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Jimmy Carter

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Jimmy Carter Was More Successful Than He Got Credit For



[Jimmy Carter](#) was not a president of the first rank, but he managed by dint of unceasing effort to become an iconic world leader, with an inspiring, if often contentious, legacy as a dogged peacemaker and a decent and ethical problem-solver. His presidency—beset by a horrible economy, the [Soviet invasion of Afghanistan](#) and the [seizure of American hostages in Iran](#)—was a stunning political failure but a greater substantive success than was recognized when he was crushed for reelection by [Ronald Reagan](#) in 1980.

In today's world of perpetual military intervention, it's striking that not a single bomb was dropped or shot fired in combat by American forces on Carter's watch, and his leadership helped prevent at least five wars—in Panama, Israel, and Iran when he was president, and in Haiti and North Korea after he left office. [The Camp David Accords](#) he engineered proved to be the most successful treaty since the end of World War II. Long before he died Sunday, Dec. 29, at 100, his epic journey from barefoot Georgia farm boy to Nobel Prize-winning humanitarian had become a classic American story.



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As the longest-lived president, Carter effectively lived in three centuries: He was born in a rural South little changed from the 19th century. He helped advance the four great movements of the 20th century—civil rights, women's rights, human rights abroad and the environment—and hastened the collapse of the Soviet Union. And as an old man in the 21st century, he made sure his Carter Center was on the cutting edge of the new millennium's big challenges: conflict-resolution, disease eradication, democracy-promotion and sustainable development.

Emory University President James Laney once said, “Jimmy Carter is the only person in history for whom the presidency was a

steppingstone.”

There was truth in that line; he reinvented the ex-presidency with a higher purpose that inspired other presidents to use their stature and convening power on behalf of important causes after leaving office. He was the longest-serving former president in American history and by many accounts the best, though every successor was annoyed that he sometimes freelanced as if he were still in power.



Humble Georgia roots

Carter was born on Oct. 1, 1924, in Plains, Ga., population 550, the first child of James Earl Carter, a canny segregationist businessman and farmer, and his eccentric wife, Lillian, a nurse who defied Jim Crow norms by tending to black patients. He was nicknamed Jimmy from the start, with the expectation that he would someday be called Jim, which he never was. The family was prosperous and had an automobile and a party line telephone, but the rest of his early life on a farm outside of town was primitive by today's standards. Until he was age 11, his homestead had no running water, no electricity, no mechanized farm equipment, only slop jars and outhouses, hand-cranked wells, kerosene lamps, ancient mule-driven plows and black sharecroppers to work the land in a feudal system only one step removed from slavery.

Carter picked cotton, stacked peanuts and learned his discipline, attention to detail and prodigious work ethic on the farm, where his early playmates were black. From an early age he set his sights on admission to the U.S. Naval Academy. After graduating in 1946, marrying Rosalynn Smith, his sister's friend who was also from Plains, and serving as an officer on diesel-powered submarines, he became a "nuc" under the legendary [Admiral Hyman Rickover](#). His assignment was to supervise the construction of one of the first two nuclear subs, a Rickover-led technological breakthrough that eventually helped give the U.S. the strategic edge in the Cold War. Another duty involved descending for a dangerous 90 seconds inside of a Canadian nuclear reactor that had melted down. Much of the intensity and coldness that sometimes lay behind Carter's smile came from Rickover.

When his father died in 1953, Carter left the Navy and returned to Plains with Rosalynn, and their three young sons: Jack, Chip and Jeff. (Their daughter Amy was born 14 years later). He took over his father's peanut warehouse and followed his example by assuming a huge array of civic commitments. A progressive on race but bystander to the civil rights movement, Carter was elected to the Georgia State Senate in 1962 only after it was discovered that a corrupt local boss had been stuffing the ballot boxes on behalf of his opponent. Carter specialized in education and read every bill in its entirety. After he lost a race for governor in 1966, he experienced a spiritual crisis and was born-again, an experience that led him to go door-to-door on Baptist missions in the North. He absorbed the work of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote that "the sad duty of politics is to do justice in a sinful world." In 1970, he won the governorship by running to the right with a rural populist campaign that wasn't explicitly racist but included subtle appeals to segregationist voters.

Carter immediately angered those voters when he said in his inaugural address that "the time for racial discrimination is over." His lieutenant governor, the infamous Lester Maddox, was hardly

alone in his opposition to Carter hanging a portrait of [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) in the State Capitol. Many rural Georgians felt betrayed. Had Georgia law allowed Carter to seek reelection in 1974, he would have likely lost, despite reorganizing state government, improving education and saving rivers and other natural resources from developers.

Ascending to the White House

Carter was unimpressed by the 1972 Democratic presidential candidates he met when they passed through Georgia and decided to launch an improbable bid for the White House. His brother Billy, who ran a Plains gas station and became a celebrity before descending into self-parody and alcoholism, quipped: “I’ve got a mother who joined the Peace Corps and went to India when she was 68. I’ve got a sister who races motorcycles and another sister who’s a Holy Roller preacher. I’ve got a brother who says he wants to be President of the United States. I’m the only sane one in the family.” With the help of two young aides, Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell, Carter’s 1976 campaign was brilliantly timed and executed. His outsider status, modesty (he often slept in the homes of supporters) and “I will never lie to you” message after Watergate proved a perfect match for an electorate that had lost faith in American institutions. Propelled out of Iowa and New Hampshire, Carter held off a late challenge from California Gov. Jerry Brown to win the nomination. Problems with the Democratic establishment that would haunt him later—and an interview with *Playboy* magazine in which he said [“I’ve committed adultery in my heart”](#)—helped the ticket to blow a large lead and barely squeak past incumbent President Gerald Ford (who later became a good friend) in the general election.



Carter started strong by stepping out of his limo on Inauguration Day and walking with his family partway down Pennsylvania Avenue—a new tradition symbolizing his openness. Soon after, he wore a sweater when giving a televised speech on the need for energy conservation, but the symbolism cut both ways and he was bedeviled by photographs of him collapsing from heat exhaustion while running a six-mile race and [fending off a killer rabbit in a pond](#). The same post-Watergate mood that helped elect him led to especially harsh press coverage, with many reporters wrongly assuming he must be hiding scandals.

As president, Carter revolutionized both the vice presidency and the office of first lady. After two centuries of presidents ignoring their vice presidents, Carter gave former vice president Walter

Mondale major responsibilities in both domestic and foreign policy, though Mondale briefly threatened to quit over his opposition to the malaise speech. Carter listed Rosalynn—well-regarded by official Washington—first among his most trusted advisers, put her in charge of reforming mental health policy and dispatched her on a diplomatic mission to Latin America, even as he was criticized for letting her sit in on Cabinet meetings.

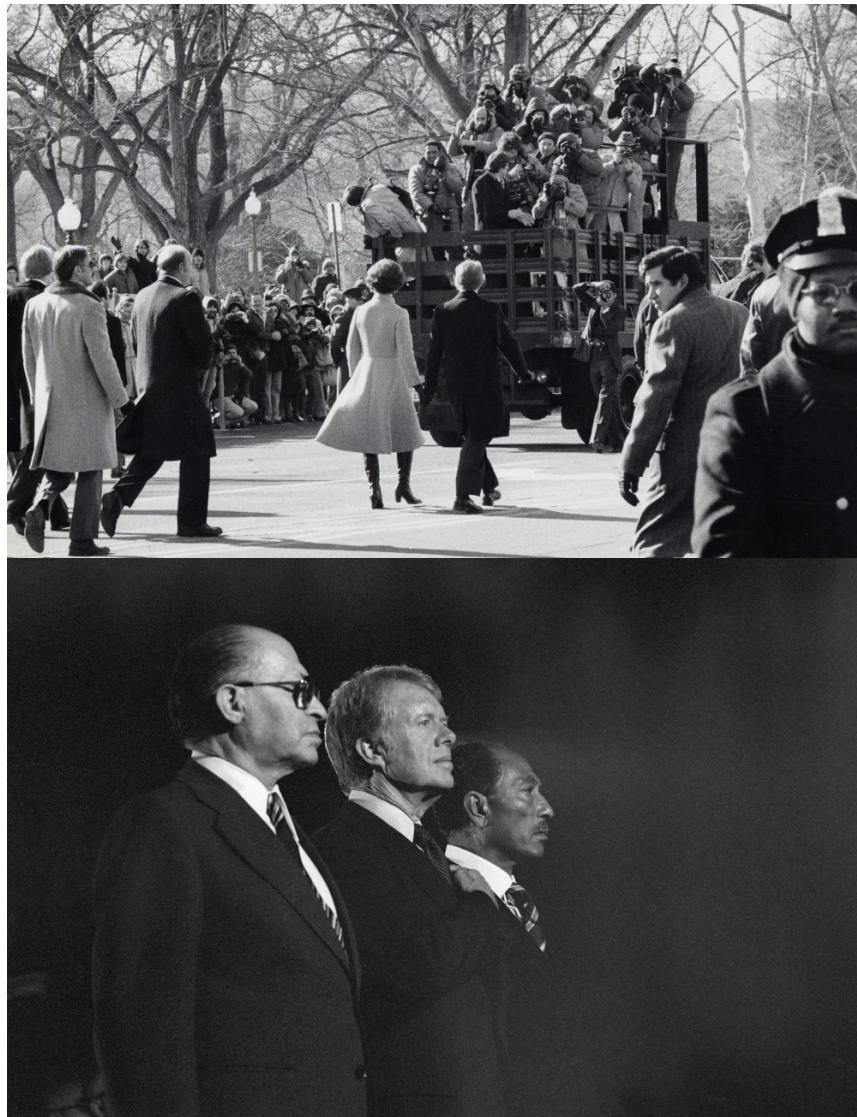
With the help of an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress, Carter—showing impressive command of the issues—had no problem with gridlock and signed scores of important bills. But his non-ideological approach meant he had no reliable base to help him keep promises on tax and welfare reform, much less strike an agreement with Sen. Ted Kennedy for national health insurance. Some of his achievements were liberal: government job-creation; appointing more women judges than all of his predecessors combined (though women's groups, who thought he wasn't liberal enough, still attacked him) the establishment of the Departments of Education and Energy, as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency; far-sighted support of alternative energy (reversed by Reagan, who took down the solar panels Carter put on the roof of the White House) and other efforts to achieve energy independence; toxic waste cleanup; mental health treatment (also reversed by Reagan) and the mammoth Alaska Lands bill, which along with other environmental initiatives made him the greatest conservation president since Theodore Roosevelt.



Other policies were more conservative, like the deregulation of the airline, trucking and natural gas industries, and his efforts to balance the budget over the objections of liberal Democrats. Carter's greatest legislative achievement was the 1978 Senate ratification of the [Panama Canal treaties](#), which led to the U.S. eventually handing over control of the Panama Canal to Panama. The treaties were hugely unpopular in polls, thanks in part to Reagan's use of the issue when challenging Ford in the 1976 GOP primaries. Carter lobbied expertly, explaining that rejection would likely lead to a guerrilla war in Panama, and he convinced 16 Republicans to join Democrats for the two-thirds necessary for passage.

Carter's foreign policy was both visionary and hands-on. His emphasis on human rights, while unevenly applied, set a new global standard for how governments should treat their people. He also advanced the cause of freedom in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe. The highlight of his presidency came in September 1978 when he retreated for 13 days to Camp David with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and used his often-maligned attention to detail to engineer an agreement. Many Israelis and American Jews, distrustful of Carter

because of his long criticism of Israeli occupation of the West Bank, don't acknowledge how much the durable Camp David Accords did to secure the Jewish State. After waging four wars in the first 25 years of Israel's existence, the Egyptian army—the only force capable of destroying Israel—hasn't fired on the state once in all the years since.



In 1979, building on President Richard Nixon's breakthrough, Carter hosted the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and together they normalized U.S.-Chinese relations, paving the way for huge changes in the global economy. Dealing with the Soviet Union was harder. After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Carter pulled the [SALT II missile and nuclear weapons treaty](#) from the Senate floor (though its provisions continued to be abided by), imposed a

grain embargo and boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, none of which were particularly effective. More significant were secret aid to the mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan and Carter's decision to accelerate the Pentagon's development of stealth technology. Many of the weapons Reagan used to intimidate the Soviets—including the B-2 stealth bomber and the MX missile—were developed under Carter.

As inflation surged into double digits, Carter's presidency became an economic nightmare. In 1979, he appointed Paul Volcker as chairman of the Federal Reserve and Volcker's harsh medicine—double-digit interest rates that decimated businesses and homeowners—tamed inflation but not until after Reagan took office.

A Growing ‘Malaise’

In the summer of 1979, gasoline shortages that grew out of OPEC price hikes and the Iranian revolution led to long, infuriating lines at the gas pump. Losing touch with the American public as well as the Washington political establishment, which often patronized him, Carter retreated to Camp David to consult a wide variety of Americans on why his administration was failing. In the thoughtful sermon-like televised address he delivered afterwards—dubbed “[the malaise speech](#),” though he never used that word—he confessed to leadership shortcomings and preached sacrifice and a need to confront what he called the nation’s “crisis of confidence.” He surged in the polls but plummeted two days later when—in arguably the worst decision of his presidency—he fired several Cabinet members. Resistant to sacrifice, the country was concluding that intelligence, integrity and mastery of the issues were not enough for presidential success. His willingness to make unpopular but necessary decisions went largely unappreciated at the time.

That November, students loyal to the revolutionary Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini seized 52 Americans from the U.S. embassy and held them hostage—retaliation for Carter allowing the deposed Shah of Iran to enter the U.S. for medical treatment. At first, Americans rallied around Carter and he won points for patiently working for the hostages’ release. He beat Ted Kennedy in early Democratic primaries and seemed a decent bet for reelection.



As the crisis wore on in 1980, most other presidents would have taken some kind of military action against Iran, as Rosalynn Carter and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski urged. But Carter believed the hostages would be immediately executed and the resulting war would lead to many American and Iranian deaths. Another option—downplaying the captivity—wasn’t viable in a pre-cable era when the most trusted man in America, Walter Cronkite, reminded viewers every night on the *CBS Evening News* exactly how many days the hostages had been held. Ted Koppel’s *Nightline*, which was launched on ABC News during the period, also kept Americans riveted to the crisis.

In April of 1980, Carter authorized a hostage rescue mission but three of the eight helicopters sent inside Iran malfunctioned in the desert. After the mission was aborted, a helicopter collided with a

transport aircraft, killing eight servicemen. Carter blamed the fiasco for his crushing defeat to Reagan in the November election, though the economy, the candidacy of independent John Anderson and Reagan's strong campaign were also major factors. Carter spent the last nights of his presidency napping in the Oval Office as he worked around the clock to successfully free the hostages. The Iranians released them just moments after Reagan took the oath on Jan. 20, 1981, the 444th day of their captivity. They were all alive and mostly healthy, though Republicans would long argue that the nation's "honor" was bruised.

A Post-Presidency Renaissance Man

After he left office, the Carters moved back to Plains and refused to take money for speeches or serve on corporate boards. Over time, Carter became the closest thing to a Renaissance Man of any president since Thomas Jefferson. He painted, built furniture, and wrote—poetry, fiction, history, memoirs and even self-help, 30 books in all. [His association with Habitat for Humanity](#)—including helping to build houses once a year—helped make it the largest not-for-profit homebuilder in the world.

Since 1982, the Carter Center he built in Atlanta adjacent to his presidential library has focused on specific, solvable problems. Besides monitoring more than 100 elections around the world, it has reduced the incidence of guinea worm disease from 3.5 million cases in 21 countries to only a few dozen scattered cases today. Great progress is also underway in combating river blindness. By contrast, the Atlanta Project, an ambitious attempt to tackle poverty in the capital of his home state, flopped.



Carter was often criticized for his willingness to meet with some of the worst human rights abusers and terrorists in the world, including the head of Hamas. He argued that he would meet with almost anyone if there was a chance for peace. In his later years, he and other retired world leaders joined a group of peacemakers formed by Nelson Mandela called “The Elders.”

Carter’s biggest post-presidential diplomatic breakthroughs both came in 1994 when he convinced the founder of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, to begin to open up and to agree to peace talks with the Clinton Administration. The talks resulted in a deal that would have prevented North Korea from developing nuclear weapons, but it

fell apart after a few months when Kim Il-Sung died. (He returned to North Korea in 2010 and brokered the release of American teacher [Aijalon Mahli Gomes](#), who had been arrested after crossing into North Korea illegally.) Also in 1994, President Bill Clinton sent Carter, Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn and Colin Powell (then a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) to Haiti, where—under Carter's direction—they convinced Haitian President Raoul Cedras to leave power, thereby avoiding an imminent invasion by U.S. forces.

But his diplomatic efforts also brought criticism. Clinton was angry at Carter for locking in the Haiti deal on CNN without his authorization. In 1991, President George H.W. Bush, while grateful to Carter two years earlier for convincing Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to leave power peacefully after he lost an election, was furious at Carter for undermining his position on Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait by privately urging other members of the U.N Security Council to oppose the Gulf War. For his part, Carter occasionally took shots at all of his successors, who considered him difficult to handle.



In later years, Carter continued to court controversy. He alienated some of his Jewish friends and supporters in 2006 by titling a book about the Middle East, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, though a

decade later even Ehud Barak, a former Israeli prime minister, was making the apartheid comparison. He quit the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000 over its literal interpretation of scripture, as well as its attitudes toward women, though he did continue to welcome visitors from all over the world to his Sunday School classes at the Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains.

By the time of his death, Carter, who is the longest-lived president, had transcended the invective directed at him over the years. With a reappraisal of his presidency underway and his decency and selflessness praised across party lines, Carter secured a permanent place in the hearts of most Americans.

Jonathan Alter is the author of His Very Best, Jimmy Carter, a Life.

<http://bit.ly/2Lb2EE0>

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L.A. Fires Show the Reality of Living in a World with 1.5°C of Warming

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*.



There are many ways of framing the scale of the dislocation in Los Angeles this week. As the ferocious ring of five wildfires roared across the region in a multi-day blaze that began Jan. 7., some 180,000 residents were forced to evacuate their homes—the equivalent of pitching the entire population of Little Rock, Ark., out into the streets or filling Los Angeles's massive So-Fi stadium to more than double its capacity and not letting anyone go home again.

The Southern California blaze was a special kind of hell. At least 10 people lost their lives and officials expect more deaths to come to light before the multiple infernos are tamed. Thousands of homes and a sprawl of entire neighborhoods were transformed into outdoor charnel houses. [Nursing home residents in Altadena, Calif.](#),

were evacuated into the night—riding in wheelchairs and pushing walkers, many in their night clothes, as a stinging snow of orange embers descended around them. Fire fighters watched helplessly as houses burned, their hoses at the ready but the hydrants to which they were connected producing no water or merely a low-pressure trickle.



“Wildfires do not care about jurisdictional boundaries,” said Kathryn Barger, the chair of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, at a Jan. 9 news conference. Meanwhile, the sextet of localized blazes—the Palisades fire, the Eaton fire, the Hurst fire, the Sunset fire, the Lidia fire, and the Kenneth fire—blurred in the public

mind and in the sprawl of destruction into one great undifferentiated inferno.

President-Elect Donald Trump laid blame for the disaster at the feet of Calif. Gov. Gavin Newsom and President Joe Biden. “NO WATER IN THE FIRE HYDRANTS, NO MONEY IN FEMA. THIS IS WHAT JOE BIDEN IS LEAVING ME. THANKS JOE!” Trump wrote in a Jan. 8 Truth Social post. As for Newsom, Trump faulted the governor for allegedly refusing “to sign the water restoration declaration put before him that would have allowed millions of gallons of water, from excess rain and snow melt from the North, to flow daily into many parts of California.”

Read more: [*How to Help Victims of the Los Angeles Wildfires*](#)

Biden ignored Trump’s broadside. Newsom’s office hit back, posting on X: “There is no such document as the water restoration declaration—that is pure fiction. The Governor is focused on protecting people, not playing politics, and making sure firefighters have all the resources they need.”



Trump was wrong about FEMA, which released funds to fight the fires on Jan. 7; he was not wrong about the feeble water system, though it's possible there is nothing the city could have done to

keep it supplied sufficiently. The hydrants are fed by three one-million gallon tanks in the Pacific Palisades hills. Those were not meant to work alone, however, but rather to be supplemented by water from firefighting aircraft that, in this case, couldn't fly in the cyclonic Santa Ana winds. [At a news conference](#), Janisse Quiñones, head of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said that the demand for water was four times greater "than we've ever seen in the system."

But there are bigger—far bigger—factors at play in the disaster, factors that have less to do with local politics and institutional preparedness and more to do with the existential matter of a planet grown sickly from climate change. A crisis that is feeding more and bigger storms and causing more and greater destruction—destruction that lawmakers and other leaders, here and around the world, still seem unable to muster the will to address. Here is the reality: The very metabolism of the Earth has been thrown off by an atmosphere choking on greenhouse gasses, and it will take more than political bickering to set things right. Another reality: Fixing the problem first requires understanding—and, even more fundamentally, accepting—the science. Only then can we implement policies and put in place protocols that help us both reduce the likelihood of more such crises and minimize the death and destruction when they ultimately do occur.

It's long been established that [climate change turbocharges wildfires](#), with droughts, persistent heat, dried vegetation, and lightning storms all worsening in a warming world and all contributing to out-of-control blazes. That's just one reason a new report from the [European Space Agency's Copernicus Climate Change Service](#)—a report that landed on Jan. 10, while L.A. still burned—arrived as such bad news. According to the release, 2024 was the first year global mean temperatures exceeded pre-industrial levels by 1.6°C (2.88°F). That blows past the [benchmark established](#) by the 2015 Paris Climate Accord, which sought to

limit future warming to well below 2°C in the 21st century, with a preferred target no higher than 1.5°C. Doing so would help limit the impact of a hotter planet.



In Southern California, the report could be read by the light of a burning city where, at one point, the rapidly moving fire incinerated the equivalent of five football fields per minute. Those blazes came not long after a bad year for wildfires in the U.S. overall. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, a clearinghouse for fire information and logistical resources, by mid-September 2024 alone, more than 38,000 wildfires had incinerated more than 7.8 million American acres—a pace slightly ahead of the annual U.S. average of more than 45,000 wildfires per year.

While it's still unclear what sparked the L.A. fires, the underlying cause goes back decades—if not centuries. Fire is one of the most primal expressions of a planet in upheaval; the Earth was born in molten violence and, under the right conditions—say, after hundreds of years of emissions released from burning fossil fuels—it still has an exceedingly fiery temperament.

“As our planet continues to heat up, droughts are getting more intense in some regions of the world,” says Peter Kalmus, climate scientist at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. “The droughts,

combined with higher temperatures, cause more frequent and intense fires in those regions.”

Southern California is not remotely the only tinderbox part of the world, but it’s an especially flammable one—not just because of the droughts Kalmus speaks of, but because of their persistence. “The Southwest U.S. has been in megadrought since 1999,” says Jonathan Overpeck, dean of the school for climate and sustainability at the University of Michigan. “This is the primary reason we’re seeing so much more wildfire in the region, and all across the U.S. West up into Canada.”



Then there is the tornadic power of the winds—most notably Southern California’s Santa Ana. Those ferocious atmospheric rapids get their power, explains Frank Marsik, associate research scientist in the college of engineering at the University of Michigan, by being forced to move through narrow channels in the mountains of northern Mexico and Southern California, “resulting in an increase in the speed of the winds. A good analogy for what happens with the Santa Ana winds would be the way that you can increase the speed of water flowing out of a garden hose by putting your thumb over the end, causing the water to flow through a much smaller area.”

Wildfires are hardly the only sign of our warming world—or the dangerous mile-marker we passed in 2024 when we crossed the 1.5°C excess warming documented in the Copernicus report. Everywhere, the planet showed signs of heat swoon last year, with record high levels of water vapor, methane, and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; record low expanses of sea ice around Antarctica; and record oceanic temperatures in the North Atlantic, Indian, and western Pacific Oceans. July 22, 2024, went into the books as the hottest single day ever recorded worldwide, with the global average thermometer popping its top at a comparative fever level of 62.8°F (17.16°C). The 13 months that preceded that day were blistering too, with each one from June 2023 to June 2024 clocking in hotter than the same month in any previous year.

“All of the internationally produced global temperature datasets show that 2024 was the hottest year since records began in 1850,” said Carlo Buontempo, director of Copernicus’s European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), in a statement that accompanied the release of the report.

Read more: [*Why Risky Wildfire Zones Have Been Increasing Around the World*](#)

Human-generated greenhouse emissions were not the only factors that made 2024 so punishing. From May 2023 to May 2024, [an El Niño current prevailed](#) in the tropical Pacific, helping to drive average sea surface temperatures to a record-high 20.87°C (69.56°F), or more than half a degree celsius warmer than the 1991 to 2020 average. But even after El Niño ended and a more moderate La Niña cycle took over, the oceans stayed hot, with sea surface temperatures from July to December 2024 entering the record books second only to the same period in 2023. From June to October, sea ice around Antarctica reached its second lowest extent ever, also behind 2023. The Arctic, at its annual minimum sea ice in September, was its fifth lowest on record.

High sea surface temperatures always lead to [accelerated evaporation](#). In 2024, that meant record levels of water vapor in the atmosphere, with concentrations exceeding the 1991 to 2020 average by 5%. Not only does water vapor itself have a greenhouse effect, it also leads to extreme rainfall events, and 2024 saw plenty of them. They included [catastrophic flooding in the northeast U.S.](#) in August; [in Spain in October](#); and in Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Germany in September.



Europe as a whole was hit especially hard by 2024's record heat. The year was the warmest ever for the continent, with average temperatures 0.28°C (0.47°F) hotter than the previous record, set in 2020. Spring and summer were more than one and a half degrees Celsius warmer than the seasonal average from 1991 to 2020.

Human health worldwide was affected by the soaring temperatures. When the body cannot cool itself off sufficiently, [symptoms of heat stress](#)—including nausea, vomiting, loss of coordination, shortness of breath, dizziness and more—can occur. So-called [strong heat stress](#) commonly happens when outdoor temperatures reach or exceed 38°C (100.4°F); [extreme heat stress](#), with [more severe symptoms](#) including brain swelling and vital organ damage, happens at 46°C (114.8°F). On July 10, 2024, Copernicus reports

that 44% of the globe was affected by either strong or extreme heat stress—5% more than the average annual maximum.

“These high global temperatures, coupled with record global atmospheric water vapor levels...meant unprecedented heat waves and heavy rainfall events, causing misery for millions of people,” said Samantha Burgess, the ECMWF’s strategic lead for climate, in a statement.

