

# TIME 100 CREATORS

THE  
MOST  
INFLUENTIAL  
DIGITAL  
VOICES

Streaming Star

# KAI CENAT



Mel Robbins  
Livvy Dunne  
Khaby Lame  
Joe Rogan  
& 95 more



# TIME Magazine

[July 28th, 2025]

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# How We Chose the 2025 TIME100 Creators

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.



Over the past decade, we've seen a significant shift in how people view institutions and established gatekeepers. The media industry has been no exception, and while our business has been challenged, others have seen increased attention and relevance. Led by changes in consumer behavior that accelerated during the pandemic, digital creators, the entrepreneurs who have built businesses through significant online followings, have

emerged to shape our culture. They are changing what we watch, how we spend our time, what we buy, and how we vote.

Recently, we've expanded the TIME100, the world's most influential community, to include individuals who work in fields that we believe are shaping the future. Today, we release the inaugural [TIME100 Creators list](#), in recognition of how significantly these individuals are changing the way people inform themselves.

The signs of growth are everywhere. In 2024, internet users spent nearly 2½ hours a day on social media. Much of that time was given over to individuals like those on [TIME100 Creators](#). They are among the 67 million content creators globally, forming a multi-hundred-billion-dollar industry where social media creator revenues are growing five times faster than those of traditional media.

You don't need to be in our business to recognize these changes. Just ask any 16-year-old when was the last time they watched something on television. While they scratch their head, throw in a question about [Kai Cenat](#). Like many creators, the 23-year-old streamer with 18 million followers on Amazon-owned Twitch has powerful relationships with millions of people, especially young ones. (It is the nature of our digital world that many others can spend much of their day online without hearing of him.)

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**As we often say**, influence comes in many forms, and it can be for better or for worse. And if any of us can say the wrong thing, for creators the hazard may be made more likely by the constancy with which they communicate. Most of the people on our list face pressure to respond to news, and criticism comes when their comments don't match audiences' expectations. Some of them are polarizing; some of them are delightful—at least for now, until the day they inevitably say something to inflame their followers or those who don't follow them at all.

And they feel that pressure. "Something that I'm noticing within myself, that I just discovered, is I have anxiety," Cenat told Andrew R. Chow for

our new cover story. “I’m always worrying, ‘Oh God, what if things don’t go right?’ I’m scared, I’m scared, I’m scared.” This comes from someone regarded as one of the most successful creators on the planet.

Cenat joins individuals from 15 different countries as part of the 2025 TIME100 Creators. They make a living and reach billions across platforms like YouTube, Twitch, and TikTok where people, especially members of Gen Z, spend huge chunks of time. We also looked at leaders on platforms attracting other audiences, including Instagram, X, LinkedIn, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Substack. We focused primarily on English-language creators. We also selected those who built careers for themselves natively through these digital platforms, rather than carrying them there through success in a previous medium like television or journalism. Led by Lucy Feldman, we polled our correspondents, editors, and contributors, who surveyed sources around the world. We also consulted with our data and insights partner #paid, a creator marketplace, to better analyze the reach, engagement, and businesses these individuals have built.

And, to introduce the inaugural list of creators, earlier this summer, we gathered nine of them—[Alix Earle](#), [Sean Evans](#), [Charli D’Amelio](#), [Hannah Berner](#), [Paige DeSorbo](#), [Tefi Pessoa](#), [Devon Rodriguez](#), [Vivian Tu](#), and [Cyrus Veyssi](#)—at a studio in New York City to create videos for TIME.

“We came away with a better understanding about how each of them thinks,” Feldman says. “They showed us what it takes to break through the noise.”

*Data and insights powered by #paid*

[Buy a copy of the TIME100 Creators issue here](#)

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# The Making of an American Pope

Luscombe is an editor at large at TIME, where she has covered a wide swath of topics but specializes in interviews, profiles, and essays. In 2010, she won the Council on Contemporary Families Media Award for her stories on the ways marriage is changing. She is also author of [\*Marriageology: the Art and Science of Staying Together\*](#).



## The Brief July 1, 2025

**Our cover story, plus updates on Elon Musk and the Trump Administration suing L.A.**

Podcast ID – Short Length: d70482c0-ed2c-4301-b235-1536dfc3dab7

Podcast ID – Long Length: d5aa789a-bb07-44c4-958e-44d97c5222be

“I’m ticked,” says John Prevost, the retired Midwestern high school principal who is now, abruptly and without warning, globally famous and in demand. “I didn’t want to be, but I’m so angry.” He’s sitting at the table of Denise and Rob Utter, who have invited a bunch of people from their local Catholic parish, about 45 minutes south of Chicago, to talk about their friend and John’s kid brother Bob, whom they have known for decades, over pizza. Sometimes they call him Father Bob. Occasionally they remember to call him by his new name, [Pope Leo XIV](#), but it’s unfamiliar to their tongue. One of the guests accidentally calls him Pope Pius.

It’s probably not all fun and games to be the spiritual leader of 1.4 billion people from very different cultures at a time when the Catholic Church is recovering from multiple scandals, riven from within, financially ensnarled, and, especially in the so-called developed nations, wrestling with a growing disinterest in the stuff it does best—ancient ritual, obligatory gathering, biblical exegesis. But it’s also a teensy bit of a drag to be his brother.

Pope Leo XIV, 69, is the person to whom lots of people look when they want to come in contact with God. John Prevost, 71, is the person to whom they look when they want to reach the Pope. His mailbox is inundated. A local accounting firm sent him a 30-page pitch deck on how it would sort out the Vatican’s finances. Another opportunist sent him two baseballs, asking for them to be forwarded to His Holiness, newly anointed as the world’s most famous White Sox fan. “Dear Mr. Prevost, please have your brother sign these baseballs,” the accompanying letter said, according to its recipient. “You can keep one and run a fundraiser.” His mail carrier is sympathetic, advising him to hire someone to handle the paper blizzard.

It’s not just mail. His phone (a landline) rings well into the night. One recent warm day, Prevost was watering his yard when he noticed people at his front door. It was congregants from a now shuttered church in Chicago, St. Adalbert’s. “They had a two-page letter to send to the Pope in the hopes that he will convince the Cardinal to reopen the church—and they were not going to give up,” he says. Even Hollywood is getting in on the act. Prevost has already had a showbiz publicist offer to represent him, and a journalist stop by post-interview to give him tips on what is imprudent to say on live TV—such as his imminent travel plans.

Prevost's travails are one of the many ripple effects of May 8, 2025, when the [conclave](#) made several types of history by handing the papal keys to a recently appointed [American Cardinal](#). Robert Francis Prevost is not only the first [Augustinian](#), the first modern missionary, and the first devotee of Peeps and Hostess Snoballs to occupy the Throne of St. Peter, he's also the first leader from a land where opportunism and entrepreneurship are admired only slightly less than the triune God. America is not used to having a local guy as the driving force of an institution with four times as much history and an even greater capacity to inspire fear and awe. But a deep dive into Pope Leo's education and background shows that either by divine intervention, wise choices, luck, or all three, his path made him uniquely prepared for steering through the choppy waters facing the ancient denomination he now leads.

JULY 28, 2025

# TIME

## THE MAKING OF THE POPE

by BELINDA LUSCOMBE

*Robert (left), Louis, and John,  
with their mother Mildred  
Prevost in Chicago in 1959*



time.com

As recently as three months ago, it was a truth universally acknowledged that there was not going to be a Pope from the U.S. anytime soon. The Americans were too dominant elsewhere, too loud, too confident, too greedy, too obsessed with individual liberties. They venerated the new and the shiny, preferring novel and homegrown faiths to the traditions of Europe or Asia. They were more concerned with LGBTQ rights and the ordination of women than the plight of the poor and dispossessed.

But if ever there were going to be an American Pope, people could have predicted he'd come from the Midwest. "He's Midwestern nice," says Father Paul Galletto, the pastor of St. Paul church in Philadelphia, of the fellow Augustinian he has known since his 20s. "He listens to you. He's pleasant. He's not going to jump in the middle of your conversation, tell you you're wrong. That's a great advantage for him."

Even the much prevailed-upon John Prevost can't stay ticked for long. A few evenings before our dinner party, someone left a package at his doorstep. It was a Wordle cap. (He plays Wordle with his Vatican-based brother every day; he in English, the Pope in Italian.) "And then here comes the card: 'Dear John, in a world where there are so many evil people right now, you are a breath of fresh air, thank you,'" says Prevost. "'We so appreciate your sense of humor and your kind words.' And that changed my attitude. People are watching me, so I'd better not be crabby."

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**It was clear** from very early on where the youngest of Mildred and Louis Prevost's three sons was heading. "The only thing that was in question until eighth grade was, would it be an order priest, or would it be a diocesan priest?" says John. (The former belongs to a brotherhood, while the latter serves a church.) "Nothing was forced on him. That was his decision to make." The family were eager Catholics: his mother, a school librarian, sang in the choir, as did young Robert. They had relatives who were nuns. Before he became a high school principal and district superintendent, Louis, who served in the Navy during World War II, had considered being a priest. His sons' career choices mirrored their father's: Louis, the oldest, named after his dad, went into the Navy. John was a principal of Catholic high schools. And Robert took the path his father might have taken.





Apart from his devotion to the church, and the fact that study came easily to him, Robert was a regular kid, riding his bike around the streets of the south Chicago working-class suburb of Dolton by day, playing flashlight tag by night, and occasionally squeezing the glowing goo out of fireflies and wiping it on an older brother. It didn't seem odd that he occasionally set up a pretend Communion table on the ironing board and gave his family play sacraments. John confirms that even while very young, Robert had a reputation among the neighbors, with one elderly lady telling him as they played in the yard that he'd be Pope one day.

When young men showed an inclination toward entering the priesthood in 1967 Chicago—a city that was Catholic enough that locals identified themselves by their parish rather than their neighborhood—they'd be visited by representatives of the various orders, football-scout style, to see where they might fit in. “I remember sitting around a table each time someone was coming, and they would come, and then everyone would ask questions,” says John Prevost. “We had to sit there and be nice.” The vocational director who persuaded eighth-grade Robert to give the Augustinians a spin was

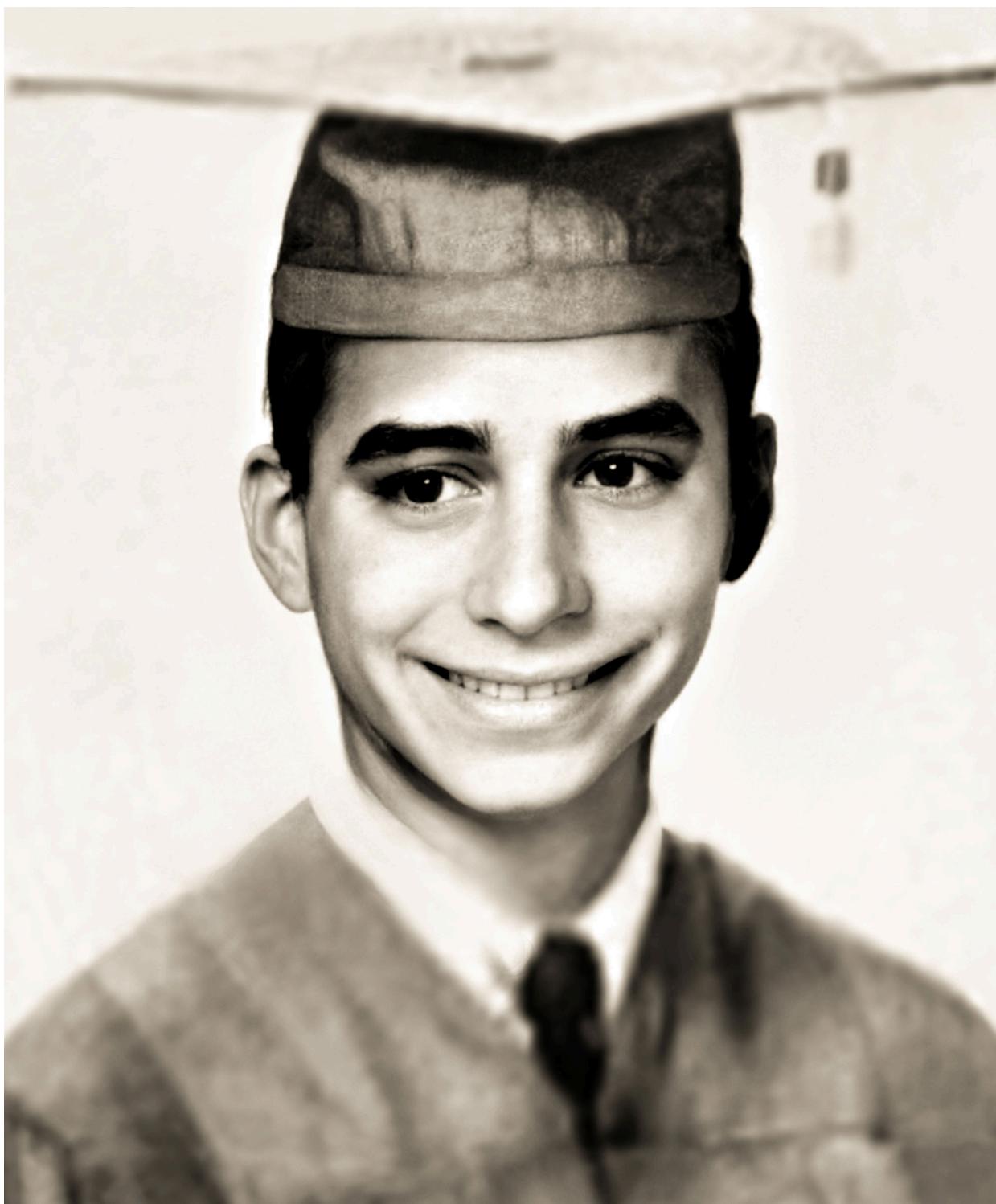
Dudley Day, a Catholic of the old school, whose views were conservative enough that he later parted ways with his local church over a disagreement about modernization.

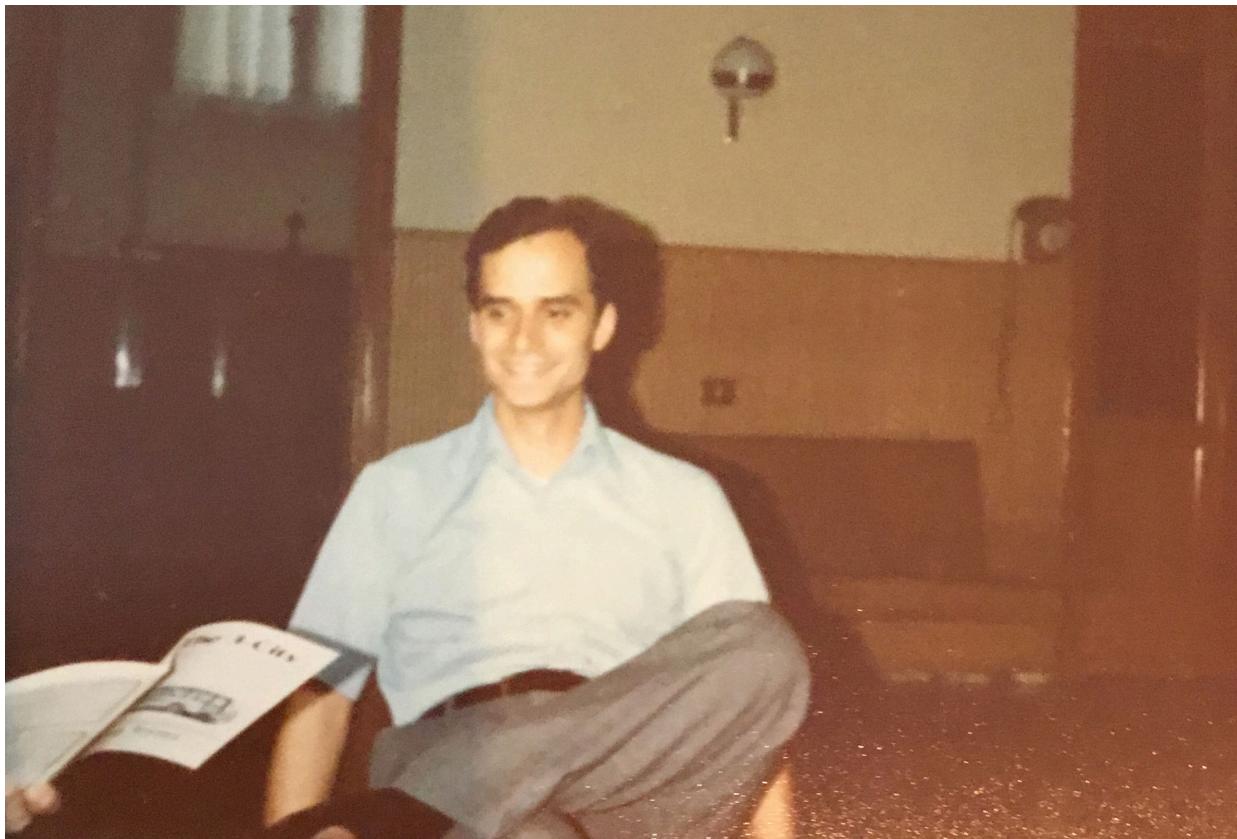


St. Augustine, the minor seminary in Holland, Mich., where Robert Prevost completed his secondary education, was the kind of place that sorted the priests from the merely pious. About 50 boys were accepted every year, and about a dozen graduated four years later. "It was tough; it was rigorous," says Father Becket Franks, who was the year ahead of the future Pope at school. Students were up at 6 a.m. and had scheduled activities until about 8:30 p.m., when they had a few hours of free time before retiring to a large dormitory lined with beds. They attended Mass and two other prayer services a day and had a lot of time in close quarters together.

Prevost, who was co-valedictorian and yearbook editor among other accolades, had a reputation for being a good person to turn to for help with homework, especially math or languages. "He was the smartest person I think we ever met," says Franks, who is now a Benedictine monk and

chaplain. “He had mastered French by the middle of high school.” Students were required to undertake certain extracurricular activities (Prevost was in the choir with Franks—both sing tenor—and played tennis) and to keep up their academic performance, but mostly the school’s focus was how to live in community. “Everything that we went through at St. Augustine Seminary High School prepared Robert Prevost for his position,” says Franks. “Not just education but dealing with people and learning patience and how to behave.”





