

President-elect Donald Trump

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- **FX's Say Nothing Is the Must-Watch Political Thriller of 2024**

How Trump Won

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



It was the moment he had fantasized about for four years. At 2:24 a.m. on Nov. 6, [Donald Trump strutted on stage in a Florida ballroom](#), surrounded by advisers, party leaders, family and friends. The Associated Press had yet to call the race, but it was clear by then that the voters had swept him back into power. Staring out at a sea of supporters sporting red MAGA hats, Trump basked in the all-but-certain triumph. “We’ve achieved the most incredible political thing,” Trump said. “America has given us an unprecedented and powerful mandate.”

How [Trump](#), 78, won re-election will be the stuff of history books, and already America’s choice can be traced to some key decisions. To Trump’s top aides, the thesis of the campaign could be summed up in a simple slogan: “Max out the men and hold the women.” That meant emphasizing the [economy](#) and [immigration](#), which Trump did relentlessly. It meant diverting attention away from the chaos of his first term, the [abortion bans](#) he ushered in, and his assault on American democracy four years ago. It meant a campaign that rode the resentment of disenchanted voters and capitalized on the cultural fractures and tribal politics that Trump has long exploited.

Most of all, the outcome can be credited to a singular figure whose return to the White House traced a political arc unlike any in 250 years of American history. Trump left office in 2021 a pariah after [inciting a mob of supporters](#) to ransack the U.S. Capitol at the end of an attempt to overturn his electoral defeat. Three years later, he engineered an unprecedented political comeback. Trump effortlessly dispatched his GOP rivals, forced [President Joe Biden](#) out of the race, and vanquished Vice President Kamala Harris in a dominant victory that exceeded virtually everyone’s expectations. Along the way, Trump shrugged off a [34-count felony conviction](#) and an array of other criminal indictments.

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The scale of his success was stunning. Trump carried North Carolina, flipped Georgia back to his column, and smashed through the Blue Wall. His campaign outperformed its goal of turning out men and holding women. Exit polls showed Trump winning large numbers of Latino men in key battleground states, improving his numbers with that group in Pennsylvania from 27% to 42%. Nationally, Trump's support among Latino men leaped from 36% to 54%. Trump also increased his share of voters without a college degree, gained ground with Black voters in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, and held steady nationally with white women, shocking Democrats who had expected a post-*Dobbs* uprising. Among first-time voters, Trump boosted his support from 32% four years ago to a 54% majority.

Read More: [How Far Trump Would Go](#).

He got his share of big breaks. When [Trump launched this campaign](#) on the heels of a third straight rebuke in national elections, Republican leaders tried to ignore him. His primary opponents were too timid to take him on. A combination of friendly judges and legal postponements pushed his most damning criminal trials to after the election. Until July, Trump's general-election opponent was an unpopular incumbent viewed by many as too old to continue in the job. Biden only confirmed those suspicions when he [bumbled through](#) their first, and only, debate. The Democrats' hasty replacement of the first-term president [with Harris](#) deprived them of a better-tested candidate who could potentially have rallied broader support. Voters took Trump's own advanced age and increasingly incoherent trail rhetoric in stride. Much of the country read [Trump's legal woes](#) as part of a larger corrupt conspiracy to deny him, and them, power. And he benefited from a global restiveness in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that has ousted incumbent leaders around the world.

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The consequences may be historic. Trump has dominated American politics for nine years now, and after four years of his tumultuous presidency punctuated by an insurrection, the country chose to reinstall him. Trump campaigned on an authoritarian agenda that would [upend America's](#)

[democratic norms](#), and he is already preparing to deliver on it: mass detention and deportations of migrants; revenge against political enemies via the justice system; deploying the military against his own civilians. How far he chooses to go with the power the public has handed him is a question that will shape the fate of the country.



To the MAGA faithful, Trump's victory is a thrilling vision coming into view. For the less fervent supporters who helped put him over the top, his rhetoric is largely bluster in service of reforming a government out of touch with America's economic and social needs. To the rest of the country and much of the world, [a second Trump term](#) looks like a blow to democracy in the U.S. and beyond. That split screen will animate American discourse for the next four years. The nation is more polarized than at any point since the Civil War. But soon, there will be at least one thing that binds us all together: Come Jan. 20, we will all be living in Trump's America. This account of how Trump did it, based on more than 20 interviews over the last eight months, offers a glimpse of what that may look like.

As always, the strategy started with Trump's instinct. In April 2023, he was huddled with advisers at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, days after he had [made history](#) as the first former President charged with a crime. The subject of the conversation: How could he control the political narrative? Trump had just gotten off the phone with [his friend Dana White](#), the CEO of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. There was a fight that Saturday in Miami. "I think those guys would love me," Trump said.

When Trump entered the arena on April 10, he [was met with thunderous applause](#). While there, he ran into the Nelk Boys, a group of influencers who host a right-wing podcast. Trump had gone on their show a year earlier, but it was [removed by YouTube](#) for spreading election lies. The chance meeting led to a second appearance. His closest confidantes didn't realize it at the time, but interviews on male-focused podcasts would become a throughline of his extraordinary political resurrection.

Read More: [*The Full Transcripts of Donald Trump's Interviews With TIME*](#)

It's easy to forget how shaky Trump's prospects seemed at the outset of his campaign. He [announced](#) his third bid for the White House in Nov. 2022, days after [Republicans took a beating](#) in the midterms—the third straight national election in which the former President was seen as a drag on his party. Trump's hand-picked candidates embraced his lie that the 2020 election was stolen and lost critical races across the country. Elected Republicans took it as a sign that America was done with Trump and nearly all shunned his grievance-riddled kickoff speech at Mar-a-Lago. They just hoped he would fade away.



But the early campaign launch turned out to be a savvy move, positioning Trump to cast his looming criminal prosecutions as politically motivated. With [each indictment](#), he gained ground with the GOP base and raked in millions in cash. His primary challengers spent more time trying to beat up on each other than take out the man who stood in their way. Florida Governor [Ron DeSantis](#), arguably Trump's most formidable opponent, [dropped out](#) after the Iowa caucuses. By March, Trump had secured enough delegates to become the presumptive Republican nominee. It was the fastest contested presidential primary in modern American history.

Trump's landslide in the primary was the product of a strategy honed by Trump's two campaign managers: Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita. Wiles, a veteran Florida-based strategist, had worked for DeSantis's 2018 run for governor, but they had a falling out after he was sworn in. Following the 2020 presidential election, Wiles took charge of Trump's primary PAC, Save America. In exile but already plotting his path back to Washington, Trump suspected his toughest obstacle in the 2024 primary would likely be DeSantis, sources close to him say. Who better to help him than Wiles?

Wiles recruited LaCivita, a hard-nosed Republican operative. Together, they drafted the campaign's strategy. The MAGA base was strong enough to assure Trump's victory in the GOP primaries, they concluded, giving them time to test-run a plan to defeat Biden in November. Trump's team focused on building an operation that could identify and turn out Trump supporters who were not reliable voters.



Wiles and LaCivita, political director James Blair, and Trump's longtime pollster Tony Fabrizo, believed that gender would be key. In 2020, Biden won by holding the same 13-point lead among women that Hillary Clinton had over Trump in 2016, while narrowing the gap among men by five points. "Men cost us the last election," a top Trump campaign source says. "Our objective became not to let that happen again."

Surveys found that men, [particularly young men](#), were turning away from Biden the most, especially over the economy. In a head-to-head matchup, Trump's lead was the most dominant among unreliable male voters younger than 40. Advisers concentrated on activating this cohort, which, by and

large, [saw Biden as an elderly man](#) who shouldn't be President. These young men didn't get their news from mainstream media and were less concerned with [reproductive rights](#) or democratic backsliding. When they did interact with politics, it was mostly through edgy bro podcasts and social media. They appreciated Trump's brashness and habit of smashing norms. It was a risk to focus significant energy on turning out voters who don't care much about politics. But LaCivita would often repeat a Winston Churchill line that became a campaign mantra: "To try to be safe everywhere is to be strong nowhere."

As Trump pursued the male vote, he also had to avoid losing women by larger margins than in 2016 and 2020—no easy feat after his Supreme Court appointments helped [overturn Roe v. Wade](#) and pave the way for abortion bans across the country. Whenever abortion came up, [Trump insisted the issue](#) was now up to the states, and pivoted as much as possible to the economy, immigration, and crime—issues the campaign believed triggered anxiety with well-to-do suburban women who were open to backing him.



When [Trump spoke with TIME in April 2024](#), Biden's poll numbers were tanking and Trump's camp believed they were well on their way to a decisive victory. In two interviews, Trump laid out a second-term agenda that would reshape America and its role in the world. All the while, a constellation of Trump-allied groups, such as the [Heritage Foundation's Project 2025](#) and the Center for Renewing America, were laying the groundwork to implement Trump's strongman vision. Many of their ideas—from imposing harsh abortion restrictions to gutting environmental protections and placing the entire federal bureaucracy under presidential control—were broadly unpopular with wide swaths of the electorate. But Trump seemed to think a victory in the fall was preordained.

Read More: [*The Reinvention of J.D. Vance*](#).

The campaign's confidence only grew over an intense three weeks that began with Biden's disastrous June 27 debate performance. On July 13, [Trump survived an assassination attempt](#) in Butler, Pa., with the shooter's bullet piercing his ear and Trump rising to his feet and pumping his fist as blood streaked down his face, a spectacle of defiance that thrilled his supporters. [Trump's announcement of 39-year-old Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance as his running mate](#) at the Republican convention days later seemed like a statement of confidence that the MAGA movement would endure long after its leader exited the scene.

The high didn't last for long. Three days after the GOP convention concluded, [Biden announced he would not seek reelection and endorsed Harris](#). In a matter of days, the [Vice President consolidated Democratic support](#). Soon she was outraising Trump by hundreds of millions of dollars, and hosting rallies that attracted the kind of attendance and enthusiasm her party hadn't seen since the Obama era. Trump's victory no longer seemed like a foregone conclusion.



In a series of meetings in Palm Beach and at Trump's New Jersey golf club, Wiles, LaCivita and their staff held bull sessions to address the threats posed by their new opponent. A younger candidate made it harder for them to attract voters disillusioned with Biden. Holding down losses with women while running against one would be even tougher. Democratic efforts to tie Trump to extreme agendas like that of Project 2025 were starting to bear fruit. Early internal polling indicated the challenge, according to Trump sources. Fabrizio had surveys showing that there was a broad appetite for change, and the biggest risk they had was letting Harris become the change-agent candidate.

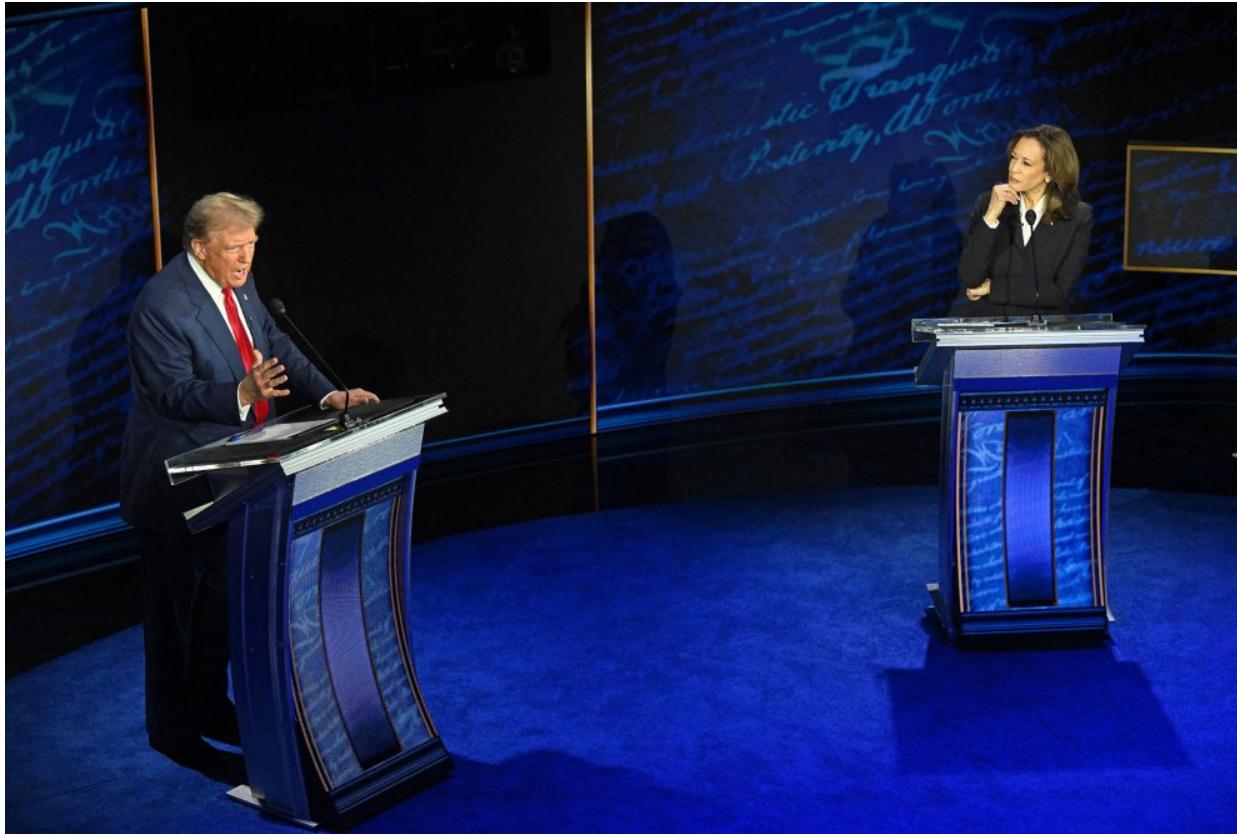
The Trump team began running ads, and having their surrogates go on cable television, blaming Harris for Biden's presidency, surmising that she would inherit many of the same vulnerabilities of her boss. They focused on her role [working on immigration for the Administration](#), in which she was assigned to address the root causes of migration from Central America, to blame her for a surge in border crossings. At the same time, Trump set out to

distance himself from Project 2025, while working to paint Harris as further to the left than she really is.

Privately, the campaign estimated that Trump's message on abortion—to leave it to the states—was insufficient. Surveys showed that abortion rights were the third or fourth most important issue to voters. After months of Trump dancing around the issue of federal restrictions, Trump's top lieutenants told him it was time to address it head on. On Oct. 1, Trump [posted](#) on Truth Social that he wouldn't support a national ban.