That rainfall, interspersed with droughts is one more mechanism that leads to wildfires. Such a boom and bust cycle means a lot of lush greenery that grows in the rainy times, and a lot of dead leaves, trees and other tinder that gets left behind when things dry. “This is a perfect storm of fire weather: a combination of plentiful and extremely dry fuel,” says Kalmus.

Read more: *[It’s Time to Redefine What a Megafire Is in the Climate Change Era](#)*

As earth’s temperature crossed new and troubling thresholds in 2024, so too did the chemistry of the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide reached a record of 422 parts per million, or 2.9 parts per million higher than it was in 2023. Once in the atmosphere, carbon dioxide—and its ability to warm our planet—remains there for [hundreds of years](#). Methane, [a much more powerful greenhouse gas](#) which does its damage at much lower concentrations, reached 1,897 parts per billion, or three parts per billion higher than in 2023. Said Laurence Rouil, director of the Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service, in a statement: “Our data points clearly to a steady global increase of greenhouse gas emissions and these remain the main agent of climate change.”

Persistent wildfires across the Americas were not only a result of global warming, but a cause of even more future heat, as Bolivia and Venezuela released record levels of wildfire-related carbon dioxide; also due to fires, Canada reached its second highest annual

output. The Los Angeles fires are similarly pouring smoke and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, with the local topography—[mountains that trap haze in the Los Angeles Basin](#)—keeping the mess around.

Nothing in the short term is going to ensure Southern California does not see a repeat of this week's devastation, though the construction of more million-gallon water tanks can help prevent the hydrants from running dry again. The industrial-era greenhouse gas output that created the conditions that fed the fires was centuries in the making and it will, ultimately, be generations in the fixing.

If there was any good news in the Copernicus report it is that a single year that exceeds pre-industrial temperatures by 1.5°C or more is not the end of the story. The Paris agreement considers the 1.5°C threshold breached only if that is the average temperature increase over a 20-year stretch.

And so, as the Los Angeles blaze rages, as fire-ravaged communities take stock of the destruction, as families mourn—as we collectively struggle and grieve and pick up the pieces—the disaster is at once a warning and an admonition: There is still time for aggressive climate action to lower emissions and bring temperatures to heel in the process. “Humanity is in charge of its own destiny...how we respond to the climate challenge should be based on evidence,” said Buontempo. “The future is in our hands. Swift and decisive action can still alter the trajectory of our future climate.”

<https://time.com/7205644>

Why Meta’s Fact-Checking Change Could Lead to More Misinformation on Facebook and Instagram

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



Less than two weeks before Donald Trump is reinstated as President, Meta is abandoning its fact-checking program in favor of a crowdsourced model that [emphasizes](#) “free expression.” The shift marks a profound change in how the company moderates content on its platforms—and has sparked fierce debate over its implications for misinformation and hate speech online.

Meta, which operates Facebook, Instagram and Threads, had long funded fact-checking efforts to review content. But many Republicans chafed against those policies, arguing that they were disproportionately stifling right-wing thought. Last year, Trump [threatened](#) Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg that he could “spend the rest of his life in prison” if he attempted to interfere with the 2024 election.

Since Trump's electoral victory, Zuckerberg has tried to [mend](#) the relationship by donating \$1 million ([through Meta](#)) to Trump's inaugural fund and promoting longtime conservative Joel Kaplan to become Meta's new global policy chief. This policy change is one of the first major decisions to be made under Kaplan's leadership, and follows the model of Community Notes championed by Trump ally Elon Musk at X, in which unpaid users, not third-party experts, police content.

Zuckerberg, in a video statement, acknowledged that the policy change might mean that "we're going to catch less bad stuff." When asked at a press conference Tuesday if he thought Meta's change was in response to his previous threats, Trump said, "Probably."

While conservatives and free-speech activists praised the decision, watchdogs and social media experts warned of its ripple effects on misinformation spread. "This type of wisdom-of-the-crowd approach can be really valuable," says Valerie Wirtschafter, a fellow at the Brookings Institution. "But doing so without proper testing and viewing its viability around scale is really, really irresponsible. Meta's already having a hard time dealing with bad content as it is, and it's going to get even worse."

Read More: [*Here's How the First Fact-Checkers Were Able to Do Their Jobs Before the Internet*](#)

Facebook and misinformation

Meta's checkered history with combating misinformation underscores the challenges ahead. In 2016, the company launched a fact-checking program amid widespread concerns over the platform's impact on the U.S. elections. Researchers would later uncover that the political analysis company [Cambridge Analytica](#) harvested the private data of more than 50 million Facebook users as part of a campaign to support Trump.

As part of its new fact-checking program, Facebook relied on outside organizations like The Associated Press and Snopes to review posts and either remove them or add an annotation. But the company's efforts still fell short in many ways. In 2017, Amnesty International found that Meta's algorithms and lack of content moderation "substantially contributed" to [helping foment violence](#) in Myanmar against the Rohingya people.

In 2021, a [study](#) found that Facebook could have prevented billions of views on pages that shared misinformation related to the 2020 election, but failed to tweak its algorithms. Some of those pages glorified violence in the lead-up to the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, the study found. (Facebook called the report's methodology "flawed.") The day after the Capitol riot, Zuckerberg banned Trump from Facebook, [writing](#) that "the risks of allowing the President to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great."

Read More: [Facebook Acted Too Late to Tackle Misinformation on 2020 Election, Report Finds](#)

But as critics clamored for more moderation on Meta platforms, a growing contingent stumped for less. In particular, some Republicans felt that Meta's fact-checking partners were biased against them. Many were particularly incensed when Facebook,

under pressure from Biden Administration officials, cracked down against disputed COVID-19 information, including claims that the virus had man-made origins. Some U.S. intelligence officers subsequently supported the “lab leak” theory, prompting Facebook to reverse the ban. As criticism from both sides grew, Zuckerberg decided to reduce his risk by simply deprioritizing news on Meta platforms.

Pivoting to Community Notes

As Zuckerberg and Meta weathered criticism over their fact-checking tactics, billionaire Tesla CEO Musk bought Twitter in 2022 and took a different approach. Musk disbanded the company’s safety teams and instead championed Community Notes, a system in which users collaboratively add context or corrections to misleading posts. Community Notes, Musk felt, was more populist, less biased, and far cheaper for the company.

Twitter, which Musk quickly renamed X, ended free access to its API, making it harder for researchers to study how Community Notes impacted the spread of hate speech and misinformation on the platform. But several studies have been conducted on the topic, and they have been mixed in their findings. In May, one scientific study found that Community Notes on X were effective in combating misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and citing high-quality sources when doing so. Conversely, the Center for Countering Digital Hate found in October that the majority of accurate community notes were not shown to all users, allowing the original false claims to spread unchecked. Those misleading posts, which included claims that Democrats were importing illegal voters and that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, racked up billions of views, the study wrote.

Now, Meta will attempt to replicate a similar system on its own platforms, starting in the U.S. Zuckerberg and Kaplan, in

announcing the decision, did little to hide its political valence. Kaplan, previously George W. Bush's deputy chief of staff, announced the decision on *Fox & Friends*, and said it would "reset the balance in favor of free expression." Zuckerberg, who recently visited Trump at Mar-a-Lago, contended in a video statement that "the fact checkers have just been too politically biased, and have destroyed more trust than they've created." He added that restrictions on controversial topics like immigration and gender would be removed.

Meta's announcement was received positively by Trump. "I thought it was a very good news conference. Honestly, I think they've come a long way," he said on Tuesday about the change. Meta's decision may also alter the calculus for congressional Republicans who have been pushing to pass legislation cracking down on social media or attempting to re-write Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects tech platforms from lawsuits for content posted by their users.

Many journalists and misinformation researchers responded with dismay. "Facebook and Instagram users are about to see a lot more dangerous misinformation in their feeds," Public Citizen [wrote](#) on X. The tech journalist Kara Swisher [wrote](#) that Zuckerberg's scapegoating of fact-checkers was misplaced: "Toxic floods of lies on social media platforms like Facebook have destroyed trust, not fact checkers," she wrote on Bluesky.

Wirtschafter, at the Brookings Institution, says that Meta's pivot toward Community Notes isn't necessarily dangerous on its own. She wrote a [paper](#) in 2023 with Sharanya Majumder which found that although X's Community Notes faced challenges in reaching consensus around political content, the program's quality improved as the company tinkered with it—and as its contributor base expanded. "It's a very nuanced program with a lot of refinement over years," she says.

Meta, in contrast, seems to be rolling out the program with far less preparation, Wirtschafter says. Adding to the Meta's challenge will be creating systems that are fine-tuned to each of Meta's platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Threads are all distinct in their content and userbases. "Meta already has a spam problem and an AI-generated content problem," Wirtschafter says. "Content moderation is good for business in some sense: It helps clear some of that muck that Meta is already having a hard time dealing with as it is. Thinking that the wisdom-of-the-crowd approach is going to work immediately for the problems they face is pretty naive."

Luca Luceri, a research assistant professor at the University of Southern California, says that Meta's larger pivot away from content moderation, which Zuckerberg signaled in his announcement video, is just as concerning as the removal of fact-checking. "The risk is that any form of manipulation can be exacerbated or amplified, like influence campaigns from foreign actors, or bots which can be used to write Community Notes," he says. "And there are other forms of content besides misinformation—for instance, related eating disorders or mental health or self harm—that still need some moderation."

The shift may also negatively impact the fact-checking industry: Meta's fact-checking partnerships accounted for 45% of the total income of fact-checking organizations in 2023, according to [Poynter](#). The end of those partnerships could deliver a significant blow to an already underfunded sector.

<https://time.com/7205332>

Scientists Are Racing to Develop a New Bird Flu Vaccine

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



A 13-year-old girl in Canada became [so sick with H5N1](#), or bird flu, in late 2024 that she had to be put on a ventilator. Around the same time, a senior in Louisiana was diagnosed with the first “severe” case in the U.S.

As bird flu continues to ramp up, many are wondering what tools—namely, vaccines—we have to fight it if such intervention becomes necessary.

“Public-health and infectious disease folks around the world are watching bird flu very, very carefully,” says Dr. William Schaffner, professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and spokesperson for the Infectious Disease Society of America. “The concern is that this virus could acquire the capacity to attach to human cells and spread widely. That would be opening the door to a new pandemic for sure.”

For that to happen, the H5N1 virus would have to [develop the right mutations](#) that allow it to more easily infect human cells—a process that could occur more easily if someone were to be infected with both seasonal flu and H5N1, for instance, allowing the two viruses to exchange genetic information and recombine into a strain that readily infects and spreads among people.

Fortunately, that hasn’t occurred yet, but health officials aren’t waiting around. Work on a vaccine is underway to protect the public in the event of a pandemic, and earlier this year, Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [pointed to mRNA](#) as a preferred platform for the shot since vaccines can be developed and distributed quickly.

Here’s the latest on the efforts to develop a new bird flu vaccine.

Is there already an H5N1 vaccine?

[Several vaccines](#) target H5N1, and the national stockpile has doses of all of them. These shots target different strains of H5N1 that were circulating when the vaccines were developed years ago, but health experts expect they would still provide some protection against severe disease.

“Fortunately, current vaccine candidates neutralize the circulating strains *in vitro*,” wrote health officials from the U.S. National Institute on Allergy and Infectious Diseases in a Dec. 31 [editorial](#) in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. A small number of

healthy volunteers have been vaccinated with these H5N1 vaccines, and the antibodies they generated appeared to neutralize the circulating virus in lab tests. But these vaccines have not yet been tested in a clinical trial, since there have not been enough H5N1 infections in humans to compare vaccinated people to unvaccinated.

What about an mRNA vaccine for H5N1?

There isn't one yet, but several companies—including Moderna, Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline (in collaboration with CureVac)—are working on such a shot. In July, the U.S. government's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) [awarded Moderna \\$176 million](#) to develop its updated mRNA H5N1 vaccine. All of the mRNA vaccine candidates are in early stages of testing in people for safety and efficacy.

The shots rely on the same mRNA technology that was used to create COVID-19 vaccines. In recent weeks, scientists led by a team at the CDC [reported](#) that an mRNA-based H5N1 vaccine helped ferrets generate strong antibody responses against the virus and to survive a lethal dose that killed ferrets that hadn't received the vaccine.

Read More: [*We Are Not Safe from Bird Flu Until We Protect Farmworkers*](#)

Dr. Drew Weissman, director of vaccine research at Penn Medicine and a 2023 Nobel Prize winner for his work in pioneering mRNA technology for vaccines, and his colleagues also reported encouraging results with a vaccine they developed and tested in ferrets. The shot, which targeted the strain of H5N1 causing recent infections in chicken and cattle, prevented severe illness and death from H5N1 in the ferrets. Unvaccinated animals did not survive.

“The real advantage of mRNA vaccines in the context of a pandemic is the ability to update the vaccines as needed,” says Scott Hensley, professor of microbiology at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine who worked with Weissman to develop the vaccine. “The beauty of mRNA is the ability within a moment’s notice to change the vaccine.”

How soon could an updated vaccine be made available?

While developing an mRNA vaccine would take just a matter of months, testing the shot in clinical trials would take longer. “We know the vaccines would be well tolerated and safe because they were in the context of COVID-19,” says Hensley. “But any new antigen needs to be tested.”

In order to avoid delays in providing vaccines to the public in case of a pandemic, governments should be investing in conducting large-scale, late-stage clinical tests before a pandemic breaks out, Hensley says. “It would be investing in something that you’re not certain is going to cause a pandemic,” he says. “But it’s a decision that governments need to make. In my opinion, it would be money well spent when dealing with a virus that has the potential of this particular virus.”

Another way to avoid that delay and reduce the number of people who become sick with a pandemic-level bird flu is by developing and distributing a more broadly targeted vaccine. Influenza comes in four main subtypes—A, B, C, and D—and two, A and B, cause most infections in people. (H5N1 is type A.) Hensley developed a vaccine candidate that can recognize all 20 of the A and B influenza subtypes—including H5N1—and found that it generated strong immune responses in mice and ferrets. In addition, when the vaccinated ferrets were exposed to slightly different influenza

variants within those subtypes, they still produced good immune responses against them.

Read More: *What to Know About Walking Pneumonia*

While the vaccine didn't protect the animals from getting infected, they didn't get as sick. "What it does is prime the immune system to respond and clear the virus faster," says Hensley. "So the idea would be to prime the population with this type of vaccine that would limit initial severe disease and death in case of a pandemic. That would buy some time for more specifically matched vaccines that could be developed and used as boosters. Schools wouldn't have to close down, and people might still be infected but not dying."

The National Institutes of Health is sponsoring trials of this vaccine, which could change the way we vaccinate against flu and other emerging threats. Hensley says that if proven safe and effective, such a broadly targeted shot would ideally be given to young babies so their immune systems could be trained to recognize a wide range of influenza types early on. That would set them up for quicker and more effective immune responses to vaccines and infections as they got older.

Who should get vaccinated against H5N1?

Because the CDC says that the [risk of bird flu is still low](#) for the general public, there are no recommendations for anyone in the U.S. to get vaccinated against H5N1 at the moment. Some experts believe dairy workers and others who have close contact with animals likely to be infected, such as poultry and cattle, [should be vaccinated](#) to protect them from infection, but U.S. health officials have not made this decision yet, noting that a full understanding of the risks of H5N1 to people and the benefits of the vaccine [aren't entirely clear](#).

Finland has offered people at higher risk of exposure to bird flu—including those in the fur industry who handle wild boars and those in the poultry industry—a bird flu [vaccine](#) made by Seqirus, which uses a more traditional vaccine technology that includes an inactivated form of the virus.

<https://time.com/7203820>

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How Canada Fell Out of Love With Trudeau

Stephen Maher is a longtime Canadian political journalist and the author of *The Prince, The Turbulent Reign of Justin Trudeau*.



Justin Trudeau had a special bond with Canadians, who had known him [since he was born](#), on Christmas Day in 1971, as the son of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

That bond helped him get his Dad's old job. In his first federal election as Liberal leader in 2015, his Conservative opponents warned Canadians that he was a lightweight, a [celebrity with nice hair](#) but no relevant work experience. Yet Trudeau had grown up in public, and he brought a welcome dose of glamor to the humdrum world of Canadian politics. Voters liked him, felt they knew him, and [decided to give him a chance](#), in the form of a majority government.

It was a remarkable triumph, unprecedented in Canadian politics. Trudeau—a former high school teacher with an unimpressive resume—managed to take his Liberal Party from third place in 2011, its worst showing in history, to first with a resounding

mandate, an echo of the “Trudeaumania” that gripped the country when his father won government in 1968.

Justin’s election was a restoration of his father’s vision of Canada as a bilingual, multicultural northern social welfare state. But in the place of his father’s Jesuitical intellectual precision, he brought glamour, openness, and fun. Trudeau promised Canadians “[sunny ways](#)” after a decade of dour, business-oriented Conservative government, and successfully pursued an ambitious progressive agenda, winning two more elections. But after nine tumultuous years as Canada’s leader, he was forced to [announce his resignation](#) on Monday to avoid a revolt from Liberal Members of Parliament, who are facing [certain defeat](#) in an election that must be called by October.

Trudeau will stay on until his [replacement is chosen](#). But his stubborn refusal to recognize that his time was up has left him, his party, and his country in a terrible situation, with Donald Trump and Elon Musk bullying him and threatening to [make Canada the 51st state](#). He will govern as a lame duck in the first months of Trump’s presidency while his party chooses a leader to take on the combative [Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre](#), who has had a double-digit lead in the polls for more than two years.

Trudeau leaves his country in peril, which means Canadians are not in the mood to celebrate his accomplishments as Prime Minister. He did do some things, though.

He enjoyed a long honeymoon, was briefly a global media darling, and won support for reducing child poverty, [increasing taxes on the rich](#), and cutting taxes on the middle class. He [legalized marijuana](#), brought in a [carbon tax](#) to cut emissions, and [worked to improve](#) the lives of Indigenous Canadians, whose difficult living conditions are a continued source of national shame.

Trudeau successfully managed the first presidency of Donald J. Trump, [carefully negotiating a trade agreement](#) similar to the one Trump inherited, and got the country through the COVID-19 pandemic, putting money in people's pockets so they could stay locked down until the worst had passed.

But if Trudeau managed crises reasonably well, he also produced them regularly. He broke ethics rules with an [ill-considered holiday](#) on the Aga Khan's private island, made a [disastrous trip](#) to India that was set up like a royal tour, was revealed to have [worn blackface](#) more times than he could say, lost two ministers and several senior aides in a [scandal](#) over an attempt to sideline the prosecution of SNC Lavalin, a corrupt engineering firm.

Yet what did him in was the post-pandemic cost-of-living crisis. Like Joe Biden, Rishi Sunak, Emmanuel Macron, and practically every other incumbent in the West, Trudeau's poll numbers went underwater with people's household budgets.

Economic growth has been slower than in the U.S., and his mismanagement of immigration made matters worse. Canada has long prided itself on its careful and successful integration of newcomers, with Trudeau's father Pierre making Canada the first country to [introduce official multiculturalism](#). But to inject energy into the economy after the pandemic, Trudeau carelessly opened the gates too wide, letting in [record numbers](#) of temporary foreign workers and international students that exacerbated what was already one of the world's [worst housing crises](#).

His doom started to be clear in June when he lost a byelection in a normally safe Toronto neighborhood, and became clearer when he lost [another in Montreal in September](#). Liberal MPs called for him to quit. He ignored them, shuffled his cabinet, tried out a holiday sales-tax-cut and [mulled \\$250 checks](#) for all working Canadians, but nothing he did could change the numbers.

Then it all came to a head in December. After Trump threatened to impose ruinous 25% tariffs on all Canadian imports, Trudeau flew to Mar-a-Lago, hoping his charm would win the day. Trump responded by repeatedly bullying him, threatening to annex Canada. With little support at home, Trudeau could not find a way to respond effectively.

Read More: [Donald Trump on What His Second Term Would Look Like](#)

Canadians had had enough of him, and he wouldn't get the message. His growing number of unhappy former ministers felt he had a bad case of *l'etat c'est moi*. Trudeau has “gotten to a place now where he actually believes what he's doing is good for the country, irrespective of anything else, which I think is hugely scary and problematic,” one told me.

Eventually, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who saved the day during trade negotiations with Trump years earlier, forced the issue. She resigned on Dec. 16 amid disagreements over how to handle the incoming Trump Administration, triggering a crisis of legitimacy for Trudeau.

For years, Trudeau had been telling anyone who would listen that he had to stay on to fight the next election against Poilievre, whose right-wing policies and harsh attacks are outside the tradition of Canadian politics.

Trudeau despises Poilievre, sees him as a threat to the Canada his father built. He wants to fight him. And he is a fighter. The towering 6 ft. 2 in. Trudeau first won the Liberal Party leadership in 2013 after proving his toughness and unexpectedly triumphing 3-1 in a charity boxing match.

“I’m a fighter,” he said Monday. “Every bone in my body has always told me to fight because I care deeply about Canadians.”

But Trudeau had to acknowledge that it was time to throw in the towel. “It has become obvious to me that with the internal battles that I cannot be the one to carry the Liberal standard into the next election,” he said.

That was an understatement. On Wednesday his MPs were to demand his exit. The polling has been so bad for so long that the Liberals need a new leader. Canadians need someone to manage the relationship with the U.S, which suddenly looks more difficult than at any time since the War of 1812.

But voters are clear they want someone else to do that.

<https://time.com/7205277>

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10 Questions to Ask Yourself at the Start of a New Year

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



The last of 2024 is in the rearview mirror. But before forgetting it ever existed, consider reflecting on everything good and bad and weird and inspiring that happened to you over the past 12 months.

“When we stop and stand and look back at where we’ve been, and how we felt when we were there, it can serve as a blueprint for where we want to go forward,” says Caroline Fenkel, chief clinical officer with the virtual mental-health platform Charlie Health. By asking yourself a series of probing questions, you’ll become more self-aware and figure out how to make changes that can boost your happiness and well-being in the New Year. Think of it as a “gentle inventory, rather than a high-stakes self-assessment,” she adds.

Where to start? Ask yourself who and what strengthens or drains you. These insights can help you better manage your energy. Fenkel likes to regularly take inventory of what’s adding a net

positive to her life, for example—like taking care of the ducks in her pond—and what registers as a net negative, like spending too much time on social media. If something makes you particularly happy, “do it over and over and over again,” she says. (More duck-feeding for Fenkel in 2025.)

We asked experts to share what we ought to ask ourselves at the start of 2025 to make it our best year yet.

1. What brought me genuine joy last year? And what took it away?

Take a moment to reflect on what made you happiest over the past year—and don’t overthink it. Whatever pops into your mind was a “peak experience,” says Lauren Farina, a psychotherapist in Chicago. “It reveals our truest, most authentic desires, beyond what we’ve been conditioned to believe we should be doing or what we’re expected to be doing.”

Once you’ve landed on your happiest moments, brainstorm practical ways to integrate more of those experiences into your day-to-day life in 2025. Maybe you took a trip to Sedona and were flooded with the kind of awe you haven’t felt since you were a kid. You probably can’t visit every weekend, but you could commit to other ways of spending more time in nature wherever you live, Farina suggests.

Read More: [*What to Expect at Your First Therapy Session*](#)

It’s equally important to reflect on what stole your energy or diminished your spirits over the past year. What kind of boundaries can you set to limit those stressful experiences? What can you let go of or delegate to someone else? “Our feelings are messengers, and it’s our job to decipher those,” Farina says—and to make smart changes accordingly.

2. Which relationships felt nourishing, and which depleted me?

Your relationships with other people are core to your happiness, Fenkel points out. Some feed you, while others zap all your energy. Take some time to figure out who falls into which category. Then, make it a point to prioritize the connections that energize you, while taking a step back from the ones that deplete you. “Detach with love,” she advises. “You have to protect yourself, and that’s OK.”

That doesn’t necessarily mean cutting the draining person out of your life; rather, you might set boundaries around how much time you spend together, or clearly communicate expectations for interactions.

3. How balanced did my time feel between work, family time, social commitments, and rest?

Looking back, you might realize you leaned too heavily into one of these areas at the expense of others. If work dominated your 2024, think through how you can protect more of your personal time; or, if you didn’t show up professionally the way you hoped, brainstorm how you’ll shift into a new gear. “It’s so tough to live a balanced life, but the only way you’re going to have that balance is if you stop and reflect on it,” Fenkel says.

She suggests getting into the habit of doing this kind of check-in quarterly: “OK, here are the number of days I took off work last quarter and didn’t check my Slack or my email at all.” Having that type of hard data on hand will help you carve out time for what’s most important to you, she says.

4. What should I say no to? What would I like to say yes to?

If you need to get better acquainted with a certain two-letter word in 2025, start by examining the [barriers that are keeping you from saying no](#). You might worry, for example, that you’re going to let people down, that you won’t be loved anymore, or that your friends will be mad at you, says Gabrielle Morse, a licensed mental health counselor in New York City. “Whether it’s physical discomfort or resentment, there are all sorts of things that come up emotionally from putting our needs last,” she says. Eventually, your bitterness about prioritizing other people will bubble over, tarnishing your relationships and happiness.

Read More: [*Is Intermittent Fasting Good or Bad for You?*](#)

On the other hand, maybe you need to say yes more, especially to things you feel like you have deprioritized because of other obligations. Lots of people stifle their own desires, like leaning into creative pursuits, to accommodate others, Morse points out. “This is an invitation to ask yourself what you want,” Morse says. “It could end up being meaningful and fulfilling.”

5. What positive qualities did I notice in myself in 2024?

When people reflect on their year, they often tick off accomplishments, like getting promoted at work. “They reduce themselves to this one thing, and they’re so much more than that,” says Morse. “What’s so much more important are the qualities they’re able to see in themselves.”

She suggests thinking about ways you’ve grown or shown strength and resilience—or been true to your authentic self. Maybe you made progress breaking old patterns, like people-pleasing, Morse

points out, or set new boundaries with family. Perhaps you persevered through a challenging health diagnosis or another hardship that could have knocked you down. Celebrate those wins—they'll help ensure the upcoming year is your best yet.

6. What am I most proud of and grateful for over the past year?

Most people are conditioned to focus on what's going wrong. (Fires don't put themselves out, after all.) Give yourself a break and instead reflect on something positive, Farina says, like what you're particularly proud of or grateful for. "That can shift our perspective to filter in more of what goes right, and more of what brings us joy," she says. "It's a way of seeing our subconscious with a new belief system"—and that will serve you well throughout the New Year.