From Michigan, Prevost went to [Villanova](#), the Augustinian university just outside Philadelphia. It was in Pennsylvania that he really developed his love of driving, which according to two contemporaries, he would do while reading a book. He and three friends once asked Father Bill Sullivan, who oversaw would-be friars, if they could drive to a church dance in Chicago—some 12 hours away—and be back the following afternoon. In January. Their request was declined. “He just was an easy guy to be with,” says Sullivan, now a parochial vicar at St. Jude’s, the church the Utters belong to in New Lenox, Ill. “He made friends. People really listened to him.” Prevost majored in math and minored in philosophy, but it was pretty much the end of his study of anything not directly related to his faith. In September 1977, shortly after he finished his coursework at Villanova, he made the first round of vows to join the Augustinian order.

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**At 22, Robert Prevost** was committing his life to an establishment in the midst of generational change. The Catholic Church of his parents had been altered profoundly by the Second Vatican Council, which released a series of

reports in the mid-'60s, loosening up some of the church's strictures and establishing a series of new procedures and rules that allowed, among other things, Mass to be said in languages that were not Latin and pastoral care for those who are divorced. One result of these changes was a call for a new style of urban and more ecumenical Catholic university. Prevost joined an institution founded on those principles.

The Catholic Theological Union (CTU), housed in the former Aragon Hotel, was a decade old when Prevost arrived. Two dozen or so men's orders studied there, as well as women and laypeople, and the school had female professors and a rabbi on staff. What it didn't have was any students on the way to becoming diocesan priests. (They trained in the more palatial Mundelein Seminary outside Chicago.) The mix of cultures, genders, and orders and the shedding of hierarchy—professors were called by their first names—made it an exciting place to be. "It was, in a certain sense, the best of what religious community can become," says Sister Dianne Bergant, 88, who taught there for 45 years.

Bergant marveled at the opportunities she was given. "This is going to sound like an exaggeration, but I do not ever remember being minimized by my male colleagues because I was a woman," she says. "Women were considered to be theologians in the same way as men." She had Prevost in two classes, Old Testament and Pentateuch, and doesn't remember him at all but can tell from her class notes that he did well and always turned in his assignments on time. Each student had a spiritual director, and Prevost chose Sister Lyn Osiek, who also supervised his theological-reflection class. "Calm and steady," says Osiek. "Those are the two words that I would say about him. It was just like nothing fazed him. He was really a person who was at peace with himself."



At the end of the day students from a religious order went back to the houses of their communities where professors from the order also lived and dined and prayed with them. About a dozen Augustinians lived together in the St. John Stone Friary in Hyde Park, with others coming and going. While it's safe to say it was collegial, it was not one of the party houses. "Sometimes we were invited up to different parts of the building where the other communities were to celebrate various things," says Prevost's classmate [Father Mark Francis](#), now superior general of the Viatorians. "The Passionists, for example, would always have a Kentucky Derby Day. And the Precious Blood always had kegs of beer." Bergant confirms this: "Those Precious Blood men put on good parties."

(The St. John Stone Friary has been in the news over the years because a priest accused of abusing at least 13 minors was allowed to move in there in 2000. A victims' group filed a [complaint](#) with the Vatican in March, alleging that Prevost "endangered the safety" of children by allowing the priest to

live near an elementary school. “To our knowledge, Pope Leo XIV has acted in accordance with Church policies in every abuse case,” the [Archdiocese of Chicago said in a statement](#) in May, “and has consistently expressed his compassion for survivors of this crime and sin.” A lawyer for Midwest Augustinians has suggested the location was selected because of the supervision the priest would receive. The complaint also alleged that Prevost failed to properly handle three women’s claims of sexual abuse while he was bishop in Peru in 2022; the Vatican has said Prevost [followed church protocol](#) and sent the results of an initial investigation to Rome. The Vatican closed its own investigation in August 2023, though the diocese later reopened the case.)

The scholarship at CTU was both rigorous and progressive. One of the required classes, on Christology, had two versions, one taught by a professor trained by Edward Schillebeeckx, the respected Belgian theologian who promulgated the idea that the true role of the Christian was not to ascribe to a certain set of beliefs but to right injustice as Jesus did, and the other trained by the equally respected German theologian Karl Rahner, whose emphasis was on the mystical nature of Christ and thus of all humans.

“We were not trained in a very doctrinaire, rigid kind of theology,” says Francis, who served a stint as CTU’s president. “One of the strengths of the school was the missiological part. The question of religion and culture was very important in terms of how we have to recalibrate things if you’re moving from one group to another, one culture to another.” Many of CTU’s graduates became missionaries, including one of Prevost’s contemporaries, Ezechiele Ramin, who was murdered in 1985 in Brazil as he tried to broker peace between the corporate landowners and the local landless farmers. There is a campaign to have him beatified.

Bishop Daniel Turley, who lived in the Augustinian friary for a few months in the late ’70s, remembers Prevost as being particularly committed to the idea of doing missionary work. In general, the Augustinians are considered a missionary order who teach and preach. [St. Augustine](#) left Europe and moved to North Africa with a handful of other devotees to live out a life saturated by their beliefs while also absorbed in the needs of their neighbors. Augustinians don’t stay in one place like the Benedictines, but move around, bringing their gifts to different places, but always among other Augustinians.

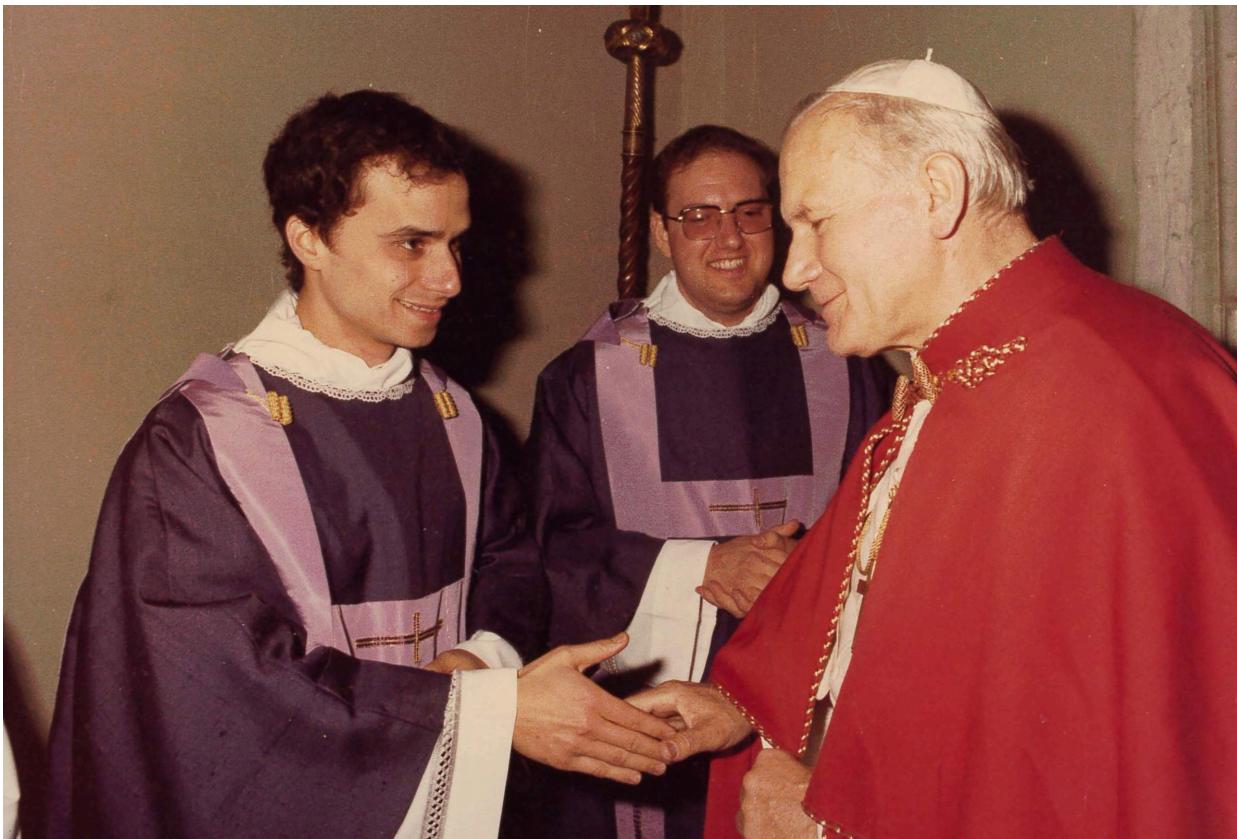
The current Pope once described the order as “brothers and friends whose lives and witness truly make a difference.”

Wherever Prevost has gone, he has been among men who had been trained as he was and committed to sharing everything. Even when he was a Cardinal with his own papal apartment, he went to the Augustinian curia for meals and Mass every day, and once a week to play tennis; he dined there at least twice in the early weeks of his papacy. “He was very interested in what I was doing in Peru,” says Turley, who worked there for 52 years. While other students were heading to their rooms to study, Prevost wanted to talk about what people in Turley’s diocese needed. “Of all of them, he was the most community minded,” says Turley.

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**If Prevost spent** most of his first quarter-century less than 800 miles from his home, the decades that followed would take him quite a bit farther. After he graduated from CTU and took his solemn vows in 1981, he was invited to study canon law in Rome. “Americans had stopped going to study in Rome,” says Galetto, who was one of the first to return. “We thought American theology was better, more modern. It wasn’t based on patristics, but more on psychology and sociology.” When he arrived with Robert Dodaro, his co-valedictorian from way back at high school, neither speaking Italian, Galetto was their guide. [John Paul II](#), now St. John Paul II, had just been elected, a youngish Polish Pope emerging at the same time as Lech Walesa’s Polish trade union, Solidarity. “There was this electric feel,” says Galetto. “Large crowds were coming to the audiences.”

While Prevost was studying a historic and doctrinaire subject, essentially the legal framework for the Catholic Church’s operations, at the Angelicum, a 440-year-old school where John Paul II had also studied, he was surrounded by the excitement of a new era. The Augustinian house was across St. Peter’s Square from the Vatican, and it was filled with men from around the world. Galetto remembers Prevost really enjoying the global nature of the brotherhood. “When you study in Rome, you realize that the church is really universal,” says Galetto. “Many of the Augustinians who are in the United States, we just think that the American problems are the church’s problems, but there’s so much more than that.”



Because of his legal expertise, Prevost was asked to become personal secretary to a bishop in Chulucanas in northern Peru. But he arrived in the aftermath of deadly El Niño floods and set to work helping rebuild the region. “When you’re a missionary, you just learn how to do everything, from electronics to auto mechanics,” said then Cardinal Prevost during a visit to St. Jude’s last year. It was not a seamless process. There might still not have been an American Pope if one of Prevost’s Augustinian brethren hadn’t saved him from being electrocuted with a well-aimed tackle on a roof after the young missionary picked up the wrong two wires.

While Pope Leo owes his formal education almost solely to the northern hemisphere, much of his shaping as a practitioner occurred in Peru. “Those are the life experiences that give you life to continue on, that nourish you,” says Turley, who was Prevost’s superior when he arrived. “As a young priest, to go through that, and see how beautiful it is, how poor people can be, and yet all of the goodness and the power of people when they come together, and the wonderful things that they can do if you start breaking

down prejudices and division.” Prevost said as much at St. Jude’s: “The part of ministry that most shaped my life is Peru.”

After a decade in South America, it must have been quite an adjustment to take on the role of head of his home Augustinian province, which stretches throughout the Midwest and into Canada. One of his duties as provincial prior was to minister to Augustinian schools, and he was called in to help out St. Rita of Cascia High School in Chicago. The students have a retreat every year, and the school likes to invite priests who are unfamiliar to the boys to hear confession so they don’t feel awkward. In 2000, Prevost was one of those priests. “I had gone to confession several times before, but it was like two minutes, let me get out of here as quickly as I can,” says Patrick “PJ” McCarthy. “But this was more of just a conversation.” The two sat knee to knee in the darkened room and talked about underage drinking and sibling rivalry, among other things. “He was not judging me, and he was just very open,” recalls McCarthy. Mike Stawski, who was on the retreat as a student leader, noticed right away that Prevost was different from most priests.

“What was so fascinating about him was that almost immediately, we forgot that he wasn’t with us the whole time. He was so welcoming, so caring for what we were doing.”

After two years, Prevost was voted in as the head, or prior general, of all Augustinians, based again in Rome. He traveled a lot, encouraging the other 2,800 or so Augustinian friars around the world. But priors general can serve only two terms, and in 2013, Prevost found himself back in Chicago, back at CTU, helping guide Augustinians in training, work usually done by much younger men. “It’s like having the CEO of an international organization retire from being CEO, but yet be employed by the organization for passing out mail,” says Bergant, the Old Testament scholar.

If Prevost felt it was a comedown, he said nothing to his friends. That’s the Father Bob the folks of New Lenox talk about, never too busy or too big for his community. After Father Mike Schweifler had a heart transplant on Easter in 2005, the women of St. Jude’s who were looking after him struggled to get his brethren to visit. But Prevost, who was prior general, came several times. “Sometimes he was just on a stopover and he drove here from O’Hare for a few hours or a few minutes,” says Denise Utter. “And then he’d go back to O’Hare, because he had a connecting flight.”



At the same time Prevost's friends want to make clear that he's not overly reverent. He laughed when they showed him *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update" segment about his election on YouTube. When they get together for pizza (he favors mushroom and sausage), "we mostly don't talk about faith-based things at all," says Utter. Lisa Solava and her husband Rich visited Prevost in Rome in 2011, and he took them through a back door to St. Peter's Basilica for Mass so that they emerged right under the altar. "When I walked up that spiral staircase, I looked up and I went, 'Jesus Christ!'" recalls Solava. "And he goes, 'That's a good reaction.'" The current Pope also knows his way around a good clean Midwestern joke, at least according to his brother. One of the last jokes he told [Pope Francis](#) was about going to the doctor because his arm hurt in two places, says John Prevost. "And the Pope said, 'Really? What did the doctors say?' And Bob said, 'Doctors told me: Don't go to those places.'"

Prevost's return to Chicago also turned out to be something of a stopover, because in 2014, Francis, whom Prevost had met when the [late Pontiff](#) was still Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, asked him to return

to Peru, this time as bishop of Chiclayo, a large metropolis in the north. The diocese was dominated by clerics who were members of Opus Dei, a very conservative sect of Catholicism, and Prevost, who had to become a Peruvian citizen to become a bishop, was charged with moving it back to the middle. “So you had some resistance to the new bishop,” says Turley. “But those [Opus Dei adherents] who were in control quickly lost control, because the people really wanted someone who was open and welcoming.”

The challenges weren’t only from within the church. “Right after he became a bishop, we had the tremendous problem of Venezuela,” says Turley, who oversaw the Catholic Church’s response to the 1.5 million asylum seekers accepted into Peru after the Venezuelan economy and civil society began to collapse in 2014. They needed housing, jobs, and medical help. “One of the best bishops to work with in dealing with migrants was none other than Bishop Robert Prevost,” says Turley. “His diocese was so well organized to take care of them.”

The combination of Prevost’s formal but reformist education and long fieldwork among people with very little but each other to insulate them from hardship was perhaps what drew Pope Francis to swiftly raise his standing at the Vatican as the Pontiff saw the dying of the light. In *Hope*, Francis’ last book, he wrote that for the church to grow, it had to focus less on conversion and more on attracting people through the way Christians lived, and therefore for high-ranking church officials, “the title of ‘servant’—here in the sense of ministry—should obscure that of ‘eminence.’”



In 2023, Prevost was made a Cardinal and moved back to Vatican City, working in successively more prominent roles, until the announcement of his election in May. “He’s been formed in the kind of church that is forward-thinking, missionary in its outlook, globally aware, and then, especially in Peru, very deeply formed by his accompaniment of people who were the poorest,” says Sister Barbara Reid, the current president of CTU. “You can hear it in everything he says.”

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**For many, it** can be hard to believe the Catholic Church has any relevance today. All those ornate empty buildings with men in robes waving smoke around elderly congregants, preaching homilies with references to activities as quaint as shepherding and sowing, and praying to dead saints whose miracles are now forgotten or considered dubious. The first American Pope officially comes from the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, which seems almost as fantastical as coming from the Gladden Fields of Middle Earth. The church of his childhood, St. Mary of the Assumption, is abandoned, its stained-glass windows (one displaying the papal keys) uncontemplated.

But every time one expression of faith dies, a new one seems to rise up offering something more in keeping with the needs of the era. History records the first Pope Leo as an adept diplomat; he's credited with persuading Attila the Hun not to sack Rome. The current Pope Leo has already offered Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky a place to negotiate. In the wake of the U.S. bombing of Iran, he urged world leaders to "stop the tragedy of war before it becomes an irreparable abyss."

When Galetto saw his fellow Augustinian [step onto the balcony](#), he paused for a moment to reflect on the mysterious ways of the universe. "We started at the same place 40 years ago. Here I am stapling papers together at a parish because we're having a prayer service," he says, "and he's going to be talking to Putin about the war in Ukraine. God had a plan for him, and God had a plan for me."

Bob Prevost might never climb behind the wheel of a car again. But Pope Leo might be able to drive something. Already inquiries about becoming an Augustinian novitiate are up fivefold from last year. Augustinian websites have been flooded with traffic. And another type of visitor has been showing up on John Prevost's doorstep: people who feel that an American Pope is a sign. "Because of my brother, they are going back to the church," says the older Prevost. "They say, 'I've been away for a long time. And I'd like to come back.'"

## **Correction, July 1**

*The original version of this story misspelled the last name of two of Pope Leo XIV's friends. It is Solava, not Salva.*

## **Correction, July 2**

*The original version of this story misstated how often students at St. Augustine Seminary High School gathered for Mass, as well as the years Becket Franks attended the high school. Along with two other prayer services, Mass was held once a day, not three times. Franks was one year ahead of Robert Prevost, not one year behind.*

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# The Hidden War Over Ukraine's Lost Children

Shuster is a senior correspondent at TIME. He covers international affairs, with a focus on Russia and Ukraine. For his first book, *The Showman*, he reported inside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's compound in Kyiv as the Russian invasion unfolded.



Vladimir Putin could not make out the names of the missing children that appeared on the screen in front of him. They were printed in tiny letters, 339 in all, each representing a child abducted from the war zone in Ukraine and, according to authorities in Kyiv, forcibly taken to Russia. [Putin](#) had never been confronted with the list in public, and he showed no particular interest in reading it.

