possible in the new, climate-changed, virus-stricken world we were spiraling into at breakneck speed. Sharice, a 25-year-old public university graduate, said she lost her sense of direction during 2020. “I don’t know what I want to do anymore,” she acknowledged. “I met with a career advisor and they asked what I was interested in. I went blank. I told my therapist, she asked me what I was interested in, I went blank. Before this whole pandemic happened, I had an answer for that. I don’t even know any more, I really don’t know.”

Craig, a 23-year-old private university graduate, had elaborate plans and aspirations before the pandemic started. “I’m like, a theater dude. I like to be in plays and make them, and that’s just been wiped off the face of the earth for the foreseeable future.” He got a job at “one of those Instagram museums” so that he could make ends meet. “I’ve basically given up on any kind of planning for the future,” he conceded. “Ambitions are just dangerous right now. I don’t even know that the world’s going to be here!”

If, for some young Americans, profound uncertainty fostered nihilism or stasis, for others it gave rise to new commitments, of various forms. Angelica, a 21-year-old Latina student, had a job as a paralegal before the pandemic hit, and she used her income to pay for things like clothes and nights out at restaurants and bars. She lost her position, and the promise of a full-time job in the firm after graduation, soon after the economy contracted in March of 2020. It was painful and challenging, as was her decision, a few weeks later, to file for unemployment. Going on welfare just didn’t seem like the kind of thing she would ever do.

The experience made Angelica realize how important financial stability was to her sense of identity. As an economics major, she

felt some shame at not being “economically independent.” By summer, Angelica had found a new job, but she told us that she no longer feels entitled to “the luxury” of spending money on things like drinking with friends. The shock of insecurity she experienced led her to invest in her future. She paid down her maxed-out credit card, chipped away at her student loans, and made sure she sent in her rent check on time. “My name is on this lease,” she explained, “and I have to pay my bills.” She also got fixated on improving her credit score, using the number as a marker of her accomplishment, a sign and symbol that she was back on her feet. “It’s so funny, being a finance and economics major and finally understanding the value of a dollar in my last year because of a personal experience through Covid,” she remarked. She viewed the crisis as a hard but important life lesson, one that would ultimately take her to a better place.

Yasmina, a 21-year-old who attended a Jesuit college, said 2020 convinced her to look for a different kind of security. She gave up on fleeting friendships, and focused on the people whose values, interests, and goals align with hers. “I kind of see who’s in my life permanently, and I see who is in my life temporarily... I find it a lot harder to maintain more of those surface level connections with people.” Leticia, who’s also 21, said, “I’m more picky with who I relate to. I started to hang out only with specific people that were my really close friends. I try to avoid socializing with people that are not going to form long-lasting relationships with me.”

Both Yasmina and Leticia are spending more time with their romantic partners. Yasmina believes that going through the pandemic together made her relationship stronger. It was their hardest year ever, she acknowledged, but they survived. For Leticia, her close bond with her boyfriend, whom she had been casually seeing before the pandemic, is in part a result of the months when they were unable to do anything other than text and video call. “I liked the fact that we were just talking for like three

months,” she explained. When they finally were able to go on actual dates (“mostly getting takeout and sitting in his car!”), she was comforted knowing they had cultivated trust and friendship first. “We were just there for each other,” Leticia said. “That’s all I needed.”



In some cases, young people’s need for intimacy in the pandemic intensified and accelerated their relationships. Some couples made big leaps at the outset of the crisis, deciding to quarantine together even though they had never cohabitated. Others jumped into a serious relationship during the peak pandemic months. Many said they reconnected with people they had casually dated but not given much thought to before the lockdowns, or rekindled romances that they thought had flamed out.

The biggest opportunities during 2020 transcended personal relationships, and involved more political concerns. [Studies show](#) that some 15 to 26 million Americans participated in Black Lives Matter protests that year, with young adults, aged 18-34, expressing by far [the most support](#). Twenty-somethings across the country came out, *en masse*, not only because they were outraged by police violence against Black people. In my interviews, I learned that they were also incensed by the glaring governmental failures and other forms of injustice that had become so apparent in the pandemic.

That summer millions of young Americans were beginning to believe that a better world was possible. They marched. They organized. And then they did something seemingly routine but massively consequential: [they registered to vote](#).

The civic reawakening of young Americans pushed participation among 18-29 year-old Americans to [record levels](#) in 2020, with fifty percent voting in the presidential election, compared to 39 percent in 2016. Joe Biden needed all of the twenty-point margin that he won among these voters to reach the White House. If he doesn't get something like that this year, the U.S. will likely take another sharp turn to the extreme right.

