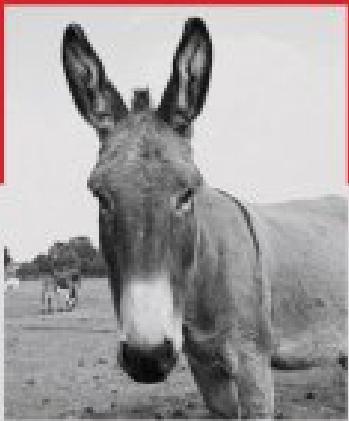


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Inside the Party's Plan to
Find Its Way Back

by
CHARLOTTE ALTER

TIME Magazine

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Inside the Democrats' Reboot

Alter is a senior correspondent at TIME. She covers politics, social movements, and generational change, and hosts TIME's Person of the Week podcast. She is also the author of [The Ones We've Been Waiting For: How a New Generation of Leaders Will Transform America](#). Her work for TIME has won a Front Page Award from the Newswoman's Club of New York and has been nominated for a GLAAD Media award.



Like a lot of Democrats these days, Chris Murphy has been doing some soul searching. For years, the Connecticut Senator, who took office shortly after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, was one of the nation's most outspoken advocates for tighter gun laws. Gun safety was so important, he argued, that supporting an assault-weapons ban should be mandatory for Democratic leaders.

Recently, Murphy has come to believe he was wrong. Not about tougher gun laws, but about trying to force all Democrats to adopt his position. “I bear some responsibility for where we are today,” he told me in a phone interview in April. “I spent a long time trying to make the issue of guns a litmus test for the Democratic Party. I think that all of the interest groups that ended up trying to apply a litmus test for their issue ended up making our coalition a lot smaller.”

Murphy’s shift in thinking is part of the reckoning that has gripped the party since President Donald Trump’s victory in November. Democrats could dismiss Trump’s first win as a fluke. His second, they know, was the product of catastrophic failure—a nationwide rejection of Democratic policies, Democratic messaging, and the Democrats themselves. The party got skunked in every battleground state and lost the popular vote for the first time in 20 years. They lost the House and the Senate. Their support sagged with almost every demographic cohort except Black women and college-educated voters. Only 35% of Democrats are optimistic about the future of the party, according to a May 14 AP poll, down from nearly 6 in 10 last July. Democrats have no mojo, no power, and no unifying leader to look to for a fresh start.

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Everyone knows how bad things are. “As weak as I’ve ever seen it,” says Representative Jared Golden of Maine, who represents a district Trump won. Trump’s second term is “worse than everyone imagined,” says Nevada Senator Jacky Rosen. The Democratic National Committee has offered few answers as it prepares to release a “postelection review” sometime this summer. “I don’t like to call it an ‘autopsy’ because our party’s not dead—we’re still alive and kicking,” explains Ken Martin, the new party chair. “Maybe barely, but we are.”

You already know most of the reasons for the 2024 fiasco. Joe Biden was too old to be President, and just about everybody but Joe Biden knew it. His sheer oldness undermined all efforts to sell his policies effectively.

Democrats lost touch with the working class, with men, with voters of color, with the young. Voters saw Democrats as henpecked by college-campus progressives, overly focused on “woke” issues like diversity and trans rights. They tried to convince people that the economy was good when it didn’t feel good; they tried to convince people that inflation and illegal immigration were imaginary problems. In an era when voters around the globe were in an anti-incumbent mood, Democrats were stuck defending the status quo. The pandemic election of 2020 and the post-*Dobbs* midterms in 2022 lulled top party officials into a dangerous complacency. They thought Americans hated Trump enough to accept an unsatisfying alternative. They thought wrong.

Over the past two months, I’ve spoken to dozens of prominent Democrats, from Senators to strategists, frontline House members to upstart progressives, and activists to top DNC officials, in an effort to figure out how the party can chart its way back. I asked them all versions of the same questions. How did they dig this hole, and how can they get out of it? What ideas do Democrats stand for, beyond opposing an unpopular President? How can they reconnect with the voters they’ve lost? Who should be leading them, and what should they be saying? In other words: What’s the plan?

Many of these conversations made my head hurt. Democrats kept presenting cliches as insights and old ideas as new ideas. Everybody said the same things; nobody seemed to be really saying anything at all. But in between feeble platitudes about “showing up and listening” and “fighting for the

“working class” and “meeting people where they are,” a few common threads emerged.



Democrats know they have a branding problem that transcends policy, messaging, or leadership questions. They largely agree they need to re-center economic issues in their messaging and develop what some are calling a “patriotic populism” to counter Trump. They need to build a bigger tent. Many moderate Democrats want to sideline the activist groups that pressured elected officials to take unpopular positions. Even many progressives are retreating from the purity politics that reigned in the Trump era. They know they need fresh ideas and new leaders, even though they can’t always agree on how to find them.

The intraparty squabbles between moderates and progressives that have dominated the past decade have given way to different fault lines. “If you’re talking about ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal,’ or ‘progressive’ or ‘moderate,’ you’re missing the whole f-cking point,” says Representative Pat Ryan, who outran Kamala Harris by double digits in his purple district in New York’s

Hudson Valley. “It’s not progressive or moderate. It’s status quo or change. It’s for the people or for the elites.”

After a brutal winter, Democrats are beginning to show signs of life. The party won a crucial supreme court race in Wisconsin and picked up two seats in the Pennsylvania statehouse. In early April, roughly 4 million people attended more than 1,300 rallies across the U.S., demanding their leaders fight harder against Trump. The Fighting Oligarchy Tour, headlined by Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, has drawn hundreds of thousands of people across red states. The grassroots is sending a clear message to sitting Democrats: Do better, or we’ll replace you with people who will.

Most in the party recognize this is a crisis moment. But every crisis is also an opportunity—a chance to rethink policies, reframe messaging, and recruit new leaders who can meet the moment. The last time Democrats were this deep in the wilderness was in 2005, when few outside the DNC had heard of Barack Obama. Republicans’ own search for answers in the wake of Mitt Romney’s 2012 defeat gave rise to Trump. When you hit rock bottom, anything is possible—and every transformative political figure of the modern age has emerged from a moment like this one.

It’s a sunny Tuesday in early spring, and Jake Auchincloss is sitting on a bench outside the Rayburn House Office Building. Auchincloss, a 37-year old third-term Congressman from Massachusetts, seems nervous, almost jittery, as he explains why he thinks everybody is getting the Democrats’ problems wrong. “I hear a lot: ‘Get a leader, let’s rally behind somebody.’ And I strongly disagree with that,” Auchincloss told me. “The forest of ambition is large. There’s no shortage of presidential timber. I’m worried about the ideas.” This is what keeps Auchincloss up at night: “It’s that we are bereft of big ideas.”

Auchincloss has a few. He wants to offer free one-on-one tutoring to kids who are behind in school because of COVID-19, subsidize community-health clinics, and hold social media corporations accountable for what he calls the “attention fracking” of America’s youth. But a decade of fighting MAGA, he says, has “depleted some intellectual dynamism” from his party.

“In 2028, we’d better be ready to have dynamic candidates on the stage offering whole new ideas,” he warns, “or we’ll lose again.”

In our conversations, Democrats often made that argument. It’s not enough to say what we’re against, they’d say, we have to say what we’re for. But when I asked these same party insiders what that should be, most regurgitated ideas Democrats have run on for decades. Protect Social Security and Medicare! Protect abortion rights! Protect labor! OK, I’d say. What about new ideas? They mentioned their own pet projects: a bill blocking a supermarket merger; a bill addressing specific veterans’ issues; a bill ensuring the right to fix your own car. Somehow, I had a hard time imagining “permitting reform!” as a rallying cry capable of mobilizing millions of low-information voters.

“I’ve heard some folks say, ‘It’s not our policies, we just have to communicate better,’” says Representative Angie Craig, who is running for an open Senate seat in Minnesota. “It actually is our policies that swing-state voters aren’t with us on. For those colleagues who were calling to defund the police: our voters are not with you on that.”

Most Democrats now acknowledge that the progressive movement encouraged a kind of purity politics that hampered the party’s ability to win majorities. “We swung the pendulum too far to the left,” says Representative Ritchie Torres, who represents a Bronx district where Trump made inroads with working-class people of color, as he did in cities around the country. “We have become more responsive to interest groups than to people on the ground.”

Many Democratic officials believe the party moved too far left on social issues in particular. “There are some sports where trans girls shouldn’t be playing against biological girls,” says one lawmaker, adding that most of his fellow Democrats agree but are “afraid of the blowback that comes from a very small community.” Even abortion is up for a rethink. Some Democrats want a retreat from the enthusiastic embrace of abortion rights, and a return to talking about abortion as “safe, legal, and rare,” as Bill Clinton put it. “Refusing to say that even in the third trimester there’s no limits on it, it’s not where the average American is,” says another Democratic lawmaker. “The really embarrassing truth is Donald Trump is closer to the median

voting on abortion than Democrats were.” Yet the fact these lawmakers would only share these thoughts without their names attached shows how much Democrats still fear antagonizing their liberal base.

Others insisted that the problem is one of emphasis. When Democrats spent so much time talking about other things—Student debt! LGBTQ rights! Police reform! Climate change!—voters decided they’d taken their eye off the ball. “You’ve got to be principally seen worrying about jobs and people’s pay and health care—economic issues,” says Representative Chris Deluzio, who represents a working-class district in western Pennsylvania. “And I think folks see too many Democrats as not caring principally about the economy.”

This theory might make more sense if Harris had run a 2024 campaign that was all about trans kids, abortion, and gun safety. Harris didn’t run that campaign. She offered tax credits to boost small businesses, proposals to lower the cost of groceries and childcare, and the most comprehensive affordable-housing plan ever put forth by a presidential candidate. And she lost. “Kamala Harris was talking about it,” says Representative Greg Casar of Texas, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. “But nobody was hearing it.”