Read More: [*How Trump 2.0 Would Remake Washington.*](#)

There were internal challenges as well. Trump was becoming increasingly restless and agitated. He brought in allies from his previous campaigns, including Corey Lewandowski, one of his 2016 campaign managers. One of the most consistent proponents of "let Trump be Trump," Lewandowski believed Wiles and LaCivita were blowing it, according to multiple campaign officials. In August, Lewandowski held a meeting with Trump in which he advised the Republican nominee to fire his entire campaign leadership, according to two sources familiar with the meeting. Trump made no commitments but nodded and heard him out. Wiles and LaCivita soon held a meeting with Trump to say that Lewandowski was creating a distraction, throwing the campaign off course. What they have been doing has worked, Wiles told him, and it was not the time to deviate. Trump agreed. On his next plane ride, he held a meeting with all of them, including Lewandowski, who over the final weeks of the race was sidelined as an adviser, largely relegated to appearances on cable news.



Harris' momentum seemed to continue through September. She [won the lone debate](#) between the two candidates, baiting Trump into mistakes. "There was a lot of internal worry that she was a stronger opponent than we realized and that the ground has shifted," says a top Trump official. But the campaign was relieved a week later, when polling showed that the debate hardly changed the race and that the candidates were tied. Trump returned to his mantra: accelerate the push to win over young, male voters. In late July, Wiles tasked Alex Bruesewitz, a 27-year-old GOP consultant, with presenting Trump with a list of online podcast personalities for interviews, several people familiar with the matter tell TIME. Bruesewitz and Danielle Alvarez, another Trump senior adviser, reached Trump on the golf course the next morning.

"I have a list of podcasts I wanted to pitch you on," Bruesewitz said. Trump stopped him there. "Have you talked this over with Barron?" he asked, referring to his 18-year-old son.

"No, sir," Bruesewitz said.

“Call Barron and see what he thinks and let me know,” Trump said, and abruptly hung up. Bruesewitz reached Barron later that day and learned that he was particularly fond of Adin Ross, a provocateur mostly known for collaborating with celebrities on live-streams of video games, such as NBA2K and Grand Theft Auto. They agreed that’s where Trump should start. The [podcast strategy](#) was in motion.

In August, Trump appeared on Ross’ podcast, which went viral, [racking up](#) millions of views on the livestream. The ensuing weeks were marked by a succession of fawning interviews with laddish podcast hosts: Logan Paul, Theo Von, Joe Rogan. The campaign made a deliberate decision to avoid most traditional media interviews.



Trump took an unorthodox approach to outsiders. He neutralized a potential third-party threat by offering Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. control over health care policy [in exchange for dropping out and endorsing him](#), Kennedy claimed. The campaign outsourced its most labor-intensive field operations in critical swing states to groups like Turning Point USA and America First Works. In the final weeks of the race, [billionaire Elon Musk poured more than \\$100 million into his own political action committee](#) to help Trump in swing states. Promised the leadership of a new “government efficiency commission” that would oversee the myriad federal agencies that regulate his companies, Musk hired staffers and incentivized them with payouts to reach voters. He personally camped out in Pennsylvania, seen by both sides as the pivotal battleground state, and handed out \$1 million checks in sweepstakes for registered voters who signed a petition. Musk also turned X, his social media platform, into a cauldron of conspiracy theories and characterized the stakes of the race to his more than 200 million followers as existential. In the election’s final weeks, he promulgated the far-right conspiracy theory that Democrats were “importing” undocumented immigrants to swing states to irrevocably tilt the electoral map in their favor. “If Trump doesn’t win,” Musk [said](#), “this is the last election.”

As always, Trump’s self-destructive impulses posed a challenge. With a little more than a week before Election Day, he fulfilled a lifelong dream by [holding a rally at New York City’s Madison Square Garden](#). The event was marked by hateful, xenophobic and racist rhetoric by Trump’s warm-up speakers. The Trump campaign brought in an array of profane pugilists, including the insult comic Tony Hinchcliffe, who [called Puerto Rico a “floating island of garbage.”](#) The campaign did not vet his remarks or upload them into the teleprompter ahead of his routine, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

Trump’s former chief of staff John Kelly had recently gone [on record saying that Trump praised Hitler’s generals](#). Trump’s former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Ret. Gen. Mark Milley, [called him “fascist to the core.”](#) Internal polling from the Harris campaign indicated that the odiousness of the rally was tipping late-deciding voters in her favor. It seemed like Trump might be imploding at the 11th hour.



Shortly after 9 p.m. on Election Night, Trump entered a ballroom in his Mar-a-Lago club to a raucous ovation and a crowd full of his well-heeled benefactors. Behind him were his family members, including his son Eric and [daughter-in-law Lara](#), and his youngest son Barron. For the next three and a half hours, he watched with glee alongside Musk and White as the returns rolled in even more favorably than his most bullish champions predicted.

Trump's transition team is stacked with loyalists like former Cabinet secretary Linda McMahon and businessman Howard Lutnick; his sons Don Jr. and Eric; and his running mate Vance. All of them were tasked with making sure only true believers join his Administration-in-waiting. He's expected to tap into the network of organizations that have been preparing to implement his ideas. That includes Russ Vought, his former director of the Office of Management and Budget who runs the Center for Renewing America, who has been crafting draft executive orders Trump can sign within his first hours as President.

The first, and most aggressive, agenda item is expected to be immigration and the border. In his interview with TIME, Trump said he plans to use executive power to begin mass deportations of undocumented migrants, ordering the National Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and federal law enforcement to conduct raids. Tom Homan, a former Trump official now affiliated with Project 2025, is expected to lead the effort, according to campaign sources.

At the same time, top Trump advisers tell TIME, there will be a massive purge of the federal bureaucracy. The most satisfying part of that to Trump, they say, will be [firing Jack Smith](#), the Special Counsel prosecuting him on charges of willfully mishandling classified information and conspiring to overthrow the 2020 election.



Trump's most controversial moves are all but certain to face significant legal and political fights. He has vowed on the campaign trail to pick an attorney general who will investigate and prosecute his political rivals and critics. Trump will be emboldened by a [Supreme Court ruling](#) last summer that

granted U.S. presidents potential immunity from some criminal prosecution for official acts. Between Trump's psychological disposition, his vows to seek revenge on his adversaries, and the removal of many of the guardrails that hindered him in a first term, scholars of authoritarianism see a nation on the brink of crisis.

Ultimately the election is as much a judgment on the American people as it is on the man they have returned to office. [Trump's comeback](#) didn't happen at random. By building a social and political movement that gave him coercive power over the Republican Party, Trump systematically demolished many of the nation's long-standing norms, ushering in a cohort of lackeys who will enable his most autocratic impulses. He will enter his second term committed to creating a governing environment with few restraints on his power. He did not hide any of this. It was what the American people decided they wanted.

With reporting by Philip Elliott/Washington

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How We Chose the 100 Most Influential Climate Leaders in Business for 2024

Kyla Mandel is a senior editor at TIME. She oversees climate, science, and space coverage.

NOV. 25, 2024

TIME 100 CLIMATE

THE 100 MOST
INFLUENTIAL
LEADERS
DRIVING
BUSINESS
TO REAL
CLIMATE
ACTION

Ajay Banga

BY JUSTIN WORLAND

Plus

Wanjira Mathai
Jennifer Granholm
Niels Christiansen
Andrew Forrest
Bill Gates
& 94 more



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Finance is the climate story of 2024. And it's a theme that has proved inescapable in our [TIME100 Climate list](#) of influential climate leaders in business this year. Around the world, decision makers, executives, researchers, and innovators are working to help unlock the necessary

funding and resources needed to drive successful and equitable climate action.

It's a story encapsulated by our cover subject, [Ajay Banga](#), who, as president of the World Bank, has woven climate priorities into its mission. Banga entered the job in 2023 with aspirations of making it less risky for the private sector to invest in the energy transition in the Global South. And innovative approaches to funding the climate fight are playing out in every sector—from inside Microsoft's C-suite, where the company's chief sustainability officer [Melanie Nakagawa](#) helped spearhead what's thought to be the largest corporate investment in renewable energy deployment to date, to the island of Grenada, where President [Dickon Mitchell](#) deployed a first-of-its-kind debt clause postponing \$30 million in repayments, allowing the country to prioritize hurricane recovery efforts.

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To identify this year's changemakers, TIME's editors spent months vetting names from across the economy. We valued measurable, scalable achievements over commitments and announcements. We favored more recent action. The result is our second annual [TIME100 Climate list](#) which represents multitudes of individuals making significant progress in influencing the business of climate change. We asked them to talk about it, hoping their words will stir others to do the same.

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The Democrats' Blame Game Begins

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

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Kamala Harris has been defeated, Donald Trump is headed back to the White House, and the Democrats have begun soul-searching to determine what went so wrong in a landslide that saw the party lose ground with some of its most reliable constituencies.

There's plenty of blame to go around. But most of the finger pointing hasn't been aimed at Harris, who ran a truncated campaign that was generally well-regarded before the Election Day drubbing. Instead, some of the sharpest criticism focused on President Joe Biden for moving forward with a catastrophic re-election bid that set the stage for an across-the-board failure.

"The story might have been different if he had made a timely decision to step aside and allowed the party to move on," says David Axelrod, the strategist behind both of Barack Obama's presidential wins.

The frustration with Biden, many Democrats argue, must be extended to those who enabled his bid for a second term, including members of his inner circle who shielded an 81-year-old President in physical decline. "I don't believe that Joe Biden believed he was diminished," says John Morgan, a Florida attorney and Biden donor. "Now who may have known he was diminished were the sycophants around him in the White House."



But as the extent of Harris' loss becomes clearer, the focus on her missteps is likely to grow. Harris didn't just lose swing states. She ceded territory across the nation, including in blue states that Democrats have long taken for granted. In Rhode Island, the party's 27-point advantage under Obama shrunk to 21 points when Biden was the nominee, and shriveled to 9 points with Harris atop the ballot.

Read More: [How Trump Won](#).

Across the first wave of exit polls were manifold signs of Harris failing to match Democrats' showing four years earlier. Biden carried 57% of women; Harris slipped to 54%. Biden carried 55% of voters who earned less than \$50,000; Harris carried 48% of those working-class voters. Biden won the vote of 48% of those without a college degree; Harris claimed 44% of them. Biden won 71% of voters of color; Harris won 65%. Voters split 49%-49% on whether Biden or Trump could be trusted on the economy; Trump held a four-point advantage on the question.

A Democratic strategist with deep ties to Biden's orbit says Democrats have long known they were weak with Latino and Black men, making the decision by Harris' team to put so much focus on turning out women with appeals to protect reproductive rights a major misstep. On the question of abortion rights, Latino voters who said abortion should be legal in most cases backed Biden—who struggled to even say *abortion*—by a 63%-34% margin. Four years later, Harris won by 9 nine percentage points on that question with Latinos.

Among Black voters, Biden prevailed over Trump on the question of having abortion legal in most cases by a 94%-6% split. This year, Harris posted a 79%-18% advantage. It was clear, in hindsight, that an issue the party saw as a potent political weapon to turn out women may have also turned off men of color.

Read More: [What Trump's Win Means For His Legal Cases.](#)

While the initial criticisms of Harris were fairly mild, some party strategists saw in her cautious campaign a series of strategic blunders.



“She let the GOP define her,” says one senior Democratic operative. “She could have left the convention and tried to reach out to voters from across the political spectrum, but she and [running mate Tim] Walz went inexplicably into hiding and didn’t do interviews for weeks.”

Plenty of other tactical choices drew second-guessing. Maybe Harris should have been nicer to “bros.” Maybe she wasted too much money on digital ads. Maybe she should have steered clear of lefty icons like Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or distanced herself from her boss more explicitly.

Yet many had nothing but praise for Harris’ polished run. “I can’t sit here and be like, ‘She didn’t come to Michigan enough.’ She was here almost every day,” says Representative Haley Stevens, who was re-elected to represent her district in the northern Detroit suburbs. “They didn’t take anything in the Blue Wall for granted.”

“I think she ran the best campaign anyone in her position possibly could have. But that doesn’t mean she was the right person,” says former Democratic congressman Tom Malinowski of New Jersey. “In hindsight, I think there is a strong argument for having had an open competitive process in place” to replace Biden on the ticket, Malinowski says.

Read More: [*World Leaders React to Trump’s Win.*](#)

The party’s soul-searching is likely to extend to the groups it relies on to turn out the vote. Take, for instance, NextGen America, the party’s biggest youth-vote machine, which spent almost \$56 million, hired 256 staffers and recruited almost 30,000 volunteers. It was a massive undertaking—and yet Harris won just 55% of voters under the age of 30, lagging Biden’s performance by five points. Another group, Swing Left, raised \$25 million from Red State Democrats for on-the-brink districts, knocked on almost 350,000 battleground doors in the final weekend, and placed more than a half-million calls in that final push. The celebrity-tinged GOTV machine didn’t work.



Yet to some observers, focusing on campaign minutia misses the bigger picture—that Harris may have been doomed from the start by forces outside of her control. “No incumbent party has ever won with a president with a 40% approval rating or under,” says Axelrod. “No party has won with people’s attitudes about the economy what they were.”

Harris, Axelrod argues, had the added challenge of running while the country is still suffering from post-pandemic PTSD, which helped Republicans tap into anti-establishment rage. “These forces were so large that I’m not sure where there are strategic or tactical decisions that could have changed the outcome,” says Axelrod. “At the end of the day, being the VP of an Administration that people wanted to fire may have been an insurmountable obstacle.”

Another Democratic strategist with deep ties to organized labor suggests the stars were aligned for Democrats to fail, even against a candidate as flawed as Trump: “Maybe this was actually just inevitable as a result of years of economic concerns and inflation—like [what] happened to pretty much every incumbent in the entire world.”

Yet even considering world trends and economic cycles, some saw in the verdict an unmistakable sign of misogyny. To this camp, it's hard to ignore that Trump has now won twice against female opponents, while losing to an old white man. Rodell Mollineau, a former senior aide to Democratic Senate Leader Harry Reid, notes that despite his overwhelming victory, Trump was an unpopular candidate himself. "They picked him over a Black woman," Mollineau says. "This is a tough pill to swallow."

It's a point not lost on Biden's shrinking circle of defenders. "'Everyone who destroyed Biden and pushed him out, got the race they demanded,' says a Democratic state committee member in Pennsylvania. 'There was a choice: The only person that ever beat Trump, or a gigantic unknown.'"