There's reason to believe that young Americans are pushing us in that direction. The passion for social change that inspired so many to protest and vote was nearly rewarded with policies that promised to transform the lives of twenty-somethings, from student debt relief to climate change mitigation. But conservatives in Washington, from Senator Joe Manchin, who killed Biden's signature social and environmental bill, Build Back Better, to the Supreme Court, which deemed Biden's student debt forgiveness program illegal, largely blocked the president's plans.

As the 2024 primary elections get started, most 18-29 year-olds remain skeptical of Trump and incensed by the GOP's assault on reproductive rights. But they're also [disappointed with President Biden](#) for not fully delivering the post-pandemic boost he promised. His mixed record on core generational issues, including student debt forgiveness and climate change, has tampered their enthusiasm, as has his refusal or inability to curb Israel's massively deadly counter-attacks on Gaza. During 2020, young Americans came out for Biden because they believed he would transform things. Instead, the country has stagnated. Nothing has restored their faith in the future, no national candidate has earned their trust.

By now, we've had years to reckon with the cascading crises of 2020. But instead of processing what we went through, we've largely repressed our collective traumas and neglected to recognize what it took to survive. The coronavirus, we know, was far less dangerous for most young people than it was for older generations. It may well have been reasonable to demand that they give up things they hold sacred, from social and educational opportunities to jobs and careers, for the common good and the health of more vulnerable people. But surely we owe them something in return.

At minimum, America's twenty-somethings deserve recognition for their sacrifices. But something more substantial seems more appropriate, given how much we asked from them when everything was on the line. Respect. Debt relief. College scholarships. Compensation, perhaps. Today, none of these are on either party's platform. Everyone wants to win over young people, but no one has offered meaningful support.

We haven't even given thanks.

** All names here are pseudonyms, because the young adults in my sociological study were promised anonymity.*

Adapted from Eric Klinenberg's 2020: One City, Seven People, and the Year That Everything Changed, published by Knopf.

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How Avatar: The Last Airbender Is a Love Letter to Asian and Indigenous Cultures

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



While fictional fantasy series transport viewers to impossible worlds full of magic and mysticism, they also tend to look an awful lot like medieval Europe. *The Lord of the Rings*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Witcher* and many of the most famous fantasy films and TV series explicitly pull from Western folklore and mythology, meaning that even worlds that are designed to stretch the bounds of our imagination are Euro-centric at their core.

And then there's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, the fiercely beloved animated Nickelodeon series from 2005. *Avatar*, not to be confused with [James Cameron's film series](#), depicts an epic power struggle between four nations who channel the elements of water, fire, air and earth, respectively, in battle. And although *Avatar* was an American production, its creators forged a distinctly Asian world, with influences from monastic Tibet, Thai kingdoms, and Japanese villages, as well as Arctic indigenous communities.

This unique approach was not lost on the TV writer Albert Kim when he watched the series with his daughter. “It was incredibly

rare back then—and frankly even now—to find this epic fantasy world that draws its influences from Asian and indigenous cultures,” he says. When the pandemic hit in 2020, *Avatar* saw a massive resurgence, topping Netflix viewership charts. Now, Kim is the showrunner of a live-action series adaptation, which arrives on Netflix on Feb. 22 facing enormous expectations from the show’s faithful fanbase. As Kim navigated *Avatar*’s nuanced character arcs, turbulent sociopolitical themes, and ambitious visual tableaus, he made it a priority to center Asian cultural specificity, in order to ground the characters, deepen the world’s lore, and provide badly-needed representation.

Virtually every aspect of *Avatar*, from costumes to props to stunt coordination, required deep cultural research and collaboration. From Japanese folk musicians to indigenous parka designers, here are some of the key ways that the show’s creators paid homage to Asian cultures.

Martial Arts



At the heart of *Avatar* is the telekinetic practice of “bending,” in which warriors channel natural elements against their opponents. Each type of bending is inspired by a different form of Chinese martial art. Earthbenders, who raise rocks out of the earth, emulate the weighty Nanquan style, which stays low to the ground. Firebenders, in contrast, practice Changquan, a sharp, explosive style. Stunt coordinator Jeff Aro also crafted hybrid fighting styles

for characters including Aang (played by Gordon Cormier) as they traveled to other nations and learned their techniques. “We wanted to treat martial arts like language,” he says.

Costume



Much of *Avatar* is set in polar regions based on those that are home to Inuit and other indigenous cultures. Costume designer Farnaz Khaki-Sadigh embarked on months of research on those cultures, including studying the carvings on whale bones and antlers in museums. She also sought counsel from indigenous elders and hired indigenous artists directly. That included Taalrumiq, an Inuvialuit artist based in British Columbia. Taalrumiq created geometric designs for parka trims, which traditionally could signify a wearer’s family or status level. Taalrumiq’s trim featured blue wavy patterns inspired by growing up on the Arctic Ocean.