Senator Ruben Gallego met me outside the Senate gym, still slightly damp. Gallego, who was raised by an immigrant single mother and served in the Marine Corps, was a rare bright spot for his party last year. He outperformed Harris by 8 points in Arizona, handily won Latino men, and was one of only two new Democrats to win Senate battleground races. As we walked through the Capitol, Gallego, 45, describes his very simple message: “I’m here to bring you more security: economic security, and your personal family security.” It meant talking constantly about the cost of living, and taking a more hard-line stance on immigration than most of his Democratic peers.

When we arrived at his hideaway—Gallego was so new to the Senate that he had forgotten his key—the freshman Senator told me he didn’t necessarily think other Democrats needed to adopt his security message. He just wants them to speak like normal people. The party’s problem is bigger than bad messaging, he believes. The problem is caution. “Democrats in general are

always fearful of messing up,” he said. “The Democratic mindset has been to run very tight, not open campaigns.”

I knew what he was talking about. Aides on the Biden and Harris campaigns were so cautious they’d often go off the record just to provide canned talking points. That approach, Gallego says, is self-defeating in the age of social media, where crafting the perfect sound bite can mean missing the moment altogether. “I told my team during the campaign: This is a vibe election,” says Gallego. “If we can match the policy with creating this vibe, this culture, that’s gonna break through across all modes and mediums.” His point was that the art of messaging has changed. It’s less about developing the perfect slogan, and more about authenticity, simplicity, virality. The more consult-ified something sounds, the less memorable it is.



Like Gallego, many moderate Democrats have particular critiques of the party’s economic message. “I think Democrats have made this mistake of saying, ‘I’m here to help the little guy.’ Nobody wants to be called the little guy,” says Representative Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, 36, who has won twice

in a red district in Washington State. “The fatal mistake in politics is condescension.” She’s not the only Democrat who thinks the party erred by targeting their messaging to the most marginalized, rather than the vast, struggling middle class. Nearly 70% of voters in battleground districts think Democrats are “too focused on being politically correct,” according to brutal internal polling shared with top party leaders in March, while a majority think Democrats are not looking out for working people and are “more focused on helping other people than people like me.”

The focus on protecting the most vulnerable, in other words, has left many Americans feeling ignored. “I constantly get draft mailers in my office that say things like ‘Democrats are fighting so you could put food on the table.’ That is not aspirational,” says Mallory McMorrow, a Michigan state senator now running for U.S. Senate. To McMorrow, the Democratic message should be simple, universal, and optimistic: “Democrats fight for the American Dream,” she says.

Others believe the party has to emphasize a more populist pitch to counter Trump’s. “The Democratic Party needs to make as our central message that our goal is to break the unholy alliance between corporate greed and corrupt government,” Casar told me. “If somebody is more conservative than me on this social issue, or we may disagree on this foreign policy issue, at the end of the day people say: the Democratic Party puts me first and the billionaires last. And that’s what wins.”

One of the things that surprised me over the course of these conversations was the way a Sanders-style economic populism had gained traction with politicians not normally associated with the Sanders wing of the party. “Our economy is rigged because our government is rigged,” Chris Murphy told me. Democrats, he added, “have to wake up every morning thinking about how to unrig our government so that the corporations and the billionaires don’t always get what they want.” This was a man who stumped so hard for Hillary Clinton in 2016 that he was on a shortlist to be her VP. “I think it was a huge mistake for our party to view Bernie as some fringe threat to the party,” he says now. “Bernie’s message all along has been the crossover message, the message that appeals both to Democrats but also to a big element of Trump’s base.”

Five months ago, Kat Abughazaleh was an online journalist and researcher who made viral takedowns of far-right figures. But when she saw Democrats clapping politely during Trump's second Inauguration, something snapped. "It was just so pathetic," she told me, speaking on the phone from her home office in the Chicago suburbs. "I was like, 'Well, maybe they'll actually do something.' And then they didn't."

Shortly afterwards, Abughazaleh, 26, announced a primary challenge to Representative Jan Schakowsky, an 80-year-old party stalwart who has served in Congress since the year Abughazaleh was born. Schakowsky wasn't the worst member of Congress, Abughazaleh thought. They agreed on a lot of issues. But Abughazaleh thought Schakowsky wasn't up to the moment. Her campaign announcement video asked a simple question: "What if we didn't suck?" She raised more money in the campaign's first week than Schakowsky did the entire first quarter. Within six weeks, Schakowsky announced she would not seek re-election.

Even if the Democrats generate new policy ideas and adopt a sharper pitch, they'll still bump up against the core issue that tanked Biden, Harris, and much of the rest of the party last year: age. Many Democrats are finally realizing that too many of their leaders are too established, too out-of-touch, or simply too old to connect with voters.



Four House Democrats died in office over the past year. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries has acknowledged that Republicans could not have passed a budget resolution in April had their narrow majority not been widened by the deaths of two members of his own caucus. Of the 30 House Democrats who are 75 or older, more than half told Axios they planned to run for re-election next year.

Many Democrats are not eager only for generational change. They want change at the top of the party as well. Some see Jeffries and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer as too deferential to established norms or too reluctant to use procedural powers to slow down Trump's agenda. Both are underwater in public-opinion polls. Only 27% of Americans approve of congressional Democrats overall—the lowest number since CNN started asking in 2008. “I think the party is hyperfocused on message and forgetting about the messenger,” says Amanda Litman, the co-founder of Run for Something, which recruits new Democrats to run for office and supports them with training, mentorship, and campaign tools. “They’ve missed the way people consume information. You look for a person, not an

institution.” A sclerotic party establishment has created a culture of waiting your turn. “All the people that are in formal leadership roles,” says Pat Ryan, “are ladder climbers, not leaders.”

At the DNC, Martin has locked horns with the party’s new vice chair, David Hogg, a survivor of the 2018 Parkland school shooting who rose to national prominence as a gun-safety activist. Hogg’s political organization, Leaders We Deserve, plans to invest \$20 million to support young candidates challenging “asleep-at-the-wheel” Democrats in safe seats. Hogg tells me the party’s post-Biden “realignment” isn’t primarily about ideology. “It’s: Do you want to fight or do you want to roll over and die?” Martin has publicly rebuked Hogg, insisting the DNC maintain its long-standing position of neutrality. On May 12, the DNC’s credentials committee voted to void the elections of Hogg and another party official for procedural reasons they said predated the controversy, setting up the prospect of Hogg’s losing his position.

In the meantime, a new breed of Democrat is stepping up. They’re younger, more digitally fluent, more working class. They speak American without a D.C. accent. “People who haven’t been politicians for 30 years can go into a nonpolitical space and be a real person,” Amanda Litman told me as she walked to pick her children up from day care. These new candidates can talk persuasively about the costs of housing and childcare, issues that probably haven’t affected your life much if you’ve been in Congress since 1995. “It’s not the magic words,” says Litman. “It’s that many of these people can’t be credible messengers.”

Some new ones may emerge from the younger generation of Democrats who were elected in the 2018 wave after Trump’s first victory, and are now running statewide. Mallory McMorrow, 38, and Haley Stevens, 41, are vying for Michigan’s open Senate seat. Angie Craig, 53, is running for Senate in Minnesota. Abigail Spanberger, 45, is running for Governor of Virginia. Representative Mikie Sherrill, 53, is running for Governor of New Jersey. “The fight is generational,” Sherrill says. As soon as she arrived in Congress in 2019, she told me, she encountered an “entrenched” cohort of “collegial” lawmakers who refused to update their strategic playbook because they kept waiting for politics to go back to the chummy inside game it had been pre-

2016. “Do I think we need a new generation of leaders? Yes,” she told me. “But guess what: I think we’re about to get it.”

When Greg Casar arrived at the Tucson rally for Sanders’ and Ocasio-Cortez’s Fighting Oligarchy tour, the line of spectators stretched so long that Casar’s Uber driver thought he was going to a concert. Organizers had expected 2,000 people at a high school gymnasium; he said more than 10 times that many showed up. “People are even more opposed to what Donald Trump is doing than eight years ago,” Casar told me, fiddling with his AirPods as he sat outside a committee markup in late April. “But they want a new kind of leadership from the Democratic Party.”

As party leaders in Washington debate how to move forward, their grassroots base is sick of waiting for them to figure it out. Frustrated liberals have founded roughly 1,400 local Indivisible groups since the election, including more than 600 in GOP congressional districts. More than 46,000 young people have signed up to run for office through Run for Something since November. To those who participated in the “Resistance” movement of the first Trump term, the grassroots rage feels different this time. It’s not just targeted at Trump; it’s also focused on the feeble Democrats and spineless institutions who have failed to effectively resist him.



Some Democratic officials have responded by copying Trump's own playbook. They're favoring nonpolitical podcasts over cable studios, burnishing their social-media game, showing up at football games and Coachella. They're trying to worry less about who they're offending and more about who they're reaching. Group chats of -Democratic lawmakers are full of delicate negotiations on how best to respond to the Trump presidency. "We recognize that the most important thing we can do is make this guy unpopular," says one lawmaker. They're sharing talking points and legal strategies, while weighing various acts of defiance against the potential for distraction. Internal discussions, says this lawmaker, are laser-focused on "figuring out what's tactically smarter."

Most Democrats expect a public outcry against Trump's policies will help them retake the House in 2026. Winning back the Senate will be tougher, with more Democrats on defense in battleground states. In the meantime, a shadow presidential primary is already taking shape, with hopefuls drawing different lessons from Trump's win and its aftermath. California Governor Gavin Newsom has started a podcast, featuring Trump allies like Steve

Bannon and Charlie Kirk as guests, and pivoted to the center in his day job, cracking down on homeless encampments and pushing to reduce health care benefits for undocumented immigrants. Barnstorming against oligarchy helped Ocasio-Cortez raise \$9.6 million in the first quarter of the year, rekindling speculation about her viability as a candidate for higher office. Cory Booker's marathon Senate speech protesting Elon Musk's cuts to the federal government was liked more than 350 million times on TikTok. And Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker railed against "do-nothing Democrats" in a speech in New Hampshire. As Pritzker put it: "The reckoning is finally here."

