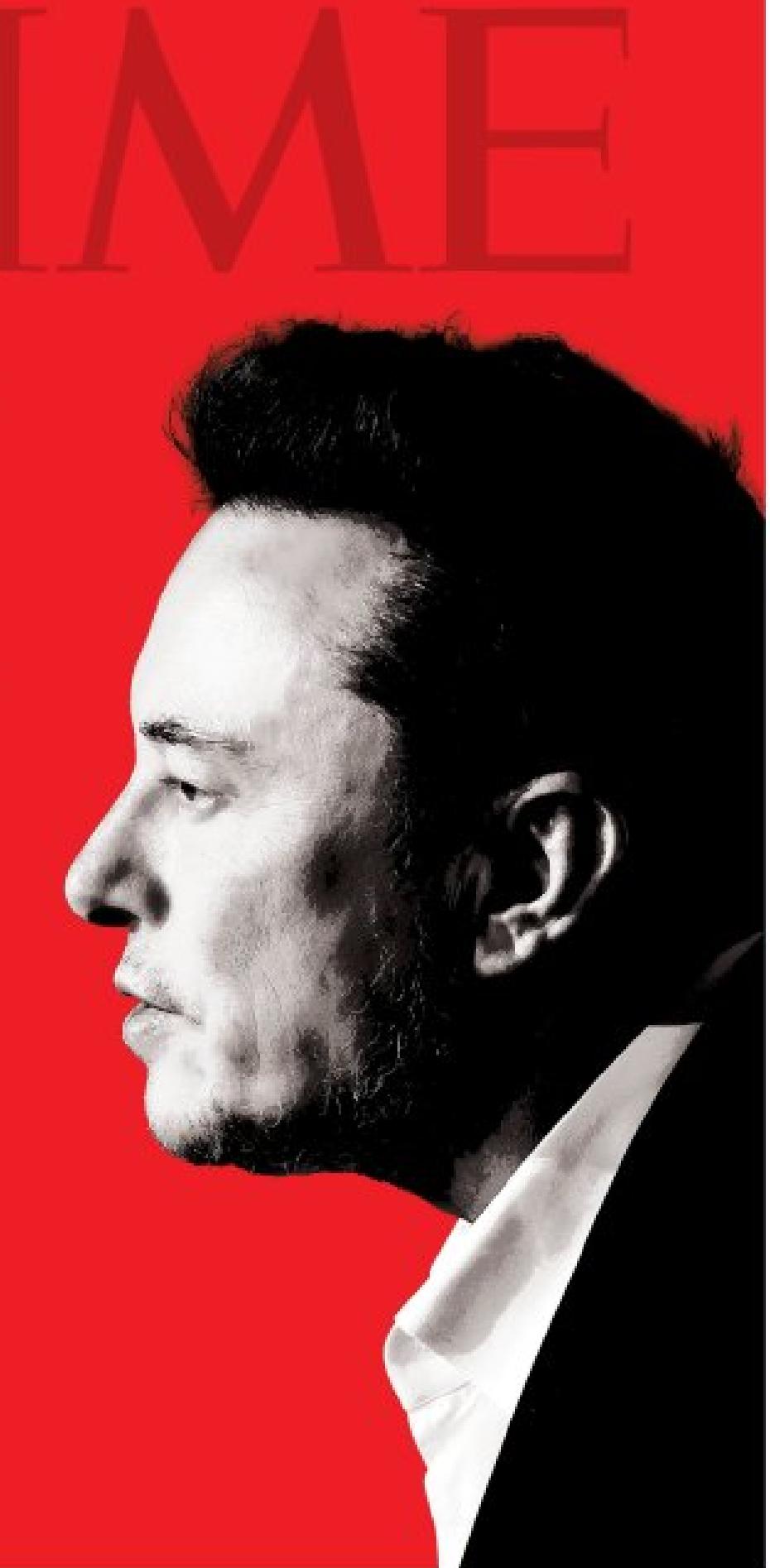




- BECOME RICHEST MAN
- BUY TWITTER
- LAUNCH ROCKET
- BRING ROCKET BACK
- IMPLANT HUMAN BRAIN CHIP
- GET TRUMP ELECTED
- WORK FROM MAR-A-LAGO
- SLASH \$2 TRILLION
- FLY TO MARS



CITIZEN MUSK

WHAT'S NEXT ON HIS TO-DO LIST?

BY SIMON SHUSTER

TIME Magazine

[December 9th, 2024]

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How Elon Musk Became a Kingmaker

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



Hang on a minute. Whom did we just elect? The Republican ticket had two names at the top: Donald Trump and J.D. Vance. But parts of this delirious November created the impression that someone else has taken hold of our collective destiny.

[We already knew him](#) in various roles—the guy who [bought Twitter](#) and fired more than half its staff, the inventor who brought the space program back to life, the carmaker whose new trucks make kids stop and stare on the sidewalk. All of a sudden, Elon Musk had [moved into the realm of politics](#), headlining rallies, steering government appointments, shaping the agenda for the next President of the United States.

For more than three years he's been one of the world's richest and most powerful men. Markets soar and tumble on his tweets. Astronauts fly in his spaceships. Armies advance with the signals from his satellites. Conspiracy theories go mainstream through his embrace. But it was only in the spotlight of these elections that [the full extent of his influence](#) came into view.

Not since the age of William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate who greased FDR's ascent nearly a century ago, has a private citizen loomed so large over so many facets of American life at once, pulling the nation's culture, its media, its economy, and now its politics into the force field of his will. Standing beside him, even Trump can seem almost in awe, less of a boss than a companion to the man for whom this planet and its challenges are not big enough.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES 

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CITIZEN MUSK

WHAT'S NEXT ON
HIS TO-DO LIST?

BY SIMON SHUSTER

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For now they act like partners, bonded through the favors they are trading and their shared desire to disrupt the institutions of government. They may deliver commands with one voice for a while. But their agendas do not align on everything. Both are willful, impulsive, and accustomed to being in charge. What will happen if they start to clash?

In that kind of fight, Musk may not have the upper hand. History is strewn with the wreckage of kingmakers who went to war against the leaders they installed. No matter how much [wealth or influence](#) Musk collects, the tools of state power will remain with the President, and things will get messy if he decides to use them against the billionaire who helped him return to the White House.

In the end, the durability of their partnership may depend on Musk's motives: What drove him to become [a MAGA prophet](#) in the first place? If it was money he wanted, then mission accomplished.

[video id=bLsYP7yd autostart="viewable"]

The value of his fortune surged by more than \$50 billion in the week after the election, peaking at more than \$320 billion, as investors went berserk for shares of [Tesla](#). But wealth has never been Musk's obsession. The way he has bet his fortune on moony passion projects, like putting a greenhouse on Mars, should be proof enough that he dreams differently than the average Klingon aboard Starship Trump.

Read more: [Why Elon Musk Was Person of the Year for 2021](#)

People close to Musk say his ultimate goal has not changed since he launched SpaceX, his rocket company, in 2002. (Among its investors are Marc and Lynne Benioff, the owners of TIME.) For more than two decades, Musk's white whale has been the red planet. It's written right there on his favorite T-shirt: OCCUPY MARS. "Everything goes to that mission," says a member of Musk's social circle who recently talked to him about his plans. "He's just realizing that being in control, directly or indirectly, of U.S. government budgets, is going to put us on Mars in his lifetime. Doing it privately would be slower."

That does not mean U.S. taxpayers would foot the bill for Musk's [dream](#) of interplanetary travel. But the public does tend to pay a price when eccentric visionaries take the reins of government. Millions of Americans, from retired factory workers to debt-laden graduates and newborn children, benefit from the social programs that Musk has promised to slash. Though he fires off multiple tweets a day to his 205 million followers, Musk has declined to answer questions from reporters, including this one, since he became consigliere to the President-elect. He has not explained his reported contacts with American adversaries, from China and Russia to Iran. Nor has he addressed the conflicts of interest that arise from playing a key role in a government whose regulators investigate his businesses.

So far, Trump seems happy to play along. In the middle of his [victory speech](#) on Nov. 6, he spent four minutes praising Musk, the "super genius" who helped run his ground game in Pennsylvania, reportedly paying canvassers to knock on 11 million doors and hiring vans to bring Amish people to the polls. "We have a new star," Trump crowed from the stage in Florida. "A star is born—Elon!" Only later, roughly 19 minutes into his speech, did the President-elect turn back to his teleprompter and remember to thank his voters.

What Musk meant to the Trump campaign went far beyond the \$120 million he pumped in, the field program he established, or the social-media boost he provided. To many of the young men who flocked to Trump in record numbers, Musk was an ideal avatar. He injected a sense of ingenuity and possibility into a familiar nostalgia act. If Trump thrills supporters by pledging to destroy corrupt institutions, Musk represents the promise of building new things and solving hard problems. Trump did not seem so old at his rallies with this *Diablo*-playing edgelord bouncing around beside him. And it became harder for Trump's opponents to paint his team as a gaggle of halfwits when the greatest innovator of our time, with a record of delivering on outlandish plans, was pledging to slash spending by \$2 trillion.



No matter how often the Democrats reminded us that Trump's fortune [grew out](#) of inherited wealth, multiple bankruptcies, and decades of corporate shenanigans, they could not deny Musk's achievements as a businessman. Even Senator Bernie Sanders, scourge of the billionaire class, hedged his criticism in a recent podcast: "Elon Musk is a very, very aggressive and capable businessperson, very impressive with what he's accomplished. He says, I could do more in a week than the government can do in, you know, five years, and in some ways he's right."

At a time when faith in government has cratered, that's all many voters want to see—a capable outsider, ruthless and independent, who knows how to take a gargantuan machine and make it leaner, faster, and more productive. Musk's promise to do that with the American bureaucracy has already created momentum and cover for cutting costs on a scale that Washington has not seen in many years. That agenda did not get far during Trump's first presidential term. Millions of people depend on government jobs, and on the protections that regulators provide from predatory businesses, like those that gave us opioid abuse and cigarettes as a cure for asthma. But small-

government Republicans will be eager to follow Musk into ugly budget battles over federal waste and bloated entitlements. Many Americans will be rooting for them.

On the campaign trail, the most convincing argument Musk offered was not on [Joe Rogan](#)'s show or onstage at Trump's rallies. It was on the launch pad in Boca Chica, Texas, where Musk's aerospace company dazzled the world by catching a returning rocket with a pair of robotic arms. If the man who did this supports Trump with such fervor, couldn't Trump accomplish even some of what he promised?

Read more: [What Elon Musk Really Believes](#)

A lot of voters seem to think so, especially the [young men](#) Musk targeted for Trump with his bravado. "The biggest factor here is that men need to vote," Musk told Rogan on the eve of the election. The next day, when 60% of white men turned out for Trump, Musk tweeted: "The cavalry has arrived." But his appeal reached well beyond the manosphere. It also moved a swath of voters who were put off by Trump's character but excited by his policies. TV pundits said these people needed a "permission structure"; Musk provided just that to suburban women like Betsy Stecz. As she stood in line for his October rally in Lancaster, Pa., Stecz described a sense of relief: "You have people finally feeling like, OK, I can hold my head up and say: I'm not ashamed to vote for Donald Trump." The reason, in her view, was Musk.

Given his role in the victory, Musk may have expected some reward. But his perch in Trump's transition has reportedly unnerved some members of their entourage. For much of November, Musk camped out at Mar-a-Lago, weighing in on Cabinet picks and advising Trump on policy priorities. He went golfing with the President-elect, sat ringside with him at an Ultimate Fighting Championship event and took pictures with the Trump family; one grandkid raved on social media that Musk had attained "uncle status." Musk coined a different term for his position: "First Buddy."



Even that was an understatement. The leaders of Turkey and Ukraine had Musk listening in on their calls with Trump. An envoy from Iran, which stands accused of trying to assassinate Trump, reportedly met with Musk to talk about defusing tensions. (Iran's Foreign Ministry has denied the meeting.) When House Republicans invited Trump to a closed-door session on Capitol Hill, Musk tagged along, the window of his car in Trump's motorcade labeled GUEST 1.

Read more: [Iran, Trump, and the Third Assassination Plot](#)

By that point, Trump had appointed him to lead a new entity called the Department of Government Efficiency. Its acronym, DOGE, was a nod to the canine-themed cryptocurrency Musk has promoted as a kind of joke. But its mandate was serious. Trump claimed it would “dismantle” the federal bureaucracy and “restructure” its agencies. “This will send shock waves through the system,” Musk said.

It could also give Musk influence over the many agencies that regulate his work. A few weeks before Election Day, the National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration announced it is investigating Tesla's self-driving vehicles after reported crashes. In June, regulators in California ordered Tesla to "correct ongoing air quality violations" at its Fremont plant. Tesla has said its cars are safe and its facilities comply with environmental standards. SpaceX has also had run-ins with the Federal Aviation Administration, which Musk threatened to sue for overreach in September. A review by the *New York Times* found that his companies are facing at least 20 regulatory battles and investigations from "all corners of the government." Musk and multiple representatives declined to comment or to respond to TIME's questions for this article, including about potential conflicts of interest.

He has yet to explain what principles would guide his purge of the bureaucracy. The co-director of DOGE, Vivek Ramaswamy, ran on a pro-business, libertarian platform in the last Republican primary. Musk's politics, by comparison, are harder to pin down. This summer he referred to himself as "historically, a moderate Democrat." He has called climate change the defining challenge of our age. When Barack Obama ran for President in 2008, Musk stood in line for six hours to shake his hand.

His relationship with Trump has often been rocky. Their views on tariffs are far apart, and Musk lasted less than six months as an adviser to the White House in 2017 before quitting in protest over Trump's climate policies. Five years later, Musk said it was time for Trump to "sail into the sunset," eliciting a furious response. "Elon should focus on getting himself out of the Twitter mess," Trump said, "because he could owe \$44 billion for something that's perhaps worthless."

Trump had a point. Musk's purchase of Twitter made little evident business sense. He paid at least double the company's value in 2022, then spent weeks dynamiting its revenue streams and cashiering its talent. The company's head count, he has said, fell from 8,000 to around 1,500 under his leadership. Some of his posts on the platform, which he rebranded as X, came off as spasms of corporate self-harm. One referred to an antisemitic theory as the "actual truth." (He later apologized.) Another shared a conspiracy theory about the hammer attack that put House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband in the hospital with a fractured skull. Dozens of companies,

including Microsoft and Coca-Cola, pulled their ads from the platform in response. “Don’t advertise,” he told them last fall from the stage of a conference. “If somebody is going to try to blackmail me with advertising, blackmail me with money, go f-ck yourself. Go. F-ck. Yourself. Is that clear?” The investment firm Fidelity assessed in October that X had lost nearly 80% of its value in the past two years.



Musk didn't seem to care. Even without most of its workforce, the platform continued to function, routinely topping the list of the most-downloaded news apps in the Apple app store. Major advertisers have returned. For some observers, all this has been reason enough to applaud Musk's takeover as a master class in corporate efficiency. "What Elon did with Twitter is he got inside, cleaned house, and now it's working better than before," says the member of Musk's social circle. "So the mood is that hopefully Musk can do the same thing with the U.S. government."

That's a tall order. Even fiscal hawks have balked at Musk's promise to eliminate \$2 trillion in federal spending. It would require taking an axe to Medicare, Social Security, and other parts of the social safety net. Musk warned the nation to prepare for a period of "temporary hardship" as these cuts take effect. But it's far from clear that he will even have the power to make them. DOGE will remain outside of government, with no authority to fire federal employees. Many budgetary experts expect it to go the same way as countless blue-ribbon panels that tried and failed to pressure politicians to cut the programs their constituents love. In identifying waste, fraud, and abuse, the U.S. Congress needs no help: it already has an oversight branch called the Government Accountability Office, which assiduously tries to do that job.

Many early fans of DOGE say they recognize the limits of its potential and celebrate it all the same. "Yes, a Department of Government Efficiency is probably a pipe dream and might end up as essential as Monty Python's Department of Silly Walks," the *Wall Street Journal* columnist Andy Kessler wrote on Nov. 17. "But even if Mr. Musk's DOGE simply trims some bloat and saves a few hundred billion, it will be worth it."

On the campaign trail, Musk talked a lot about the need for the U.S. to live "honestly" and "within its means." But if his social-media platform is any guide, his aims may have less to do with efficiency than ideology. His stated goal in acquiring Twitter matches one of his favorite reasons for supporting Trump: he says he wants to salvage free speech in America. "Freedom of speech is the bedrock of democracy," he told Joe Rogan on the eve of the election. "Once you lose freedom of speech, you lose democracy. Game over. That's why I bought Twitter." Multiple reports and studies concluded

that under his stewardship the platform has become a refuge for hateful and harmful content, in part because he fired its content-moderation team.

Read more: [*Elon Musk and the Tech Bro Obsession With ‘Free Speech’*](#)

Asked to explain his shift to the right, Musk often brings up the “woke mind virus,” his term for the leftward shift in American society that, in his view, gave rise to identity politics, cancel culture, and supposedly rampant online censorship. His grudge against these forces is not merely political. During the pandemic, one of his children sought gender-affirming medical care, and Musk has said he was tricked into approving it. His transgender daughter, who is now 20 years old and estranged from her father, legally changed her name in 2022 to Vivian Jenna Wilson. On a podcast in July, Musk said his child “is dead, killed by the woke mind virus. I vowed to destroy the woke mind virus after that.”

Wilson posted her response the next day: “I look pretty good for a dead bitch.” On Nov. 5, as the results of the election became clear, Wilson published another message: “Blame the f-cking politicians and oligarchs who caused this to happen,” she wrote. “Direct your anger towards them.”

In ancient Greek, the word *oligarkhia* meant “rule by the few.” Its earliest critic was Aristotle; in the 4th century BCE, the philosopher described it as a state of affairs in which “men of property have the government in their hands.” In medieval Venice, the leader of the oligarchy ruled for life, and he went by the same title that Musk gave to his new department: the Doge.



The purest expression of this system in modern times took shape in Russia in the 1990s, when a few businessmen bought up control of the national economy during its chaotic transition to capitalism. The Russian term for their oligarchy is *semibankirshchina*—the reign of the seven bankers.

The most powerful among them, Boris Berezovsky, used his media assets to help Putin win his first election in 2000, and he expected the new President to share the spoils of power. Instead, the two of them began to feud. Soon the Russian state forced Berezovsky into exile and seized his television network. Broke and lonely, the oligarch died in 2013 at his mansion in the English countryside. Authorities ruled it a suicide. To this day, his former media channel carries the Kremlin's message.

One of Berezovsky's close associates, Alex Goldfarb, now lives in New Jersey, and he has followed the tandem of Musk and Trump with a mix of familiarity and dread. "There seems to be an oligarchy forming here as well," he says. "Under Putin in the early years, we had the oligarchs fighting the state with everything they had," says Goldfarb. "Here it seems we have two oligarchs, Musk and Trump, working together to take over the state."

The outcome may depend on the way this new duopoly treats the institutions they will soon control. If the aim is to sharpen them into leaner and more effective tools of governance, the public could benefit from the remaking of a system that has long been weighed down with bureaucratic flab. But Trump has also used those tools the way Putin has done in Russia—to benefit his friends and sideline his enemies.

Musk has a lot to gain from that arrangement. As long as he sticks to the role of First Buddy, he might expect an easy ride from the regulators Trump appoints throughout the government. His clearest path to Mars could thus run straight through the Oval Office. But apart from watching the spectacle of his success, what benefit will trickle down to everyday Americans?

The institutions that give us health care, keep our water clean, and educate our kids are not meant to be run like businesses. They are not built to make a profit, but that does not make them any less valuable, especially for the citizens who can least afford to pay. If those institutions get culled amid the Muskian push for efficiency, the hardship will not be temporary for those who rely on government support. For them, the pain could be devastating, and none of Musk's promises of an interplanetary future will help them get through the problems of today.

—With reporting by Eric Cortellessa/Lancaster and Leslie Dickstein/New York

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A New Era of Climate Geopolitics is Playing Out at COP29

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



The annual United Nations climate change summits are always a little crazy: tens of thousands of delegates from every corner of the globe descending on a far-flung city for two weeks of heated discussions on the future of global climate policy.

This time around the conference—known this year as COP29—is nothing short of surreal. In the area where countries set up pavilions, you can take a five-minute walk from the luxurious Russian pavilion where delegates sip

tea on sofas amid human-size Russian dolls to the Ukrainian pavilion decorated with a solar panel destroyed by Russian armaments. At most COPs, attendees keep their eyes peeled for notable heads of state or even celebrities; in Baku, delegates are on the lookout for members of the Taliban. Midway through the first week of the conference, the Argentinian delegation returned home at the direction of the country's right-wing president; the French environment minister decided to skip the whole thing because of a dispute with the host country. And the entire event began with a description of fossil fuels as "a gift from God" from Azerbaijan's president.

But nothing has made the conference more surreal than its timing. Opening just days after the U.S. election, the [topic of President-elect Donald Trump](#) serves as context for every conversation. The U.S. has for decades played a pivotal role in shaping the talks, brokering key agreements and, most recently, helping convince everyone that the world's largest economy is decarbonizing. In the opening hours of the conference, John Podesta, President Joe Biden's climate envoy, offered a blunt assessment that felt almost like an apology. "It's clear that the next administration will try to take a U-turn and erase much of this progress," he said. "Of course, I'm keenly aware of the disappointment that the United States has at times caused." (He went on to make the case that the U.S. would continue climate efforts at the city and state level).

As the talks, which this year are focused on how to finance the climate transition, continue in their second week, it's impossible to know where they will land. The organizers could eke out a brokered agreement, as often happens, or they could collapse under the strain of geopolitical pressure. Longtime COP attendees have said that these talks have at times felt closer to a breakdown than any in recent memory.

In a way, this climate moment is very dangerous. We already feel the [effects of climate-linked extreme weather today](#), which is costing lives in communities across the globe. Clearly, a stagnation in multilateral efforts to address that issue doesn't help. But there are also reasons for reassurance here in Baku. Decarbonization has moved from a theoretical question, delineated in bold but toothless commitments, to a phenomenon occurring

in the economy—from the small enterprises adapting to sustainability requirements to multi-billion investments from some of the world’s most influential firms.

Indeed, the questions here in Baku are less about whether the international climate push will go on but about how.

One of the first things that struck me upon stepping out of the airport in Baku is how much the vehicles on the street have changed since I was last here seven years ago. At the time, white Soviet-era Ladas seemed to dominate the roads. This time around, the old-school cars were few and far between. Instead, I noticed the prevalence of Chinese electric vehicles. Nearly every time I called a car, an EV showed up.

Baku’s EVs offered a small reminder, from the outset, that the energy transition is already rapidly changing the world—and not just in major economies. In 2016, when Trump was first elected, delegates gathered at that year’s U.N. climate conference wondered if the [Paris Agreement](#)—and the decarbonization push it was meant to catalyze—could survive. That’s not a question in 2024.

To some degree, the confidence comes in part from evidence from Trump’s first term. Many businesses actually accelerated their commitment to climate action in spite of Trump. And cities and states said they would step up their decarbonization policymaking. In Baku, some of those same groups have offered similar commitments. Washington Governor Jay Inslee, citing state actions, put it to me bluntly: “Donald Trump is going to be a speed bump on the march to a clean energy economy.”