When Taalrumiq was asked to design for the show, she was already a fan of *Avatar*, having watched it with her children over the pandemic. She says she was excited about being part of a show with such massive international reach. “All the Inuvialuit come from a small population who survived genocide, disease, residential schools,” she says. “It can feel like we have so many challenges that we have to overcome to see a little success. So

seeing my work in this production is going to be so uplifting; to know that we can go out into the world and be successful like anyone else.”

Architecture

The original *Avatar* animated series was visually stunning, and filled with wondrously complicated buildings—perhaps partially because no one had to actually build them. For this adaptation, production designer Michael Wylie spent months constructing sets resembling architecture across India, China and Thailand. One particularly mammoth project was a 30-foot-tall set modeled after centuries-old Tibetan temples. (See the top of this article.) Wylie and his team pulled together “terabytes” of reference photos to create a temple design with an open fretwork ceiling, series of identical columns, and plenty of gold leaf. In his research, Wylie was struck by the slow, methodical pace of Tibetan builders, carrying trees up the mountain one at a time. While Wylie had much stricter time constraints, he tried to incorporate individual craftsmanship where he could. “There were a lot of artisans on ladders and scaffolds,” he says. “We would giggle that after all these years, there were still people lying on their backs, painting patterns on the ceiling of a temple by hand.”

Music



Los Angeles is home to some of the world's best session musicians. But *Avatar* composer Takeshi Furukawa chose instead to go abroad in order to record many sections of his score. "It was really important to me that we go to people who breathe the air and drink the water of that area," he says. Furukawa staged recordings in Tokyo, Beijing, Mumbai, and Chennai for music that corresponded to cities inspired by those locales. For the Tokyo sessions—which play over the protagonist Aang's trip to the fictional Kyoshi island—Furukawa hired about 20 musicians, including an eight-person choir, and players of Japanese instruments like the shakuhachi, biwa and koto. Furukawa leaned into the differences between Eastern and Western music, and embraced what Western classical purists might call imperfections. "The notes wouldn't be the same pitch, which led to a weird rub between the orchestra and a Japanese flute," he says. "But that's the flavor and the spice."

Food



In one episode, Aang and his friends travel to the city of Omashu, which is based on the cultures of South Asia, filled with bazaars, saris, and brightly-colored fabrics. For the episode's giant palatial feast, director Jabbar Raisani summoned memories of attending a wedding in Pakistan, his father's homeland. "I told our propmaster, Nevin Swain, that the food needed to be crazy vibrant colors, particularly the desserts," Raisani says. Swain then worked with two Vancouver restaurants to cater the feast, one of which concocted a fake version of dosa that wouldn't disintegrate during the long shooting day. The result was a delectable whirl of orange, red and yellow, served on copper plates that reflected everything back at the camera.

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Abbott Elementary Gave Me My Greatest Success, Four Decades Into My Career



On my second day in L.A., back in 1984, my car caught on fire and I lost everything. I could have turned around and bought a bus ticket home to St. Louis. Instead, I chose to stay and press on. Forty years later, I'm not only still in Los Angeles, but I've found myself at the [Emmys](#) as part of the cast of a nominated TV show.

Reaching the [the Emmys](#) was a feat: there was a maze of security, metal detectors, bomb- and COVID-19-sniffing dogs. But the bigger feat was the four decades of work it took to get there. As my shoes touched the red carpet, the cameras flashed, and people I had admired for years congratulated me, I was left looking back on how the hell I ended up there. At 72, while a lot of people my age are retiring, I feel like I'm just getting started.