[video id=zb0xE9vU]

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Inside the New Nonprofit AI Initiatives Seeking to Aid Teachers and Farmers in Rural Africa

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



Over the past year, rural farmers in Malawi have been seeking advice about their crops and animals from a generative AI chatbot. These farmers ask questions in Chichewa, their native tongue, and the app, Ulangizi, responds in kind, using conversational language based on information taken from the government's agricultural manual. "In the past we could wait for days for agriculture extension workers to come and address whatever problems we had on our farms," Maron Galeta, a Malawian farmer, [told Bloomberg](#). "Just a touch of a button we have all the information we need."

The nonprofit behind the app, Opportunity International, hopes to bring similar AI-based solutions to other impoverished communities. In February, Opportunity ran an acceleration incubator for humanitarian workers across the world to pitch AI-based ideas and then develop them alongside mentors from institutions like Microsoft and Amazon. On October 30, Opportunity announced the three winners of this program: free-to-use apps that aim to help African farmers with crop and climate strategy, teachers with lesson planning, and school leaders with administration management. The winners will each receive about \$150,000 in funding to pilot the apps in their communities, with the goal of reaching millions of people within two years.

Greg Nelson, the CTO of Opportunity, hopes that the program will show the power of AI to level playing fields for those who previously faced barriers to accessing knowledge and expertise. “Since the mobile phone, this is the biggest democratizing change that we have seen in our lifetime,” he says.

In early February, Opportunity employees from around the world participated in brainstorming sessions for the incubator, generating more than 200 ideas. Many of these employees hoped to wield generative AI’s potential to solve the specific problems of clients they had long worked with on the ground in high-poverty areas. For instance, verbal chatbots offering targeted advice and trained upon specific languages and vetted documents could be especially useful for communities with limited literacy. “Our clients are never going to use Google,” Nelson says. “Now, they can speak, and are spoken to, in their own language.”

Read More: [AI's Underwhelming Impact On the 2024 Elections.](#)

The top 20 teams then worked to transform their ideas into app prototypes, with assistance from mentors at major tech companies and technical support from MIT platforms. The three winners, which do not yet have formal names, were then picked by a panel of judges. The first winner is a farming app that hopes to improve upon Ulangizi. While that app offers general knowledge, this one will be designed to take in personalized data and give specific farming advice—like what seeds to plant and when and how much fertilizer to use—based upon a farmer’s acreage, crop history, and climate.

Rebecca Nakacwa, who is based in Uganda and one of the project's founders, says that the app's ability to understand climate patterns in real time is crucial. "When we went to farmers, we thought the biggest problem was around pricing," she says. "But we were so surprised, because they told us their topmost problem is climate: finding a solution to how to work with the different climate changes. We know that with AI, this is achievable." She hopes to have the app ready for the start of planting season in Rwanda and Malawi next summer.



The second app helps teachers develop lesson plans tailored to their students. The app is led by Lordina Omanhene-Gyimah, who taught in a rural school in Ghana. She found that teachers faced an acute lack of resources and knowledge about how to cater to classrooms filled with students of different ages and learning styles. Her app allows teachers to input information about student's learning styles, and then creates lesson plans based on the national school curriculum. Omanhene-Gyimah hopes to roll out the app in classrooms in Ghana and Uganda before the next academic school year.

The third app is designed to help school owners in areas from teacher recruitment to marketing to behavioral management. Anne Njine, a former Kenyan teacher, hopes that the app will be a “partner in the pocket for school leaders, to give them real time solutions and ideas.” Opportunity says that the app is ready to be rolled out to 20,000 schools, potentially reaching 6,000,000 students.

Read More: [Meteorologists Are Using AI To Forecast Hurricanes.](#)

The success of these apps is far from guaranteed. People in rural areas often lack smartphones or mobile connectivity. (An Opportunity rep says that the apps will be designed to work offline.) There are steep learning curves for new users of AI, and models sometimes return false answers, which can be problematic in educational settings. Nelson hopes that training these AIs on specific data sets and alongside clients will produce better, more accurate results.

Nelson’s goal is for the incubator program to launch three new AI-based apps a year. But that’s dependent on the funding of philanthropists and corporate partners. (Opportunity declined to say how much it has raised for the program so far.)

The founders of the three winning apps are confident that they have found transformative real-life use cases for an industry whose impact is often exaggerated by runaway hype. “It’s not just we like using AI because it’s in vogue and everybody’s doing it,” Omanhene-Gyimah says. “We are in the field. We work with these clients on a daily basis, and we know what they need.”

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Why Sit-Down Chain Restaurants Are Struggling

Alana Semuels is an economic 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 has won awards from the Society of Business Editors and Writers and the Los Angeles Press Club.



Red Lobster filed for bankruptcy in May. TGI Fridays closed [nearly 50 locations](#) abruptly in October, then [filed for bankruptcy](#) in early November. Hooters shut down [dozens of stores](#) in June, while Buca di Beppo [declared bankruptcy](#) in August. Even budget standby Denny's said in October that it would [close about 150 stores](#) in the next two years, citing "choppy economic conditions" and the fast pace of inflation for food away from home.

Sit-down chain restaurants may be the quintessential American business, beginning with the expansion of Howard Johnson's after World War II as families got in the car and started to travel. But the economy is challenging the business model. Although inflation is slowing, cost-conscious consumers are eating more at home or at lower-cost fast-food restaurants, where the average check is \$7.92, about half the average check at a sit-down restaurant, according to CREST, a database from consumer insight firm Circana. Many sit-down (or full service) chain restaurants came into this economic climate deep in debt, and are now struggling to stay afloat.

“A whole lot of these companies are finding their sales aren’t turning out to be as strong as expected,” says Jim Sanderson, a restaurant industry analyst for Northcoast Research. Customer traffic at full-service restaurants in the third quarter of 2024 was down 3% from a year ago and is 17% below the same period in 2019, according to CREST.

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Part of the problem is labor costs are continuing to grow but inflation-weary consumers aren’t willing to pay more for restaurant food, says Sanderson. Nearly all restaurant owners surveyed by the National Restaurant Association this year said higher labor costs were “[an issue](#)” for their business. Restaurants used to spend 30-35% of gross sales on labor. Now many spend 40% to 45%, according to [Dave Foss](#), co-founder of hospitality group Maverick Theory.

Another issue is that many of these restaurants are now owned by private-equity groups that borrowed a lot of money for their acquisitions and are not seeing the cash flow they needed to come out even. TGI Fridays, Red Lobster, [Hooters of America](#), and P.F. Chang’s were all purchased by private-equity groups in the last decade. TGI Fridays has 58% fewer restaurants than it did in 2019, and Hooters had 23% fewer, according to data from industry research firm Technomic.

“If you combine restaurant margins being under pressure with a tenuous financial situation, all you need is one or two things to go wrong,” says Sara Senatore, senior analyst covering restaurants at Bank of America. Chain restaurants used to be pretty stable businesses, so private equity owners had

a good idea of what costs and sales would be, she says, but the pandemic made the business much more volatile.

Some restaurants are trying to earn back business by offering huge discounts on meals or all-you-can-eat specials, which just cuts into their bottom line even more, says Dan Rowe, CEO and founder of Fransmart, a franchise-development group. “It’s not sustainable,” he says. Red Lobster famously offered an [all-you-can-eat](#) shrimp detail before it filed for bankruptcy.

Read More: [What a \\$129 Frying Pan Says About America’s Eating Habits.](#)

There is one success story, analysts say: Chili’s, owned by the public company Brinker International, which got a new CEO in 2022. The company changed its menu, removing many items and focusing on a few staples, including burgers, fajitas, and margaritas. It got much better at social media and advertising so that when customers came into the restaurant, they were pleasantly surprised at the new and improved menu. The company also launched a “barbell” strategy in which it offered big deals to lure in customers and premium products to get them to spend money. Chili’s also reinvested in labor, making sure restaurants were fully staffed so that guests wouldn’t face long wait times. In the most recent quarter, Chili’s sales grew 14%.

“We’re starting to see a few glimmers of hope,” Sanderson says, “with some restaurants finding there is a way to re-engage customers.”

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How Quincy Jones Helped Make *Thriller* The Biggest Album of All Time

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



Forty-two years after its release, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* is a towering pillar of American culture: the best-selling album of all time, and the gold standard to which all pop artists aspire in its beloved omnipresence. *Thriller* spent 37 non-consecutive weeks at No. 1, and set the record for most top 10 singles from an album, with seven. It has since [sold over 60 million copies](#) around the world.

But its success was far from inevitable: the project faced many barriers to its astonishing rise, most centrally related to lingering doubts from executives about how widely a Black R&B artist could resonate.

Those barriers were overcome by the insatiable drive and genius of two men: Jackson and Quincy Jones. Jones, who died on Sunday night at 91 in Los Angeles, had already been a formidable impresario in music and TV for decades before pairing up with Jackson, a former child prodigy struggling with his pivot into adulthood. *Thriller* cemented Jackson's stardom as a solo artist while serving as the culmination of Jones' vast talents: together, they created a blockbuster forged by a maniacal competitiveness, a deep love for decades of global pop culture, and a fascination with new technologies and multimedia modes of stardom.

Building a new pop sound

Jones started producing for Jackson on his 1979 album, *Off the Wall*, his fifth solo release outside of his work with the Jackson 5. Jackson's previous solo albums had failed to cross over to diverse audiences, so he and Jones hoped to win over the mainstream through a fresh reimagining of disco as it exited its era of dominance, imbuing the genre with a new frontier of synthesizers and electronic drum grooves.

Off the Wall was a massive hit. But its critical acclaim was capped due to the music industry's rigid conceptions of race and genre. The Grammys pigeonholed it into its R&B genres, failing to nominate any of its megahits—including “Don’t Stop Til You Get Enough” or “Rock With You”—for Record of the Year or Song of the Year. And Jackson [complained](#) about *Rolling Stone* passing him over for a cover story in 1980: “I’ve been told over and over that black people on the cover of magazines doesn’t sell copies … Just wait,” he said.

Jones and Jackson wanted their follow-up to be bigger: for every song on the album to be an undeniable smash. “To penetrate, you have to go for the throat in four, five, six different areas: rock, AC [adult contemporary], R&B, soul,” Jones [told *Rolling Stone*](#) in 2009.

In their gamesmanship, Jones and Jackson first turned to a hitmaker who they presumed white radio wouldn't dare snub: Paul McCartney. Jones and Jackson wanted to create an easy-listening pop hit replicating the success of McCartney and Stevie Wonder's "Ebony and Ivory" in a way that might expand Jackson's global appeal to Beatles-level heights. The resulting single, "The Girl Is Mine," wasn't well-received by critics. McCartney himself called it shallow. But while some radio DJs declined to play the song because of its implications of interracial romance, the gambit worked: the song hit No. 2 on the pop chart, priming the world for the album's crossover ambitions.

The rest of *Thriller* would possess a similar, clearly-defined sonic aura: sleek, glittery, tightly-wound. To create this specificity, Jones pulled from his voracious and encyclopedic knowledge of music theory and music history. As a teenager, he cut his teeth as a jazz trumpeter in Seattle alongside Ray Charles. Jones soon became a fixture in the New York jazz scene, arranging songs for Frank Sinatra, Dinah Washington, and Count Basie. One of Jones' priorities was to imbue Jackson's music with jazz language and sensibilities, even while aiming for the top of the charts. "Baby Be Mine," for instance, was a clear homage to John Coltrane, Jones told *Vulture* in 2018. "Getting the young kids to hear bebop is what I'm talking about," he said. "Jazz is at the top of the hierarchy of music because the musicians learned everything they could about music."

In addition to jazz, Jones wanted to borrow from "bar mitzvah music, Sousa marches, strip-club music, jazz, pop," he said in the same interview. As a result, the musical inspirations on *Thriller* span decades and countries. "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin,'" for example, interpolates Cameroonian musician Manu Dibango's 1972 single "Soul Makossa." (Dibango was unhappy that he was not credited, but they worked out a financial agreement.)

As Jones pulled from music history, he also lived on the cutting edge of pop music. He brought the vanguard of 1980s musicians into the studio, including Toto—whose song "Africa" was just making its way up the charts—for "Human Nature"; and the '80s rock god Eddie Van Halen, who

respected Jones so much that he [refused payment](#) for his legendary guitar solo on “Beat It.”

Jones was also influenced by a brand new album from a young rising star: Prince’s 1999. *Thriller* synthesizer player [Brian Banks](#) later reminisced about how Jones played the title song for them upon its release, and told them he wanted its “big, bitey chord sound,” but “bigger.” That sound ended up kicking off the album’s title track, “Thriller”—and preceded a [decades-long rivalry](#) between the two icons.

The sonic adventures on *Thriller* were hypercharged by Jones’ embrace of the newest music technology, including synthesizers and drum machines. “We had so much gear that we couldn’t even put the trunks, all the boxes, in the hallways,” Anthony Marinelli, a keyboardist, [told the BBC](#). “Michael just wanted to hear the same sound with different instruments...I used this drum machine on a lot of the tracks, and Quincy would cast the perfect sideman or background vocals. There was a lot of evolution.”

All in all, Jones [used](#) some 62 musicians and 22 singers on *Thriller*. He and Jackson worked relentlessly to make the album perfect, staying up for days and nights. “They would carry the second engineers out on stretchers. And the musicians too,” Jones [told the BBC](#).

I want my MTV

But the duo was also aware that music was only one component of making *Thriller* a mega-smash. Jones had long been a part of the TV and film world, scoring soundtracks for many films and TV shows in the ‘60s and ‘70s. In 1968, he became the first African American to be nominated for best original song at the Oscars.

As a result, he had an innate understanding of how music and visuals could coalesce into major cultural moments. For the title track of *Thriller*, he facilitated the recording of a spooky spoken-word sequence by the horror actor Vincent Price, imbuing the song with narrative tension.

Meanwhile, a new force was rising rapidly in the music industry: MTV. But the television channel was still heavily segregated, and rarely played any Black musicians at all. When the channel opted to pass on airing Rick James' "Super Freak," MTV founder Bob Pittman tried to explain the choice by [saying](#), "It has nothing to do with race, but with sound."

Despite this resistance, Jackson and Jones were hellbent on getting on the channel, and allocated an enormous amount of money to create distinctive, movie-quality music videos that would show off Jackson's charisma. Jackson [paid](#) \$150,000 for the "Beat It" music video out of his own pocket. Eventually, and thanks in part to threats from Jackson's studio executives to MTV, the channel put "Billie Jean" into heavy rotation. The 14-minute "Thriller" video, directed by John Landis (*National Lampoon's Animal House*), followed, giving MTV [10 times](#) their usual ratings.

By this point, MTV was forced to acknowledge that Black artists would resonate with their so-called audience, and began playing other Black stars, like Lionel Richie and Prince. "MTV's playlist was 99% white until Michael Jackson forced his way on the air by making the best music videos anyone had ever seen," Rob Tannenbaum, co-author of *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution*, [told The Root](#) in 2013.