It was June 4, a warm day in Moscow, exactly three years, three months, and 11 days since Putin ordered the [invasion of Ukraine](#). In keeping with the habit of reclusiveness that he has cultivated during the war, the Russian President convened a meeting of his aides and ministers that day via video call. Their somber faces appeared in little boxes on his screen, while Putin sat at his desk alone.

They had a lot on their agenda. Three days earlier, the war had spilled across the breadth of Russia as the Ukrainians smuggled a fleet of cheap drones across the border and used them to attack several military airfields, damaging or destroying Russian warplanes worth billions of dollars. The next day, Ukraine and Russia held another round of [peace talks](#) in Istanbul. Putin now wanted to know how they had gone, and he called on his lead negotiator, [Vladimir Medinsky](#), to give the highlights. About two minutes into his report, Medinsky reached for the list of children he had received from the Ukrainians in Istanbul.

“These so-called kidnapped children,” he said. “They were saved by our soldiers, evacuated under fire.” Leafing through the list of names, he added, “We’ll have to figure out how many of them are here with us.” Putin gave no response, and the meeting moved on to other issues. Outside of Russia, the abduction of these children is widely seen as a war crime. For the Kremlin, it did not seem like an urgent matter.

Indeed, over the past few months, the children’s fate has been pushed to the edges of the peace process, intensifying fears across Ukraine that they may never come home. The longer they remain in Russia, the more difficult it will be to return and reintegrate them, as the effect of [Russian propaganda](#) and indoctrination takes hold over time. In one case, an 11-year-old boy named Serhii refused to speak to his relatives in Ukraine after spending only a few months in Russian foster care. “They completely brainwashed him,” his older sister, Kseniia Koldin, told me after she managed to bring him home. “They convinced him that Ukraine had been destroyed, that he would starve if he went back.”

JULY 28, 2025

# TIME

## THE KIDNAPPINGS

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN  
WERE TAKEN FROM UKRAINE  
BY RUSSIAN FORCES.  
THE FIGHT TO GET THEM BACK

by  
**SIMON SHUSTER**



time.com

Since the start of the war, about 1,200 of the abducted children have returned to Ukraine, thanks mostly to the dogged efforts of their relatives and humanitarian aid organizations. Ukraine's envoys in Istanbul asked the Russians to return an additional 339 of them, hoping the Kremlin would see it as a simple way to build trust and show goodwill in the peace talks. But, in total, the authorities in Kyiv say 19,546 children still need to be returned.

An independent research group at Yale University has spent the past three years tracking them through Russian news reports, public databases, and posts on social media, identifying more than 8,400 children who have been "systematically relocated" from Ukraine. The [Trump Administration](#), as part of its broader suspension of foreign aid, cut off funding to the program in March; it has continued operating with help from private donors.

**Read More:** [\*Trump's New Hard Line on Putin is Softer Than it Looks\*](#)

In a statement published shortly after the suspension of aid, the U.S. State Department said [President Donald Trump](#) would continue to work with Russia and Ukraine "to help make sure those children were returned home." But some U.S. diplomats have urged Ukraine not to make the cease-fire talks with Russia conditional on the children's return. "You can't set conditions if you want to move forward," one of them told me this spring. "And Trump wants to move fast."

Still, in his talks with Trump over the past few months, President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly brought up the missing children, as have lawmakers on Capitol Hill. A bipartisan group of Senators proposed a resolution in May calling for the return of all Ukrainian children before any peace deal with Russia is finalized. "We wanted to make sure that it was a part of the discussions," says Senator Roger Wicker, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who co-sponsored the resolution. "Vladimir Putin should be in prison with the other notorious war criminals of history," Wicker told me. "And it's a shame that we are not coming down on him as forcefully as we should."

So far, the strongest pressure on Putin to return the children has come from the Hague. In March 2023, about a year into the Russian invasion, the International Criminal Court issued an [arrest warrant](#) against Putin for the

“unlawful transfer” of Ukrainian children to Russia. As an indicted war criminal, Putin faces the risk of arrest whenever he travels to one of the 125 countries that recognize the jurisdiction of the ICC, including all of South America, nearly all of Europe, and roughly half of Africa.

One of Putin’s longtime associates in Moscow told me the indictment continues to irk the Russian President: “Of course it’s not comfortable for him, to put it mildly, to have these restrictions, threats of arrest, and so on.” But he has gotten used to the isolation, and he feels no urgency to act on any of Ukraine’s demands. “He could spit on the Hague. He might give the children back as part of some humanitarian exchange. He’s not Stalin. But honestly it’s just not a high priority.”

In Russian state media, the adoption and re-education of Ukrainian children is often portrayed as an act of charity and patriotism. The Kremlin commissioner for children’s rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, bragged in a televised meeting with Putin in 2023 that she had herself adopted a teenage boy from Ukraine. “It’s thanks to you,” she told Putin. (The only other Russian official indicted by the ICC is Lvova-Belova, who faces the same war-crimes charges as Putin.)



**Read More:** [\*How One Group Reunites Ukrainian Children With Their Families—and Their Identities\*](#)

During their recent talks in Istanbul, Putin's envoys at least acknowledged the issue of the missing children and promised to address it. "We will work on every one of the names in this list," Medinsky, the lead Russian negotiator, said after the talks on June 2. But he could not resist taking a jab at the Ukrainians for demanding their children back. He compared the effort to a scene from *Wag the Dog*, in which a Hollywood producer helps the White House invent a war. The producer, played by Dustin Hoffman, at one point creates a fake video of a girl running through the ruins of the fabricated war.

"If you want to get people crying, show them a lost child, ideally one holding a kitten," Medinsky said. "So that's what they're showing us."

Of all the children on the list Putin saw, perhaps the best-documented case is that of Margarita Prokopenko, who was only a few months old when the Russian invasion began. Abandoned at birth by her mother, Margarita was the youngest of several dozen children living in a home for orphans and kids with disabilities in the city of [Kherson](#). In early March 2022, Russian troops overran that city and installed a puppet government to run it. Many of those who showed open resistance to the occupation were arrested or killed.

A member of the Russian parliament, Igor Kastyukevich, soon arrived from Moscow to help cement the Kremlin's control, and he began making frequent visits to the orphanage that spring. Kastyukevich, who represents Putin's political party, would often arrive in the company of armed men, dressed in camouflage, and bring food and other supplies for the children, according to videos he posted online to document the visits. Early that fall, Kastyukevich and other Russian officials began taking the children away, they said, to ensure their safety. Margarita, the youngest, was among the first.



According to Ukrainian investigators, the girl ended up in the custody of a prominent Putin ally named Sergei Mironov, who has been a fixture of Russia's ruling elite for over a quarter century. When we first met in Moscow in 2010, Mironov served as chairman of the upper house of parliament, representing Fair Russia, one of the sham opposition parties that the Kremlin uses to create the illusion of competitive politics. With the start of the invasion in 2022, Mironov dropped that charade and became one of the shrillest cheerleaders for Putin and the war.

His tirades against Ukraine stood out for their bloodthirsty rhetoric. "Let us destroy all of the infrastructure of Nazi Ukraine once and for all," he wrote on his website in October 2022. Around that time, Putin took formal steps to [annex Kherson](#) and three other frontline regions of Ukraine. Kastyukovich, who oversaw the removal of the children from the orphanage, then became Kherson's representative in the Russian parliament.



It remains unclear exactly how Margarita ended up in the care of Mironov in Moscow. But a BBC investigation found in 2023 that the politician's wife

Inna Varlamova made multiple trips to Kherson to see the girl before her abduction, including at the hospital where Margarita received treatment for bronchitis during the Russian occupation of the city. The BBC obtained documents showing that upon her arrival in Russia, the girl was issued a new birth certificate, which listed her name as Marina Mironova, after her adoptive father in Moscow.

Mironov has not denied taking the girl into his home. In a post on social media, he responded to the BBC report with characteristic vitriol, calling it “another fake hysteria” created by Ukraine’s intelligence agencies and their “curators” in the West. “They have one goal in all this,” he wrote. “To crudely and personally discredit everyone who takes an uncompromisingly patriotic position.” Reached by TIME through his spokeswoman in Moscow, Mironov declined to comment further. He did not respond to specific questions about Margarita.

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The Russian occupation of Kherson did not last long. In early November 2022, about two months after the children were taken from the city’s orphanage, Ukrainian forces drove the Russians out. Zelensky soon went to raise the flag in front of city hall, and he invited me to join him for the ceremony. Kherson and its suburbs had been devastated in the fighting, much of the infrastructure damaged or destroyed. “They cut off all the power, all lines of communication,” the President told me during the trip. “We need to restore all that as soon as possible.”

The mood among the people of Kherson worried Zelensky just as much. They had been subjected to nine months of relentless Russian propaganda, which depicts the government in Kyiv as a band of fascist thugs. Curriculums in schools had been changed to convey the same message, and Zelensky feared it had taken hold. “I’m shocked by the force of this information, the sickness of it.” He worried that the older children could be recruited into the Russian military or, as he put it, “dragged into the war against us.”

## Where the kids were taken

*Each dot represents a facility where young Ukrainians abducted by Russia are being held. They make up a network of 136 boarding schools, hotels, hospitals, and summer camps*



Source: Save Ukraine, Hala Systems, Planet Labs PBC

On the train back to Kyiv, the President and his team worked on a set of 10 demands for ending the war. They called it the Peace Formula, and its fourth point called for the return of all Ukrainian children. “We know by name 11,000 children who were forcibly deported to Russia,” he said in a speech on Nov. 15, 2022, the day after our trip to Kherson. “Among them are many whose parents were killed by Russian strikes, and now they are being held in the state that murdered them.”

In total, around 1.6 million Ukrainian children are now living in parts of Ukraine that Russia has occupied. They are exposed to Kremlin propaganda in schools, on state-run media, and programs devoted to “patriotic education.” According to the Yale research program, which is run out of its School of Public Health, the kids selected for transfer to Russia tend to be among the most vulnerable, like orphans living in group homes. The researchers found that many of the children were taken from frontline regions of Ukraine and placed in temporary shelters before being assigned to Russian foster families; military transport planes were sometimes used to take the children to Russia.

For Ukraine, the permanent loss of these children would deepen a looming demographic crisis. Since the start of the [Russian invasion](#), the population of Ukraine has collapsed from around 41 million people to 32 million, according to official statistics. A U.N. report published last year projected that, by the end of this century, Ukraine would only have 15 million residents. The main drivers of this decline will be knock-on effects from the war, which has killed or wounded hundreds of thousands of men and led millions of women and children to flee as refugees.

All of that adds to the sense of urgency Ukrainians feel in bringing their children home. Last year, Zelensky assigned this mission to one of his close aides, Daria Zarivna, who was born and grew up in Kherson, not far from the emptied orphanage. When we met in March, she said she was especially troubled by the case of Margarita. The statements of the girl's adoptive father in Moscow made it clear she would be raised in an atmosphere of hatred toward her homeland. "If we don't get these kids back soon," Zarivna told me, "the Russian system will succeed in turning them against us."



In December, Zarivna got a chance to tell Margarita's story at the U.N. Arriving in New York City, she carried a folder of documents related to her case, including copies of Margarita's original birth certificate and the new one issued in Russia. As Zarivna went over a draft of her speech, she got word that Russia was trying to block her appearance. "They used every possible lever," she says. Russia's delegates said Zarivna did not have the accreditation needed to address the chamber. The U.S. insisted on giving her the floor, and footage of her speech went viral in Ukraine that day. But it was the Russian reaction that resonated most. "Kherson Children's Home, just one case of many," Zarivna said before turning to the Russians in the room. "You know where our children exactly are," she told them. The representative of Moscow, a young diplomat named Roman Kashaev, looked up from his desk, cracked a smile, and began to laugh.

A few months later, Zelensky arrived in Washington for a meeting with Trump in the Oval Office. Their agenda was packed. The White House wanted Zelensky to hand over the rights to Ukraine's natural resources, particularly its rare earth minerals. The deal was meant to give Trump an economic rationale for continuing to support Ukraine. Zelensky, for his part, wanted to talk about Trump's efforts to negotiate with Putin, and the conditions Ukraine wanted to set for the peace process.

At the start of their meeting on Feb. 28, Zelensky brought up the missing children. He explained to Trump how the Russians changed their names and placed them with Russian families. "We want to bring them back," Zelensky said. "It's a big dream, task and goal for me." A few minutes later, as Trump began taking questions from reporters, the meeting grew tense, then angry. The two leaders ended up yelling at each other, arguing over the leverage Ukraine has in the peace talks. "You don't have the cards," Trump said. "With us you start having cards."

**Read More:** [Exclusive: Zelensky on Trump, Putin, and the Endgame in Ukraine](#)

After the argument, Zelensky was asked to leave the White House, and the U.S. froze all aid to Ukraine, including weapons and intelligence. The flow of assistance resumed only after March 11, when envoys from the U.S. and [Ukraine](#) held talks in [Saudi Arabia](#). "The Ukrainians made very clear that this isn't just about ending a war," Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who led the U.S. delegation, told reporters after those talks. "They need to get their prisoners of war back; they need to get the children back."

Nonetheless, Ukraine consented to the U.S. plan for a cease-fire with no preconditions. The following week, news broke that the U.S. government had stopped funding the Yale program that tracks children abducted into Russia. Ukraine's allies in Washington were outraged. "This data is absolutely crucial to Ukraine's efforts to return their children home," a bipartisan group of U.S. Congressmen wrote in a letter to Rubio. Speaking later to the press, Rubio promised the U.S. would secure all the data Yale researchers had collected on the missing children and make it accessible to other parties. But the program "is not funded," Rubio said. "It was part of the reductions that were made."

A few days later, I asked [Zelensky](#) how he felt about this move, and his face showed a mix of sadness and frustration. Weighing his words, he told me it was “regrettable” for the [Trump Administration](#) not to stand more firmly with Ukraine on the matter of the missing children. “I think they want to show that they are in the middle,” he told me. “That means they can get behind Ukraine’s suggestions, or they can get behind those of Russia. They are demonstrating that.”

Still, at every round of peace talks, Zelensky insisted that Ukraine would continue to demand the return of its children. Even after his argument with Trump in the Oval Office, he continues to raise the matter in their phone calls. “We have talked about the children, how to get them back,” Zelensky told me in his office in Kyiv. “There are really big obstacles. There are children who lost their parents, but they have a grandmother waiting for them here.”

He refuses to think of them as prisoners of war, even if that status might make the children eligible for some kind of swap with the Russians. “It cannot be a trade,” Zelensky says, “because we don’t live in some other century. It’s not like buying them out of slavery.”

In his view, the only way to win the kids back would be through an international campaign to force Putin’s hand, whether through sanctions against Russia, military support for Ukraine, or criminal charges like the ones Putin faces in the Hague. “The question comes down to the will of certain leaders, who can simply put pressure on Putin to return the children,” Zelensky says. “Trump is one of them. There’s no other way.”

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# The ‘Big Beautiful Bill’ Is Massively Unpopular and Democrats Plan to Keep It That Way

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



**The Brief July 2, 2025**

**The ‘Big, Beautiful Bill’ is massively unpopular, Trump debates deporting Musk, July 4 protests, and more**

Podcast ID – Short Length: 3d9014cc-9218-44bc-bb46-19842005d0d7

Podcast ID – Long Length: fd5f5499-b19e-4fda-b0fb-582816a4dca2

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

In the end, Democrats were unable to stop Republicans from getting their [tax-cuts-and-spending plan](#) across the finish line on Tuesday. But, in conversations with strategists close to the Democratic leaders, they had a pretty clever consolation spin: this bill is the most [hated](#) piece of major legislation since at least 1990, and Republicans have no plan to fix that.

GOP strategists seemed to understand the buzzkilling buzzsaw they were marching toward with a grim sense of inevitability. Even then, there was still no guarantee the House would accept the Senate's rewrite of their work.

[video id=lwH7qRBI]

Fiscal conservatives hated the massive spending and budget trickery. Centrists despised the deep cuts to programs for the poor and elderly. Parochial lawmakers did not realize until the eleventh hour that subsidies for wind and solar energy would hit their states hard, plus an industry-killing hidden [tax](#) on those clean-energy sectors [seemed](#) to come from [nowhere](#), before getting [scrapped](#). And the pragmatists were watching the GOP's biggest donor, Elon Musk, [threaten](#) everyone who voted for it with a primary challenge *and* throwing his money toward a new third party. (True to form, President Donald Trump on Tuesday [threatened](#) to deport the South African-born American citizen for his disloyalty.)

Add onto that pile of worry the polling that shows a majority of the American public doesn't want anything to do with it. Quinnipiac University's [poll](#), released last week, showed 55% of voters opposing it, with just 29% backing it. Among Republicans, support was a shockingly low 67%.

For context, the same pollsters [found](#) in 2009 that the bill now known as Obamacare had the opposition of 44% of all voters before it passed, and 40% backing it.

A professor at George Washington University went back through the polling data on divisive legislation dating to 1990; [nothing](#) compares to what just cleared the Senate.

Democrats did not win this fight. But they certainly made sure that the external pressures to their colleagues across the aisle became toxic. The internal squabbling among Republicans kept lawmakers on the Senate floor voting for 27 hours and reflected the trouble they know is heading their way if Trump signs this into law. Among Republican strategists, there is no clear answer how to explain these votes or to make them popular. “I’m all ears if you have an idea,” one replied to a message sent Tuesday morning before the vote cleared.

As things settled down after the vote, House Democrats’ official campaign arm circulated a strategy memo about the 2026 midterms, outlining a plan to keep the consequences of the bill in the headlines for the next 16 months.

The megabill extends the first-term Trump tax cuts, rolls back clean-energy programs from the Biden era and beefs up immigration enforcement while increasing the national debt by trillions. The deep cuts to [Medicaid](#) and food-stamp programs are expected to hurt voters in spades, and advocates were already worrying that the spill-over effects would endanger everything from rural health centers to food centers for poor Americans to nursing home and home-health services. Congress’ scorekeeper said almost 12 million Americans would lose health care as a result of these cuts. And the spending cuts are mostly in service of tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, while leaving those at the other end of the spectrum holding the bag.

By the time Senate Majority Leader John Thune was celebrating getting to a 51-50 vote, it was clear Republicans had turned themselves inside out. House members who walked the plank to back it—at least on the first vote—announced they were not seeking re-election. (G’day, [Rep. Don Bacon](#) of Nebraska.) Colleagues who stuck to their guns and opposed it became targets of a White House led by their own party. (G’luck, [Rep. Thomas](#)

Massie of Kentucky.) And at least one of the three Senators who couldn't stomach voting for it decided to pack it up and head home rather than face an impossible route to another term given primary- and general-election landmines of their own making. (Safe travels, [Sen. Thom Tillis](#) of North Carolina.)