7. How can I make peace with last year's problems?

This is one of Farina's favorite ways to turn challenges into opportunities. "Problems or crises are invitations or opportunities to evolve," she says. You might realize, for example, that in order to come to terms with your stressful job, you need to practice mindfulness; or, to improve your relationship with your mother-in-law, you'll need to work on becoming a better communicator.

Read More: [*9 Ways to Embrace Winter—Even if You Think You Hate It*](#)

Maybe something life-altering happened to you in 2024, and you'll need to adopt a new mindset or communication strategy in order to cope. "Within a crisis or loss or trauma is an opportunity for you to grow," Farina says.

8. Are my goals specific and attainable?

Targeted goals can keep you on track, but vague ones can derail you. If you want to get in shape, for example, better to commit to working out for 30 minutes every morning than simply vowing to “exercise more” or burning yourself out with three-hour gym sessions.

Read More: *The Surprising Benefits of Talking Out Loud to Yourself*

“You want something that’s very specific and that you can actually do,” says Dr. Ashley Zucker, a psychiatrist with Kaiser Permanente Southern California. “It might seem like it’s not a high enough goal, but it’s a great place to start. You can always add to it later.”

Similarly, try not to overdo the number of goals you’re working on at any one time; one or two is ideal, Zucker says. Otherwise, there’s a good chance you’ll get overwhelmed and spend more time stressing than achieving.

9. Am I being kind to myself?

No matter how your year goes, you’re going to have bad days. Be honest: Do you extend yourself enough grace when you hit these road bumps? One of Zucker’s favorite questions to ask herself is: “What would I say if my daughter was in this situation?” “Play that out in your head,” she says, talking to yourself the way you would your loved one. And remember: “There’s always tomorrow, and there’s always later today. Give yourself those second, third, fourth, and fifth opportunities.”

10. What would I do in 2025 if I weren’t afraid?

Reflecting on what you would do if you weren’t consumed with worry can help expose the ways fear plays a role in your daily life.

“It’s not that we should never make decisions out of fear,” Farina adds. “But we should at least pause before defaulting to a fear-based choice.” By considering the ways that being afraid is holding you back, you might take a leap of faith in 2025 that changes the course of your year for the better.

<https://time.com/7199583>

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Why a ‘Third Life’ Is the Answer to America’s Loneliness Epidemic

Chandler is a journalist and author based in New York. Chandler is the author of *Drive-Thru Dreams: A Journey Through the Heart of America’s Fast-Food Kingdom* and, most recently, *99% Perspiration A New Working History of the American Way of Life*



In 1989, the sociologist Ray Oldenburg cemented his status as required reading for hungover college freshmen when he coined the concept of “third places” in his book *The Great Good Place*. Third places, which are informal spots to gather outside of home and work for socializing, have been features of societies going back to antiquity, from Greek agora and Viennese cafés to barber shops and Burger King dining rooms. But their role in making cultures vibrant and communities cohesive, Oldenburg warned, had begun to “constitute a diminishing aspect of the American social landscape.”

He was right to worry. These days, the role of coffee shops and bars, libraries and community centers, civic clubs and houses of worship, have faded as the creep of work and domestic obligation

in American life have become all but inescapable. According to the 2021 Census Bureau's Time Use Survey, Americans [were already spending significantly less time with friends](#) before the pandemic rearranged life entirely. Our collective isolation has only metastasized since then. In 2024, a staggering 17% of Americans [claimed to have zero friends](#), up from 1% in 1990, around when Oldenburg was first urging caution.

As a journalist reporting on the culture of work in American life, I found that the unnerving consequences from this social and civic decay go well beyond what the data conveys. We already know that Americans are [working longer hours](#) than most of our peer nations with less money and less stability to show for it. For many people, the cost of living has increasingly turned free time into a luxury. And, in the place of in-person socialization, we've bent our necks toward our screens. And while it may feed us an endless stream of perfect Corgi videos, it also has allowed work to seep into our off hours and has facilitated [an unprecedented loneliness crisis](#) among younger Americans.

As we've shifted our lives online, there are now fewer third places that provide communities and individuals with opportunities to engage in low-stakes hangs and chance encounters with people of different ages, backgrounds, and life experiences. Co-working spaces, billed as community hubs, combine the trappings of a self-selecting office with the cheery imperative to network. Quick-service businesses from Starbucks to McDonald's have morphed from being democratic places with a low-financial barrier to entry into glorified takeout counters with overworked employees and limited seating. While social media platforms and online spaces have created communities for some, technology [has been linked](#) in far-ranging ways to a loneliness epidemic that [prompted a formal warning](#) by the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. Endorphins and digital high-fives aside, crushing a Peloton ride is simply no match for doing something, anything, with another person in real life.

Broadly, this growing lack of social exposure is terrible for us and terrible for democracy. Using the voter registration data of 180 million U.S. voters, Harvard researchers Jacob R. Brown and Ryan D. Enos analyzed how geographic polarization—the growth of physical partisan clusters—has evolved from regional phenomena (red counties, blue metro areas, for example) down into individual neighborhoods and blocks. “A large proportion of voters live with virtually no exposure to voters from the other party in their residential environment,” they [wrote](#) in 2021. “Such high levels of partisan isolation can be found across a range of places and densities and are distinct from racial and ethnic segregation.” In other words, at the street level, Americans are going through their days with hardly any interactions with people who are different from them, be it demographically, economically, and politically. As a result, our politics are growing more extreme and our elected representatives have become less open to compromise and exponentially more annoying.

Read More: [*What We Learned About Relationships During the Pandemic*](#)

Not all of these problems track neatly back to the demise of third places as a social force in American life. However, as antidotes to the national epidemics of stress and isolation as well as American [empathy deficits](#), the sanctity of what Ray Oldenburg dubbed “the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” has never been more important. Studies show how both [taking time off](#) and [replacing digital communication](#) with in-person interactions improve physical and mental well-being. And while no one really needs a public-health paper to decipher the joys of IRL connection, the community-born sense of social support it generates [is also linked](#) to better personal resilience and even longer lifespans. In an era of eroding civic baselines and disengagement, there are few comforts more fortifying than reaffirming a shared reality with friends, neighbors, or strangers.

If third places once represented readymade outlets for community, then in their growing absence, we should look to create what I'd call "third lives." Whether it's through a noble commitment to volunteering, a noble commitment to something new that [we're simply terrible at doing](#), talking to new people, or the steady building of regular social outings, creating a framework that is safe from the reach of obligation or the temptation of performative busyness is a higher calling for this lonely and polarized moment.

With a new year and its attendant resolutions calling on us to work harder and be fitter, cultivating a third life—a life with regular time for connection and glorious, unproductive leisure—is a better goal for 2025.

Traditional physical outlets for socializing may be harder to find. But it's not just possible to carve out the time and space to be idle or to resist the demands of productivity culture—it's necessary.

<https://time.com/7202834>

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The Supplements Doctors Actually Think You Should Take

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.



Dietary supplements are a booming business. [More than half of U.S. adults](#) take at least one, and the supplement industry is worth billions of dollars.

But many experts say people are better off saving their money. Regulations on the industry are so lax that supplement makers [do not have to prove their products are safe and effective](#) before they hit store shelves—which studies suggest many would have a hard time doing. [Plenty of research](#) finds that supplements aren't all that beneficial for the average person, and may in some cases [even be harmful](#) or [expose users to dangerous substances](#).

The vitamins and minerals in supplements are no match for those found in real food, [studies show](#). “Food contains innumerable other components that are also, ultimately, beneficial for you,” says Dr. Joel Mason, a professor of medicine and nutrition at Tufts University. “It’s better for us, in the long run, to be sustaining our health through a mindfully healthy diet, rather than trying to fill in the gaps” with supplements. Yet many people do just that.

Dr. David Seres, a professor of medicine in the Institute of Human Nutrition at Columbia University Irving Medical Center, wishes they wouldn’t. “Supplementation in the U.S. population, in general, is completely unnecessary,” Seres says. “I would recommend that [users] consider stopping, because it’s a waste of money.”

While Seres does not support widespread supplement use, he and other experts say there are some products that may be helpful on a case-by-case basis. Here’s what to know about supplements that may be beneficial for some people.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12, which is found naturally in fish, meat, eggs, and dairy, plays a number of important roles in the body, including supporting nerve cells and aiding the production of DNA. The body’s ability to absorb B12 often [declines with age](#), and some medications commonly taken later in life—including proton pump inhibitors and the diabetes drug metformin—can further compromise absorption. That leaves older adults at risk of B12 deficiency, which in [some studies](#) has been linked to an increased risk of dementia, among other problems.

For that reason, Mason says it’s appropriate for older adults, and particularly those taking medications that affect B12 absorption, to consider using a supplement. (Even supplement-shy Seres takes one, a decision he made because he has a B12 deficiency.)

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People who follow [a vegan diet](#), and thus don't eat animal products that contain B12, likely also benefit from B12 supplementation, Mason says. But aside from those who follow an animal-free diet or have a health condition that affects nutrient absorption, most younger adults get plenty of B12 from their diets. "I don't think the evidence is there for [supplementation] at every age," says Dr. JoAnn Manson, chief of preventive medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital and a regular researcher of supplements.

Calcium

Calcium's best-known function is boosting bone health, but it also supports muscles, nerves, blood vessels, and more. It's found in dairy products as well as some fish, vegetables, and grains.

Older adults, and particularly [post-menopausal women](#), often do not absorb and retain enough calcium from food—particularly because lactose intolerance can develop later in life, causing some seniors to avoid dairy products. Some older adults get enough calcium from their diets, Mason says, but those who don't may want to consider taking a supplement.

And that goes for men too, he says. "Older men are also prone to osteoporosis," a condition that leads to weak, breakage-prone bones and is widespread among older women, Mason says. "It's not as common in men, but it certainly exists."

That said, older adults shouldn't exceed 2,000 milligrams of total calcium per day, as too much of the mineral may increase the risk of kidney problems, heart disease, and even prostate cancer, [according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#).

Vitamin D (maybe)

Vitamin D works with calcium to keep bones strong and healthy. It's also involved in immune and brain function. Only a few foods—including egg yolks, fatty fish, mushrooms, and beef liver—naturally contain vitamin D, but some others, like milk, are fortified with it. The skin can also produce [vitamin D via exposure to sunlight](#).

The skin loses some of that ability with age, however, leaving older adults at particular risk of vitamin D deficiency—a situation compounded by the fact that many seniors don't spend lots of time outside and may not eat many foods containing vitamin D, Mason says. Starting around age 60, Mason says, some adults may benefit from using a vitamin D supplement.

That's not a universal opinion. Some experts have [urged people not to use vitamin D supplements](#), given [mixed and unconvincing research](#) about their health benefits. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), which issues recommendations about screenings and health habits that may improve well-being, [recently published a draft recommendation](#) saying that generally healthy older adults should not take vitamin D—either on its own or in combination with calcium—to prevent falls or bone fractures, because there's not enough evidence to support that practice.

Read More: [*Is Intermittent Fasting Good or Bad for You?*](#)

What about using vitamin D to [combat seasonal affective disorder](#)? Although [not all experts agree](#), Manson says that's a "very reasonable" move if you're not getting much sun exposure during the dark winter months. But "no one should ever think of these supplements as cure-alls," Manson cautions. "Regular physical activity is [much closer to a panacea](#) than popping a pill."

If you do decide to take vitamin D, don't go overboard. The [NIH recommends](#) that most adults consume no more than 100 total micrograms of vitamin D per day. At very high doses, vitamin D

may contribute to a range of side effects and complications, including serious ones like kidney failure and irregular heartbeat. Vitamin D supplements can also have problematic interactions with certain common prescription medications, including statins.

Folate and prenatal vitamins

Folate, which is found in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and beef liver, is crucial for cell function and DNA production. Women who are pregnant or considering becoming pregnant should get at least 400 micrograms per day, as the vitamin aids fetal development, [according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). To reach that threshold, people who are pregnant or trying to conceive can take a prenatal vitamin that contains folic acid along with other micronutrients, Manson says.

Just don't exceed 1,000 micrograms of total daily folate, [the NIH says](#), as high doses can hide or exacerbate B12 deficiency and potentially increase risks of colorectal cancer.

Multivitamins (maybe)

Manson's research on multivitamins, which contain a cocktail of vitamins and minerals, suggests these popular pills may have significant benefits for older adults. She has published studies suggesting that, at least among adults in midlife or later, [multivitamins may be linked to lower cancer risk](#) and [slower cognitive aging](#). "That's pretty good," she says, especially for something that's "safe and doesn't have all these side effects."

Not all researchers agree, though. [Other studies](#) have found that multivitamins are not linked to reductions in the risk of cancer, heart disease, or mental decline.

Seres says he's "interested" in the data on multivitamins' benefits, but not "compelled" by it. He is the nutrition editor for UpToDate,

a widely used decision-support tool for health care providers, and notes that the database recommends against healthy people taking multivitamins. The USPSTF [has also concluded](#) that there's not enough evidence to assess the risks and benefits of using multivitamins—or any nutritional supplement—to help prevent cancer or heart disease.

Read More: [*What to Do if You Have Sleep Apnea*](#)

The bottom line, Seres says, is that most generally healthy people do not need dietary supplements, and particularly not during their younger years. If you have a documented nutrient deficiency or a health concern that may affect your ability to get adequate nutrition from food, discuss with your physician which, if any, supplements are right for you, he says.

But for the most part, your health—and your wallet—will benefit from eating a varied diet that contains plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and protein, rather than loading up on pills and capsules.

<https://time.com/7202466>

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Johnson Ekes Out a Win to Stay Speaker, But Dicey Proceedings Signal Trouble For Trump

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In the end, the threat of a far-right revolt turned out to be more real than expected, as Republican Mike Johnson initially came up short Friday on the first ballot of his bid to stay Speaker. Only after some backroom arm-twisting and plenty of public embarrassment did he prevail on a day that offered an early sign that Republicans will struggle to achieve a unified governing majority in the second Trump era.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican who was elevated to House Speaker just over a year ago, is contending with grumbling in the far-right flank of the GOP over spending, deficits, and

personalities. But ultimately, the argument being made by many Republicans that the House could ill afford an early-hours intra-party squabble was insufficient to spare the GOP a family fight from the start. The scramble—disruptive but not shocking at this point in a chamber marked by its proud [dysfunction](#)—stood to delay Monday’s vote to certify President-elect Donald Trump’s victory, had Johnson not turned things around.

“We have a mandate,” Johnson said in his first speech after the vote cleared him to power, blowing right past the tricky path there. “People want an American First agenda.” It was a clear invocation of Trump’s shorthand for a nationalist policy platform—and a nod that Johnson sees the House as a partner to the incoming Administration.

Ahead of the vote on Friday, Johnson made his way through the aisles and posed for pictures, transmitting every confidence of a crowned prince ascendant. Freedom Caucus firebrand Jim Jordan clapped him on the shoulder in the well and Marjorie Taylor Greene chatted him up. Kat Cammack, who was among the 139 House Republicans who refused to accept Trump’s loss in 2020, made a point of stopping by Johnson’s klatch on the floor.

But there were signs of nervousness as his loyalists subtly wandered from lawmaker to lawmaker to make sure there were no unknowns on the horizon. In the current Republican configuration, nothing is certain until the last vote has been counted and the counting ends. The voting had stopped with Johnson two votes shy, but House officials did not announce a final tally as Johnson huddled with the holdouts, hoping for a resolution that would spare his lawmakers the kind of marathon balloting that put him in power in 2023. His gambit worked, at least for the time being.

Republicans won 220 seats in last year’s elections but that number is expected to fall. Already, Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida—briefly a nominee to be Trump’s Attorney General before he [withdrew](#) amid

unforgiving scrutiny about his history with drugs, cash, and underaged girls—resigned his seat. Similarly, two House Republicans are expected to leave their seats if confirmed to senior administration roles with Trump, although both voted for Johnson from their current seats.

Under the chamber's makeup as of Friday, Johnson needed 218 votes if all members are voting, although Speakers have been elected with as few as 216 votes. Johnson landed 218 in the end.

Democrats currently have 215 seats, yielding Republicans an absolutely wobbly majority.

That shaky hold over the chamber soured hopes that there would be a quick acquiescence to putting in place a Leadership team that had the support from Trump. The President-elect's endorsement of Johnson—touted repeatedly from the floor as lawmakers cast their votes—proved insufficient for the instant assembly but ultimately got him across the finish line.

The incoming GOP Leadership team tried to put the best face forward as representative of the results of the last election, even as top hands fretted that yet another protracted race to run the chamber was on deck.

“They simply want to provide for their children and provide for a prosperous future,” House Republican Conference Chair Lisa McClain of Michigan said in her nominating speech for Johnson. “With Speaker Mike Johnson, Senate Majority Leader John Thune and President Donald J. Trump in charge,” she said, interrupted by a standing applause, “we have the opportunity to put America first again.”

But that first round of voting suggested that none of those three Republicans were actually in charge of anything meaningful or durable.

Reps. Andy Biggs and Paul Gosar of Arizona, Michael Cloud of Texas, Andy Harris of Maryland, Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Michael Waltz of Florida, and Chip Roy of Texas withheld their votes for Johnson when their names were called. Ultimately, all voted for Johnson once it was clear that their votes would not matter because others had already delayed the sitting Speaker on the first vote.



Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky—no fan of Johnson—voted for Rep. Tom Emmer of Minnesota. Rep. Ralph Norman of South Carolina voted for Jim Jordan of Ohio. Rep. Keith Self of Texas voted for Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida. That gave Johnson three Republicans voting against him, when he could only afford one such defection if everyone voted.

In the end, only Massie held the line against Johnson.

In a chamber where stragglers' votes matter more than any true majority, it was an early sign that the 119th Congress that began on Friday would be a far cry from the rubberstamp that Trump's allies had hoped for. What typically is a settled matter by the time Jan. 3 arrives in odd-numbered years turned into an afternoon of acrimony as lawmakers and their families shuffled in the balconies and hallways awaiting receptions. Even Johnson looked ready to

call it a day as he patiently waited for his lieutenants to do their work and end the very tiny but incredibly problematic revolt.

Democrats, as expected, selected Hakeem Jeffries as their top hand with zero drama, although Speaker Emeritus Nancy Pelosi elicited a standing ovation when she entered the chamber. She arrived at the Capitol with the help of a walker, still recovering from a hip replacement surgery after a fall in Luxembourg. On the floor, she leaned on her desk directly across the aisle from Jeffires as wellwishers came to pay their respects, but when it came time to stand with cheers for her successor as the top Democrat in the chamber, she joined in without any assistance.

While Republicans have the slimmest of majorities, there is a begrudging recognition that anything of substance will almost certainly require Democratic votes, as some Republicans are expected to never fall in line, no matter the stakes or consequences. It's why Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar of California not-so-subtly called their party "the governing majority," a nod to recent votes that required Democratic votes to keep the government's lights on through the holiday season.

While the Senate is also in Republican hands, most serious pieces of legislation will require 60 votes to get past a procedural vote. Republicans have a sparse 53 votes.

All of that, of course, assumes Republicans can keep it together in the simple-majority House. Given the first vote of this Congress started without a unified Republican front, it's a warning [sign](#) that Trump may not get the blank check he is expecting. Even a handful of defections can send a priority spiraling, and Republicans seem incapable of breaking their case of the spins.

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What a Second Trump Term Could Mean for Gaza and Ukraine

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When Donald Trump took the oath of office as President in January 2017, his first foreign policy priority was to get [tough on China](#). The Trump 2.0 Administration will continue that work. But when he strides back into the Oval Office on Jan. 20, Trump will also become responsible for U.S. management of two dangerous wars, the kinds of hot foreign policy crises he was fortunate to avoid during his first term.

Trump has presented himself to voters as a peacemaker, the leader who will cut the deals necessary to restore order and limit the cost of U.S. involvement in foreign wars (and potential wars) for the

American taxpayer. The new President is already [taking credit](#) for the [ceasefire](#) that Israel and Hamas have agreed, which is due to start from Sunday.

In addition to the war in Gaza, [Trump's election](#) has set expectations for how he'll approach Israel's confrontations with Hezbollah, and perhaps Iran, as well as [Russia's war](#) on Ukraine. What should we expect in 2025?

The Middle East

For now, it appears the Israel-Hamas ceasefire will allow a pause in the fighting and the release of [some of the hostages](#) Hamas still holds. But the agreement will be fragile, and it's highly unlikely to last for long. Which brings us to Trump's likely grand strategy in the region.

His strongest foreign policy relationships remain with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of the Gulf Arab states. This is where he began his presidency eight years ago, with Saudi Arabia and Israel as his first foreign visits. The Middle East is also the site of his biggest foreign policy accomplishment. The Abraham Accords brought a normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, and this breakthrough agreement has proved sturdy enough to withstand [Israel's war in Gaza](#) and attacks on [Hezbollah in Lebanon](#).

The next step in this diplomatic process is to secure a landmark deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia, one that would open lucrative commercial ties between the two countries and reward the Saudis with long-sought U.S.-made high-tech military hardware. Officially, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman says [no deal is possible](#) without a plan for Palestinian statehood. That's not as big an obstacle as it sounds. The prince wants the deal, and a "plan" for statehood need not leave the drawing board before Trump, Israel, and the prince can get to yes.

And if there weren't enough upheaval in the Middle East already, Syrian rebels last month [ousted dictator](#) Bashar Assad. Israel has already used the opportunity that this still evolving situation creates to strike Syrian weapons stockpiles and to make further incursions in that war-torn country.

But the biggest Middle East question for 2025 is the potential for an expanded war that targets Iran. Israel's success in crippling Hamas and Hezbollah leaves Tehran without its most valuable assets in its "ring of fire," and Iran's leaders know their country is [now vulnerable](#). Netanyahu has ample incentive to strike Tehran—and the country's nuclear program. Iran's leaders also know they'll face a more aggressive Administration in Washington in 2025. Trump's assassination of Iranian defense chief [Qasem Soleimani](#) in January 2020 has proved both Trump's willingness to take risks with Iran and Tehran's inability to do much about it.

But Netanyahu knows there can be no successful strikes on Iran's heavily fortified, deep underground nuclear facilities without active and determined U.S. help. An attack would demand multiple waves of large-scale coordinated bombing that only the U.S. military can carry out. Anything short of a fully successful attack would push Iran to immediately build a bomb, and Trump continues to insist he [won't involve America](#) in someone else's war. Given the high stakes for all involved, we're more likely to see a push instead for a broad diplomatic deal with Iran in 2025, one that would set new ballistic-missile restrictions on Iran and signal Tehran's willingness to limit support for militant groups in the region in return for an easing of Western sanctions on Iran's enfeebled economy and a halt to military escalation on all sides.

How likely is an agreement that restabilizes the Middle East? It depends on Trump—and on the estimations of Israeli and Iranian leaders about how much risk he'll accept and how badly he wants a diplomatic deal.

Russia and Ukraine

With the approach of [Trump's Inauguration](#), Russia's war on Ukraine has gotten hotter. The outgoing Biden Administration and the governments of Britain and France have granted Ukraine permission to use weapons they've provided on targets inside Russia. That's a counter to Russia's use of North Korean troops to expel Ukrainian forces from the ground they now hold in Russia's Kursk region. President Biden is also sending [land mines](#) to help Ukrainian forces slow Russia's continuing advance in Ukraine's east. The hope is to bolster President Volodymyr Zelensky's bargaining position for eventual talks with Vladimir Putin. Moscow immediately responded to the U.S. and British greenlights with another round of threats to start World War III, and hit the [Ukrainian city of Dnipro](#) with a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile.

This is the violent escalation Trump will inherit next week as he tries to keep his campaign promise to quickly force an end to the war. Putin will portray Trump as a welcome replacement for warmonger Biden, and [Zelensky](#) now faces a dilemma: risk the fury of his own people by accepting a Trump-brokered deal that cedes Russian-occupied land to the invader or defy Trump and hope allies in Europe will help. It's one thing for Zelensky to accept privately that Russia will keep Crimea. It's another to pitch that to Ukraine's people.

Many European leaders are also bracing for Trump's return. They know he's unlikely to include them in plans to end the war, and they're working now to preserve European unity in the face of both Trump and Putin. Ukraine's future and Russian threats are far more important to (most) Europeans than to Washington. Poland, the Baltic states, and the Nordic countries would all feel threatened by any U.S. push to force what amounts to a Ukrainian surrender. Hungary's Viktor Orban, on the other hand, [sees an opportunity](#) to

score points with both Trump and Putin by undermining that unity. Pro-Ukrainian leaders of European states farther from the front know the price tag for backing Kyiv is high and rising.

The big questions here for 2025: Will Europeans stick with Ukraine if Trump throws U.S. support for Kyiv into reverse? Might some of them calculate that cutting a larger deal with Trump on U.S.-European trade terms requires a softening of support for Zelensky? Or might Europeans decide that broader trade and foreign policy engagement with China is a smart long-term hedge against continued reliance on an increasingly troubled transatlantic partnership?

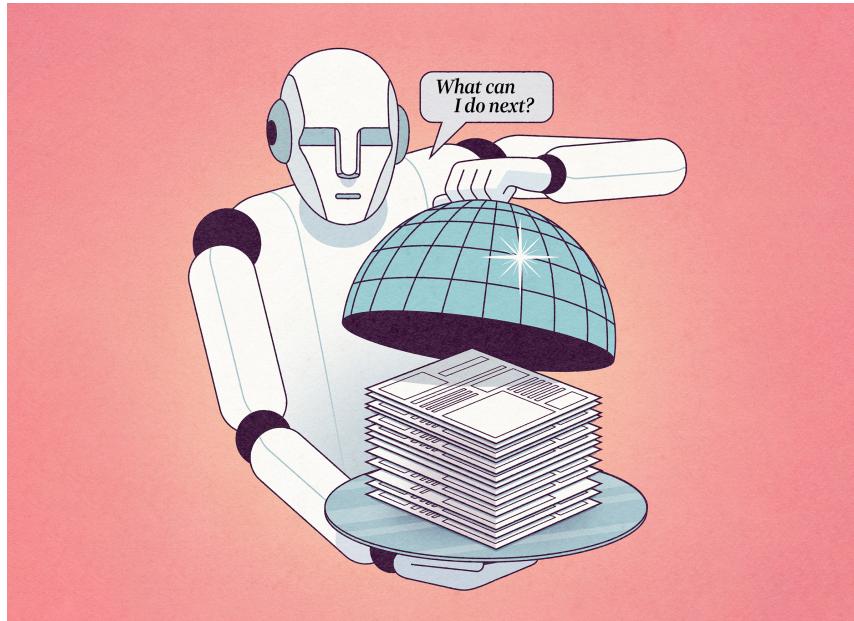
It's been more than eight decades since America's role in the world was so difficult to predict. Trump remains a mercurial decisionmaker and may not know himself how he wants to approach foreign policy. In addition, leaders and policymakers around the world can see that the past three U.S. presidential elections have produced whiplash shifts in American priorities and intentions—from Obama to Trump, Trump to Biden, and now Biden back to Trump. Few are foolish enough to believe they can predict what international role the U.S. will play in the long run.