This change was crucial to MTV's own success: the channel scored its first quarterly profit in 1984, right when "Billie Jean," "Beat It," and "Thriller" were cresting. After that, big-budget music videos became a central way for musicians to showcase their art to the public, ushering in a new era of visual-first music stardom. "Michael and MTV rode each other to glory," Jones said in 2022. "The video standard has not changed since then."

Ultimately, *Thriller* was just one small part of Quincy Jones' astonishing career, which also included Ella Fitzgerald collaborations, the soundtrack to *The Color Purple*, and "We Are the World." (The 2018 documentary *Quincy*, co-directed by his daughter Rashida Jones, covers all of this and more.) He ranks third on the list of most Grammys won of all time, and belongs to the elite group of EGOT winners, people who have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony (in his case an honorary one, thanks to two honorary Oscars). But *Thriller*'s audacity, quality, and universal appeal

revealed the height of Jones' powers. Thanks to his belief in Jackson and his exhaustive artistic rigor, the pair broke all sorts of records and set new templates for pop stardom.

“*Thriller* was a combination of all my experience as an orchestrator and picking the songs and Michael’s—all the talents he ha[d] as a dancer, as a singer, as an amazing entertainer,” Jones told *Fresh Air* in 2013. “It was like us throwing everything we’d accumulated as experience and putting it all together.”

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How AI Is Being Used to Respond to Natural Disasters in Cities



The number of people living in urban areas has [tripled](#) in the last 50 years, meaning when a major natural disaster such as an earthquake strikes a city, more lives are in danger. Meanwhile, the strength and frequency of extreme weather events has increased—a trend [set to continue](#) as the climate warms. That is spurring efforts around the world to develop a new generation of earthquake monitoring and climate forecasting systems to make detecting and responding to disasters quicker, cheaper, and more accurate than ever.

On Nov. 6, at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center in Spain, the Global Initiative on Resilience to Natural Hazards through AI Solutions will meet for the first time. The new United Nations [initiative](#) aims to guide governments, organizations, and communities in using AI for disaster management.

The initiative builds on nearly four years of groundwork laid by the International Telecommunications Union, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the U.N. Environment Programme, which in early 2021 collectively convened a [focus group](#) to begin developing best practices for AI use in disaster management. These include enhancing data collection, improving forecasting, and streamlining communications.

Read more: [*Cities Are on the Front Line of the ‘Climate-Health Crisis.’ A New Report Provides a Framework for Tackling Its Effects*](#)

“What I find exciting is, for one type of hazard, there are so many different ways that AI can be applied and this creates a lot of opportunities,” says Monique Kuglitsch, who chaired the focus group. Take hurricanes for example: In 2023, [researchers](#) showed AI could help policymakers identify the best places to put traffic sensors to detect road blockages after tropical storms in Tallahassee, Fla. And in October, meteorologists used AI weather forecasting models to [accurately](#) predict that [Hurricane Milton would land](#) near Siesta Key, Florida. AI is also being used to alert members of the public more efficiently. Last year, The National Weather Service [announced](#) a partnership with AI translation company [Lilt](#) to help deliver forecasts in Spanish and simplified Chinese, which it says can reduce the time to translate a hurricane warning from an hour to 10 minutes.

Besides helping communities prepare for disasters, AI is also being used to coordinate response efforts. Following both [Hurricane Milton](#) and [Hurricane Ian](#), non-profit GiveDirectly used Google’s machine learning models to analyze pre- and post-satellite images to identify the worst affected areas, and prioritize cash grants accordingly. Last year AI analysis of aerial images was deployed in cities like Quelimane, Mozambique, after Cyclone Freddy and Adiyaman, Turkey, after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, to aid response efforts.

Read more: [*How Meteorologists Are Using AI to Forecast Hurricane Milton and Other Storms*](#)

Operating early warning systems is primarily a governmental responsibility, but AI climate modeling—and, to a lesser extent, earthquake detection—has become a burgeoning private industry. Start-up [SeismicAI](#) says it’s working

with the civil protection agencies in the Mexican states of Guerrero and Jalisco to deploy an AI-enhanced network of sensors, which would detect earthquakes in real-time. Tech giants [Google](#), [Nvidia](#), and [Huawei](#) are partnering with European forecasters and say their AI-driven models can generate accurate medium-term forecasts thousands of times more quickly than traditional models, while being less computationally intensive. And in September, IBM [partnered](#) with NASA to release a general-purpose open-source model that can be used for various climate-modeling cases, and which runs on a desktop.

AI advances

While machine learning techniques have been incorporated into weather forecasting models for many years, recent advances have allowed many new models to be built using AI from the ground-up, improving the accuracy and speed of forecasting. Traditional models, which rely on complex physics-based equations to simulate interactions between water and air in the atmosphere and require supercomputers to run, can take hours to generate a single forecast. In contrast, AI weather models learn to spot patterns by training on decades of climate data, most of which was collected via satellites and ground-based sensors and shared through intergovernmental collaboration.

Both AI and physics-based forecasts work by dividing the world into a three-dimensional grid of boxes and then determining variables like temperature and wind speed. But because AI models are more computationally efficient, they can create much finer-grained grids. For example, the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts' highest resolution model breaks the world into 5.5 mile boxes, whereas forecasting startup [Atmo](#) offers models finer than one square mile. This bump in resolution can allow for more efficient allocation of resources during extreme weather events, which is particularly important for cities, says Johan Mathe, co-founder and CTO of the company, which earlier this year inked [deals](#) with the Philippines and the island nation of [Tuvalu](#).

Limitations

AI-driven models are typically only as good as the data they are trained on, which can be a limiting factor in some places. “When you’re in a really high stakes situation, like a disaster, you need to be able to rely on the model output,” says Kuglitsch. Poorer regions—often on the [frontlines](#) of climate-related disasters—typically have fewer and worse-maintained weather sensors, for example, creating gaps in meteorological data. AI systems trained on this skewed data can be less accurate in the places most vulnerable to disasters. And unlike physics-based models, which follow set rules, as AI models become more complex, they increasingly operate as sophisticated ‘black boxes,’ where the path from input to output becomes less transparent. The U.N. initiative’s focus is on developing guidelines for using AI responsibly. Kuglitsch says standards could, for example, encourage developers to disclose a model’s limitations or ensure systems work across regional boundaries.

The initiative will test its recommendations in the field by collaborating with the Mediterranean and pan-European forecast and [Early Warning System Against natural hazards](#) (MedEWSa), a project that spun out of the focus group. “We’re going to be applying the best practices from the focus group and getting a feedback loop going, to figure out which of the best practices are easiest to follow,” Kuglitsch says. One MedEWSa pilot project will explore machine learning to predict the occurrence of wildfires in an area around Athens, Greece. Another will use AI to improve flooding and landslide warnings in the area surrounding Tbilisi city, Georgia.

Read more: [How the Cement Industry Is Creating Carbon-Negative Building Materials](#)

Meanwhile, private companies like [Tomorrow.io](#) are seeking to plug these gaps by collecting their own data. The AI weather forecasting start-up has launched satellites with radar and other meteorological sensors to collect data from regions that lack ground-based sensors, which it combines with historical data to train its models. Tomorrow.io’s technology is being used by New England cities including Boston, to help city officials decide when to salt the roads ahead of snowfall. It’s also used by Uber and Delta Airlines.

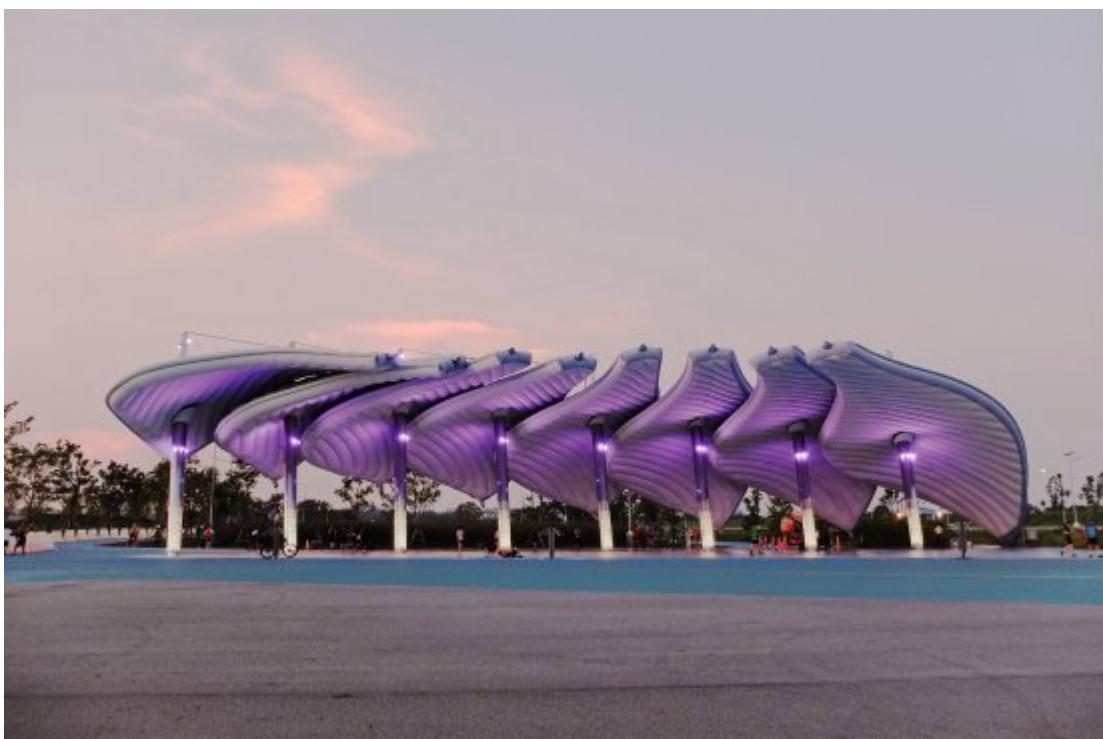
Another U.N. initiative, the [Systematic Observations Financing Facility](#) (SOFF), also aims to close the weather data gap by providing financing and technical assistance in poorer countries. Johan Stander, director of services for the WMO, one of SOFF's partners, says the WMO is working with private AI developers including Google and Microsoft, but stresses the importance of not handing off too much responsibility to AI systems.

“You can’t go to a machine and say, ‘OK, you were wrong. Answer me, what’s going on?’ You still need somebody to take that ownership,” he says. He sees private companies’ role as “supporting the national met services, instead of trying to take them over.”

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These Taiwanese Companies Are Turning Waste Into Building Materials



Insect shells, rice husks, water bottles, and bamboo charcoal might not be the first things that come to mind when you think of high-performance building products. But Taiwanese upcycling company Miniwiz is using them to create just that. “We take leftover construction waste, leftover fiber waste, leftover plastic or packaging waste, and turn that into a building material you can use for another 30 years,” says CEO Arthur Huang.

Carbon emissions from the built environment include “operational” carbon generated through uses like lighting and ventilation, and “embodied” or “embedded” carbon, created during the process of material extraction,

manufacturing, and transportation. Embedded carbon is expected to contribute to nearly half of new construction emissions between 2020 and 2050.

“We solve the embedded-carbon footprint issue by very dumb logic,” Huang says. “You just use the carbon you’ve already produced.”

Read More: [*How the Cement Industry Is Creating Carbon-Negative Building Materials*](#)

Mining and extraction of materials for the modern construction industry is carbon-intensive, but Huang believes we can eliminate the carbon released by new material production by using things we would otherwise throw away.

Miniwiz has invented processes to turn over 1,200 kinds of local waste into building products that can function as everything from brick or wall panels to tiles and air filters; since its inception in 2005, Miniwiz has built a number of large-scale structures including the earthquake- and fire-resistant Taipei EcoARK, composed of over 1.5 million PET bottles, and Anything Butts, a modular structure made from recycled cigarette butts. Recent projects like the wall fabric in Hong Kong’s AIRSIDE shopping mall built in 2023 reduce carbon emissions by over 70% compared with traditional materials, according to Miniwiz’s CO₂ Emissions Summary.

Concrete, one of the most commonly used traditional construction materials, contributes up to 8% of total annual emissions. Wen-yi Kuo, founder of material-development company LOTOS, works on reducing emissions by extending the life of concrete, and ultimately hopes to replace the material with local waste-based alternatives.

Kuo has developed a product to help tackle the toll humidity can take on buildings in Taiwan. The natural stucco, made from waste silt dredged from Taiwan’s water reservoirs, can replace cement-based alternatives. The material prevents water damage to concrete buildings and can be added to cement mortar as a waterproofing agent.

He went on to co-create C-Slurry, a concrete substitute that uses industrial waste like blast-furnace slag from steelmaking instead of cement as a binder, combining it with other forms of local waste like oyster shells and demolished red brick to invent alternative low-carbon building materials.

“If we want to be lower-carbon and circular, most of the materials need to be local,” says Kuo. “This has the added benefit of reducing carbon emissions from shipping and transportation.”

Persuading customers to try something new in Taiwan’s “conservative” construction industry is a challenge, Kuo says. “We introduce the new technology to help solve people’s problems, and build trust from there.”

“In the end it comes down to whether someone has the consciousness and they’re willing to pay for this,” Miniwiz’s Huang adds. “So we are using technology to find a way to produce at half the price, twice as good.”

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9 Things You Should Do for Your Brain Health Every Day, According to Neurologists

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



Taking care of your cognitive health ought to be—well, a no-brainer. According to a survey published in March, [87% of Americans](#) are concerned about age-related memory loss and a decline in brain function as they grow older, yet only 32% believe they can take action to help control that trajectory.

“All of us want to be cognitively intact for as long as possible,” says Dr. Seemant Chaturvedi, a neurologist and stroke specialist at the University of

Maryland Medical Center. The good news, he adds, is that “there are definitely risk factors that can be modified.” Prioritizing healthy behaviors can increase the likelihood that, when we reach our 70s and 80s, we’re still able to summon important memories, drive a car, and engage in a wide variety of activities, Chaturvedi says. And there’s no such thing as “too young” to start taking these steps.

With that in mind, we asked four neurologists what we should all do every day for better brain health.

Manage your chronic illnesses

If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes, it’s essential to make sure it’s under control. Each condition can “damage the blood vessels in the brain and increase the risk of stroke and dementia,” while diminishing cognitive function, Chaturvedi says. In [one study](#), for example, people who had hypertension in their 40s to early 60s had a 6.5% steeper decline in cognitive skills—including mental processing speed and executive function—in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, compared to those with normal blood pressure. [Other research](#) has found that people with higher levels of LDL cholesterol and lower levels of HDL cholesterol tend to have more amyloid plaque in their brain, which is linked with Alzheimer’s disease.