But perhaps more important is the massive investment that has begun over the course of the last eight years. Baku’s EVs are just one example. Across the globe, many of the world’s largest companies have spent billions to facilitate the buildout of clean technology infrastructure. Those investments are simply too costly to undo and the momentum too strong to stop. “No one country can stop progress,” says Catherine McKenna, a former Canadian environment minister. “I said that last time [Trump was elected], but it’s even more true because now it’s in the real economy.”

But the bigger question for delegates is how the ongoing transition—not to mention the effects of extreme weather—will play out around the world. Which countries will win and lose? How will the most vulnerable fare? And will the transition happen fast enough—especially in developing countries—to avoid some of the worst effects of climate change?

Indeed, these issues have led to brawls at COP29 over everything from how climate rules play out in trade relationships to how much different countries should pay to help their counterparts to the role of oil and gas in the transition. With tensions high, in the middle of the first week of this year some of the most prominent voices in the international climate world—including former U.N. climate chief [Christiana Figueres](#) and climate scientist [Johan Rockström](#)—dropped an [open letter](#) calling for a wholesale reform of the process. Host countries should face tougher selection criteria to ensure that they’re committed to phasing out fossil fuels, and the process should be streamlined to allow faster decision making.

The post-election timing was unstated in the letter, but it wasn’t coincidental. Regardless of whether Trump follows through on his promise for the U.S. to leave the Paris Agreement for a second time, the climate world will be left with a giant vacuum. Many negotiators are quick to say that the U.S. international climate posture never amounted to real climate leadership. Even under supportive presidents like Biden and former President Barack Obama, the U.S. shaped agreements with American politics in mind, even if it weakened the deals, and struggled to deliver the [climate aid](#) that others demanded. Even so, for many, the U.S. will be missed when it’s gone.

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As Trump Seeks Mass Deportations, Workplace Raids May Not Help Much

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



Just over a year into Donald Trump's first term as President, immigration agents raided a meat processing plant in Bean Station, Tennessee, arresting 104 workers. It was the largest worksite raid in a decade. Two months later, 114 were arrested at a large-scale nursery in Sandusky, Ohio. The next year,

immigration agents raided poultry plants in six towns in central Mississippi, arresting 680 workers in one day.

When Trump comes back to office in January, he plans to bring back the raids, after President Biden largely put a stop to such enforcement tactics.

“Worksite operations have to happen,” Tom Homan, Trump’s former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and his incoming “border czar,” said on “Fox and Friends” last week.

Worksite raids generate headlines and TV news stories, but the operations don’t lead to a significant number of deportations, according to those familiar with such operations. “They are flashy, they are disruptive, they are controversial—therefore, I would expect them” during the second Trump Administration, says John Sandweg, who was acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement during the Obama Administration. “But from a numbers perspective, they are not going to materially increase the count.”

Trump won the election after repeatedly promising on the campaign trail to launch the largest deportation effort in U.S. history, one that would remove millions of people from the country. Trump confirmed Monday on social media that he was prepared to declare a national emergency and use the military to help beef up his mass deportation program.

- [Meet Kashyap ‘Kash’ Patel, Trump’s Nomination for FBI Director](#)
- [Where Trump 2.0 Might Look Very Different From Trump 1.0](#)
- [‘We Are Reeling’: Trump’s Pick of Tulsi Gabbard Alarms Intelligence Community](#)
- [What Trump’s Win Means for Education](#)
- [What Trump’s Win Could Mean for Housing](#)

Deporting people is challenging and requires time and resources. During Trump’s first term, deportations peaked in the 2019 budget year, when the federal authorities removed about 347,000 people.

To further boost those numbers, the Trump administration may decide to address the backlog of some 3 million cases in the immigration courts by

convincing Congress to fund more immigration judges. Or they could hire more agents to locate hundreds of thousands of people still in the U.S. who have already been ordered removed by a judge, says Sandweg.

Worksite raids are expensive, resource-intensive operations that are likely to be less effective in boosting that number, experts say.

Eric Ruark, director of research for NumbersUSA, a group that advocates for reducing both legal and illegal immigration levels, says “worksit enforcement is essential” to dealing with illegal immigration. “It also sends a message to people who might want to come that there’s not going to be the opportunity to work in the United States because they don’t have authorization,” Ruark says. (Homan has also argued that worksite raids are an effective way to find victims of sexual trafficking and forced labor.)

Ruark predicts that reviving of workplace raids will prompt a collision within the Republican Party, as pro-business Republicans are likely to see the raids as undermining the economy. “You’re going to see pushback,” Ruark says. “The only thing standing in the way of carrying out his campaign promises would be opposition within his own party.”

Michelle Lapointe, legal director for the American Immigration Council, which opposes Trump’s immigration plans, agrees that the raids are about sending a message. “Part of the strategy is to terrorize people—and these worksite raids do exactly that,” she says.

After the raid in eastern Tennessee in April 2018, workers sued in court and claimed officers with Homeland Security Investigations and the Internal Revenue Service had illegally singled them out for arrest based on their appearance. A court approved a \$1 million settlement. Some workers were also granted legal status as part of the settlement terms. The meat processing plant in Bean Station is still operating.

Lapointe says her organization is preparing to defend workers if worksite raids ramp up again under Trump. “They promised to carry these out again and we take them at their word, unfortunately,” she says.

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Is It Time to Worry About Bird Flu?

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.



[H5N1 avian influenza](#), more commonly known as bird flu, has infected more than 100 million birds in the U.S. and almost 500 dairy cattle herds across 15 states. The virus has popped up in mammals including elephant seals, goats, foxes, and house cats.

Despite its prolific spread among animals, federal health authorities maintain that the risk to the U.S. public remains low. There have only been 46 confirmed human cases in the U.S. during the current outbreak. All but one of those people had a known exposure to affected poultry or cattle, [according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), and all of their illnesses were mild. The [CDC says](#) there is no evidence that the virus is spreading from person to person at this time.

Recent news, however, has some people feeling uneasy. On Nov. 12, Canadian health authorities [announced](#) that an otherwise healthy teenager there who caught bird flu from an unknown source is in critical condition and struggling to breathe, underscoring the illness' potential severity—and its sometimes-mysterious spread.

Read More: [*8 Things You Should Do for Your Bones Every Day, According to Orthopedic Doctors*](#)

In October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture also raised alarm bells when it [announced](#) that a pig in Oregon had tested positive. That's a worrying development, because pigs can be infected with swine, human, and bird flu viruses, making them prime "mixing vessels," says Meghan Davis, an associate professor of environmental health and engineering at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. If a pig were to be infected with multiple types of influenza at the same time, the viruses could potentially combine to form a new strain capable of spreading widely among humans, Davis explains. [That's what happened](#) during the 2009 "swine flu" pandemic.

"There are a lot of things I worry about," Davis says. "This is one of them."

Another cause for concern: flu season is underway in the U.S., and as seasonal influenza virus goes around, "humans, ourselves, could be a mixing vessel," Davis says. If a person were simultaneously infected with bird flu and seasonal flu, the two viruses could theoretically combine to create a more transmissible strain.

- [**6 Tips for Life-Changing Sleep**](#)

- [What to Expect at an Annual Physical](#)
- [The Surprising Health Benefits of Pain](#)
- [The Best Thing to Do for Your Gut Health](#)
- [Is Venting Healthy, Or Does It Make Things Worse?](#)

The good news is that, as of now, there's no evidence that the avian virus has undergone significant-enough changes to [easily infect and spread among humans](#), says Troy Sutton, an assistant professor of veterinary and biomedical sciences at Penn State University.

Why have some people gotten sick at all, if the virus isn't good at infecting humans? At a high-enough dose—if a [farm worker](#) is in close contact with sick animals, for example—the virus can sometimes get into human cells, even though it's not built to do exactly that, Sutton says. But, crucially for public health, the virus doesn't seem to have evolved in a way that makes it easy for those who get sick to pass on the illness to others.

That seems to be, in part, because the virus isn't good at growing in the human nose, Sutton says. The seasonal flu is highly contagious because it takes root in the upper respiratory tract. When a sick person coughs, sneezes, or even talks, they may expel infectious respiratory droplets. The bird flu virus isn't as prevalent in the upper airways, which seems to make it less transmissible among humans, Sutton says.

That's not to say respiratory spread is impossible, though. Two recent studies in ferrets—[one](#) by researchers at the CDC, and [one](#) led by a researcher from the University of Wisconsin-Madison—raised that possibility. The researchers isolated the bird flu strain that sickened the [first person infected](#) in the current outbreak and tested how infectious it was among ferrets. Although it wasn't as contagious as the seasonal flu, the bird flu virus was capable of spreading among ferrets by droplets, the researchers found.

But there are important caveats, Sutton says. Ferrets—while commonly used in influenza research—are not a perfect parallel for humans. And the studied strain is similar but not identical to the one spreading widely among cows right now. Overall, the CDC [concluded](#), “the virus still is not capable

of spreading efficiently among people via respiratory droplets compared to seasonal influenza viruses.”

Still, health authorities are getting ready in case that situation changes. In October, the U.S. Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) gave \$72 million to pharmaceutical companies that make H5 influenza vaccines, directing them to use the funds to get shots prepped “should they be needed now or in the future,” according to an agency statement. ASPR representatives said they took that step out of an “abundance of caution.” Federal health officials have not recommended that anyone get vaccinated against H5N1, and shots are not publicly available.

Getting a regular seasonal flu shot does not protect against bird flu, but it’s a good idea to get one anyway—especially for people who work or regularly come into contact with animals. The CDC also recommends that farm workers wear personal protective equipment, such as masks and goggles, and take flu antivirals as soon as possible in case of exposure.

But for the general public, health authorities say, there’s not much to do at this point. Just refrain from drinking raw milk (since the virus can persist without pasteurization), avoid touching dead or sick animals, and get your seasonal flu shot.

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Teens Are Stuck on Their Screens. Here's How to Protect Them

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



Screens are an integral part of modern teenage life, but there's little regulation of the types of content teens see and how much they view. Research shows that while online videos can be useful for educating and

connecting young people, excessive viewing—and the sneaky ways streaming, social media, and other internet platforms try to attract and engage teens—can negatively affect their emotional and psychological development.

Who's responsible for making sure that teens use their screens safely: The content creators who build algorithms that target and keep adolescents glued to them? Parents who should establish limits on the amount of time and type of videos their children watch? Policymakers who can hold creators and video platforms more accountable for how they provide their content?

In a new [report](#) released by the American Psychological Association (APA), experts highlight the latest science in understanding how video viewing of all kinds affects adolescents. Potentially harmful content—such as videos that focus on aggressive behavior, cyber-hate, body shaming, self-harm, suicide, discrimination, and other risky behaviors—can distort adolescents' still-developing views of themselves and of appropriate social behavior. Studies show that teens sometimes mimic or adopt dangerous behaviors they see online, putting themselves and others at risk. Young adults bring different vulnerabilities to what they watch, and those already experiencing stress or trauma, for example, may be more sensitive and affected by content that focuses on these experiences. Those who are more sensitive to body image and emotional content may be negatively affected by videos that prey on these insecurities.

The report also provides recommendations for how parents, educators, policymakers and content creators all could, and should, play a more active role in ensuring that video viewing has positive, rather than harmful, effects on teen health.

“Parents don’t realize that in many cases no one has screened the content their kids are watching to make sure it’s okay for kids,” says Mitch Prinstein, chief science officer for the APA. “We prepare kids for the world they will grow into, whether that includes how to drive safely or how to engage in sexual behavior safely, or how to take care of their bodies. But we are not doing enough in my opinion to prepare kids for how to live in the digital environment.”

Here's how experts recommend teen video viewing can become more helpful and healthy for young people.

What parents can do

To some extent, parents can set screen time limits, but they should take a more active role in learning about what their children are viewing as well. “These are such unfamiliar platforms for some parents that it’s easy to throw your hands up and say, ‘I don’t understand any of this,’” says Prinstein. “But we have to ask kids to teach us and show them that we’re interested and willing to partner with them to understand what they find enjoyable. Then, they tend to be more open with telling us when stuff confuses or upsets them.”

Spending time viewing and discussing videos with teens fosters conversation around difficult issues presented, such as bullying or inappropriate behaviors. Such conversations should also include guiding them to distinguish between reliable and legitimate sites and sources of information, and less reliable ones that spread misinformation.

Read More: [Why the U.S. Surgeon General Wants a Warning Label for Social Media](#)

It’s also important for parents to be vocal about what they find appropriate and what’s not, rather than ignoring it. “We have to speak up and ask our kids what they think about what they just saw, says Prinstein. “Otherwise, kids tend to think we agree with what they just viewed.”

The report also explains that parents’ own video viewing habits can influence their children, and if parents practice what they preach—limiting screen time and being selective about what they watch—their children often adopt those patterns as well.

Think about video as a diet, the APA experts suggest. Just as parents guide and teach their kids about healthier and less healthy foods, it’s important for them to educate teens about what content is more educational and potentially helpful—such as the kind that tells stories of how teens navigate

the challenges of relationships with family and friends—and what content is less helpful (the kind that focuses on negative behaviors like cyberhate, bullying, and stereotyping).

What educators can do

Digital literacy begins at home but should continue at school, according to the report. Teachers can educate teens about how to become smarter consumers of content.

“I was doing some presentations recently with middle schoolers, and we looked at the privacy section of some apps, and the kids were absolutely shocked when they learned what information of theirs was being used and taken without them fully appreciating or realizing it,” says Prinstein. “Once teens know, they can become very powerful deciders for themselves on what to view and how to view video content.”

Prinstein says schools could also educate teens about the adolescent brain, so they better understand the changes they are experiencing and how to manage them. If they understand why it’s so hard to control their impulses or why it feels so important to be accepted by their peers, then they can start to modify their behaviors, including how they view videos.

What video platform creators can do

The report calls on platform creators to exert stronger control over the algorithms that perpetuate and encourage excessive viewing, and the advertising that is increasingly targeted to teens. Companies can address features such as autoplay that keep teens glued to their screens; many of these features are now driven by AI and may perpetuate the more negative impacts that videos have on teen development.

Comment sections are another source of potential harm, as teens who post content might judge their self-worth by what others say about them. Comments also shape teens’ views of what is “acceptable” and can be

confusing or hurtful if teens' own views differ from what they perceive others think.

Read More: [*9 Ways to Reset Your Relationship With Social Media*](#)

The report also recommends that companies take more responsibility for the content posted on their sites, rather than putting all the responsibility on content creators. While there is an exemption that protects platform companies from the content that people post on their sites, “it’s time to revisit that exemption to see whether there is some responsibility to monitor content, especially if companies know adolescents will be there,” says Prinstein.

What policymakers can do

Addressing the exemption is one important action that policymakers can take. But being more proactive and considering things like specific teen accounts that would allow teens to access more appropriate content, rather than the entire internet, is another potentially beneficial strategy. Other countries, such as the U.K., already implement such an approach, says Prinstein. The U.K.’s Age Appropriate Design Code addresses ways to protect children’s privacy, including teen profiles that provide wider parental control. “The U.K. versions of these platforms look totally different for kids than they do for adults,” says Prinstein. “So we know platform companies can do it. But nothing similar has been passed in the U.S.”

Earlier this year, both the House and Senate passed versions of the [Kids Online Safety and Privacy Act](#) that would impose a “duty of care” on platform companies for minors using them. That includes adding safeguards against cyberbullying and sexual exploitation, as well as setting safety defaults that limit autoplay and targeting features on minors’ accounts. But disagreements over whether that duty of care would impinge on platform companies’ First Amendment freedom of speech rights means the House and Senate still need to reconcile some elements of the bill before it passes.

The latest science points to the importance of taking action, Prinstein says. “This is the first step to say that we know a whole lot about video content and kids’ development,” he says. “Let’s start following the science and start putting teens’ health first.”

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The World's Freshwater Resources Drop to Troubling Low

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



It's not easy to lose track of Lake Erie. It's harder still to lose track of two and a half Lake Eries, but that's more or less what happened back in 2015, when the Earth lost 290 cubic miles (1,200 cubic km) of freshwater, or 250% of Lake Erie's volume.

The loss of freshwater in lakes, rivers, and underground aquifers was to be expected during the 2014 to 2016 window, since that period coincided with an El Niño warming, during which there is usually more evaporation and

less replenishment by precipitation. The problem, as [a new paper](#) in *Surveys in Geophysics* reports, is that eight years later, the lost water has not been replenished—even after the relative cooling of the [2020 to 2023 La Niña cycle](#).

The near-decade of drying coincides with the nine warmest years in the modern climate record, making a strong case that the freshwater loss is a direct result of climate change.

“It’s striking that since 2015 we’ve had a series of years that have all been at the top [in temperature],” says Matthew Rodell, a hydrologist at NASA’s [Goddard Space Flight Center](#), and the lead author of the paper. “It would seem like an incredible coincidence if they’re not related to the water storage decline on land. It’s definitely something to be concerned about.”

The global observations that documented the great drying were conducted by two pairs of spacecraft known as the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment, or GRACE, satellites. Jointly operated by NASA, the [German Aerospace Center](#), and the [German Research Centre for Geosciences](#), the [original GRACE tandem](#) was launched in 2002 and remained in service until 2017. The second pair, known as the [GRACE Follow-On](#) and operated by the same international collaboration, went aloft in 2018 and are expected to function through the end of this decade.

The satellites operate not by directly measuring water levels, but rather by tracking variations in the planet’s gravity field, which change depending on the mass and density of the part of the planet over which each GRACE is flying. “The gravity field is non-uniform,” says Rodell. “Where there’s a mountain range, for example, there’s more mass, which means more gravitational potential, so you’d actually weigh a little bit more when you stand on top of a mountain.”

The same is true of rivers and lakes and aquifers, which exert a slightly more powerful gravitational tug when they’re brimming with water and a slightly less powerful one when they’re less full. The twin GRACEs fly in formation with an average distance of 124 miles (200 km) between them, a gap that widens or narrows slightly when the changing gravitational pull of the planet plucks at them.

“Every five seconds the satellites are measuring the distance with the precision of a micron, which is about the size of a red blood cell,” says Rodell.

Running those gravitational numbers, Rodell and his colleagues arrived at the global loss of 290 cubic miles of freshwater, which, averaged out over all of the world’s lakes, rivers, and underground aquifers, comes out to a drop in water level of 1 cm (0.39 in.). The planet’s total water budget—which includes oceans, seas, clouds, glaciers, polar caps, and more—does not change in times of drought or flood or El Niño or La Niña, of course, and the seemingly missing water is just a tiny fraction of the overall 14 million cubic miles of freshwater the planet holds. But the location of that water matters too, and less and less of it is available to the 8.1 billion humans who depend on it.

Rising global temperatures increase both surface evaporation and the capacity of the atmosphere to hold water vapor, for example, which dries out the soil and aquifers and lowers sea and lake levels. When the super-saturated atmosphere finally does produce rain, it tends to dump it in hard, fast storms, rather than in slower, more drenching downpours that have a better chance of seeping into the dry, compacted surface.

“The extreme precipitation then runs off of the surface and can’t recharge the soil,” says Michael Bosilovich, a senior meteorologist at Goddard and a co-author of the paper. Some of that water drains into fresh lakes and rivers, but more runs into the saltwater ocean. “What we’re not getting is the [freshwater] replenishment we would have had in the past.”

For cities and agricultural regions that rely on aquifers, this can lead to a vicious cycle of drying, with more groundwater being pumped up to meet human needs, less rain falling to replace it, and the rain that does fall draining off. Making things worse has been a series of local, national, and continental droughts that occurred around the world during the period covered by the new study. Intense drying began in [northern and central Brazil in 2014](#), followed by similar conditions in Australia, Southeast Asia, South America, North America, Europe, and Africa. Indeed, 13 of the 30 worst droughts observed by the GRACE satellites since 2002 occurred in

2015 or later, and are believed to have been exacerbated by climate change-related evaporation.

“The series of major droughts around the world explain in large part why we’ve had a persistent decrease in water storage on land,” says Rodell.

At least six more years of readings are expected to be produced by the GRACE Follow-On satellites, and those will tell their own tale of the health of the planet, but the authors of the current study are not optimistic. “At least as far as the GRACE data goes, we don’t see this turning around,” says Bosilovich.

“Going back to the 1980s, there have been equally steep [freshwater] declines, but there has been a recovery afterwards,” says Rodell. “In this one, not only was the drying abrupt and steep, but nine years later, we haven’t recovered.”

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Inside Capitol Hill's Latest UFO Hearings

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



Americans had a pandemic on their minds back in 2020 when [then-President Donald Trump signed](#) a \$2.3 trillion COVID-19 relief bill that stimulated the slack economy and averted a government shutdown. Tucked inside the bill, however, was another bit of business entirely—a [provision requiring the Pentagon](#) to investigate more than 120 sightings by military pilots of what used to be known as UFOs, and now go by the more decorous-sounding “unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP).” Lawmakers wrote the requirement into the must-pass legislation in the hope

that it might help explain [cockpit footage](#) of UAP sightings that the Navy had declassified earlier that year and that had been burning down the internet ever since.

The [Department of Defense released the mandated report](#) in 2021, analyzing both the video evidence and eyewitness accounts of flying objects moving in all manner of ways that defy conventional aeronautics—loop-the-looping and changing directions with a nimbleness no existing technology could manage. None of the objects produced detectable exhaust. Some turned with a suddenness that would have produced g-forces deadly to any human being who might be aboard. Others dove into the ocean and then flew straight back out.

The military's verdict? A shrug. The objects weren't U.S. Air Force or Naval aircraft, but whether they belonged to a hostile foreign power—terrestrial or otherwise—was impossible to say.

"These things would be out there all day," [one pilot told the New York Times](#) in 2021. At the speeds at which the objects were moving, he added, "twelve hours in the air is 11 hours longer than we'd expect."

Inauguration day for Trump's second term is still more than two months away, but when the once-and-future president returns to Washington, he'll find the mystery of UAPs again there waiting for him.

On Nov. 13, two subcommittees of the House Oversight Committee held a joint hearing provocatively titled "Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena: Exposing the Truth," during which they heard from four witnesses who spent just over two hours making the case that American skies are indeed being plied by un-American—and quite possibly unearthly—machines.

"Let me be clear," [testified Luis Elizondo](#), a former military intelligence official who spent 10 years running a Pentagon program investigating the unexplained sightings, "UAP are real. Advanced technologies not made by our government or any other government are monitoring sensitive military installations around the globe. Furthermore, the U.S. is in possession of UAP technologies, as are some of our adversaries. I believe we are in the midst of a multi-decade, secretive arms race, one funded by misallocated

taxpayer dollars, and hidden from our elected representatives and oversight bodies.”

What caused both the lawmakers and the witnesses at the hearing particular concern is not just the fact that the sightings keep occurring, but *where* they’re occurring—with a disproportionate share of them happening over military or other secure installations. Committee chairman Glenn Grothman (R-Wis.) put the question directly to Elizondo.

“I suppose, hypothetically, you could have incursions over just regular airports,” he said, “but is it obvious that these incursions are more likely over military facilities than over a random airport?”

“There is definitely enough data to suggest that there is some sort of relationship between sensitive U.S. military installations, also some of our nuclear equities, and some of our Department of Energy sites,” Elizondo answered. “This is not a new trend; this has been going on for decades and that information has been obfuscated, unfortunately, from folks like you in this committee, and I think that’s problematic.”