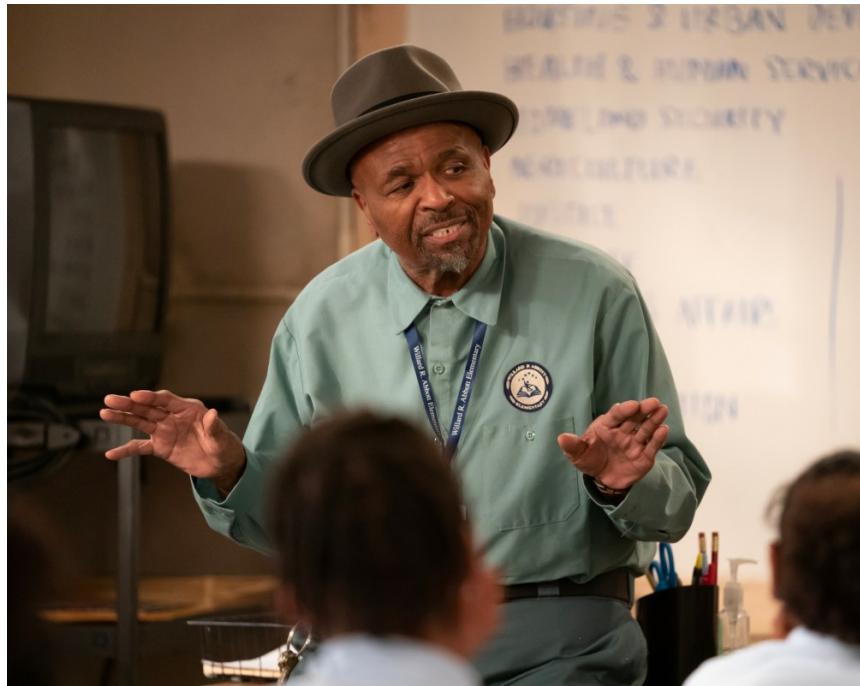
Four decades earlier, when I was new to L.A. and truly just getting started, the Emmys were geographically close but in every other way a distant dream. Though I wanted to act, I had to take a lot of square jobs to get me through: working in a brick yard, as a short order cook in a truck stop, a telemarketer, limo driver, and even a country western DJ, often from 10 in the morning until 10 at night. It was a nightmare not to be able to pursue my dream.

Then I remembered the reason why I came to Los Angeles. I willed myself to pursue the craft of acting. I began booking small jobs on shows like *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *The Practice*.

Eventually, I got a chance to audition for the sitcom [Friends](#). I thought I knocked it out of the park. But when I called my agent for feedback, the phone went dead silent. He told me that the casting department thought my audition was so terrible, I should go back to being a telemarketer. My face dropped. My heart sank.

But I did not allow it to break me. It lit a fire instead. I was determined that no one would ever say that about my work again. I enrolled in classes, workshops, performed theater. When I was invited to become a lifetime member of the Actors Studio, I not only felt like a working actor, but that I belonged. In hindsight, that rejection was one of the best things to happen in my career—until I met [Quinta Brunson](#).

Read more: [8 Shows to Watch After Abbott Elementary](#)



Long before I landed the role of a lifetime as Mr. Johnson, the custodian at Abbott Elementary School, my life was shaped by the real [underpaid teachers](#) at [inner city schools](#) in St. Louis—schools that, then as now, lacked equipment, supplies, and facilities. Like the teachers on [Abbott Elementary](#), they would do anything to help their students succeed. Teachers like my Aunt Helen, one of my favorite humans, who also happened to be my third grade teacher, who grabbed me by my collar on the first day and let me know that there would be no messing around. She demanded excellence. She constantly reminded me of how smart I was. That was going to be my key to freedom.

Growing up in The Ville neighborhood in St. Louis, my community was full of Black cultural, civic, and business leaders: doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, and entrepreneurs. I never heard words like *impossible, stop, can't, or quit*. I heard, *you can. You must. Continue*. I had been shielded from Jim Crow, from the realities of *colored only* movie theaters and restrooms.

So it was a shock when, after leaving Lincoln University and working as the only Black man at a newspaper in Texas, on my second day on the job I found “KKK” and the N-word carved into

my desk. I called my grandparents, who raised me, and told them, “I’m coming home.” My grandmother laughed. “Is that all? They didn’t carve ‘em in you?” After all she and my grandfather had lived through, she said: “We don’t let anybody block us, turn us back, or say we can’t.”



That advice propelled me through so many hard years and to the day when, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, I put myself on tape in my own home to audition for the pilot of a new [sitcom](#) called *Abbott Elementary*. This was one of the darkest times in American history, defined by everything that was taken away from us. But that’s when one of the greatest events of my life happened—and I do mean the *greatest*. The pandemic took so much from everyone, but it gave so much to me. A few weeks after sending in my taped audition, I booked the part of Mr. Johnson, though because it was just a guest role, I thought it was just going to be a day or two of my life.

When the day came to film the pilot, there was a scene with all the teachers in the library: Jeanine (Quinta Brunson), Barbara (Sheryl Lee Ralph), Gregory (Tyler James Williams), Principal Ava (Janelle James), Melissa (Lisa Ann Walters), and Jacob (Chris Perfetti). I was standing in the far back behind all of them. I couldn't hear the cues. And every actor knows your job as a guest star is to hit your mark, say your line, and stay out of the way. Do your job. Don't knock over the furniture, and go home. You're a guest in someone else's house.