That’s why it’s important to get your numbers checked regularly, and to work with your doctor to establish a treatment regimen, Chaturvedi says. The sooner you do that, the better: “If you’re 35 or 40 and have high cholesterol, the current belief is that it’s better to start treatment early,” rather than waiting until you’re 65 or 70 and have a heart attack, he says. “If you get started early, maybe you could either postpone or never even have the heart attack,” which would be doing your brain a big favor.

Read More: [7 Metrics Everyone Should Know About Their Own Health](#)

Exercise for 30 minutes

Your entire body will benefit if you work out at least a few days a week—and that includes your brain. [Research suggests](#) that exercising improves cognitive processes and memory, while [increasing the thickness](#) of your cerebral cortex, which is responsible for tasks like language, thinking, and emotions. “We’re learning more and more about the benefits of regular exercise for brain health,” Chaturvedi says. “Even in patients who have mild dementia, it’s recommended they engage in exercise three to five times a week.”

Whatever activity you choose—walking, biking, swimming—make sure you’re operating at a moderate intensity, or about 50% to 80% of your maximum heart rate. “A rule of thumb I give my patients is that if you and I were going for a walk, we’d want to be walking at a pace where we’d be pretty out of breath, but we’d still be able to have a conversation,” says Dr. Carolyn Fredericks, an assistant professor of neurology at Yale School of Medicine. One type of cardiovascular exercise doesn’t appear to be better than any other, she adds: “It’s just getting your heart into that range and keeping it there for a while.”

Rest up

Not getting enough sleep is a key risk factor for dementia, says Dr. Augusto Miravalle, a neurologist and multiple sclerosis specialist at Rush University Medical Center. [Research suggests](#) that people in their 50s and 60s who get six hours of sleep or less per night are 30% more likely to be diagnosed with dementia than those who log at least seven hours of Z’s. [Another study](#) found that sleep-initiation insomnia, or trouble falling asleep, is associated with a 51% increased dementia risk.

So what should you do if you lie awake at night counting sheep? Invest time in improving your sleep hygiene, which means taking steps like avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening, limiting naps, and putting away electronics before bed, Miravalle advises. If that doesn’t work, schedule an appointment with a sleep specialist to figure out if you need a more aggressive approach. Options like cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia can help some people achieve more restful slumber.

Read More: [The Best Way to Treat Insomnia](#)

Eat like you're vacationing on the Italian coast

Fredericks always recommends her patients follow a Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes fruits, veggies, whole grains, fish, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats. “We’ve tried over the years to find the secret ingredient that makes the Mediterranean diet work,” she says. “Like, could it be the omega-3’s in the fish, or the vitamin E in the nuts? But every time we try to study an individual ingredient, we don’t actually see that big of a difference at a large group level.” What appears to be most impactful, she adds, is the style of eating and emphasis on whole foods.

In addition to prioritizing certain ingredients, Miravaelle recommends avoiding those that negatively impact brain health, like trans fats and too much salt. In [one study](#), young and middle-aged men who followed a diet heavy in trans fat remembered 11 fewer words out of 104 than those who didn’t consume as much. And excessive salt intake is linked with [stroke](#), [cognitive impairment](#), and [cerebrovascular disease](#), which affects the brain’s blood vessels and circulation.

Challenge your mind

People often ask Dr. Roy Hamilton what kind of intellectual stimulation is best: Should they put together puzzles or play Sudoku every day? What about video games? He tries not to be overly prescriptive, but offers a few guidelines. Brain-boosting activities should be “mildly challenging,” says Hamilton, who’s a professor of neurology, psychiatry, and physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine. If they’re too easy, your return-on-investment will shrink; too hard, and you might give up before benefitting. “It’s got to be somewhere in the sweet zone, and it has to be something that you want to do,” he says.

Rather than focusing on one pursuit—playing games, learning a new language, reading classic literature—Hamilton recommends curating a “diet

of intellectual activities.” “You’re probably not going to get optimal effects just by picking Wordle and being like, ‘I do Wordle every day, and that’s how I maintain my cognition,’” he says. “The brain’s a lot more complicated than that.” He compares it to asking a nutritionist what you should eat for a healthy diet: The answer wouldn’t be carrots, more carrots, and only carrots. Make it a point to exercise your brain in a variety of ways, he encourages, just like you feast on lots of different snacks and meals every day.

Chat with a friend (or two)

There’s no single metric for how much time we should spend around other people. Yet research is clear that social engagement strengthens the neural networks involved with attention and memory. [In one study](#), adults ages 70 to 90 who said they had pleasant social interactions on a given day had better cognitive performance on that day and the following two, compared to when they didn’t have any such encounters. “Our brains aren’t meant to exist in isolation,” Fredericks says. “I think COVID drove home to all of us that we’re not meant to be alone in our apartments or houses—it just doesn’t feel good.” To boost your social life, consider [reaching out to old friends](#), joining a [birdwatching](#) club or another group, volunteering, or video-chatting with a [long-distance family member](#).

Read More: [How to Make Friends as an Adult—at Every Life Stage](#)

Skip the beer and cigarettes

Drinking excessively isn’t good for brain health. [Research suggests](#) it can damage the parts of the brain involved in important functions like memory, decision-making, impulse control, and attention. “The more you drink, and the longer period of time over which you’re doing that volume of drinking, the worse it is for your brain,” says Hamilton, who’s on the board of trustees of the [McKnight Brain Research Foundation](#). Think about it: When you overimbibe, you lose your inhibitions because the circuits that control your behavior go offline. “You’re literally causing temporary brain

dysfunction,” Hamilton says, and over the long term, that damage takes a toll.

Smoking is similarly perilous: It can [lead to cognitive decline and dementia](#), while increasing the [risk of stroke](#). If you’ve already tried to quit and failed, don’t let that dissuade future attempts. “Just keep going, because there’s no healthy amount of smoking,” Hamilton says. “It’s terrible for your cardiovascular health and, therefore, your brain vascular health, too.”

Wear a mask on bad air-quality days

You already know air pollution can make your eyes sting and trigger a coughing attack. Perhaps more surprising: It’s linked to an [increased likelihood](#) of developing dementia. “Dementia in this country is pretty much following the map of air pollution,” Miravalle says. One way to protect yourself: Check daily [air quality reports](#) for your town, and if pollution is particularly high, wear a reusable face mask outside, like an N95 or KN95. As Miravalle puts it, “Anything you can do to decrease exposure to certain environmental toxins is a good, common-sense strategy.”

Lower your stress

Minimizing stress can be an effective way to protect your brain health—but Hamilton acknowledges it’s no easy feat. “In my opinion, in the 21st century, maybe this is the hardest thing to do,” he says. “But there’s evidence that chronic stress is not great for cognition.” In [one study](#), for example, people with elevated stress levels had a 37% higher risk of experiencing cognitive issues, including trouble with memory and thinking.

Some people find that meditation or mindfulness help tame stress; others like doing yoga or booking a massage. Hamilton gets up at 5 a.m. every day to squeeze in a trip to the gym before his work day. “It’s not about my body so much as it is about my stress,” he says. Spend some time brainstorming what relaxes you, and after putting those strategies into action, you’ll likely benefit from head to toe.

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Why Is the U.S. So Behind on Animal Welfare?

Peter Singer is professor emeritus of bioethics at Princeton University and author of many books. His latest, [*Consider the Turkey*](#), was published by Princeton University Press this month.



Imagine that you are going to be reincarnated as a domesticated animal, and you can choose whether to be reincarnated in the U.S., or in Spain. Which country would you pick?

My guess is that many of you will think that if you choose to be reincarnated in Spain, there's a chance you might be a bull raised to die in a bullfight, and so it is better to pick the U.S and avoid such a fate.

The [cruel and bloody ritual of bullfighting](#) does mean that each year an [estimated 35,000](#) bulls die a horrendous death. But it would be a mistake to conclude that animals in Spain have worse lives than in the U.S.

Take, for instance, the matter of egg-laying hens. Around 230 million of them in the U.S.—[almost 60%](#) of the [hen population](#) there—are crammed into bare wire cages that do not allow them enough space to fully stretch their wings. Whereas in Spain keeping hens in such conditions is [illegal](#), and [Spain's 46 million hens](#) have almost twice the space given. They also have access to a nest, perching space, and litter to allow [pecking and scratching](#). None of those enrichments are to be found in U.S. cages.

These hens spend a full year in their cages, whereas it takes [about 20 minutes](#) for each bull to die in a Spanish bullfight. So it is reasonable to conclude that U.S. cages cause more suffering to hens than bullfights do to bulls, given the time and conditions spent in captivity. And given that there are more than 1,000 times as many hens in Spain as there are bulls bred to die in bullfights, a randomly selected domesticated animal is more likely to be a hen, and it will have a much better life in Spain than in the U.S.

Something similar holds for pigs, especially the mothers of the pigs who are reared and killed for pork, ham, or bacon. There are [around 6 million of these mother pigs](#) in the U.S., and about 75% of them spend the entire 16 weeks of their pregnancy in individual stalls too narrow for them to turn around, and too short for them to walk more than a step forward or backwards. Again, in Spain keeping pigs in this way is illegal.

Even more gruesome are the methods used in the U.S. to kill millions of chickens and turkeys when bird flu is detected on a factory farm. Often, the birds are killed by [shutting off the ventilation](#) to the shed, and bringing in heaters, so that, after an hour or two of heat in excess of 104°F, they die of heat stroke. In Spain, heating birds to death is not permitted.

But it's not just about the U.S. vs Spain. The laws that protect animals in Spain apply to all 27 countries that make up the E.U., stretching from Portugal on the continent's most southwestern parts to Finland in its most northeastern ones. The U.K., though no longer a member of the E.U., [continues to require](#) standards of animal welfare similar to those of the E.U.

It isn't only hens and pigs who have better lives in Europe than in the U.S. It is not [permitted to test cosmetics](#) on animals in the E.U., nor to import cosmetics that have been tested on animals. There are no such prohibitions in the U.S. and no one knows how many such experiments are conducted and what kinds are done. That's because the U.S. Animal Welfare Act, which gives the Department of Agriculture authority to regulate research on animals, specifically denies the Department authority to regulate research on rats, mice, and birds, who make up [over 99%](#) of all vertebrate animals used in U.S. experiments.

Why does the U.S. lag so far behind the U.K. and E.U. on animal welfare? One view is that Americans are still influenced by a Wild West mentality that tolerates the rough handling of animals. Supporters of that view point to the survival of the rodeo, which, like the bullfight, entertains spectators by [mistreating animals](#). People who find it entertaining to watch a frightened young calf being lassoed by a rope that chokes them and then drags them to the ground are unlikely to be concerned about the suffering of pigs or chickens.

Yet when Americans can vote for laws that give farmed animals more space to move around, they [do so](#). In 2002, 55% of Floridians voted to ban keeping pigs in stalls too narrow to allow them to turn around. In 2006, 62% of Arizonans voted to ban such stalls for both pigs and veal calves. In 2008, 63% of Californians voted to ban such stalls for pigs and veal calves, plus standard battery cages for hens. In 2016, 78% of Massachusetts voted to ban narrow stalls for pigs and veal and standard battery cages for hens, and to ban the sale of pork, veal, and eggs from out-of-state producers using these systems. In 2018, 63% of Californians voted to ban the sale of pork, veal, and eggs from out-of-state producers using systems that do not meet California's standards. (A challenge by pork producers to the ban on in-state sales was [dismissed last year](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court.)

So I suggest that the U.S. is so far behind the E.U. on animal welfare, not because Americans care less about animals than Europeans, but because the U.S. political system is less democratic than [Europe's parliamentary system](#). In most parliamentary democracies, political parties are stronger and individual lawmakers do not need to raise large amounts of money to

get re-elected. Money and lobbying have far greater influence in U.S. politics.

The U.S. congressional committee system also serves to disempower the electorate in a way that cannot happen in a parliamentary democracy, in which the Prime Minister and Cabinet are members of the legislature and have much influence on legislation. In the U.S., House and Senate Agriculture committees in both state and federal Congresses are usually made up of lawmakers representing predominantly agricultural districts, and they effectively have a veto on proposals to protect farmed animals. They often receive substantial donations from factory farm operators. In states without provision for citizen-initiated ballots, only tiny Rhode Island has farmed animal legislation that can compare with the E.U. or U.K. At the federal level, there is no legislation that even attempts to regulate the conditions in which farmed animals are kept.

Most Americans care about animals, and would like their country to be among the leading nations in protecting animals from unnecessary suffering. The reality is more disturbing, and I hope that people who learn the true situation seek to change it.

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The Horror of the Pelicot Trial Goes Far Beyond This Case

Belinda 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 trial of Dominique Pelicot, the man in the South of France who [pleded guilty](#) in September to charges of secretly drugging his wife of 50 years, Gisèle, and, over the course of about a decade, [filming dozens of men as they had sex with her](#) while she was sedated, would have been disturbing enough just as the story of an epically vile husband. But perhaps there are

even more puzzling and horrifying questions about the other men. Who were they? How could they? How can there be so many men willing to rape an unconscious woman?

Over the past five weeks of the trial, which began on Sept. 2 in Avignon, the five judges—and aghast onlookers from around the world—have had the chance to hear from several of Dominique Pelicot’s 50 codefendants, most of whom have been charged with aggravated rape. It would be comforting to think that there are more psychopaths and sexual deviants in that part of France than elsewhere, but it does not seem to be the case.

Clearly, Dominique Pelicot, 71, is a deranged, deceptive, and dangerous human. But most of the accused are unremarkable men with no criminal record who say they are not guilty of rape. Many have offered similar rationales for their behavior: they didn’t think it was nonconsensual. They thought they had license to have sex with Mrs. Pelicot, because they had permission from Mr. Pelicot.

One of the defendants, a 43-year-old carpenter, who went to the Pelicots’ home in October 2019 and again in January 2020, told the judges that after Dominique Pelicot told him Gisèle, now 72, was a consenting partner in a sex game, he hadn’t given the matter of her willingness much more consideration. He was “at a couple’s home, invited by the husband,” he said. “Now that I am being told how the events unfolded, yes the acts I committed would amount to rape,” he added, but still claimed he was innocent of the charge.

Another man, a 37-year-old unemployed agricultural laborer, who is accused of raping Gisèle Pelicot on New Year’s Eve in 2018, asserted he didn’t intend to rape her. “As the husband had given me permission, in my mind she agreed to it,” he said. A 40-year-old computer expert with two university degrees had a similar excuse for his alleged crime in June 2020. “I did not go there with the aim of committing a crime,” he said. “I had absolutely no idea that Mrs. Pelicot was not consenting.”