Democrats are coming around to a new mantra: winning the argument is less important than winning elections. If the path to victory means embracing economic populism, they'll do it. If they have to make room for new faces, then sayonara, old friends. If they need to tack to the center on some social issues, so be it. If winning requires doing more podcasts, or embracing Instagram influencers, or campaigning on permitting reform, they'll give it a try. Because now that Democrats have seen what a second Trump presidency looks like, they're relearning the lesson they should have known all along: only winning is winning.

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Audra McDonald Is Our Greatest Living Stage Actor

Alter is a senior correspondent at TIME. She covers politics, social movements, and generational change, and hosts TIME's Person of the Week podcast. She is also the author of [*The Ones We've Been Waiting For: How a New Generation of Leaders Will Transform America*](#). Her work for TIME has won a Front Page Award from the Newswoman's Club of New York and has been nominated for a GLAAD Media award.



If you happen to take your eyes off the stage during the first few minutes of *Gypsy* on Broadway, and turn instead to the aisle, you'll see a woman standing alone in the dark. She's in a velvet coat, holding a small dog, her face contorted into a grimace of ambition so fierce it looks something like rage, her eyes focused on the children dancing onstage as her hands twitch to the beat of the music. At first, nobody notices her, even though she is Audra McDonald, arguably the greatest living stage actor, even though she is

already in character as Mama Rose, the most famous and reviled stage mother in musical theater. Then, she calls out her first line (“Sing out, Louise!”) and every head turns in unison. She is the person they have come to see, and she had been standing there next to them all along.

“Rose snuck in,” she tells me, leaning back on a cushioned chair in her dressing room, four hours before curtain. Her hair, prepped for her wig, is tucked under a baseball cap, and she is wearing comfy clothes before getting into costume. “When all the rest of the mothers have been kicked out, she snuck in, went in front, checked out what was going on. She’s already miles ahead when the show starts.”

The same could be said, in some sense, of McDonald. After rumors of her casting spread last year—[“You know, people talk, people talk,” she said](#)—the announcement was met with excitement and anticipation. And since the show opened in December, she’s been garnering widespread praise, with at least one critic having a [“spiritual epiphany.”](#)

“When you talk about Greta Garbo, you think of that face. When you think about Ethel Merman, you hear that voice,” says Christine Baranski, who worked with McDonald on *The Good Fight* and *The Gilded Age*. “With Audra, it’s that lustrous presence.”

Gypsy is a musical fable that follows Mama Rose’s relentless pursuit of fame for her daughters throughout Depression-era America, resulting in her losing one, June, altogether and pushing the other, Louise, to become the burlesque dancer Gypsy Rose Lee. It’s a show about the American Dream, or, more precisely, it’s a show about a mother’s American Dream, one that for most of history could be expressed only through her children. The show, with its famed music by Jule Styne and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, is frequently referred to as the *King Lear* of Broadway, and Mama Rose is one of the meatiest roles available to a performer. “This is the Shakespeare of a musical theater woman’s career,” says Norm Lewis, who co-starred with McDonald in *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*, for which she won her fifth Tony. “This is the pinnacle.”

She’s been played by luminaries like Ethel Merman, Tyne Daly, Bernadette Peters, Angela Lansbury, and Patti LuPone in the past, but until now, Mama

Rose had never been played on Broadway by a Black actor. If anybody was going to do it, it was going to be McDonald. (LuPone's representative said the actor was "going to pass" on commenting for this story.)

McDonald is like the Meryl Streep of theater, except McDonald has more Tonys than Streep has Oscars. McDonald holds the record for most Tonys ever won by a performer, and is the only person to have a Tony in all four acting categories. And when her 11th nomination was announced on May 1, she officially became the most Tony-nominated performer in history, at just 54 years old.



And yet McDonald's record-breaking performance comes at a unique moment for American theater. More and more audiences seem to be coming to Broadway to see shows and actors they recognize from their screens. The biggest shows are still the old standbys—*Wicked*, *The Lion King*—and some

of the buzziest productions boast Hollywood names. Even as McDonald's *Mama Rose* puts theatergoers in seats—*Gypsy* took in a respectable \$1,891,769 in its highest-grossing week in January—it's still the TV and movie stars who are bringing the big money to Broadway. *Othello*, starring Denzel Washington and Jake Gyllenhaal, [ranked in \\$2,818,297](#) during a week in previews, making it the top-grossing play in Broadway history, only to be topped by George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*, which in May became the [first Broadway show to exceed \\$4 million](#) in a week. *Glengarry Glen Ross*, featuring Kieran Culkin and Bob Odenkirk, also crossed the \$2 million mark.

All of this makes McDonald's dominance even more remarkable; at a time when theater seems like it's being consumed by celebrity, her career represents a commitment to the old-fashioned principles of artistry. "She has some ability to access the rawest and most visceral emotional life and continue to sing," says Diane Paulus, who directed her in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. "That's what's mind-blowing."

[Buy a copy of the Audra McDonald cover here](#)

McDonald can walk down the street without being recognized, and she's mostly able to live her life without being accosted by fans. When audiences arrive at the Majestic Theatre, they're not coming to see her because she's famous, they're not there to take a photo or breathe the same air as a movie star; they're there to witness her raw talent. "It's not, Oh, let's look at this perfect object," says *Gypsy* director George C. Wolfe, who also directed McDonald in *Shuffle Along* as well as the movie [Rustin](#). Her talent "makes an audience feel compelled to become vulnerable in the presence of her character's vulnerability."

Sitting in her dressing room surrounded by four different bouquets, including roses from *Sunset Boulevard*'s [Nicole Scherzinger](#), widely assumed to be her main competition at the Tonys on June 8, I ask McDonald: What is talent? Is it inspiration? Is it 10,000 hours of practice? Is it, as entrepreneurs like to say, just hard work? She pauses for a second, thinking. "I think it's an open channel connection to the divine, whatever the divine means to you," she says quietly, preserving her voice. "Something coming

through, that energy, that source, God, whatever you call it. It's an open channel connection to that. Just a turnpike, no roads in the way."

Which is why this show has been marketed by only two words, telling you everything you need to know: "Audra/Gypsy." Musical theater's greatest performer taking on musical theater's greatest role.

McDonald has been singing and dancing onstage since she was 9. She was born in West Germany, where her father was serving in the military, but raised in Fresno, Calif., in the 1970s. Her father had been a high school band director before becoming associate superintendent of the Fresno school district, and her mother, an administrator at California State University, sang in the church choir. Her childhood home had both a piano and a jazz organ. "Being musical and having musicality was just what everybody did in my family," she says. McDonald didn't realize she was special until her father noticed that she sang louder than the other kids in the junior choir.

"One day after church, my mom and my dad had me matching pitches," she recalls. "They were whispering to each other. I remember thinking, What is this all about?" McDonald had been diagnosed as a hyperactive kid, she says, "and they were looking for ways to channel my energy." Her parents had just seen a show at the Fresno Dinner Theater, which had a junior company that performed before the main show.

Once she made the cut, she did Rodgers and Hammerstein, Irving Berlin, even *Gypsy*, playing one of the children in the little skit that opens the show (McDonald did not actually see the entire show when she was first in it as a child; the kids got to go home early). But when she was offered a role playing a servant girl, her parents forced her to decline.

At the time, she was devastated; looking back, however, she thinks their insistence was a gift. They worried that playing that part would have taught her, "Well, I can only play servants and I can only play enslaved people." Instead, refusing that role set her up for a lifetime of auditioning for interesting parts, "even though I didn't necessarily look the way people think I should look." If she wasn't cast, it wouldn't be because she didn't try out.

“That was instilled in me at a very early age, to not be the one to cut myself off from these roles.”

McDonald trained in classical music at Juilliard, which she recalls as an imperfect fit; in retrospect, she says, she should have studied drama. For a period after she graduated, McDonald struggled to get roles. She was told to make herself look as light as possible when she auditioned to play Julie in *Show Boat*, so “I had all this white makeup on me, to try to lighten my face up.” She auditioned for the ensemble of *Beauty and the Beast* and didn’t get the part.

Her first big role was Carrie in the 1994 revival of *Carousel*. She was 23. It was one of the first times that a Black actor was cast in a classic musical-theater role that had traditionally been seen as white. “It was just this huge thing, just mind-blowing for a lot of people,” she says. “Some people thought it was wrong and historically incorrect. And everybody’s always going to have an opinion, especially when it’s classics.” She won her first Tony for that role.

In the years since, colorblind casting has become far more normalized. “Now I just don’t think it’s thought of as such a big deal,” she says. Even though this production of *Gypsy* stars not only a Black Mama Rose but also Black daughters—making this a show about a Black family seeking vaudeville fame in the 1930s—McDonald frequently points out that not a single line has been changed from the original show. Wolfe thinks that the “boundary-breaking” nature of McDonald’s performance is the least interesting thing about *Gypsy*. “It shrinks the conversation,” he says. “Because the wonder is the talent, the wonder is the gift, the wonder is how hard she works. To discuss her exclusively within a parameter of race, or how she’s breaking through Broadway, that has more to say about Broadway than it has to say about Audra McDonald.”