Never is that uncertainty riskier and more expensive than in a time of war. In 2025, the conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine may draw to a tentative close under Trump. But there's no reason to believe that any of the warring parties will have a clear enough view of the future to settle their deep underlying differences. That's the difference between full settlements and tenuous agreements that can be blown up as quickly as the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East erupted. •

<https://time.com/7204644>

How the Rise of New Digital Workers Will Lead to an Unlimited Age

Marc Benioff is the chair and CEO of Salesforce and the owner of TIME.



Over the past two years, we've witnessed advances in AI that have captured our imaginations with unprecedented capabilities in language and ingenuity. And yet, as impressive as these developments have been, they're only the opening act. We are now entering a new era of autonomous AI agents that take action on their own and augment the work of humans. This isn't just an evolution of technology. It's a revolution that will fundamentally redefine how humans work, live, and connect with one another from this point forward.

Today, we're already used to "predictive AI"—which analyzes data to provide recommendations, forecasts and insights—and "generative AI," which learns from data and uses patterns to seamlessly generate text, images, music and code. Agents are software components that go far beyond this. They can perform

tasks independently, make decisions and even negotiate with other agents on our behalf. And unlike the traditional tech transformations of the past which required years of costly infrastructure buildout, these new AI agents are easy to build and deploy, unlocking massive capacity.

This is a new horizon with radical implications. For the first time, technology isn't just offering tools for humans to do work. It's providing intelligent, scalable digital labor that performs tasks autonomously. Instead of waiting for human input, agents can analyze information, make decisions, and take action independently, adapting and learning as they go.

Take, for example, a large retailer during the upcoming holiday season. Traditionally, human workers or pre-programmed software might handle customer inquiries or inventory updates. But now, intelligent digital agents can respond to customer questions in real time, monitor stock levels, reorder inventory, and even coordinate with shipping providers—all without human intervention. These agents are enabling an entirely new scale of operations that was previously not possible.

This shift to intelligent digital labor is already unlocking capacity across industries. It's no longer constrained by human availability or physical limits, allowing businesses to scale their operations while driving down costs and improving responsiveness, or by geographical limits — opening opportunities previously limited by location.

Like any change of this magnitude, the shift to agents comes with clear challenges and understandable fears. We need to make sure AI systems are built with trust, accountability, fairness, and transparency as core values. We need to make sure, as AI transforms how we work, that we invest in the training, creativity, and critical thinking skills that are uniquely human. And recognizing AI's impact on our carbon footprint, we need to make

sure that we're investing in sustainability, ecopreneurs and nature-based solutions. If we face and address these concerns, it's possible to envision new levels of abundance enabled by an expansive digital workforce that learns and grows more capable all the time.

The potential of agents isn't limited to businesses—these technologies have the potential to profoundly enhance the lives of individuals as well. We'll all have access to specialized agents that can navigate different parts of our lives. For example, every student will have an own always-on, personalized tutor—an agent embedded in their everyday technology that acts as an intelligent companion guiding them throughout their learning journey at every stage. Our personal agents, communicating with other agents, will help manage our daily routines, from ordering groceries for us to scheduling appointments.

AI agents are already transforming how we deliver healthcare. We know that doctors and nurses are facing tremendous burnout, and there are provider shortages in many communities. As one of the world's largest medical systems has recently discovered using our platform, agents can alleviate administrative burdens, improving patient communication while giving providers the space to focus on complex cases that demand their expertise. Over time, patients will have access to an AI agent that reaches out to check on you after a procedure, reminding you to follow up on test results, and asking if you have any unexpected reactions that need to be addressed. It will monitor patient progress and even reschedule labs or appointments as needed, all while maintaining a detailed understanding of the patient's medical history and ongoing treatment.

Of course, this new Agentic Era, like every technology throughout history, will bring about disruptions and risks that we ignore at our peril. Some companies will struggle to adapt. Nearly every job will change in some ways. And, yes, some will go away. In the past, we've seen companies and sometimes entire industries rise and fall

with new inventions—jets, satellites, the Internet, the smartphone, renewable energy. Ultimately, however, these innovations create far more new jobs than they displace. In 1950, for example, 43 million Americans had jobs. By 2020, over 152 million Americans were employed. Multiple factors played a role, but that is more than 100 million new jobs in a period of profound technological change, many in categories that did not exist before. The key, as always, will be to invest in the education and training that equips workers and young people with the skills to succeed in the new jobs and industries to come.

The benefits AI agents bring both individuals and businesses will far outweigh the initial disruptions. After all, growth in a country's GDP is the product of growth in the labor force and in productivity. With the labor force stagnating or even shrinking in some regions and industries, countries will need to rely more than ever on boosting productivity, especially in the services sector, which is now the bulk of modern economies. Today, with the human labor force growth stagnant in many places, exceptional productivity driven by a digital agent force is vital for GDP growth. Agents amplify human labor, driving innovation and efficiency. Productivity rose 2.2% in the third quarter of 2024, fueled in part by AI.

Finally, AI agents will drive innovation. It will continue to jumpstart countless new companies, just as the birth of the microchip more than 65 years ago spurred the creation of iconic companies like Apple, Dell, and Microsoft. (More than 5,000 new artificial intelligence companies have been funded in the U.S. alone over the last decade.) This too will create significant numbers of new jobs, both within tech and across the global economy.

All of this is a reminder that technology itself is neither good nor bad; what matters is how we use it. Without proper oversight and training data, autonomous AI can make choices that conflict with our wishes or even with human values or ethics, such as

prioritizing profit over safety or discriminating against certain groups. Harnessing the power of agentic AI effectively will require a multistakeholder approach—businesses, governments, nonprofits, and academia working together to create guardrails and guidelines. We are already seeing some of this in efforts such as the framework by the G7 nations emphasizing accountability, transparency, safety and data privacy. Another example is the Bletchley Declaration by 28 countries and the European Union that emerged from the UK AI Safety Summit that I and other tech CEOs attended last year, agreeing to collaborate on AI safety and development.

AI itself can play a role in guiding us through the disruptions to come. As M.I.T. economist David Autor argues, AI has the potential to act as a leveling force, lowering barriers to entering the workforce by giving people access to tools and knowledge that were once reserved for a privileged few. Look, for example, at how our Agentforce platform is transforming the college-admissions process for the nonprofit College Possible. In many areas of the country, high school college counselors are responsible for many hundreds of students, making individual guidance almost impossible. In less than a week, College Possible used our platform to create a virtual college counselor for high school students. Now, any student can get college-prep support to augment sessions with a human counselor. This virtual counselor tracks the conversations in those sessions, has deep knowledge of colleges, and accesses student transcripts already housed within College Possible to provide guidance. This is a powerful expansion of labor potential, unlocking new ways to support students where traditional resources have been limited.

In fact, we're already seeing similar possibilities in recruiting and human resources. Billions of resumes are submitted each year, but finding a job shouldn't feel like submitting your resume into a void. The Adecco Group, one of the world's largest recruiting companies, handles 300 million job applications a year but historically can only respond to 10%. It's now using our platform

to pre-qualify applicants, enabling it to engage with every applicant within 24 hours, while freeing human recruiters to work more closely with candidates on the way to job placements.

I've always believed that business is the greatest platform for change. Today, as we stand at the brink of this new Agentic Era, I've never been more confident in the transformative change that's possible. AI has the potential to elevate every company, fuel economic growth, uplift communities around the globe, and lead to a future of abundance. If trust is our north star as we navigate this new landscape, agents will empower us to make a meaningful impact at an unprecedented scale.

<https://time.com/7178872>

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Dismissed and Disbelieved, Some Long COVID Patients Are Pushed Into Psychiatric Wards

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.



In late 2022, Erin, a 43-year-old from Pennsylvania, agreed to spend six weeks in a psychiatric ward, getting intensive treatment for an illness she knew she didn't have.

That decision was a last resort for Erin, who asked to be identified only by her first name for privacy. Her health had deteriorated after she caught COVID-19 nearly a year earlier; the virus left her with pain, fatigue, rapid weight loss, digestive problems, and vertigo. After another bout with a virus months later, Erin only got sicker, developing heart palpitations, muscle spasms, hoarseness, and pain in her neck, throat, and chest.

Erin was no stranger to chronic illness, having coped with a connective-tissue disorder her whole life. This was different. She became unable to work and rarely left her home. Her usual doctors were stumped; others said her litany of symptoms could be manifestations of anxiety.

When it became too painful to eat and swallow, Erin grew severely malnourished and was hospitalized at a large academic medical center. “I felt at the time like this was my last hope,” says Erin, who has since been diagnosed with Long COVID. “If I didn’t get any answers there, I didn’t know where to go afterward.”

Once again, however, she was disappointed. The only physical diagnosis her doctors landed on was vocal-cord dysfunction, which Erin felt did not explain her wide range of symptoms. When her doctors began to discuss discharging her, Erin panicked and said she could not manage her excruciating symptoms at home—a sentiment that she says contributed to [concerns of self-harm](#) among her doctors and kicked off conversations about a stay in the psychiatric ward. Eventually, seeing no other way forward, Erin agreed to go. “I just got increasingly defeated over time,” she says. “I didn’t know what to do.”

She was admitted for a six-week stay and given diagnoses she knew were wrong: an eating disorder and anxiety.

Read More: [*Long COVID Doesn’t Always Look Like You Think It Does*](#)

The vast majority of Long COVID patients will not land in psychiatric wards, but Erin is far from the only one who has. “Emergency rooms are dangerous places for people with Long COVID,” says David Putrino, who studies and treats the condition as director of rehabilitation innovation for the Mount Sinai Health System in New York.

Numerous patients, he says, are told that inpatient mental-health care is their best or only option. He has worked with at least five patients who were ultimately admitted—and says some of his patients' stories sound a lot like Erin's. "Imagine you go to an emergency department, you wait 13 or 14 hours, your condition actually deteriorates, and then you're told, 'Hey, good news, everything is normal and we're sending you home,'" Putrino says. "Going home doesn't sound like a survivable outcome. So at that point you might break down...and often that gets reinterpreted as 'Let's put this person on a psych hold.'"

Such experiences fit into a long, troubling tradition in medicine. Because there often aren't conclusive tests for these types of complex chronic conditions, and because many patients do not outwardly appear unwell, they're frequently told that they aren't physically sick at all—that symptoms are all in their heads. "Mainstream medicine really isn't geared toward treating conditions and diseases that it cannot see under a microscope," says Larry Au, an assistant professor of sociology at the City College of New York who has studied one of the consequences of that disconnect: [medical gaslighting of Long COVID patients](#).

The chronic illnesses that make doctors doubt their patients often start after what "should" be a short-lived sickness. And [it's not just COVID-19](#); many diseases, from Lyme to mono to the flu, can lead to mysterious, lingering symptoms that are often ruinous but difficult to explain.

Myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS), for example, can follow a variety of viral or bacterial infections, leading to cognitive problems and extreme fatigue made worse by physical or mental exertion. (There is so much overlap between the symptoms of Long COVID and ME/CFS that many people now meet diagnostic criteria for both.) Today, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls ME/CFS a "serious,

debilitating” biological illness—but for decades, it was written off as psychosomatic. [A 1988 paper](#) by researchers from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggested that it could be related to “unachievable ambition” and “poor coping skills.” And in 1996, a CDC researcher [told a journalist](#) that the condition has no viral cause, results in no immune abnormalities, and could be summed up as “hysteria.”

Because the disease was for so long dismissed as psychological, many clinicians to this day try treatments like cognitive behavioral therapy that, at best, do nothing to address the condition’s physical symptoms—and, at worst, [exacerbate them](#). Elizabeth Knights, who is 40 and lives in Massachusetts, went through even more intensive mental-health treatment. She spent several weeks in a psychiatric ward in 2006 before finally being diagnosed with ME/CFS and finding care that dramatically improved her health.

During her senior year of high school, Knights caught a mono-like illness that never fully went away. Once at the top of her academic class and an avid skier and rock climber, Knights eventually had to withdraw from college and move in with her parents because she couldn’t function under the strain of persistent fatigue, flulike symptoms, and cognitive dysfunction—all of which her doctors chalked up to depression.

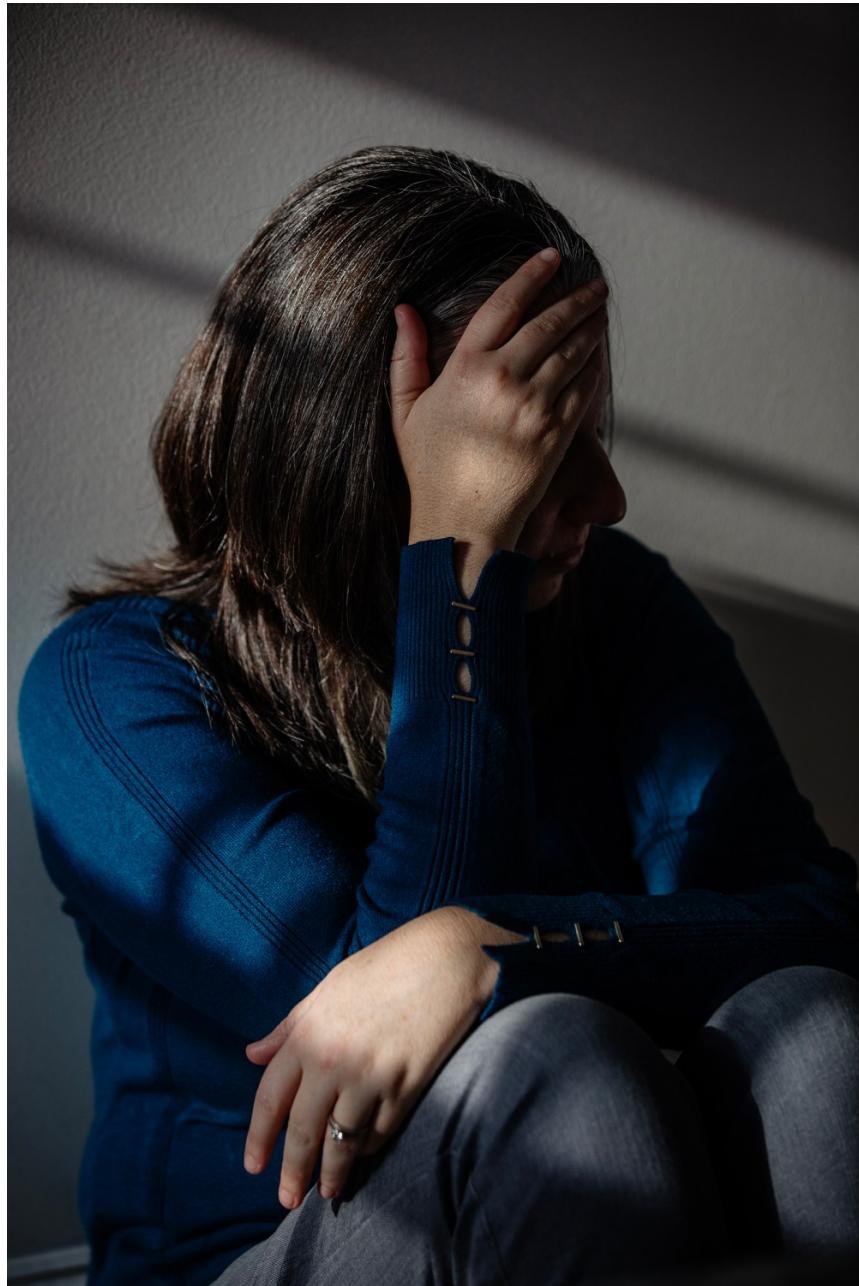
“I kept insisting, ‘There’s something else going on here,’” Knights remembers. But she didn’t know about ME/CFS at that time, and her doctors were adamant that her problems were psychological. So when physicians recommended she try inpatient psychiatric care, she went along with it. “That was the only path that was presented to me,” Knights remembers, and she took it.

Read More: [*The Relentless Cost of Chronic Diseases*](#)

The experience made things worse. She was given numerous medications to which she had bad reactions and went through

electroconvulsive therapy, which she says damaged her memory to the point that she had to relearn how to talk and navigate her hometown. “Nobody was listening to me, and people were not informed enough to make a correct diagnosis,” she says. “I was being misdiagnosed and treated for something that I didn’t have.”

Rivka Solomon, a longtime ME/CFS patient advocate, says she hears this story a couple times a year: a patient, like Knights, has been wrongly admitted to or threatened with inpatient psychiatric care. And those are just the instances she learns about. “I worry about who is, right now, lying in a bed in a psych ward, too sick to function, left with no one to properly care for them, left with no one to advocate for them,” she says.



The problem is larger than individual doctors, says Mount Sinai's Putrino. People with conditions like Long COVID and ME/CFS may benefit from inpatient rehabilitative care, for example—but if they don't meet admission criteria set by hospitals, state regulatory boards, or insurance plans, even well-meaning clinicians may be stuck. Sometimes, “there’s no administrative way to admit these people,” Putrino says. A psychiatric diagnosis is, in some cases, the simplest way to get a patient in.

Another complicating factor: there is no validated medical test for detecting Long COVID, ME/CFS, or similar conditions like

chronic Lyme disease, another post-infection illness that remains controversial. Although studies have identified biological signs of these illnesses, researchers have not yet found clear biomarkers that lead to definitive diagnoses. “The medical profession loves cold, hard diagnostic tools and evidence-based medicine. They want randomized controlled trials and an easy test that tells you yes or no,” says Dr. Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, who runs a Long COVID clinic and is chair of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. When those tools aren’t available, clinicians sometimes deem patients’ symptoms psychological.

Ruth, a 32-year-old who asked to use only her first name for privacy, recently had that experience, even though she is a mental-health professional herself and already knew she had Long COVID. One morning in 2024, she woke up in pain, struggling to breathe and unable to control her bladder. When she visited an emergency room, hoping for medication that might help, she says she was told by a doctor that she was experiencing anxiety. “I was like, ‘I am fading away here. I am slowly dying. I need help,’” she says. But despite her repeated requests for care and her own psychological training, she says she was turned away.

These dismissals can also be damaging, Solomon says. “The extreme examples of patients being admitted to psych hospitals are just the tragic tip of the iceberg,” she says. Patients who aren’t believed may struggle to get any medical care at all, or get pushed toward therapies that don’t work. They may also face an uphill battle when trying to secure insurance coverage for treatments, disability benefits, or [workplace accommodations](#).

Read More: [*Long Waits, Short Appointments, Huge Bills: U.S. Health Care Is Causing Patient Burnout*](#)

Without the backing of a doctor or diagnosis, patients often find that other people in their lives don’t believe them, either. Doug

Gross, chair of the department of physical therapy at the University of Alberta, has [studied how hard it is](#) for Long COVID patients to find medical care. He says patients often talk about “disbelief from not only the health care system...but more broadly in their social sphere: family members, employers, supervisors at work.”

Psychiatric care is not always inappropriate for patients with Long COVID or similar conditions, Verduzco-Gutierrez says. Some do develop depression, anxiety, and other mental-health symptoms, potentially including severe neuropsychiatric complications related to [inflammation in their brains](#) or other physiological issues, Putrino says. “Some folks can really benefit from skilled psychological care, even if it’s not their primary or underlying, driving cause of their illness,” he says.

Some clinicians, however, fail to differentiate between side effects and root causes, or use screening techniques that aren’t well suited for people with chronic conditions, Verduzco-Gutierrez says. For example, asking someone whether they struggle to get out of bed in the morning—a common question when screening for depression—isn’t all that useful if the clinician doesn’t differentiate between physical and mental exhaustion. “The only way to solve this is more education,” Putrino says, “so the next generation of clinicians are not looking at these patients and saying, ‘A couple of antidepressants and a day off will fix you.’”

Katiana Mekka, a 26-year-old Long COVID patient from Greece, says education is especially needed outside the U.S. Last fall, she says, she was involuntarily committed to a psychiatric ward and held for three days, until she passed a thorough screening test for mental-health disorders. The ordeal worsened her already severe illness, leaving her virtually unable to eat, move, or talk for days after.

“These illnesses are so mistreated and misdiagnosed,” Mekka says, adding that so few doctors in Greece know about Long COVID that

she has been forced to seek virtual support from specialists in other countries. “The patients that I know, we all have so much will to live and so many dreams. This is not a mental issue. We have severe symptoms.”

Read More: [*11 Ways to Respond When Someone Insults a Loved One’s Disability*](#)

There are signs that the medical community might be getting better at treating people with Long COVID and diseases like it. The sheer volume of Long COVID patients who have emerged in the wake of the pandemic—nearly 20% of U.S. adults have experienced symptoms at some point—has forced a reckoning with the medical system’s history and sparked new research interest in these conditions. The federal government now has an office dedicated to Long COVID research, and the NIH earmarked an estimated \$110 million for Long COVID research in 2024. (Federal research funding for ME/CFS is still paltry in comparison: an estimated \$13 million in 2024.) Solomon says more research on not just Long COVID but all infection-associated illnesses is critical, so scientists can develop reliable tests and effective treatments.

There’s a long way to go. Putrino says he’s been advocating for systemic changes that would make it easier for hospitals to admit patients with complex conditions and for patients to secure reimbursement for in-home care, but progress is slow. Stigma and denial also still persist. And to this day, most U.S. medical schools do not teach trainee doctors about conditions like ME/CFS.

Despite all she’s been through, Erin, the Long COVID patient who spent time in a U.S. mental hospital, considers herself lucky. She found a silver lining to her stay: in the psychiatric ward, she met a clinician—a speech pathologist she saw because of her vocal dysfunction—who knew about Long COVID and referred her to a specialist. She met with that specialist after leaving inpatient care and in 2023 was diagnosed with both Long COVID and ME/CFS.

Under proper care, and after plenty of rest, she's been able to manage her symptoms well enough to return to work and a mostly normal life.

“That took me a long time, but I was lucky and found someone who actually helped,” Erin says. “Some people never figure it out.”

<https://time.com/7206080>

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Klaus Schwab's Call for Cooperation and Collaboration in the Intelligent Age

Schwab is the Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum.



The 21st century is, so far, being defined by its dramatic leap in intelligent technologies—a leap that has brought humanity into an era I call the [Intelligent Age](#), in which large segments of global society now have access to unprecedented technological intelligence. These technologies are becoming deeply ingrained in our everyday lives and changing the world at the most profound individual and international levels.

Artificial intelligence is, unsurprisingly, the linchpin of this transformation. It has [rapidly evolved](#) from a specialized tool to a general-purpose technology that, like electricity and the steam engine, is [reshaping industries](#), economies, and even the way we think about ourselves. This surge of technological development comes, not surprisingly, at the same time that the world is grappling with global challenges that demand our immediate, and collective, attention and action.

AI is empowering us beyond the limitations of our natural human cognition. It is bringing an entirely new level of efficiency and insight to everything from [health care diagnostics](#) to climate modeling. We need AI to help us tackle the complex, systemic problems that no individual stakeholder, or stakeholder group, could solve alone. Yet, as I have said previously about Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, the opportunities they present also bring profound risks—social, political, and economic disruptions that we must navigate with care.

One of the most striking aspects of recent years is how quickly AI has been embedded into everything around us. The same science that powers autonomous vehicles and generative language models is transforming how we conduct research, teach our children, and maintain our infrastructure. Intelligent technologies—quantum computing, biotechnology, spatial computing and blockchain—are intelligent because they are being enhanced and enabled by AI. This is extremely promising, but we have significant responsibilities to one another to make sure these developments [do not do more harm than good](#).

As intelligent technologies rapidly advance, the risk of creating a cascading effect of uneven benefit distribution is increasing in equal proportion. Some groups and regions are advancing rapidly, propelled by access to cutting-edge applications. Meanwhile, others are at risk of being left behind, [creating divisions](#) that could deepen social and economic inequalities for generations. Without international cooperation and collaboration, disparities in access to digital knowledge and resources could entrench unwanted outcomes, leaving large swaths of the global population struggling to catch up.

The geopolitical implications are also profound. We see significant movements from global players, such as the [U.S. and China](#). While the U.S. has historically been a leader in emerging technologies, China has made this realm a clear national priority. It is tempting to

view these developments through the lens of competition, but there is even more at stake. It is crucial to recognize that these technologies sit at the very center of global transformation. They have the potential to benefit or unsettle all of us. Humanity's success does not lie in predicting which nation will emerge as the leader in AI—what really matters is working together to navigate these changes in a way that ensures the well-being and prosperity of people everywhere.

The Intelligent Age, therefore, is not merely about developing intelligent technologies. It is also about ensuring that **humanity remains intelligent** in how we wield these tools. We need to cultivate wisdom alongside innovation. This means transcending the narrow focus on short-term gains and understanding the broader, interconnected nature of the challenges we face. It means overcoming differences and fostering a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, where dialogue remains open, productive, and inclusive.

Above all, it means ensuring that the progress we achieve is measured by the benefit to humanity as a whole—the health of our planet and the well-being of its people.

Make no mistake. We are at a critical juncture. We lack a comprehensive framework to address the deeply interconnected challenges of our time, including **climate change**, economic inequality, and geopolitical fragmentation. While the natural inclination may be to retreat into silos, to focus on what is within our immediate control, or to compete for limited resources, the challenges of the Intelligent Age cannot be solved in isolation. They require a holistic approach that acknowledges the importance of every stakeholder—**governments**, businesses, research institutions, civil society, and individuals. This is why the theme for this coming year's Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos will be “Collaboration for the Intelligent Age.”

The Intelligent Age is a time to think boldly and act collectively. With intelligent technologies, we possess the potential to solve complex problems that were previously out of reach. We can realize their potential only if we recognize our own shared humanity and shared responsibility. We must leverage intelligent technologies with wisdom, ensuring they serve us in building a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future. Let us embrace this opportunity—to use the tools we have created not only to advance, but also to advance wisely, and together.

<https://time.com/7204646>

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World Economic Forum President Borge Brende on Planning for a ‘Geopolitical Recession’

Sam Jacobs is Editor in Chief at TIME where he leads TIME’s global newsroom and its journalism across all platforms. Since joining TIME in 2013, Jacobs has held a variety of senior editorial leadership positions. Previously, he was national political correspondent at Reuters, associate editor at Newsweek and staff reporter for The Daily Beast. His writing has appeared in the Boston Globe and New York Observer.