If we take these men at their word—and there are certainly reasons not to—they genuinely believed that if a husband allows someone to have sex with his wife, then his wife is available for sex. Given that Dominique Pelicot

fooled many people, including his relatives, who have said they had always thought theirs was a happy family, it's plausible that the men thought they were dealing with a normal spouse who had an unusual kink. But, and here's the rub, that means they also thought *that husbands can grant access to their wives' bodies*. In France. In the 21st century.

What does it say about society that men still accord husbands this kind of authority? If it were a woman's brother or father or cousin, would the men still have proceeded? Unlikely. They'd have called the police. If the shoe were on the other foot, and a wife invited women to commit a lesser violation, such as stealing a husband's car and taking it for a joyride while he slept in the backseat, claiming that her spouse enjoyed the adventure of waking up in a strange place, would the women have gone ahead without checking in with the husband first? OK, maybe some, but 50?

So sturdy is the reputation of husbands as protectors of wives and families that these men can claim they were fooled into raping Gisèle Pelicot, who has been at court observing their testimony during much of the proceedings and has testified. Many of the accused brought wives, girlfriends, sisters, and mothers to the court to attest to their character, to explain that these men were not real rapists, though their support is somewhat undercut by the fact that the men came in contact with Dominique via [an online forum called "à son insu,"](#) which means "without her knowledge." Gisèle Pelicot, who has since divorced Dominique, addressed those women during her testimony on Oct. 23. She noted that she didn't used to think her husband was a rapist either. "A rapist is not just someone you meet in a dark car park late at night," she said. "He can also be found in the family, among friends."

At least one of the defendants has argued that he was told Gisèle was pretending to be asleep [because she was shy](#). Some claimed they had been [manipulated](#) by Dominique once they got to the home or [suspected he had drugged them](#). Two said [they were gay](#) and had been hoping to sleep with Dominique. And a depressingly large number of them [said they were sexually abused as minors](#). Nevertheless, "her husband said I could" has been a common theme in their testimonies, probably because their lawyers see it as the strongest legal defense they have. It is perhaps this, even as much as the psychopathic behavior of Dominique Pelicot, that is sending a

chill down many women's spines. This recognition of how vulnerable women are not just to husbands who have ill-intent, but to a community that holds husbands in such an exalted position that it does not question fundamentally sketchy situations if the man of the house is present.

So far, nobody has come forward to say they went to the Pelicots' house and left in horror. Police have produced no reports from visitors who realized something was amiss and raised the alarm. Pelicot was unmasked only because he was caught photographing up women's skirts by a security guard in 2020, and the cops found a cache of pornography on his devices, including videos of his wife in a folder marked "abuse." There are no hero men in this story, except for those whose job it is to unearth crime. There is, of course, a hero woman: Gisèle Pelicot. If not for her determination to make this case public and her willingness to waive anonymity, it might have attracted very little attention.

Marriage has been a foundational institution for the organizing of society and raising of young children for hundreds of years. Many [reports](#) suggest that it is now [in decline](#), despite the robust [data](#) that a good marriage improves [health](#) and [happiness](#). Perhaps this case adds to the list of possible reasons why. The institution has become caught between two very different societal expectations. On the one hand, marriage is still viewed as a hierarchical power structure, with men at the head, rather than as an agreement between two equals to throw in their lot together. On the other hand, marriage no longer offers a robust assumption of monogamy, fidelity, or exclusivity. A wedding ring has less and less power as a repellent to other men's sexual approaches.

In other words, people hold Victorian ideals about the power in a marriage, but 1970s notions about the willingness of all people, including women, to be responsive to all sexual desires at all times, no matter the context. It is conservative and libertine at once. The combination of these two beliefs is uniquely treacherous for women, as this case has proved. When people believe that a husband calls the shots in marriage *and* can persuade themselves that anyone is available for sex in any situation, it leaves wide open the door for wives to be predated upon.

Women can now earn their own money. They can have children without a partner. There's scant stigma attached to being single. Obviously, very few husbands are as diabolical as Dominique Pelicot and not all men are potential rapists, but one of marriage's benefits for women used to be a measure of security: not just from poverty or physical attack, but from the expectations of other men. If marriage no longer makes women feel safer, maybe that's one more reason to go it alone.

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People Aren't Sure About Having Kids. She Helps Them Decide

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



Merle Bombardieri learned she was a micro-celebrity in 2020, when she happened to Google her own name. Her search led her to a Reddit group of “fence sitters”—people who [aren't sure whether they want to have children](#)—where she is a very big deal. Post after post mentions her book *The Baby Decision: How to Make the Most Important Choice of Your Life* and its power to help people get off the fence, one way or the other. “It’s a sort of

bible,” says Christy Starr, a 36-year-old member of the Reddit community who lives in Wisconsin.

Bombardieri, a 75-year-old therapist who also coaches people about whether they should have kids, was tickled by her VIP status among a group of people young enough to be her children or even grandchildren. She joined the r/Fencesitter message board and now spends about five hours per week answering people’s questions for free. (She could easily spend even longer: once, she hosted an “ask me anything” thread, and it took her 10 weeks to answer every question.) She sees her involvement in the group, which today has about 70,000 members, as a moral obligation. “Not everybody can buy a book. A lot of people can’t afford a coach or a therapist,” she says. “And I really want the information to be out there.”

There’s clearly a need. Most U.S. adults eventually have children. But more people—both men and women—are thinking critically about a major life choice that not too long ago was basically seen as a given.

About a third of U.S. adults under 35 who don’t already have kids say they don’t know whether they want them, and only 22% of people in that age group say having kids is very important or extremely important for living a fulfilling life, according to [2024 statistics from Pew Research Center](#). A stunning half of U.S. adults under 50 who don’t already have kids think they’ll stay child-free forever. Most say they simply don’t want kids. But financial strain and concerns about the state of the world [and the environment](#) are also common reasons, [according to other Pew data](#). People are feeling so much angst about when, how, and whether to procreate that [new psychological concepts](#) have emerged to help make sense of how people make these decisions.

Bombardieri, herself a mother of two and grandmother to one, was far ahead of that curve. She published *The Baby Decision* in 1981, decades before fence sitting was mainstream. It flew largely under the radar before blowing up in 2016, when Bombardieri self-published an updated version. “At the age of 67,” Bombardieri says, “I became more well-known, more financially successful, than I was when I was younger.”

Read More: [How to Break 8 Toxic Communication Habits](#)

Not only did she have the internet on her side the second time around, which helped more people find the book, but the world had also changed in other ways. Shifting cultural norms; evolving ideas about gender, sexuality, and partnership; concerns about politics, climate change, and gun violence; and the aftermath of a brutal economic recession had left many 20- and 30-somethings unsure about parenting and desperate for a book like *The Baby Decision*. Bombardieri has sold about 60,000 copies of the updated version and plans to release a new book, *Baby or Childfree?*, in early 2026.

Starr, from the Reddit fence sitters' community, credits an exercise in *The Baby Decision*—acting out an argument between your pro-baby and anti-baby sides—with helping her decide to become a mother. It nudged her to realize that she really did want a kid, and that most of her reasons for being child-free were rooted in fear. “It was surprising, how much the side that wanted a child was arguing for it,” Starr says. “It really made me feel more secure.”

Bombardieri isn’t alone in doing this work. Others have made a name for themselves in the space, such as [Ann Davidman](#), a California-based psychotherapist who wrote a book on parenthood decision-making and offers workshops and coaching sessions, for one. And there’s now a bona fide industry of “decision coaches,” along with traditional therapists, who help people work through all manner of difficult choices, including whether to have children.

But Bombardieri is the OG. People from all over the world—most of them women—pay \$200 to \$300 per session to hash out the parenthood question with her. Once upon a time, Bombardieri says, most of her clients ultimately decided to have kids. But these days, the breakdown is closer to 50-50.

People with kids know that it’s impossible to truly grasp what you’re in for before you become a parent. Making this life-altering decision is always, on some level, about coming to terms with uncertainty. You can’t really know how you’ll feel about waking up in the middle of the night to feed a screaming baby until you have to do it.

How can anyone, even a trained mental-health professional, help someone make a decision so momentous and personal? “There are people who think that no one else can help them,” Bombardieri says, but she disagrees. She sees herself as a guide for people who are “lost in their own thinking,” paralyzed by endless worry about all the ways their lives will change and all the questions that are impossible to fully answer. “It’s never just about ‘Baby or no baby?’” she says. “It’s about everything. It’s about acknowledging that you’re going to die someday, and what do you want to have happen in between?”

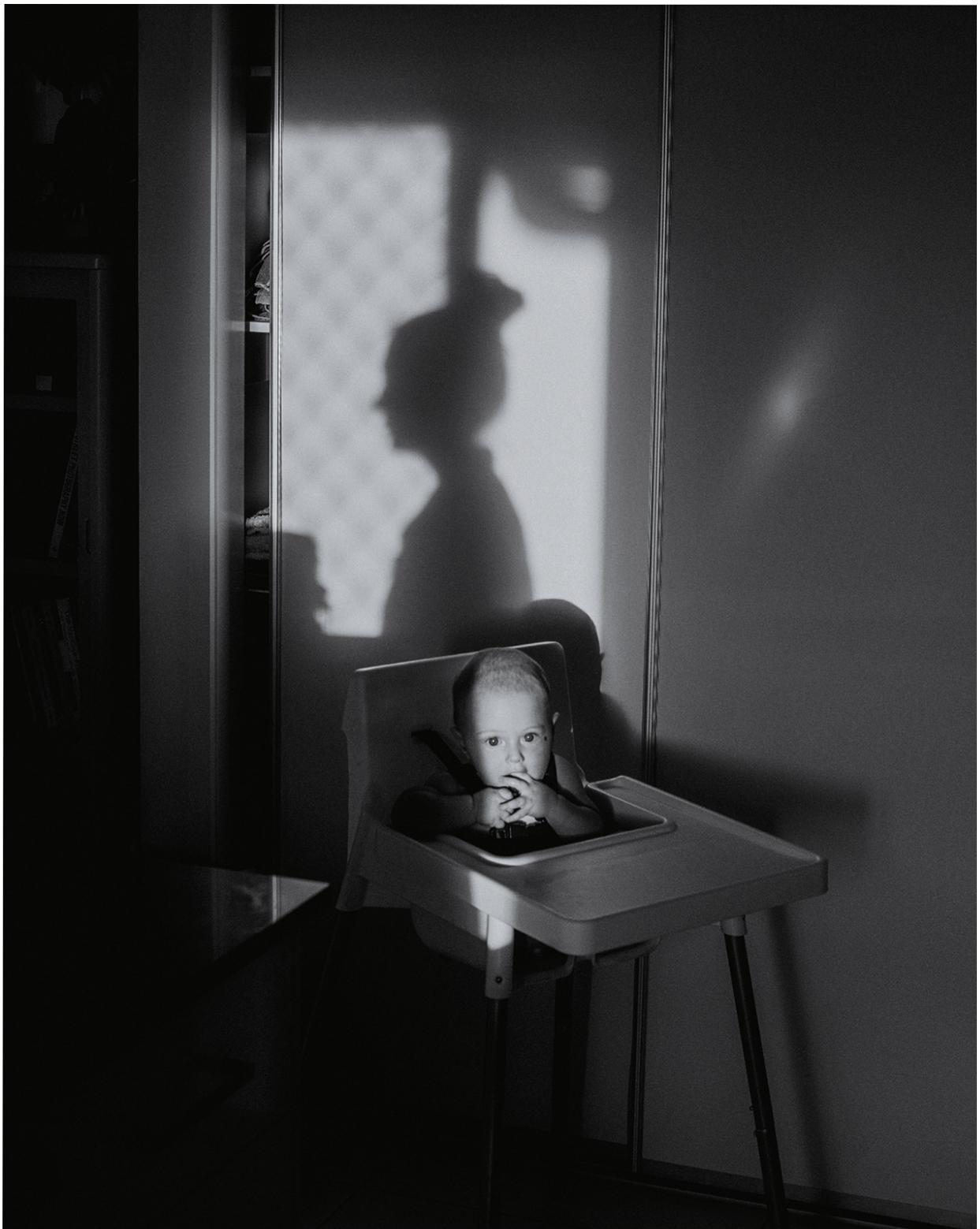
Bombardieri tries to help people interrogate their preconceived notions about parenthood and visualize what they’d gain or give up on either path. Perhaps most importantly, she helps people grapple with the idea of regret, which haunts many fence sitters. Most people will have at least occasional pangs for the road not taken, and that’s OK, Bombardieri says. The goal is to figure out which road will lead to fewer regrets, and to grieve those feelings rather than suppress them. “The people most likely to regret a decision are the people who don’t make a decision”—people who run out their biological clock or accidentally-on-purpose forget to take birth control because they can’t bring themselves to fully commit to a choice, Bombardieri says.

Read More: [The Silent Shame of Male Infertility](#)

Katie Wilson, a 46-year-old living in Washington, D.C., had all but committed to the child-free life until she hit her mid-30s. Spooked by the reality that she was running out of time to change her mind, Wilson spiraled into indecision. “I felt alone,” she remembers. “I felt like I was the only person I knew who wasn’t clear.”

Wilson learned about Bombardieri’s book in her search for clarity. And in 2014, she flew to Boston to attend Bombardieri’s parenthood-decisionmaking workshop. For hours, Bombardieri led attendees through exercises and discussion groups meant to help them make sense of their inner turmoil. She seemed to Wilson like “a vessel for all of these questions that have come before mine,” an unbiased and quietly confident voice helping her make sense of her own scrambled thoughts. Eventually, after the workshop and additional one-on-one coaching sessions with Bombardieri, Wilson and her husband decided to stay child-free.

Today, Wilson and Bombardieri together moderate a Facebook group called The Decision Café, where hundreds of people in the throes of making their choice can lean on one another for support. For Wilson, the group is a way to democratize the experience that Bombardieri offered her years ago. “A lot of people are looking for role models,” she says. “They’re looking for people like them.”



Bombardieri knows what she's talking about because she's lived it. While an undergrad at Michigan State University, she turned down a marriage

proposal from her now husband Rocco because he wanted kids and she wasn't sure. Her mother had always seemed bored in her role as a housewife, and Bombardieri, who dreamed of getting a doctorate in literature and becoming a professor, worried motherhood might hold her back. Plus, Bombardieri just wasn't positive she'd enjoy the daily realities of parenthood. When Rocco proposed, "I had just come back from being a counselor at a summer camp with really, really spoiled 12-year-old girls, and my favorite part of the day was when the camp day was over and the campers were asleep," she says. Bombardieri loved solitude and tranquility, time to read and reflect, and she couldn't envision where screaming babies or angst teens fit in.