I asked a PA to give me the cue, and I yelled out my line: "She's got some big feet!" The other actors hadn't even realized I was there; they all broke immediately and looked back at me. It was as if, in that moment, after 40 years of struggle, people were finally taking notice. I knew from making the pilot that it was going to be a memorable show. But once I saw the trailer, I could sense even more that this was different. Whether or not I would be coming back to feel that feeling again was still unknown to me.

But then they asked me back. First for two episodes, then three, then four. Toward the end of filming season one, Quinta mentioned they were considering making me a series regular. Every actor is superstitious, so I didn't want to jinx it. I kept it under one of my hats until it came true. At the end of Season 1, I pulled Quinta aside, thanked her, and told her she had changed my life.

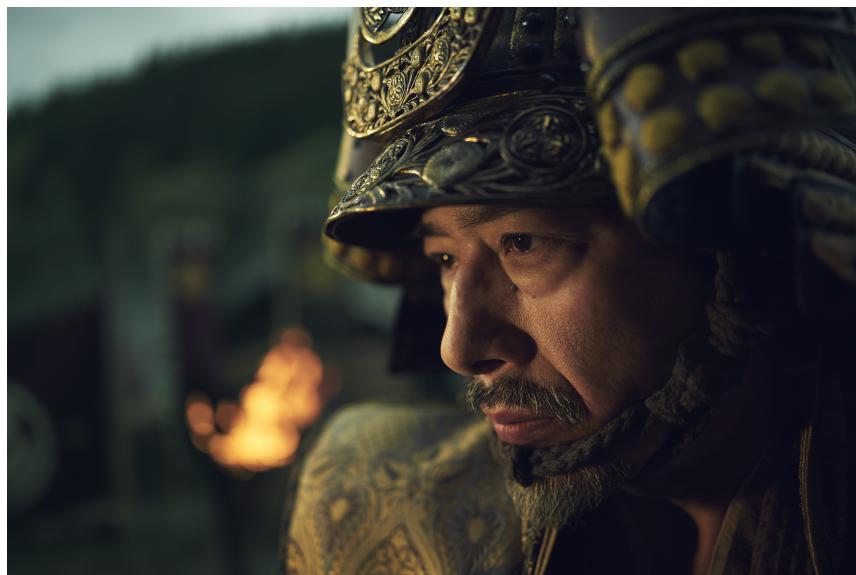
Success is when preparedness and opportunity collide. To be successful at any age, but especially as the years go by, is to never give up. It is to believe, deep down, that something great is going to happen. To will it into existence. For me, success has been about the journey, not the destination, and knowing the universe always puts you exactly where you're supposed to be. In my case: in a sage green uniform with a lanyard and a broom, sweeping up the linoleum floors of a Philadelphia elementary school.

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FX's *Shōgun* Isn't a Remake—It's a Revelation

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.



It takes a bit of hubris to mess with one of the defining TV events of the 20th century. The original *Shōgun*, a five-part miniseries based on James Clavell's best-selling 1975 doorstop, was a massive hit when it aired on ABC in 1980. Nearly a third of American households tuned in to watch a cast led by Richard Chamberlain and the iconic Japanese actor [Toshiro Mifune](#) retell the tale of an English navigator's adventures in feudal Japan. *Shōgun* broke broadcast barriers with its frank depictions of sex and violence, and racked up awards. Could there possibly be any point, beyond the entertainment industry's thirst for familiar IP, to revisiting this story in 2024?

The answer, remarkably, is yes. The new *Shōgun*, whose two-episode premiere comes to FX and Hulu on Feb. 27, is not a

remake so much as a radical reimagining. Adapted directly from Clavell's novel, this sprawling, 10-part historical drama takes a far broader view than its predecessor, moving beyond the Western outsider's perspective to survey a fracturing society that is just as baffled by this interloper's ways as he is by theirs. It's an epic of war, love, faith, honor, culture clash, and political intrigue. And at a time when so many of TV's biggest swings, from Amazon's *The Rings of Power* and *Citadel* to Netflix's *Stranger Things* and *The Crown*, have yielded at least partial misses, FX's *Shōgun* stands apart as a genuine masterpiece.

The cross-cultural encounter begins in the year 1600, when a battered European ship emerges out of the pre-dawn fog off the coast of a Japanese fishing village. Leading its scraggly, malnourished crew is John Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis from *Persuasion*), an English pilot with an irrepressible survival instinct. Unfortunately for him, local leaders aren't exactly pleased to receive his filthy delegation. (One puts him in his place by urinating on his head.) Even more hostile to a ship full of Protestants seeking a foothold in Japan are the Portuguese Catholics enlisted as the pilot's translators, who have already established trade and churches there.