Holdouts like Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mike Lee of Utah, and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming all got to yes. Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Rand Paul of Kentucky did not.

But, man, this was messy. It might not be over, given both chambers have to pass matching legislation before Trump can sign it into law. Republicans in the House have already sounded off that they would take a red sharpie to the Senate's version. If the sticking points become intractable, someone—namely Trump—may have to step in with a bullhorn and a bullying menace. And there's no telling what a wronged Trump can do when he settles on proper retribution for anyone who dared impede his victory lap.

It's rare for legislation like this to advance even as everyone in Washington understands it to be a political drag. Democrats, in a coordinated and careful way, found specific examples of how the cuts would hurt constituencies key to the Democratic Party as well as Republicans. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer held their caucuses together with discipline that has been rare since November. The messaging was clear and, more importantly, it worked. Efforts by Trump and other GOP leaders to tout this legislation have gotten the party nowhere. Now the bill is one painful step closer to getting to Trump's desk.

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# China Opens Up to More Tourists as the U.S. Under Trump Closes Itself Off

Jeyaretnam is an editorial fellow at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. She covers general news around the world.



As the U.S. under President Donald Trump increasingly closes itself off from the world, denying entry to some tourists amid a crackdown on border controls and migration, its geopolitical rival China, which has long been known for its relative isolation, has loosened its travel restrictions to unprecedented levels.

By July 16, China will have expanded visa-free entry to 75 countries as part of a broader campaign to boost inbound tourism, which has already seen a

surge. Last year, over 20 million foreigners visited China without a visa, doubling that of the previous year, according to China's National Immigration Administration. Shanghai alone [received 2.6 million overseas visits](#) in the first half of this year, around half of which were visa-free entries, a 45% year-on-year increase. China has been steadily pushing for more people to visit since reopening its borders in early 2023, after its [“Zero-COVID” policies](#) appeared for a time as though they might [drive the country](#) into a [lasting isolation](#).

It's also part of China's effort to boost its soft power, especially at a time when the Trump Administration appears to be withdrawing the U.S. from the global stage. In recent months, Trump has [moved](#) to restrict [international students](#) from the U.S., [impose sweeping tariffs](#) on the rest of the world, and [shutter USAID](#), while [reports](#) of tourists being [detained](#) or [denied entry](#) by Immigration and Customs Enforcement have [deterred](#) some from visiting the U.S.

China's response to U.S. actions—including the [targeting of Chinese international students](#) and [U.S. intervention](#) in the [Israel-Iran War](#)—has been relatively restrained, signalling the country's desire to maintain cordial diplomatic ties to the U.S., especially amid [trade negotiations](#), while also advocating for multilateralism like never before.

The U.S. has “demonstrated its military capabilities, its commitment to allies, and its influence in crisis management” through Trump’s [efforts](#) to [broker](#) peace deals [around the world](#), at times wielding the threat of force, but “these are not the metrics by which China measures its global role,” says Lin Jing, a research fellow at the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore. “Instead, China continues to showcase its consistency and stability, its non-aligned posture, and its support for a U.N.-centered international order.”

“There’s recognition that when you don’t have people-to-people exchanges, you lose an important bulwark against populist rhetoric on both sides,” David Weeks, co-founder and chief operating officer of Sunrise International, a consulting firm that advises overseas universities on recruiting Chinese students, [previously told TIME](#). “China thinks that we need more, not less, exchange if we have disagreements.”

In May, Chinese Ambassador Xie Feng emphasized the importance of people-to-people exchanges to U.S.-China relations, just as the U.S. announced enhanced screenings of student visa applicants from China and Hong Kong. “It is people-to-people ties that invigorate China-U.S. relations,” he [said](#) at his embassy. “We warmly welcome all American friends to travel in China, shop in China, succeed in China and take part in Chinese modernisation. Come and see the country with your own eyes.”

Inbound tourism could also help to rejuvenate China’s domestic economy, which the Chinese government has [prioritized](#) to mitigate against the worst effects of Trump’s tariffs as well as high [youth unemployment](#) and a [persistent real estate crisis](#). China is [opening](#) more duty-free shops around the country in an effort to bolster spending within the country. Meanwhile, Chinese businesses, like [‘Labubu’ toy retailer Pop Mart](#), have [gained global popularity](#), boosting China’s [soft power](#) and interest around the world in visiting the country.

Here’s what to know.

## What are China’s new visa-free rules

Much of Europe, Asia, and parts of the Middle East are able to travel to China without a visa.

China began expanding its visa-free scheme after reopening its borders in 2023 after inbound travel plummeted during the pandemic. The country [saw](#) just 14 million visitors in 2023 as compared to 32 million in 2019.

Since then, Beijing has [introduced or resumed visa-free entry](#) for visitors from nearly every European country, including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and most Asian countries, including Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea. Citizens of five Latin American countries—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay—and Uzbekistan were [added](#) to the scheme in June. Four countries in the Middle East—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia—were also [granted](#) visa-free entry last month. Azerbaijan will [become](#) eligible on July 16, bringing the total to 75. (By

comparison, nationals from 42 countries have visa-free access to the U.S. for tourism or business stays up to 90 days under the [Visa Waiver Program](#).)

China's scheme allows citizens of eligible countries to enter without a visa for up to 30 days.

"Our inbound tourism has already recovered to 70 to 80 per cent of pre-Covid levels. It could be fully recovered this year," James Liang, chairman of China's leading online travel service Ctrip, [reportedly told](#) Shanghai-based outlet The Paper. "There are still some bottlenecks to be addressed. If they are tackled, China's inbound tourism could reach the world's top tier in 10 or 20 years."

China has also [expanded its transit policy](#) that allows travellers from 55 countries to enter China without a visa for 10 days if they then depart for a different country from where they came. The transit policy includes 10 countries that are not part of the visa-free scheme: Canada, the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico, Russia, Sweden, the U.K., Ukraine, and the U.S.

China is also aiming to [open up Xinjiang](#)—the Uyghur autonomous region that is under Western sanctions over [human-rights concerns](#)—to more domestic and foreign tourists. Earlier this year, local officials announced goals of bringing in at least 400 million annual visits to the region by 2030.

## Travel to the U.S. falls

China's opening up is happening against a backdrop of the U.S. tightening its visa rules.

Trump has targeted international students in his [crackdown](#) on universities across the U.S. His punitive moves have included attempting to [remove Harvard's ability](#) to enroll international students, [targeting foreign-born students](#) for removal from the country, and quietly revoking the visas of thousands of international students (before [reversing](#) the move). He's also heightened screening requirements for student visa applicants—especially

those from China—including requiring applicants [make their social media accounts “public” for vetting](#).

During his 2024 campaign, Trump also [vowed to reinstate his travel ban](#) on travellers from Muslim countries, and in June he [announced a new travel ban](#) on nationals from 12 countries and tightened restrictions on nationals from seven more. And he is [reportedly](#) considering adding 36 countries to the travel ban list.

Several countries have issued advisories about travelling to the U.S., including China, which [advised](#) its citizens to “fully assess the risks” before travelling to the U.S. because of “the deterioration in China-U.S. trade relations and the domestic security situation in the U.S.”

Some European countries, including the U.K. and Germany, [issued warnings](#) after multiple European travellers were detained at the U.S. border, some for weeks. Others, including Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, [cautioned](#) transgender and nonbinary travellers about U.S. travel after Trump issued an executive order recognizing only two sexes, and several states have targeted trans people. Canada, too, [warned](#) its citizens about potential delays, denial of entry, and device seizures. Some Canadians have also [launched a travel boycott](#) of the U.S., after Trump repeatedly threatened to use “economic force” to [make Canada the 51st state](#) of the U.S.

Overseas travel to the U.S. has dropped 2.5% through April this year as compared to a year ago, Bloomberg [reported](#), with the largest drop of 10% happening in March after Trump announced tariffs on Canada, China, and Mexico. The World Travel & Tourism Council [estimates](#) that the U.S. will lose out on \$12.5 billion from tourism this year, although some suggest the [shortfall could be as high as \\$29 billion](#).

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# The Surprising Reason Rural Hospitals Are Closing

Semuels is a senior economics correspondent at TIME. She covers work, consumer spending, retail, gender, and technology. She is a four-time finalist for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism, and she has won awards from the Society of Business Editors and Writers and the Los Angeles Press Club.



**The Brief July 2, 2025**

## **The ‘Big, Beautiful Bill’ is massively unpopular, Trump debates deporting Musk, July 4 protests, and more**

Podcast ID – Short Length: 3d9014cc-9218-44bc-bb46-19842005d0d7

Podcast ID – Long Length: fd5f5499-b19e-4fda-b0fb-582816a4dca2

THOMASVILLE, ALA.—Thomasville Regional Medical Center was supposed to be a gamechanger. Situated in the U.S. Congressional district with the worst health outcomes in the country, the hospital opened in 2020 with state-of-the art equipment, including a 3D mammogram and an MRI scanner. But it closed less than five years later in Sept. 2024.

The hospital now stands empty: its pristine hallways dark, its expensive machines gathering dust. “It’s almost like the apocalypse happened,” says Sheldon Day, the mayor of Thomasville, who had worked for almost a decade to get a hospital to open there.

This apocalypse is happening throughout rural communities across the country. [More than 100 rural hospitals](#) have closed in the past decade, according to the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform (CHQPR), a national policy center that works to improve health care payment systems and whose data have been cited by the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#). About one-third of all rural hospitals in the country are at risk of closing because of financial problems. In Alabama, 23 rural hospitals—about half of all of them in the state—are at immediate risk of closing, according to CHQPR.

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Even more rural hospitals might be in trouble if Congress passes the huge piece of legislation before it, called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which includes significant cuts that would slash Medicaid spending in rural areas by \$119 billion over 10 years, [according to KFF](#). Thom Tillis, the U.S. Senator from North Carolina who said he couldn’t support the bill in its current form, said in a [statement](#) on June 28 that Congress needed to achieve the tax cuts and spending in the bill “without hurting our rural communities and hospitals.”

## Why rural hospitals are closing

People often blame rural hospital closures on poor reimbursement rates from Medicare and Medicaid. There's a reason for that assumption: Just about every hospital loses money on Medicaid and Medicare, since reimbursement rates are low nationwide. But hospitals like the one in Thomasville are struggling not because they serve a large share of poor patients or elderly people on these plans.

"When you look at the data, what you see is that Medicare and Medicaid are not the problem," says Harold Miller, president and CEO of CHQPR. "The problem is private insurers."

Rural hospitals depend on private insurers for the majority of their patient costs, Miller says. In Alabama, for instance, [CHQPR's data](#) shows that most rural hospitals depend on private insurers for anywhere between 65-80% of patient costs; in Thomasville, 18.4% of patients were using Medicare to pay for their coverage, 16.2% were using Medicaid, and 65.4% were using private insurance.



But many rural hospitals are losing money on what private insurers will pay for patient care. The one in Thomasville, for instance, was getting paid by private insurers roughly half of what it was costing to deliver services, according to [federal data compiled by CHQPR](#).

This is a very different situation than what is happening between private insurers and urban hospitals, he says. Urban hospitals and large rural hospitals are able to make up for the losses from Medicare and Medicaid patients with what they can charge private insurers. Small rural hospitals can't do that.

Rural hospitals actually need higher compensation than urban hospitals, Miller says, because they have the same fixed costs like 24-hour staffing, but have a lower volume of patients to cover those costs.

## Why small rural hospitals get less from private insurers

One reason why small hospitals get less money: Insurers demand discounts. Larger hospitals have more leverage to negotiate with private insurers over those discounts because they have higher patient volumes. Smaller hospitals have less wiggle room to negotiate.

Another problem in Alabama in particular is that just one health insurer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, has an [estimated 94%](#) of the large-group private insurance market, which most people with private health insurance fall under. Hospitals can't negotiate as well because they have to accept Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama patients, and losing those patients would be financially ruinous. That's how one small rural hospital in Alabama, Medical Center Barbour in Eufaula, gets paid just \$65 for an X-ray by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, compared to \$97.03 by Aetna, according to Miller's data.

"Alabama Blue Cross could single-handedly save all the rural hospitals in Alabama," Miller says. "It just has to pay adequately."

**Read More:** [\*Medicaid Expansions Saved Tens of Thousands of Lives, Study Finds\*](#)

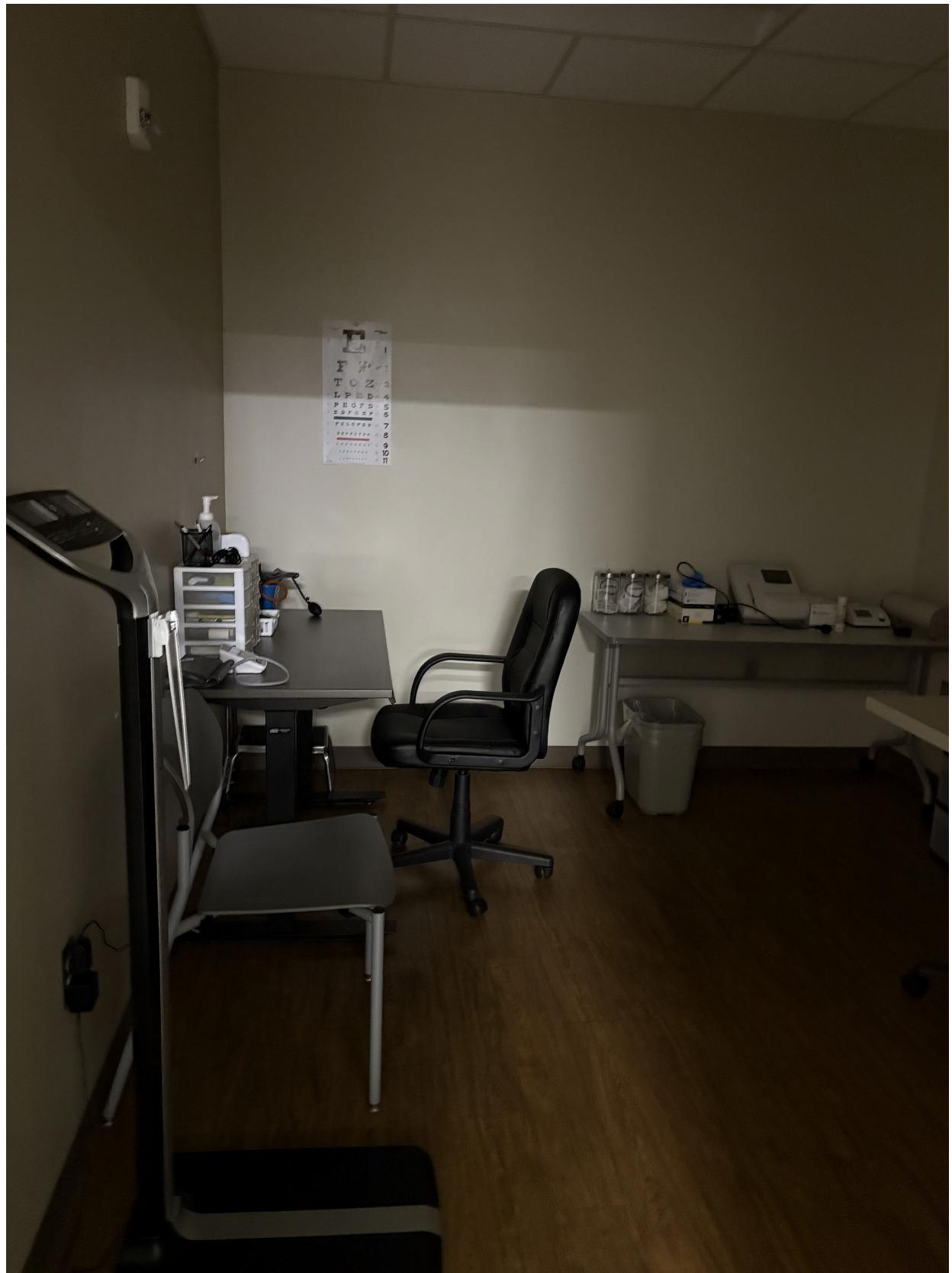
In a statement, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama said that it works each year with the Alabama Hospital Association to evaluate the care rural hospitals provide and to compensate those facilities. It disputed CHQPR's assertion that private insurers are responsible for 65-80% of patient costs in rural hospitals in Alabama, saying that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama patients comprise only a small share of patient volume at rural hospitals in Alabama (while declining to offer specific numbers). "Thus, the largest financial impact to rural hospitals is the government payer sector," the company said. A Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama spokesperson said the company's market share statewide is "different for different market segments"—but referred TIME to [federal data](#) showing that it, and not any other insurer, covers the vast majority of Alabamans.

The company launched a medical scholarship program in 2016 to promote access to quality health care in rural areas of Alabama, a spokesperson said, and 38 medical students have now graduated and are practicing in rural parts of the state.

The challenges facing rural hospitals nationwide have gotten worse in the last year or two, Miller says, because costs have gone up after the pandemic as labor became scarce and many doctors and nurses quit the field after getting [burned out](#). What's more, the federal government offered many pandemic-era grants to hospitals so they could stay open, but those have run out. One reason the Thomasville hospital failed is that it could not get any of those federal grants because it had not been open long enough.

## **What happens when a rural hospital closes**

On a recent weekday afternoon, Dr. Daveta Dozier, a family physician who has practiced in Thomasville for 40 years, walked me through the closed Thomasville hospital. The hallways and patient rooms should have been buzzing with beeps and medical conversations, but the building was eerily quiet, like it had flatlined. She pointed out the MRI machine where she'd send patients so they could avoid the 90-minute roundtrip drive to Mobile, and the laboratory where her patients could get blood work done.



Now, she says, when she tells her patients to get complicated lab work or imaging, they can't do it locally. So many don't do it at all.

"Half the time they don't go," she says. "Either they can't find family to take them or they're working and they can't get off."

This means by the time they end up seeking health care, they are sicker than they would have been had the hospital stayed open. That corresponds to what doctors have been seeing across the country after isolated rural hospitals close. [One study found](#) that following a closure, the hospitalization rates and average length of hospital stays increased for locals. When hospitals were more isolated, rural patients were more likely to be readmitted to a hospital after an initial stay.

Dozier is in private practice with her husband, who is also the medical director for the local nursing home. In the past few weeks, she says, the nursing home had eight separate patients with medical needs like urinary tract infections and pneumonia that required them to be transported to hospitals in Mobile. Had the hospital in Thomasville been open, they could have been treated there.