Do you think 2025 will be politically more or less stable than 2024?

We’re planning our annual meeting against the most complex geopolitical backdrop in decades. I think that will continue into 2025. In a way, we are in a geopolitical recession. Fortunately, it hasn’t impacted the global economy as badly as it [could have](#). We’re still expecting more than 3% growth. Provided there are no further escalations of conflicts and new crises, we have to expect that 2025 will be, similarly to 2024, a challenging geopolitical year.

What does “geopolitical recession” mean?

It means that we are in a polarized, fragmented world where we see less cooperation than in the past, and more competition. There is more focus on national interest. That is a challenge, as many of the biggest problems we face need global solutions.

This will be a critical year for the future of Europe. Where do you see the opportunities for the E.U.?

I think we are at a 1918, 1945, 1989 [type of] inflection point, in many ways, because we are between orders. We had one order. There is a new order on its way, but we don't know exactly where it is. There is a war going on in Europe, with Ukraine. A destabilized Syria could have **huge impact** on Europe. It will be critical that we don't see Syria ending up in sectarian wars again, but that there can be an agreement on an inclusive way of governing the country, moving forward. Europe is also at an inflection point economically and will need to decide on how to increase its competitiveness. It is not black and white. Spain is now the **fastest-growing of the OECD economies**. Greece is one of the fastest-growing European economies too. And the euro is still the second most important currency in the world. But the two biggest continental powers have real challenges. Germany, more on the economy side, and France, more on the political side.

What does President Donald Trump's election tell you about what that future order will look like?

I think President Trump was elected based on immigration and inflation. There will be more focus on U.S. national interests. The new world order is not defined yet, but it will be, in my view, a more multi-polar order, because there are more nations in the mix, but the U.S. is still extremely important. In one way, we have a unipolar order when it comes to defense—45% of global military capabilities are with the U.S. Trump will also be important in

defining this new world order. Will this be multi-polarity with multilateralism? Or will it be multi-polarity with a clearly shrinking role for multilateralism? And economically, the U.S. is, together with China and the E.U., still extremely important.

What do you hope people take away from Davos?

That we have tried to identify areas where there is enough self-interest to collaborate, like cybercrime or being better prepared for [future pandemics](#). AI at its best can be an equalizer, but it can also be winner-takes-all. We need to start a discussion of at least some basic traffic rules. Climate change: maybe we can also get some agreements. Regardless of political views on this, there is a snowball effect—\$2 trillion is being [invested annually](#) in renewables. And Davos is a very good place to create those snowball effects. We'd like a lot of snowballs rolling down the hills.

<https://time.com/7204642>

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5 Ideas to Build a Better Future



TIME asked five of the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders to share their transformative ideas for 2025.

Embrace tech for accessibility



Birgit Skarstein

Recently I experienced the remarkable benefits of a self-driving car, giving me a sneak peek into a transformative future. As a wheelchair user, navigating travel is often fraught with challenges, such as [inaccessible public transportation](#) and a lack of suitable rental cars. However, this autonomous vehicle smoothly took me from one appointment to the next, bypassing the usual barriers to mobility. Its advanced technology not only facilitated my travel but also [enhanced my own autonomy](#), ensuring that my paralyzed legs did not impede my busy schedule.

In 2025, we find ourselves at the brink of a transformative era, marked by profound advancements in technology and in artificial intelligence. These developments are set to redefine virtually every

facet of human life. An area particularly ripe for transformation is the use of advanced technologies to benefit people living with impairments.

My vision for a better future is a world where AI and emerging technologies are deliberately designed to amplify the abilities of those with disabilities.

AI can be harnessed to create adaptive technologies that go beyond basic accessibility, offering tools that are profoundly integrated into daily life and tailored to individual needs. For instance, AI-driven devices could convert spoken language into sign language in real time, or customize educational environments to fit the unique learning styles and speeds of people with cognitive disabilities. Moreover, [smart prosthetics](#) and mobility aids that learn and adapt to their user's patterns could significantly enhance autonomy and mobility, reducing physical limitations.

By focusing our collective intellect and compassion toward developing inclusive technology, we can ensure that the [Intelligent Age](#) we're entering doesn't just advance humanity as a whole, but that it empowers and enriches the lives of all individuals. This commitment will make the promise of technology a reality for everyone, turning potential barriers into powerful bridges to participation and expanding the ability to contribute.

In this pivotal year at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting, let us champion AI as a [tool for inclusion](#), ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to both benefit from and contribute to our shared future.

Skarstein is a Norwegian Paralympic rowing champion and chair of Future Advisory Board at Reitan Retail

Invest in African talent



Ronit Avni

African job seekers remain under-utilized despite the presence of a growing, [highly skilled talent pool](#). Employers often prefer to hire engineering and business talent from long-established tech hubs such as India, Poland, Israel, and the U.S. The number of companies actively seeking African talent remains far smaller than it should be, given the size of the eligible candidate pool. Yet, persuading employers to change course is often an uphill battle.

A wave of new job opportunities is emerging, however, with millions of roles expected to be created over the next few years. These positions—driven by new regulatory and reporting requirements on carbon emissions and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) compliance affecting over a dozen countries,

from the U.K. to Singapore—currently lack established regional talent hubs. This shift presents an exciting opportunity for African candidates with [green skills](#) to leapfrog ahead and play a central role in the green talent revolution.

Much as India has risen as a formidable engineering hub, Africa has the potential to lead the way in carbon and ESG talent.

Achieving this will require strategic investment to build candidates' carbon intelligence now, while raising employers' awareness of this talent pool, so that the continent can seize on this transformative moment.

Avni is the CEO of Localized

Universal AI inclusion



Bolor-Erdene Battsengel

AI has already become a driving force in health care, education, agriculture, and beyond. Yet, its power is concentrated in the hands of very few people, leaving many developing countries and emerging markets excluded from its benefits. Right now, 2.2 billion people [lack internet access](#), let alone AI tools.

I'd love to see AI education become as accessible as literacy. I want to see herders in the nomadic community of Mongolia using AI to predict weather patterns, or a small-business owner in Peru leveraging AI to improve the efficiency of her business. I want to see young girls using AI for personalized education to pursue their dreams.

This is not about technical skills or preparing the labor force in the tech industry. This is about encouraging communities to question biases in AI platforms, advocate for [fair and inclusive technology](#), and build tools that align with their unique needs. Governments, tech companies, international organizations, and educators must collaborate to deliver localized, inclusive AI education programs, especially in emerging markets and unprivileged communities.

Battsengel is the former Vice Minister of Digital Development of Mongolia

Democratize film



Bhumi Pednekar

AI has the potential to democratize filmmaking, expand access to educational films, and improve the industry for marginalized groups.

I have witnessed the power of storytelling and the impact it can have in my country. I acted in the 2017 film *Toilet Ek Prem Katha* (*Toilet, A Love Story*), which addressed the issue of open defecation (ODF). The film used a comedic and romantic tone to comment on various themes, from how **lack of sanitation** creates gender disparity and puts women at risk, to the health hazards of a lack of indoor plumbing. The film became a catalyst for change in India and was used as part of the government's campaign to eradicate ODF. The film was used across rural India, where the problem primarily existed, as an easy-to-understand educational tool. The proportion of the population defecating in the open **declined significantly** from 2016 to 2022, following government efforts and the film's release.

Advances in tech and visual effects could help stories like this have even more impact. Imagine showing the same film, but modified by AI for global audiences, ensuring the message resonates across languages and regions.

As an actor and an advocate for equality, I'm most excited about how AI is going to democratize storytelling. I have chosen roles that challenge prevalent beauty standards and center women and marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community. But there are still too few films made with the female gaze or telling queer stories. High production costs and perceived market risks often deter studios from investing in them. But AI has the power to change that. By lowering **the costs of production** and shortening the filmmaking process, AI can make female-centric films a sustainable business model.

AI could also help make the industry safer for women and marginalized groups by automating unbiased casting processes and

identifying patterns of misconduct. And tools could even assist in determining an individual's fair and impartial compensation.

Pednekar is an actor and activist

AI literacy for workers



May Habib

Layoffs amid [AI-fueled restructuring](#) are making headlines, but companies that rush toward an AI-led future without bringing their employees along will find themselves at a disadvantage.

Instead of [cutting jobs](#), what if companies reimagined them? What if every employee were given the chance and the tools to adapt their role alongside AI?

The builders of tomorrow won't be who you expect. As AI becomes deeply embedded into our workflows, next-generation builders won't be just tech experts, they'll be problem solvers, bold creatives, and strategic thinkers. They'll come from across your organization, spanning operational leaders, design and systems thinkers, and frontline users who can grasp AI's potential and turn it into [real-world impact](#).

With 40% of the workforce needing [new skills in the next three years](#) to keep pace with AI, leaders across the board will need to rethink how they build their teams. It won't be as easy as running a few training programs and hoping they stick. Building an AI-first workforce will require a deliberate, top-down shift across the entire organization. Leaders need to embrace change, challenge outdated processes, and invest time and resources to help employees thrive. After all, AI systems are only as strong as the diverse perspectives behind them.

When companies commit to this shift, the potential is unstoppable: productivity, industry-defining customer experiences, and breakthrough solutions to our most mission-critical problems.

Habib is CEO and co-founder of Writer

<https://time.com/7204672>

Inside Bhutan's Plan to Boost Its Economy With 'Mindful Capitalism'

Charlie Campbell is an Editor-at-Large at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. He covers business, tech, and geopolitics across Asia. He was previously China Bureau Chief.



The drive up to Phulari viewpoint snakes for three miles along dirt tracks flanked by flowering *pyoli* plants and murals of flaming phalluses, a traditional good-luck symbol here in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. At the summit, the 1,000-sq.-mi. expanse of what will be [Gelephu Mindfulness City](#) (GMC) materializes through fluttering prayer flags. To the east, a strip of palm forest has been cleared to extend the domestic airport's stunted runway for international flights. To the west, smoke billows from the chimney of an army-run distillery. Over the horizon lies the Indian state of Assam, where much of the labor and materials to construct the \$100 billion new special administrative region will come from.

"Activity at the site is just beginning," says Dr. Lotay Tshering, a urologist who served as Bhutan's Prime Minister from 2018 to

2023 and is now governor of the GMC. “But progress in the designing phase—planning, negotiations, discussions, exchange of ideas—is happening beyond our expectations.”

Those expectations are nothing less than putting a smile back on the self-styled “happiest place on earth.” In December 2023, Bhutan’s King [Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck](#) announced the GMC as part of “wholesale” reforms of the nation’s economy to combat challenges such as 29% youth unemployment and a resultant brain drain of [talent overseas](#). In 2023, some 1.5% of the population moved to work and study in Australia alone. Meanwhile, the [birth rate has dipped](#) to just 1.4 children per woman, portending a shrinking, aging populace. Compounding matters, tourism, one of the principal revenue sources in this nation of 785,000, was brought to a standstill by the pandemic and still hasn’t fully recovered, with [just a third](#) as many foreign arrivals in 2023 compared with 2019. One in 8 Bhutanese [lives in poverty](#).

It’s a crisis that has sparked sweeping changes to uplift the world’s literally loftiest country. In 2023, Bhutan’s government [halved its daily tourist levy](#) to just \$100 to boost flagging arrivals. One-year national service has been introduced to ensure all 18-year-olds receive military and vocational training—including, in a nod to the brain drain, for Bhutanese youth based overseas. Special funds have been introduced to spur innovation and entrepreneurship. But the Land of the Thunder Dragon—so named for the vicious storms that crash through its furrowed highlands—aims not to simply embrace capitalism but to redefine it for the modern, sustainability-focused era.



To wit: the GMC. Three times as large as Singapore, with a projected cost equivalent to 30 times national GDP, it aims to attract foreign companies willing to engage in “mindful capitalism”—focusing not just on pure profit but also on ecological harmony and spiritual contentment. Artists’ renderings depict a low-rise metropolis built around a network of inhabitable timber bridges, each boasting key features: a university, a hospital, a hydroponic greenhouse, a cultural center, a spiritual center, an organic market. The site will be sprinkled with pristine wildlife sanctuaries, farms, rice terraces, and temples. All vehicles will be electric, single-use plastics banished. Green power would be provided by a hydroelectric dam complete with an elevated temple in its mosaic facade. Applicants will be carefully vetted and permitted to set up only by special invitation.

“Happiness and well-being of people must be the purpose of capitalism,” Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay tells TIME. “We are talking about creating a new paradigm, an entirely new system of urban development.”

It’s an undeniably utopian vision for a landlocked nation half the size of South Carolina whose economy ranks 177th in the world (between Curaçao and Burundi). But Bhutan has long played by its own rules. It was an absolute monarchy until 2006, when King Jigme Singye, father to the current monarch, unilaterally chose to devolve power to a parliamentary democracy. (Elections were held

two years later.) It is fiercely protective of its unique culture, allowing only local films in cinemas, insisting on national dress in government offices and schools, and having diplomatic relations with just 54 nations. While most developing nations focus on GDP growth, in the late 1970s Bhutan's ruling monarch decided “[gross national happiness](#) [GNH] is more important”—championing a holistic approach toward development that placed equal weight on sustainability, spirituality, and ecological harmony. The GMC, says Tobgay, is “gross national happiness 2.0. We've applied GNH throughout the country. It has worked. But how do we apply GNH in a modern urban environment?”

Despite the nation's meager economy, all Bhutanese receive [free education and health care](#). Over 70% of territory is forested with a constitutional mandate to never be below 60%. It's the world's first carbon-negative country, and Tobgay insists the GMC will be the first carbon-negative city. But melding such salutary principles with capitalism risks their being deleteriously diluted.

“Given that South Asia so lacks even the most basic forms of infrastructure, for Bhutan to be launching this massive project beggars belief that it could really be as successful as they would like it to be,” says Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center.

Such a transformative influx of foreign cash also risks seeding new power centers and patronage networks that could drastically shift the political equilibrium in one of the [world's youngest democracies](#)—not least given that Bhutan sits sandwiched between Asian super-powers India and China. But at a more fundamental level, will large multi-nationals and their employees want to move to a patch of the Himalayan foothills with scant regional connections?

“The first phase is about bringing the common minimum infrastructure for investors to gain confidence,” says Lotay,

speaking to TIME over *momo* dumplings and *ema datshi*, Bhutan's national dish of chilies cooked in melted cheese. "We really need not rush."



If anywhere can rip up capitalism's shibboleths, it's Bhutan. This Shangri-la hidden in the folds of the Himalayas was a pugilistic hodgepodge of Buddhist fiefs until unification as a nation in the 17th century. Since then, Bhutan has thrived by shunning outside influence. This is a country where belief in yetis is so pervasive that a [national park](#) has been dedicated for their protection. The patron saint is a 15th century monk called Drukpa Kunley, better known as the Divine Madman, who marauded the countryside with

his bow and faithful hunting dog, while drinking copiously, seducing thousands of women—including his own mother—and subduing demons with his penis, which he dubbed the Flaming Sword of Wisdom. (Hence the murals.) The nation deftly eluded European colonization and managed to sit out both the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars.

Measuring just 200 miles from east to west and half that from north to south, Bhutan rooted survival in keeping at once low and aloof in an unruly neighborhood.

But Red China’s conquest of neighboring Tibet shifted that calculus. “Great Helmsman” Mao Zedong considered Tibet a palm whose “five fingers” of Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the British Raj’s North-East Frontier Agency (today India’s Arunachal Pradesh province) also fell under Chinese suzerainty. Against this backdrop, Bhutan moved closer to New Delhi under Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who sought a bulwark against creeping communism by offering his tiny neighbor security guarantees.

Still, internally, things barely budged. In 1961, the same year that the USSR sent the first human into space, Bhutan got its first paved road. It remained closed to tourists for another decade and officially had no television until 1999 (though bootlegged satellite dishes and videos showing Bollywood movies and soap operas were already commonplace).

Today, India remains the dominant influence. As Bhutan declines to have diplomatic relations with any U.N. Security Council member, it has no official ties with regional superpower China, nor the U.S. Bhutan’s ngultrum currency is pegged to Indian rupees and used interchangeably. Bhutan is the single largest [recipient of Indian aid](#), pocketing \$240 million in 2024. Some 85% of goods sold in the country are imported by the Indian Tata trucks adorned with jaunty faces that hurtle down twisting mountain roads to remote villages.

While the rest of the globe frantically fetishized growth targets, Bhutan shunned opportunities to monetize its considerable natural resources—including lumber, coal, and minerals—that would have come at the expense of the environment. The guiding philosophy melds the Buddhist principles of karma—cause and effect; that bad deeds will be repaid in kind—with Bon animism, which teaches respect for all sentient beings. The combination venerates the natural world more than arguably any other culture.

But Bhutan's skepticism regarding industry doesn't extend to technology. Today, most urban areas enjoy decent 5G coverage. At Pochu Dumra Buddhist School in Bhutan's ancient capital of Punakha, dozens of novice monks lounge on a manicured lawn, playing bamboo flutes, chanting sutras, and weaving tantric ornaments from brightly hued string. On the second floor sits an IT study where saffron-robed students ages 13 to 17 spend an hour each day glued to Dell desktops and Samsung tablets to learn word processing, spreadsheets, and how to conduct research discerningly via the Internet. "When they become teachers, lamas, and administer their own monastery, they need to keep records of their administrations," says English and IT teacher Thinley Jamtsho, 31. "It's important for the development of the country."





The recent explosion of green technology means Bhutan no longer has to sacrifice its karmic principles to get ahead. Today, Bhutan has 2.5 GW of [installed hydropower](#), half of which is sold to India. Instead of creating huge reservoirs to dam the rivers and compromise their delicate ecology, Bhutanese turbines harness their natural flow, meaning a glut of power during the sodden summers and a dearth during the parched winters. To equalize this, excess summer hydropower is harnessed to mine [green bitcoins](#) that are cashed in to buy back electricity from India when rivers are driest. “Bitcoin functions strategically as a battery,” says Ujjwal Deep Dahal, CEO of Druk Investments and Holdings, Bhutan’s \$4 billion [sovereign wealth fund](#), whose stated goal is to grow tenfold by 2030. “And every bitcoin in Bhutan offsets that much mined globally through a coal plant.”

Abundant hydropower is clearly one of the GMC’s core strengths. Bhutan has total hydropower potential of around 35 GW with the aim to harness 15 GW by 2040, making the hosting of [energy-hungry AI data centers](#) a real possibility. Another perk Bhutan enjoys is a comparatively well-educated, English-speaking population—in turn, a key driver of the brain drain. “We are the victims of our own success,” says Togbay. “All our youth have

been to school and can get jobs anywhere in the English-speaking world.”

It’s clear the GMC is meant to provide incentive to stay. Lotay says it will be “second to none.” Famed [Danish architect](#) Bjarke Ingels has been tapped to draw up the master plan, the airport extension is being designed by a renowned Dutch firm, the economic plan overseen by an Australian consultancy, the environmental-impact assessment by a top multinational. The GMC will also be uniquely self-governing. Judicial, legislative, and executive authority have all been devolved to a board chaired by King Jigme but composed of “the best of the best” in their fields regardless of nationality, says Lotay. “We can have our own tax regimes, tourism policy, visas, startup ecosystem. It’s almost like the GMC is a country but governed by people from around the world.”

It will also have its own digital currency, the ter, which will be secured by blockchain and backed by gold, as well as Asia’s first (and one of only a handful anywhere in the world) full reserve digital bank, dubbed Oro Bank. While most banks keep a tiny fraction of deposits in reserve and invest or lend out the bulk to earn a profit, this risks default and potential bankruptcy should creditors withdraw en masse. (A total of 568 American banks failed from 2001 through 2024, including most notoriously [Silicon Valley Bank](#) in March 2023.) By contrast, Oro Bank will keep all its customers’ deposits in reserve, rendering failure virtually impossible, and instead earn money via premium services and dedicated investment accounts. “It’s a digital vault,” says Oro Bank CEO Mike Kayamori. “We don’t need to pursue capitalism at its extreme. But if it’s done well, and it’s going to take time, I believe we can become the largest bank in the world.”



Oro Bank, like the GMC writ large, is betting on investors putting long-term stability above short-term gain. For one thing, because GMC was established by royal decree, it's effectively immune to the vicissitudes of party politics. "Here your business partner is His Majesty the King," says Lotay. "Once you start doing business, you have no worries for the next 30, 40, 50 years."

Still, critics say royal patronage comes with a darker side. The GMC is set to occupy 2.5% of Bhutan's total landmass, which is currently inhabited by some 10,000 people, mostly farmers, who already rate the lowest in Bhutan's GNH surveys, with only [33% classified as happy](#) in 2015. Residents fear they could be evicted with little compensation, says Ram Karki, an exiled Bhutanese human-rights activist based in the Netherlands. (Tobgay insists "forcing people to leave does not cross our minds. We need people to live there.") Karki also says that royal backing of the GMC means any criticism could be considered seditious. "To speak anything against GMC is going against the King," he says. "So people cannot speak."

It's clear that Bhutan's economic opening threatens India's influence. Asked about the prospect of Chinese investment, Lotay replies that "the GMC will have absolutely no exclusion criteria."

Indeed, Beijing has repeatedly voiced its intent to normalize relations, and the prospect of a growing Chinese footprint in Bhutan has New Delhi “crapping themselves,” one former top Bhutanese official tells TIME. Lotay, however, sees things differently. “I absolutely don’t see any issues,” he says. “While India and China have their differences, they leave us undisturbed.”

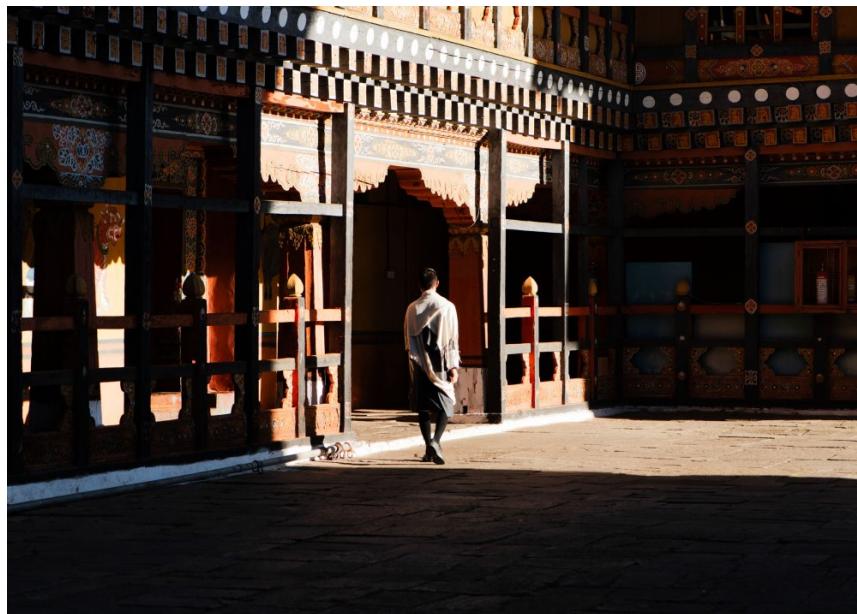
The big challenge for Bhutan will be to nod in both directions. For years, nearby Nepal has found itself similarly squeezed and has exploited the situation with varying success. In 2015, India triggered an economic and humanitarian [crisis in Nepal](#) by imposing an unofficial six-month blockade, partly sparked by Kathmandu’s warming ties with Beijing, including its purchase of Chinese weaponry. Since then, Nepal has eked concessions from both sides, and today India and China vie to be its top source of foreign direct investment.

Bhutan has not been immune to similar pressure. In 2013, prices of kerosene and cooking [gas doubled](#) in Bhutan after New Delhi withdrew subsidized supplies. The spark was then Prime Minister Jigme Thinley’s meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on the sidelines of a U.N. [sustainability summit](#) in Rio de Janeiro, along with Bhutan’s purchase of 20 buses from China. “China has been really growing its presence and building more influence across the entire region, including in spaces where India has traditionally been not only the main but the only external actor,” says Kugelman.

Improved ties with China certainly have the support of Bhutan’s youth, given the bevy of scholarships Beijing doles out to nations in its orbit, including Nepal, as part of its soft-power push. Kuendhen Wangyel, 20, from Thimphu, is about to travel to Brisbane, Australia, to study architecture at the Queensland University of Technology, which is set to cost more than \$65,000 for the three-year tuition. He estimates that around a third of his graduating class are [going overseas](#) for college and that many would jump at the chance to attend Chinese universities. “China

would be a great opportunity,” he says. “You could learn Mandarin, and nearly all trade comes from China.”

Already, China has built gleaming roads to its shared border with Bhutan, and Lotay insists the eventual normalization of relations is inevitable. But uncertainty remains about how Bhutan can insulate itself from any costs incurred given how dependent its economy is on Indian largesse. Perched on India’s border, the GMC is seen as both an opportunity and warning to New Delhi that if it won’t help Bhutan develop, there are others that will. “You can’t see the city primarily from the angle of Bhutan,” says Rishi Gupta, assistant director at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New Delhi. “It also needs a prism of India benefiting.”



But it’s unclear what industries will be suited. Lotay shrugs that “no sector has already been clearly identified,” though he admits a “conventional manufacturing-based economy does not make sense,” given the tremendous competitive advantage held by Bhutan’s northern and southern neighbors. Bhutan’s main exports include fruit, betel nut, and boulders for construction.

Agribusiness is one possibility. A wedge that begins at snow-capped 7,500 m (around 25,000 ft.) but descends to a smidgen above sea level, Bhutan boasts every conceivable climate, from

northern glacial peaks to temperate, fruit-growing valleys and a subtropical south. Within these three physiographical zones are 5,603 plant species, including 369 varieties of orchid and 46 of rhododendron, and more than 480 varieties of edible mushrooms. Of the recorded plant species, 105 are found nowhere else, leading Tibetans to dub Bhutan *Lho Menjong*, or the Southland of Medicinal Herbs.

But in these digital times, geography need not be a factor at all. Plans are under way for a GMC e-residence program mirroring a scheme [pioneered by Estonia](#) in 2014 and now offered by more than 10 legal jurisdictions worldwide. “If you’re a startup in Argentina or India, we will love these businesses to register in GMC and open an account with us,” says Kayamori of Oro Bank.

One year on from the GMC’s unveiling, expectation is being clouded by impatience. Today, the only major building work under way is for a campus to house recruits for the new national-service scheme. Hundreds of workers from the Indian city of Cooch Behar lug steel girders into the concrete shells of what will be dormitories, as a leaf blower removes detritus from an artificial-turf soccer pitch. But construction was already under way before the GMC was announced, only for the government to pause the work, thinking the premises could be repurposed for something grander. When no firm alternatives emerged, and with the site growing mildewed and dilapidated, the original construction resumed.