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Elizondo was not the only witness to charge that the government is playing cute with what it knows or doesn’t know about the origin of UAPs. Retired rear admiral Tim Gallaudet was deployed off the east coast of the continental U.S. in Jan. 2015 when one of the cockpit videos that was declassified in 2020 was first captured. According to his testimony, he and a handful of other Naval officers received an email with the video attached—an email that vanished from all of their inboxes “without explanation” the next day. The anomalous object, he said, exhibited “flight and structural characteristics unlike anything in our arsenal.” For Gallaudet, the content of the video, not to mention its disappearance, served as “confirmation that UAPs are interacting with humanity.”

Some of the most sensational claims of the two-hour session came from journalist Michael Shellenberger, founder of the [news site Public](#) on the [Substack platform](#), who submitted 214 pages of testimony into evidence. Last month, Shellenberger [published an article](#) alleging that the government

was running what he described in his testimony as “an active and highly secretive” program called Immaculate Constellation, which includes “hundreds, maybe thousands” of images and videos of UAPs. “And it’s not those fuzzy photos and videos we’ve been given,” he testified. “It’s very clear, very high resolution.”

Read More: [The Surprising Health Benefits of Pain](#)

Michael Gold, a former NASA associate administrator and a member of the space agency’s UAP independent study team, weighed in too, lamenting what he described as “the pernicious stigma that continues to impede scientific dialogue and open discussions” about UAP. “Science requires data which should be collected without bias or prejudice, yet when the topic of UAP arises, those who wish to explore the phenomena are met by resistance and ridicule.”

That’s not only a disservice to public knowledge, but a risk to public safety —one that Gallaudet, with his military pedigree, was quick to point out. “There is a national security need for more UAP transparency,” he said. “In 2025, the U.S. will spend over \$900 billion on national defense, yet we still have an incomplete understanding of what is in our airspace.”

Added Elizondo: “We are talking about technologies that can outperform anything we have in our inventory. And if this was an adversarial technology, this would be an intelligence failure eclipsing that of 9/11 by an order of magnitude.”

Whatever the unexplained technology is, the witnesses stressed, it is the government’s responsibility not just to figure out its origin, but to share what it learns with the taxpaying public. “The intelligence community is treating us like children,” Shellenberger testified. “It’s time for us to know the truth about this. I think that we can handle it.”

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Muhammad Yunus on the Race to Build Bangladesh 2.0

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



Dhaka looks reborn after a fresh lick of paint. Though this is not your typical municipal spruce-up. The sprawling Bangladeshi capital has been festooned with garish political murals celebrating August's student-led ouster of reviled Prime Minister [Sheikh Hasina Wazed](#). Mile upon mile of concrete balustrades are daubed with caricatures of the deposed autocrat

with fangs and devil horns, slogans extolling “Gen-Z, the real heroes,” and vows to “flush sh-ts from our society.”

It’s not language that sits easily with 84-year-old Muhammad Yunus, though the Nobel laureate says he can forgive the students’ salty exuberance. “The words are very explosive,” Yunus tells TIME with a chuckle. “These young minds are full of ideas and ambitions and aspirations. They depicted their future in those murals and it’s something much greater than Bangladesh has ever seen.”

The task of turning those aspirations into reality now falls to Yunus, who was tapped to serve as “chief adviser” to the interim government though for all intents and purposes is Bangladesh’s new leader. His job is to piece back together South Asia’s second biggest economy of over 170 million people and shepherd the motley band of student leaders, military generals, Islamists, and opposition politicians who forced Hasina’s departure toward fresh elections. A six-pronged reform process is underway, focusing on the election system, police administration, judiciary, anti-corruption commission, public administration, and national constitution.

“The previous government created this environment of total oppression, denial of everything, killing at random, disappearance of people, destroying every single institution,” he says. “It was a fascist regime.”

Indeed, more than 1,500 people were killed in clashes between protesters and security forces during July and August and many more wounded. (In addition, Yunus claims 3,500 people were extrajudicially disappeared during the last 15 years of Hasina’s reign.) The uprising began with peaceful demonstrations against employment quotas for regime loyalists, but a heavy-handed crackdown ignited a powderkeg of rage against inequality and political repression that brought tens of thousands of mothers and daughters, bankers and beggars, united onto the street.

As protesters encircled her official residence in Dhaka, Hasina fled in a military helicopter to India, where she and her cabal of key advisers continue to rail against her ouster. Yunus revealed that he would be seeking Hasina’s extradition after prosecutors issued a warrant for her part in the

violence, though few believe Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would comply.

“Not only is she being hosted by India, the worst part is that she’s talking, which causes a lot of problems for us,” says Yunus. “It makes people very unhappy to hear that voice. So this is something that we have to resolve.”

Yunus grew to global renown in the 1970s for pioneering poverty-reducing microcredit. What began with a single \$5 loan to a woman weaving bamboo stools in his home city of Chittagong has since spread to over 100 countries. Over four decades, Yunus’s Grameen Bank disbursed some \$37 billion in collateral-free loans to over 10 million of the world’s poorest people. More than 94% of loans worldwide have gone to women, who suffer disproportionately from poverty and are more likely to use earnings to help their families than men.

It’s a life’s work that won Yunus the sobriquet “banker to the poor” as well as the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009, and the Congressional Gold Medal a year later. But Yunus’s global fame rankled Hasina, who derided him as a “bloodsucker,” and her government launched over 200 legal cases—including over alleged forgery, money laundering, and embezzlement—against him in a bitter and bizarre vendetta.

When [TIME last spoke with Yunus](#) in June, he was facing six months in prison on a sham conviction for violating Bangladesh’s labor laws. But Hasina’s ouster both expunged his legal travails and presented a late career change as his tormentor’s successor. “At first, I tried to skip the responsibility,” he says. “I said, ‘Find someone else.’ But later I said, ‘OK, you have given your lives, your friends have given their lives, so I will do the best I can.’”

Today, the octogenarian cuts a cheerful and sprightly figure despite swapping the international lecture circuit for dawn to dusk meetings. Still, it’s been a chaotic transition. Hasina’s sudden flight left a political and security vacuum as her party, the Awami League, was purged at all levels of government and its members arrested. Practically every government

institution had been politicized, engendering deep distrust of the military, courts, civil service, and especially security services. Thousands of police deserted lest they be targeted in reprisals (at least 44 officers were [killed](#).)

The basic instruments of state ground to a halt. Instead, private citizens from the opposition and Bangladeshi diaspora were summarily drafted into key roles, prompting accusations of nepotism, as the anti-establishment agitators became the new ruling class overnight. These new officials struggled to navigate a bureaucratic quagmire that often requires half-a-dozen signatures simply to send an email. For days Bangladesh's new rulers lacked the most basic facilities. Yunus's first speech to the nation was drafted on an aide's iPhone.

The interim government's ambiguous legality has also meant that U.S. backing—as demonstrated by Yunus's [meeting](#) with President Joe Biden in September—has been key to retaining the engagement of institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. But Donald Trump's impending return to the White House in January has spurred a sense of deep anxiety. In the wake of Hasina's ouster, there were sporadic attacks on Hindus and other minorities that were spun and amplified by the Awami League as evidence that radical Islamists had seized control.

On Oct. 31, Trump [posted on X](#) to condemn the “barbaric violence against Hindus, Christians, and other minorities who are getting attacked and looted by mobs in Bangladesh, which remains in a total state of chaos.”

Both the Awami League and influential Indian Americans are understood to be [lobbying](#) Trump to impose sanctions on Bangladesh, for which the U.S. is top export destination. Compounding matters, Yunus has his own baggage with Trump, owing to his close friendship with Hillary Clinton, publicly lamenting her 2016 election defeat: “Trump’s win has hit us so hard that this morning I could hardly speak. I lost all strength.”

Still, Yunus is confident that he can find common ground with the President-elect despite their divergent worldviews. “Trump is a businessman; we are in business,” he says. “We are not asking for free money to help us out of some crisis; we want a business partner.”

Reassuring global firms that Bangladesh remains open for business is a top priority. Still, the glacial pace of reform means doubts fester.

A new constitution is being drawn up, yet whether Bangladesh adopts a more presidential or parliamentary system, unicameral or bicameral, is still to be thrashed out. Smaller parties are pushing for proportional representation, though secularists fear that may boost the clout of fringe religious hardliners. Then there's a question of whether the new constitution needs to be ratified by a referendum to be truly legitimate. Not to mention the fact that none of Bangladesh's existing politicians have been involved in the process.

"They formed six reform commissions without discussion with any of the political parties," says A K M Wahiduzzaman, information and technology affairs secretary of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). "This is not a good sign. This is a sign of an autocratic government."

Wahiduzzaman wants a timeline and roadmap to elections to be unveiled as soon as possible. Yunus won't be rushed, though. "I don't have a date," he says. "First we have to fix the rails so that the train goes in the right direction."

But true national reconciliation may not be possible without the participation of Bangladesh's oldest political party that, at one time at least, enjoyed tremendous popular support. Today, Awami League members that remain in Bangladesh say they are being subjected to collective punishment. Zahid Maleque, who served as health minister until January, says he dares not surrender to court to answer conspiracy charges as he suffers from a heart condition and believes he'd be refused bail. "My passport has been canceled, my family bank account has been frozen," he tells TIME from hiding. "I'm a sick man. I've not seen my family for four months."

The purge has spread beyond party bigwigs. Across Dhaka, influential citizens who once flaunted their connections to the Awami League are now minimizing any ties, fearful they could be weaponized by business rivals. Human-rights groups have also raised alarm that journalists perceived as

sympathetic to Hasina have been stripped of their press credentials and at least 25 charged with crimes against humanity related to the violence.

“Media professionals are bearing the brunt of the need for vengeance,” Antoine Bernard, director of advocacy and assistance for Reporters Without Borders, said in a [statement](#). “The interim authorities … must do everything in their power to end this vicious process.”

Yunus insists everyone will receive a fair trial and that the Awami League will be welcome to contest elections once those responsible for killings and abuses are held accountable. “They are as free as anybody else to participate,” he says. “We’ll fight them on political grounds.”

Yunus is also determined to recapture some of the reported billions of dollars that the Awami League has siphoned out of the country. He says that European Commission President [Ursula von der Leyen](#) has offered to share the bloc’s mechanisms for rooting out corruption in aspirant members. “Every country that we talk to has offered support to get the money back,” says Yunus. “They have done it before in other situations.”

Yet human-rights advocates believe that the incorporation of Islamist elements into the interim administration augurs diminishing space for minorities. For all its legion of faults, the Hasina regime kept a lid on extremism and had even tabled a transgender protection law. But one of the first actions the interim government took was to rescind a ban on Bangladesh’s main Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami. Ho Chi Minh Islam, a Dhaka-based nurse and transgender rights activist, says that religious hardliners within the student movement have made LGBTQ+ people fear for their safety. “Senior figures in the interim government have spoken out against our community,” she tells TIME. “All we want is safety and security.”

Women were at the forefront of the uprising yet are sparsely represented in the interim government, whose six reform commissions are all led by men. “I’m disappointed, I’m enraged,” says Samantha Sharmin, a graduate of Dhaka University’s Fine Arts Department who was a prominent figure in the protests. “I don’t know what happened. Women were the main force turning this protest into an uprising. We want women and young people to be central in politics.”

It's a race to enact meaningful reforms before the clamor for elections reaches fever pitch. In September, the Asian Development Bank lowered its growth forecast for Bangladesh from 6.6% to 5.1% due to the political tumult as well as recent catastrophic flooding. The BNP appears the government-in-waiting though has a reputation for graft and retributive politics to rival the Awami League. (Wahiduzzaman insists any corruption within his party is limited to a tiny minority and offenders are brought to book.)

If unrest and paralysis continue, a beleaguered populace may even look more fondly at Hasina's record. Bangladesh was the Asia-Pacific's fastest growing economy over the past decade, with GDP rising from \$71 billion in 2006 to \$460 billion in 2022. Yunus knows that improving livelihoods is the only sure way to buy the necessary time to rebuild state institutions, so autocracy can never return—a new Bangladesh that prospers long after those murals have sun-bleached and blistered. “Reform is the core of the whole revolution,” says Yunus. “That’s why we call it Bangladesh 2.0.”

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Don't Worry, You're Not 'Undateable'

Ury is the author of the bestselling book [*How to Not Die Alone*](#), the Director of Relationship Science at Hinge, and the dating coach for the new Netflix show [*The Later Daters*](#), premiering on November 29.



I have a friend in his late 30s who is a recovering alcoholic. He spent a large portion of his 20s overcoming his addiction. While he never doubted his ability to be a great partner, he *did* worry what his dates would think when he mentioned why he no longer drinks.

After a few tough rejections, he began to worry that his past made him "undateable."

Over time, however, he found a way to tell his story. He shared that he'd struggled with alcohol, realized he'd had a problem, and had been sober for a long time. He explained how the experience had helped him grow, speaking from a place of strength and growth. He did not ask his dates for acceptance or permission.

One day, he matched with a woman who had grown up in an abusive household. When he told his story, instead of being turned off, she felt relieved. She had baggage. He had baggage. Their baggage could match!

Instead of her typical experience on dates—dreading the moment when someone asked her about her family—she finally felt comfortable sharing her truth. Today, they're in a committed relationship, with a beautiful house, supportive community, and adorable baby.

I'm sharing this story because, as a dating coach and the Director of Relationship Science at Hinge, I often hear from people who feel like there's something big they need to disclose on early dates—chronic illness, mental health struggles, college debt, family estrangement, lack of romantic experience, or trauma. They worry these parts of their lives make them unworthy of love. They don't know how to share this information and worry they'll be rejected. They tense up on dates, waiting for the inevitable moment when the awkward topic will arise. Or they avoid dates altogether.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Your vulnerability, when shared intentionally and authentically, can make you feel powerful, not powerless. In fact, as research shows, vulnerability can even be sexy.

Read More: [Stop Taking First Dates So Seriously](#)

Consider the science: We're attracted to vulnerability because of what psychologists call the "beautiful mess effect"—a phenomenon in which we tend to judge our own displays of vulnerability more negatively than others do. What feels to us like exposing our weakness through vulnerability, others tend to see as an act of bravery and authenticity. We want to project a perfect, glossy exterior, but that doesn't give the other person anything to grab onto. You need roughness and ridges for that. When you disclose

deeper truths, you make your dates feel more comfortable sharing what's really going on for them.

If you still need convincing, let's look at the numbers. In a survey we conducted at Hinge with over 4,000 daters on the app, we found that [93%](#) of singles are looking for someone who's comfortable being vulnerable. And they're 66% more likely to go on a second date with someone who shows emotional vulnerability on the first date. In fact, a majority say emotional vulnerability is the biggest thing they're looking for on a first date—ranking it higher than attractiveness, income, or height.

Despite this, only a third of people say they show emotional vulnerability on a first date because they're afraid it will be a turn-off. Men, in particular, feel this pressure: 75% say they rarely or never show vulnerability on first dates because they worry it will make them seem weak or undesirable.

But here's the thing: The people who reject you for being vulnerable are not your people. Someone who judges you for your past, your struggles, or your truth isn't the right partner for you. And the sooner you find that out, the better.

Of course, there's a right way and a wrong way to be vulnerable on an early date. It's about sharing intentionally, with boundaries, from a place of growth and self-awareness. Remember: this is a date, not a therapy session.

Here's how to tell your story in a way that feels empowering, not overwhelming:

Don't rush

Intimacy needs to be earned. While you may want to get something off your chest, you don't have to disclose everything on the first date. If someone asks you a question you're uncomfortable with, you can tactfully deflect. For example, let's say you are estranged from your family. If your date tells you all about their mom's famous lasagna recipe, and asks about your parents, you can smile and say, "My family life is messy. We can get into it

another time.” You can also say your family doesn’t have similar traditions and leave it at that.

Explain how this experience helped you grow

You are not asking the other person to feel bad for you. Instead, you’re telling them how going through this has helped you become who you are. When you share your narrative from a place of confidence, people will respect you, not reject you.

For example, you can say things like, “While I wish I were closer with my family, I’ve worked hard to create a chosen family of friends, and I’m excited to build my own family one day.” Or “Of course, I wouldn’t have chosen to spend my college years undergoing chemo, but it’s the reason I decided to become a doctor.” Or “I’m really proud of the work I’ve done to get through this, and it’s made me a more empathetic person.”

Remember that their reaction is about *them*, not you

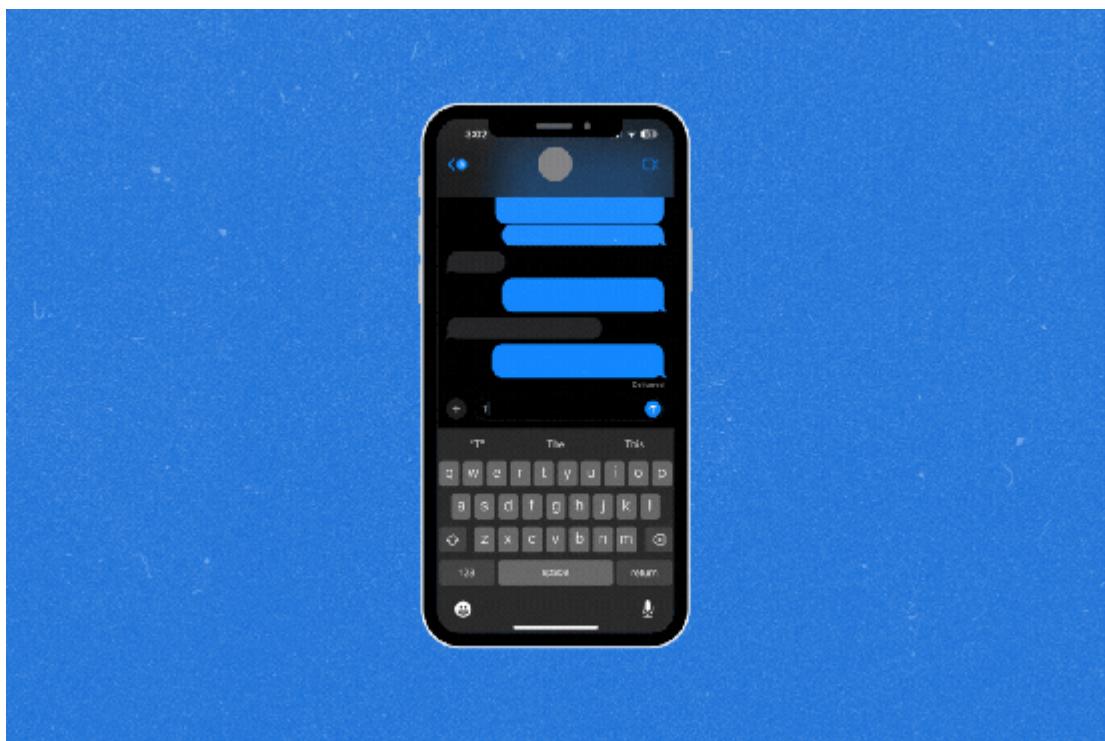
Some people will be able to handle your vulnerability, others won’t. If they seem uncomfortable or judgmental, that says more about who they are and where they are in life than it does about your dateability. This is your story and your experience. You are sharing, not asking for their permission, forgiveness, or acceptance.

Feeling “undateable” is a story we tell ourselves, but it’s not the truth. What makes you human—your struggles, your imperfections, your messy, beautiful story—is exactly what makes you lovable. Vulnerability isn’t a liability; it’s your greatest asset. And when you share your authentic self, you’re giving someone else permission to do the same.

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FYI: People Don't Like When You Abbreviate Texts

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



If you get a text that says “wyd”—translation: “what are you doing?”—there’s a good chance there’s one thing you’re crossing off that list: replying to the message.

According to [a study](#) published Nov. 14 in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 99.3% of texters have used abbreviations that, in theory, could save precious typing time, like opting for “hru?” instead of asking someone how they are, or shortening “really” to “rly.” Study author David Fang, a doctoral student in behavioral marketing at Stanford University, wondered if this habit enhanced or diminished digital

communication. He's always made it a point to text in complete sentences, because he worried that otherwise, the people on the receiving end of his messages would think he was slacking off. But he wasn't sure if his intuition was correct, so he decided to test it.

It turns out that Fang was on to something. Abbreviations in text messages register as insincere to recipients, who then send shorter and fewer responses (if they bother to reply at all). "I was surprised at how significant the negative results were," he says. "Abbreviations are quite subtle—they're not really a blatant transgression. But people can see you're taking a shortcut and putting less effort into typing, and that triggers a negative perception."

All age groups hate text abbreviations

Fang and his co-authors started off with open minds: Abbreviated messages could indicate a lack of effort that might rub people the wrong way, sure, but they might come across as laid-back and approachable, promoting a greater sense of closeness.

To determine which instinct was correct, the researchers conducted eight experiments with data from thousands of people. They analyzed anonymous Tinder and Discord conversations, which led to the conclusion that people were less likely to exchange contact information with or reply to abbreviation-lovers. They also asked participants to rate text conversations—including texts that they had received from other people in real life. People described messages with abbreviations as being less sincere than those without any, and indicated that they weren't inclined to reply.

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

Interestingly, the effects held true among different age groups—from savvy Gen-Z texters to those who probably didn't know what half of the abbreviations meant. Though some might think of abbreviations as youthful or hip, young people don't actually like them. "Younger people dislike abbreviations just as much as older people," Fang says. "It's equally negative."

Why the harsh reaction? It's likely due to something called social exchange theory: the common belief that a relationship hinges on its cost-benefit balance. How much effort one person puts in, the thinking goes, influences the other person's reciprocal effort. So if you feel like someone isn't putting much into a texting relationship—which inherently has a back-and-forth, give-and-take nature—you'll likely adjust your communication accordingly.

Why it matters

If you love abbreviations—bc, IDK, they're cool or convenient—you don't have to shun them entirely based on these results, Fang says. Rather, he suggests thinking carefully about who's on the receiving end of your messages. Say you're trying to woo a potential date: In the Tinder analysis, a 1 percentage point increase in "netspeak" (which includes common abbreviations and acronyms) was associated with a 7 percentage point decrease in average conversation length. "When two people meet on Tinder, and they're pretty much strangers, you could imagine that if the conversations are shorter, maybe people aren't building as strong of a connection," Fang says. "One of the ramifications could be that relationships just will not take off as much."

Even people in your inner circle might not appreciate your informal texts. In one of Fang's experiments, people were asked to imagine being in a text conversation with someone they were close to or distant from. They found that even when two people were close, abbreviations indicated insincerity. Over time, that could take a toll on relationships. As [past research has concluded](#), people value the quality of their conversations—and they want text-message exchanges to convey thoughtfulness and reflect the strong connection they've cultivated. "Your existing relationships might not be nurtured as much if you're a bad texter," Fang says.

Read More: [Is Venting Healthy, Or Does It Make Things Worse?](#)

But let's say, on the other hand, that you're texting with a delivery driver who's bringing the dinner you ordered to your apartment. If you want to fire off a "WYA"—"where are you at?"—you're probably not going to offend anyone. "You don't imagine establishing a long-term relationship with that

person,” Fang says. “But if you do—if you’re talking to a coworker or a potential date—you might want to be more cognizant of the types of texts you send, and use less abbreviations.”

The ‘effortless’ text that wasn’t

Michelle Drouin, a psychology professor at Purdue University Fort Wayne and author of [Out of Touch: How to Survive an Intimacy Famine](#), isn’t surprised by the study’s results (which she was not involved with). She points out that predictive texting has become so advanced that spelling out a full word or phrase barely requires any additional effort compared to opting for the abbreviation. “It takes some effort to be this effortless,” she says. “It implies a kind of *laissez-faire* attitude, or an intentional cutting of the letters. It’s no longer a time-saving technique.” If you try to type “rly,” for example, your phone will probably auto-correct it to “really,” at least until it learns you prefer the shortened version.