But 30 years after *Carousel*, the conversation has not entirely moved on. “A talent as rare as Audra McDonald shouldn’t play a Black Rose. She should just play Rose,” [wrote columnist John McWhorter in the New York Times](#), adding that a Black woman seeking Shirley Temple-style stardom for her Black daughters would be “a delusion so quixotic that it would have to be

the story's central tragedy." After seeing her performance, McWhorter wrote a whole new piece: "[I've Changed My Mind. Audra McDonald Was Right.](#)"

Let me tell you about the time I acted with Audra McDonald. Well, first let me clarify. I was a student intern on *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* in the summer of 2011, and McDonald was the star. One of the other actors twisted her ankle during blocking, so for a week of rehearsals, I stood onstage and did the injured cast member's physical movements while she sat in the wings, icing her ankle, saying her lines, and singing her songs. At one point, my character was supposed to give a drink of water to McDonald's Bess. We didn't have props yet, so I pretended to hand McDonald a glass the way a toddler might present an imaginary cup at a tea party. She took it, and drank. She drank the water as if it were a full gulp of cold water on a hot day, as if she could see the droplets spilling down the side of the non-glass that I sloppily handed her, the glass that she invented. Then she wiped her chin, where the imaginary water had spilled.

To show up and work like this every rehearsal, every performance, every day, McDonald has become an emotional athlete. "She's a marathon runner," says Baranski. "She's a Navy SEAL."

McDonald arrives at least three hours before every show. She gets into her wig and makeup, stretches, and does her vocal warm-ups. Then, a half hour before the show begins, she needs total quiet. She asks that nobody speak to her unless it's an emergency. "It's almost like there's a bomb ... those things that implode before they explode? That's me," she says. "I'm clearing the way for me to go on her journey." (In the middle of all this, she also has to rub a pepperoni stick all over her hands, which helps keep the little dog in check onstage.) Then, five minutes before curtain, "I'm a little bit like a restless horse," she says, banging on her knee in a galloping beat, like, "Let's go."

And indeed McDonald's career has been nonstop, if not always a straight line. Two years after *Carousel* she won another Tony, for her performance in *Master Class*. A few years later she won her third, for *Ragtime*. By that point, she was one of only a handful of actors in history to win three Tonys in five years; she was 27. Five years later, she won again, for *A Raisin in the*

Sun, and earned an Emmy nomination for her role in the 2008 TV adaptation.



Still, she says, her onstage acclaim did not necessarily translate to roles beyond Broadway. “People only see our successes,” she says. She was trying to break into television, but “I was banging my head up against the wall.” There were “years and years where I couldn’t book a thing,” she says. “I couldn’t book a commercial.”

Finally, in 2007, as she was in the middle of a divorce from her first husband, she was cast as fertility specialist Naomi Bennett in *Private Practice*, Shonda Rhimes’ spin-off of *Grey’s Anatomy*. She commuted to L.A. for years, not wanting to uproot her young daughter Zoe from her home in New York. But eventually it became too much; she asked Rhimes to write her gracefully out of the show, so she could be back east for Zoe’s teenage years.

It was soon after McDonald returned from L.A. that she took on the part of Bess. That role demonstrated the lengths she would go to bring a character to life. She would repeatedly go back to the original texts, insisting her character have a scar on her face because that’s how she was described in the novel that inspired the play that inspired the opera. She interviewed sex workers and drug addicts in order to inform her emotional understanding of the role. Even months after the critics had come and gone, she was still doing more research to deepen her connection to Bess. One day, well after the show had opened, Paulus visited her backstage. “She was like, ‘I just watched this documentary,’” Paulus recalls. “We’d done a run at American Repertory Theater, we’d done a run on Broadway, and she’s still searching, she’s still learning.”

Two years later, she played Billie Holiday in *Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill* (Tony No. 6) and was nominated for an Emmy for her performance in the TV broadcast. (She has one Emmy for hosting a PBS special as well as two Grammys, so she needs only an Oscar to complete her EGOT.)

When she took a role in *Shuffle Along* in 2016, however, McDonald’s physically taxing career crashed against her family life. By then McDonald was married again, to Broadway actor Will Swenson, but she was surprised to learn during rehearsals that she was pregnant again at 45. It was a complicated pregnancy, full of swelling and water in the knees at a moment

when she had to do a lot of high-energy dancing. One night, while she was singing her big number, she started to hemorrhage onstage. “I felt it happen. I felt that gush,” she told me [when I interviewed her in 2023](#). “And I thought, ‘I just lost my baby, and I’m still singing.’”

It turned out McDonald did not lose her pregnancy that night; her younger daughter Sally is now 8. But after experiencing a second medical event onstage and leaving mid-performance to go to the hospital, she did have to back out of *Shuffle Along*. When the show closed shortly afterward, her pregnancy was blamed. That experience, she says, taught her about the pressures women face while trying to balance motherhood with a career in the theater. “It was very interesting to have people in the business come up to me afterwards and say things like, ‘Oh, wow, your baby literally stopped that show,’” she recalls. “That was really difficult and unnecessary.”

“It’s so hard to have the kind of career Audra had and to have a marriage and a family,” says Baranski. “She’s the total human being and the total performer. Often one thing suffers because of the other, but she brings it all together.”

In many ways, McDonald has lived Mama Rose’s dream. Rose is a woman who swallowed her own aspirations and put them into her girls, trying to save her daughters from a life where they “cook and clean and sit and die,” as Rose puts it. “People were always referring to Rose as some monster,” McDonald says. “I think she’s not a monster.”

McDonald doesn’t need her audiences to like Rose, but she needs them to understand her. “I think she’s a woman with very few options, big ambitions, big dreams, big trauma that she’s trying to run from,” she says. “She is trying, and she’s not succeeding.”

I ask McDonald if the show had made her think differently about her own girls. “So interesting having one that’s 8 and one that’s 24,” she says. “And when I started this show, it was before the election, and where are we now?” She does what can only be described as a full-body shudder. Sally wants to be a veterinarian or an astronaut or a tennis star, depending on the day. Zoe works at a theater and is playing bass for a new musical. “I want happiness and fulfillment and health for them. I want them to be able to be free, to be

who they are, to express that without fear of persecution,” she says. “Then the other dream is to recognize and respect all people and all different cultures and ways of being and ways of expressing and ways of living and ways of existing, and they do.” Then she exhales a long breath. “It’s a weird time.”

Performances of *Gypsy* began less than three weeks after the 2024 election, which not only dashed the dreams of those who hoped to elect the first Black woman President but also marked a culmination of a cultural backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion. Since then, President Trump has taken over as chair of the [Kennedy Center](#), where McDonald has performed on multiple occasions, and his Administration has slashed millions of dollars of arts funding, with [National Endowment for the Arts](#) grants being summarily canceled.

I ask McDonald how she’s staying sane through all of this. “I don’t know that I am,” she says. She flexes her fingers as if she’s making and unmaking a fist. It’s clear she has thoughts—a lot of them—but she’s weighing what to share. After a long silence, she says there’s only one way through the madness: “Let art bring people back to their humanity.”

McDonald has been deliberate about using her stature to create more opportunities for other Black performers; she co-founded Black Theatre United after George Floyd’s murder to combat systemic racism in commercial theater. But now, she’s using her politics to fuel her performance. “Night after night, the show has to feel fresh. So sometimes you have to find new veins to open,” she says. “Post-election, I didn’t have to search as hard for the veins. They were raw and coming right up.”

There’s a moment at the end of the show when Rose, rejected by her children, finally comes to terms with her thwarted ambitions for herself. She is the stage mother, and not the star, because she “was born too soon and started too late.” She sings in a frenzy, her face streaked with tears, as her lips quiver and her hands reach up spread-fingered toward a future she never got a chance to grasp: “When is it my turn?” And you can see it, in this sweating, crying, grasping moment: the clear turnpike, the open channel to the divine.



Normally, McDonald doesn't like to know who is in the audience. But on the night former Vice President Kamala Harris came to see the show in

February, somebody let it slip. That night, when she sang those words —“When is it my turn?”—it was about so much more than one stage mother’s vaudeville ambitions.

McDonald has based her Rose on her aunts, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, and whenever she sings this final song, “I always feel them coming up.” But the night Harris was in the audience was different. “I felt like I had roots shooting all the way down to the center of the earth, and then just shooting all the way up through my head,” as if she were channeling “every Black woman that’s ever lived,” she says. “That’s what it felt like to me that night that she was there.”

Given all of her accomplishments, it’s reasonable to wonder where she goes from here. How does one push past the pinnacle? For McDonald, though, it’s hard to look beyond *Gypsy*. She will return on the third season of *The Gilded Age* in late June, and is thinking of starting a concert tour soon, but the Broadway run was recently extended through October, and she has no plans to leave.

And if she breaks her own record at the Tonys? McDonald would be honored, she says, but the awards are not the point. “They don’t change your life per se,” she says. “They change people’s perception of you, people’s expectations of you.” When I ask her what she means, her face starts to transform into a Greek chorus of envy and concern. “‘Well, you’ve got a Tony, you must be something!’ Or: ‘You’ve got a Tony, and you didn’t get nominated this time, so now you’re a loser!’ Or: ‘Are you OK? Oh, God, you didn’t win, oh God!’”

Her face returns to normal. “That’s all being thrown on you: it’s perception and expectation,” she says. “It’s an incredible honor, but it’s almost like you have nothing to do with you actually winning a Tony. You can do your work, and that’s it. All I can do is do my work.”

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How We Chose the TIME100 Most Influential People in Philanthropy 2025

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



In May, partners of the Gates Foundation gathered in Manhattan to announce that the organization would spend \$200 billion over the next 20 years and then close its doors in 2045. Supporters, including [Michael Bloomberg](#), were on hand to mark the occasion. The scene, staged at Carnegie Hall, a venue built by one of America's great 19th century philanthropists, paid tribute to a

long tradition of American giving, while pointing to new ways of thinking that are shaping the 21st century.

For those reasons, we include Bloomberg, the U.S.'s single largest recorded donor in 2024, and Mark Suzman, set to lead the next chapter of the Gates Foundation, in our inaugural [TIME100 Philanthropy list](#). We launched the annual TIME100 21 years ago with the belief that individuals have the power to change the world, and in recent years we've expanded the franchise into areas poised to significantly shape our future—[AI](#), [Climate](#), [Health](#), and now Philanthropy. In many places, as global institutions are chastened and world governments reverse ambitions, philanthropy is stepping into the void.