Blackthorne soon stumbles into a crisis far bigger than his own. A year after the death of the reigning *Taikō*, a Council of Regents has been established to govern Japan until the late leader's young son is old enough to take his place. One regent, Lord Yoshii Toranaga (producer Hiroyuki Sanada), an aging war hero based in Edo, has fallen out with the other four, who are intimidated by his growing power and independence. Summoned to Osaka, Toranaga is threatened with impeachment. His reaction could plunge the nation into a civil war.

A brilliant strategist, Toranaga knows how useful a ship containing 500 muskets and 20 cannons—as well as a “barbarian” who knows how to use them—could be to him in a land where wars are generally waged by sword-wielding samurai. So Blackthorne, rechristened Anjin (the Japanese word for *pilot*), is transported to Osaka, where his fate and that of the embattled regent become inextricably entwined. Toranaga enlists Toda Mariko (Anna Sawai), a noblewoman who has converted to Christianity, as the Anjin’s translator. The first time we see this shrewd, steadfast, stoic yet heartbroken character, she’s calmly coaxing a young mother to surrender her baby to be slaughtered as part of her disgraced husband’s *seppuku*.

Blackthorne may be the character viewers encounter first, just as he was in the original *Shōgun*. He also speaks English, though the language often stands in for the Westerners’ and Christians’ lingua franca, Portuguese. Yet in this telling, from co-creators Justin Marks (*Top Gun: Maverick*) and Rachel Kondo, Toranaga and Mariko are just as much protagonists as the man they call Anjin. The three have something in common: each is a savvy reader of social situations engaged in a struggle for survival. Blackthorne must navigate an unfamiliar culture, with intricate customs, if he ever wants to see his crew, ship, or homeland again. Toranaga, who insists he has no ambitions of becoming *shōgun*, will be killed and his clan decimated on the battlefield if he doesn’t approach his

conflict with the Council correctly. Mariko, the wife of a brutish warrior (Shinnosuke Abe) and the daughter of a dishonored family, feels called to suicide but forces herself to keep living in deference to her Catholic beliefs and out of loyalty to Toranaga.



Crucial to this widening of scope is Marks and Kondo's decision to not only have the Japanese characters—who comprise the vast majority of the cast—speak their own language, but also to translate their words for Anglophone audiences using subtitles. Mifune, et al. spoke Japanese in the 1980 version as well, but like Blackthorne, Americans who didn't know that language could only understand what they were saying in scenes where the Anjin communicates through a translator. That conceit kept viewers grounded in, but also confined to, the pilot's bewildered point of view, holding the Japanese characters and the society they inhabited at arm's length.

A bit of a no-brainer in 2024, when TV audiences are international and multilingual series increasingly common, the subtitles alone are enough to justify the remake. Toranaga, Mariko, and their countrymen are no longer othered by default; we hear them candidly marvel at the Anjin's strange ways, his appetite for rabbit stew and aversion to baths. In terms of storytelling, viewers' ability to understand what the Japanese characters are saying to one

another opens up *Shōgun*'s world immensely. We get private conversations, backstories, access to the inner lives of scheming double agents and ambitious courtesans and sons impatient to prove themselves through combat. The expanded perspective makes the series a true, immersive saga, complementing performances that move fluidly between subtlety and grandeur, staged amid sumptuous visuals that contrast dramatic coastal vistas and firelit minimalist interiors with the violence of warfare and *seppuku*. (There is quite a bit of suicide in this show.)

I think it's possible to make great television on any scale, but too many flawed streaming-era epics have made it tempting to assume that such grand, historical and speculative stories are better suited to the big screen, if not tomes as thick as phone books. Billion-dollar world-building aside, *The Rings of Power* plods. Apple's *Foundation* and *Pachinko* nail the aesthetic elements of the classic books they're based on but muddle their plots beyond recognition. Empty spectacles like *Citadel* and *See* were dead on arrival. *The Crown*, *Stranger Things*, *The Mandalorian*, and especially *Game of Thrones* flourished for a while, then fizzled or flamed out. *The Underground Railroad*, Barry Jenkins' stunning 2021 adaptation of Colson Whitehead's alternate history of American slavery, was starting to look like the exception that proved the rule.

Almost three years later, as the streaming landscape contracts and content spends shrink, *Shōgun* stands as more vital evidence that the medium can still achieve greatness—and that its splashiest, most cinematic efforts are just as capable of excellence as the talkier, more grounded dramas and comedies that critics often prefer. The factors common to all great serialized stories, regardless of scale, are simple: compelling characters, ingenious plots, universal themes. TV's second *Shōgun* teems with all of the above. The costly embellishments are just a bonus. Call it a remake if you must, but few shows out there feel fresher.