This was also the 1970s, the era of consciousness-raising groups and second-wave feminism, when some women were chafing against their roles as mothers and housewives. "There was kind of a feeling of 'If you have a child, you're going to be a traitor to the movement,'" Bombardieri says.

Slowly, though, her opinion changed. She found role models who'd successfully balanced interesting careers in academia with motherhood and got more comfortable around children while working in day-care centers. She also devised early versions of the exercises that eventually appeared in *The Baby Decision*, like the one that helped Starr: staging an argument between your two minds on the matter. "It would have been nice to have the book," she says with a laugh.

Eventually, Bombardieri concluded that she could have kids without losing herself. After marrying Rocco, she had her first daughter in 1977, then her second in 1979. In 1981, *The Baby Decision* was born. She was pregnant with Vanessa, her youngest, while writing it on her typewriter. "I'd be going, 'Click, click, click,' and she'd be going, 'Kick, kick, kick,'" Bombardieri says.

Read More: [Why It's So Hard to Have Your Fertility Tested](#)

She hoped the book would help other people unsure about parenthood and destigmatize the [choice not to have children](#)—which she argues should be the default position unless people are confident they want to bring kids into the world. Bombardieri hated the stereotype that child-free adults were

selfish Peter Pans who just wanted to “lie in the sun and go on vacations,” because she felt the exact opposite tended to be true. “If you’re not going home and spending all weekend nurturing a young child, you have time and energy to do other things that make the world a better place,” she says.

Even 40 years later, with the [U.S. fertility rate falling](#) to record lows and heteronormative family structures [no longer necessarily the standard](#), so-called pronatalism has surprising staying power. Bombardieri still considers people who choose not to have children “mavericks”—and although her book is neutral about the question of having kids, Bombardieri says the most emphatic thanks she gets are from child-free people who feel relieved that someone validated their choice.

“When I wrote my book in 1981, I would have assumed that by now there would be a lot more acceptance of child-free people than there is,” she says. But as it turns out, even in 2024—and perhaps *especially* in 2024, when Vice President-elect J.D. Vance’s suggestion that “childless cat ladies” shouldn’t have the same voting privileges as parents [got a huge new platform](#) during his campaign—child-free people need a voice, she says. That’s partly why she’s writing her new book. But it’s also a recognition that people’s worries about parenthood have changed even since the 2016 version of *The Baby Decision*.

Back in the ’80s, she says, people were still awakening to the reality that there are many ways to achieve happiness and that procreating is only one. Her book helped further that idea. The 2016 rerelease rose from a desire to share the wisdom won from her decades of coaching and therapy work, and to speak to the concerns of a generation that felt politically, economically, and socially unsettled. “I hope I have a long life,” she remembers thinking when it came out, “but if I died tonight, I’m so glad that I have these ideas out in the world.”

Read More: [13 Things to Say When Someone Asks Why You Haven’t Had a Baby Yet](#)

In recent years, however, she began getting peppered with questions from her clients and Reddit followers that even the newer book couldn’t answer. Climate-crisis projections continue to intensify, leading some people to

question the morality of having a child and others to fear what kind of world their future offspring would inherit. [The rollback of reproductive rights](#) has many people worried about [what could happen if their pregnancy went wrong](#). Even many women in states with robust reproductive care now report deep fears about the risks of pregnancy and childbirth—because the news and social media are so full of horror stories that many women now think outcomes that are bad, but rare, are likely, Bombardieri believes. And many potential parents are worried about how a baby would change the division of labor in their partnership, a particularly relevant concern now that [women outnumber men in the college-educated workforce](#).

It's a fraught time for could-be parents. They are confronted, from one angle, with people like billionaire (and father many times over) [Elon Musk arguing](#) that declining birth rates will lead to societal collapse. On the other side, there's a small but growing [anti-natalism movement](#) that argues it's irresponsible to bring children into a violent and overpopulated planet plagued by a worsening climate crisis.

These forces clearly weigh on people, as more seem to be struggling with the baby decision than ever—enough that Bombardieri is training a handful of clinicians (including her daughter Vanessa) to continue her work in this burgeoning specialty.

Bombardieri is a decade postretirement age, after all. Once she finishes her forthcoming book, she'd like to get to a place where she can finally wrap up a long-gestating novel about surrogacy, write poetry, draw, and simply slow down, enjoying time with her friends, family, and husband.

The life she is heading toward, full of meaningful relationships and time for rest, relaxation, and contemplation, sounds an awful lot like the one she imagined for herself before deciding to have kids all those years ago. She gave up the peace and quiet of her daydreams for the messy unknown, making the leap that scares so many fence sitters. Did she ever regret it?

“You know, certainly in the earliest years of parenting, when it was really taxing and two kids were crying at the same time or whatever, I would think, Life would be easier if I didn’t have a child,” Bombardieri says. “But I

didn't regret the decision. I just love my daughters so much and enjoy them so much."

That's not to say Bombardieri hasn't wondered, from time to time, what a different life might have brought with it. More travel and less financial stress, probably. More published books, maybe even an M.F.A. Bombardieri can clearly visualize that alternate route, and she seems neither guilty for admitting to its existence nor wistful about not having taken it. It's merely a different ending to the choose-your-own-adventure book of her life—exactly the kind she's trying to help fence sitters everywhere write for themselves.

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Breaking Down Wicked's Iconic Songs With Composer Stephen Schwartz

Annabel Guterman is a senior editor at TIME.



The Wicked Witch of the West has been a fixture in American culture for nearly 125 years. After coming to life in 1900 with [L. Frank Baum](#)'s novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, she rose to prominence [onscreen in 1939](#), portrayed by Margaret Hamilton as a sinister old lady intent on ruining an innocent girl's wish to go home. Decades later, Gregory Maguire gave her an origin story, introducing her as Elphaba in his 1995 novel *Wicked*. That, in turn, was adapted into a [hit Broadway musical](#) in 2003—one of the most lucrative and longest running. Now, Elphaba's story is coming to the [big screen](#) with director Jon M. Chu's two-part adaptation, starring [Cynthia Erivo](#) as Elphaba and [Ariana Grande](#) as her perkier counterpart Glinda. The first installment arrives in theaters on Nov. 22.

Wicked is much more than a simple origin story. Told through music and lyrics by the Oscar-winning composer Stephen Schwartz, it explores love, betrayal, and heartbreak as Elphaba navigates her complex relationship with

the future Glinda the Good. Schwartz, whose other musical credits include *Godspell* and *Pippin*, has been involved with *Wicked* since its inception onstage. Countless vocalists have interpreted these songs, on Broadway and on tours around the world, but the film brings new opportunities to dive even deeper into the world of Oz. That meant some songs were expanded or restructured—a challenge that Schwartz was excited to tackle with his collaborators.

TIME spoke to Schwartz about key songs in *Wicked*, from Elphaba's first big number to the dramatic cliff-hanger, from their origins to how they translate onscreen.

“The Wizard and I”

Wicked's third song follows Elphaba as she realizes her life is about to change. Madame Morrible (Oscar winner [Michelle Yeoh](#) in the movie), the headmistress of Shiz University, has seen Elphaba's magical talents, and announces that she will write to the Wizard so the two can meet. This is perhaps the first time Elphaba is noticed for something that doesn't have to do with the electric green color of her skin. It's one of the most emotional moments in the show as Elphaba stands alone in the middle of the stage and sings.

But that bare-bones approach made Schwartz worry about how the song would present on film. For the movie, Chu leaned into the fantastical elements of the story to convey Elphaba's sudden flood of hope. Schwartz says that the director's clever solution managed to make the song feel more cinematic while staying true to its purpose. He was also struck by Erivo's performance, noting that her voice sounds much younger in this song compared to the movie's last, “Defying Gravity.” This choice made the progression of the character clear, and it was a subtle decision that Schwartz remembers Erivo making on her own. “Cynthia can sing anything, she's gifted like a virtuoso with an instrument,” he says. “It was really interesting and impressive how she brought who and where the character was at that particular point in the story into the sound of her voice.”

“What Is This Feeling?”

Early in the process of writing the show, Schwartz was having trouble with this number, which finds Elphaba and Glinda as reluctant roommates who can't stand each other. After conferring with his collaborator Winnie Holzman, who wrote the book for the *Wicked* musical (and later co-wrote the film's screenplay), he cracked it on the fifth try. Holzman had the idea to write a "falling in hate" song. She told Schwartz that instead of a song where two people instantly fall in love, they should instantly fall into loathing, but in such an intense way that it somehow still feels good.

Initially, Schwartz wrote a song more resembling a ballad, but during readings he could see that it wasn't working. "I realized the idea was right, but it needs to be really high energy," he says. He went home after one reading and wrote the song overnight. That version made it to Broadway—and Schwartz notes it is one of the songs in the movie that most closely resembles how it is performed onstage.

“Dancing Through Life”



One of *Wicked*'s longer songs, "Dancing Through Life" covers a lot of ground. Fiyero (*Bridgerton's* [Jonathan Bailey](#)), the partying prince who keeps getting kicked out of different schools, arrives on the scene and gets everyone together to dance at the Ozdust Ballroom. Schwartz wrote an earlier version of this song that was preformed pre-Broadway in the show's out-of-town tryout in San Francisco, called "Which Way Is the Party?" But it didn't land with audiences, which is when Schwartz decided it needed to more explicitly state Fiyero's philosophy for life: "Nothing matters but knowing nothing matters/ It's just life/ So keep dancing through." As he sings, major developments are happening for all the key characters, including Glinda gifting Elphaba the pointed hat that eventually becomes her signature look.

Though it's Fiyero's song, Elphaba and Glinda share a dance at the end, and their relationship is forever changed. They let their walls come down and stop seeing each other as enemies. "It's very exciting when you can tell a big story moment wordlessly, just with music and movement," Schwartz says. "That's something Jon Chu was able to achieve in a wonderful way because of closeups, and things you don't have onstage."

For the movie, Schwartz considered an idea for a new song about Elphaba, Glinda, Fiyero, Boq (Ethan Slater), and Nessarose (Marissa Bode) being friends. "Like a *Grease* song, a 'We Go Together' type of thing," he says. Ultimately, the song didn't feel necessary because that storytelling was accomplished in other ways, much of if through dancing.

"Popular"



After the breakthrough in their relationship at the dance, Glinda sings to Elphaba that she wants to help her become popular. The bubbly tune, punctuated by Glinda's promises to fix her friend's hair and show her how to flirt, came to Schwartz easily. He wanted it to sound like the cheerleaders in high school that he had crushes on ("the unattainable girls"), but slightly offbeat compared with your typical bubblegum pop. "I made it odd rhythmically, instead of straightforward," Schwartz adds. "The accents come in strange places. There's a yodel in the title when she does 'Pop-youuu-lar.'"

For the movie, Schwartz, music producer Greg Wells, and musical supervisor Stephen Oremus wanted to update the rhythm, but he remembers that Grande was adamant that they stay true to the original. It was important

that all changes to the song felt like they came from Glinda's motivations, rather than Grande's own vocal stylings. "She does little inventive things within it, but I think they are strongly character-based," Schwartz says. "That was something she was very insistent on."

The movie also features an extended ending for the song, which Schwartz recalls that Grande was initially hesitant to perform. But Schwartz explained to her that he felt that this was what Glinda would do, especially visually on screen. Then, he remembers, she went with it "wholeheartedly."

“One Short Day”



This was the third song Schwartz wrote for the show, following a version of what became "No One Mourns the Wicked" and an earlier version "The Wizard and I." Both were quite dark, and Schwartz remembers writing "One Short Day" to bring in some levity and fun. The result is a celebratory number (and the one that is most changed for the film) that brings Elphaba and Glinda to Oz.

Before Elphaba meets the Wizard (Jeff Goldblum), she and Glinda cram in as many exciting activities as they can on the trip. “Winnie and I had this idea that when the girls go to Oz, it would be like one of those tourist books,” Schwartz explains. “If you only have one day in the Emerald City, what should you see?” They end up on a whirlwind tour, where they are enchanted by the cultural offerings. “One Short Day” also includes a mention of the Wizard and his supposed powers in a brief play-within-a-play.

In the movie, this portion is expanded to delve into the history of Oz, including details about the city’s ancient book of spells known as the *Grimmerie*. Schwartz says the new part of the song also highlights how the Wizard is using propaganda and spreading misinformation about himself to the citizens of Oz.

“Defying Gravity”



The Act I closer and one of *Wicked*’s most memorable songs comes as Elphaba is being chased by the Wizard’s guards. The man she had so trusted has just betrayed her—and he’s gotten all of Oz to turn against her. In response, she vows to fight back. But the walls are closing in, and Glinda is begging Elphaba to apologize, hoping that things can return to normal. Instead, Elphaba levitates for the first time. Onstage, she is hoisted into the air as she sings.