Read More: [9 Things You Should Do for Your Brain Health Every Day, According to Neurologists](#)

The research didn’t examine people’s motivations for using abbreviations, but Drouin thinks that those who intentionally chop letters off their words are trying to “put off a vibe of, ‘I don’t care,’” she says. “If they want to portray to the other person that they’re not taking this very seriously, and [the conversation] feels casual to them, then these abbreviations might be well-suited.”

Otherwise, if you’re trying to make a good impression, steer clear. People we don’t yet know are constantly making snap judgments about us, and the words we use play an important role in what kind of impression we make. Given that texting is a mainstay of modern-day relationships—the “social currency of the ages,” as Drouin calls it—it can be helpful to reflect on your texting habits and whether you’re presenting yourself well. “If you have your texting game on point, I think you can really foster and maintain a lot of goodwill with your social connections,” she says. “People should really pay attention to the way in which they say things and the frequency with which they say the things they want to say. It matters.” YW for the tip.

Once Again, Donald Trump Misreads the Senate

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



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

Inside Donald Trump's hermetically sealed bubble of supporters, it's become something of a given that the former and future President can simply bypass Congress and magically fill his Cabinet with the loyalists of his choosing.

That might have been the case if Trump didn't want [Matt Gaetz](#) and [Pete Hegseth](#) as Attorney General and Secretary of Defense, or [Tulsi Gabbard](#) overseeing the nation's spy agencies—not to mention [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#) getting anywhere near the CDC. These are picks almost tailor-made to ensure the Constitution's [Advice and Consent](#) clause remains on sturdy ground.

Even those who most need Trump to think they are worthy allies are setting the ground for a slow slide back to reality: "None of this is gonna' be easy," incoming Senate Majority Leader John Thune said last week of Trump's nominees, underscoring just how much of a slam-dunk this Cabinet is not.

But if you want to really understand the posture key leaders are taking on Trump's norm-busting nominees, [listen](#) carefully to what outgoing Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell is [telling](#) allies in open session and, [perhaps](#), in private [counsel](#).

"Institutions worth preserving have to be defended. And this is the work which, by necessity, has occupied my focus during my time in Washington," McConnell [told](#) a conservative think tank gala in his honor last week. "It's been quite evident to me that a credible check on majority rule was worth preserving even when it didn't serve my party's immediate political interests. Because wild swings in policy with every transfer of power don't serve the nation's interest. For consequential legislation to endure, it should have to earn the support of a broad coalition."

McConnell was speaking broadly at an American Enterprise Institute event about the Senate's baked-in slow pace and its capacity to cool passions. But when asked point-blank, the outgoing Leader minced no words: "Each of these nominees needs to come before the Senate and go through the process and be vetted."

To someone unversed in McConnell-ese, that answer might not have meant much, but it was a doozy for anyone who knows the way in which the Kentucky Republican wields his influence. By Sunday night, perhaps egged on by a since-deleted message on the platform formerly known as Twitter, the MAGAverse was going [ballistic](#) at the suggestion that the Upper

Chamber was not on-board with giving Trump a blank check on his own Cabinet.

If Trump can't get the support he needs from a Republican-controlled Senate to confirm his polarizing picks, that leaves only the prospect of recess appointments to ram them through. It's an idea that's led to some out-of-the-box fantasizing. (The House, too, would have to [recess](#), although the roadmap to Speaker Mike Johnson managing to engineer a Senate recess has too many pitfalls to take seriously.)

Privately, Republicans are dubious that availing himself of widespread or even unilateral recess appointments is the best way for Trump to assemble his second-term team or to sustain any credibility for the Senate. But they also are bracing for an incoming White House unmoored with norms or traditions, with an eye toward [vengeance](#), and a leader who sees any second-guessing as disloyalty meriting meted justice.

Yet at least on his Cabinet nominees, no one should expect Thune to abdicate his safeguarding role. After all, he's long sat at McConnell's side to study the particulars of the Senate history and tradition.

That's why so many insiders see McConnell's comments—those confirmed and those dubiously reported and then deleted from social media—as a cover for others to quietly defect. Like House Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, McConnell expects to formally slide back into a rank-and-file position in his party but [retain](#) outsized influence on big questions of strategy, identity, and ambition—even as party colleagues may [grumble](#) about leaders who won't actually give up power.

The Trump-McConnell animus is never going to evaporate and provides a useful foil for Thune to try to stay in Trump's good graces as long as possible. When asked last week about the possible use of recess appointments, Thune was careful in his word choice and seemed plenty happy to let McConnell play the heavy.

"It's an option," he said of leaving the Senate on a break long enough for Trump to install his picks to serve roughly two years. But he was realistic about the math in his chat with Fox News.

- [Meet Kashyap ‘Kash’ Patel, Trump’s Nomination for FBI Director](#)
- [Where Trump 2.0 Might Look Very Different From Trump 1.0](#)
- [‘We Are Reeling’: Trump’s Pick of Tulsi Gabbard Alarms Intelligence Community](#)
- [What Trump’s Win Means for Education](#)
- [What Trump’s Win Could Mean for Housing](#)

“You have to have all Republicans vote to recess, as well. So the same Republicans ... that might have a problem voting for somebody under regular order probably also has a problem voting to put the Senate into recess.”

Put plainly: that is really, really unlikely to happen. Someone like Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska is not going to be ready to tank a Gaetz nomination by recorded vote but then send herself home for at least 10 days to give Trump a Supreme Court-guided window of a recessed legislature.

All of this is steeped in the experiences of the longest-serving party chief in Senate [history](#), McConnell. He has hardly been circumspect about his skepticism toward Trump—or any President, really—relying on the procedural loophole to stack the deck while lawmakers are away, regardless of if the fuse-lighting tweet might have been made in haste or error.

Take, for instance, Trump’s 2018 demands that McConnell eliminate the procedural hurdle of 60 votes to move forward on most legislation. McConnell simply [ignored](#) the demand, drawing more ire from Trump without any real cost to his power in the Senate. And when Joe Biden tried for the same result in 2022, McConnell once again simply [pretended](#) the request didn’t land in the Capitol.

It’s expected to [remain](#) the same when Thune takes over in the next Congress. Most Republican lawmakers seemed to agree with that posture, one that served McConnell and his legacy well even if it left Trump and Biden alike frustrated.

Therein lies the power of Senate inertia. Unlike Trump, the Senate doesn’t [swerve](#). It tends to hold steady, which is why—at least in an historical framework—Trump’s visions of unilateral appointments to the Cabinet

don't really hold up to scrutiny. Going against Trump is risky, but the bigger trouble may come from trying to recalibrate the Senate to accommodate potential Cabinet picks who thus far have drawn a mix of confusion, bemusement, and horror from the halls of the U.S. Capitol.

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Why Maiden Names Matter in the Age of AI and Identity

Zalis is a pioneer for online research, movement leader, and champion of gender equality. She is an internationally renowned entrepreneur, speaker, mentor, and CEO of The Female Quotient.



Women today are rewriting the rules when it comes to taking their partner's last name, a decision that has significant implications in our tech-driven world. That is why my company, The Female Quotient, partnered with The Knot and SmithGeiger on a [revealing research report](#) showing 77% of married women still take their partner's last name, but among unmarried

women, only 64% plan to follow this tradition when they marry. This shift signals a growing awareness of the impact that names have on personal identity and professional recognition. But it also gives us a glimpse into the aftereffects of how artificial intelligence (AI) systems handles our data if women do decide to give up their maiden names.

In the digital age, a name is more than just a label. It's tied to our professional history and social media presence. It's also how we are recognized by AI algorithms. When a woman changes her surname, she often loses data continuity across systems that rely heavily on name recognition. Platforms like job applications, academic records, and social media accounts often fail to connect the dots between the old and new names. For instance, a woman who has built a successful career under her maiden name might find that AI systems struggle to link her past achievements with her new surname. Years of hard work and success may suddenly become invisible in the eyes of a machine.

Back in 2014, author and teacher Dorie Clark from Columbia Business School wrote in [Harvard Business Review](#), “If you decide to change your name a new problem results. Instead of being haunted by the past, you’re now a ghost, lacking the typical identifiers of professional credibility (blog posts, mentions in the media, articles you’ve published, and so on).” In 2022, Bala Chaudhary, an assistant professor of environmental studies at Dartmouth, told [Psyche Org](#) “A name change can be especially problematic when a researcher applies for grants or tenure, as a reviewer may conclude that the researcher has not done enough work in the field, when they may not have been evaluating the entire record.”

This challenge is something I’ve personally encountered. As one of four girls in my family, if I had chosen to change my last name after marriage, I would have lost not only my professional identity but also my given name —one that I have carried my entire life. My decision wasn’t just about preserving my career; it was about maintaining the legacy I had already built and the connection to my name, which defines both my personal and professional journey. Like many women today, I knew that keeping my maiden name allowed me to stay connected to the professional accomplishments that shaped my career.

While 77% of married women still follow this tradition, there is a clear shift happening, particularly among younger generations. The FQ report found that 32% of unmarried Gen-Z women are more concerned with preserving their personal brands than adhering to traditional practices, compared to just 3% of Millennials. Interestingly, 29% of unmarried women who plan to take their partner's last name will not use it professionally, highlighting a growing trend of women separating their personal and professional identities.

The implications of these choices extend far beyond personal identity. Public figures like Simone Biles Owens, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter have all kept maiden names (or a combination of it with their partner's surname), signaling independence and career longevity. This trend is mirrored by Selena Gomez, who recently stated, "I'm not changing my name no matter what. I am Selena Gomez. That's it." These decisions underscore the importance of name retention in maintaining independence and continuity in a world where technology plays an ever-increasing role in how we are represented.

Read more: [It's 2022 and People Are Still Confused That My Kids Have Their Mother's Last Name](#)

We must challenge the societal norms that underpin these traditions. Titles like "Mr. and Mrs." connected to one partner's surname perpetuate the idea of female subordination. Public campaigns and education can help shift these outdated attitudes. Lucy Stone, a 19th-century suffragist who famously retained her maiden name, demonstrated that challenging the status quo can lead to meaningful change. LGBTQIA+ couples are also at the forefront of this shift, with 18% opting for non-traditional naming conventions, according to the FQ report, further challenging the notion that identity is tied to one partner's surname.

At the same time, AI developers must step up to create smarter systems that recognize and connect identity changes—whether they involve name changes or personal rebranding. Platforms like LinkedIn have already introduced tools allowing users to account for name changes, a critical step in improving data accuracy and job recommendations. Yet, much more

needs to be done to ensure that AI systems don't punish women for the personal choices they make around their names and identities.

Names are not just labels—they are integral to our identity and professional legacy. The decision to keep or change a maiden name after marriage carries profound implications—for AI systems, professional visibility, and societal norms alike. Addressing these issues through advocacy, smarter AI, and cultural shifts will ensure that all individuals, regardless of their names, receive fair representation and recognition.

After all, names hold power, and that power should open doors, not close them. It's time to ensure that every person, regardless of their chosen name, can reach their full potential.

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Erdo\u011fan Is Plotting His Next Power Grab

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



Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a [political survivor](#). For more than 20 years, [first as Turkey's Prime Minister](#) and then as its President, he has weaved his way through the kinds of crises that end the careers of even the most resourceful and resilient of leaders: [runaway inflation](#), a [spiraling currency](#), the arrival of millions of [refugees](#), a [devastating earthquake](#), corruption accusations,

[mass protests](#), international condemnation and pressure, and a [2016 coup attempt](#).

Erdogan has always been a shrewd populist who understands the importance of cultivating both the right friends and the right enemies. There are few stronger examples on the world stage of a leader who sees no permanent allies or rivals, only the never-changing need to win one more election. And by [dismantling](#) many of Turkey's independent state institutions—the military, the courts, and the media—he's amassed major power even at times his popularity was very much in question.

Read More: [The Man Who Could Beat Erdogan](#)

After [stinging defeats](#) in local elections in March for his ruling Justice and Development (AK) party, Erdogan took a step back to process his losses. It might be time, he concluded, to re-establish some long-strained ties. Though he spent years demonizing minority Kurds to form a useful alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Erdogan [has worked](#) to make peace with the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey's southeast. He is now floating "[normalization](#)" talks with Ozgur Ozel, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), a center-left outfit. He's made nice with [President-elect Donald Trump](#) to boost economically valuable relations with the U.S. He's also using politically [unpopular austerity measures](#) to try to bring inflation under control. Once again, Turkey's longtime leader is proving unpredictable enough to frustrate an opposition hunting for weaknesses.

But Erdogan has a practical problem: Turkey's constitution allows Presidents just two terms. He has the luxury of time to find a solution, because Turkey's next presidential election is [scheduled for May 2028](#). He has two options to try to hang on to power beyond that date. The first is to push parliament to call early elections, which would allow him to run once more before the expiration of his current term. The second would be to change the country's constitution.

Erdogan's preference is to rewrite the constitution. That's an approach he already took in 2017 when he pushed a [successful referendum](#) that transformed Turkey from a parliamentary system into a presidential

republic, cementing his grip on power. He'll sell the change to voters as a clean break from a troubled past, allowing him to continue to lead the Turkish Republic into its [second century](#). Not content to erase the term limit, he also hopes to make it easier to win a third term by allowing a candidate to get elected without a majority of votes in the event of a second-round runoff.

But he faces an obstacle. His alliance with the MHP doesn't offer anywhere close to the number of parliamentary seats to even call a constitutional referendum, much less to make the desired changes without one. This is why, even as the CHP resists Erdoğan's call for a new partnership, he's again [turning to the Kurds](#) who supported him early in his career with an offer to play peacemaker. Support from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) might give him enough votes for the referendum.

There is no guarantee this plan can work. Cutting a deal with [Abdullah Öcalan](#), the jailed leader of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), won't by itself end a 40-year Kurdish insurgency—and any deal he makes with a broader group of Kurdish leaders will remain one terrorist attack away from blowing up Erdoğan's plans.

Whatever strategy he chooses, there remains one constant in Turkey's politics: Never bet against the country's master political tactician.

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How LTK Revolutionized Shopping

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



Two women clad in sheer pearl-dotted bodysuits with giant white roses strapped to their heads greet guests entering a Fashion Week party at Hotel Fouquet's in New York City. A sign outside the room notes that the capacity

is 74 people, but more than 200 guests have RSVP'd. The noise is deafening, though that matters little: the point of this party is to photograph and be photographed.

One woman wears a leopard-print minidress with a matching coat, another a blazer with no shirt underneath. Several women fix their makeup in the mirrored cocktail tables scattered around the room. Even the DJ pauses to take a selfie.

Many of the attendees have hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of followers on social media, but the star of the night is Amber Venz Box, the host of the event and president and co-founder of LTK, one of the most popular influencer platforms in the world. Box, 36, usually keeps a relatively low profile: She lives on a ranch in Texas with her co-founder, CEO, and husband Baxter Box and their four kids in a location she won't disclose for privacy reasons. But in this room, influencers clamor for a picture with the willowy redhead. Several call her their hero. One of the richest self-made women in the U.S., with *Forbes* estimating her net worth at \$315 million in 2021, she helped pioneer the modern influencer economy by building a bridge between content creators and advertising dollars.

[video id=dSASwiNu autostart="viewable"]

“We've come such a long way,” she says in a welcome speech. “Looking at the guest list for today, 10% of you in the room are LTK millionaires.” Everyone swivels their heads in search of these mystery super earners. A man next to me, clad entirely in black, whispers, “Damn, let me take off my sunglasses and take a look around.”

LTK has revolutionized the online shopping experience with what Box describes as a win-win-win model. The company allows influencers to post links to products they're wearing, carrying, and decorating with on the LTK platform, which their followers can access via social media or the LTK app. If, for instance, an LTK creator posts a photo in a cute blazer on Instagram, one of her followers can click over to the creator's LTK page to see where it came from and click from there to the brand site to buy it. The retailer makes the sale and pays a commission to the influencer and a transaction fee to LTK. The platform also offers creators information about their reach, their

follower demographics, and what types of photos and videos are attracting attention. The company even connects influencers with brands looking for a specific type of person to promote a product—say, a furniture company seeking someone who appeals to 20-something women decorating their first apartments. LTK takes a cut of those deals too.



Box boasts that more than 8,000 retailers are on LTK, 40 million people shop through LTK creators every month, and LTK has helped 419 influencers become millionaires. She estimates that the company, which raised \$300 million from SoftBank at a \$2 billion valuation in 2021, will generate about \$5 billion in sales for brands this year, much of which will come this holiday season. Last November, according to LTK, more than \$200 worth of products were purchased every second through its creators.

Influencers are giving traditional advertising a run for its money: Goldman Sachs predicts the creator economy will approach half a trillion dollars by 2027. But Box saw the potential more than a decade ago. During her speech at the soirée, she thanks everyone for flying in from all over the country. She

lists some of the brands at Fashion Week that are on LTK—Proenza Schouler, Ulla Johnson, Simkhai—and emphasizes just how much the market has changed.

“Cheers to this community, and I hope that you guys have a wonderful, amazing Fashion Week,” she says, “because Lord knows, these brands need you.”

Hours before the party, Box sits in her hotel room, fretting over what to wear. The choice is important not only because of who will see her outfit that night but also because LTK’s 4.4 million Instagram followers will be able to look up her ensemble and purchase it through the LTK app. She ultimately decides on a \$2,065 blush-colored Costarellos gown, accessorized with a black handbag and pearl and diamond earrings.

Growing up in Texas, Box was an introverted kid who came to see fashion as a tool for attention. Her aunt, an artist, would paint her shoes for school. Box got kicked out of fifth-grade math class for knitting scarves she would sell to her friends. In high school she started making wire earrings, knockoffs of the gold ones she’d seen Jessica Simpson wear on *Newlyweds*. It wasn’t long before fellow teens were dropping off their prom dresses at her home so she could make jewelry to match their look.

Box launched a jewelry line in high school and later sold it at the local store where she worked in college. “I thought that I was going to be the next Rachel Zoe,” she says, referring to the celebrity stylist who had her own reality show. She spent a summer living in a frat house in L.A. while interning for photographers and stylists. The next summer she shared a mattress on the floor with a friend in an apartment in New York City and worked as an intern for the fashion brand Thakoon.

“Anna Wintour was always popping in,” Box remembers. “It was sort of *Devil Wears Prada* in real life where they made us hide. Like, Anna couldn’t see anyone but Thakoon [Panichgul] when she came in, and they would give us a warning. It was a really open space so you’d have to crouch down behind a wall.” (Panichgul did not respond to requests for comment.)

When Box returned to Southern Methodist University for her senior year, she met her now husband Baxter, who had started a tech incubator. One day, he looked at her spreadsheets and realized her jewelry sales dwarfed what she was making as a sales clerk. “He was like, ‘Oh my god. Where is this money?’ And I was like, ‘You’re looking at it,’” gesturing to her clothes and shoes.

Baxter encouraged her to commit to the jewelry line full time, and she made a deal with his incubator to support the business. Still living in her father’s house, she shipped her wares to department stores in New York and set up stands at local markets. “My stuff was, like, really avant-garde. And at this market, I was next to glitter makeup bags,” she says. “I was sort of being snooty and a little offended about my positioning there. But then the first day, I sold \$8,000 of jewelry, and they sold \$400,000 of the sparkle bags.” She went home to complain to her father. “He was like, ‘Amber, sell to the masses.’” She didn’t have time to implement the lesson. It was 2008, and when the economy took a turn, the business began to collapse.

She worked as a personal stylist and made a decent living until she launched a fashion blog in 2010. The blog was featured in the Dallas *Morning News* and took off. But then her clients started enthusiastically buying the clothes she featured in her posts—without paying her for the advice. Dismayed, she went to a conference for fashion bloggers in New York on a mission to figure out how to monetize the blog. “I remember Leandra [Medine Cohen] from Man Repeller was onstage, and so I ran and grabbed her afterwards, and I was like, ‘Hey so, how do you make money doing this?’ She was like, ‘Well, I don’t.’ So literally no one’s making money.” (Medine Cohen declined to comment, but a source close to her says the Man Repeller founder does not believe that she would have ever characterized her business this way.)

Box had spent thousands of dollars on a laptop, a camera to photograph her outfits, a website domain, and a designer to build and maintain the site. “Fashion blogging was sort of like a rich-girl sport,” she says. She dreamed of making a commission on the clothes she recommended on her blog, just as she had working with brick-and-mortar boutiques. And so the first iteration of LTK, called RewardStyle, was born. She had \$236 in her bank account the day it launched.

My home is a testament to the power of the influencer: I own a ridiculously efficient pepper grinder touted by several celebrity chefs, a Scandinavian rug hawked by a lifestyle blogger, and baby spoons recommended by a nutritionist turned [momfluencer](#). That's before I even reach my closet. If you are active on social media, particularly Instagram or TikTok, you can also probably pinpoint the people online who inspired you to buy certain items.

But Box spent years trying to convince Silicon Valley that influencers were the future of commerce. In 2010, Box convinced Shopbop, which had been acquired by Amazon, that influencers might drive traffic to the online retailer. Medine Cohen and other fashion bloggers came onboard.

“We went to San Francisco, did this whole tour, and everyone was like, ‘I’m gonna call my girlfriend and see what she thinks about this.’ The idea of monetizing fashion blogs, it wasn’t really clicking for them,” Box says. “And then one of the places that we went into, the secretary dialed in and was like, ‘Baxter Box is here, and he brought his wife.’”

Looking back, Box says being overshadowed by a man wasn’t the only reason it was difficult to launch a company with her romantic partner. Even before they were co-founders, when his incubator had a deal with her jewelry company, she felt a sense of inequity. “I still think the structure that was initially created was not appropriate,” Box says. “There was friction when he was getting paid and I wasn’t, and I was like, ‘This doesn’t make sense. I’m the one slaving away, and you’re getting the check every month.’”

Frustrations compounded when they both decided to work full time on LTK—in the same room. “I would get calls and he would be G-chatting me, like, ‘Why didn’t you say this? You should have said that.’” Box eventually decamped to the bathroom to take her meetings. “Those were awful years,” she says. “We did break up several times. We never told anyone at the company, and we never behaved differently, because we didn’t want any of the company to think, ‘Oh no, what’s going to happen? The founders broke up.’”

The Boxes did, eventually, figure out how to work together: they operate out of separate buildings on their ranch and meet with each other in the car on the way to pick up their kids. And the rest of the world did, eventually, catch up to Box's vision.

Companies slowly realized that potential customers were more likely to buy a product from an influencer whose taste they already trusted than from an ad put in front of them by an algorithm. A 2022 Pew Research Center study found that 30% of adult social media users had purchased something after seeing an influencer post about it, a number that jumped to 53% for those who follow creators' accounts. "Influencers offer a huge benefit to brands moving into spaces with customer bases who are unfamiliar with them," says Jared Watson, a professor of marketing at NYU who specializes in the influencer economy. And then there are the parasocial or one-way relationships that followers form with influencers they love. "It feels like it's a request from a friend or family member to check out this product, and they feel like they're not going to be led astray," Watson says.



In 2013, the Boxes launched LiketoKnow.It, a new platform with a focus on driving sales from social media. Consumers bought \$10 million worth of products promoted by its creators. In 2015, they bought \$50 million. In 2016, they bought \$150 million.