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Kate Winslet Is Hilarious in HBO's Authoritarian Comedy *The Regime*

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.



[Kate Winslet](#) is the reigning queen of the HBO miniseries. She redefined an iconic heroine in [Todd Haynes' *Mildred Pierce*](#) and disappeared behind the grimace of an embattled small-town detective in [Mare of Easttown](#), earning Emmys for both roles. And she may well win a third for her astute portrayal of the fragile, eccentric demagogue at the center of HBO's *The Regime*.

Yet because it is a black comedy, rather than a weighty drama, the funny, brilliantly executed but thematically undercooked six-part series, premiering March 3, represents a major departure from her most celebrated work. A delusional right-wing kleptocrat who believes she's a champion of the people, Winslet's Chancellor Elena Vernham presides over a fictional Central European nation

from within the walls of a former grand hotel she “requisitioned” as her own personal Versailles, growing increasingly paranoid as her country’s economy falters. Showrunner Will Tracy (*Succession*, *The Menu*) has made a careful study of the 21st century authoritarian. Like [Marine Le Pen](#), Elena is a daughter desperate to triumph where her ideologue father failed. Like [Vladimir Putin](#), she’s a restless expansionist. Like [Donald Trump](#), she speaks constantly of love but thrives on hatred. And like so many dictators, past and present, she’s petrified of pathogens—in her case, mold.



Enter Herbert Zubak ([Matthias Schoenaerts](#)), a fanatical pro-Vernham soldier whose exploits have earned him the nickname *Butcher*, who is conscripted to keep Elena safe from spores by following her around with a humidity meter. As her neuroses erode her relationships with a passive husband (Guillaume Gallienne) and all but her most sycophantic advisers, Zubak becomes her confidant. And his genuine populism, which prescribes radical land redistribution and, er, a diet that includes rural dirt, threatens to destroy the regime’s lucrative relationship with the West.

Tracy keeps the abrupt political realignments coming, as Winslet, equipped with a lisping, upper-crust accent and gamely leading deranged musical numbers, pivots fluidly from hysterical hypochondriac to tyrannical alpha, hopeless romantic to malignant

narcissist. The other performances are excellent as well, from Schoenarts' energetic turn as a rugged maniac to a supporting cast that includes [Hugh Grant](#) and [Andrea Riseborough](#). Quippy dialogue features many great *Veep*-esque insults ("mewling vulva," "Our Lady of the Shrinking GDP"). Most inspired of all is Kave Quin's production design, which fuses the aesthetics of fascism with Elena's unique foibles to craft an utterly convincing backdrop to her breakdown. At one point she's carried aloft in a sort of luxury popemobile. When Zubak prescribes potato steam to treat her mysterious ailment, dozens of golden vessels heating heaps of tubers appear in the palace.



The Regime is a lot of skillfully produced fun, but it never delivers the shrewd political commentary its premise could support. It's less a satire than a farce—more *The Menu* than *Succession*.

Observations about global capitalism, far-right hypocrisy, and American and Chinese imperialism remain under-developed, as do some secondary characters whose scenes never get a chance to become full-fledged story lines. By all means, give Winslet another Emmy. If only Tracy's ambition matched that of his star.

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Ramy Youssef Is Tired of Apologizing

Sanya Mansoor is a reporter at TIME, where she has covered topics including state politics, criminal justice, voting access, religion, and South Asia.



[Ramy Youssef](#) is tired of apologizing. In his new HBO special, the 32-year-old comedian jokes about how he often has to prove that Muslim men are not inherently violent. After Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, he says he received a call from a friend a few days later, asking: 'Yo bro, where are you at with Hamas?' His response is exasperated, but sharply funny: 'Where am I at, like, are we f-cking? Am I a member?'

In *Ramy Youssef: More Feelings*, which debuts on March 23, Youssef wades through heavy topics with equal parts levity and empathy. He deftly weaves tales of jokingly probing his Saudi wife's family about Jamal Khashoggi's murder, trying to solve geopolitical crises before hooking up, and how we can't escape being just like our parents.

The topical nature of his special is in keeping with how he shows up in public: Youssef is among several artists calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, and he has donated some proceeds of his standup tour to the [Palestinian NGO Anera](#).

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Youssef has also ventured beyond comedy in recent years. He starred in his first film—the [Oscar-nominated *Poor Things*](#)—in 2023, and directed a [Season 2 episode of *The Bear* set in Copenhagen](#). He's also working on a fourth season of his acclaimed Hulu series [*Ramy*](#).