Now, their families have to make the trek to visit them. "The first thing you hear them say is, 'I don't want to go to Mobile,'" she says.

**Read More:** [\*When Fighting with Your Insurance Company Becomes a Full-Time Job\*](#)

Barbara Smith, 78, knows what it's like to drive frequently to Mobile for care. Her husband, who recently passed away, had [bladder cancer](#), and the nearest treatment center was nearly 2 hours from their home. "It sure was a lot of driving," she says.

With closures of rural hospitals like the one in Thomasville, some hospitals' emergency rooms in urban areas of Alabama become full and send patients to other hospitals—and sometimes other states—to be seen, Dozier says. [Emergency department crowding](#) is a growing problem across the country.

There is another hospital 20 minutes south of Thomasville called Grove Hill Memorial Hospital. But it is also financially struggling and recently made

the decision to convert to what's called a rural emergency hospital, which means it will [only have an emergency room](#) and not inpatient care. With that conversion, it receives federal funding to help it stay open—but patients won't be able to get much there except for emergency services.

I asked Stacey Gilchrist, chief operating officer of the Thomasville hospital in receivership, why Thomasville needed a hospital when patients could go to Grove Hill for emergency services. She gave the example of a 40-year old woman who rushed to the Thomasville hospital when she was having chest pains; doctors there stabilized her, but other physicians in Mobile who later treated her said she would likely have died if she needed to drive further. "If you're having a heart attack, do you want to ride 20 minutes down the road, or five minutes?" she says.



Many of Thomasville's patients come from even more rural areas. Riding 20 more minutes could be the difference between life and death for them, she says.

What's more, she says, Thomasville's hospital was much more than an emergency room. It had 29 rooms where patients could stay overnight and be treated for serious conditions, a lab, and the newest equipment that isn't in any other rural hospital in the region.

## Shrinking access, less health care

Thomasville is located in Alabama's 7th Congressional District, which stretches between Birmingham and the state's border with Mississippi. A Harvard [study](#) from 2022 found that the district ranked last in terms of life expectancies nationwide.

Officials like Mayor Day say this is partly because it's so hard to access health care. "People just simply don't go to the doctor until they get real sick," he says.

He had hoped that opening the Thomasville hospital would help. He and local officials had worked for years to put together an incentive package to encourage someone to reopen a hospital in Thomasville, after the last one closed in the wake of the Great Recession.

"We really wanted to change the dynamic of health care here," he says.

**Read More:** [They Hated Health Insurance. So They Started Paying For Each Other's Care](#)

Thomasville is not the only community optimistic enough to try to open a rural hospital at a time when many were closing. Between 2017 and 2023, 11 acute care general hospitals were opened in rural areas, according to [data from KFF](#). But 61 hospitals closed during the same time period.

The city gave the investors who built the Thomasville hospital a discount on the land and approved a one-cent sales tax that would go to the hospital to

help it stay open. The investors bought new equipment, knowing that money can be made in diagnostics if they could get people to come to Thomasville rather than going elsewhere for tests like MRIs and CT scans.

Specialists from Mobile started coming up a few days a week to see patients, sparing residents the long drive. A physical therapy practice opened in the building, and Day had plans to expand the campus and open a [cancer](#) treatment center.

But then the pandemic hit, and costs spiraled out of control because the hospital could do fewer money-making procedures and had to spend more on personal protective equipment and other pandemic-related services. Compensation by private payers remained stubbornly low at rural hospitals across the country during the pandemic, [according to CHQPR](#).

Finally, the Thomasville hospital's owners ran out of money, filed for bankruptcy, and shut it down.

The hospital closure had an impact on the local economy. Businesses think twice about opening in a rural location without health care, Day says. And existing businesses that can't move, like farms who need lots of rural land, have to deal with sicker workers.

## How rural hospitals can succeed

A new owner has bought the Thomasville hospital's assets out of bankruptcy, and Day says they plan to reopen the Thomasville hospital soon. He's hoping they can do things differently this time so that they can figure out a way to keep the rural hospital from losing money.

One idea is to join a network with a big, urban hospital so they can more effectively negotiate reimbursement from insurers. Another is to create a network of rural hospitals that can band together to negotiate.

And Day is hoping that Congress will act. One bill, the [Rural Hospital Stabilization Act](#) of 2025, was introduced in April and would give grants to rural hospitals to help them stay out of the red.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has talked about being more proactive to prevent chronic diseases before they happen, and Day thinks the Thomasville hospital could play a role in that by making it easier for patients to get preventative care close to home.

Day is already talking about using AI in the hospital and creating a medical campus to attract people from across the region, adding assisted living services and dementia care. Details are thin, and all of that takes money. But as a mayor who has seen a hospital close twice in his town, he hopes that, working with elected officials, he can figure out a way to change the hospital's fate this time.

"Every rural community in the country is facing this battle," he says. "But closing hospitals is not an option. If you don't have basic health care, you're going to kill your community."

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# Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs Acquitted of Sex Trafficking and Racketeering Conspiracy, but Found Guilty on Lesser Charges

Lee is a reporter at TIME. She covers U.S. news with a focus on health and reproductive rights.



Sean “Diddy” Combs, the music mogul whose [trial garnered global attention](#), has been acquitted of sex trafficking and racketeering conspiracy. The jury found Combs guilty on two counts of transportation to engage in prostitution (a federal felony), [one in connection with his ex-girlfriend](#),

musician [Cassandra “Cassie” Ventura](#), and another in connection with his ex-girlfriend who testified under the pseudonym “Jane.”

Upon hearing the verdict, Combs—who had pleaded not guilty to all charges—could be seen putting his hands together in a prayer stance and mouthing “thank you” to the jurors, according to court reporters.

Combs’ lead lawyer, Marc Agnifilo, had requested that his client be released ahead of sentencing, in light of him being found “not guilty” of sex trafficking and racketeering conspiracy. But the judge overseeing the case declined to grant Combs bail, meaning that the music mogul will remain in custody until his sentencing. The date of the sentencing hearing has not yet been set. Combs has been in custody since he was arrested in September.

The prosecution has said that Combs faces up to 20 years in prison (the two transportation convictions carry a maximum sentence of 10 years each) but it will be down to the judge to decide how long he serves.

Douglas Wigdor, the attorney for Ventura, issued a statement soon after the verdict.

“Although the jury did not find Combs guilty of sex trafficking Cassie beyond a reasonable doubt, she paved the way for a jury to find him guilty of transportation to engage in prostitution,” Wigdor said. “By coming forward with her experience, Cassie has left an indelible mark on both the entertainment industry and the fight for justice.”

On Tuesday, the jury revealed they had reached a verdict on all but one count—the racketeering conspiracy charge. They said there were members with “unpersuadable opinions on both sides.” The jury returned to deliberate Wednesday morning and, after less than an hour, reached a verdict.

The final verdict comes after around seven weeks of emotional, graphic testimony from multiple witnesses.

Here’s what to know about the case against Combs.

## What were the accusations against Diddy?

Combs was [arrested](#) in September, after many people came forward with physical and sexual abuse allegations against him.

The federal investigation into Combs that led to his arrest was spurred in part by a civil lawsuit filed in 2023 by his ex-girlfriend Cassie, who alleged that he had physically abused and raped her.

Ventura and Combs [reached a settlement](#) a day after she filed her suit, but Combs denied the allegations. Then, in May 2024, CNN aired CCTV footage in which Combs can be seen punching and kicking Ventura in a Los Angeles hotel hallway in 2016. After the footage was released, Combs [admitted](#) to assaulting Ventura in a video posted on Instagram.

The federal indictment against Combs alleged that he manipulated and forced women to participate in what he called “freak-offs,” in which he would allegedly force victims to engage in sexual activities with male sex workers, often giving the women drugs to keep them “obedient and compliant.” Combs also frequently recorded the “freak-offs,” according to the indictment.

**Read more:** [\*‘Freak Offs,’ Drugs, and Violence: Breaking Down the Charges Against Diddy\*](#)

The indictment additionally accused the music mogul of “creating a criminal enterprise” that committed many crimes, including sex trafficking, forced labor, and kidnapping.

The indictment detailed various incidents of alleged abuse dating back to 2008. Other allegations separate from the federal indictment date back years earlier, with multiple accusers [saying](#) in civil lawsuits against Combs that he assaulted or abused them in the 1990s.

[More than 50 civil lawsuits](#) alleging abuse perpetrated by Combs have been filed against the music mogul. The accusers [include](#) other former romantic partners, as well as young artists, aspiring entertainers, and men and women

who say they encountered Combs at parties or clubs. A number of them were under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged incidents.

Combs has denied the allegations, [saying](#) in a [December 2023 statement](#) after a fourth lawsuit was filed against him: “Let me be absolutely clear: I did not do any of the awful things being alleged. I will fight for my name, my family and for the truth.”

## What charges did he face?

Combs was indicted on federal charges of sex trafficking, racketeering conspiracy, and transportation to engage in prostitution. Months after an initial three-count indictment, he was later [charged](#) with an additional count of sex trafficking and an additional count of transportation to engage in prostitution.

The jury found Combs not guilty of count one, racketeering conspiracy. He was not guilty of counts two and four, which were charges of sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion in connection with Ventura and “Jane.” The jury found Combs guilty of count three, transportation to engage in prostitution in connection to Ventura, and guilty of count five, transportation to engage in prostitution in connection to “Jane.”

Combs now faces up to 10 years in prison for each count of transportation to engage in prostitution. (He was found guilty on two counts, meaning he stands to serve up to 20 years in total.)

## What happened during the trial?

Prosecutors called many witnesses—including a male escort who said he was hired to participate in the “freak-offs,” Ventura’s friends and mother, and federal investigators—to the stand. Their case focused on the testimony of three women, including Ventura. The defense didn’t call any witnesses to the stand, and Combs himself didn’t testify. His lawyers claimed that all the sex being discussed during the trial was consensual.

Ventura, who was almost nine months pregnant at the time she took the stand, cried as she recounted the “freak-offs” that she said Combs pressured her to participate in, [the New York Times](#) reported. She said during her testimony that the “freak-offs” lasted anywhere from 36 hours to four days, and she described being subjected to unwanted sexual activity. Once, she testified, an escort urinated into her mouth until she began to choke and raised her hands, according to the *Times*. She also described the 2016 incident at the Los Angeles hotel, as well as other times she alleges she was physically and sexually abused by Combs.

**Read more:** [\*Sean Combs Had “Devilish” Look After Hotel Assault, Witness Tells Court\*](#)

While cross examining her, Combs’ lawyers pointed to messages between Ventura and Combs, arguing that she had voluntarily participated in the “freak-offs.” But Ventura insisted that she participated only because she had been going along with Combs’ requests and that she had been afraid of violent retaliation. She also testified that she and Combs had an opiate dependency during their relationship, the *Times* reported.

Ventura said during her testimony that she received \$20 million from Combs to settle her civil suit, but she said, “I’d give that money back if I never had to have freak-offs.”

Multiple other witnesses reportedly testified that they saw or heard Combs beating Ventura.

Another woman, who testified under the pseudonym Mia, also took the stand. Mia began working for Combs in 2009, and held various roles in the eight years she worked for him. During her testimony, she described a moment when she had been sleeping in a room in Combs’ home; she said he penetrated her without her consent, according to the *Times*. She described another incident in which she alleges she was forced to perform oral sex on him. She testified that she was afraid of retaliation, and that she felt like it was impossible to say no to him.

“I couldn’t tell him no about a sandwich—I couldn’t tell him no about anything,” she said.

During her testimony, Mia also described an incident in which she said she witnessed Combs attacking Ventura.

A third woman, who went by the pseudonym Jane, took the stand and recounted her relationship with Combs. She dated the music mogul from 2021 until he was arrested in September, and said that what had been an intense relationship became a series of incidents involving unwanted sex with male escorts. She described one incident in June 2024 in which the two got into an argument that she said turned into a physical altercation that left her with a black eye and welts on her forehead. She testified that Combs told her to “put some ice on it and put an outfit on” before offering her an Ecstasy pill and instructing her to have sex with a male escort he had invited to come over, according to the *Times*.

Federal investigators also took the stand, describing the items seized during a raid on Combs’ home in Los Angeles, including guns, drugs, about 200 bottles of baby oil, and roughly 900 bottles of Astroglide.

At one point during the trial, the prosecution showed the jury clips from videos of the “freak-offs,” which were taken from electronic devices that Ventura had shared with federal investigators. The videos are sealed, so the public and reporters couldn’t view them; instead, jurors viewed the videos on screens and listened with headphones. In its cross-examination, the defense selected other clips of those videos to show the jury, claiming that those clips are “powerful evidence that the sexual conduct in this case was consensual and not based on coercion,” the *Times* reported.

Ventura’s and Jane’s testimonies were central to both the prosecution and defense’s closing arguments on Friday. Speaking for nearly five hours, prosecutor Christy Slavik argued that Combs had coerced the women to participate in “freak-offs” through threats, violence, and blackmail, and portrayed them as victims of forced labor, [the Washington Post reported](#).

“You do not need to find that all of the freak-offs or even the majority of freak-offs that he had with [Ventura] or Jane were the product of force or coercion,” Slavik said, telling the jury that “if there was one time, one single freak-off, when the defendant knew or recklessly disregarded that

[Ventura] or Jane was participating because of his lies, his threats or his violence then that's it. He's guilty."

The defense, meanwhile, argued that the women were consenting participants in the freak-offs. "The evidence, I think, is overwhelming that Cassie wanted to do this," Combs' attorney Marc Agnifilo said during his nearly four-hour closing, [the Post reported](#). At one point, Agnifilo called the abusive relationship between Combs and Ventura "a great modern love story." Jane, he said, may be "regretting" joining the freak-offs, but Agnifilo argued that "regret is not the same as intent at the time."

In a rebuttal that lasted a little over an hour, prosecutor Maurene Comey dismissed the defense's arguments as "excuse after excuse for inexcusable criminal behavior," the *Post* reported.

Weeks into the high-profile trial, a juror was dismissed after Judge Arun Subramanian said there were "inconsistencies" in how the juror described where he lived, according to [AP](#). "Taking these all together, the record raised serious concerns as to the juror's candor and whether he shaded answers to get on and stay on the jury," Subramanian said. Combs' lawyers had argued against the removal, voicing concerns about replacing the juror, a Black man, with an alternate juror who is white.

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# Zohran Mamdani's Upset Is a Seismic Moment for the Left

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**The Brief June 25, 2025**

**Updates on New York's primary, Iran, and more**

Podcast ID – Short Length: 85514303-5732-49f6-aeb4-50c602413301

Podcast ID – Long Length: 2d42fbcd-6977-4c45-b783-b86d5c920ea8

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

The world's economic capital stands to have a [democratic socialist](#) at the helm.

No. That is not some A.I. hallucination. That really happened Tuesday in New York City's mayoral primary.

New York is still tallying the votes, for sure. But a 33-year-old state lawmaker who became an avatar for the political movement led by Bernie Sanders and [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) is leading in the race for Mayor of New York City. The significance of an apparent [Zohran Mamdani](#) victory over former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is a seismic moment that signals how much of an insurgent posture Democrats are in at the moment. As party leaders fret about whether Kamala Harris lost for being seen as too "woke" on various issues, the coastal deep-blue enclaves are completely disconnected from that [conversation](#), and the party's dreadful standing on the national stage.

"Tonight is his night. He deserved it. He won," Cuomo said of Mamdani's showing. The 67-year-old member of a New York political dynasty did not address if he, like incumbent Mayor Eric Adams, may run in November as an independent.

**Read more:** [Republicans See Mamdani as New 'Face of the Democratic Party'](#)

For his part, Mamdani was not ready to spike the football in victory. The official winner is not likely to be declared until next week at the earliest, thanks to New York's ranked-choice voting system. Lower-performing candidates will be eliminated and their votes will be reallocated next Tuesday by the Board of Elections. Still, Cuomo quickly conceded.

Mamdani, who would be the first Muslim to lead New York, has cast himself as "Donald Trump's worst nightmare" and a progressive champion poised to lead a deeply resourced grand experiment.

With strong showings in Brooklyn and Manhattan, Mamdani seemed to be coasting easily toward a shocking rise to one of the most prominent jobs in U.S. politics. For many people—particularly those outside of America—there's the President, and then maybe the Speaker of the House. Sometimes, the Senate Majority Leader is in the pecking order. And then there's the Mayor of New York City.

To be clear: few Establishment Democrats liked any of the viable options in the race heading into Tuesday. Mamdani's pro-Palestinian activism drew accusations of antisemitism. Cuomo was forced from the Governor's gig amid [accusations](#) from at least 11 women. (Cuomo has consistently [denied](#) the allegations but said he stepped down so the state could focus on governing rather than being consumed by a looming impeachment.) And Adams, the incumbent, is his own [ethical mess](#).

Still, someone has to lead New York.

Should he prevail, Mamdani instantly becomes the [ringleader of The Resistance](#). As the elected chief of the nation's largest city—with a budget of \$115 billion and 300,000 employees—he would command a platform that has few peers. But it also would be a tough test case: can a democratic socialist effectively lead such a huge bureaucracy with even fewer peers?

Much like the likes of Ocasio-Cortez, Nancy Pelosi, and Hillary Clinton, Mamdani is about to become shorthand on Fox News and the MAGAverse for [rightwing attacks](#). And with the self-proclaimed label of democratic socialist, he is about to be an anchor that other fellow Democrats will have to deal with.

But he could also be a model for Democrats struggling to figure out how to chart a path in the second Trump era. If democratic socialists want to convince the electorate they are ready for the national stage, New York might be the best proving ground possible.