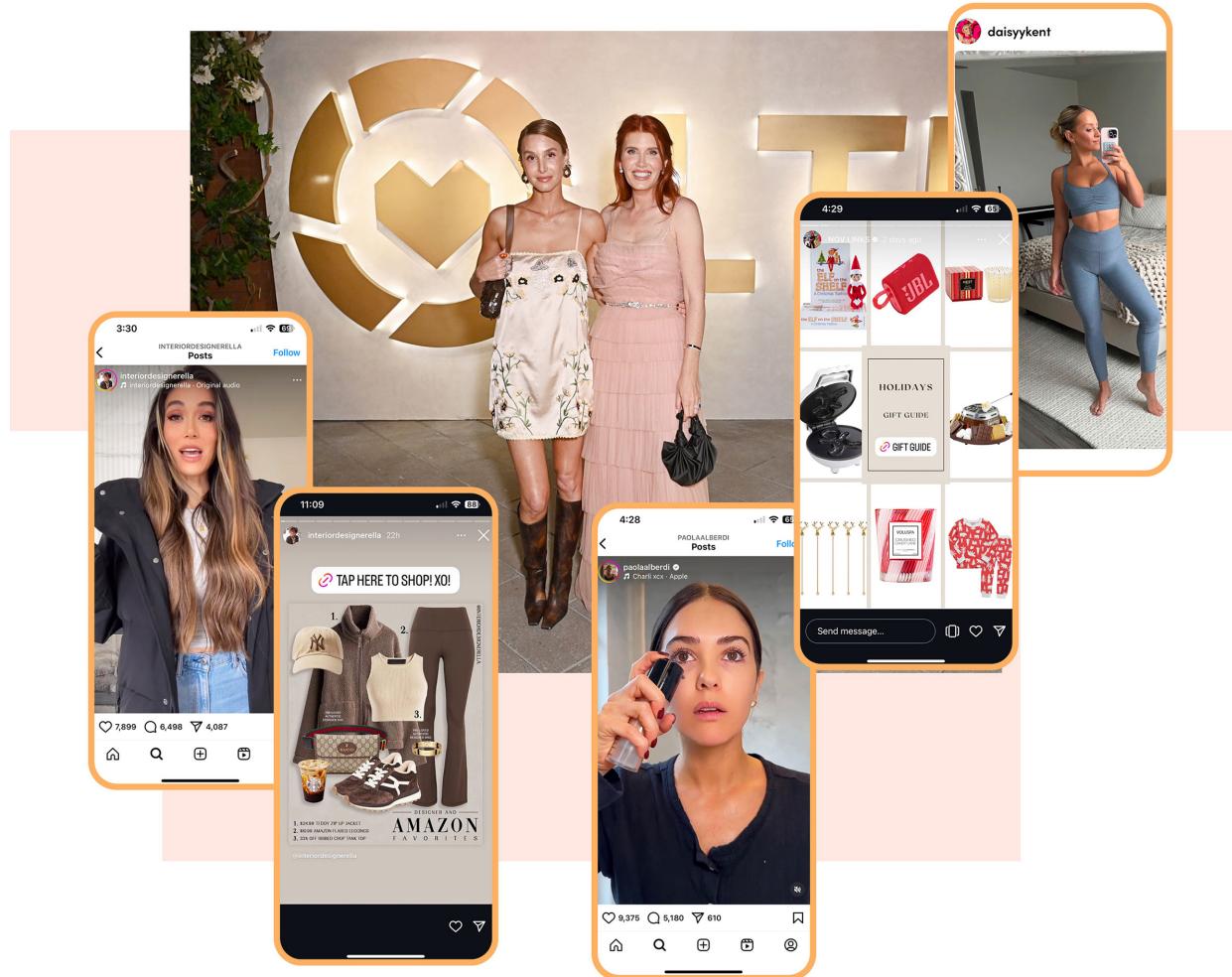
Paradoxically, the success made Box nervous. She felt too dependent on the fickle practices of social media sites. This fear had manifested when Pinterest, without warning, turned off outside links one day in 2012. (They turned LikeToKnow.It's back on when Barneys complained that it had an ongoing ad campaign using its links.) So Box's team began to build the LTK app, launched in April 2017, to cultivate a space that is less reliant on other social platforms. It saw a massive boom during the pandemic when creators suddenly had endless time to post everything from Target lamps to Chanel earrings—and shoppers endless time to stare at their phones.

The business grew so much that Box began to feel overstretched and, in 2023, decided she could no longer reside in a big city. "I am a pleaser," she says. "There's guilt with every no. It's really nice to say, 'Sorry, I can't come to your birthday party or charity thing. I don't live in Dallas anymore.'" She was also concerned about how her social media presence was impacting her family. "In Dallas, especially, we are a recognized family, and it is uncomfortable to go into restaurants and other places, because I know I'm just being watched all the time, and I know my kids are being watched in the same way, because they've been part of the story online," she says. Which isn't to say she's stopped posting about them entirely. On a recent trip to New York City to celebrate her daughter Birdie's 9th birthday, Box chronicled the family's outfits for their various excursions with links to LTK.

Watson of NYU says LTK has turned into the tool of choice for influencers. Individual social media sites like TikTok have ways to shop within the app but cannot offer creators data on engagement across other platforms. And competitors simply do not have as many brand relationships as LTK, which was early to the space. "They effectively make it a really nice one-stop shop for creators," he says. "And success begets success. One of the reasons LTK is crushing it is because all influencers hear about from one another is LTK."

If you're intrigued by the idea of becoming an LTK millionaire, know that it's not as simple as posting a few mirror selfies. The company now boasts more than 300,000 creators, but it remains selective. There's an application process in which Box's team analyzes influencers' engagement on social media, their aesthetic, and whether their content is shoppable. Once accepted, creators participate in a boot camp on how to light their pictures, write captions, and create an editorial calendar. "You also need credibility," Box says. "For example, now that I'm living on a ranch, my wardrobe has changed entirely. I have a huge boot collection because there are snakes where I live."

The company also recruits. It has targeted reality stars like Whitney Port from *The Hills*, who attended the Fashion Week party, and Daisy Kent from *The Bachelor*, who was one of 360 creators at the 12th annual LTKCon summit in Dallas three weeks later. "It kind of gives me meaning outside of the platform of the reality show or whatever I'm doing," says Olivia Flowers, a *Southern Charm* alum. "They teach me how I can promote my brand, which is me."



Box likes to hold up Emily of the Netflix show [*Emily in Paris*](#) as a model influencer. “Be Emily and then also make what you’re doing in your life shoppable,” Box tells her creators. I point out that many people—even fans of the show—find Emily insufferable exactly because of her influencer tendencies: her [wild fashion choices](#), her overly peppy demeanor, her insistence on taking photos of every aspect of her life. “She’s not for everyone,” Box says, laughing. But Box does think Emily could be successful on LTK. “I would tell her to keep being positive and happy. I tell our creators that. Also, respond to followers. If they message you and say they bought the jeans, they want your acknowledgment and validation. They

should respond, ‘I hope you liked them. What did you wear them with?’ I call being a creator the hospitality business.”

Jen Adams, an interior-design guru with 3.1 million Instagram followers, personifies this attitude. Walking out of the Fashion Week party, she is stopped every few steps by someone she has mentored. She hugs each new person and bounces with joy as she talks about the impact Box has had on her life. “The Nordstrom Anniversary Sale has always been a big event for creators. We call it Christmas in July,” she says. One year, LTK reposted one of Adams’ pictures the night before the sale. “When that day’s commission came in, I literally fell out of bed,” she says. One of LTK’s most successful creators, she now employs 15 people, all of whom, she notes, are moms, and all of whom are supported by her LTK affiliate-link business, as is her own family.

How much money does she make on LTK exactly? She won’t say. Several other influencers I speak to are similarly circumspect. If they are indeed millionaires, though, they are in the minority when it comes to the overall creator economy. Of the estimated 50 million people earning money by promoting content, only about 4% earn more than \$100,000 a year, according to a 2023 report from Goldman Sachs. And yet the number entering the space is likely to keep growing. A Morning Consult poll last year found that 57% of Gen Z and 41% of adults overall would become an influencer if they had the opportunity.



Asked how the company can maintain both its rate of growth and its air of exclusivity, Box says LTK is looking to broaden its reach overseas as well as expand its smaller verticals, like wellness and cooking, in the U.S. Kit Ulrich, LTK's general manager of the creator shopping platform, points to pickleball as an area of particular interest to sports brands looking to boost sales.

Though Box sold another company she co-founded, a platform that connected customers with nail technicians, to Glamsquad in 2023, she sidesteps questions of an LTK acquisition, saying only that she is always open to “strategic opportunities” but is focused on “future-proofing” the business. She knows, after all, that others want in. Instagram launched Instagram Shopping so users can buy from brands without leaving the app, and TikTok has TikTok Shop, though in November TikTok began letting its users link to LTK in their posts.

LTK introduced full-bleed, scrollable videos, à la TikTok, this year and has been incorporating AI learning to connect brands with creators. Meanwhile,

the company has not forgotten what happened with Pinterest and continues to urge creators to grow their followings on its own app. Box says internal metrics show engagement on Instagram has been plummeting since the spring. “Individual creators have less power and control about whether their community is going to see them at any given time,” Ulrich says. “Then you run the risk of not being able to earn as much money.” Instagram did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Maybe someday Box will kick up her designer boots and retire to the luxury yurt vacation retreat that she and Baxter opened near Big Bend National Park in 2020. But if she learned anything from her early days trying to turn her passion into a livelihood, it’s to recognize the challenges ahead but not be cowed by them. She recalls going to the store she worked at in Dallas and telling them about the new business she was launching. “The owner was like, ‘No one’s ever gonna pay somebody for online sales. So when it doesn’t work, you can have your job back.’” She’s good.

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Can Hearing About Someone Else's Problems Fix Your Own?

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.



Would you spend \$40 on a meal? A workout class? A new T-shirt? To chat with a stranger about their life experience for half an hour?

The last is the business model behind [Fello](#), a new app that pays people to tell their life stories to others going through the same stuff. Just like Uber and Airbnb let people make cash from their cars and homes, Fello lets you monetize your hard-won wisdom.

The idea is to provide “a new type of support that you don’t get from going to a generic support group, perusing Reddit or Facebook groups, or meeting with a therapist,” says CEO Alyssa Pollack, a former executive at Uber Eats. The person on the other side of your screen isn’t a mental-health professional, but can speak to “the specific ‘lived experience’ that you’re going through.”

Though the app is new, the idea is not. Fello and other platforms like it are selling something that humans have long gotten for free: peer support. “It’s something that people naturally do,” says Kelly Davis, vice president of peer and youth advocacy at the nonprofit Mental Health America. “If you’re having a hard time, you often seek out someone else who went through something similar.”

Increasingly, that human tendency is being packaged and pitched as an answer to a deepening problem: traditional mental-health care is [hard to find](#) and [hard to afford](#). Demand far outpaces supply, and providers often charge hundreds of dollars per session. The result is that more than half of U.S. adults with a mental illness did not receive treatment for their conditions as of 2022, [according to Mental Health America](#). Overall, 42% of Americans say they’re concerned about their mental health, [Harris Poll data finds](#), but only [10% of U.S. adults are seeing a therapist](#).

Peer support isn’t a complete fix. Lived experience can’t replace the years of training that mental-health professionals receive, especially for particularly sensitive situations or vulnerable groups. But some advocates, including [policymakers within the Biden Administration](#), argue it helps meet needs. Peers may offer a more attainable and softer-touch form of support for people who don’t want or require clinical treatment—or a complementary approach for people who are [in treatment but feel something is missing](#). A

peer offers something unique: the kind of camaraderie and practical advice borne from going through something hard and making it to the other side.

Read More: [*The Surprising Benefits of Talking Out Loud to Yourself*](#)

Keith Humphreys, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University, says this kind of care can be invaluable for patients and the system at large. Some people going through a tough time—a career setback, relationship hurdle, or life transition—just need a sympathetic ear. If they can get that from a peer rather than a specialist, they could free up mental-health services for people who truly need them, and perhaps get a type of guidance better suited to their situation.

These days, people who want peer support have lots of options. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has been using community to help people get and stay sober for nearly a century, and has inspired spin-off groups like Narcotics Anonymous and Workaholics Anonymous. Peer-counseling centers are becoming [popular at schools and colleges](#). The National Alliance on Mental Illness runs a [free peer-to-peer mentorship program](#) for people with mental-health conditions. Federal and state health officials have even drafted rigorous training and [competency requirements](#) for people who wish to become professional peer supporters. In most states, if individuals meet these standards—which usually involve at least 40 hours of training, sometimes augmented by additional supervision by mental-health professionals—they can [bill their services to Medicaid](#).

Fello isn't the first app to wade into these waters. (It's not even the first founded by an ex-Uber employee—that would be [Basis](#), which launched in 2018.) Platforms including [HeyPeers](#), [HearMe](#), [TalkLife](#), and [7 Cups](#) offer similar services. But virtual peer support isn't always executed well. Some companies have [reportedly](#) dealt with safety issues, like bad actors who abuse the model to give harmful advice or prey on vulnerable people.

Fello is betting that because [loneliness is at epidemic levels](#) and people are clamoring for [novel forms of mental-health support](#), it's time for something new. "There's been a major shift, even in the last five years, for people's propensity to go get support," Pollack says. Why not get it from a stranger on your phone?

The app, which launched in August, already has thousands of users and hundreds of peer supporters, called “Fellos,” Pollack says. People seeking help with substance use, parenting, or relationships are matched with people with no special qualifications other than having lived through something similar. To become a Fello, all someone has to do is clear a background check, submit references who can vouch that they’ve experienced what they claim to, complete roughly five hours of training—significantly less than would be required of state-certified peer supporters—and pass an assessment. The app charges \$40 per 30-minute session, and the Fello pockets 70% of the fee.

Not all experts are buying it. Dr. John Torous, director of digital psychiatry at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, says he has reservations about paying to chat with strangers who may be seen as alternatives to therapists, but who don’t have the training or licensure to back up that perception. “Who are these people, really?” he says. “That’s the part that’s concerning.”

Apps like Fello operate in a gray area: their peer supporters aren’t professionals, but they’re not quite friends either. That makes Torous uneasy. “We don’t want to make having a conversation costly,” Torous says. “That would be a bad trend for society, if you have to pay to talk.”



At the core of this debate is a straightforward question: can hearing about someone else's life improve your own?

The science on peer support is mixed. For starters, it might not be great for the person dispensing the advice. Although some peer supporters [report](#) gaining resilience and insight into their own conditions, it can be emotionally taxing to relive challenging experiences over and over again. Many peer supporters do just fine psychologically, or even grow and find

community, but the practice introduces the risk of [burnout](#) and [emotional exhaustion](#), studies suggest.

Among people receiving peer support, there's [minimal evidence](#) to suggest the practice leads to "clinical recovery"—the sort of symptom reduction a traditional medical provider would measure. A 2019 [research review](#) concluded that there is "no high-quality evidence" to say whether the practice works for people with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia.

But peer support does seem to boost the chances of "personal recovery," or the ability to build a satisfying and meaningful life even if symptoms persist, according to [a 2023 study](#). Other [studies suggest](#) peer support fosters belonging, community, social connectedness, resilience, belief in oneself, hope, and empowerment—all of which can contribute to overall well-being, even if those attributes are harder to measure than clinical symptoms.

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

Keris Myrick, vice president of partnerships and innovation at the mental-health advocacy organization Inseparable and a peer-support expert, says it's a mistake to expect peer support to achieve the same things as traditional mental-health care—or to replace it—when that was never the goal.

A medical professional may be focused on treating someone's condition. But a peer supporter doesn't "really care what the person's diagnosis is," Myrick says. They're "walking alongside" someone, helping with whatever "the person identifies that they want to work on," whether that's a medical issue or not. Even though the goal isn't necessarily to lessen specific symptoms, that sometimes happens, Myrick says. [Studies have shown](#) that people who receive peer support are less likely to have repeat psychiatric hospitalizations.

Myrick, who has schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder, knows the power of a good peer. When she was first diagnosed, she felt something was missing from her "conventional" regimen of therapy and medication. "I remember meeting with my psychologist and saying, 'You wouldn't understand. You haven't been through it,'" she remembers. As a Black woman, she longed for someone who could relate to her.

Myrick stuck with her traditional care. But it was another woman of color living with mental illness who helped her solve problems like how to stay in graduate school and showed her that it was possible to live a rich, fulfilling life post-diagnosis. She “gave me the hope and the evidence that recovery was real and possible,” Myrick says. “I had to actually see it.”

There's real power in being around people who get what you're dealing with, says Humphreys, from Stanford. In 2020, he published [a research review](#) that found AA is not only effective at maintaining sobriety, but *more* effective than cognitive behavioral therapy. Humphreys thinks that's because participants can tap into shared understanding and see sober living in action.

In most cases, Humphreys says, there's no downside to trying peer support as a first resort. “If somebody says, ‘I felt a little tightness in my chest when I was running,’ I wouldn't say, ‘You immediately need to go to a cardiac surgeon.’ I would say, ‘Go to your primary-care doctor,’” he says. “You go to the lowest-level thing” first.

There are limits, though. Peer counselors—particularly those who have not gone through extensive training—may not know what to do when faced with an emergency, like someone at imminent risk of self-harm. [A 2023 report](#) by Mental Health America found that only around half of student peer counselors felt their organizations offered enough training on handling crises. Davis, who wrote that report, adds that peer supporters, particularly students, may be out of their depth with less-common conditions like psychosis and schizophrenia.

Read More: [America Has Reached Peak Therapy. Why Is Our Mental Health Getting Worse?](#)

Myrick adds that the model can go sideways when a peer supporter tries to act like a “mini clinician,” rather than an equal. A key tenet of peer support is that “you're not diagnosing people” or “telling them to take or not take medicine,” Davis agrees. If a relationship veers into that territory, it can have consequences for treatment.

Peer support can be transformative. But the danger is that it's easy to offer either "too much or too little," as one [2023 research review](#) put it. A peer may either overstep the bounds of what their relationship is supposed to be, or may not have enough training to make a real difference.

That's a particular risk as peer support becomes the latest service to get the gig-economy treatment. Startups may or may not emulate the rigorous, research-backed training that certified peer supporters receive. Without that foundation, Myrick says, businesses are selling little more than the chance to talk to a stranger masquerading as a friend.

And, as Myrick says, "I want to have friends who will be my friend without having to give them 40 bucks."

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TIME's Top 100 Photos of 2024



Every year the TIME photo department sits down to curate the strongest images that crossed our path over the previous 12 months. And [every year](#), sitting with the images, we find ourselves mulling the ways this collection feels heavier than the last, how the year produced images unlike what we've seen before.

But this year something else, a tautness, runs through the collection – the tension of conflict, the anxiety over outcome, anticipation of excitement or in possibility. Somehow, these photographers are able to capture that coiled feeling and hold it within the four walls of a frame. Be it by impeccable timing or intentional framing, they have created a time capsule that feels as if it's about to be opened.

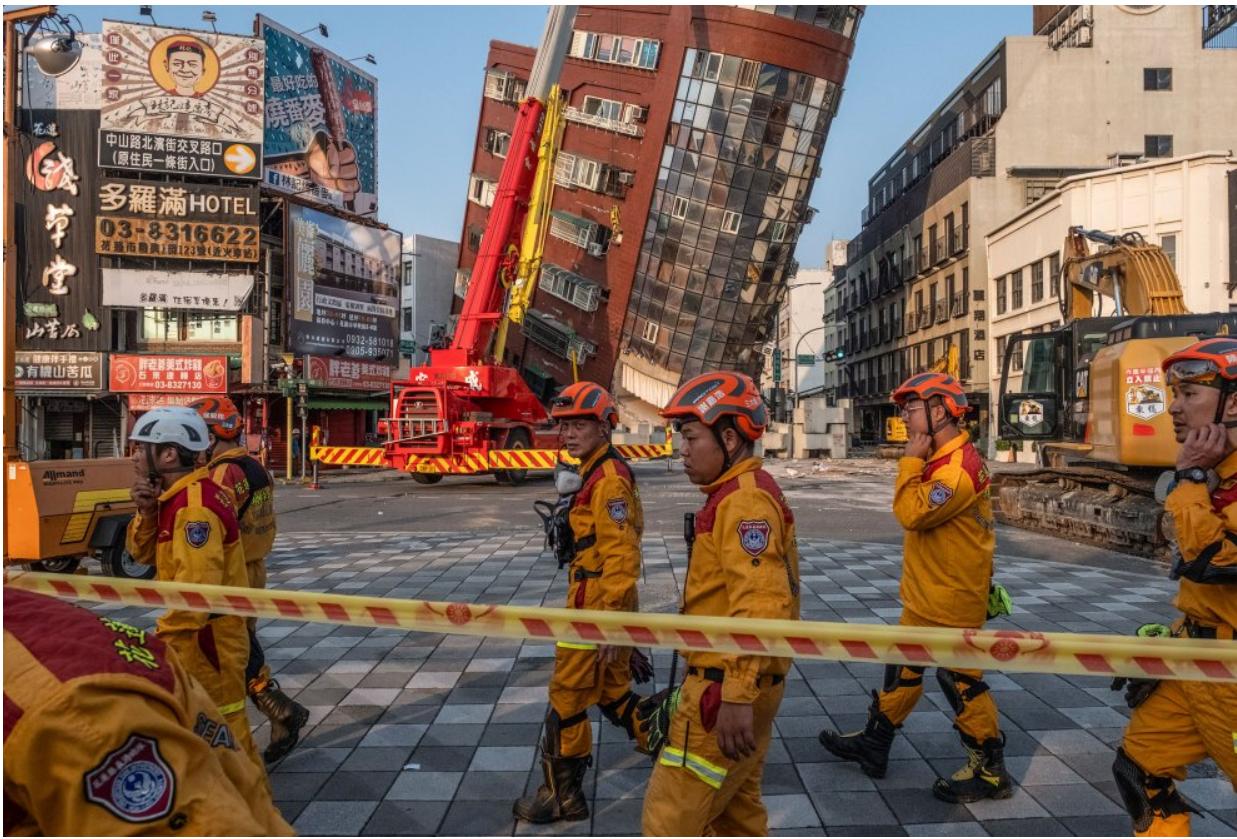
You can feel it in the perfectly captured moment of [Brazilian surfer Gabriel Medina](#) suspended triumphantly in the air after earning the highest single-wave score in Olympic history, a passing moment on television frozen in time by photographer Jerome Brouillet. You can sense it in the image by photographer Al Drago of [Journalist Evan Gershkovich](#) on the tarmac as he approaches friends, colleagues—and the precipice of a year-long fight to bring him home. It's in the frame captured by photographer Anna Moneymaker, of President Trump seconds after an assassination attempt in Butler, Pa., the suspense of the moment before he rose, throwing his fist in the air.

What follows is our attempt to string together that tension and bring it to the eyes of our readers. We hope it captures not only the events that defined the world over the last months, but also why, on the cusp of an uncertain new year, that world feels the way it does.

— *Kim Bubello, Senior Photo Editor*

Warning: Some of the following images are graphic in nature and might be disturbing to some viewers.