[This project](#), representing individuals from 28 countries and assembled by TIME's reporters, editors, and contributors around the world, was led by Ayesha Javed. "At this pivotal moment, this list tells the stories of how generous donors and leaders of foundations and non-profits are directing funding into the communities that need it most," Javed says.

In the U.S. in particular, foundations are under increased pressure as the new Administration aims to remove the government from spaces where it previously played a substantial role. TIME100 Philanthropy honorees like [Elizabeth Alexander](#) and [Nick Allardice](#) are responding. As president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the largest funder of the arts and humanities in the U.S., Alexander says she focused on supporting "multi-vocal, multi-experiential democracy" in America. And Allardice, who leads GiveDirectly—one of the world's largest providers of unconditional cash transfers to people living in extreme poverty—says he is leaning the organization further into humanitarian work despite a \$20 million hit to funding due to USAID cuts. "Cash can be uniquely powerful when all the other supply chains are super disrupted," Allardice told TIME.



A new generation of donors is doing things their own way. [Katherine Lorenz](#), president of the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, was instrumental in creating the Giving Pledge Next Generation for descendants of Giving Pledge signatories to help shape their family giving, while Austrian heiress [Marlene Engelhorn](#) invited a council of fellow citizens to decide how to give away the bulk of her inheritance. Through their foundation Good Ventures and grantmaker Open Philanthropy, [Dustin Moskovitz and Cari Tuna](#) take a data-focused approach to direct funds to causes where they can do the most good. Meanwhile, in January, Stack Overflow co-founder [Jeff Atwood](#) announced his mission to give away half his wealth within five years. He next plans to make direct cash payments to residents of poor counties in West Virginia, North Carolina, and Arizona. “It’s not a handout,” he says. “It’s an investment in our fellow Americans.”

Collective giving is on the rise too. The grassroots movement allows individuals to pool resources for greater impact. According to the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, “giving circles” have contributed more than \$3.1 billion to social causes since 2017. [Hali Lee](#), founder of the Asian Women

Giving Circle and co-founder of the Donors of Color Network, argues the future of philanthropy belongs to community action.

The new leaders in philanthropy, many of whom are accustomed to great success in their own fields, are eager to see impact and see it now. As [David Beckham](#), a longtime UNICEF ambassador, says, “The competitive part of it is, I want to see wins.”

[See the full list here](#)

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

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Trump Discovers the War in Ukraine May Be Too Complicated to Fix

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



Coming out of his two-hour call with Vladimir Putin on Monday, Donald Trump made an unusual concession: Only Russia and Ukraine should be involved in talks to end the war between them, he wrote on social media, “because they know details of a negotiation that nobody else would be aware of.” The admission of ignorance seemed out of character for a President who often [claims to know](#) more than anyone else about a great

variety of subjects, and it may have set the peace process on a new and uncertain course.

From Putin's point of view, the gaps in Trump's knowledge about the war have always offered an advantage. One of the Russian leader's favorite negotiating tactics is to overwhelm his interlocutors with a torrent of historical theories and cherry-picked facts. Ukrainian officials and their European allies have tried to prepare Trump for such conversations with Putin by offering their own views on the complexity of the war and its history, but they have often run up against a wall of ignorance about Ukraine within the Trump administration.

"They're not read-in on a lot of the background," says a Western official who has discussed Ukraine at length during visits to the White House. On the Ukrainian side, a diplomat put the same frustration in starker terms: "It's this messianic attitude," the diplomat says of the U.S. approach to Ukraine under Trump. "Like they know everything and don't want to hear anything."

The Trump team's faulty command of the facts has at times been painfully obvious. In a call on Monday, Trump reportedly told a group of European leaders that Ukraine and Russia could begin ceasefire talks "immediately." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was also on the call, reminded him that these talks had begun a few days earlier, on May 16, in Istanbul. Trump's apparent lapse in memory led to a moment of "puzzled silence" on the line, according to Axios, which [reported the exchange](#).

Trump's lead envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Steve Witkoff, has had similar moments of confusion. In an interview in March, he could not name the regions over which the war is being fought. "These so-called four regions," he said, struggling to recall them. "Donbas, Crimea... You know the names."

A real estate tycoon with no formal diplomatic background, Witkoff has met with Putin several times this year, and the contrast in their level of knowledge about Ukraine has been striking. The Russian leader has a habit of lecturing his guests for hours about what he sees as the historical roots of the war. A few days before launching the invasion in 2022, Putin offered

one such disquisition to Olaf Scholz, then the Chancellor of Germany, who found it difficult to follow.

“It was a really bad experience to have this long debate with Putin,” Scholz recalled in an interview with TIME that spring. “And I was really arguing with him, saying: Please understand, if politicians start to look at history books, at where their borders had been before, then we will have only wars for hundreds of years.”

But Putin has long relied on nationalist and imperialist narratives to justify his actions, often citing the old historical tomes he is known to study obsessively. When asked last year to explain his decision to invade Ukraine, “Putin went on for a very long time, probably half an hour, about the history of Russia going back to the eighth century,” his interviewer, Tucker Carlson, later recalled. “And honestly, we thought this was a filibustering technique and found it annoying and interrupted him several times.”

Countering this technique at the negotiating table requires a grasp of the facts that few in the White House can readily muster. During his first presidential term, Trump [rarely read the briefing books](#) prepared for him by the intelligence community, which responded by condensing the information he needed onto a single sheet of paper with visual aids. Since his return to the Oval Office, he has only sat for about a dozen presentations of the President’s Daily Brief, far fewer than normal, according to an analysis [published in early May](#) by Politico.

In trying to expand Trump’s understanding of Ukraine, President Zelensky has repeatedly encouraged him and his senior aides to visit the country and witness the war firsthand. None have agreed to join Zelensky on one of his frequent trips into the war zone. In February, Vice President J.D. Vance declined one such offer, telling Zelensky he was not interested in taking a “propaganda tour.”

The apparent lack of interest from the White House has often frustrated career diplomats tasked with informing Trump’s decisions, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the relationship. The U.S. President’s main source of on-the-ground insight would normally be the U.S. embassy in Kyiv. But Ambassador Bridget Brink has struggled to gain influence within

the White House, these officials said. Brink stepped down from her post last month, having served in Kyiv through nearly three years of full-scale war.

“Unfortunately, the policy since the beginning of the Trump administration has been to put pressure on the victim, Ukraine, rather than on the aggressor, Russia,” she [wrote](#) last week of her decision to resign.

After Trump’s call with Putin, it seems the White House may no longer be interested in pressuring either side to end the war. Trump did not threaten sanctions against Russia for refusing to accept a ceasefire, nor did he promise any further U.S. engagement in the peace process.

“It’s not our people, it’s not our soldiers,” he [said on Wednesday](#) in the Oval Office. “It’s Ukraine and it’s Russia.” The American effort to engineer a peace between them has so far failed to produce the clean and easy win that Trump had promised. It has, in a word, turned out to be a lot more complicated than he thought.

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\$25 Butter and \$40 Eggs: The Search for Food in Gaza

Wright is an Editorial Producer for TIME.



When Reham Alkahlout, a mother of four, scours the markets in Al-Nasr, Gaza, she is gripped by a gnawing anxiety spurred by rows of scarce stalls, the acrid scent of burnt wood and plastic, and a scattering of overpriced essentials—if any are available at all.

Once vibrant with produce and daily bustle, markets have been hollowed out by months of siege, bombardment, and economic collapse. Since Israeli forces resumed offensive operations on March 18, the price of flour has climbed by 5,000 percent, residents say, and cooking oil by 1,200 percent.

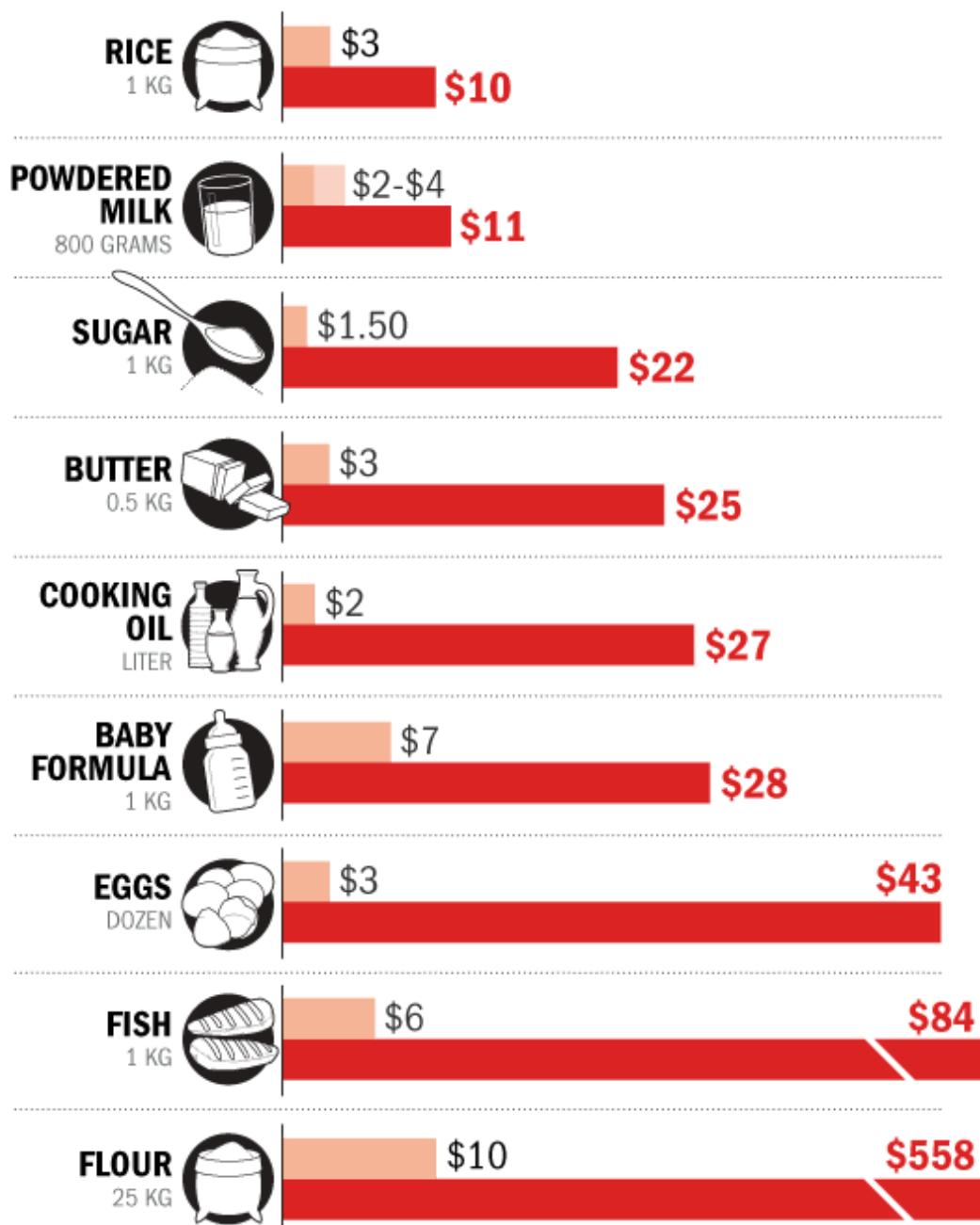
“No one can afford to buy,” says Alkahlout, 33, a psychological counselor working at a school housing the displaced. “Sometimes we are forced to purchase small amounts just to feed our children.”