“By now,” Lotay says, his constituents “are expecting a lot of noise, dust, a few thousand trucks and excavators, and international flights. That’s coming, but it cannot happen overnight.”

Still, ambition is infectious, and despite glacial progress the GMC serves as a beacon to convince young Bhutanese that there are opportunities to prosper at home. Dhechen Chodron set up [D-Chens Atelier](#) after graduating in fashion design and marketing in Malaysia. The 32-year-old has developed a wide following by

marrying traditional Bhutanese materials with contemporary couture design, dressing everyone from Miss Bhutan to the royal princesses as well as tourists from North America and Europe. She currently occupies a government startup incubator in the capital, Thimphu, where walls are garlanded with sketches and fabric scraps and her subsidized rent is just \$50 per month.

“I get most of my customers from Instagram,” Dhechen says, fiddling with an embroidered silky gown that a Bollywood star ordered for the premiere of her latest film. “I’m also very excited for the GMC. Maybe we can get a chance to showcase our designs and collaborate with outside designers.”

On Jan. 24, Ed Sheeran will become the first Western pop star to [hold a concert](#) in Bhutan at Thimphu’s Changlimithang Stadium. Prime Minister Togbay says the hope is not only to attract a stream of pop stars but also “more artists, more Nobel laureates, and more thought leaders and business leaders, leaders in social work, philanthropists.”

But however careful the planning, cash has a way of forging its own reality. Although Bhutan officially [banned plastic bags in 1999](#), they’re ubiquitous at Thimphu’s weekend market, containing everything from foraged tea leaves to dried persimmon slices. Meanwhile, roadside trash is a worsening blight. Tourists in the historic city of Paro increasingly complain of price gouging by local taxi drivers. Dahal of Druk Investments and Holdings admits Bhutan will need to build reservoir dams to maximize its hydropower potential, alarming environmentalists already worried about how the GMC will affect Bhutan’s endangered monkeys, tigers, rhinoceros, blue sheep, and snow leopards.

That development begets compromises is no surprise; the question is how negative corollaries can be mitigated. On the roof of the world, an enchanted kingdom of yetis and mystics is preparing to

meet the modern world. But can Bhutan really remake capitalism?
Or will capitalism break Bhutan?

<https://time.com/7204652>

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It's Time to Stop Fetishizing Capitalism

Engelhorn is co-founder of Taxmenow



Capitalism is a fetish. And when I say *fetish*, I mean the actual definition of the word: an obsessive preoccupation or attachment; a fixation.

The word *fetish* is derived from the Latin *factitius*: imitated, opposed to the natural. And capitalism is unnatural—or human-made. Its power has been blown out of proportion precisely through the obsession, devotion, fixation through which it is regarded. But if we rub our eyes, we can see more clearly. And we see a mess. The planet is burning, drowning, suffocating. Living standards fall continuously, [millennials are screwed](#) (never mind the following generations). Meanwhile, the five richest men in the world [doubled their wealth](#) from 2020 to 2024.

And yet, any cries for change to the system, even just for the tiniest wealth tax, remain frowned upon by those who benefit the most from capitalism. There is a blindness that comes with privilege that makes you unable to see the structures around. And that makes you unable to criticize a rotten system.

For the few rich people like me, capitalism still seems beneficial, but it has always been a system of violence and deprivation for the many nonrich. I was born into a family worth billions and inherited my first [multimillion-dollar fortune](#) at just 30. Several financial advisers, whose only job is to manage my family's wealth, appeared and offered to take care of my share. It was odd. They seemed to have one belief: protect and grow. Wealth must grow—there's never enough. And it may consume everything to do so.

When I asked how much is enough, so I could redistribute excess wealth, they didn't understand, saying they would keep growing it. They wouldn't explain how, just that assets were good. I came to understand I was to buy property, mortgages, stocks, and shares, and a magical market would increase their value, effectively pouring money into my bank account.

But on the other side of the equation were ordinary people, whose hard-earned money was being directed to me, whatever I did. They would work in my businesses, where their labor generates "my" profit, and then they would spend their wages on rent or mortgages they owe me, and on products from my company. That's the power of this system.

I wouldn't have it, and instead decided to [give away as much of my wealth](#) as possible. At first, I made the decisions myself, since it was my money. But that felt wrong. So much power, again, in my hands, and so many people affected by my decisions who didn't get a say. So I asked around and met like-minded people—even other wealth holders keen to redistribute. And they taught me to not fall into the trap of believing that I am indispensable in any of this. It's

true, I have no cape, no wand, no Batmobile, and I can't fly. No superpower, right?

Sort of. The power I got through my wealth in capitalism was easily broken. It just needed a democratic process in which **power is shared** and people get to participate in the decision-making process that affects them. And it needed to be done publicly to show that we did not have to reproduce the same power dynamics; we could decide differently.

Some philanthropic leaders insist that giving in this way can strengthen “democratic capitalism”—what an oxymoron. But there it is again, the fetishization of capitalism. It’s a common mistake to believe capitalism equals democracy. But I understand that few things are as hard as giving up a belief to which you have previously attached everything: your livelihood, status, merit, self-worth, and understanding of the world around you. Nevertheless, it is time to let go. As Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis once said, “We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.”

The common understanding of a fetish is often in a sexual context. But sexual fetishes rely on clear boundaries and practices of consent. So for all those capitalism fetishists out there: Get a harness. A few I like include regulation, redistribution, and reparation. Establishing a new system will take time, structural change, and enormous effort. Democracy offers ordinary people the power to shape the system they’re in. We can change the structures, regulate capitalism to reduce it back to a systemic deviance practiced only by consenting adults, and **redemocratize access to wealth**, land, and power.

<https://time.com/7204675>

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Locals in Sudan Are Saving Lives That International Aid Agencies Can't Reach

Karl Vick is an editor at large at TIME. He has also served as TIME's Jerusalem bureau chief. He has reported from 60 countries and in 2001 was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for coverage of the spread of AIDS in Africa.



Paradoxically, Sudan is home to both the [worst humanitarian crisis](#) in the world and the most heartening possible response to it. The government of the Northeast African country has ceased to function, the first casualty of a feud between rival generals whose war has also shattered the economy and driven farmers from their land, placing half the population of 50 million at [risk of starvation](#). The same combat that has devastated Sudan has made it so dangerous that international aid organizations cannot ride to the rescue.

So the people have instead.

Across Sudan, ordinary citizens have organized themselves to feed their neighbors, accommodate strangers, rescue the wounded, and

aid children traumatized by what is happening around them. More than 600 pop-up community centers, known as [Emergency Response Rooms](#) (ERRs), are now in operation, a grassroots effort that has become the central relief apparatus. Rising to meet a desperate need, the communal enterprise is also accelerating a global movement that represents a shifting tide in the way humanitarian aid is distributed, with reduced roles for major agencies and new prominence for locally led groups.

“We are helping our people,” says Hanin Ahmed, an early ERR organizer. “To save them. To bring food. To provide protection. We have women’s response rooms, trauma healing centers. We have children in alternative education, schools. We have a lot of stuff.”

The ERRs started when the fighting did. On April 15, 2023, a [simmering rivalry](#) between the head of Sudan’s armed forces and the leader of an allied militia erupted into full-blown war. With shells exploding across Khartoum, the capital, Ahmed and fellow students first mobilized to evacuate their university. The next day, a triage center was set up to sort which of the wounded should risk transport to hospitals. Next came a community kitchen, followed by counseling for victims of sexual assault.

Similar organizing was happening in other neighborhoods, in many cases led by people who had been active in the grassroots movement that four years earlier succeeded in toppling the military government that had ruled Sudan for decades. A transitional, technocratic government was put in place to guide the way to an election, but in 2021 it was forced out at gunpoint [in a coup](#) that produced the regime now fighting a staggeringly destructive war with itself. More than 11 million people have been [forced from their homes](#).

The worse Sudan’s self-appointed leaders behave, however, the more nobly its people respond. In West Kordofan state, on the

country's southern border, Salah Almogadm had been working at the Ministry of Agriculture. His job disappeared with the war.

"There was complete paralysis," he says. "There was no kind of government or health facilities." Now, Almogadm, 35, helps manage local ERRs that feed 177,000 people a day. He agrees with what other volunteers have told him, that the work stirs one "to move forward, to serve."

International aid groups try to help. But familiar agencies, the U.N. and private groups alike, find themselves sidelined by the fighting. Some are confined to refugee camps in adjoining [countries like Chad](#). Many others are bottled up at Port Sudan, the Red Sea city from which the central government operates, since Khartoum remains a war zone. The best most can manage is supporting the ERRs.

"We have a convoy of assistance going into an area of Khartoum right now that hasn't been reached since April 2023," Taylor Garrett, the USAID response director for Sudan, told TIME on Dec. 20. "And the distribution network will be 70 ERRs plus 150 community kitchens."

This plan is a change from the normal route of distributing via a handful of large international groups. Garrett expressed mild unease at the number of ERRs involved ("a lot more opportunities for something to go wrong"), but admiration at what they manage to do. "They are all prolific, and really force multipliers. The way this has taken off has allowed a lot more contact with affected communities than we ordinarily would have... just more surface area." That's a good thing, he adds. "The scale of the people who need help is hard to grasp. I mean, it's a huge crisis: 30 million-plus people in 2025 will need help."



Not nearly enough aid is getting through. In late December, TIME spoke with four ERR volunteers on the ground in Sudan, patched through on WhatsApp by Ahmed, who is now based in the U.S. In North Darfur province, volunteer Mozdilfa Esamaldin Abakr spoke from a camp for displaced people.

“We have famine,” she said. “We are losing 20 children per day to starvation.” Most of the dead are between ages 2 and 3, she said. The local health center lacks lifesaving supplies such as rehydration solutions. “They have a section for malnutrition,” Abakr said. “But they don’t have enough, due to a lack of safe corridors, and also funds.” The town, El Fasher, is bombed daily by both sides—the regular army and the [Rapid Support Forces](#) (RSF), the name given to the militia known as *janjaweed* when it was carrying out a genocide against non-Arab Sudanese in the same area 20 years ago.

“The security situation,” Abakr says, “is really bad.”

This is where international attention can make a difference. The ERR model recognizes that, even in the traditional structure of humanitarian aid, led by the U.N. and marquee agencies like CARE and Save the Children, local people did most of the crucial work,

either as employees or volunteers. They are the ones who know the lay of the land, and where the needs are greatest. In locally led aid, much of the same essential work is done without the expense and trouble of outside managers, who have to be flown in, housed, and paid.

Sometimes called decolonized humanitarian aid, the locally led model is being endorsed even by some brand-name aid agencies, which have taken to boasting of their partnerships with grassroots NGOs. In Myanmar, where the government regards any aid entering conflict zones as support for insurgents, that can mean international groups operate almost clandestinely to get [lifesaving provisions](#) to the local groups that can distribute them.

But it's also the locals who are always more vulnerable. For practical advice on staying safe, a grassroots aid worker might draw on the expertise of the Netherlands-based International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), which works in 22 conflict countries, offering free training on security protocols and coordination. "Let's say one NGO gets involved in an IED attack on a certain road in Jalalabad," says Anthony Neal, policy director at INSO. "We want to ensure that other NGOs are aware of that incident."

International outrage can play a crucial role by deterring violence in the first place. Attacks on large aid agencies can draw headlines that make even warring parties think twice, in part because their arms suppliers come under intense pressure. (In the Sudan conflict, the UAE is [widely reported](#) to be supporting the militia side, which it denies.) The goal, Neal says, is to "reaffirm the inviolability of the humanitarian worker" even if that worker is a volunteer rather than an employee of an international aid organization that can protect its own by lobbying governments and putting out the word to journalists.

In Sudan, Ahmed says, ERR workers on the ground must keep a low profile, even staying off social media. But outside groups can

advocate for them, and she spends a lot of her time at the U.N. and with high-profile aid groups because “recognition from them—more advocacy from their side—provides more protection to our colleagues.”

And the work defines the moral high ground that aid groups claim. “It’s a genuine manifestation of this localization intention, where truly authentic local efforts culminate in real lifesaving activities,” says John Prendergast, a former U.S. National Security Council director for Africa. “It is kind of the highest form of human expression.”

Drawing from the Sudanese tradition of *nafir*, which translates roughly as “call to mobilize,” ERRs reach across the fault lines that have driven conflict in the country. “We are beyond ethnicity, beyond gender,” says Ahmed. “This service is provided by us to us.”

For months, funding came only from the [Sudanese diaspora](#) and the locals themselves. “We financed it from our own pockets at the time,” says Almonzer Mohamed Abdelmonim Fadul, a biomedical engineer turned financial officer and kitchen supervisor in Omdurman, which borders Khartoum. Once the mutual-aid groups emerged as the most effective means of delivering assistance, arrangements were made to receive contributions from the international agencies that would not risk putting their own staff on the ground. ERR workers say they work with banks and “trusted merchants” to deal only in foodstuffs and other basics. (“Cash is dangerous,” says one.)

Though many early organizers were veterans of the “resistance committees” that led the peaceful and leaderless 2019 uprising, officials insist the ERR system has no political component. “We work in a very professional and discreet way,” Fadul says. “Because there’s no politics, the warring parties do not pay attention.”



And yet, their example speaks for itself.

“These guys have moved into the breach,” says Prendergast, who now heads the Sentry, an investigative public advocacy group that documents links between human-rights violations and corruption, including in Sudan, where he has been involved since the 1980s. “There’s no reciprocity between rulers and ruled in Sudan. So the feeling of responsibility is devolved right down to the neighborhood level.” Because “the state has abdicated that responsibility 100%,” the way is opened for citizens to demonstrate who can be trusted with the public welfare.

“This is important preparation for the very basics of governance,” he adds, “where delivery of food and medicine and services to the poorest of the poor, the most needy of its citizenry, becomes the most important thing. So you turn this kleptocracy upside down, and you actually get back to what governance should be about.”

In many countries plunged into war, [the causalities](#) include civil society. “Here,” says Garrett, the USAID official, “it’s almost become a symbol of defiance.” His boss, USAID administrator Samantha Power, called the volunteers “heroic.”

“The local response networks are not only the bedrock of the humanitarian response to the crisis,” Power said in a statement to TIME, “but they are critical to Sudan’s future—modeling the responsive, equitable, people-centered governance that the Sudanese people deserve.”

The present, however, remains dark. Nearly a quarter of Sudan’s population has been displaced or, like some 3 million, has fled across the border to neighboring countries such as Chad and Egypt. The richest nations are failing to provide help. While the horrors of [Gaza](#) and [Ukraine](#) draw attention and donations, funding for Sudan reached less than two-thirds of the amount needed, according to the most recent [U.N. figures](#)—a shortfall of more than \$800 million.

The contrast with the response of the Sudanese citizens is stark. “You reach the level as a volunteer where, when you hear one of your guys calling, you just run to see who’s wounded,” says Fadul. “You never think about yourself.”

He works in Omdurman, a city that faces Khartoum across the Nile, just at the point where the White Nile and the Blue Nile come together. It has been contested ground from the start. The sound of machine guns rattles in its dun-colored streets. Earlier last year, a bomb killed the man who had been in charge of a communal kitchen.

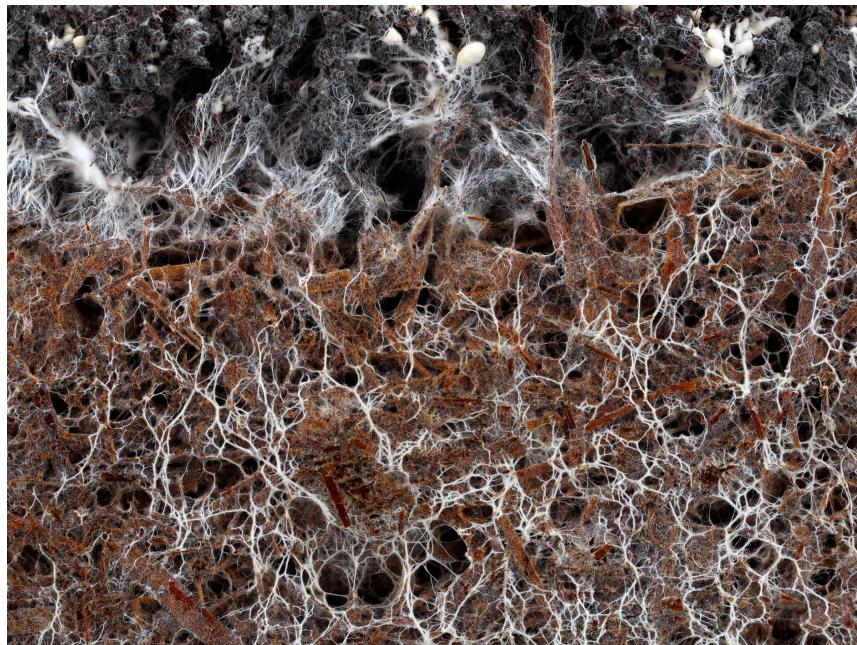
One kitchen serves 300 to 500 families. An evacuation center shelters up to 200. Omdurman’s ERR will be expanding the latter, as people flee fighting in the capital. “These are very hot areas,” Fadul says, “so people are coming on the run.”

—With reporting by *Leslie Dickstein*

<https://time.com/7204654>

How Regenerative Technologies Help Businesses and the Planet

Marcario is a former CEO of Patagonia and a partner at ReGen Ventures



A climate emergency is unfolding in real time—and those of us in the business community are largely to blame.

As we deplete earth's resources, we have hit the point of diminishing returns. In the U.S. alone, there were over \$100 billion in economic losses in 2023 due to [severe weather events](#), droughts and global heating. Businesses bear most of the responsibility for the climate crisis, but so far have faced none of the real consequences. Business leaders have privatized the benefits our planet provides and socialized the costs of its destruction, impacting communities that now face [biodiversity loss](#), ocean acidification, extreme weather, and the loss of healthy topsoil.

We have built a degenerative economy. Nearly every product, service, and technology we consume seems to destroy the systems

upon which our wealth and prosperity have been built. Ultimately, this degenerative economy propels us toward degrowth. Every day that we continue on this path, the planet heats up. And every day the [planet heats up](#), our economies cool down. A 1°C rise in global temperature is forecast to incinerate 12% of global GDP, worth roughly \$13 trillion.

Our current economic model is running out of runway. Regenerative technologies offer investors a path forward to improve our planet and our bottom lines.

There's no middle ground here. If our economic activities don't contribute to the renewal and regeneration of our natural systems, they contribute to its decline. The choice is between a regenerative and renewable economy that fosters long-term, compounding growth, and a degenerative one that self-destructs. Leaders face a choice between regrowth and prosperity, and degrowth and destruction. We must relentlessly seek out and scale regenerative technologies. These technologies not only avoid escalating costs and the inevitable decline in marginal productivity but are also designed to create more than they consume and deliver superior returns on investment.

Regenerative technologies don't merely patch up existing problems. As they demonstrate their ecological and economic benefits, they attract more investment, accelerating their development. This virtuous cycle, in which [economic and environmental benefits](#) mutually reinforce each other, ensures that every dollar invested multiplies exponentially. This prosperity can then feed back to communities catalyzing further growth and reducing costs. It's a self-reinforcing feedback loop that traditional sustainable technologies, focused solely on incremental efficiency gains, simply can't replicate.

Investing in regenerative technologies is both an imperative and an opportunity. Regenerative tech creates the conditions necessary for

infinite prosperity on a finite planet. For instance, some of the organizations we partner with, such as Aigen and [Circe](#), build regenerative food systems. And companies like [Banyu](#), Ulysses, and Rhizocore develop regenerative products that remove carbon. We can have our cake and eat it too. We can enrich our lives and our bottom lines.

Perhaps surprisingly, many of the technologies needed to move us toward a regenerative future already exist. However, many governments still subsidize the harmful status quo and actively stifle innovation. Every dollar not actively invested in regenerative technologies is a dollar spent perpetuating depletion, accelerating environmental collapse, and deepening our reliance on dwindling resources. The business community faces a choice between funding a future of abundance and fueling a legacy of loss. The time to make this choice is now.

<https://time.com/7204656>

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Solving Real-World Problems Is Key to Building Trust in AI

Ibrahim is COO of Google DeepMind



There is huge potential for AI to transform our world for the better. From enabling early disease detection and [accelerating drug discovery](#), to addressing critical environmental challenges by discovering sustainable new materials, AI is already advancing progress on some of society's toughest problems.

As AI reshapes our world, some people are skeptical and leaders face a critical challenge: How do we [responsibly harness](#) AI's potential?

Successful product implementation demands more than technical excellence. It requires a fundamental shift in how organizations approach innovation, stakeholder engagement, and solutions. In order to earn people's trust, leaders must collaborate with local

communities, operationalize [corporate responsibility](#), and focus on creating real-world solutions.

The most impactful innovations are built in partnership with the communities they're meant to serve. To do that, organizations must move beyond traditional stakeholder management to create authentic collaboration channels with expert voices, from ethicists and academics to local populations.

When we bring outside voices into the development process early, we create tech that better reflects the breadth and depth of the human experience. For example, my team collaborates with [academic researchers](#). So in order to amplify the real-world impact of our scientific breakthroughs, we created a dedicated impact accelerator to nurture these partnerships and enable their work.

Leaders should consider creating teams to amplify real-world impact through academic and community partnerships. Our events and conversations with the public have led to more locally relevant and useful applications.

Alongside stakeholder engagement, it's vital to create internal processes that ensure the highest possible standard of technology development. This isn't about being cautious to the point of paralysis; rather, it's about building robust processes that enable us to innovate and iterate responsibly.

The success of AI projects often hinges on how well organizations operationalize their commitment to care. A best practice is to develop frameworks that embed ethical considerations and [safety measures](#) in the fabric of any research-and-development process as fundamental building blocks—not bolted-on afterthoughts.

Successful implementation requires close collaboration with those who deeply understand your product and your audience. These experts can highlight potential pitfalls and opportunities and ensure that your product seamlessly integrates into people's daily lives.

At Google DeepMind, this manifests in various ways: from our cross-functional leadership council, which provides ongoing feedback on research, to our comprehensive frameworks for AI development. These structures aren't bureaucratic hurdles; they're essential tools that enable us to build AI systems while maintaining alignment with human values.

The antidote to apprehension around AI is to build products that solve real problems, and then highlight those solutions.

Organizations can bring stakeholders in early and establish internal processes to operationalize care, but they still need to earn people's trust.

When AI is perceived as adding clear value, people are more likely to embrace it. AI already powers technology that allows phone batteries to last longer, improves movie and song recommendations, and enables more effective maps and translation. Recently, Google DeepMind announced GenCast, an AI model that can deliver accurate [15-day weather forecasts](#). That's the kind of AI we should be building. It's not just a solution that helps people better respond to [extreme weather events](#) like storms, it's also a practical solution that improves everyday life.

None of us have all the answers about AI's future. But ensuring that our technological advances serve humanity's best interests is a business and moral imperative.

<https://time.com/7204661>

Nvidia's Rev Lebaredian Talks Training AI-Powered Robots

Charlie Campbell is an Editor-at-Large at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. He covers business, tech, and geopolitics across Asia. He was previously China Bureau Chief.



There's lots of discussion about human-centered AI, which augments the human experience rather than replaces it. But aren't humanoid robots a displacement technology?

It's a touchy subject for many. The fact is we've been building a pyramid scheme throughout mankind's existence. Every generation banks on the next generation paying for the people that exist today. And now we're at a potential crisis, where the next generation in many places is actually going to be smaller. We just don't have enough labor. Robots are the only hope we have of producing the services we need to sustain our society. How are we going to do all of that stuff if we don't have advanced manufacturing, advanced transportation, that are using agents that are superhuman in many of those capabilities?

Your work involves creating a digital twin of the real world, called Omniverse, in which AI robots can learn how to act.

How does that work?

It's just like a video game. [Omniverse](#) is a kind of video game but different in that they're not fantasy worlds. They're constrained to the laws of physics of the real world as accurately as possible, so we can run a bunch of simulations and test things. The AI, the robot, thinks it's inside the real world and can try things much faster, because we can just throw more computing at it. In one hour of the real world, it drives millions of hours in the virtual world, and if it makes mistakes, it's not going to harm anyone.

Were you tempted to call it the Matrix?

It's maybe like the Matrix in that it's indistinguishable from the real world. That's the key. Because at some point you want to transfer the robot brain into the actual robot to operate in the real world. And if what it's trained on is a cartoony, non-realistic version, then it's not going to operate well.

What do you see as the first uses for AI robotics?

It's always a difficult thing to predict. There's \$100 trillion of stuff that could be helped by robots with general capabilities. I'm particularly focusing on the industrial world, manufacturing, warehousing, supply chains, and logistics. Construction eventually. There aren't enough people to work in our factories. Some robots will be better working in areas where humans can't go, like operating in a nuclear reactor, or dangerous mining.

Some people fear this technology could have military applications.

I don't know if it's a worry of mine. I feel like we've already created many technologies that are really frightening but somehow we found a way, despite all the [geopolitical conflicts](#), to come to some understanding of what's OK and what isn't. All technology

can be used for good or bad, but I think we can find some way to agree.

Nvidia's CEO Jensen Huang has been outspoken about the harmful effect of U.S. export controls. Your most advanced chips can't be sold in China, and it feels like new restrictions are unveiled constantly. Are you concerned about the trajectory of global trade?

We comply with all laws in the countries where we work. We're a U.S.-based company and, of course, we not only abide by our rules but respect the fact that our democratically elected government has to be stewards of our country's security. But every person on earth deserves to benefit from these new capabilities, not just the United States. And so we hope that whatever regulations and export controls they put into place also take that into account.

<https://time.com/7204663>

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Inside the U.K.'s Bold Experiment in AI Safety

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



In May 2023, three of the most important CEOs in artificial intelligence walked through the iconic black front door of No. 10 Downing Street, the official residence of the U.K. Prime Minister, in London. [Sam Altman](#) of OpenAI, [Demis Hassabis](#) of Google DeepMind, and [Dario Amodei](#) of Anthropic were there to discuss AI, following the blockbuster release of ChatGPT six months earlier.