TIME spoke with Youssef about his new special, what makes his comedy distinctive, and his advocacy for the Palestinian people.

TIME: Tell me about what went into making the special.

It has been five years since I shot a special. So much about the world has changed. So much about my life has changed. The first special I shot was a week before Season 1 of my show came out. Since then, I've put out two more seasons of *Ramy*, a season of *Mo*, and I got to do a film [*Poor Things*]. It was this marker point for me in my life. It's been a real journey. I'm very grateful that it happened exactly when it did.



TIME: Your special doesn't shy away from speaking about therapy and intimacy. What was it like leaning into that kind of vulnerability?

I never want to do comedy that feels like it's critiquing others without critiquing myself. That's been a rule for me. This special is definitely a more full embodiment of that idea. There's a hope I have that if I could lay out what's going on and how I think about it, that maybe I can be someone that makes harder things a little softer to digest.

Was there a discomfort that came with turning inward, or do you feel comfortable with this level of self-disclosure?

Between the first special and the second special, I got a lot more comfortable. Part of that was because of digging inwards in making my show, *Ramy*. It's a process that has become much more familiar to me, but then I also feel young. In a lot of ways, I'm just at the beginning of my career.

Is there another season of *Ramy*?

There is. Whenever we find our way back, there's going to be a bit of a time jump.

You open your special by talking about the causes you speak out about. Why be vocal about the Palestinian cause?

I did stand-up there many years ago, and I felt a very organic connection to the people there. I have worked with a lot of people who live there, I have friends who are there. They have been incredibly underserved and they are without justice. So for it to blend into my work is just a natural extension. It's kind of a no-brainer to talk about it.

Are there particular risks that come with that support?

I don't think so. It's about genuinely connecting to people who desperately need that connection. Anytime you put yourself on screen, there's going to be some blowback of people being like, 'Dude, you're ugly' or 'Hey, you suck.' For as much as I circle around politics, I'm not actually discussing political theory. I'm more discussing how it makes me feel and that's why I've named both specials *Feelings*.

You get at how the gay and trans issue has been divisive and complicated for the Muslim community. How have you tried to depict some of that tension creatively in your work?

I try to bring a little bit more dimension, a little bit more humanity, and am less focused on judgments or lanes. I've never written anything that didn't have a gay character. I've never written anything that didn't have a Muslim character, I think it's really important that we see people not as headlines.

You also talk about the Biden campaign reaching out to you in 2020 to help them win over Arab Americans in Michigan. It seems you now have more reservations about the President. It's

a feeling echoed by many Muslims, Arabs, and young people in America. Is there something Biden could still do to win you over?

A cease-fire would be a great start. [Jon Stewart was great in his comeback](#). He spoke to this point: Isn't it the candidates' job to assuage the concerns of the voters? Or, is it the voter's job to be quiet so that the other candidate doesn't win? The idea that if you speak up, it might get worse is almost textbook abuse.

Stewart actually came out to the special taping, and it was surreal. I grew up at a time when the only person on television speaking truth to power for anyone who looked like me was a Jewish man from New Jersey.

What do you say to those who argue withholding support from Biden is like helping elect Trump, who will just put the Muslim ban back in place?

Anyone who's like, well, there's gonna be a Muslim ban. I have relatives who, since the first time the Muslim ban was enforced, still can't get visas. So it actually hasn't gotten that much better.



You've taken on more diverse projects recently. What else can we expect? ?

I'm in a period of chasing a few different ideas: some directing, some acting. A lot of my favorite artists started working young, but made my favorite work of theirs once they were closer to 40. I'm not quite there, but I'm starting to understand why.

What makes your style of comedy distinct?

There's a certain thing that I really love in comedy, that I've gotten to flex in a couple of different ways. I've been working on an animated show and I've been circling around more physical comedy. I love grounded absurdity. I love grounded spirituality. I love the tension between two feet on the ground but almost everything else in the sky. It's really fun. Everything for me fits in a really fun or f-cked up question, and then letting it go wherever it needs to go.

In your special, you talk about the shame you felt after lying to your dad about a plagiarized book report on Gandhi you wrote while you were in school. What do you want your dad to know once he finds out that you did, in fact, cheat?

I want him to know that it just made me make sure I was a better person for him as an adult. And that I really appreciate everything that he has done for me. Him and my mom are the best people I know.

Correction, March 22

The original version of this story misstated the name of the organization that received donations from Ramy Youssef. It is Anera, not Near East Refugee Aid.

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