Famine, which has loomed over the enclave for much of the 19-month war, is now imminent, according to international aid groups. The groups, led by the U.N., base their assessment on a complex formula known as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. The most recent [report](#), released May 12, found the whole of Gaza qualified as an “Emergency,” or at critical risk of famine. Some 470,000 residents (22 percent) had reached “Catastrophe,” defined as “starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels.”

Food prices tell the same story of scarcity. Residents of Gaza’s north say a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of rice that cost \$3 in February is now \$10. A cucumber costs 7 times more. Baby formula has quadrupled and the price of a can of peas is up 1,000 percent. Some items, like fruit and chicken, simply cannot be obtained.

Grocery prices in Gaza

Gaza City area prices for select food items
before and **after** Israel's March 18 offensive



TIME

Israel controls what enters the Strip, and imposed a total blockade on aid on March 2 with the collapse of a two-month ceasefire. *The New York Times* [reported](#) on May 13 that specialists in the Israeli military share the assessment of aid groups that starvation has become an immediate danger.

“The first symptom of hunger is pain,” says Dr. John Kahler, who worked in Gaza last year as co-founder of MedGlobal, a Chicago-based NGO that provides emergency response and health programs to vulnerable communities. “And that pain doesn’t go away. It isn’t like it gets better or you forget it.”

Civilians interviewed by TIME from Gaza described an increasingly desperate search for basic necessities. Alwaheidi, who resides in Sheikh Redwan near Gaza City, fears the possibility that, any day now, she may be unable to provide for her children. Nineteen months of war, triggered by the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks that killed approximately 1,200 people inside Israel and took some 250 captive, has resulted in over 50,000 Palestinian [deaths](#) and the destruction of much of Gaza—including the systems that fed residents during previous wars.

Collapse of Communal Kitchens

Community kitchens in Gaza, once a critical safety net for thousands of families, have been decimated. The communal spaces offer a hub for volunteers to prepare and distribute free meals, but only a fraction remain [operational](#), leaving massive gaps in emergency food provision.

With cooking gas prices increasing by 2,400% and flour by over 5,600%, according to residents, the facilities can no longer prepare food at scale. “The whole concept of community kitchens that we started during the war is almost entirely going to shut down because there are no supplies anymore,” says Juliette Touma, director of communications for UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). “The prices of everything have increased massively.”



World Central Kitchen (WCK), a nonprofit that provides meals to communities impacted by disasters and humanitarian crises, on May 7 [announced](#) it was forced to halt cooking in Gaza. “The borders need to open for World Central Kitchen to be able to feed people in need,” said WCK Gaza response director Wadhah Hubaishi. “If given full access to our infrastructure, partnerships, and incoming supplies, we are capable of providing hungry families in Gaza with 500,000 meals a day.”

Looting

Thousands of aid trucks [wait](#) at the Gaza border, blocked by Israel, which maintains that Hamas—governing the enclave since its 2007 election win—is diverting much of the aid. “During the war, Israel allowed humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza, and facilitated it,” [said](#) Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar in a statement. “But Hamas stole that aid from the people and earned its money from it.”

Residents say they fear looting, which tends to worsen with shortages.

“About a week ago, vegetable shops in the Al-Nasr, Al-Shati, and Sheikh Radwan areas were robbed,” says Reham Alkahlout, a mother and resident of Al-Nasr, also in Gaza’s north. “How can a family breadwinner meet the family’s needs when there is no monthly income? Some people resort to theft,” she says. The Associated Press [reported](#) that both armed groups and civilians have participated in looting aid warehouses and shops in northern Gaza. Hamas has acknowledged executing individuals accused of looting and announced a 5,000-member force to combat armed criminals.

UNRWA’s main complex in Gaza has been [targeted](#) by looters, as have markets and community kitchens. “We’ve seen individual looters. We’ve also seen organized crime, and we’ve lost quite a lot of aid that was taken by the looters,” says Touma, the spokesperson. “At the same time, when the ceasefire started and we started seeing more aid coming in, the looting decreased significantly.”

The Maternal and Child Health Crisis

The impact of Gaza’s food shortages falls with particular severity on pregnant women and children. Since the aid blockade began in March, 57 children have reportedly [died](#) from the effects of malnutrition, according to the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Health Ministry.



A malnourished mother struggles to produce nutritious breast milk. Their diets are extremely limited, consisting mainly of whatever sparse rations they can obtain, often lacking the “very, very specific protein and micronutrients and vitamins for their children to thrive,” says Kahler of MedGlobal, which has two nutrition centers still open, supplying caloric dense food to infants to mothers. “Most of these surviving women and children haven’t had a real night’s sleep in over 18 months. The accumulated effects of sleep deprivation on decision making and metabolic disease are enormous.”

The same reality confronts every family. “We go to sleep every day fearing that we will lose a member of our family,” says Alwaheidi. “And we do not know how long we will be able to provide food for our children.”

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The Challenge of Overhauling FEMA In a Climate Changed World

Shah is a reporter at TIME.



Severe storms hit the Pittsburgh area earlier this week—killing three and causing widespread power outages in the region.

It's the latest in a string of deadly storms in the U.S.—at least 24 people were killed after storms hit the south and midwest in [early April](#), and at least 32 people were killed when storms swept through much of the country in [mid-March](#). Following both storms, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), stepped in to provide assistance to individuals and counties.

While Pittsburgh might not need FEMA aid, if the Trump Administration has it their way, many communities across the country could be left in the lurch on disaster recovery aid, as the administration looks to dismantle the agency and shift disaster response onto states. And climate change is only making it more complicated.

The reality of leaving disaster response to states would be “devastating,” says Allison Reilly, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Maryland. “FEMA exists because there are times when the state can simply not respond.”

Trump first posed the idea of overhauling FEMA while visiting North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in January. “I’d like to see the states take care of disasters, let the state take care of the tornadoes and the hurricanes and all of the other things that happen. And I think you’re going to find it a lot less expensive. You’ll do it for less than half and you’re going to get a lot quicker response,” he said.

One of his first executive orders was establishing a council to assess the effectiveness of the disaster response agency. Just days before the Pittsburgh storm, Trump appointed 13 people—including Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem—to review FEMA. The group is expected to submit a report to the president [within 180 days](#), according to the executive order.

Trump’s move to dismantle the agency comes as extreme weather events are only becoming more common—and more costly. In 2024, the U.S. saw 27 weather and climate disasters with at least \$1 billion in damages each—second only to 2023, which had 28 billion-dollar events. And researchers predict an [above-average hurricane season](#) is on the horizon.

“There’s a tremendous opportunity for national emergency management capability to invest in... the impacts of climate change, and how can we better prepare,” says Jeff Schlegelmilch, associate professor of professional practice and director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Columbia Climate School.

FEMA wasn't designed to meet our changing climate. "FEMA and the structure of disaster response and its inception was really designed to handle maybe one or two major disaster recoveries at a time. And currently there's over 100," says Schlegelmilch. "The mechanisms of disaster response recovery have vastly outgrown [FEMA's capabilities]."

Traditionally, FEMA has worked alongside state officials—not independent of them. The agency does more than just give out money: FEMA deploys experts in disaster response and recovery and maintains stockpiles of emergency equipment. Outsourcing this to states would prove to be more expensive, according to research from [the Atlantic Council](#)—and could lead to states bidding for emergency supplies and expertise in the event of a natural disaster.

In the absence of FEMA, states would have to hire their own disaster response experts to be on standby. "It means that every state has to have such a large body of people who could respond to a disaster, but for exceedingly rare events," says Reilly. "You're going to need a lot of people on staff with nothing to do for a long period of time until disaster happens. Or you're going to have states who are just completely ill prepared, which is probably more likely to happen."

Larger states—like California or Texas—might have the funding to pick up the slack, but smaller states simply would not have the capacity to respond to natural disasters.

Experts say that FEMA has very real issues that need to be addressed—the agency's staff is stretched thin across an increasing number of disasters, and the agency often [leaves behind](#) low-income survivors in disaster response.

"The need for emergency management reform is something that's actually been called on by people of all walks of life. If we can rebrand and create something for 21st century challenges, we should," says Schlegelmilch.

But getting rid of the system without a meaningful replacement will only cause harm, says Schlegelmilch. "That shock [for] municipalities from that sudden change of one system to suddenly nothing being there [would] be very measurable in terms of lost lives and livelihoods."