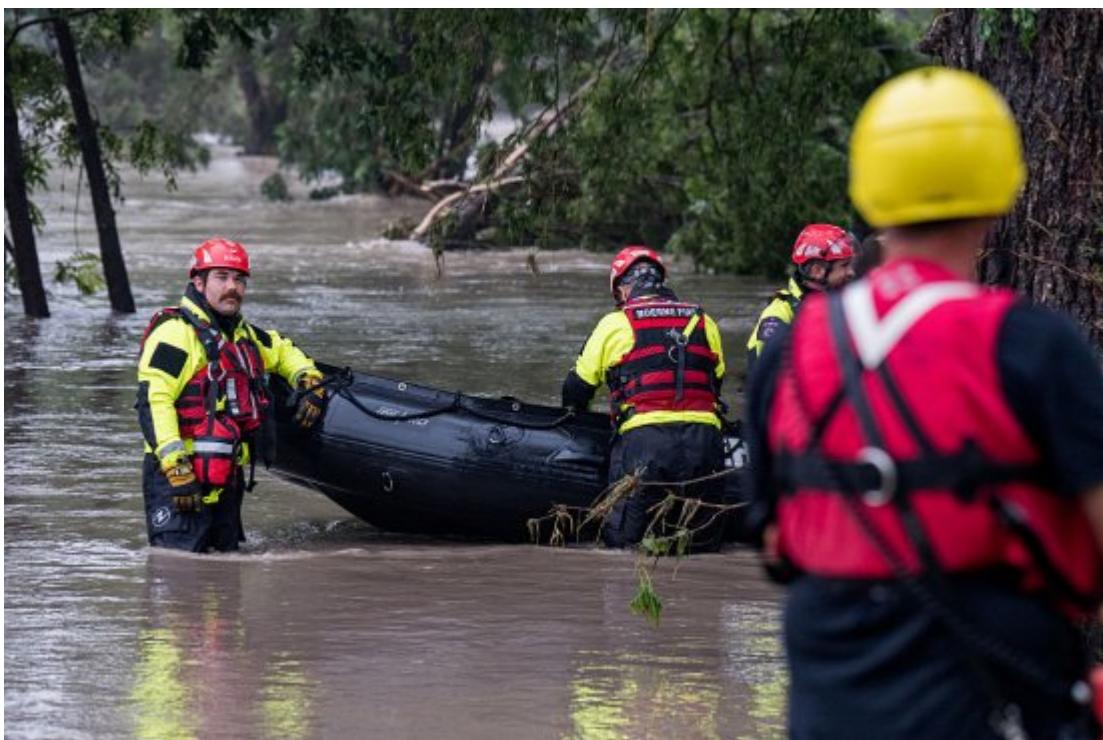
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# What Made the Texas Floods So Devastating?

Shah is a reporter at TIME.



**The Brief July 8, 2025**

**Netanyahu backs Trump's vision for Gaza, what made the Texas floods so devastating, and more**

Podcast ID – Short Length: d9916037-25a5-4b91-84ec-284784a0cd20

Podcast ID – Long Length: aed834cf-4e05-4617-b12c-fc19ab8e31fd

At least 105 people have died and more than a dozen are missing after devastating flash floods hit central Texas over the 4th of July weekend. Search and rescue operations are still underway as more rain is expected to hit the battered region in the coming days.

A number of conditions came together to cause the deadly floods, experts say. “[The storm was] fueled by warm and moist air combined with the leftovers of Tropical Storm Baryl on very interesting geography,” says Slobodan Simonovic, professor emeritus at the department of civil and environmental engineering at Western University.

## What caused the flash floods?

The floods were triggered in part by the remnants of Tropical Storm Barry, which made landfall in Mexico at the end of last month.

“When you have a tropical cyclone, the system dies, but that system still puts lots of water vapor in the atmosphere,” says Aiguo Dai, professor of atmospheric and environmental sciences at the University of Albany, SUNY. “The moisture stays in the air and travels with the winds, and in this case, it looks like some of the water vapor from that remnant moved into [central] Texas.”

**Read more:** [Experts Question If Weather Service Was Operating at Its Best Ahead of Texas Floods Amid Trump's Cuts](#)

It’s not uncommon for this to happen. Barry is the 20th tropical cyclone or remnant to cause over 15 inches of rain across interior Texas since 1913, according to the [National Weather Service](#). Last fall, the remnants of Hurricane Helene led to devastating floods across the Appalachian region. In 2021, flash floods from the remnants of Hurricane Ida killed dozens of people in four states.

Texas Hill Country, where much of the flooding took place this time, is often referred to as “flash flood alley.” It’s home to steep terrain and a lack of vegetation that creates a perfect storm for waters to rise quickly.

“In a mountainous, [sloping] terrain, the water can run very fast from the upper drainage area into a river basin and create a very fast rising river in a few hours,” says Dai. “Downstream, people may not notice there’s an intense storm upstream.”

[video id=CyjQpqLe]

## How is climate change impacting flash floods?

Climate change will only make events like this more common. “The transformation of increased temperature into heavier and more [frequent] precipitation, it’s very simple proof that with continuous warming we will be facing more and more events like this,” says Simonovic.

**Read more:** [What We Know About the Victims of the Texas Flooding](#)

Tropical storms and hurricanes are only going to become more intense with climate change, as rising ocean temperatures intensifies evaporation, making the air wetter and leading to stronger and more destructive storms.

Simonovic says that it’s imperative that we begin to acknowledge that the realities of climate change are already here—and better plan to adapt to it. “Things are changing, but also things changed. Losing [more than] 80 lives in Texas in the middle of 2025, it’s really hard to accept. We have to be prepared, and prevent this from occurring more often.”

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# The 9 Most Underrated Healthy Foods

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



Some foods simply radiate star power. Apples and bananas? They've [got their own song](#). Peanuts, potatoes, and pepperjack cheese? They're in your pantry—and the cooking hall of fame.

But the obvious choices aren't the only ones—and they're not even necessarily the best. "People tend to fall into certain patterns—we're creatures of habit," says registered dietitian nutritionist Mindy Haar, assistant dean at New York Institute of Technology's School of Health Professions. "But from a nutritional point of view, by varying your diet, you're going to get ahead." In addition to exposing yourself to nutrients you

might not be getting from the same old foods, switching up your standard fare can also be a delightful surprise for your taste buds.

We asked dietitians to reveal their favorite underrated healthy foods, plus ideas on how to incorporate them into your diet.

## Celery

The simple celery stalk—often thought of only as a hummus-dipping vehicle—deserves to be reconsidered. It's packed with essential nutrients like vitamin K, potassium, and folate, as well as a variety of antioxidants. Plus, it's versatile, says Laura Pensiero, a chef and registered dietitian who owns the restaurant Gigi Trattoria in Rhinebeck, N.Y. While the stalks can be chopped up and used in salads, stir-fry recipes, soups, and stews, the leaves hold untapped potential, too. Pensiero suggests using them to make a fresh, herby pesto that levels up pasta and grilled vegetables or can be smeared on sandwiches. You can also blend celery leaves into your favorite smoothie or juice for an extra kick of nutrition.

## Clementines

This flavorful fruit—a hybrid between a mandarin and a sweet orange—is one of Haar's favorite choices for a nutrient-dense snack or even dessert. Because they're small, two clementines are considered a serving; they're about the equivalent of one big orange, calorie-wise. "Clementines are wonderful sources of vitamin C," she says. "They have some fiber, they're satisfying if you're thirsty, they're very portable, and you can go on a hike and not worry about keeping them refrigerated."

**Read More:** [What's the Most Refreshing Drink That's Not Water?](#)

## Pumpkin seeds

These flat, oval-shaped seeds are “small but mighty when it comes to nutrition,” says Maggie Michalczyk, a Chicago-based registered dietitian and author of [The Great Big Pumpkin Cookbook](#). “They’re packed with

plant-based protein, healthy fat, and fiber, as well as important micronutrients like zinc, iron, copper, and magnesium.” Just 1 oz. of pumpkin seeds will give you [168 mg of magnesium](#), which is 40% of the daily recommendation for adults. Consider sprinkling them onto toast, tossing them into your favorite salad, mixing them into guacamole, or subbing them in for pine nuts in pesto, Michalczyk suggests.

## Pomegranate juice

Hydration: great! Hydration with nutrition benefits: even better. Michalczyk likes pomegranate juice, which contains [health-boosting polyphenol antioxidants](#) and is also [a good source of potassium](#)—an important electrolyte that plays a role in muscle function. “I love its tart bright flavor for warm-weather cocktails and mocktails,” she says. One of Michalczyk’s favorite recipes involves mixing 100% pomegranate juice with sparkling water, adding a squeeze of lime juice, and topping with fresh mint. Or, for a mocktail that’s “delicious and looks like a sunset,” she suggests mixing pomegranate juice with passion fruit puree and sparkling water, and then garnishing it with mint.

## Freekkeh

This ancient whole grain isn’t as popular in the U.S. as, say, quinoa. But it’s commonly used in Middle Eastern cuisine, in part because it’s a [great source](#) of protein, fiber, potassium, and folate. “The seeds are a bit tender and the kernels are roasted, so it has a smoky, nutty flavor,” Haar says. She serves it in place of rice or barley in all kinds of dishes, sometimes mixing it with chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, sunflower seeds, and raisins. It’s been a hit: “I find that when I entertain and have people over, they’re excited to try new things,” she says, and head home inspired to recreate the recipes themselves.

## Prunes

Perhaps you think of prunes in association with relieving constipation—a great [benefit](#) of the fruit, thanks to its [fiber](#). But there's so much more to the dried plums, says Erin Palinski-Wade, a registered dietitian and certified diabetes care and education specialist in New York. [Research suggests](#) eating five or six prunes a day can slow bone loss and [prevent the risk of fractures](#). Plus, they can [lower heart disease risk](#) in postmenopausal women.

**Read More:** [Should You Take a Fiber Supplement?](#)

While there's nothing wrong with eating prunes straight from the package, you can also experiment with more creative approaches. Consider blending them into a puree that you can swap for butter, sugar, or eggs in your favorite baked goods, for example. Palinski-Wade uses [pureed prunes in chocolate chip cookies](#)—her kids love them, she says, and it's nice to add some health benefits to a tasty treat.

## Sardines

It's time to get over your [tinned-fish ick](#), Michalczky says: Sardines are a nutrient-dense, protein-packed staple that belong in your pantry. [One can](#) contains 351 mg of calcium, 35 mg of magnesium, and 364 mg of potassium, among other nutrients. That makes sardines a “secret weapon to up the nutrition of anything you add them to,” Michalczky says. Eat them directly out of the can, with crackers, in pasta, or on avocado toast, she suggests.

## Hemp hearts

First, to clarify: The soft-shelled seeds of the hemp plant don't contain psychoactive or mind-altering properties. They are, however, rich in protein, omega-3 fatty acids, and minerals like magnesium. “They're a true powerhouse, and a convenient way to upgrade so many dishes,” says Lora Silver, an oncology dietitian at Yale New Haven Health's Smilow Cancer Hospital. She likes adding them to her fruit and yogurt parfait, swirling them into French toast batter and salad dressings, and dusting them over avocado toast. When she craves a “creamy porridge,” she blends them with

ground flaxseeds, shredded coconut, and nut butter for a grain-free, high-fiber, low-carb hot cereal.

## Watercress

Kale tends to get more attention than this leafy supergreen—and Silver believes it's time to change that. In [one study](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, watercress was rated as the top “powerhouse” choice out of 41 fruits and vegetables, based on its nutrient density and association with reduced chronic disease risk. The obvious way to use it is in a salad, but you can get more inventive, too. Silver suggests balancing watercress’ peppery flavor with caramelized onions in a sandwich, or pairing it with peanut sauce in a grain bowl or wrap.

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# Trump Should Have Never Ditched the Iran Nuclear Deal

Josh Black was on the U.S. negotiating team for the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. From 2023 to 2025, he served under President Biden as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs on the National Security Council.



Questions remain over the true damage to Iran's nuclear program. But as conflicting [comments](#) and [reports](#) come in from the Trump Administration and [Pentagon intelligence estimates](#), one thing is certain: Trump's failed diplomacy got us in this mess.

I should know. Ten years ago, I was in Vienna as part of the U.S. team negotiating a deal to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

Those negotiations culminated in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It was Trump’s decision in 2018 to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal that ultimately led to the perilous situation in the Middle East today.

The JCPOA was the result of a sustained campaign of principled, effective U.S. diplomacy. President Obama began laying groundwork for this nuclear deal as soon as he came to office in 2009. His view—shared then and now across the U.S. political spectrum—was that the U.S. cannot accept a nuclear-armed Iran. At the time, Iran claimed that its nuclear energy program was for exclusively peaceful uses. Yet given evidence of Iran’s [past interest](#) in possessing a nuclear bomb prior to 2003, the U.S. could not take this claim at face value.

To get the nuclear deal, Obama and his national security team rallied the world to increase pressure on Tehran. The U.S., E.U., and other allies put in place punishing sanctions. The U.N. Security Council followed suit with a [fresh round of sanctions](#) in June 2010 that were wide-ranging and [targeted the nuclear program](#).

These sanctions worked: they convinced Iran to come to the negotiating table. To iron out the technical provisions of a deal, the U.S. then put together a team of top career diplomats, nuclear scientists, lawyers, and sanctions experts. It was a remarkable lineup of American patriots and professionals. It was my great honor to serve on that team.

Our goal was to offer Iran phased and reversible sanctions relief in exchange for far-reaching limits on Iran’s nuclear activities. To maximize leverage, we coordinated with other countries, including not just European allies but also Russia and China. It was difficult, exacting, high-stakes work—for months on end.

The effort paid off. Iran agreed to substantial limits on its nuclear activities, including to export out of the country around 98% of its enriched uranium stockpile. Iran’s commitments were then subject to intrusive and permanent international monitoring. By the end of the Obama Administration, the deal was working, with [all sides implementing their commitments](#).

Trump's abrupt withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 led to the predictable result: Iran's nuclear program surged ahead, breaking free of the deal's constraints.

When Trump returned to office in January, he launched a hasty effort to negotiate a new deal. But it bore a striking resemblance to the deal negotiated by Obama, with one nuclear expert calling the Trump framework a "[dollar store JCPOA](#)."

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu tanked these talks with airstrikes on June 12. The U.S. launched its own strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities on June 22.

Trump [seems convinced](#) the matter is now resolved. But what will be the fate of the tons of enriched uranium that Iran stockpiled after Trump withdrew from the JCPOA? How much Iranian nuclear infrastructure remains intact? Will Iran ever welcome back intrusive international monitoring of its nuclear activities, such as specified in the JCPOA?

To resolve these questions, the Trump Administration will need to do the tedious, difficult work of pursuing complex negotiations. Talks [look set to resume](#) next week.

But it will require a high level of technical expertise and diplomatic capacity. And the timing couldn't be worse, as Trump and Elon Musk's culture war on the so-called "Deep State" has hollowed out and demoralized the ranks of government experts whose support was critical to achieving the JCPOA in the first place.

This sad saga has reminded me of what we've lost in the Trump era. The JCPOA was a product of effective and principled American diplomacy, undertaken in close coordination with our closest allies. It was a team effort by countless government professionals and specialists, all motivated by patriotism and a sense of mission, and operating in an era where they were celebrated not denigrated. It was a victory of dialogue and diplomacy over bluster and bombs.

Ten years ago that approach delivered results for the American people and the world. I worry about what comes next.

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# Why Europe Can't Tame the Far Right

*Ian Bremmer is a foreign affairs columnist and editor-at-large at TIME. He is the president of Eurasia Group, a political-risk consultancy, and GZERO Media, a company dedicated to providing intelligent and engaging coverage of international affairs. He teaches applied geopolitics at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, and his most recent book is [The Power of Crisis](#).*



The [2015 migrant crisis](#) still hangs over Europe. The more than 1.3 million migrants—particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq—who claimed asylum that year has been a boon for grievance-driven European populism and its most talented practitioners. The upshot is a cultural and [economic anxiety](#) that has transformed the continent's political landscape.

And yet, the first 10 years of the far right's rise have amounted to a "yes, but" decade. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany party has steadily expanded its regional and federal influence, but all other major parties still treat political collaboration with it as taboo. In France, the populist Marine Le Pen has shown she can reach the second round of presidential elections, but has been unable to claim victory. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni in 2022 became the first anti-immigrant populist to win a big European election, but her strong cooperation with Brussels and consistent support for Ukraine has helped her defy far-right stereotypes. In the U.K., Brexit champion Nigel Farage might now be polling in first place, but that's still some distance from winning the next general elections in 2029.

Centrist governments have also emerged this year after elections in Germany and Romania, despite a rise in support for the far right. Meanwhile, the Dutch government, led by the far-right Party for Freedom, collapsed in June, and the Austrian Freedom Party has failed to form a ruling coalition despite winning elections in September.

For now, E.U. institutions are holding up fine. Pro-E.U. parties continue to dominate politics in Brussels and the risk that Euroskeptics can create gridlock remains low. In the European Parliament, the centrist coalition that backed Ursula von der Leyen for a second term as European Commission President will hold together despite growing tensions. In the European Council, just four of 27 members (Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, and the Czech Republic) are led by nationalist governments. But Brussels has finally managed to limit the ability of far-right governments to shift E.U. policies, and Meloni and Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala cooperate closely with von der Leyen.

All that said, the next few years will offer big opportunities from Europe's anti-migrant, Euroskeptic far right. Questions about economic resilience and stubbornly high prices remain the main sources of economic anxiety for voters. Even as immigration policies have been tightened and the number of asylum seekers in Europe has fallen, the long-term presence of migrants amid stagnating economies will continue to feed voter anger. The economic pressures applied by Donald Trump's trade war compound public frustration with their current governments. In short, there's no reason to

believe far-right parties and politicians will fall silent or fail to score future political gains at the expense of beleaguered centrist establishments.

Two years from now, far-right parties will have their best-ever shot at capitalizing on mounting voter anger with national elections in France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. In France, though Le Pen is currently barred from seeking the presidency [following an embezzlement conviction](#) in March, her National Rally party could finally sweep to power in the heart of Europe. In Italy, Meloni will face pressure to adopt more Euroskeptic positions on high-profile issues in the run-up to elections. In Spain, the center-right Popular Party will likely lead the next government but could be forced to welcome the [far-right Vox](#) into a coalition for the first time. In Poland, steadily eroding support for [Prime Minister Donald Tusk](#) could pave the way for a return of right-wing nationalist parties to power there. The far-right Karol Nawrocki has already [prevailed in the June presidential elections](#), and he will take office in August.

Taken together, these developments would shift the balance of power in the populists' favor, transforming how the E.U. defines its values and its interests. The potential fallout—whether on the rule of law, security and economic matters, internal borders, dealing with an expansionist Russia, or even the future of the E.U. itself—remains grave.

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# Is Cheese Giving You Nightmares?

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](#).



**The Brief July 7, 2025**

**Trump comments on Musk, the Weather Services' forecasts ahead of the Texas floods, and more**

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Podcast ID – Long Length: fbc0a6b2-ecea-4f40-91e5-dcfffecec0e5

For centuries, folklore and popular wisdom have linked poor eating habits and indigestion to nightmares and restless sleep. In *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge [at first dismisses](#) the ghosts that torment him as mere dietary disturbances: “You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato,” he says to one spectral visitor. “There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!” Earlier, Benjamin Franklin [lamented that](#) “[I]ndolence, with full feeding, occasions nightmares and horrors inexpressible; we fall from precipices, are assaulted by wild beasts, murderers, and demons, and experience every variety of distress.” In the early 20th century, cartoonist Winsor McCay made his name with his “[Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend](#)” series, in which his protagonists suffer bizarre dreams and nightmares which they attributed to eating Welsh rarebit—a delicacy of spiced cheese on toast.