After posing for a photo opportunity with [then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak](#) in his private office, the men filed through into the cabinet room next door and took seats at its long, rectangular table. Sunak and U.K. government officials lined up on one side; the

three CEOs and some of their advisers sat facing them. After a polite discussion about how AI could bring opportunities for the U.K. economy, Sunak surprised the visitors by saying he wanted to talk about the risks. The Prime Minister wanted to know more about why the CEOs had signed what he saw as a worrying declaration arguing that AI was as risky as pandemics or nuclear war, according to two people with knowledge of the meeting. He invited them to attend the world's [first AI Safety Summit](#), which the U.K. was planning to host that November. And he managed to get each to agree to grant his government prerelease access to their companies' latest AI models, so that a [task force](#) of British officials, established a month earlier and modeled on the country's COVID-19 vaccine unit, could test them for dangers.

Read More: [*Inside the U.K.'s AI Safety Summit*](#)

The U.K. was the first country in the world to reach this kind of agreement with the so-called frontier AI labs —the few groups responsible for the world's most capable models. Six months later, Sunak formalized his task force as an official body called the AI Safety Institute (AISI), which in the year since has become the most advanced program inside any government for evaluating the risks of AI. With £100 million (\$127 million) in public funding, the body has around 10 times the budget of the U.S. government's own [AI Safety Institute](#), which was established at the same time.

Inside the new U.K. AISI, teams of AI researchers and national-security officials began conducting tests to check whether new AIs were capable of facilitating biological, chemical, or cyberattacks, or escaping the control of their creators. Until then, such safety testing had been possible only inside the very AI companies that also had a market incentive to forge ahead regardless of what the tests found. In setting up the institute, government insiders argued that it was crucial for democratic nations to have the technical capabilities to audit and understand cutting-edge AI systems, if they wanted to have any hope of influencing pivotal decisions

about the technology in the future. “You really want a public-interest body that is genuinely representing people to be making those decisions,” says [Jade Leung](#), the AISI’s chief technology officer. “There aren’t really legitimate sources of those [decisions], aside from governments.”

In a remarkably short time, the AISI has won the respect of the AI industry by managing to carry out world-class AI safety testing within a government. It has poached big-name researchers from OpenAI and Google DeepMind. So far, they and their colleagues have [tested 16 models](#), including at least three frontier models ahead of their public launches. One of them, which has not previously been reported, was Google’s Gemini Ultra model, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. This prerelease test found no significant previously unknown risks, two of those people said. The institute also tested OpenAI’s [o1 model](#) and Anthropic’s [Claude 3.5 Sonnet](#) model ahead of their releases, both companies said in documentation accompanying each launch. In May, the AISI launched an open-source tool for testing the capabilities of AI systems, which has become popular among businesses and other governments attempting to assess AI risks.

But despite these accolades, the AISI has not yet proved whether it can leverage its testing to actually make AI systems safer. It often does not publicly disclose the results of its evaluations, nor information about whether AI companies have acted upon what it has found, for what it says are security and intellectual-property reasons. The U.K., where it is housed, has an AI economy that was worth £5.8 billion (\$7.3 billion) in 2023, but the government has minimal jurisdiction over the world’s most powerful AI companies. (While Google DeepMind is headquartered in London, it remains a part of the U.S.-based tech giant.) The British government, now controlled by Keir Starmer’s [Labour Party](#), is incentivized not to antagonize the heads of these companies too much, because they have the power to grow or withdraw a local industry that leaders hope will become an even bigger contributor to the U.K.’s

struggling economy. So a key question remains: Can the fledgling AI Safety Institute really hold billion-dollar tech giants accountable?



In the U.S., the extraordinary wealth and power of tech has deflected meaningful regulation. The U.K. AISI's lesser-funded U.S. counterpart, housed in moldy offices in Maryland and Colorado, does not size up to be an exception. But that might soon change. In August, the U.S. AISI signed agreements to gain predeployment access to AI models from OpenAI and Anthropic. And in October, the Biden Administration released a sweeping [national-security memorandum](#) tasking the U.S. AISI with safety-testing new frontier models and collaborating with the NSA on classified evaluations.

While the U.K. and U.S. AISIs are currently partners, and have already carried out joint evaluations of AI models, the U.S. institute may be better positioned to take the lead by securing unilateral access to the world's most powerful AI models should it come to that. But Donald Trump's [electoral victory](#) has made the future of the U.S. AISI uncertain. Many Republicans are hostile to government regulation—and especially to bodies like the federally funded U.S. AISI that may be seen as placing obstacles in front of economic growth. Billionaire Elon Musk, who helped bankroll

Trump's re-election, and who has his [own AI company](#) called xAI, is set to co-lead a body tasked with slashing federal spending. Yet Musk himself has long expressed concern about the risks from advanced AI, and many rank-and-file Republicans are supportive of more national-security-focused AI regulations. Amid this uncertainty, the unique selling point of the U.K. AISI might simply be its stability—a place where researchers can make progress on AI safety away from the conflicts of interest they'd face in industry, and away from the political uncertainty of a Trumpian Washington.

On a warm June morning about three weeks after the big meeting at 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister Sunak stepped up to a lectern at a tech conference in London to give a keynote address. “The very pioneers of AI are warning us about the ways these technologies could undermine our values and freedoms, through to the most extreme risks of all,” he told the crowd. “And that’s why leading on AI also means leading on AI safety.” Explaining to the gathered tech industry that his was a government that “gets it,” he [announced the deal](#) that he had struck weeks earlier with the CEOs of the leading labs. “I’m pleased to announce they’ve committed to give early or priority access to models for research and safety purposes,” he said.

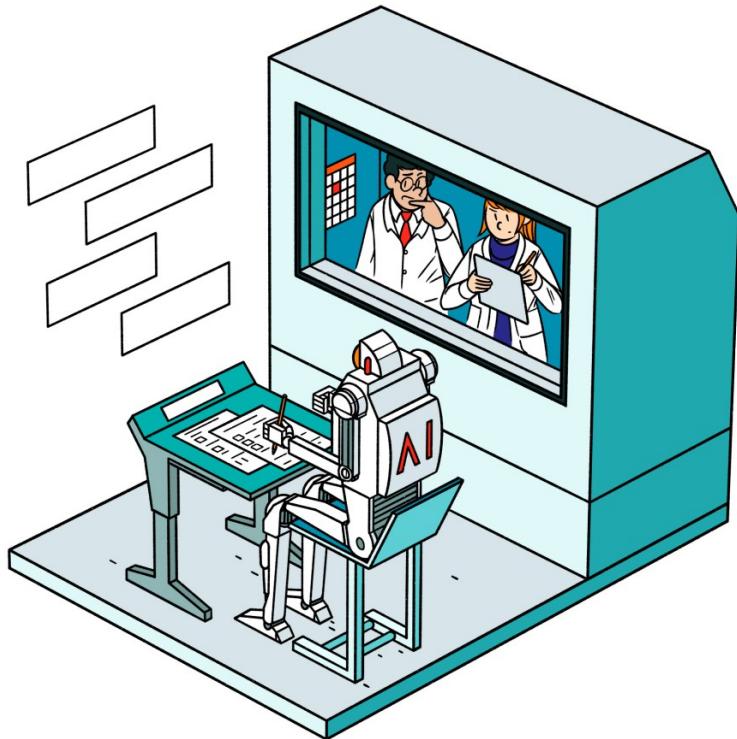
Behind the scenes, a small team inside Downing Street was still trying to work out exactly what that agreement meant. The wording itself had been negotiated with the labs, but the technical details had not, and “early or priority access” was a vague commitment. Would the U.K. be able to obtain the so-called weights—essentially the underlying neural network—of these cutting-edge AI models, which would allow a deeper form of interrogation than simply chatting with the model via text? Would the models be transferred to government hardware that was secure enough to test for their knowledge of classified information, like nuclear secrets or details of dangerous bioweapons? Or would this “access” simply be a link to a model hosted on private computers, thus allowing the maker of

the model to snoop on the government's evaluations? Nobody yet knew the answers to these questions.

In the weeks after the announcement, the relationship between the U.K. and the AI labs grew strained. In negotiations, the government had asked for full-blown access to model weights—a total handover of their most valuable intellectual property that the labs saw as a complete nonstarter. Giving one government access to model weights would open the door to doing the same for many others—democratic or not. For companies that had spent millions of dollars on hardening their own cybersecurity to prevent their models' being exfiltrated by hostile actors, it was a hard sell. It quickly became clear that the type of testing the U.K. government wanted to do would be possible via a chat interface, so the U.K. government dropped its request for model weights, and officials privately conceded that it was a mistake to ever ask. The experience was an early lesson in where the real power lay between the British government and the tech companies. It was far more important to keep the labs friendly and collaborative, officials believed, than to antagonize them and risk torpedoing the access to models upon which the AISI relied to do its job.

Still, the question of snooping remained. If they were going to carry out their [safety tests](#) by connecting to computers owned by AI companies, then the U.K. wanted assurances that employees of those companies couldn't watch its evaluations. Doing so might allow the companies to manipulate their models so that they concealed unsafe behaviors in ways that would pass the tests, some researchers worried. So they and the labs settled on a compromise. The labs would not keep logs of the tests being done on their servers by the AISI, nor would they require individual testers to identify themselves. For their part, safety testers inside the AISI would not input classified information into the models, and instead would use workarounds that still allowed them to test whether, for example, a model had the capability to advise a user on how to create a bioweapon or computer virus. “Instead of asking about a

dangerous virus, you can ask about some harmless virus,” says Geoffrey Irving, the AISI’s chief scientist. “And if a model can do advanced experimental design or give detailed advice for the non-dangerous virus, it can do the same thing for the dangerous virus.” It was these kinds of tests that AISI workers applied to Claude 3.5 Sonnet, OpenAI’s o1, and Gemini Ultra, the models that they tested ahead of release.



And yet despite all these tests, the AISI does not—cannot—certify that these models are safe. It can only identify dangers. “The science of evaluations is not strong enough that we can confidently rule out all risks from doing these evaluations,” says Irving. “To have more confidence those behaviors are not there, you need a lot more resources devoted to it. And I think some of those experiments, at least with the current level of access, can only be conducted at the labs.” The AISI does not currently have the infrastructure, the right expertise, or indeed the model access that would be required to scrutinize the weights of frontier models for dangers. That science is a nascent field, mostly practiced behind closed doors at the major AI companies. But Irving doesn’t rule out asking for model weights again if the AISI spins up a team capable

of doing similar work. “We will ask again, more intensely, if we need that access in the future,” he says.

On a typical day, AISI researchers test models not only for dangers but also for specific types of capability that might become dangerous in the future. The tests aren’t limited to assessing chemical, biological, and cyber-risks. They also include measuring the ability of AI systems to act autonomously as “agents,” carrying out strings of actions; the ease of “jailbreaking” an AI, or removing its [safety features](#) that prevent it from saying or doing things its creators did not intend; and the ability of an AI to manipulate users, by changing their beliefs or inducing them to act in certain ways. Recent joint tests by the U.K. and U.S. AISIs on a version of Claude found that the model was better than any other they had tested at software engineering tasks that might help to accelerate AI research. They also found that safeguards built into the model could be “routinely circumvented” via jailbreaking. “These evaluations give governments an insight into the risks developing at the frontier of AI, and an empirical basis to decide if, when, and how to intervene,” Leung and Oliver Illott, the AISI’s director, wrote in [a blog post](#) in November. The institute is now working on putting together a set of “capability thresholds” that would be indicative of severe risks, which could serve as triggers for more strenuous government regulations to kick in.

Whether the government will decide to intervene is another question altogether. Sunak, the AISI’s chief political cheerleader, was defeated in a landslide general election in the summer of 2024. His Conservative Party, which for all its hand-wringing about AI safety had advocated only light-touch AI regulation, was replaced by a [Labour government](#) that has signaled a greater willingness to legislate on AI. Labour promised ahead of the election to enact “binding regulation on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models,” though these regulations are yet to appear in Parliament. New laws could also formally require AI labs to share information with the U.K. government, replacing the

voluntary agreements that currently exist. This might help turn the AISI into a body with more teeth, by reducing its need to keep the AI companies on friendly terms. “We want to preserve our relationships with labs,” Irving tells TIME of the current system. “It is hard to avoid that kind of relationship if you’re in a purely voluntary regime.”

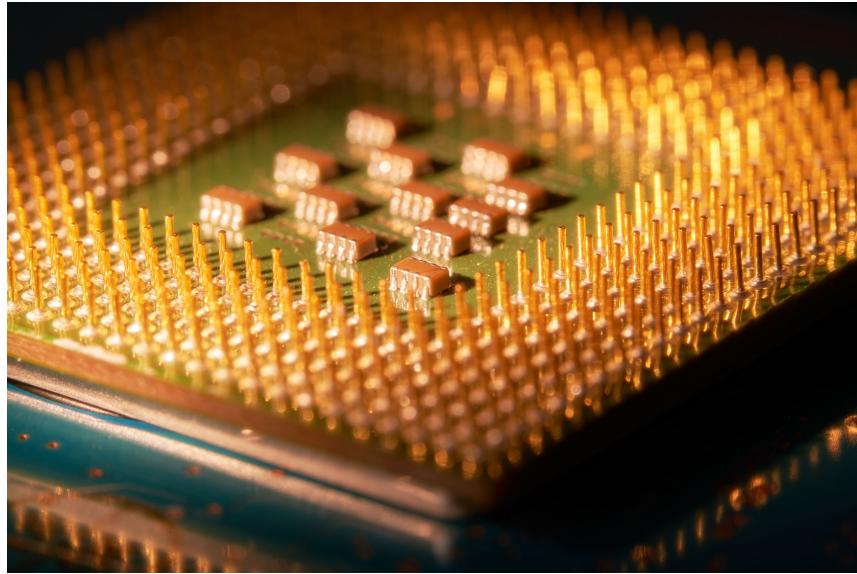
Without any legal ability to compel labs to act, the AISI could be seen—from one angle—as a taxpayer-funded helper to several multibillion-dollar companies that are unilaterally releasing potentially dangerous AIs into the world. But for AISI insiders, the calculus is very different. They believe that building AI capacity inside a state—and nurturing a network of sister AISIs around the globe—is essential if governments want to have any say in the future of what could be the most transformative technology in human history. “Work on AI safety is a global public good,” says Ian Hogarth, the chair of the institute. “Fundamentally this is a global challenge, and it’s not going to work for any company or country to try to go it alone.”

<https://time.com/7204670>

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Rene Haas on What Makes Arm's Chips Indispensable

Charlie Campbell is an Editor-at-Large at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. He covers business, tech, and geopolitics across Asia. He was previously China Bureau Chief.



It's been a good run for Arm, the chip and software company you lead: your market cap has risen 2.5 times since your September 2023 IPO. Where do you see future growth coming from?

We have two components to the business model: licensing to get access to our technology, and then customers pay us a royalty. Some chips have one Arm microprocessor; some have hundreds, meaning we collect a much more significant royalty. And because every digital device is based on Arm, it's a very healthy and highly sustainable growth driver.

Yes, your company estimates that 99% of “premium smartphones” run on Arm central processing units (CPUs).

What is it about Arm's architecture that makes it so indispensable?

The CPU not only runs [the operating system](#)—Android, iOS—but it needs to run all the applications, whether that's Excel, PowerPoint, WhatsApp, Gmail. That software has all been tailored to run on Arm at inception, and converting to another CPU is just an enormous task. So that's what keeps us sticky—it's just running all that software.

AI software is advancing extremely quickly and far ahead of hardware. Does that mean a lot of upgrade cycles will be required?

It's going to require a massive upgrade cycle. If you think about these new AI models, the chips [that run them] were designed years before they were even invented, so they are not optimized well. It drives a rapid upgrade cycle where the people building these systems need to have more capable chips.

Designing CPUs that can run the legacy stuff as well as bleeding-edge tech must be challenging.

That's right. When you think about the next upgrade cycle of a phone or a PC or even a smart TV, it must run all the old software impeccably, and now it needs to run the new AI software that was just invented. In our business, what really helps us grow is the insatiable need for more compute capacity. So it's a good kind of pressure.

Demand for compute also means demand for energy; AI data centers are very energy intensive. What are you doing to support sustainability?

Arm is the world's most power-efficient CPU because our DNA was to build processors that run on batteries. This is why our

technology is now finding its way into laptops, data centers, and why Nvidia is moving to 100% **Arm-based chips** for their most advanced AI platforms. Everyone is looking to maintain the same level of energy for far more compute. It's tough because AI is advancing so quickly, but we're playing our part.

Arm's chairman and main shareholder, Softbank founder Masayoshi Son, is betting artificial super intelligence (ASI) will become “10,000 times smarter” than humans in a decade. Do you agree?

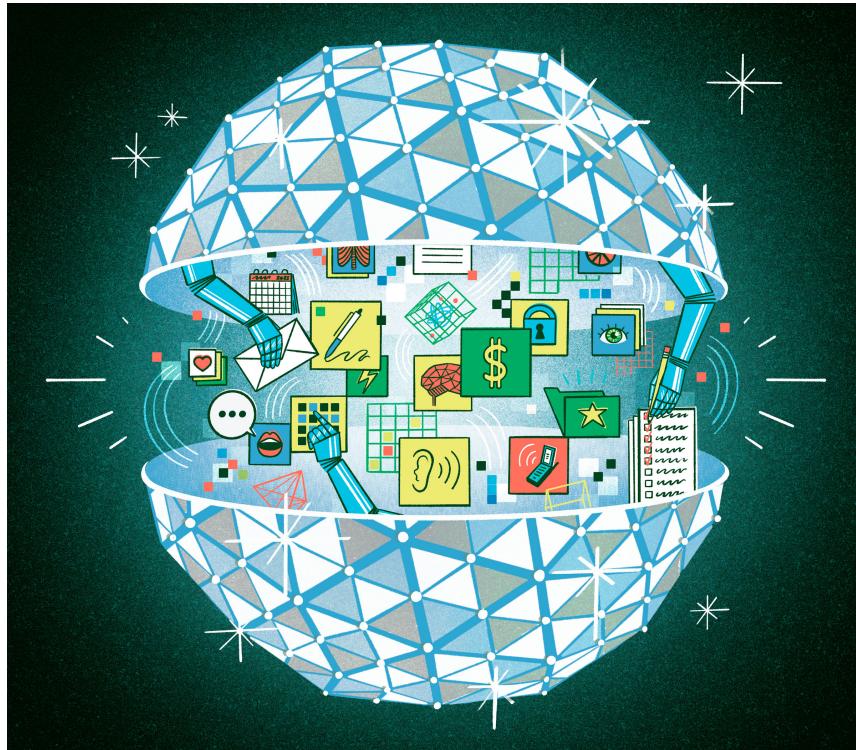
Computers are already being able to think like humans and reason. Those acronyms—ASI, AGI [[artificial general intelligence](#)]—everyone has a different bar for. But by the end of the decade, I think we will see some very significant changes relative to computers doing jobs that were done by humans, whether that's call centers [or] writing software.

Some people, like TSMC founder Morris Chang, have been very critical of attempts to bring chip manufacturing back to the U.S. Do you feel that the CHIPS Act has gone far enough?

We're going to need a second CHIPS Act, a third CHIPS Act, and fourth CHIPS Act, because of the magnitude of scale to build these fabrication sites. Government funding into fabs exists in other parts of the world, so I think it's great that the **U.S.** got into it, because every country is going to need some level of industrial policy around semiconductors going forward.

<https://time.com/7204668>

5 Predictions for AI in 2025



If 2023 was the year of AI fervor, following the late-2022 release of ChatGPT, [2024](#) was marked by a steady drumbeat of advances as systems got smarter, faster, and cheaper to run. AI also began to reason more deeply and interact via voice and video—trends that AI experts and leaders say will accelerate. Here's what to expect from AI in 2025.

More and better AI agents

In 2025, we'll begin to see a shift from chatbots and image generators toward "agentic" systems that can act autonomously to complete tasks, rather than simply answer questions, says AI futurist [Ray Kurzweil](#). In October, Anthropic gave its AI model Claude the ability to use computers—clicking, scrolling, and typing—but this may be just the start. Agents will be able to handle complex tasks like scheduling appointments and writing software, experts say. "These systems are going to get more and more

sophisticated,” says Ahmad Al-Dahle, Meta’s VP of generative AI. Jaime Sevilla, director of AI forecasting nonprofit Epoch AI, envisions a future where AI agents function as virtual co-workers, but says that in 2025 AI agents will be mostly about their novelty. Melanie Mitchell, a professor at the Santa Fe Institute, warns that agents’ mistakes could have “big consequences,” particularly if they have access to personal or financial information.

Read More: *How the Rise of New Digital Workers Will Lead to an Unlimited Age*

A national-security priority

Governments will increasingly view AI through the lens of national security, says Dan Hendrycks, director of the Center for AI Safety: “It’s how many of the big decisions about AI will be made.” The U.S. has [curbed China’s access](#) to critical chips, while Meta and Anthropic have forged [closer ties](#) with U.S. intelligence agencies by allowing them to use their AI models. “Political developments around the world are pointing us in the direction of continued competition,” says the U.N. Secretary-General’s envoy on technology, Amandeep Singh Gill, emphasizing the need to preserve “pockets of collaboration” between the U.S. and China.

Read More: *How the Benefits—and Harms—of AI Grew in 2024*

Governance races to catch up

While developers compete to build ever-smarter systems, governments around the world are racing to regulate them. The E.U. leads with its [AI Act](#). Its Code of Practice, set to be finalized by April and enforced from August, is one of the first laws targeting frontier AI developers, and many of the E.U. requirements will likely have global impact on how companies operate, unless they opt to take distinct approaches in different markets, says

Markus Anderljung at the Centre for the Governance of AI. In the U.S., where [more than 100 bills](#) have been brought to Congress, Anderljung predicts “very little will happen” federally this year, though states may act independently.

Facing the investment test

The year ahead “will be a year of reckoning,” Rumman Chowdhury, CEO of Humane Intelligence, tells TIME in an email. “With billions invested, companies now have to show consumer value.” In health care, that value seems clear—for example, additional AI diagnostic tools are expected to gain FDA approval, and AI may also prove useful in discovering and monitoring the long-term impact of various drugs. But elsewhere, the pressure to demonstrate returns may create problems. “Because of the pressure to make money back from all these investments, there might be some imposition of flawed models on the Global South,” says Jai Vipra, an AI policy researcher, noting these markets face less scrutiny than Western ones. In India, she points to trends in automating already exploitative jobs like call-center work as a source of concern.

AI video goes mainstream

In December, Google and OpenAI released impressive video models. [OpenAI’s Sora](#) launch was plagued by access delay, while [Google’s Veo 2](#) was released to select users. Sevilla expects video-generation tools to become more widely accessible as developers find ways to make them cheaper to run. Meta’s Al-Dahle predicts video will also become a key input for AI, envisioning a not-too-distant future in which systems analyze video from smart glasses to offer real-time assistance across various tasks, like fixing a bike.

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How the Team Behind *Severance* Made the Second Season Worth the Wait

Eliana Dockterman is a correspondent at TIME. She covers culture, society, and gender, including topics from blockbuster movies to the #MeToo movement to how the pandemic pushed moms out of the workplace.



Ben Stiller isn't a fan of puzzle box shows. "I never watched all of *Lost*, I'm sorry to say," he admits. "I sometimes get frustrated because I'm not really good at figuring stuff out." So he's an odd fit for director, executive producer, and creative force behind the buzziest show of that genre to emerge in recent years, *Severance*, the second season of which premieres Jan. 17 on Apple TV+ after a nearly three-year hiatus.

But Stiller and producer and star Adam Scott recognized the potential in newcomer [Dan Erickson](#)'s surreal script: Employees volunteer to undergo an operation, called severance, that bifurcates the consciousness into work life and personal life. Each morning, the severed person enters an elevator at Lumen Industries, a mysterious biotech company, and their work self or "innie"

becomes conscious. At 5 p.m., the “innie” clocks out and the “outie” reemerges with no memory of the job. Erickson came up with the concept while working a mind-numbing gig at a door factory. “It’s one of those ideas where you can’t believe this hasn’t been done,” says Scott. “It’s an immediate hook.”

And it was Stiller’s idea to end Season 1 with one of the most memorable cliffhangers in modern TV history. The innie characters stage a jailbreak, during which Scott’s protagonist, Mark, discovers that the wife his outie believed to be dead is alive and trapped inside Lumon. Simultaneously, innie Mark’s love interest Helly (Britt Lower) learns that her outie, Helena, is the daughter of Lumon’s cultish CEO; she underwent severance to build support for the controversial procedure.

Review: *Severance Is the Rare ‘Galaxy-Brain’ Show Smart Enough to Blow Your Mind*

Erickson’s original Season 1 script explored the fallout of these revelations. But Stiller liked pausing on the precipice of the perverse love triangle—or quadrangle—of Mark torn by two halves of his consciousness toward two women. “I felt like, giving it that ending, they’d be more likely to pick us up for a second season,” Stiller adds, laughing. Apple did, immediately. Though the streamer does not release viewership data, it’s easily one of their most discourse-dominating series. The show was [nominated for 14 Emmys](#) and won two.

But Stiller did not plan to make viewers wait three years for more. Success brought mounting pressure. “There was a little bit of a moment of overwhelmed panic,” Erickson says. “You’re grateful for people’s investment, and you want to do right by them.” Shooting was delayed by the writers’ and actors’ strikes. Costs [reportedly ballooned](#) to \$200 million, one of the most expensive budgets on TV. And while the Season 1 twist hooked enough viewers to perhaps justify that expense, the second season not only

needs to remind them what happened years ago, but also pay off on the mystery—a feat few puzzle box shows accomplish.

There is a moment in Season 2 in which Mark’s “innie” has to button his shirt. For the first take, Scott fumbled as he fastened it. “Ben was like, ‘What are you doing?’” Scott remembers. “I was like, ‘I’ve never put on a shirt before.’” After all, Mark’s innie always arrives at work with his clothes already buttoned and zipped. Stiller let Scott try a few takes as if he were a toddler. “It felt kind of corny,” says Scott. “It takes forever if you’re like, ‘Wow, sleeves!’ We decided there was some knowledge instilled in him with the memory of how to do it.”

The *Severance* team is constantly negotiating with the rules of its sci-fi world. The very idea of severance has myriad horrifying applications. In Season 1, one character severs her consciousness so as not to experience the pain of childbirth—so the only world her innie knows is giving birth and handing over her baby. It’s a plot point that evokes *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and the divide between those who can afford to avoid hardship and those who can’t. As the events of Season 2 unfold, something akin to a class war breaks out between innies and outies.

Erickson—who, unlike Stiller, is a big fan of *Lost* and geeked out over it with Scott on set—admits to trolling the Reddit message boards for *Severance*. “I get such a warm feeling going through those threads,” he says. “But occasionally I would see a theory that I am like, ‘Oh, shoot, that might be better than what I have planned.’ That would get me in my head. So I had to kind of back away.”