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Gerry Connolly Dies At Age 75. Here's How the Democratic Congressman Fought For the Federal Government

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



Democratic Rep. Gerald “Gerry” Connolly of Virginia died on Wednesday at the age of 75.

His family [said](#) in a statement posted on his X account that Connolly died Wednesday morning in his home while surrounded by his loved ones. The statement didn’t share a cause of death. Connolly had [announced](#) in

November 2024 that he was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus, and would be undergoing chemotherapy and immunotherapy. Last month, he [said](#) his cancer had returned, and that this would be his last term in Congress.

“We were fortunate to share Gerry with Northern Virginia for nearly 40 years because that was his joy, his purpose, and his passion,” his family said in the statement on Wednesday. “His absence will leave a hole in our hearts, but we are proud that his life’s work will endure for future generations. We thank you for your love of Gerry, and know he loved you all so much.”

Connolly, a champion for federal workers and harsh critic of the Trump Administration, was elected to Congress in 2008. Here are some key actions that he took while in office.

He advocated for federal employees

Connolly, whose district is home to many federal employees, was known for his outspoken advocacy for the federal workforce.

He was a cosponsor of the [2010 Telework Enhancement Act](#), which mandates that federal agencies permit some of their employees to telework at least one day each week. He also pushed for legislation to provide federal employees with a raise, reintroducing the [Federal Adjustment of Income Rates \(FAIR\) Act](#) each year.

Connolly holds a forum each year for federal employees to help keep them informed about their benefits during the federal government’s Open Season, according to his [website](#).

The Virginia congressman fiercely defended government workers in the wake of President Donald Trump’s election as the Administration sought to cut federal funding and employees.

“The federal workforce is our country’s single greatest asset,” Connolly said in a [statement](#) when introducing the FAIR Act for a final time in January. “Even after serving dutifully through a global pandemic and

enduring the Trump Administration's cruel personal attacks, unsafe work environments, pay freezes, government shutdowns, sequestration cuts, furloughs, and mindless across-the-board hiring freezes, they come to work every day in service to the American people."

He took on a leadership role on the House Oversight Committee

Last year, Connolly was [elected](#) by Democrats to serve as the ranking member of the House Oversight Committee.

In that position, Connolly [urged](#) inspectors general to investigate the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), a controversial Trump Administration initiative led by [Elon Musk](#) that focuses on [reducing federal spending and bureaucracy](#).

Connolly's ascension to the leadership position was tinged with controversy, as he defeated Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York to win the role amid a push by some Democrats for a younger generation to take on more power within the party. In April, when announcing the return of his cancer, Connolly said he would step down as ranking member.

He criticized President Donald Trump

Connolly vocally criticized Trump throughout his time in the White House and joined the majority of Democrats in supporting both efforts to impeach the President during his first term.

"To extort a foreign country to investigate your political opponent is an unconstitutional abuse of power. To solicit foreign interference in an American election is an unconstitutional abuse of power," Connolly [said](#) on the House floor in support of Trump's first impeachment in 2019. "The delicate balance of power that underpins our democracy is threatened when a President disregards the Constitution by obstructing Congress to cover up illegal behavior. In doing that, President Trump violated his oath."

He supported abortion and LGBTQ+ rights

Connolly was a supporter of both abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

He condemned the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, saying it had "plunged the country into a reproductive care crisis" and put the U.S. on "a dark and dangerous path."

He was also an original cosponsor of the Equality Act, which would explicitly bar discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation in employment, public education, housing, public accommodations, credit, jury service, and federally funded programs.

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Behind the New Biden Book That Was Roiling Washington Even Before His Cancer Disclosure

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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.

Joe Biden often forgot top White House aides' names, occasionally resorting to shorthand descriptions of roles like "Press" for longtime communications chief Kate Bedingfield. There was discussions of him possibly needing a [wheelchair](#) in a second term, and he sometimes ate dinner as early as 4:30 p.m. He seemed completely unfazed by a jarring

debate performance that sent the Democrats into a [spiral](#) and put donations on ice. While attending a glitzy Hollywood fundraiser for his crumbling re-election campaign, he at one point [blanked](#) when face to face with George Clooney, one of the biggest stars in the world.

These are just *some* of the details contained in the stunning and excellent *Original Sin: President Biden's Decline, Its Cover-Up, and His Disastrous Choice to Run Again* from journalists Alex Thomason of Axios and Jake Tapper of CNN. Through more than 200 interviews with Biden insiders after Election Day, Democratic operatives, and frustrated loyalists who feel betrayed, the pair paints a damning portrait of an insular President whose team coddled him to the point of severely limiting his evening bookings, shielding him from bad news, and letting him continue to spout information that was objectively not true.

To say this book has been the talk of the town would undersell its current buzzy dominance. Even when Biden revealed a prostate cancer diagnosis on Sunday, it was hard to digest the news outside of the conversation reignited by *Original Sin* about how much Biden and his team were hiding about Biden's capabilities to continue the job for four more years.

Before the announcement of that cancer diagnosis, I sat down with Thompson for a chat about this project, which is out today. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

TIME: What was Biden's team thinking?

Thompson: I think in every political organization, regardless of party, there's a tension of loyalty to your principal and loyalty to the bigger mission. In Biden's camp, the tug of war clearly went to the side that cared more about him and themselves than they cared about the larger mission, the White House and the country. And I think that's how they rationalized, not just having him run for reelection, but rationalizing that this guy could do the job for four more years. Many believed that it eventually would've precipitated into a constitutional crisis because he would've not been up to the job. And the people around him were not willing to admit it.

None of them confronted the principal. That's telling about the culture that was created in which questioning or stress-testing created suspicions of disloyalty. Who created that culture?

It's a combination of Joe and Jill, and then I'd say the two enforcers around them, which was Anthony Bernal on the Jill Biden side and Annie Tomasini on the Joe Biden side. These are people who are obscure and you have never heard of.

But they are seen not just in White Houses but at Royal Courts throughout world history. The ultimate loyalists who believe that at the end of the day, they are the only ones who have the principal's true interests at heart. Questioning them means you have a target on your back.

It's also on Joe Biden, Jill Biden, and their immediate inner circle for not creating a culture where dissent was welcomed.

Which runs exactly counter to Joe Biden's experience as Vice President, where a team of rivals in Doris Kearns Goodwin's framework was encouraged during his first eight years in the White House.

In fact, Joe Biden, by Obama and his telling, was instructed to dissent in meetings in order to stir the pot so that people would come off their risk-averse positions and really engage, because in these high level meetings on policy and on politics, people are always looking over their shoulder for someone to try to use a position to knife them or to hurt their standing with the President. Over time, anyone who really questioned the theology of Biden was eventually kicked out, and the only people remaining in that inner circle are the truest of true believers.

Did Joe Biden think he was up to another term?

Yes. That's why I think people want to point the finger at Jill and like the other aides. At the end of the day, this was Joe Biden's decision. Joe Biden thought he deserved to be reelected. Joe Biden believed he could have done it. There's always been a caricature—a true one—of Joe Biden as a guy

with a chip on his shoulder, but by 2022, 2023, that chip had grown to the size of a boulder.

You describe a Politboro around the President. Did they ultimately serve the President or did they serve themselves?

We used that because we did think it was apt, but people inside the administration would refer to them that way.

They also referred to Ron Klain as the Prime Minister.

When you have a President whose energy is limited, whose time is limited, whose bandwidth is limited, then a lot of decisionmaking filters down. And there were big decisions being made that people who had served in previous administrations and were surprised that Joe Biden was not involved in. One Cabinet member put it to us this way, and this is more so the case in 2023, 2024: the President is making the decisions, but if you present the decisions in a certain way, often it's not really a decision.

People have told us that they would spend as much time planning how to present decisions to Biden to make sure they could be done quickly and often would try to make it binary. That was the case as early as 2022. And that process became even more so the case 2023, 2024, which is also part of the reason why the circle shrank and shrank and shrank.

What was the relationship with the Vice President?

So Kamala Harris always wanted to say she was always in the room. That was not always true.

Why not?

Biden is a guy who likes people he's known for a long time. He hasn't known her for a long time. That being said, she voluntarily made herself one of the biggest validators of Biden's health. After Robert Hur's report, she went out there and said, "He's completely on it." She didn't have to do that. Her comments did not age well.

Some of the details in this book are frankly damning. For instance, Biden taking a whole day to nap at Camp David during debate prep. What happened?

Beyond their own self-interest and Biden's ego? If you believe that Donald Trump is an existential threat to democracy, to the republic, it's very easy to rationalize anything. A lot of people around Joe Biden believe an 86-year-old Joe Biden is still better than Donald Trump. And I think a lot of Democrats agree with them.

Is that healthy for democracy?

No. We have a long-time Biden aide who said very explicitly all that mattered was that he win and then he could disappear and only have an occasional moment of a sign of life. And that when you vote for someone, you're voting for their advisers, too. But these are unelected people. If you think Trump is a threat to democracy, you can even rationalize doing things that could arguably be seen even by your own colleagues as undemocratic.

Why this project?

So I had been covering Biden's age going back to 2021, but especially starting in 2023, people were leaking that they were concerned not just about the reelection campaign, but about the four years after the campaign. After Nov. 5, Jake Tapper and I felt two things. One, the most important moment of this entire campaign was when Joe Biden decided to run for reelection.

There wasn't really a moment where that was decided. It was just always assumed, right?

Well, Joe Biden did at one point say, "We're going, right?" There was no hinge point. The most important decision of the 2024 campaign was Joe Biden deciding he was going to run for reelection. The second thing that both Jake Tapper and I thought was there is more to the story than what's been reported before. And people might be fine to say the truth. When we embarked on the project, we didn't know if that was going to be the case. I feel like I only got 10% of what happened at the time.

What do you make of the Bidens' plural pushback and preemptive prebuttal of this book?