A modest body of contemporary research has sought to explore the link between food and nightmares more empirically. The latest is a new [study](#) published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*—finding that if you want to get your z’s, you’d best limit the cheese.

To conduct the current study, Tore Nielsen, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Montreal, and his colleagues surveyed 1,082 students at MacEwan University in Alberta. All of them completed a questionnaire about their diet, food sensitivities, sleep habits, dream recall, and more. The students reported how late in the evening they eat, whether they regularly snack without feeling hungry, and if they have any gastrointestinal symptoms, food allergies, or diet-related conditions such as lactose intolerance. They also reported how well they sleep and how often their sleep is disturbed by nightmares.

**Read More:** [What Doctors Really Think of Sleepmaxxing](#)

About 25% of people said that eating certain foods before bed seemed to worsen their sleep, while just over 20% said that some foods improved their sleep. Of the people who reported having more nightmares after eating certain foods, 31% attributed the bad dreams to consumption of desserts and other sweets, 22% pointed to dairy, 16% cited meats, and 13% blamed [spicy foods](#).

The most commonly cited medical condition linked to sleep quality was lactose intolerance—lending legitimacy to Scrooge’s “crumb of cheese” charge. Of the people who believed their diet was related to worse sleep overall, 30% were lactose intolerant.

“Nightmares are worse for lactose intolerant people who suffer severe gastrointestinal symptoms and whose sleep is disrupted,” said Nielsen in a [statement](#) that accompanied the release of the study. “This makes sense because we know that other bodily sensations can affect dreaming.” One 2024 [meta-analysis](#), for example, found that all manner of sensory experiences—including sounds, smells, flashing lights, physical pressure, and pain—can be incorporated into dreams when people are sleeping and investigators provide the stimulus.

Food-related nightmares might also be linked to depression and anxiety, the researchers say; lactose-intolerance symptoms like bloating, cramping, and gas directly affect mood, which can carry over into sleep, powering bad dreams. The paper cites an earlier 2005 [study](#) by Nielsen showing that “dreaming is more emotionally intense and conflictual when abdominal cramping is at its worst,” including during menstruation.

**Read More:** [\*What's the Least Amount of Sleep You Need to Get?\*](#)

When people eat can make a difference as well. Eating late in the evening or snacking up until bedtime is linked to an “eveningness chronotype”—essentially the state of being a [night owl](#)—which by itself has been associated with nightmares in earlier [cited studies](#).

Nielsen and his colleagues concede that their current work does not establish causation, with at least the possibility existing that bad dreams and poor sleep may lead to equally poor dietary habits, rather than the other way around. “Direction of causality in many studies of food and sleep remains unclear,” the authors write.

Not all foods, of course, are linked to nightmares and sleep disruption, and some may even support better sleep. Close to 18% of people who regularly eat fruits reported better sleep, along with 12% of people who consume a lot of vegetables, and 13% of people who drink herbal tea.

Nielsen does not believe the current research remotely closes the book on the food and sleep and dreaming link, seeing a need for a lot of future work. “We need to study more people of different ages, from different walks of life,” he said in the statement. “Experimental studies are also needed to determine if people can truly detect the effects of specific foods on dreams. We would like to run a study in which we ask people to ingest cheese products versus some control food before sleep to see if this alters their sleep or dreams.”

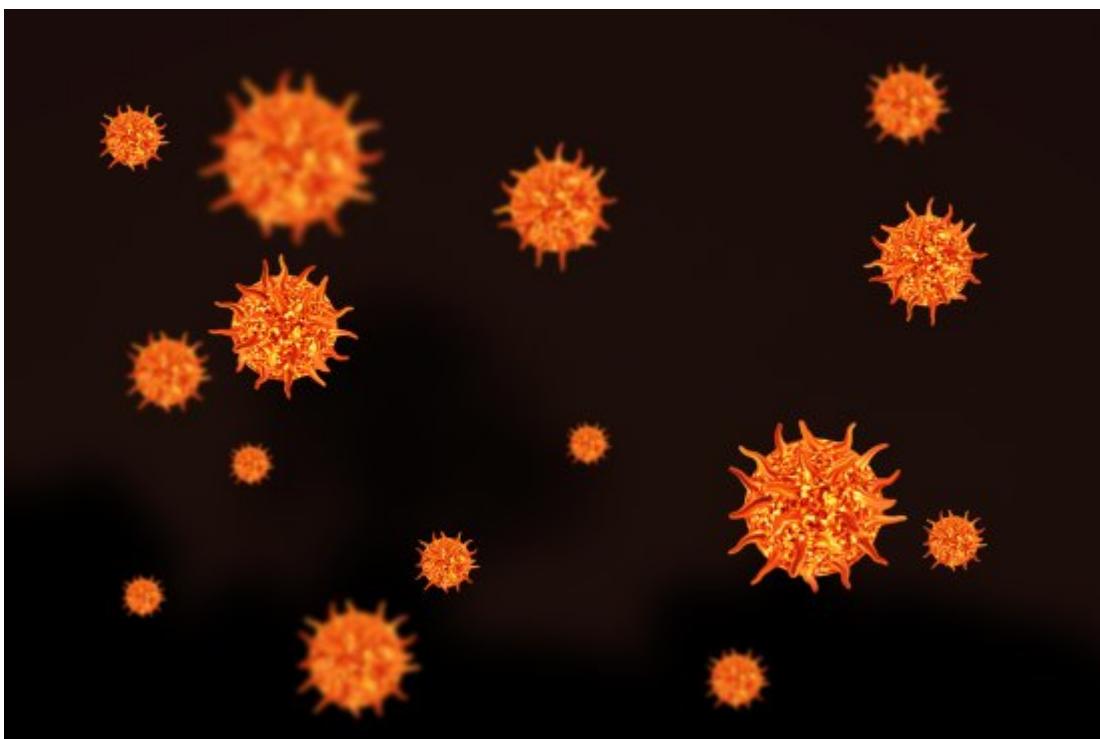
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# Today's AI Could Make Pandemics 5 Times More Likely, Experts Predict

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 a finalist for the 2022 Orwell Prize.



Recent developments in AI could mean that human-caused pandemics are five times more likely than they were just a year ago, according to a [study](#) of top experts' predictions shared exclusively with TIME.

The data echoes concerns raised by AI companies OpenAI and Anthropic in recent months, both of which have warned that today's AI tools are reaching

the ability to meaningfully assist bad actors attempting to create bioweapons.

**Read More:** [\*Exclusive: New Claude Model Triggers Bio-Risk Safeguards at Anthropic\*](#)

It has long been possible for biologists to modify viruses using laboratory technology. The new development is the ability for chatbots—like ChatGPT or Claude—to give accurate troubleshooting advice to amateur biologists trying to create a deadly bioweapon in a lab. Safety experts have long viewed the difficulty of this troubleshooting process as a significant bottleneck on the ability of terrorist groups to create a bioweapon, says Seth Donoughe, a co-author of the study. Now, he says, thanks to AI, the expertise necessary to intentionally cause a new pandemic “could become accessible to many, many more people.”

Between December 2024 and February 2025, the Forecasting Research Institute asked 46 biosecurity experts and 22 “superforecasters” (individuals with a high success rate at predicting future events) to estimate the risk of a human-caused pandemic. The average survey respondent predicted the risk of that happening in any given year was 0.3%.

Crucially, the surveyors then asked another question: how much would that risk increase if AI tools could match the performance of a team of experts on a difficult virology troubleshooting test? If AI could do that, the average expert said, then the annual risk would jump to 1.5%—a fivefold increase.

What the forecasters didn’t know was that Donoughe, a research scientist at the pandemic prevention nonprofit SecureBio, was testing AI systems for that very capability. In April, Donoughe’s team revealed the results of those tests: today’s top AI systems *can* outperform PhD-level virologists at a difficult troubleshooting test.

**Read More:** [\*Exclusive: AI Outsmarts Virus Experts in the Lab, Raising Biohazard Fears\*](#)

In other words, AI can now do the very thing that forecasters warned would increase the risk of a human-caused pandemic fivefold. (The Forecasting

Research Institute plans to re-survey the same experts in future to track whether their view of the risks has increased as they said it would, but said this research would take months to complete.)

To be sure, there are a couple of reasons to be skeptical of the results. Forecasting is an inexact science, and it is especially difficult to accurately predict the likelihood of very rare events. Forecasters in the study also revealed a lack of understanding of the rate of AI progress. (For example, when asked, most said they did not expect AI to surpass human performance at the virology test until after 2030, while Donoughe's test showed that bar had already been met.) But even if the numbers themselves are taken with a pinch of salt, the authors of the paper argue, the results as a whole still point in an ominous direction. "It does seem that near-term AI capabilities could meaningfully increase the risk of a human-caused epidemic," says Josh Rosenberg, CEO of the Forecasting Research Institute.

The study also identified ways of reducing the bioweapon risks posed by AI. Those mitigations broadly fell into two categories.

The first category is safeguards at the model level. In interviews, researchers welcomed efforts by companies like OpenAI and Anthropic to prevent their AIs from responding to prompts aimed at building a bioweapon. The paper also identifies restricting the proliferation of "[open-weights](#)" models, and adding protections against models being [jailbroken](#), as likely to reduce the risk of AI being used to start a pandemic.

The second category of safeguards involves imposing restrictions on companies that synthesize nucleic acids. Currently, it is possible to send one of these companies a genetic code, and be delivered biological materials corresponding to that code. Today, these companies are not obliged by law to screen the genetic codes they receive before synthesizing them. That's potentially dangerous because these synthesized genetic materials could be used to create mail-order pathogens. The authors of the paper recommend labs screen their genetic sequences to check them for harmfulness, and for labs to implement "know your customer" procedures.

Taken together, all these safeguards—if implemented—could bring the risk of an AI-enabled pandemic back down to 0.4%, the average forecaster said.

(Only slightly higher than the 0.3% baseline of where they believed the world was before they knew today's AI could help create a bioweapon.)

"Generally, it seems like this is a new risk area worth paying attention to," Rosenberg says. "But there are good policy responses to it."

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# Megan Stalter Is Reinventing the Rom-Com Heroine

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.



Megan Stalter talks about the experience of starring in *Too Much*, a Netflix romantic comedy series from [Lena Dunham](#), with the dreamy satisfaction of a person recounting how she found her soulmate. Like so many contemporary love stories, it began with a digital meet-cute, when the *Girls* creator—then a total stranger—slid into her DMs. “She messaged me on Instagram and said, ‘I have a project for you,’” Stalter recalls. “I was like,

‘What?!’ And she said that she wrote it with me in mind, which is the craziest thing to hear from my No. 1. I’m a No. 1 fan of Lena.”

The fantasy continued in the UK, where she filmed her role as an operatically heartbroken New Yorker who crosses the Atlantic and meets a disarmingly gentle London boy (*The White Lotus*’ Will Sharpe). Even after growing a cult following on social media with [videos of unhinged characters](#), then breaking out on Max’s *Hacks*, Stalter might have felt nervous about anchoring such a high-profile show. But her immediate rapport with Sharpe, who she was pleased to discover was “weird and funny like me,” as well as Dunham and her husband and co-creator Luis Felber, set her at ease. There is a perfect awkward moment in the premiere when Stalter’s character, Jessica, plants a hearty smooch on Sharpe’s Felix, and he responds only with an embarrassed smirk. It was the first scene they shot together, and yet, she says, “we had such an easy time improvising a lot of those lines.” A blissful working relationship, sealed with the worst kiss ever.

Maybe Stalter got lucky in finding such simpatico collaborators, but after our video chat in June, I suspect she could get along with almost anyone. “We clicked,” she says four separate times about her first encounters with different collaborators. She brims with appreciation for the people in her life; family members get the same enthusiasm as idols turned friends like Dunham. Brilliant at embodying characters high on their own questionable supply, Stalter has no trouble speaking earnestly about herself or her work. What comes through when she does is buoyancy, warmth, and a form of gratitude free of self-doubt—all auspicious traits for a rom-com ingénue in the making.

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For as long as she can remember, Stalter, 34, has been fascinated by beauty pageants and their pick-me-princess competitors. The title character of *Little Miss Ohio*, a compilation of cheerfully deranged monologues she released in the pandemic summer of 2020, is a faded beauty queen struggling to film a promo for this year’s pageant. In June, she [accepted an award](#) at an LGBTQ-oriented Critics Choice Association event for her portrayal of *Hacks*’ absurdly self-assured rookie talent manager Kayla wearing a tiara and sash

with her sheer gown. (While Kayla is apparently straight, Stalter is in a long-term relationship with a woman, Maddie Allen, and describes herself as “almost lesbian.”) Playing to an audience that embraced her campy sensibility long before she was a TV star, Stalter proclaimed: “I’m in shock that a country-bumpkin brunette made her way all the way to Hollywood and now I’m accepting the award for Best Gay Actor of All Time.”

In fact, it was her relatively humble Ohio upbringing that nurtured Stalter’s love affair with brash female characters: “To be like, *I should win, I’m the best actor, I’m the best politician or the prettiest girl in the room*, is so funny to me, because it’s so overly confident, but also there’s something really vulnerable about those kinds of characters.” A pageant girl’s bravado is matched only by her need for external validation. Stalter experienced this dichotomy firsthand as a kid who practiced tirelessly with her mom for a local poetry-declamation contest. She loved to perform, making videos with siblings and cousins, and believed in her own abilities. But, she says, “In high school, I never really got the part I wanted” despite her hard work.



That discouraging experience motivated her to create her own material. “Part of why I love doing comedy and writing for myself and doing stand-up is

that you get to make the rules,” she says. “No one’s telling you you can’t do it. I don’t have to wait for someone to say yes.” Still, it would take a while—and a few attempts at training for a more practical career, like nursing or teaching—to make her way to the comedy hub of Chicago, where she studied improv and broke into the stand-up scene. She felt like a success almost immediately, just knowing she’d finally begun to do the work she was meant to do. “It wasn’t like, ‘When is my dream gonna come true?’” she recalls. “As soon as I was like, ‘I’m gonna go for it,’ it felt like my dream was coming true. Being in an improv class was so exciting to me, getting out on my first show, or even just doing open mics.”

In the summer of 2019, Stalter moved to New York. But it was during the pandemic, which she weathered in Ohio, that her star rose, as the housebound scrolled in search of a laugh—and found lo-fi videos in which she portrayed such characters as “your boss when her tube top falls off on a Zoom meeting.” She was so convincing in variations on a woman whose cockiness is undermined by nervous stumbling or general strangeness that not everyone realized it was a bit. But being misunderstood has never fazed her. “I don’t mind making someone feel unsettled a little bit, or [pushing] them out of their comfort zone,” she says, citing [Nathan Fielder](#) as a comedian whose [blurring of personality and persona](#) she finds riveting. Besides, those bewildered reactions are fodder for the inside jokes she shares with fans who do get it.

Among the latter group were the creators of *Hacks*, Lucia Aniello, Paul W. Downs, and Jen Statsky, who spotted her online and looked past a shoddy self-tape audition to cast her as Kayla. The pandemic was still raging when Stalter moved to L.A. to shoot the dramedy, which casts Jean Smart and [Hannah Einbinder](#) as comedians of different generations jockeying for success in a sexist, ageist Hollywood. Introduced as a broad, nepo-baby foil to Downs’ pushover-manager character, Jimmy, Kayla evolved from inept assistant to shrewd showbiz strategist. In Season 4, which aired this spring, she agonized over whether to sell out Jimmy and take a big job at her father’s firm. She gives the show’s writers credit for this transformation: “They definitely let me improvise. But the storylines and the scripts are all them, so if they didn’t want [Kayla] to be such an essential part, I wouldn’t get to be.” That vote of confidence paid off, allowing Stalter to exhibit a versatility that no doubt helped her level up to multifaceted romantic lead.

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For a *Girls* girl and rom-com devotee already pinching herself to be sure the last few years weren't all a dream, landing *Too Much* felt like divine intervention. "That is straight from the stars. That's from God," says Stalter, who has always been a big believer.

In a story that echoes Dunham's romance with Felber, a British musician, Stalter's Jessica has been spiraling since her ex, Zev ([The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel](#) alum Michael Zegen), dumped her for an Instagram-perfect knitwear influencer, Wendy ([Emily Ratajkowski](#)). After a humiliating breakdown, Jess seizes the chance to work abroad in London. That means leaving her claustrophobic clan of single women in Great Neck; Rhea Perlman, [Rita Wilson](#), and Dunham play her grandma, mom, and sister. (This female-dominated family reminded Stalter of her own: "I was raised by women that all have big, strong personalities.") She arrives to find that her council-estate sublet is nothing like the verdant country estate she pictured. Her dry British boss ([Richard E. Grant](#)) resists her messy American charms. And she remains so obsessed with her ex and his now-fiancée that she accidentally lights her nightgown on fire while making a bitter video addressed to Wendy.



Felix, an indie rocker styled like a young Robert Smith, offers a calming contrast to Jess' too-muchness. But this reformed party boy has baggage too. In episodes that flash back to the couple's previous partners and explore their families' internal dynamics, *Too Much* illustrates how who we are in each romance is the culmination of every other serious relationship, sexual or otherwise, we've had. "Anytime you're dating, you're bringing everything that's ever happened to you," Stalter notes. "If you actually *are* falling in love, you are showing really bad sides of yourself."

This honest approach to romance, which affectionately comments on the idealized rom-coms parodied in each episode title ("Enough, Actually"), resonated with Stalter. Raised on the escapist pleasures of *Bridget Jones* and the [Julia Roberts canon](#), she describes Dunham's surprisingly humane spin on the genre as "subverted and unexpected and so my sense of humor," but also grounded in "beautiful, real, dramatic moments." Some are love scenes every bit as frank as the ones Dunham famously made for *Girls*, though this time around the sex is often good.

If Stalter had any lingering nerves about these intimate moments, they didn't make it to the screen. Her vulnerable performance evokes Bridget's dizziness and intelligence, and the commingling of naivety and jadedness that made *Pretty Woman*'s Vivian appealing. You can see flickers of *Legally Blonde*'s Elle Woods and *Clueless*' Cher Horowitz—who could be icons to Jess—in a wardrobe of candy colors, skirt suits, and whimsy. What these women share isn't a hair color, a shape, or a profession; it's their effervescence, a spirited lightness that has defined screwball *It Girls* for a century and practically fizzes out of Stalter's pores.