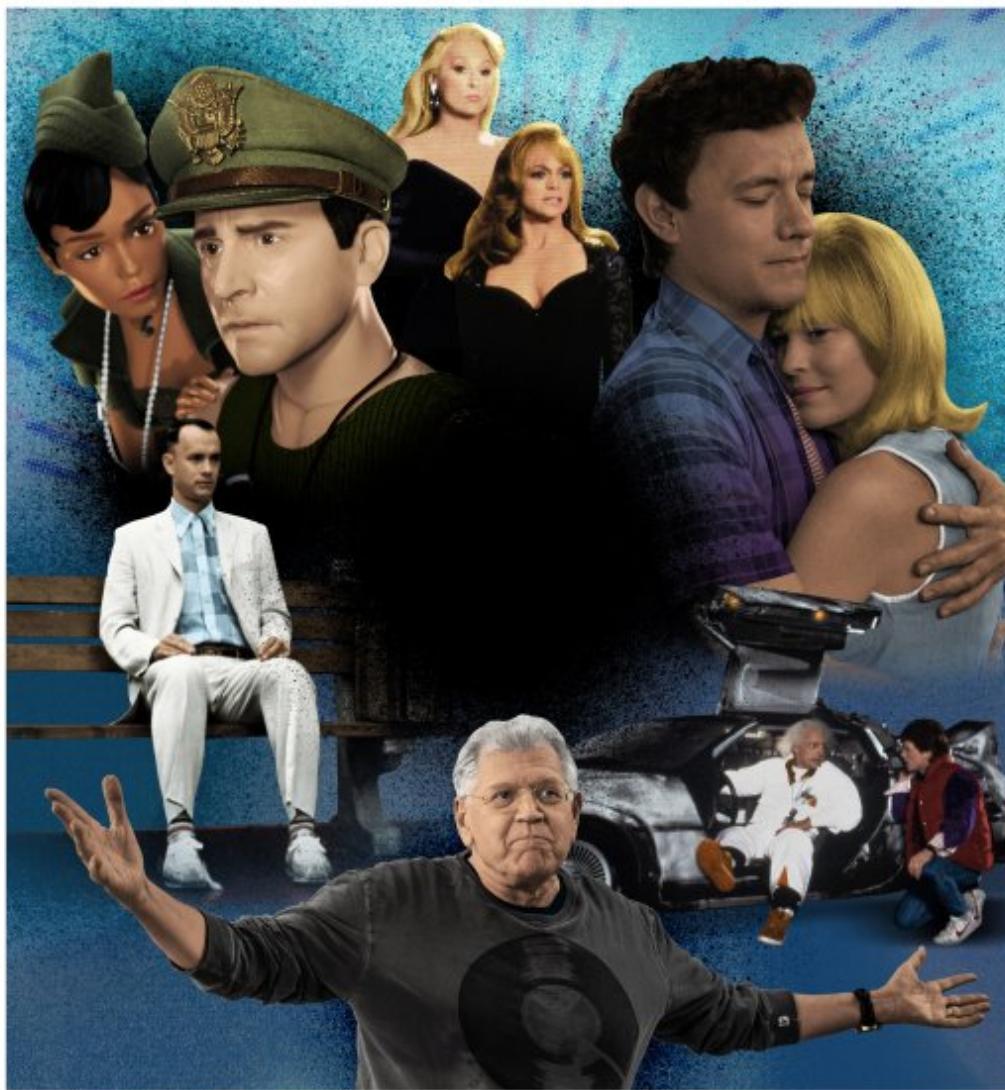
“I wanted you to feel this power coming up through the ground, inhabiting her, and then her owning her power,” Schwartz says. When Erivo sang “Defying Gravity” in the movie, Schwartz admired how restrained she was —until the very end. The final note, a riff that has had a life well beyond *Wicked*, becomes Elphaba’s battle cry. “It’s fun for me to hear what the different choices are,” Schwartz says. “The only rule for me is that it has to feel organic, it can’t feel like you’re doing a riff on *American Idol*. It needs to feel like it comes from the gut. I certainly think Cynthia achieved that.”

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Robert Zemeckis Just Wants to Move You

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



Robert Zemeckis' *Here* is the most unfashionable movie of 2024—which is exactly what's beautiful about it. In a world where even those who profess to love movies largely stream them at home, *Here* is a picture that demands big-screen real estate. It's inventive and confident filmmaking from a veteran director whose most recent features have [performed modestly](#) at the box office or, worse, sunk with barely a trace. It's so unabashed in its desire to make us feel something that it runs the risk of being called sentimental—some early reviews have labeled it as such. It's the kind of movie that a whole family—from young teenagers to nonagenarians—could trek out to see on a Sunday or holiday. And it reunites two stars—[Tom Hanks](#) and [Robin Wright](#)—who helped make Zemeckis' 1994 *Forrest Gump* such a resonant success.

In 2024, all these pluses are almost minuses, relics of things we no longer look for in movies. But Zemeckis—who, in a career spanning more than 40 years, has hit some high highs and a few rather low lows—is optimistic that audiences will find their way to *Here*, not just because he wholeheartedly believes in it, but because he knows it's a miracle it got made in the first place. “It defies everything that’s happening in the corporate whatever,” he says in a Zoom call from Los Angeles, “[among] whoever it is that makes decisions about what movies should be made.” Maybe because his last film to receive a traditional theatrical release, 2018’s tender, innovative, and mildly strange [Welcome to Marwen](#), failed to find an audience, he knows a miracle when he sees one. “Hey, the truth is that I could never make any of the movies I made, today. Not a single one.” Why? “Because,” he says, with deadpan understated confidence, “they’re too original.”

Maybe that sounds like hubris. But for someone who knows, provably, how to connect with moviegoers in an actual theater—as he did with *Forrest Gump*, with [Back to the Future](#) and its sequels, with pictures like [Cast Away](#) and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*—it’s really just a reckoning with the state of moviegoing today. Most of us watch movies in isolation, which Zemeckis sees as a huge problem. It’s easy to forget what it feels like to laugh as part of a larger audience of human beings, or to be part of a crowd of viewers who allow themselves to be swept along in a wave of emotion. And though we think we want to see something original, do we really? If so, the mountains of product being made from already-familiar IP means we’re out of luck.

What chance does a movie like *Here* have in a world like that? Zemeckis, more than anything, sounds grateful that he'll have a chance to find out.

Read more: [*The 100 Best Movies of the Past 10 Decades*](#)



Adapted from Richard McGuire's 2014 [graphic novel](#), a landmark for its visual inventiveness, *Here*—set in a single room of one house, and covering centuries' worth of life in that exact location—is, from a technical standpoint, unlike any other film ever made. The camera is stationary, as it used to be in the days of silent film. But in *Here*, that stillness feels exhilarating and modern, given that what we see within the frame moves and changes not just with passing days, years, and decades, but with eons. We see a young couple enter this room—the Second World War has just ended, and these two are looking forward to building a life together. But we've also seen the ground on which this house was built as an early home to dinosaurs (who trample over a couple of prehistoric eggs as they valiantly try to outrun death) and later to North America's indigenous peoples, who fall in love and build families just as our post-World War II couple will do (though they're not nearly as fully fleshed out as characters). Across centuries the landscape shifts from barren earth to verdant, flowering fields—the story flashes backward and forward in time, though it never leaves this relatively small

patch of space. Within this single frame, small interior squares pop up to show what was happening in this exact spot decades ago, or what might happen in a few decades' time.

From the minute Zemeckis picked up McGuire's novel, he saw it as a film. But getting the result he wanted wasn't easy, not even for a filmmaker known for his fluency in special effects. "When I started getting my team together and described the style of the movie I was going to make, everyone's reaction was 'Well, that won't be a problem.' And it turned out to be maybe the most difficult movie we ever made," Zemeckis says, "a gigantic puzzle."

Nestled within that puzzle is the story's heartbeat. Our postwar couple, Al and Rose, are played by [Paul Bettany](#) and Kelly Reilly. They give birth to a son, Richard, who, from his teenage years to old age, is played by Tom Hanks. While he's still in high school, Richard meets and falls in love with Robin Wright's Margaret. She gets pregnant; the two marry, living with Al and Rose ostensibly only until they can afford a place of their own, though that day never comes. The extended family lives under one roof, and not always happily. There are births, deaths, major illnesses, and marital frustrations. Wright and Hanks anchor the film's drama, and to play the younger and older versions of their characters, their faces and bodies are enhanced digitally.

The de-aged versions of Hanks and Wright are admittedly a little disorienting, especially at first. But Zemeckis—who, with films like *The Polar Express* (2004) and *Beowulf* (2007), has long been a proponent of performance-capture and other digitally advanced technologies—bristles at the suggestion that audiences might think of Hanks and Wright's appearance as "uncanny." He hates that word. The only reason people might have that response, he says, is because they know they're seeing a movie illusion. He explains that the effect is nothing more than digital makeup; he finds the results perfect, and perfectly believable, given how much de-aging technology has improved since Martin Scorsese used it in [The Irishman](#), in 2019. (The de-aging in *Here* was accomplished via an AI technology known as Metaphysic Live.)



But when pressed to acknowledge that some viewers might find that very perfection unsettling, Zemeckis concedes that the effect might require a small leap of imagination. “It’s an intellectual exercise,” he says. “An audience might be going, ‘Oh, how can that be? I know they’re not that age.’” But test audiences, he says, weren’t overly bothered. “They quickly got over it.” And while he acknowledges that [unchecked AI presents a danger](#) to actors’ livelihoods, he considers the technology used in *Here* to be completely defensible from an artistic standpoint. “AI is a catch-all phrase, because what I’m doing is just using really fast computing to create digital makeup. I’m not creating any kind of avatar or anything.”

In the end, Zemeckis might be right that the sight of a “young” Hanks and Wright, reunited after 30 years, may be enchanting enough to carry audiences along. Yet not even *Forrest Gump* can escape the scrutiny of audiences who feel they’re too sophisticated for it: for every person who remembers the movie with pleasure, there’s one who derides it for its ostensible schmaltziness. It seems the only thing the latter group can recall about the film is the sugary bromide about life being just like a box of chocolates; they don’t care how beautifully crafted, and acted, it is, and its sly humor—which you’d think would be self-evident in a story about a naïf

trying to make sense of 20th century history—seems to have totally slipped past them.

Zemeckis has some ideas about why modern audiences, especially, have issues with *Forrest Gump*. “I think modern audiences have lost the understanding of irony because they watch a movie like *Forrest Gump* in isolation, and they don’t understand the irony of what it was, what it’s all about. They take it a hundred percent literally,” he says. “And filmmakers like me, who find irony in life and in art and in movies—that’s getting lost somehow.” Still, there’s hope. Zemeckis’ bitterly funny 1992 satire *Death Becomes Her*, considered a flop upon its release, has been rediscovered and embraced by younger audiences. Both it and *Back to the Future* have also been reimagined as Broadway musicals; their bones are enduring.



Read more: [The 33 Most Anticipated Movies of Fall 2024](#)

Perhaps, whether it’s an immediate hit or not, *Here* will have a similar shelf life. The movie captures the sense that time seems to stretch before us endlessly when we’re young; it’s only when we stop and look back that we realize time isn’t our own, to use or control. The spaces we fill today were filled by others before us, and will be filled by someone else tomorrow—

though another way of looking at it is that all beings are interconnected across dimensions. Common experiences unite us: Our parents fall ill or simply age, and we must care for them. Babies are born at inconvenient times, but we make it work. People we love leave us behind. Our children grow up to live their own lives. At one time or another, we all ask the same question: Where did the time go?

The dazzling construction of *Here* gets at the unanswerability of that question. There's something searching and wistful about this movie; it couldn't have been made by a young person. In adapting McGuire's book, Zemeckis worked with his frequent collaborator (and *Forrest Gump* screenwriter) Eric Roth, and though the story stretches across centuries, it's particularly affecting in the way it captures life in mid- to late-20th-century America. When Al brings out his home-movie camera, circa 1960, the family squints into the glare of the light bar necessary for shooting indoors: this is how midcentury parents captured our happiest moments, by nearly blinding us. The family TV in the corner hits the high points of each era (the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*) or at least nods at the weird stuff that gets stuck in our brains (the opening sequence of *CHiPs*).

But any film that tangles with big human feelings risks being characterized —to come back to that all-too-convenient word—as sentimental. Zemeckis is ready for that. “I think people who use the word *sentimental* just don’t like the fact that they were moved. It makes them scared, and I think they’re lashing out at a feeling that makes them uncomfortable.” Watching movies in isolation, removed from that ripple of communal feeling, has done us no favors. Maybe it’s time we relearned how to feel uncomfortable, together—to bring it back into fashion, before it goes extinct.

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FX's *Say Nothing* Is the Must-Watch Political Thriller of 2024

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



In 1972, at the bloody height of the Troubles, home invaders abducted a widowed mother of 10 named Jean McConville from her Belfast apartment. Her children never saw her alive again. The family spent decades demanding answers from the Irish Republican Army, which was known to have “disappeared” fellow Catholics at the time, as to what had become of McConville and why—a quest that propels [Patrick Radden Keefe’s](#) acclaimed 2018 book, [Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland](#). Now the best seller has been adapted into an exceptional

nine-episode FX miniseries, also titled *Say Nothing*, that resonates not only as a gripping true-crime drama, but also as an urgently timely work of political art.

While the mystery of McConville's disappearance gives the narrative shape, Keefe (an executive producer) and creator Joshua Zetumer weave several related stories into a profound meditation on radicalism, regret, and the [complicated legacy of the Troubles](#). From a distance, we observe the rise of [Gerry Adams](#), who would become the longtime leader of Irish republican party Sinn Fein. Though an onscreen disclaimer dutifully notes that he has always denied having been an IRA member or participated in its attacks, the show's version of a cutthroat young Gerry (Josh Finan) masterminds bombings and orders the deaths of compromised comrades.



But the core of *Say Nothing*, which will stream in full on Hulu beginning on Nov. 14, is the story of Dolours Price, portrayed as a young woman by Belfast native Lola Petticrew and in middle age by Maxine Peake, in a pair of indelible performances. Raised by Catholics who had been jailed and

maimed for the republican cause, brilliant firebrand Dolours and her quieter but, as it turns out, more militant sister Marian (Hazel Doupe), briefly explore nonviolence in the '60s; the strategy yields only beatings at the hands of Protestant cops. The Price girls soon volunteer for the Belfast branch of the IRA, refusing the helpmate duties of their mother's generation in favor of frontline action. In one madcap sequence, early in the series, they hold up a bank disguised as nuns.

A less glamorous aspect of Dolours' IRA career involves driving traitors and other locals judged to be liabilities across the border to Ireland proper, where she knows that her confederates will execute them. Too perceptive, perhaps, for her own good, she remains conflicted about this particular form of violence. "I just didn't think my contribution to this war would be killing Catholics," she says. Barely out of her teens, Dolours harbors a burning desire to attack London and instill in Northern Ireland's English overlords the same fear she and her family have always felt.



A disputed border. A generations-spanning conflict layered in land, identity, and faith. The downtrodden population of one side resists the military occupation of the wealthier overlord, but endures the bulk of the carnage. Questions of war vs. insurgency, freedom fighter vs. terrorist, the ethics of either side's making civilians collateral damage for the sake of what they see as justice. The Troubles seem more than a little relevant to the tragedy now playing out in [Gaza](#); earlier this year, [Ireland recognized a Palestinian state](#), and Irish artists like [Nicola Coughlan](#) and [Sally Rooney](#) have criticized the Israeli government. Without sacrificing the specificity of Dolours' story, *Say Nothing* captures the moral, ideological, and emotional complexity of such struggles, past and present.

At a moment when extreme positions prevail, some might bristle at the grace the show gives to its protagonist. An episode that has the frenetic intensity of an espionage thriller positions her as the canny yet nervous ringleader of a band of teens planting car bombs. But then it progresses through the next four decades' worth of history, structured by the older Dolours' candid interview for a confidential Belfast oral-history project. And as her story becomes increasingly intertwined with the McConvilles' search for the truth about Jean and with Gerry's use of power to escape accountability, the series leaves the impression that life is long. No matter the merits of their cause, a young revolutionary with a conscience will grow up to be a person haunted by the very worst things they did in service of it.

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