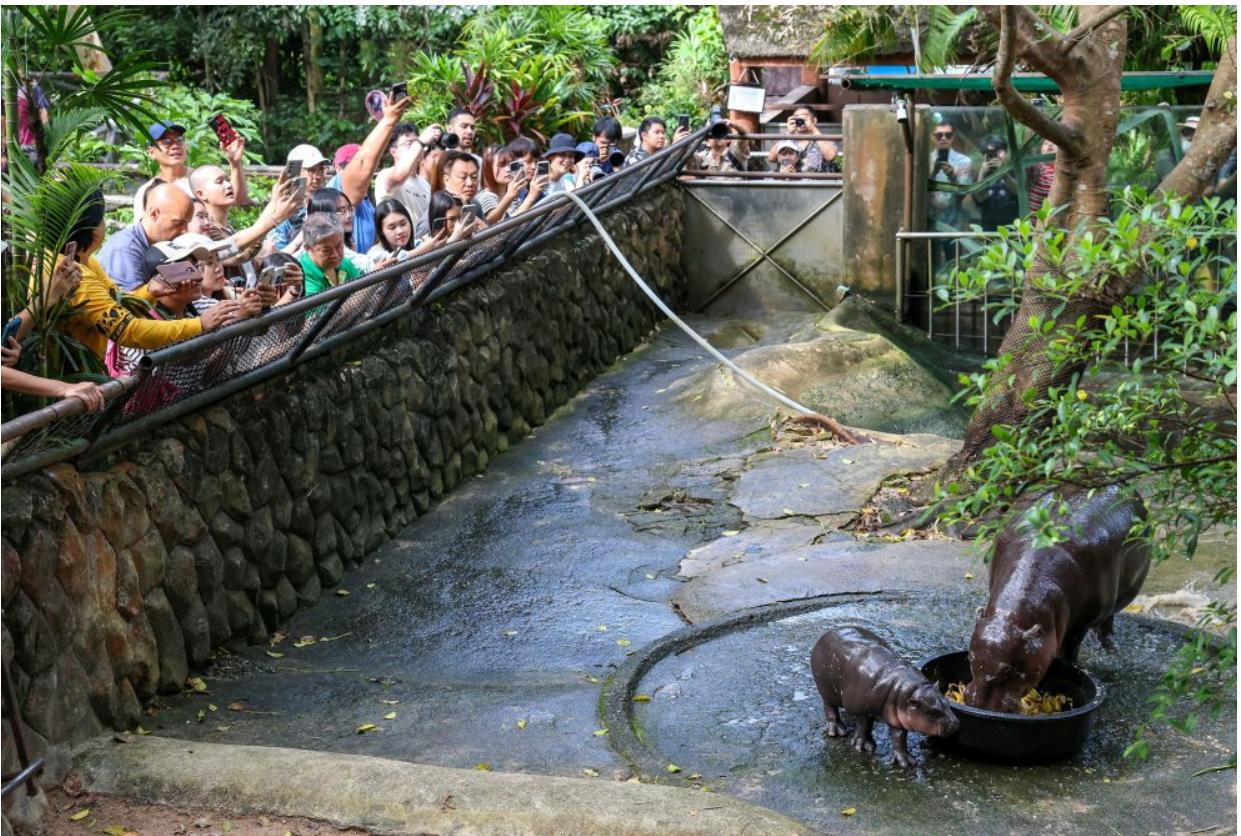












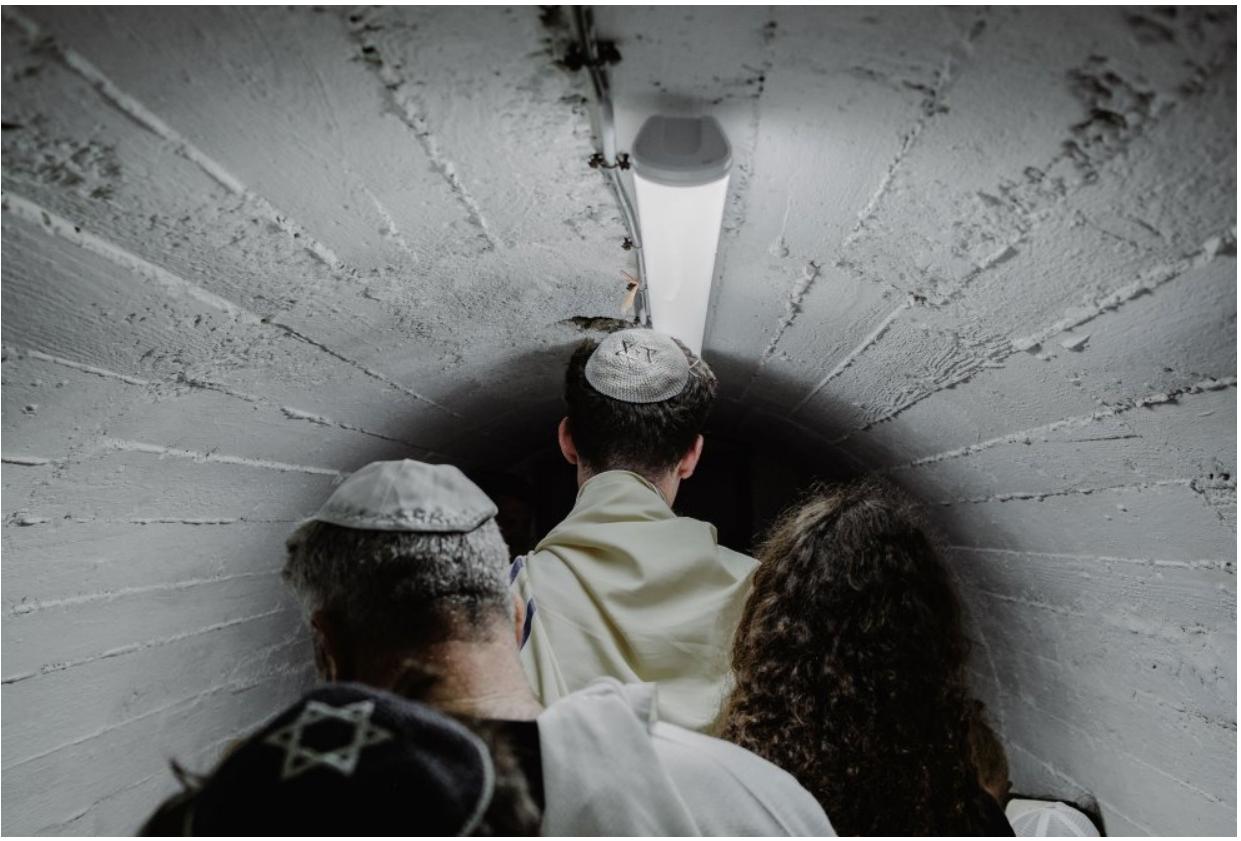










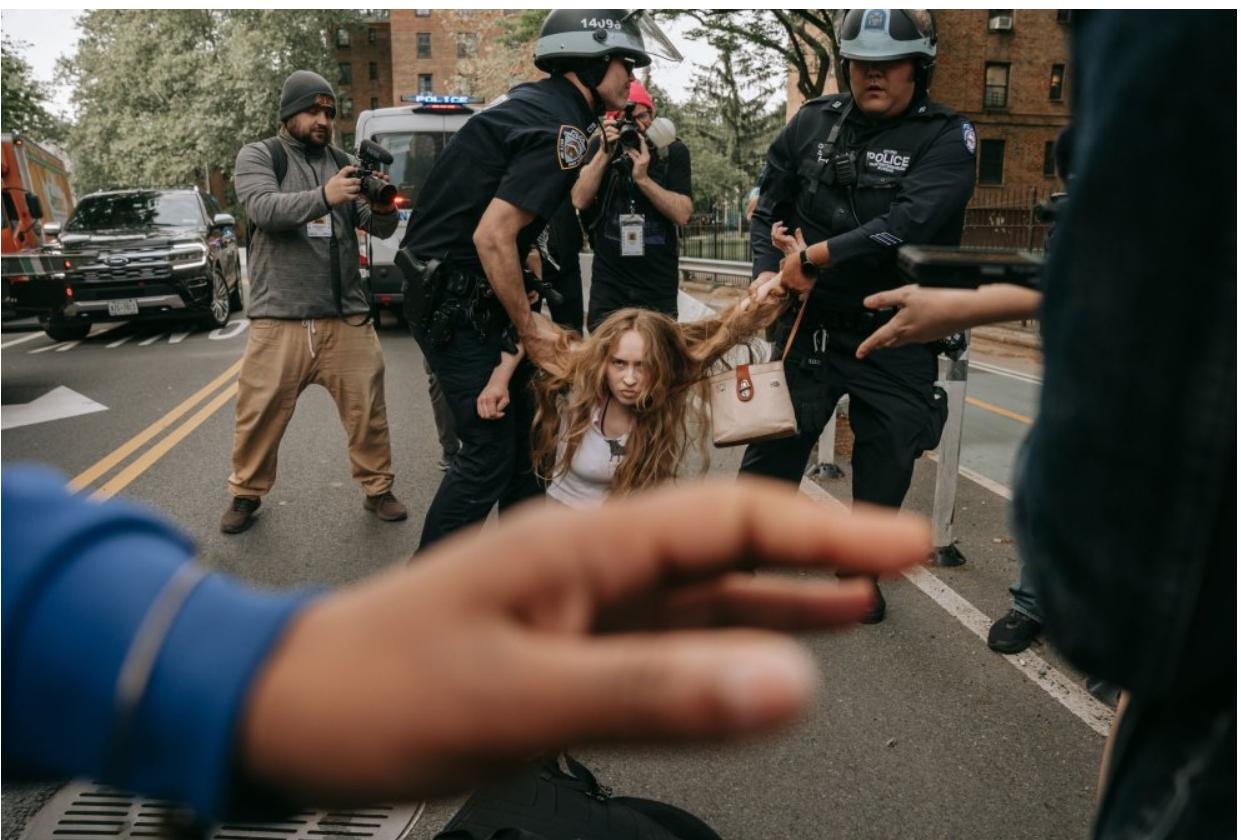




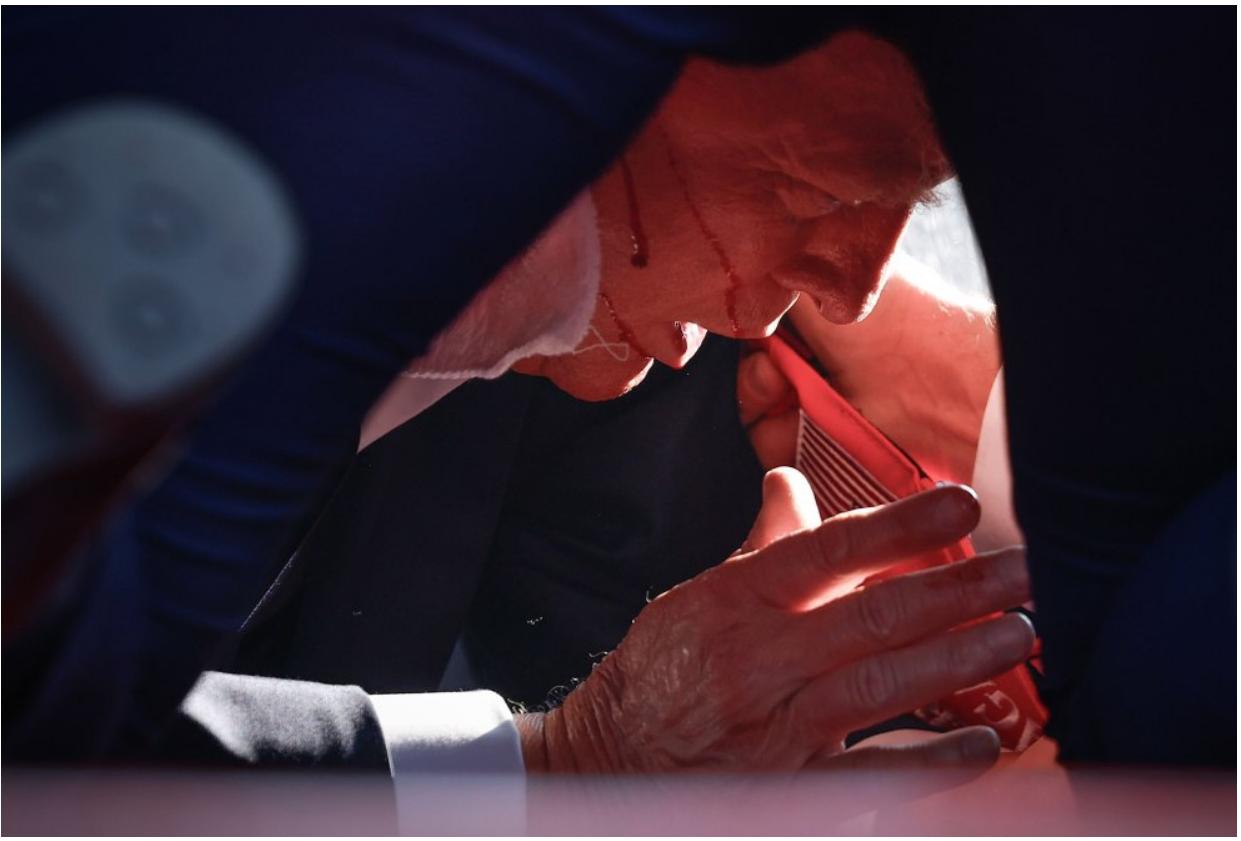
















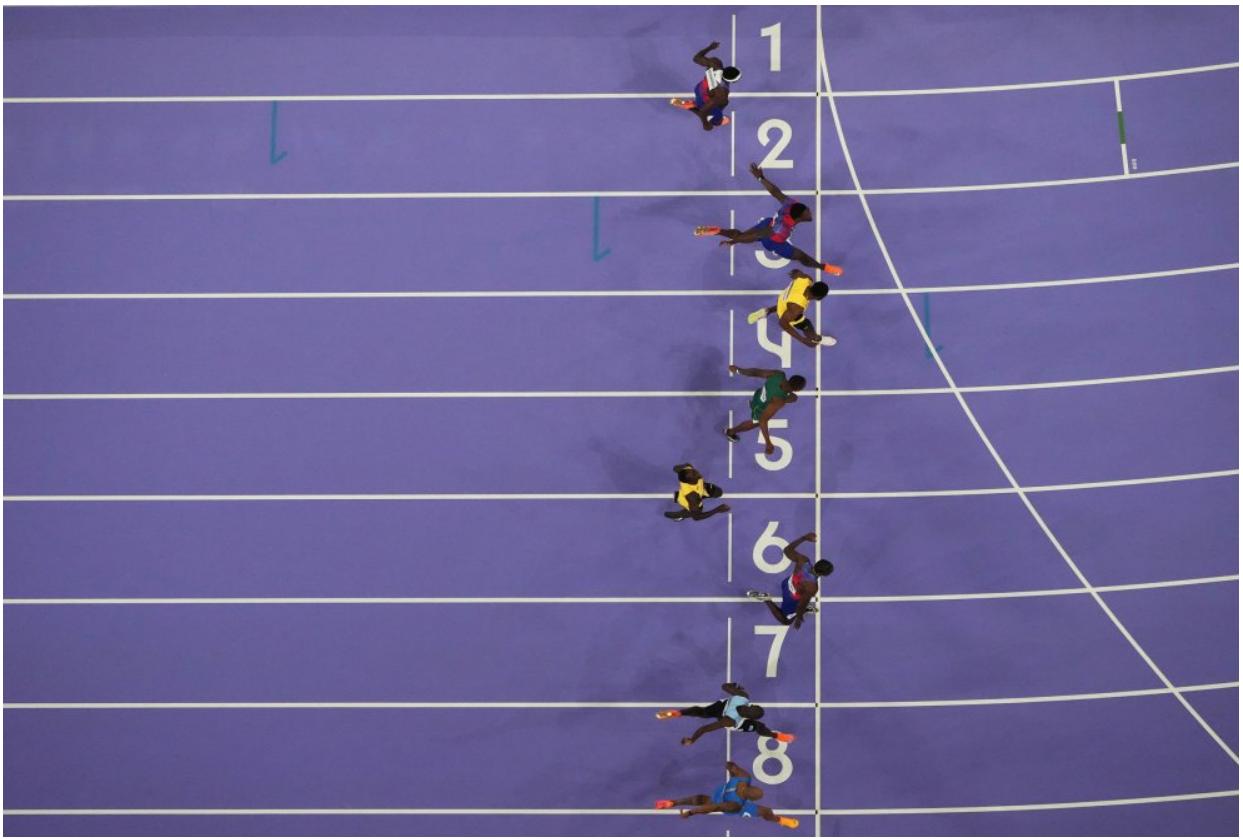
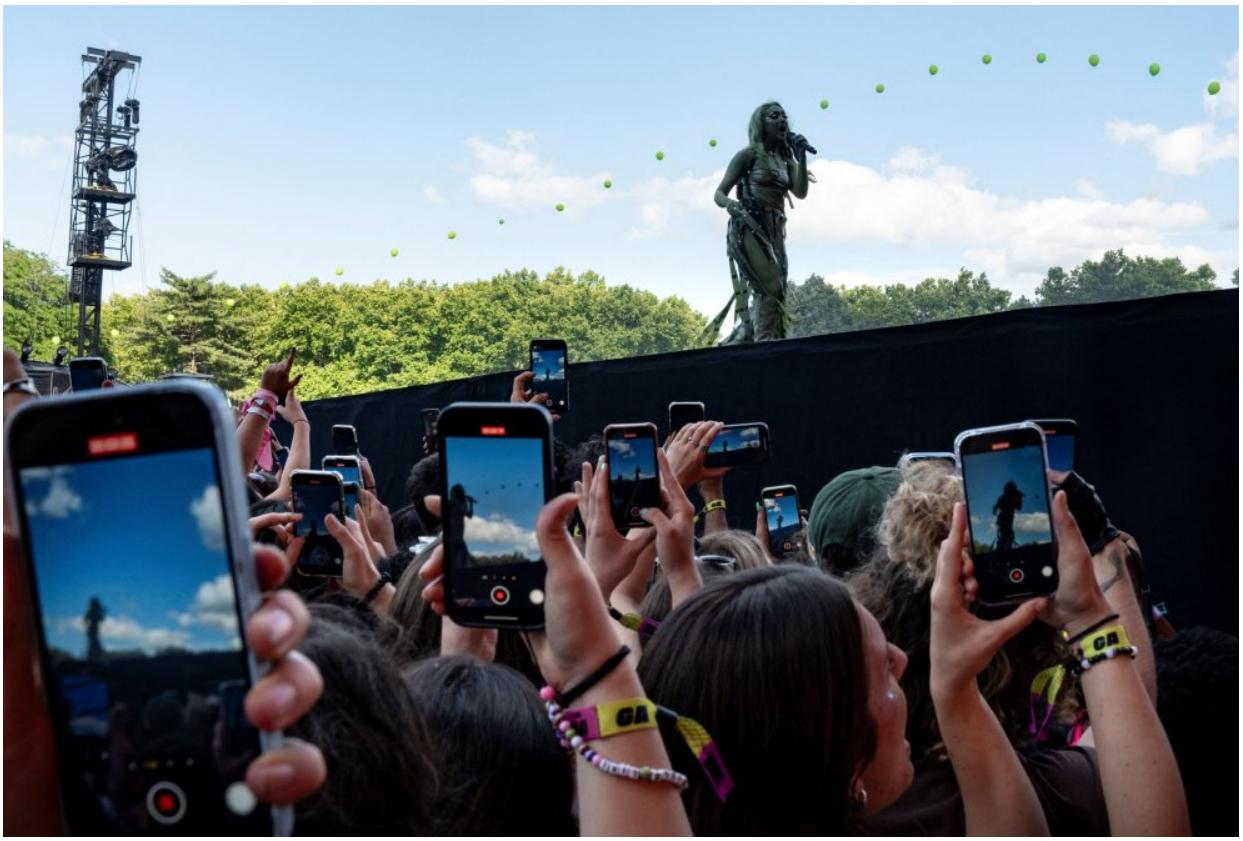