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Even in recent decades, as LGBTQ voices have moved into the mainstream, it's been rare to see queer actors leading straight romances. So it feels notable that Stalter, who has been openly bisexual for longer than she's been famous and says that "right now, I actually couldn't imagine being with a man," slides so comfortably into hetero roles. She does have years of experience with men to draw on. But immersing herself in queer community, especially via camp-soaked niches of social media, where her aggressively femme characters often play off unseen husbands, has also made her a keen

observer of straightness. “Queer people sometimes are curious about straight culture, as straight people are curious about queer cultures,” she notes.



At the same time, she has cherished the opportunity to play women navigating relationships with women, as she did in the title role of the 2023 indie film *Cora Bora*, which follows an unmoored musician straining to hold on to a long-distance girlfriend. “It’s really emotional and meaningful for me to play queer characters because of what it means for representation,” she says. To that end, she has spent the past few years developing a comedy series called *Church Girls* with A24 and Max. Inspired by her experiences, it casts Stalter as a young, Christian woman in Ohio coming to terms with the realization that she is a lesbian.

Especially in a polarized society where loving God and “love is love” can seem incompatible, Stalter feels compelled to demonstrate otherwise. “I’ve never understood why you wouldn’t be able to be gay and be a God girl,” she says, pointing out that the Bible has about as little to say against homosexuality as it does against, say, eating shrimp. “It hurts me to think, if somebody wanted to connect in a spiritual way, that they would feel like they wouldn’t be allowed to because of their sexuality.”

*Church Girls* is Stalter’s dream project, the one she makes time for even as she juggles TV roles, live comedy tours, and a devotion to posting weird videos on the internet that didn’t end when she booked *Hacks*. (“Laughing with strangers online is just important to me.”) Which is not to say she’s torched her personal life: “You always make time for things that are important to you.” For her, that means friends, family, plus her dog and two cats—“literally God’s little angels sent down to help us.” On screen and off, in work as at home, Stalter seems to seek out soul-deep connections. It’s the kind of romantic quest that, like a wounded American girl giving love a second shot in the land of *Wuthering Heights* and *Notting Hill*, you can’t help but root for.

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# Ari Aster's Eddington Is a Wigged-Out Modern Western Overstuffed With Ideas

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.



How many times in the past few years have you heard, or used, the expression “The pandemic broke our brains”? Particularly in less densely populated parts of America, plenty of government officials and citizens still hold a grudge over the way businesses and schools were temporarily shut down. In some places, [mask-wearing](#) is still treated as a sign of wimpiness. Parents blame their kids’ social awkwardness or inability to keep up in school on the [“lost” years of education](#) over Zoom. Forget that COVID-19 actually killed people, and that some who survived still suffer lingering

effects. The pandemic is the global event we just can't let go, a handy scapegoat for people's anger over how and why their lives aren't exactly as they'd like them to be.

How did we get here? That's the question writer-director Ari Aster's somber comedy-Western *Eddington*, playing in competition here at the Cannes Film Festival, appears to be asking. The story opens in late May 2020. Major cities like New York were already facing frightening death tolls that climbed higher each day—but that's not what *Eddington* is about. It's set in the (fictional) city of Eddington, NM, where the local sheriff, [Joaquin Phoenix's](#) Joe Cross, tools around town responding to minor crises like noise complaints. He has a wife he adores, [Emma Stone's](#) Louise, who wiles away her days making whimsically creepy dolls; she even manages to sell some once in a while, though it turns out Joe is paying friends-of-friends to buy them. She's also emotionally fragile, and some unspecified trauma has caused her to have zero interest in sex. It doesn't help that her overbearing mother, Dawn (Deirdre O'Connell), has moved into the couple's cozy Southwestern-style home, toting along a figurative suitcase of conspiracy theories.

Joe is stressed at home and annoyed at work. He's basically a decent guy, but you get the sense he's ready to blow. He hates the recently established local mask mandates: An asthmatic, he claims that wearing a mask prevents him from breathing properly, oblivious to the fact that his asthma makes him more susceptible to serious COVID complications. But what he hates more than masks is the town's sanctimonious mayor, Ted Garcia ([Pedro Pascal](#)), who's up for reelection. Ted is promising a "tech-positive future" for the city, but that really just means opening an AI deep learning facility that will gobble up resources and ultimately put real, live, thinking people out of work, though he's also pro-wind and solar power. He's one of those guys who'll put his stamp on anything, as long as he thinks it will make him look good.

It's easy to see why he drives Joe crazy. And in a fit of pique one day, Joe decides to enter the mayoral race himself. He enlists the help of his two loyal deputies, Michael (Micheal Ward) and Guy (Luke Grimes), to figure out the requirements. He carefully makes his own signage, decorating his

sheriffmobile like an elaborate circus wagon. (The signs have a confident, professional look, made by a guy whose enthusiasm is greater than his knowledge of punctuation and grammar. One reads “Your Being Manipulated.”) And he proceeds to both annoy and destroy his opponent, who’s such a glad-handing windbag you don’t mind seeing him being taken down a peg or two. (Pascal is good at playing these types of sleazy charmers.) One of his campaign commercials shows him laughing and smiling with random Black citizens, in numbers larger than the city’s actual Black population. Joe wonders aloud if he’s had them shipped in.

But Joe’s droll swagger can’t hide the fact that he’s beginning to fall apart. Louise has fallen under the spell of a slippery self-help guru, played by a buttery-smooth [Austin Butler](#); there’s another complication in that she and Ted have a sexual history together—Ted may have raped her, though he denies it. Just as Joe launches his campaign, the [murder of George Floyd](#) spurs protests around the country, and not even little Eddington is spared. Small bands of protesters gather, brandishing Black Lives Matter signs. They mean well, but there’s hypocrisy there too. In one of the movie’s most cutting lines of dialogue, an insufferable white liberal do-gooder, played by Amélie Hoeferle, scolds Michael, who is Black (and whom she briefly dated), for not taking to the streets in protest. “I haven’t experienced racism, but you have,” she tells him, practically poking her finger in his chest. There will always be white people who just can’t stop themselves from telling Black people how they ought to feel.

*Eddington* is an intelligent, questioning movie. But Aster just tries to pack in too much. He jabs at the sometimes-questionable veracity of recovered-memory syndrome. He’s annoyed, justifiably, by the way activists with good intentions can be so piously bullying they can actually drive you away from a cause. The plot spirals into murder and mayhem; it takes way too much time to wrap up. And I have almost no clue what the ending means, though there’s a great sight gag of three unlikely people crowding into one queen-size bed as if it were simply business as usual.

As a filmmaker, Aster is two parts visionary to one part irritant. He knows how to translate his ideas into evocative visuals: in his terror-round-the-maypole reverie [Midsommar](#), Florence Pugh wears a flower crown made of

what appear to be blinking, breathing, sentient flowers—the effect is creepy and beautiful at once. *Beau Is Afraid* is an ode to human neuroses in movie form, and if it's wearisome by the end, its opening sequence is wickedly brilliant, a shaggy-dog rondelay in which a hapless New Yorker (played by Phoenix) encounters, in a span of minutes, the worst of all Manhattan has to offer, from neighbors bitterly complaining about nonexistent noise to a crew of dirty, crazy-eyed street people pouring into his apartment for an impromptu hootenanny of debauchery.

Aster has so many ideas he doesn't know when to stop, which is why it's easy to lose patience with his movies. And while he has a sense of humor about his own neuroses, he's often guilty of oversharing. But he's observant about the way humans interact, and about their tendency to let their fears and insecurities rule them. And he's clear-eyed about the ways even well-meaning people can do horrible things if they're pushed to the breaking point. One of the strengths of *Eddington* is that even though it's a story about people preoccupied with politics, and a society under great strain, the last thing Aster wants to do is lecture us. Some of the movie's views may be his own, but mostly it seems drawn from weird, aggravating, or poignant behavior he's observed firsthand. (It's worth noting that while Aster was born a New Yorker, he spent much of his childhood living with his family in New Mexico.) And the movie's score, by the Haxan Cloak and Daniel Pemberton, is wonderful: there are sweeping passages of Elmer Bernstein-like jauntiness. If this wigged-out modern Western doesn't quite work, it's at the very least a cry of vexation over what our country, messy at the best of times, has become, thanks to a virus that found its way not just into our lungs, but into our very lifeblood. Dr. Aster has listened in on America's heartbeat; the diagnosis is that we're basically a mess.

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# Saab CEO Micael Johansson on the Future of Warfare and Why Europe Needs Its Own ‘Golden Dome’

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.



Swedish company Saab AB has been a cornerstone of the European aerospace and defense industry for almost nine decades. Renowned for its innovative approach, Saab develops military aircraft, surface-to-air

missiles, submarines, and other defense systems for governments around the globe.

Saab today sits at the cutting-edge of defense technology, continuously enhancing its product portfolio to meet evolving security challenges. And with security once again at the top of the world political agenda, Saab has benefited. The \$27 billion firm has seen its share price double since the start of the year and rise eight-fold since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Micael Johansson has served as CEO and president of Saab since 2019. In May, he was also [appointed](#) president and chairman of the Aerospace, Security and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD), which represents over 4,000 defense-related companies across 21 European countries and works with policymakers and institutions across the continent to boost regional security.

TIME caught up with Johansson on the sidelines of last month's Shangri-La Security Dialogue in Singapore.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

**We're here at Shangri-la Dialogue, where U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth just [remarked](#) that the Indo-Pacific is the "primary theater" for the U.S. Is that how Saab is seeing things? Do you feel that this is a region for you to expand sales?**

We are not focusing only on Europe, and we are also in the U.S. But we have to be selective in what campaigns we can win, because bearing in mind Japan is very U.S.-oriented. [South] Korea as well. The Philippines has a big U.S. presence, especially in the naval domain. But we have things to offer that make a difference. And there is a feeling that, "OK, we want to have the support of the U.S., but we also maybe need to work with a few others." Even Japan is opening up a bit; South Korea as well—they selected the C390 transport aircraft [produced by Brazilian firm Embraer] and not [Lockheed Martin's] C130.

So, of course, we can find our niches and work here. But it's super important the U.S. makes sure that these countries have the capabilities needed to work with them, and being interoperable is, of course, a given. That's the perception we have in Europe. [The U.S.] has been crystal clear, independent of administration, that Europe has to take responsibility for its security and create deterrence. And I agree completely that we've been too naive for decades now, since the [Berlin] Wall fell that eternal peace will happen, and we come from a peace dividend. So we have a lot to catch up to do, but we have a good foundation of defense industries.

**Secretary Hegseth talked about broadening the defense industrial base. That must be music to your ears in these days of “America First” that the U.S. wants to be collaborative for military industries?**

Every politician, not only in the U.S. but also European, have now started to state that you don't have any defense capabilities unless you have a strong industrial base. And I also think it needs to be tighter—so much will be software-defined going forward, so you will need upgrades all the time. You see it in Ukraine. This means that you have to have a business model where you work closely in peace time and also in wartime, if that happens.

**What are some of the lessons Saab has learned from Ukraine in terms of the specific capabilities you've seen tested on the battlefield?**

It's going to be more and more autonomous systems in all domains going forward, for sure. Maybe one cannot draw full conclusions from the war in Ukraine—in terms of whether conflict will always look like that, if unfortunately we get a new one, because it depends on what kind of air superiority you have. And if that had happened, you maybe wouldn't have seen this standstill World War I type of war, at the same time with the drones taking everything out in a 10 km [6 mile] “death valley” at the frontline. But autonomous systems and how often you have to upgrade your systems to cope with the congested environment, in terms of electronic warfare and stuff, we'll see a lot of that going forward. So these things we've learned, and then we learned a few things from what we have provided, either indirectly donated by other countries, or directly to Ukraine, and how things are actually working on the battlefield. And that's important feedback as well that affects our development going forward.

**Saab is a Swedish company and your country recently joined NATO. How has that affected government support and the mindset of your business?**

It's a big thing for our country. Because being an independent country, nonaligned, that is all about sovereign defense capabilities. Of course, we've had our bilateral relationships before and we have been supplying things that are interoperable with NATO, so that's not been a problem. But I think for the defense forces, being a country in the Nordic Region which now has to supply Finland—the transport perspective, the logistics, how to support the 1,300 km [800 mile] border that Finland has with Russia is, of course, something we never thought about. Before it's all about moving things south, north; now it's going to be west, east, and putting a number of capabilities and defense forces in Finland, and we're also doing that as we speak in the Baltic states. So the whole defense concept and NATO capability targets, which we've never had before, will be some new things. Saab as a company is well positioned—we have a portfolio of everything from fighters to submarines to globalized airborne early warning and also lots of sensors, command and control, and advanced weapon systems. So portfolio-wise we're in a very good position to support NATO adaptation.

**Read More:** [\*The Man Who Wants to Save NATO\*](#)

**There's been a lot of focus on maintaining a status quo in the Taiwan Strait and you've started doing deals with U.S. allies here. Is Saab's Gripen E fighter a key component of that goal of maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific?**

We hope that we will be selected from some countries on the Gripen fighter side. Thailand has selected us, we have a campaign with the Philippines, we will see which way they go. They are U.S.-oriented but you never know; maybe they may need a more agile fleet, or dual fleet. But everyone selects what they think would be needed.

But these megadeals are extremely political. So, it's prime minister level or defense minister level. So even if you have a fantastic product, they involve security agreements, and you have a government-to-government agreement. And if a country like the U.S. leans in and uses its leverage, of course, it's

difficult to win. But there are countries that do not want that and those are where we try to be successful. But we have a fantastic product, that's not a problem.

**But if you're supplying countries which are U.S. allies enlisted as part of Washington's strategy of containment of China, Sweden might face pushback from Beijing. Is that something which enters into your calculus?**

It's never been something that's popped up. We never had any pushback from China for being in the region. Absolutely not. But it's an interesting question. Can that happen? I don't think so. But I can't be 100% sure.

**How are AI and other future technologies being infused into your products? And how do they aid the product development in terms of digital twins and things to be able to reach the market quickly?**

AI agents are incredibly important when you have so much information to digest and to quickly get to a situation awareness picture. If you don't use AI, you won't be able to make out a reasonable situation awareness, and the quicker you can do that, the better you will [respond] toward your aggressor.

The future is not to create a super-secret electronic warfare library, where you would have your sensors picking out signatures on certain platforms and next time you fly you recognize: "This is a MIG29, this is a SU57." Now the sensor systems are intelligent in the way that you can reshape your signal so that you have cognitive understanding of what the threat looks like. If you don't use AI in that perspective, you're done. That's also the future. So we do include AI agents in our electronic warfare systems to continuously understand what you're looking at, what you're trying to hit.

**And in terms of gray zone tactics, what are you learning from both Ukraine and what's happening in other theaters?**

There are lots of gray zone things happening, of course. It's obvious ... when you deliberately ruin cabling at the sea bottom, and the Nord Stream gas [pipeline] blowing up, and there are shadow ships "by mistake"

dragging their anchors for 20 km. Crazy, of course. But also probing critical infrastructure and power junctions and stuff like that. And also agencies, authorities, even community offices have been taken out by cyber. Of course, there's a cyber threat all the time and it's a battle in itself to cope with that.

**You've been made president and chairman of ASD. How do you expect to use this position to strengthen Europe's security landscape?**

These are very important times. We need to push for more collaboration and creating scale and to actually run a few flagship projects together, and to get the incentives from the [European] Commission to do that. To have countries put some money into a common bucket where we can do things together is important. Then I want the U.K. to be part of the European way of working on defense as if they were still in the E.U. That's super important. But then we have the regulation perspective. So there's lots to do from a European perspective. And the challenge is that the E.U. is a consensus organization. But industry can do a lot to create bridges by working together to create stronger defense in Europe. We have a good foundation of a defense industrial base, and that's because we are globally competitive as industries, but we have so much spending going outside Europe in a different direction, mainly the U.S. I want a competitive landscape. But you can't have the U.S. buying everything from the U.S.—98% or something—and then we've been spending like 78% outside Europe, and the majority of that in the U.S. We have to do more ourselves to be really competitive going forward and to take care of our security landscape.

**As such, are President Trump's tariffs positive for you, given selling between Europeans means avoiding these levies? Or will they still affect your supply chains?**

In the end, it will [affect supply chains.] Of course, trade wars are terrible but I think we have a bit more resilience in our business segment, because we carry more stockpiles, we have some protection when it comes to contracts, we don't have a hub somewhere where all the components are being built for everything we do—like the car industry, which could be extremely dependent on what's happening in Mexico, for example. [Our

industry] is more regionalized when it comes to the supply chain as well. But, of course, we have dependencies, and it's not good, but it will take a little bit longer before we are super affected. Also, so many countries have reciprocal agreements between Europe and the U.S., where this is exempted from tariffs and taxes. I don't know whether these executive orders overrule all of this—that has never been discussed—but, of course, it's not good to have tariffs.

### **Are they dangerous for global security?**

Yeah, I think they'll create complexities, and maybe you don't get the best capability because you have to rely upon other things—you can't afford, or you can't work with some companies, and then you get stuff that is not the best. So in the end, indirectly, it could be affecting what capabilities you build.

### **There's been lots of changes in defense procurement like drone technology and unmanned submersibles. But what is the next great leap you are looking at in the future of the security industry?**

Obviously, lots of swarm technology and drones and collaborative combat aircraft. But I also think [it will be] the connectivity aspect of systems. Everything will be connected going forward. And then you have hypersonic weapon systems and being able to protect yourself from them. That's the big next step. It's going to be dangerous, it's going to be super quick, and that's probably the next step. But how to use AI's compute power is also absolutely something we put a lot of effort into.

### **President Trump recently advocated a Golden Dome missile defense system for the U.S. Is this something which Europe should also consider?**

Absolutely. That's the flagship project that I would like to push for—not only for Saab but also for ASD. We need to come together—industries and countries—to create things like that: integrated enemy cell defense systems with short, medium, and long-range capabilities. We don't have that in Europe. We need to have that.

## **Is there enough cohesion and unity in Europe for this type of thing to happen?**

I think so. We have the capabilities to do it. It's just how you create that industry construct, and how do you align the requirements. It comes with aligning requirements and demand, and then industry will come together. We're not really there yet. There have been political statements like the [European Sky Shield Initiative](#), but it's really slow. That's the problem.

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