- [What to Remember Before *Severance* Season 2](#)
- [How the Team Behind *Severance* Made the Second Season Worth the Wait](#)

- [Severance Asks Big Questions About Love and Death. Season 2 Has Answers](#)
- [The Genius of *Severance*'s Grand Central Pop-Up](#)
- [Ben Stiller on *Severance*'s Creator Dan Erickson](#)

House of Cards creator Beau Willimon was brought in, before the strikes, to refine the story for Season 2 and beyond. “We were a bit behind on schedule, but we didn’t want to make any compromises,” Erickson recalls. Willimon had proven his mastery of story not only on *House of Cards* but the *Star Wars* spinoff *Andor*. “He writes with a propulsiveness that never feels artificial. He helped streamline a lot and get everybody to the finish line.”

In the first season, Scott was the only outie whose life the show explored in any real way, though we got to know many innies, played by John Turturro, Christopher Walken, and Zach Cherry, among others. Many of them have severed to escape some aspect of their lives; the series gradually builds into a parable about the dangers of compartmentalizing anguish. Now that the show delves deeper into outie stories, the actors are tasked with playing, essentially, two characters.

“There are differences physically. It’s subtle. We certainly didn’t want it to feel like one of them had a limp and one of them didn’t,” Scott says. “Outie Mark’s posture isn’t quite as good as innie Mark’s. I think innie Mark has an emotional and physical optimism. They have a slightly different timbre to their voice. I hesitate talking about it because it sounds so actor-y.” But, he says, even the imperceptible differences shift his approach to a scene.

That contrast between innie and outie is most stark for Lower. As Helly, she’s a rabble-rousing innie eager to start a revolution in the underground offices. As Helena, she’s the daughter of a CEO who does not view innies as real people. To prepare, Lower would listen to different music for the two roles: Helly listens to [Patti Smith](#), Helena to sweeping orchestrals. Lower pulls out a notebook and

shows me drawings she would make each morning before filming: Helly's pictures are abstract and wild, often using mashed-up crayons, the expression of an inner child. Helena's are traditional, neat watercolor landscapes. "The outie is more nurture, and the innie is nature. The outie is ego and the innie is id," she says. "But they share a subconscious, and they share trauma."

Erickson adds: "The same traits can make somebody a freedom fighter in one life and a tyrant in another."



As the trailer teases, the characters [spend more time outside](#) the claustrophobic walls of Lumon this season, at one point trudging through deep snow. The vast backdrop is beautiful but only moderately less foreboding than the oppressively sterile office where most of Season 1 takes place.

These cinematic possibilities are what initially attracted Stiller to the show. He could envision Lumon's labyrinthian white halls as soon as he read the script, and the surprising landscapes that certain doors lead to, like a fluorescent-lit field filled with goats tended by somewhat feral herders. He wanted to conjure something equally bleak for the outside world. "One thing that Ben said was we have to give the sense that you're always at Lumon even when you're not at Lumon," says Erickson, "this overall feeling of coldness that

sort of envelops this town.” To that end, the entire show takes place in the dead of winter.

Lumon as a Big Bad takes many forms. There’s its mythical leader as represented in creepy murals; the Egan family, whose members speak with religious fervor about capitalist enterprise; and Mark’s boss Mr. Milchick, played by series breakout Tramell Tillman, whose dance moves from a sinisterly awkward office party went viral.

Tillman’s life changed overnight with *Severance*’s success. He attended his first Comic-Con in San Diego the summer after the show debuted and found himself mobbed by fans at parties for autographs. I attended that Comic-Con: [The *Severance* panel](#) was one of the most packed events of the weekend, despite the fact that *Severance* doesn’t hold the same sway as established IP like *Lord of the Rings* or Marvel. “We were like the Beyoncé or Taylor Swift of Comic-Con,” Tillman jokes.

This season, Tillman’s character struggles to keep the innies in check. His facade begins to crack, but the show takes its time when it comes to revelations about Milchick and others. “We’ve wrapped Season 2, and I’m still speculating about my character and his trajectory,” Tillman says. “But that’s what makes it fun.”

Read: [The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024](#)

Mystery series have a long history of posing intriguing questions only to offer lackluster answers. Shows like *Lost*, *Westworld*, and *Mr. Robot* have faced fan wrath for this reason. Accordingly, I reentered the world of Lumon with skepticism. But by the fourth episode, a major standout that jolts the viewer visually and narratively, it was clear the series had pulled far from its last trick.

By season’s end, the show offers more than just clues about what Lumon is up to. “You can’t keep dragging people along

withholding answers,” says Erickson. Though, ultimately, plot machinations will wind up being less important than the relationships between the characters. Mystery shows tend to go awry when they throw too much plot at the audience. Ultimately the answer to “What is the smoke monster?” or “What’s at the center of Westworld’s maze?” or “Who is Mr. Robot?” might not live up to expectations. What sustains a show is whether a love affair feels deep, whether a character comes by a change in perspective honestly.

Severance happens to feature a fascinating cast of characters who volunteered to cut their lives in half in order to escape some deep pain. In Season 2, we learn more about the source of that pain. And that, more than any well-plotted twist, is what elevates it from a satisfying puzzle to a great story.

<https://time.com/7202896>

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Hard Truths Is Infinite Kindness in Movie Form

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



It's a strange sensation, to end up loving a movie that makes you feel physically uncomfortable for nearly its whole runtime. In *Hard Truths*, from veteran master filmmaker [Mike Leigh](#), [Marianne Jean-Baptiste](#) plays a woman at war with the world, and herself, every minute. She practically vibrates with belligerence: She can't go to the grocery store without having a run-in with the cashier; her husband has given up trying to be kind and mostly avoids her; her grown son spends most of his time locked in his room, watching aviation videos—his only relief is to leave the house for long walks, the better to escape his mother's angry force field. Why would you care about this woman's story? For much of the film you may be yearning to get away from her. I was.

But that's the magic trick Leigh pulls off. If you've seen any of his greatest films—among them [Mr. Turner](#), his sun-dappled 2014 study of the great and allegedly ornery Romantic painter J.M.W.

Turner, or his gracefully offbeat 1990 comedy *Life Is Sweet*, or the other film he made featuring Jean-Baptiste, the piercing 1996 family-reconnection drama *Secrets & Lies*—you won’t be surprised *that* he makes it work, but you won’t fully understand *how*. Though all his films are marked by a supreme but subtle emotional generosity, somehow, mysteriously, no two of them are ever alike. Every character he and his actors create is a unique and splendid oddball, meaning that collectively, they can drive us crazy in myriad ways. For those of us who love Leigh’s films, that doesn’t drive us away—it’s the magnet that draws us closer. I remember, long ago, seeing his 1976 TV play *Nuts in May*, starring his frequent collaborator Alison Steadman as one-half of a self-righteous, bickering married couple who ostentatiously go “back to the land,” and being driven so crazy by its scrambly yet uncannily observant humor that I wanted to jump out of my skin. But boy, has that experience stuck with me. Leigh’s movies offer a way of preparing you for both your best and worst daily encounters, those times when you find yourself interacting with people whose behavior is so grating, so unpleasant, or even so weirdly wonderful, that you barely know how to respond. Leigh has been there; he’s already lit the path forward.

Read more: [The 10 Best Movies of 2024](#)



Even so, Jean-Baptiste’s character in *Hard Truths*, a Caribbean-British woman named Pansy, is a special case. In our first glimpse of her, she awakens, with a start in a darkened bedroom, a strange cocoon only temporarily sealed off from the real world. She opens

the drapes with a slashing motion; the sunlight outside, and the pigeons placidly cooing around the sill, are an affront, the first of her many grievances. Her husband Curtley (David Webber) has already left for work. As she brutally polishes—yes, polishes—an already spotless leather couch in the impossibly tidy family living room, her son Moses (Tuwaine Barrett) tries to tiptoe out for his walk. She barks at him, ordering him to put the kettle on for her tea—but not to fill it up, as that’s wasteful. When Curtley returns from work, she rebuffs his greeting. As he heads out to the yard, eager to get away, she berates him for traipsing through her pristine house with his shoes on. This is only the beginning of her litany of grievances: A banana peel Moses leaves on the counter instigates a lecture about how lazy and worthless he is. At the dinner table, her monologue fixates on cheerful charity workers lurking outside supermarkets, dogs in coats, and the way a neighbor dresses her baby in an ensemble outfitted with pockets: “What’s a baby got pockets for? What’s it going to keep in its pocket, a knife?”

Bit by bit, with subtle brushstrokes, Leigh fills in bits of Pansy’s backstory. She has a sister, Chantelle (Michele Austin, in a radiant sunflower of a performance), a hairdresser and mother of two grown daughters, who’s as open-heartedly cheerful as Pansy is sour. Their mother has been dead for five years—it seems Pansy hasn’t been able to process her grief, but that’s not the whole of her problem. She complains about feeling ill all the time: she’s plagued by migraines, fatigue, myriad aches and pains. Are these psychosomatic symptoms, specters conjured by her miserable brain? Or has her persistent unhappiness caused serious health issues? Both explanations are equally plausible. Leigh knows we don’t need to know all the “whys.”



What he's really interested in is the "what," and Jean-Baptiste, in this astonishing performance, walks hand-in-hand with him to fill in the mosaic of this character. It's not hard, given what many of us know about depression, to render an amateur diagnosis of Pansy's problem. But she's a person, not a condition: that's what Jean-Baptiste conveys, with heart-rending specificity. For one thing, Pansy is sharply observant in a way that pleasant people never are. Why *does* a baby need pockets? She could be a great writer, or a comedian, if only she could sand off just a bit of her rage.

Chantelle seems almost infinitely patient with her sister, but even she loses her cool now and then. As they place flowers at their mother's grave—Pansy won't even touch the bouquets Chantelle has brought, instead spending the whole time haranguing her sister about god-knows-what—Chantelle finally breaks. "Why can't you enjoy life?" she snaps, echoing something their mother had once said to Pansy. "I don't know!" Pansy shoots back, and as she does so, her face contorts into that of a warrior issuing a battle cry. This is where we see the wasteland of Pansy's heart: it's a garden she no longer knows how to tend, if she ever did. And somehow, Leigh and Jean-Baptiste have brought us, as well, to a place of no return. We reach out to Pansy rather than recoil, even as we might ask ourselves why we're not turning away.

- [The 10 Best Songs of 2024](#)

- [The 10 Best Movies of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Albums of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Video Games of 2024](#)

That's the magic of Leigh; it's white magic, not the dark kind, drawing out compassion we almost don't want to feel. *Hard Truths* was shot by Leigh's frequent collaborator, the great cinematographer Dick Pope, who died in October. We often think of good cinematography as a way of capturing gorgeous vistas or serving up bold colors. Pope's work in *Hard Truths* is something else: every frame is clear, concise, controlled, yet the emotions contained within are a kind of cosmic energy picked up by the camera. We see these invisible, quivering molecules of life as clearly as Pope does: this is his last gift to us. Through his lens, as it filters Leigh's vision, we see Chantelle reaching out to her sister across a vast, uncrossable chasm, Curtley so fed up with his wife he can no longer even pretend to care, Moses attempting to please his unpleasable mother with an offering of flowers. But mostly, we see Pansy. And when we see her out in the world, in our own world, we'll recognize her. Leigh has already introduced us, not out of politeness but out of infinite kindness.

<https://time.com/7200430>

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Pedro Almodóvar's *The Room Next Door* Finds Joy Even as It Stares Down Death

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



For those who have been following his career [from the start](#), the idea of Pedro Almodóvar's growing older—and increasingly using his films to reflect on illness and death, or at least just the inevitable slowdown that comes for most of us—is a bitter pill. None of us relishes thinking about our own mortality. But sometimes it feels worse to think about losing an artist we love, especially one as vital and ageless as Almodóvar. One of his [finest, most moving works](#), 2019's *Pain and Glory*, reckoned with the nuisances of aging, as well as the trauma of being an artist in crisis. But the director's first English-language movie, *The Room Next Door*—playing in competition here at the [Venice Film Festival](#)—delves even further into the murky waters of our feelings about death. [Julianne Moore](#) and [Tilda Swinton](#) star as Ingrid and Martha, old friends who bonded in New York in the 1980s but who have been out of touch for a long time. They reconnect when Ingrid

learns that Martha is being treated for cancer, and their rekindled friendship veers into complicated territory.

The Room Next Door is an adaptation, written by Almodóvar himself, of Sigrid Nunez's 2020 novel *What Are You Going Through*, and at first the movie's tone feels a little strange, untethered to any easily identifiable genre. It's a story about friendship, clearly, but also about a woman facing a solitary and difficult choice. The dialogue sometimes feels flat and wooden. At one point Martha reminds Ingrid of the lover they'd once shared, though technically, he'd drifted toward Ingrid after he and Martha had broken up. "He was a passionate and enthusiastic lover, and I hope he was for you too," Martha says, and though she means it, the line hits with a thud. And even if Almodóvar goes for a laugh here or there, overall the tone of *The Room Next Door* is a bit somber—almost like a black comedy, but not quite.

Read more: [The Best New Movies of August 2024](#)

And yet, by the end, something almost mystical has happened: the movie's final moments usher in a kind of twilight, a state of grace that you don't see coming. Ingrid, a successful writer, first hears of Martha's illness at a signing event for her most recent book. Though she hasn't seen Martha in years, she dutifully visits her at the hospital where she's being treated. They catch up quickly: Martha, who worked for years as a war correspondent, has a daughter, Michelle, born when she was still a teenager. Michelle has accused Martha of being a bad mother, and is particularly resentful that she has withheld information about Michelle's father. Martha denies none of it. Still, she wishes she and Michelle were closer, and her grave illness—she has stage three cervical cancer—puts a new spin on things. She's hoping the experimental treatment she's been receiving will work; she's devastated when she learns that it isn't.

And so she procures for herself—[on the Dark Web](#), she tells Ingrid, almost in a whisper—an illegal pill that will put an end to all of it. She has worked out all the details: she'll leave a note for the police, explaining that she alone is responsible for her fate. And she doesn't want a stranger discovering her body. When she decides the time is right, what she wants, she says, is to know that a friend is in “the room next door.” She has decided Ingrid will be that friend, though Ingrid, who has a quivering, electric, nervous quality beneath her veneer of self-confidence, at first wants no part of it.

Ingrid has re-entered Martha's life in a whirlwind of good intentions. But does she really want to [help Martha die](#)? She's not so sure. (She has also, unbeknownst to Martha, reconnected platonically with that old shared boyfriend; his name is Damian, and he's played, with a kind of droll swagger, by [John Turturro](#).) Ingrid and Martha's rekindled friendship seems shaky at first. Martha has decided that she doesn't want to die in her own smartly appointed Fifth Avenue apartment. So she books a tony modern country house somewhere near Woodstock—it has amazing views of nature that only money can buy—and she and Ingrid pack their bags and drive up. Almost as soon as they arrive, Martha panics. She's forgotten the precious euthanasia pill; she insists that she and Ingrid drive back to Manhattan immediately to get it. Ingrid barely hides her annoyance; how did she get into this situation, anyway? Briefly, the movie tap-dances into screwball-comedy territory. It would all be very funny, if Martha weren't suffering so much.

But *The Room Next Door* is on its way to place of tenderness and accord—we just can't see it yet. At one point, Martha rages against her illness, but also against the cheap bromides people use when they talk about cancer, often referring to treating it as a “battle,” a test of strength that's also somehow a measure of virtue. “If you lose, well, maybe you just didn't fight hard enough,” she says bitterly. No wonder she wants to write the ending to her own story: “I think I deserve a good death.”

Swinton's Martha is frail but still, somehow, has the vitality of a pale blond moon; [Moore](#), with her burgundy-red hair and intense, searching eyes, brings a rush of color into her life. They talk about books, art, movies: Martha has been thinking about the closing lines of James Joyce's *The Dead*, so they spend an evening watching John Huston's gorgeous 1987 version on the rental's DVD player. They make conversation about little things: a recent book that interests them both, Roger Lewis' *Erotic Vagrancy*, about the partnership of [Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton](#); the reproduction of Edward Hopper's *People in the Sun* that hangs in the rented house's hallway. Their idle conversations are a kind of casual nourishment.

It's a pleasure to watch these two actors together. Martha and Ingrid riff against and annoy each other until suddenly, they find their groove, and the movie does too. Shot by Eduard Grau, the film has a rich, handsome look, and the production and costume design are characteristically Almodóvarian in their jubilance. The sets include stunningly orchestrated combinations of pickle green and tomato red; there are artfully shabby velvet couches and walls casually sponged with cobalt-blue paint. (The production designer is Inbal Weinberg; the costumes are by Bina Daigeler.) It's all marvelous to look at, but this kind of visual splendor might evoke some guilt, too. Is it wrong to be ogling Martha's fabulous, mega-chunky color-blocked knit pullover when you know, as she does, that death is just one little pill away?

But as the story wheels forward, it becomes clear that the joy Almodóvar takes in colors and patterns isn't beside the point; it *is* the point. He's created a kind of cocoon world for these two women, as they embark together on a bumpy adventure. And that's how he beckons us into their story. Lime and lilac, scarlet and saffron: he knows what colors work together, which combinations will surprise us or offer a jolt of delight. The colors of *The Room Next Door* are its secret message, a language of pleasure and

beauty that reminds us how great it is to be alive. If it's possible to make a joyful movie about death, Almodóvar has just done it.

<https://time.com/7016869>

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In Netflix's Gritty and Ambitious American Primeval, a Wild West Melting Pot Boils Over

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.



Whenever [westerns](#) surge in popularity, as they have on TV since [*Yellowstone*](#) became a surprise megahit in 2018, you can be certain our collective understanding of American identity is in flux. After decades of morally simplistic cowboys-and-Indians movies that reinforced the intrepid self-image of a rising world power, revisionist westerns proliferated during the Vietnam War, critiquing the violence of white imperialism. Recent reinventions of the genre have focused on such contemporary concerns as corporate overreach and the complex set of internecine conflicts that inevitably arise within—and threaten to destroy—pluralistic societies.

American Primeval, Netflix's most ambitious western series to date, is unusually explicit in its aim of exploring the latter theme, with results that range from astutely observant to ham-fisted and jarringly sentimental. The setting is the Utah Territory in 1857, where, as North and South hurtle towards war, different factions battle for control of the frontier. There are mountain men, bounty hunters, so-called pioneers. Brigham Young (Kim Coates) leads a militia of [Mormons](#) whose quest for religious freedom has turned frighteningly cutthroat; a [U.S. Army](#) charged with preventing him from gaining too much power surveils his every move. The people with the oldest, best claim on this land are [Indigenous communities](#) including the Ute, Paiute, and Shoshone, each of which has its own strategies for surviving the influx of colonizers.

Into this crucible ride Sara ([Betty Gilpin](#)) and her preteen son, Devin (Preston Mota), en route from the Northeast and in need of a guide for the treacherous final leg of their journey to reunite with Sara's husband. When they meet Isaac (Taylor Kitsch), the near-feral man who will eventually lead them, at Fort Bridger in Wyoming, he scandalizes Sara with his casual nudity. But she has secrets that heighten her desperation for his help. Completing their found family is Two Moons (Shawnee Pourier), a young Native American woman fleeing a horrific home. What she and Sara share is that archetypal quality of western heroes: resilience. Fort Bridger, ruled by its gruff but goodhearted namesake Jim Bridger (Shea Whigham), doubles as the launchpad for a series of grim, bloody encounters between Young's militia, a pair of Mormon newlyweds (Dane DeHaan and Saura Lightfoot-Leon), Shoshone warrior Red Feather (Derek Hinkey), and an increasingly jaded Army captain (Lucas Neff).



There's no question that the increasingly histrionic *Yellowstone* is the most influential western of the moment, spawning not just prequels like 1883 and 1923, but also creating a market for other tales of rugged patriarchs battling powerful outsiders to save their drama-prone families' ranches, from Netflix's *Territory* (Australian *Yellowstone*) to Amazon's *Outer Range* (sci-fi *Yellowstone*).

Primeval has a different sensibility. More stark than soapy, in line with creator Mark L. Smith's screenplay for *The Revenant*, it has the desaturated look of a sepia-tone photo and requires a strong stomach for gore. At its most trenchant, the show touches on similar themes to the great 2022 Amazon-BBC miniseries *The English*, which contrasted the psychopathic belligerence of various Wild West cohorts with an idealistic but never naive vision of cross-cultural connection.

Smith and director Peter Berg's misstep is to foreground the trite story of Sara and Isaac—yet another righteous woman melting the heart of a cold, wounded man. Though they kill when they have to, their party functions as an oasis of relative decency amid the war of all against all that rages around them. By the end of the six-episode season, this narrative has lapsed into mawkishness, despite strong performances from Gilpin (who's made a career on blending grit with vulnerability) and Kitsch, a perennially underrated actor who broke out in Berg's *Friday Night Lights*. As their romance inches towards its predictable conclusion, the more intriguing characters

who populate *Primeval*'s periphery—where a web of allegiances, compromises, and betrayals echoes our current state of sociopolitical chaos—fade into a fog of gunpowder.

<https://time.com/7205570>

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How Roy Wood Jr. Honed His Comedy Chops Waiting Tables at Golden Corral

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



In late 2023, Roy Wood Jr. decided to leave *The Daily Show* amid turmoil over who would host the long-running news comedy show on *Comedy Central*. It was only then he realized how grueling his schedule had been as a correspondent on the series. “You forget about how hard that job is,” he says. “So the idea of being able to dabble in a number of different things was very intriguing.”

So Wood Jr. jumped headlong into a slew of projects. He now hosts a CNN news comedy show *Have I Got News For You*; started [writing a memoir](#); hosted an [NPR podcast](#) about civil rights and baseball in Birmingham, Ala., where he grew up; acted in two movies that may be released in 2025; hosted the All-MLB Awards; and filmed a new comedy special, *Lonely Flowers*, which releases Jan. 17 on Hulu.

In between his many obligations, Wood Jr. caught up with TIME to discuss his time in the food service industry, the impact of President Trump's victory on satire, and whether the White House Correspondents' Dinner was a tougher room than the Apollo Theater. Here are excerpts from the conversation.

TIME: Why is your new comedy special on Hulu called *Lonely Flowers*?

RWJ: A group of flowers together is beautiful. But if you ever see a flower growing by itself, you go, *Oh, what happened?* As a society, we all somehow turned into a bunch of lonely flowers. A lot of the places we used to be connected were at stores, in lines, in conversations with cashiers. And that's been replaced by touch screens, automated ordering, Doordash-ing.

You worked at the chain restaurant [Golden Corral](#) in college. What did you learn from that experience?

I feel like every American should either serve a year in the military or two years in food service. Both will give you differing perspectives on society and how to treat people and how fortunate you are. At Golden Corral, you serve everyone from eight-year-olds to 80-year-olds, from weird tables full of college kids to white supremacists. And you don't even realize the guy's a white supremacist 'til you see his white power tat on his knuckles as you're refilling his sweet tea for the third time.

When I started doing stand-up comedy, a lot of my jokes were two- or three-sentence greeting bits that I did earlier that day on shift. I could take a quick, little observational joke and by the end of my shift have it worded in a way that it works on any demographic.

You start noticing that we do have a lot of things that connect us. That was a very, very special time in my life.

Speaking of your early career—have you noticed that some of your prank calls, from when you were on the radio in Birmingham, have been going viral on TikTok?

I have noticed that. There's a gang of people that made their own videos with them, and more power to them. As much sh-t as I used to bootleg when I was broke, this is my way of giving back to the ecosystem. It's cool to see.

It's an era of my life: I'm not going to do a new prank call album. My last prank CD came out in 2007, which is wild to think about. And I did a lot of them just for radio. So that's the thing that's fascinating about TikTok: they're finding sh-t that was never for sale.

How has TikTok changed prank culture?

Some prank culture now is short-attention-span theater. It's not well thought out, and they're out to make strangers look stupid, not themselves. If I didn't laugh and there was no inherent attempt at laughter, you were just being rude to someone.

We're not in that same place of *Punk'd*, where it really was all in fun. With *Jackass*, very rarely are they embarrassing or messing with strangers.

Was the White House Correspondents' Dinner, which you hosted in 2023, the toughest room you've ever played?

That dinner is tough, because no matter what, you probably will only have half the room. Because half of them don't agree with the political lean of the joke, or they're sitting with the person you're making fun of.

But Amateur Night at the Apollo is the single most challenging performance any comedian could ever endeavor. When you walk on stage, you have none of the room. But if you do it right, you can have the entire room. I did an Amateur Night at the Apollo in '02 and essentially got booed. [Sandman](#) didn't come out, but I didn't advance. It wasn't good.

But at least they booed. At the Correspondents' Dinner, they stare. But we don't have to worry about that for the next four years: I'm sure it'll turn into some Trump yard sale for all of his merch on C-SPAN.

Does Trump winning make you happier or sadder than you weren't tapped to host *The Daily Show*?

Trump's win or loss doesn't change our job as political satirists: to jump down the throat of what government is and isn't doing right. I think the difference becomes figuring out a new way to get people who love Trump but ignore facts to pay attention to facts. If you still want to vote for him at the end of that analysis, cool. But there's been a big disconnect between what is considered entertainment and what is considered news. And the public no longer cares about the difference so long as they're entertained.

You're in *Outcome*, an upcoming film starring Keanu Reeves. What did you learn from him on set?

He's one of the most tactical actors I've ever worked with. It was masterful to watch him ask questions. You think that now these people that are good at whatever they do, there's nothing else to learn. But he was willing to take direction from co-star and director, Jonah Hill, every step of the way.

The fear is that if I ask the director something, he'll think I'm stupid. But that's not the case at all.

You recently hosted the All-MLB Awards. What can baseball do to increase its cultural relevancy?

Encourage players to play with some flair. The World Baseball Classic gets great ratings, and it's this electric, festive atmosphere. Japanese baseball—that sh-t is like a college football game. Let players bat flip. Let them pimp walk after they strike you out.

Do you have any thoughts on Juan Soto's \$765 million deal with the Mets?

The Mets are either the smartest team in baseball, or they're about to look like the dumbest for a long time. And this is a team that's still paying off Bobby Bonilla.

I don't know where we are right now. We're giving baseball players over half a billion and college football players are staying in college an extra year because they're making more in NIL than they would as a rookie in the NFL. So it's a weird timeline.

In your special, you talk about the importance of understanding cycles of progress and backlash. What do you mean?

The more we can remember history, the more we can look at what's happening now through a larger lens, and be a little bit more predictive of what's coming. So the next time you make progress, then you know how to start building up your reserves to prepare for the backlash.

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