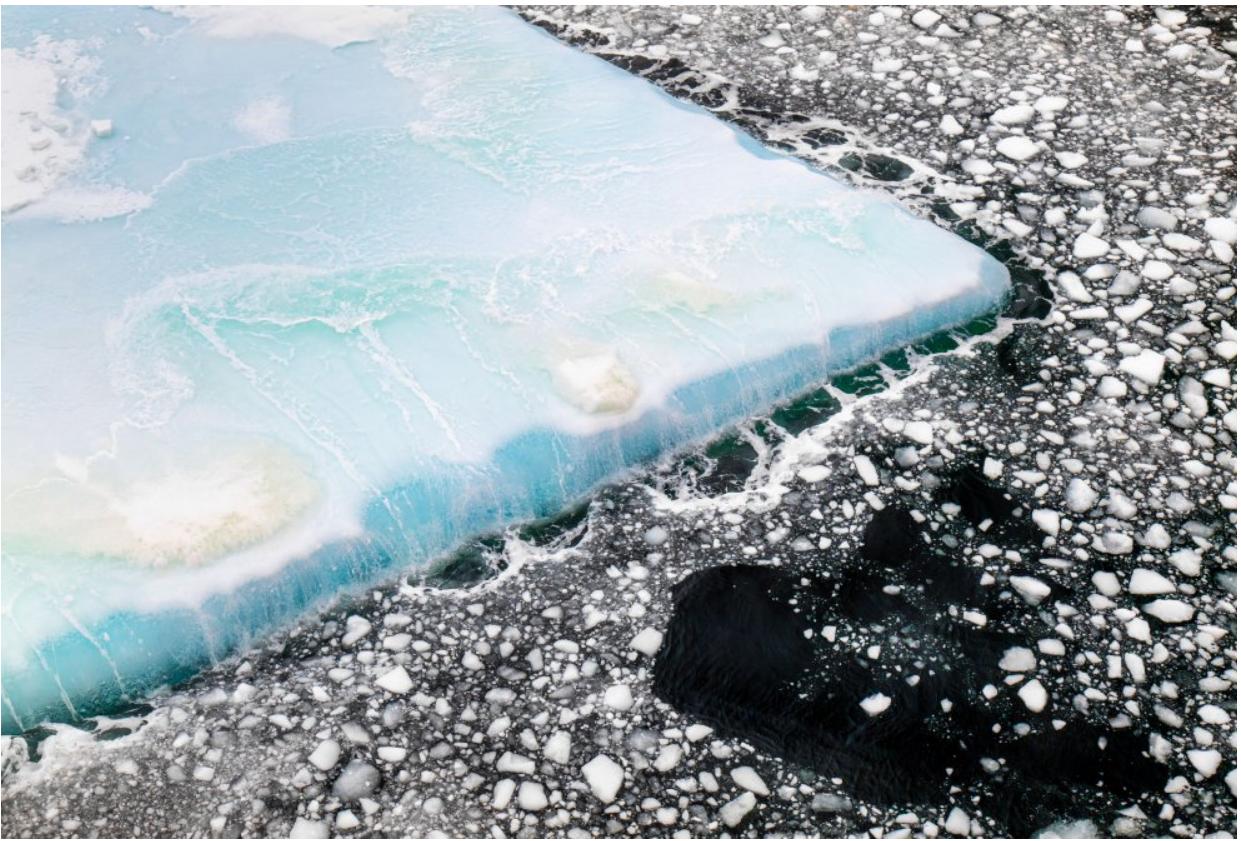


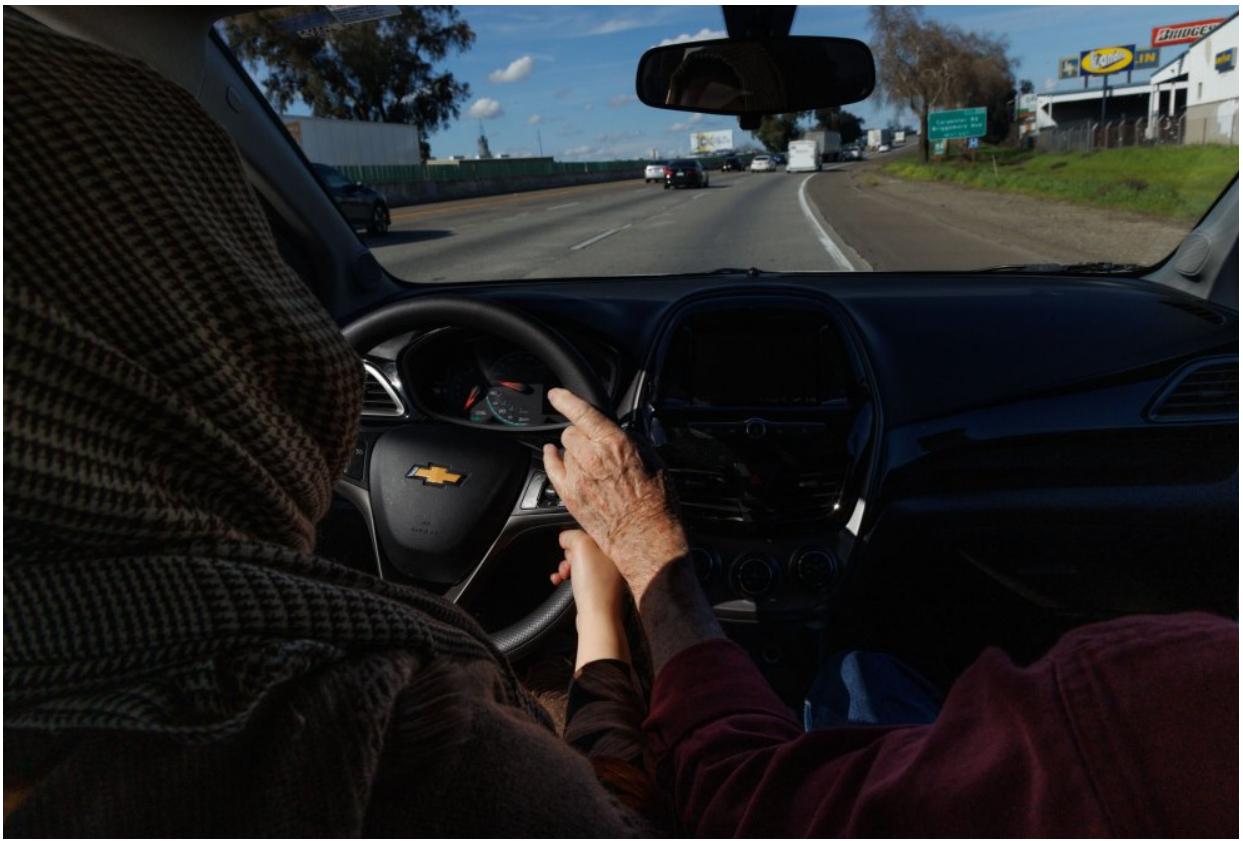






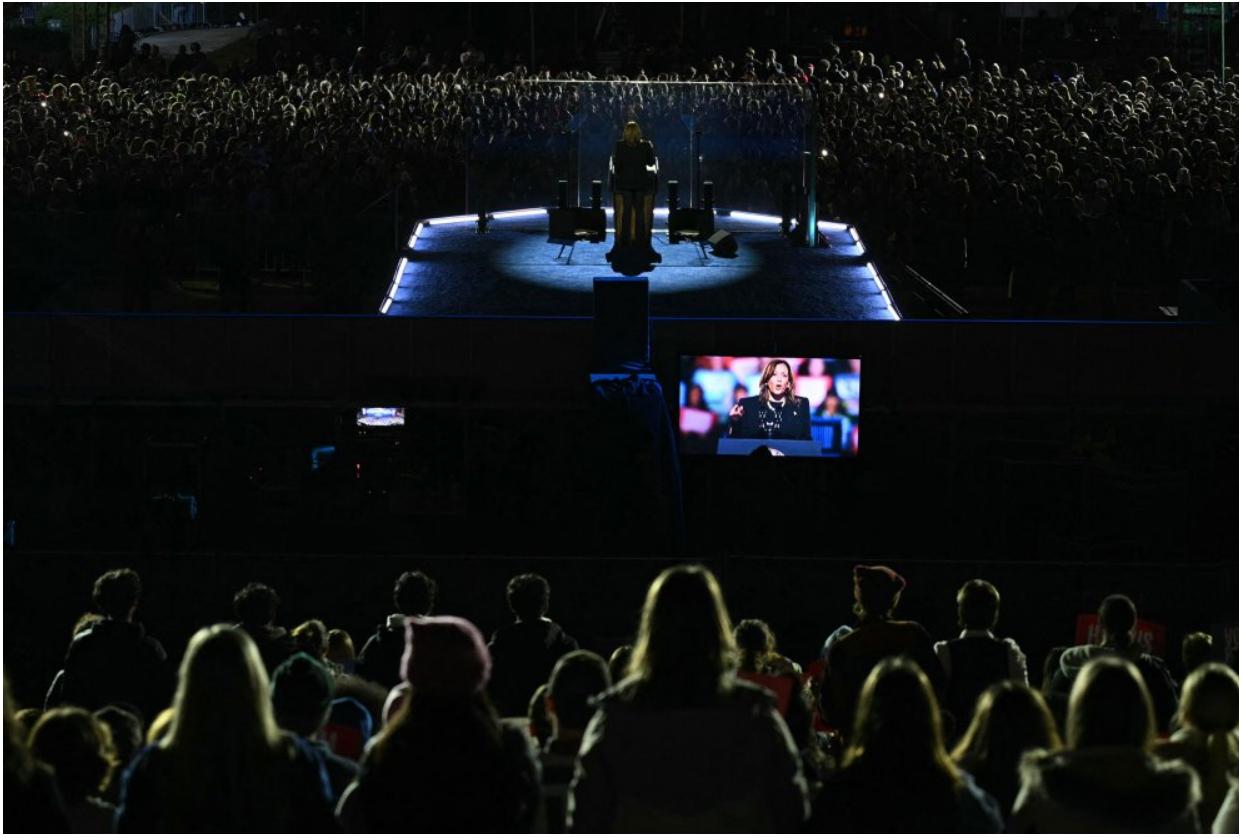








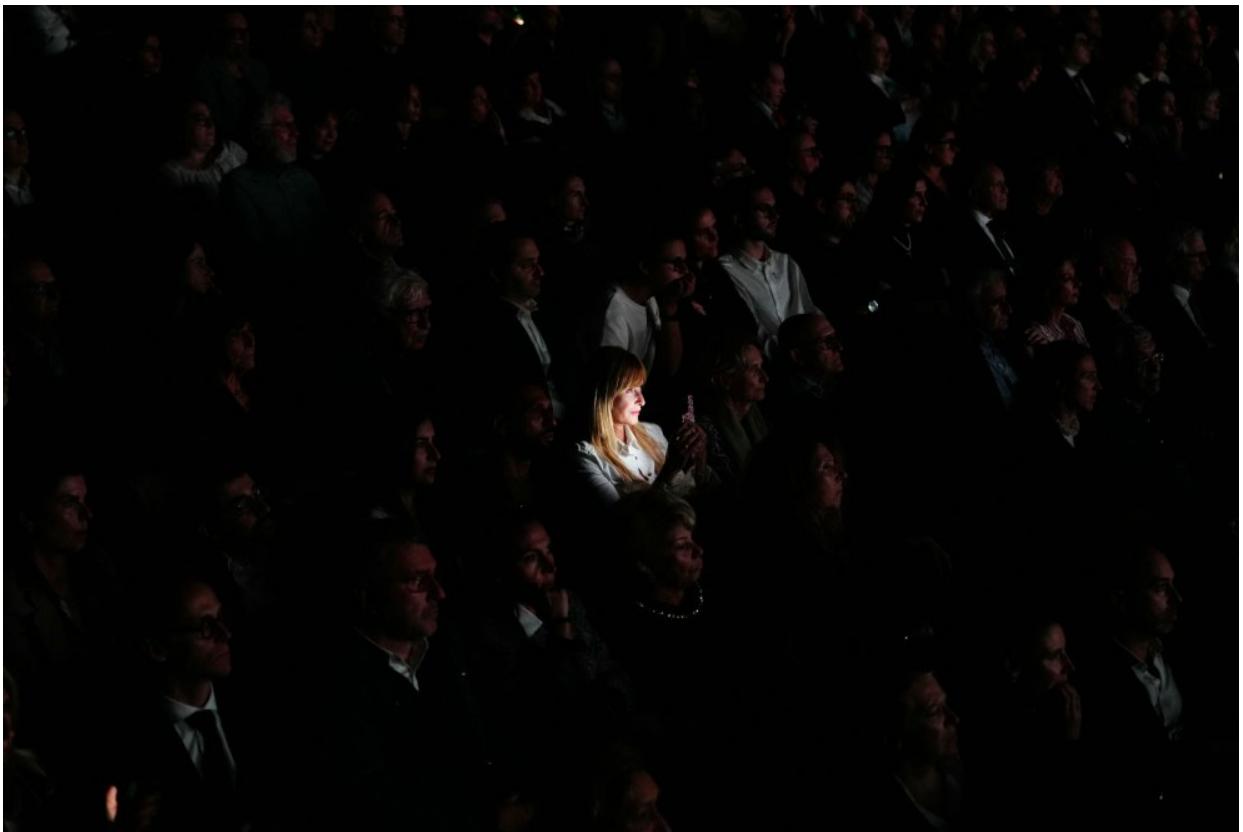


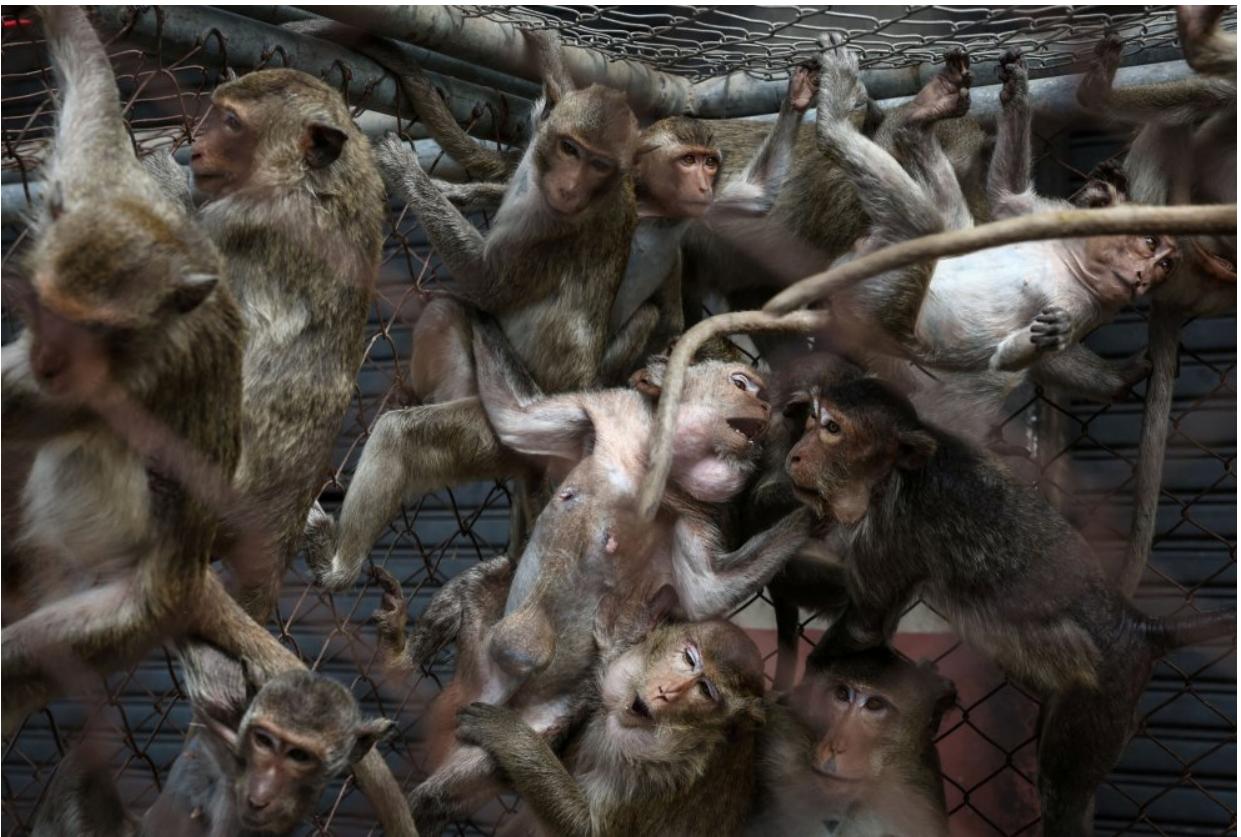












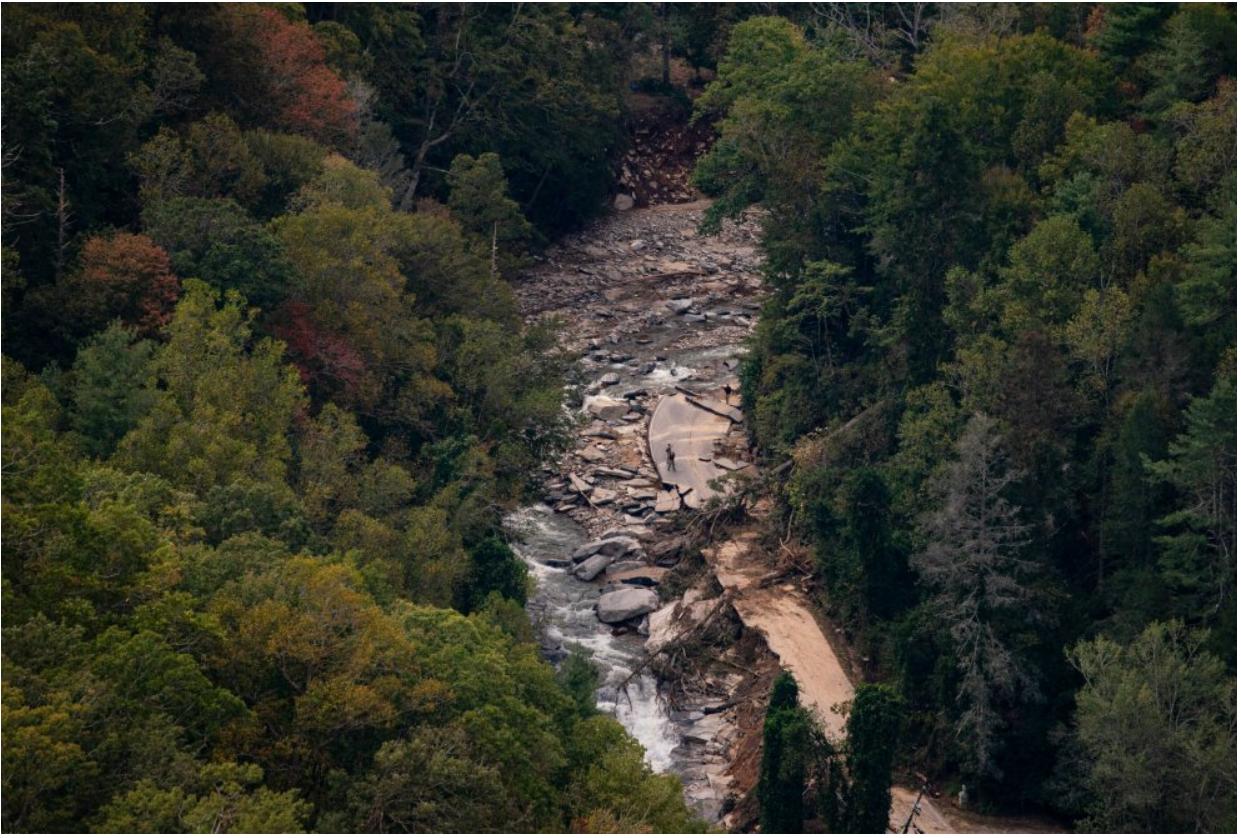






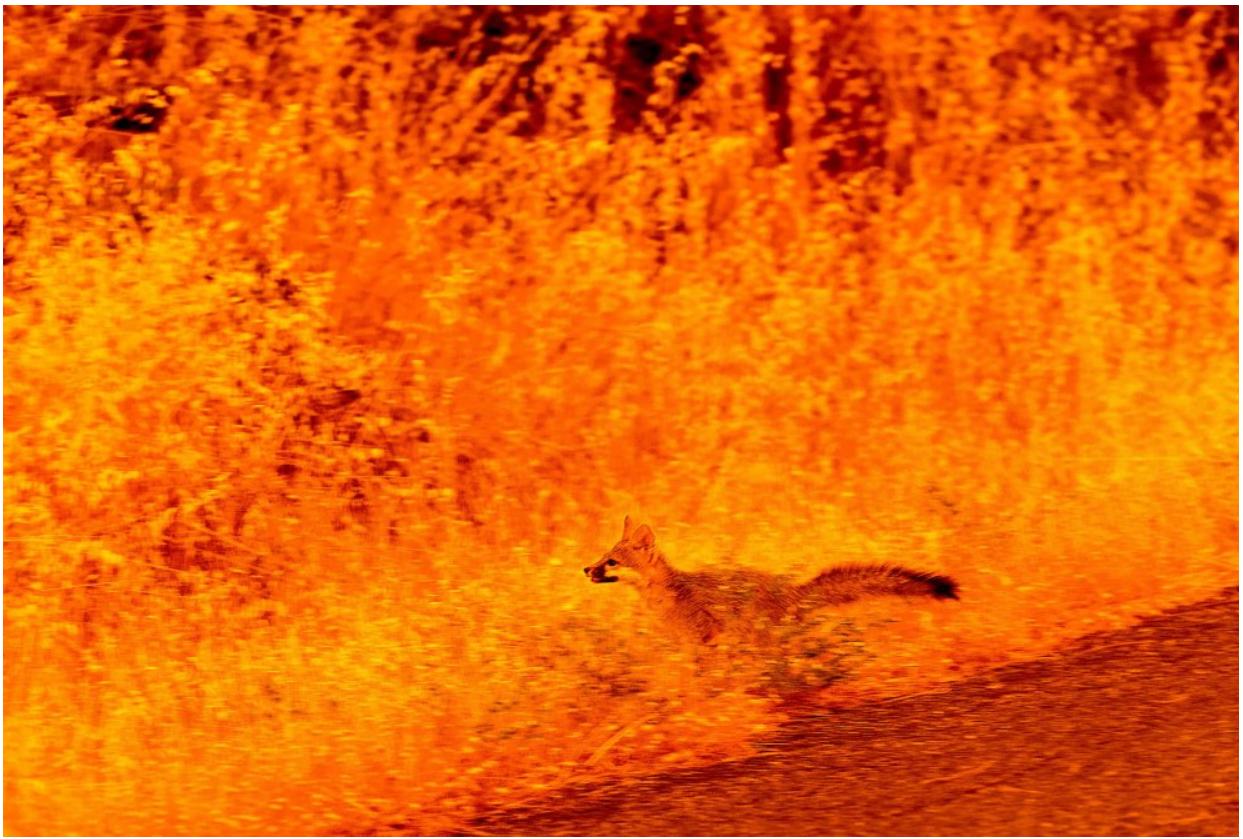




















The original version of this story misstated the lane that Noah Lyles was running in during the 100m final at the Paris 2024 Olympics. It was lane 7, not lane 3.

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Emilia Pérez Is an Exuberant Ode to Human Possibility

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.



Very rarely does the right movie arrive at precisely the right time, at a moment when compassion appears to be in short supply and the collective human imagination has come to feel shrunken and desiccated. [Jacques Audiard's](#) operatic musical *Emilia Pérez* is the story of a disillusioned lawyer working in Mexico, [Zoe Saldaña's](#) Rita, who's almost too successful for her own good. She has just successfully defended a media mogul accused of murdering his wife, though she knows he's guilty. But before her self-loathing can solidify into a comfortable habit, she gets a phone call—a mysterious, growly entity wants to meet with her. She's whisked,

blindfolded, to a secret location, where the gruff leader of a drug cartel, Juan “Manitas” Del Monte, face a map of tough-guy tattoos, outlines a delicate but lucrative mission for her. Manitas wants to transition to living as a woman and wants Rita to arrange both the surgery and subsequent disappearance. Rita pulls it off: It takes a few years, but Manitas re-emerges into the world as the person she always knew she needed to be. She is now Emilia Pérez (Karla Sofía Gascón plays both roles), free to live life as she chooses. Rita, well compensated as promised, runs off to London to live the high life. She thinks her mission is over, though it’s really only just beginning.

In fiction, and sometimes even in real life, it’s too easy to view the fulfillment of a dream—having a wedding ring slipped onto your finger, overcoming great odds to earn a college degree, maybe even undergoing gender-affirmation surgery—as a happy ending. But after Emilia gets exactly what she wants, then she asks, Now what? *Emilia Pérez* is a story not about personal fulfillment but about personal responsibility, the “what happens next?” after you become the person you were destined to be.

If you set a Douglas Sirk movie in modern Mexico, and added singing and dancing, you might come up with something like *Emilia Pérez*, which is now streaming on Netflix. Audiard drew the screenplay from an opera libretto he’d written, adapted loosely from a novel by French author Boris Razon, *Écoute*. (The film was shot entirely in France, on faux-Mexico sets.) The plot turns may feel zany at first, but once you get into the movie’s groove, they come to make perfect emotional sense. When Rita first meets Emilia, four years after she and Manitas have parted ways, she of course doesn’t recognize her. The menacing, muscular thug she’d met earlier—who was, even so, a doting family man, devoted to his two kids and their mother, Jessi, played by [Selena Gomez](#)—is now a vixen with a seductive, throaty voice. Rita had already helped get Manitas’ family settled in Switzerland; having no knowledge of their patriarch’s secret, they believe him to be dead. But now Emilia has another request for Rita, one that’s almost more challenging, and more dangerous, than the first. Emilia wants to make amends for the suffering she caused in her old life; she also longs to reconnect with her family. And because no one can escape loneliness, she yearns for companionship, too. She meets a woman whose scrappy spirit matches her

own, Epifanía (Adriana Paz, in a warm, radiant performance), though that relationship also comes with its own complications.

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



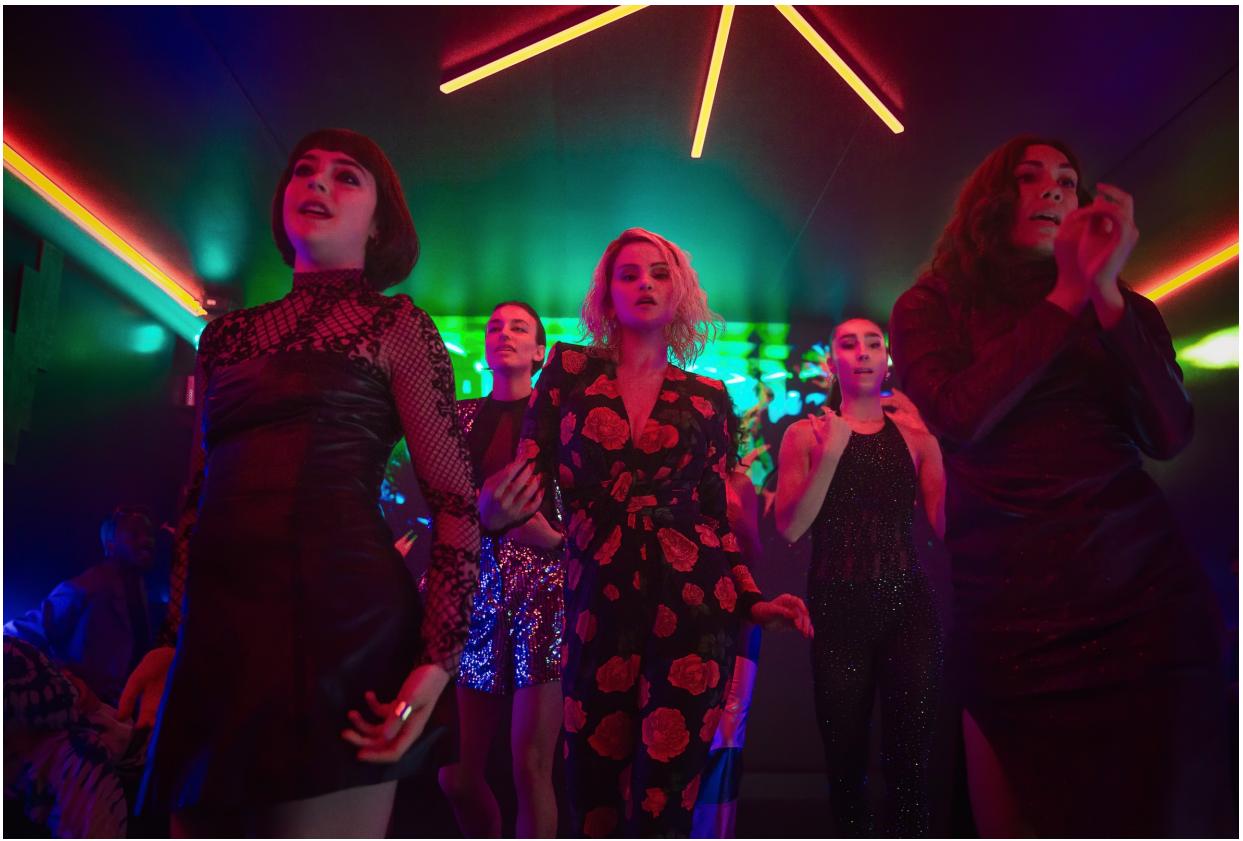
Audiard orchestrates the craziness of the plot with the assurance of an ace conductor. The musical numbers are exuberant, extravagant in feeling, without being overly polished. This isn't a movie about showing off how much money you've spent but about how willing you are to go for broke. And it's fantastic to see Saldaña—who, long ago, played a rebellious ballerina in Nicholas Hytner's *Center Stage*, the sort of girl who extinguishes a cigarette butt on the pavement with one stomp of her dainty pink toeshoe—sing and dance in a vehicle worthy of her. “El Mal” is a Bollywood-inflected number decrying the hypocrisy of people who are happy to show up at a fancy benefit dinner even as, in their everyday lives, they have no qualms about killing those who stand in their way. Saldaña prowls through the song with angry swagger. Rita is a complex character: she has principles, but she's also motivated by money. There's nothing

goody-goody about her. Saldaña makes those dimensions feel believable and real.

It's kismet that Saldaña somehow found her way into a Jacques Audiard movie. There's no easy way to categorize his filmmaking career: over the years he's made, to cover just three examples, a gorgeous melodrama about two people clawing their way out of tough circumstances (*Rust and Bone*), a bold and inventive western (*The Sisters Brothers*), a gritty romance about a crook who dreams of becoming a pianist (*The Beat That My Heart Skipped*). Actually, the idea of "dreaming of becoming" is probably the key to most of Audiard's movies, and certainly to *Emilia Pérez*. He has discovered a great star to bring his ideas to life. Gascón, who was born and raised near Madrid, is in her early fifties; she transitioned at age 46, and she has spent the bulk of her career acting in Mexican telenovelas. In *Emilia Pérez*, she's incandescently alive. As Manitas, she shows us a man who's more than ready to give up his macho authority—he makes his case, piercingly, in the delicate but resolute "Deseo"—though we'll later see that a tendency to manipulate others still lingers in Emilia's character. She's lots of things at once, because all humans are. Gascón's performance is bold, assertive, but also blazingly tender. There's a Mildred Pierce-style practicality about her, though she can also be as sultry-sunny as Lana Turner. She has a knack for putting us in touch with big emotions, no matter how much we might want to push them away.

As it turns out, roughly half the country is now having to work through some big emotions they'd rather not have to feel. In the 1990s, in the more liberal corners of the United States, you couldn't pass more than three Honda Accords without seeing a "Practice Random Acts of Kindness" bumper sticker. Even those who cherished liberal ideals would roll their eyes: that kind of sloganeering was for people who made their own granola, who could find a peace march to join every weekend. They probably had a composting pile. And like many bromides, it could mean different things to different people: a white-supremacist granny who goes out of her way to make cookies for a bereaved neighbor might think she's fully in compliance.

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



But at the risk of dropping a bomb from the water-is-wet department: Boy, has the world changed. Or at least our view of it in the United States. *Emilia Pérez* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival last May; it won the Jury Prize, and its four women actors, Gascón, Saldaña, Gomez, and Paz, took home a combined Best Actress award. I saw the film first in Cannes and again in early fall, before the election. And while most people I knew liked it, or at least derived some pleasure from it, I had a conversation with two people who despised it, claiming it didn't accurately represent the experience of trans individuals at all.

Though it's impossible, obviously, for a movie to reflect the experiences of a nonmonolithic group of people, lived experience certainly counts for something when we're talking about art. No one has to like, or approve of, anything, for artistic reasons or any other. But the very existence of *Emilia Pérez*—and the fact that so many people have already responded to it—means something different in late fall 2024 than it did in May. Even many well-meaning, liberal-thinking Americans have tended to tiptoe delicately around the issue of trans rights, constantly in fear of offending or mistakenly

using the wrong terminology. Now that those rights are even more imperiled than before, a movie like *Emilia Pérez*—one that, instead of pleading for trans acceptance merely treats it as a given—feels even more like movie fireworks, fierce and glorious, a radical act of the imagination with kindness in its heart. Audiard’s film is a challenge to find the beginning that comes after the end. It’s not about trans possibility, but about human possibility. Because they’re one and the same.

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Pablo Larraín's Maria Strives, and Fails, to Capture the Magic of La Diva Callas

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.



You don't have to love [opera](#) to love [Maria Callas](#). She was bold but vulnerable, her life roiled by drama. Her voice reflected all the colors of paradise, as it was before Adam and Eve were kicked out. And her beauty was halfway between mythical and mischievous, as if she'd been drawn by the gods' caricaturist-in-chief: her mismatched features—the take-charge nose, the almondine eyes—met in a kind of haphazard classical perfection.

If you have room in your life for only one opera singer, Callas is the one—she's enough. No wonder [Pablo Larraín](#) wanted to add her to his gallery of great troubled ladies, which already includes Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (2016's *Jackie*) and Princess Diana (2021's *Spencer*). In *Maria*—playing in competition here at the 81st Venice Film Festival—[Angelina Jolie](#) plays La Diva Callas in the final days of her life, in 1977 Paris. Like a gothic ghost, she glides through her gilt-and-brocade apartment in fairytale dressing gowns, eating nothing but popping the sedative known as Mandrax in plentiful quantities. She has stopped performing and all but stopped singing, though she's considering a comeback: she stands at the entrance to her kitchen and commands her loyal housekeeper Bruna (the reliably terrific Alba Rohrwacher) to listen and respond as she works her way through an aria: Bruna dutifully, and not unkindly, tells her boss what she wants to hear, even though the sound coming out of that mouth is shaky and pale, a shadow approximation of its former self. On a whim, Maria also orders her *other* loyal servant, Ferruccio (played by the wonderful Italian actor Pierfrancesco Favino), to move her piano from one end of the apartment to the other; in the next breath she'll inquire about his messed-up spine. It's all in a day's work for Bruna and Ferruccio. Maria is their very own lovable, troubled tyrant.

Meanwhile, too many times to count, Jolie's Maria gazes into the middle distance, mourning the person, the presence, the artist she used to be, reflecting aloud on her one true love, the “ugly and dead”—as she puts it—[Aristotle Onassis](#). (When he appears in the movie's flashback scenes, a wily gnome in evening dress, he's played by Turkish actor Haluk Bilginer.) Every gesture Jolie makes is tragic and quivering; when she smiles, it's the wan, magnanimous kind, as if she really couldn't be bothered. This is a performance from the “Don't hate me because I'm beautiful” school, a great artist's final days rendered with a self-conscious sheen that has nothing to do with the inherent grandness, or sadness, of Callas's life.

It's not Jolie's fault: *Maria* is a movie made with great respect, almost adulation, but very little that qualifies as real feeling. That's not to say Larraín doesn't feel for his subjects; oh, how he loves his suffering ladies! It's just that he can't translate those feelings into anything but tasteful, mannered kitsch. In *Jackie*, [Natalie Portman](#) worked valiantly to capture

both her subject's frostiness and her guarded sorrow, despite all the clever-arty filmmaking around her. And in *Spencer*, Kristen Stewart, one of the most original young actors we've got, played [Princess Diana](#) as a deeply tragic figure, which is never the same as playing a person. The movie's most famous scene involves its lonely heroine's symbolic gobbling of a pearl necklace. The point, if the hammer hasn't hit your head hard enough, is that poor Diana was just so hungry, for food, for love, for everything. Larraín has his loyal fans, and lovers of *Jackie* and *Spencer* may adore *Maria*. But to me, Larraín's allegedly sympathetic psychoporraits are the movie equivalent of Madame Alexander dolls lined up on a dresser: extremely pretty, but not made for touching.

I do acknowledge that that's the *point*. These are intentionally stylized exercises, designed to come off as inventive and extreme. But their fussiness is exhausting. The plot of *Maria* is built around an extended visit from a TV interviewer—is he real or imagined? Does it matter?—who goes by the not-unsymbolic name of Mandrax. (He's played by Kodi Smit-McPhee.) Dear Ferruccio, who's trying desperately to get Maria off the pills, has told her that Mandrax—both the man and the drug—is not her friend, but to no avail. She entrusts Mandrax with her deepest secrets, including one involving her craggy, disloyal lover Onassis, who left her abruptly for that other Larraín doll-subject, Jacqueline Kennedy. Callas read about their marriage in the papers, and as Jolie's Maria lets that truth drop, something cracks inside her—it's the only truly moving sequence in the movie. Mostly, though, *Maria* is preoccupied with telling, not showing. "I am quite rebellious by nature!" Maria informs the awestruck Mandrax, as she surveys him coolly through her Nefertiti eyes. It's just one of the movie's many lines of dialogue drawn from the You Don't Say? catalog. (The screenplay is by Steven Knight, who also wrote *Spencer*.)

There's much to admire in *Maria*, if admiration is what floats your boat. Jolie trained, with great dedication, so she could do her own singing; at times, her voice and that of Callas are melded, in various proportions, into a single track. It all sounds OK—though you might feel an instinctive shiver when the mix is heavier on Callas. The film is gorgeous to look at, thanks to ace cinematographer [Ed Lachman](#), as well as production designer Guy Hendrix Dyas and costume designer Massimo Cantini Parrini. Jolie gets to

wear some smashing '70s-luxe togs, including several lithe tunic-and-pants ensembles and a combo dressing gown/evening coat in regal, fur-trimmed brocade. Callas had killer clothes and wore them beautifully—*Maria* gets that right.

Larraín doesn't shy away from the darker corners of Callas's life. Her mother apparently put her and her sister to work "entertaining" German and Italian soldiers during the Axis occupation of Greece; Larraín dramatizes one such episode deftly and discreetly. Yet even so, *Maria* captures nothing of the spirit of Callas. Jolie plays her subject as haughtily cool and deeply insecure, but captures none of her imperious charisma. Callas could be demanding, but it was all part of her sterling self-discipline: she believed in her talent above all else. And there was a great aura of joy around her, which made her vulnerability that much more piercing. Larraín does his movie no favors by using footage of the real Maria Callas in the closing credits sequence: To see her laughing just as she sang, with her whole being, or even just to catch her lost in troubled thought, is to get a jolt of all the vitality Jolie and Larraín have failed to capture. Callas, only 53 when she died, was bigger than life. *Maria* may burnish her legend. But it also snuffs out her spark.

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Netflix's *The Madness* Casts Colman Domingo in a '70s-Style Paranoid Thriller for Our Time

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.



Muncie Daniels is just trying to make his voice heard over the cacophony that passes for public discourse. An ambitious CNN commentator, the protagonist of the action-packed Netflix conspiracy thriller *The Madness* has been neglecting his disordered personal life and losing sight of his progressive values. But all that bland, commercially palatable careerism can't prevent Muncie, played by the versatile Emmy winner [Colman](#)

[Domingo](#), from getting dragged into a war between the far right and the radical left, edgelord billionaires and misfits living communally at society's fringes. In fact, that war threatens to annihilate everything he's achieved.

It's a timely premise, following a presidential election that empowered one extreme, alienated the other, and left the U.S. with an even noisier, more chaotic public square than we had before. Creator Stephen Belber (*Tommy*) and his co-showrunner, VJ Boyd ([Justified](#)), channel our collective exhaustion with the discourse into a '70s-style paranoid thriller grounded in the hyperpartisan polarization of today. *The Madness* can traffic in false equivalences—a common pitfall of political fiction that values moderation as an end in itself. And the show sometimes gets goofy in depicting the personalities and peccadilloes of each faction. Still, it mostly succeeds, on the strength of Domingo's performance, Muncie's complexity, and, above all, the visceral sense of contemporary chaos and futility it channels.

Muncie is hoping to get away from it all when he rents a cabin in the Poconos to work on his novel. What he's escaping includes an ex (Marsha Stephanie Blake) he still loves, the couple's resentful teenage son (Thaddeus J. Mixson), an adult daughter (Gabrielle Graham) he has neglected, a colleague who all but calls him a sellout on national TV, and, deeper in his consciousness, unresolved angst surrounding his father, who let otherwise laudable ideals lead him into violence. Instead of penning a best seller, Muncie discovers he's being framed for a local white supremacist's murder, which he happens to have been the only person to witness.



A pundit who traded strong convictions for a mainstream platform and his family's stability for personal success, Muncie suddenly becomes a fugitive shouldering the weight of everything he worked to transcend, from systemic racism to the sins of his father, while facing dark forces far wealthier and more powerful than a few neo-Nazis. Once a ringmaster of the media circus, he's now the caged lion. And he has to discern which of the few allies who believe he's innocent—a fringe media personality (Bri Neal), the victim's estranged widow (Tamsin Topolski), an FBI agent with an agenda of his own (John Ortiz)—he can actually trust. It's at once a terrifying situation and a chance to finally develop an appreciation for friends and family whose loyalty he hasn't reciprocated. Conveyed by Domingo with subtlety and intelligence, this level of detail makes Muncie the rare richly drawn hero in a genre that tends to privilege plot over character.

Less convincing, at times, are the details of the world-gone-mad he inhabits. Sometimes, in its quest to frame both ends of the political spectrum as unhinged, the show verges on cartoonish. Is it not enough to have Muncie visit an antifa “gun commune”—does the guy he's looking for there have to

frequent swinger bars, too? Yet *The Madness* resonates anyway, thanks largely to its atmosphere of all-encompassing panic, fueled by anxiety that Muncie is a pawn of nefarious individuals with the power to bend society to their will and underscored by inventive action sequences. Now that so many political thrillers, from *Citadel* to *Hijack*, go out of their way to avoid political faultlines for fear of offending viewers at home or abroad, it's a relief to have a show that at least acknowledges how very frantic the vibes have become.

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How a Room Full of Lifeless Westworld Robots Inspired Charles Yu's Interior Chinatown

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



When Charles Yu was a writer for the dystopian sci-fi HBO series *Westworld*, he went to set one day and saw dozens of naked actors lying on the floor, playing broken shells of automatons waiting to be revived. “They’re literally bodies lying on metallic shelving—and that’s somebody’s job,” Yu remembers thinking. “They’re coming here to put on body makeup and lie there naked for hours in a 60-degree environment.”

Witnessing the fringes of a television set and the stark realities of the people who make a living there partially inspired Yu's novel, *Interior Chinatown*, which was released in early 2020. The genre-bending metanarrative tells the story of Willis, a "generic Asian man" in the background of a *Law & Order*-like procedural who longs to break out of his minor and oft-humiliating role. The novel not only skewered TV's narrow formulas, but also served as a parable for how Asian Americans have long been shunted to the edges of American society. It [struck a nerve](#) during the pandemic, and won the National Book Award for Fiction.

The novel's breakout success led to Yu receiving an opportunity he had not considered: Hulu calling and asking if he would be interested in turning *Interior Chinatown* into an actual television series. Such an adaptation would necessitate navigating a head-spinning stack of realities and mediums: to create a police procedural inside of a genre-busting action-dramedy, based on a novel written in the style of a TV screenplay. But Yu jumped at the opportunity, and signed on to write the adaptation and serve as the showrunner. "Going in, I should have been more mindful of the fact that literally everyone was like, this is going to be really hard," Yu tells TIME. "I didn't fully understand how hard it would be to crack it until I started doing it."

Read More: [What It's Like to Never Ever See Yourself on TV](#)

Four years later, the [TV adaptation of *Interior Chinatown*](#) arrives on Hulu on Nov. 19, to [positive reviews](#). Jimmy O. Yang (*Love Hard*) stars as Willis, alongside Chloe Bennet (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) and Ronny Cheing (*The Daily Show*), as they attempt to unshackle themselves from their designated societal roles and track down Willis' long-lost brother. Taika Waititi (*Jojo Rabbit*, *Thor: Ragnarok*) executive-produced the show and directed the pilot.

Interior Chinatown is a bit of a paradox: it's a show whose primary conceit is that Asian-American voices remain on the periphery, while centering an Asian-American everyman hero. This dynamic is not lost on Yu. "I got to make this show, and am an incredibly lucky, privileged person to get to do this," he says. "But that doesn't mean I don't want to tell the story of most people who are not nearly as lucky, including my own parents and a lot of recent immigrants as well."

In an interview, Yu talked about the state of Asian American representation, recent backlash against diversity initiatives, and the rise of AI. Here are excerpts of the conversation.



TIME: *Interior Chinatown* was published in early 2020. How did everything that's happened since impact how you wrote the TV adaptation?

Yu: We started a writers room over Zoom in 2022, and it was really on our minds how the world in which we'd all see each other again would be so different: on the heels of George Floyd, January 6, the wave of anti-Asian sentiment. On one level, the novel is about how Asians are invisible in the American public imagination, which felt more relevant than ever. But I also felt like it could be about so much more, and that it needed to be.

What advice do you have for anyone like Willis, who longs to become the main character of their own story?

Don't be afraid of looking dumb. I'm 48, and it wasn't until I became a dad and very cringey that I realized that is something I wish I had been willing to do when I was 28. I was terrified at work: of getting up and talking in front of even five people. So it sounds like such a platitude, but if you're gonna break out of your role, it starts with you believing you can.

How much did writing for HBO's *Westworld* shape *Interior Chinatown*?

In so many ways. The main thing was that having seen the inside workings of making a TV show, it made me really excited to then start to try to take it apart or poke at it from the inside. It inspired the idea of seeing the edge of the set: The story and then the people behind the story. It gave me that idea that either you're very, very visible, or you're completely invisible.

Being on set was surreal. There's this sense that a lot of the robots are NPCs [non-playable characters], and you may never encounter most of them. Their existence kind of spun me out. What if you're just a robot who's off in some dusty side quest, and nobody does your side quest? What is your life like?

Some of the strongest parts of the novel are the characters' interior thoughts and extensive histories, which they don't

speak out loud. Was it challenging to translate that for TV?

Yeah, that was the single biggest challenge. In a novel you can slip into someone's consciousness. Gifted filmmakers know how to create subjectivity and interiority, to tell a story that has forward movement but can live in your thoughts and the intimacy of relationships. I learned how to better use silence and negative space.

What did you learn from [Taika Waititi](#), who served as an EP and directed the pilot?

He can take a script and loosen up the connective tissue, to both soften and scuff it up. He's looking for both visual and emotional nuance: something that's less polished but much more human.

One of the big conflicts in the book is Willis grappling with whether to climb his way up through an unjust system stacked against him—in which the most he can ever achieve is “Kung Fu Guy”—or to try to rebel from the system itself. Having worked your way up through Hollywood, can you relate?

Oh, that's a little bit spicy. I'll try not to duck it. Yes. I'm a rule follower. I started as a good kid of immigrants, who wore a heavy coat of guilt and responsibility: like, 'Don't waste our effort.' I felt like the way I was going to get ahead was working really hard, figuring out the rules of a system, and playing within those rules.

But then I hit a bunch of walls, eventually. And that's what we see Willis do. Some of the walls are visible and some are not, and a lot of them are internal. I'm not even talking about discrimination, necessarily. I mean, I got to make this show, and am an incredibly lucky, privileged person to get to do this. But that doesn't mean I don't want to tell the story of most people who are not nearly as lucky, including my own parents and a lot of recent immigrants as well.

So the parallel is: At some point, you hit the limit of what the rules are going to allow you to get to, and you have to try things that are scary. There is resistance. No single role is going to define a whole person. That's what I think the show is ultimately about, for Willis and the other characters: trying on various roles that approximate you but don't define the totality of what you are.

In 2020, you wrote an [essay for TIME](#) about the lack of Asian-American representation on screen. Has anything changed?

There has been noticeable progress, at least from a Hollywood perspective, in the variety and specificity of stories being told. Before, you could list the three Asian things there had been in the last 10 years. Now, [there's kind of too many](#) [to name].

The question is, what do we do with more visibility? What do we do with doors that are now open, that weren't for a long time?

Amid Donald Trump's re-election, what do you make of the growing backlash against diversity and inclusion efforts?

Up front, it is important to hear a diversity of voices. But I feel like what I don't hear in the conversation is empathy, and I include that from my side. I don't hear a nuanced discussion of why a particular story matters—and I start to hear that hardening into a sort of assumed dogma. Nobody likes to be told that something is important for its own sake.

Now, it's not some complicated conversation. You can grow up not reading anything about Native Americans or narratives from Black Americans, or not learning about how long Asian Americans have been part of the country. That is a huge problem, because it's not reality.

But it's important for us to not devalue the perspective of people who have totally different value systems. The whole point of asking people to read marginalized narratives is so they'll see the human stories of the people telling them. But that has to go both ways. 'White guy' as an epithet is weird

to me. I feel like I hear it all the time, and I'm like, 'Why aren't we talking as if everyone's perspective matters, whether or not they look like us?'

Having dealt with AI on *Westworld*, what do you make of its recent real-world advancements?

It's weird to have worked on something less than 10 years ago and see that it's not so sci-fi. I totally believe an AI could write a better rom-com or buddy comedy than I could. But there's people who have something it'll be harder to capture, and there's something magical about that. I don't think there's an AI Taika Waititi, for instance.

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