It's apt to say Bidens plural in the same way that aides now refer to their post-presidential office. Not his post-presidential office.

That wasn't by accident.

You look at a lot of the aides in the post-presidential office, a lot of them are either from the First Lady's office or connected to the First Lady. They feel that he had a good presidency, but his legacy is going to be tarnished for the next few years in Democratic Party circles. Their prebutting, it speaks to the denial within that inner circle that our reporting with over 200 interviews really demonstrates.

What role did Dr. Biden play in the march towards reelection until it ended? Did she want a second term?

Absolutely. And her top aide repeatedly would talk about things they would do in a second term, trips they wanted to take, goals they wanted to do. Her evolution is interesting because she used to be a reluctant political spouse, then became probably the most enthusiastic one. She had no strong policy views, but she did want to stay in the trappings of power. At the end of the day, Joe Biden made the decision, but she was completely on board and also kept it going.

You were one of the first people to be out there with reporting on the President's decline, which was in plain sight in the rear view mirror. How did we become so desensitized to it?

There's a difference between someone making a meme of him stumbling up the steps of Air Force One and him having moments of not being capable behind the scenes. I think it was easier to dismiss or rationalize some of those public moments. I think the more troubling things were actually happening behind the scenes. I could have written a story every single day about *Biden made a gaffe*, *Biden is old*. My stories were about what was going on behind the scenes. Aides were frustrated because the President's

schedule was so limited to the hours between 10 and 4, and it was very difficult to schedule any sort of public event outside those hours.

Dinner at 4:30 is a pretty damning detail.

Those schedules that were shared were only shared after Election Day because even the people who knew that something was wrong or that he wasn't necessarily up to four more years still thought this is better than Trump.

Turning to the Vice President here, Biden referred to her as a work in progress. Why did he pick her if he didn't think she was up for the job?

It's a great question because even some of his top aides when we were reporting this book said that the actual original sin is not him running again. It's picking her. And there are a lot of people within Biden world that feel that that decision was made for political expediency.

The truth is that his heart was with Gretchen Whitmer because, of those two, Gretchen Whitmer is more of a Biden Democrat. So even once they won, there was this culture of "Yeah, help her, but don't go out of your way" because some people thought it was another sort of instance of disloyalty.

The book reads like a tragedy. Was this avoidable? Could Joe Biden have sidestepped the sad ending of this? Or was this preordained?

It was avoidable in the fact that Joe Biden could not have run again and decided to settle for one term. But was Joe Biden based on his entire biography, capable of doing that? I don't know.

So the toughest square foot of real estate in American politics is Joe Biden's head. And you spent a lot of time there. Why did he think he should have run for a second term?

Your greatest strength is your greatest weakness. Joe Biden's greatest strength is his perseverance. It's your tragedy through political setbacks and

eventually his never quitting. The real answer of why Joe Biden ran for reelection is he thought he deserved it; he just doesn't ever quit.

A through line of this reporting that I hadn't really considered was the Beau Biden situation where they successfully concealed his health challenges, which may have taught them the wrong lessons. Walk me through that process.

Based on the Bidens' own memoirs, in August of 2013, Beau Biden goes in for brain surgery and they find a brain tumor and it's glioblastoma, and they don't get it all out. Six months later, while he's still the sitting Attorney General of Delaware, they have his doctor say he has a clean bill of health even though he's going to be the Attorney General for another year. During that year, he stops doing interviews, his speech is slipping, his energy is basically non-existent. And the Bidens believe in this power of positive thinking, "We're gonna' get through this. He's not gonna die. He's fine, he's gonna be Governor or President."

There is a world if Beau Biden does not get cancer, he is elected Governor of Delaware in 2016, which he'd already declared for, and then runs in the 2020 primary. And Beau Biden is president in 2021. A lot of Biden people still talk about it that way as the great 'What if?' So this combination of the power of positive thinking and the Biden just ethos of "it's none of your business," which can very quickly turn into you're covering up something that should be public knowledge. And that is what happened in 2014.

There was no reckoning with concealing Beau Biden's terminal disease. Instead, there was an outpouring of grief and empathy. They got away with it because there was no reckoning with that decision. That experience made them even more bunkered and them-against-the-world.

Do they realize what they did? Or are they still in denial?

Well, denial sometimes means you know it, but you can't bring yourself to say it.

Do they know it?

I don't know. They are certainly in denial. They believe he could have won. They believe he could have served another four years. Sometimes I think it's *protest too much*. And there are a lot of people not in that inner circle, but in the White House and around them who feel that they are not in denial. And they do recognize that maybe they should have spoken up or maybe they should have confronted him, at least had the conversation. No one, because of the culture around Biden, got in his face and said, "Hey, maybe you're not up for this. Not just the campaign, but for the next four years."

There weren't many people willing to do that. Not because there not smart people, but because they felt that doing so would hurt their own internal standing

What has that bunker mentality done for folks to this day?

A common thread through people that Jake and I both talked to was some of them felt they were like coming out of a fog and replaying scenes in their head of "When should I have known?" Or "When should I have realized that this was a bigger deal?" Or "At what point was his being old turn into something different?" I think some of them felt—Joe Biden's decision, what else are they gonna' do?

What does history ultimately write about Joe Biden?

A lot of it depends on what happens with the second Trump term because Biden himself framed his entire presidency as hinging on defeating Trumpism. And the fact that Trump came back makes it look like a failure because he was the one who set those stakes. Despite passing significant pieces of legislation, despite an effective, very quick rollout of the Covid vaccine, and other things that could arguably age well, one of the central questions of this book is: How did Trump win? And we felt that this was actually the most important answer to that question.

What's the first line of Joe Biden's obituary

At the moment? The 46th President—between the two terms of Donald Trump.

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How Doctors Treat Aggressive Prostate Cancer Like Joe Biden's

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](#).



In a statement from his personal office on May 18, former President Joe Biden revealed he has an aggressive form of prostate cancer that has spread to his bones. “While this represents a more aggressive form of the disease,

the cancer appears to be hormone-sensitive which allows for effective management,” his office said in a statement. “The President and his family are reviewing treatment options with his physicians.”

Recent [studies](#) show that survival for men with prostate cancer that has spread to the bone is just under two years. But this form of cancer, though aggressive, can sometimes be controlled. Here’s what oncologists who treat prostate cancer say are the most common strategies for treating a cancer like Biden’s, and some of the challenges.

The latest ways to curb aggressive prostate cancer

“The good news is this: we have now entered an era of different treatments that I call therapy intensification where we are trying to attack cancer with a multi-modality approach,” says Dr. Maha Hussain, deputy director of the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “We can come up with a significant prolongation of life by comparison to when I entered the field.” She has seen patients with prostate cancer that has spread survive and “live many, many years.”

Most prostate cancer is fueled by the male hormone testosterone, so the most effective strategies to control it starve the cancer by cutting off its supply, say experts. Historically, doctors have removed the testes—the main source of the hormone—but today, pills and injections can suppress testosterone not just in the testes but in other organs that produce small amounts, such as the adrenal glands, as well. Doctors also now add chemotherapy to hormone-suppression to better control cancer growth.

Exactly which combinations of treatments are right for Biden will depend on whether his cancer is new or if it was previously diagnosed and recently re-emerged. Either scenario is possible, say experts.

Read More: [*The Race to Explain Why More Young Adults Are Getting Cancer*](#)

With respect to having prostate cancer initially diagnosed at such an aggressive state, after it has already spread, “I don’t think there is any reason to think this could not be the natural history of prostate cancer in an older person,” says Dr. Robert Figlin, cancer center director at Cedars-Sinai Cancer Center. “And this would not [indicate] something that was missed or mismanaged in past years. This is certainly something that can occur in the course of a male’s life—it’s not unusual to present in this way.” Many older men are diagnosed with aggressive disease, with [studies](#) showing that about 20% of prostate cancer cases are diagnosed in men 75 years and older, and that men 70 and older tended to have [higher Gleason scores](#), an indicator of the cancer’s aggressiveness, at diagnosis. (Biden’s Gleason score is 9, his office said in the statement, indicating a more aggressive cancer.) “Prostate cancer can sit dormant for years and suddenly decide to wake up,” says Hussain. “I’ve seen all kinds of cases—all shades of grey.”

Treatment options also depend on a patient’s overall health. Other conditions a person might have can affect their ability to tolerate the therapies and side effects. “We have to take into account other diseases a man may have, other medical conditions that may be life-limiting, goals that man has in terms of longevity and quality of life, and other medications he may be taking,” says Dr. Michael Morris, prostate cancer section head at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

What about immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy—an exciting new treatment that harnesses the immune system to fight certain cancer types—is so far not effective against prostate cancer. While it has been successful in slowing melanoma, breast, lung, kidney and bladder cancers, and lymphoma, prostate cancer remains relatively hidden from the immune system, making it what doctors call a “cold” cancer. “I’d rather call it a sneaky cancer,” says Hussain. “Prostate cancer cells literally sit inside the bone marrow next to the white blood cells,” which are immune cells. “The white blood cells can’t see it, so unlike other cancers, prostate cancer has still not been responsive to immunotherapies.”

Read More: [A New Immune Treatment May Work Against Several Cancer Types](#)

However, while current immunotherapy strategies may not be as effective against prostate cancer, new immune-based interventions are being explored, says Morris. “For now, for a patient who presents today with prostate cancer, there is no real role for immunotherapy,” he says. “But there are many ways of manipulating the immune system to activate against prostate cancer. If you ask me in another couple of years, we will have a quite a different message.”

Doctors are also exploring whether introducing chemotherapy earlier, along with hormone-suppressing treatments could improve their chances of controlling the cancer and preventing it from spreading and becoming more aggressive. “One of the most important questions for patients with newly diagnosed metastatic disease would need to answer is whether they need docetaxel chemotherapy in addition to [hormone suppressing] therapy,” says Dr. Timothy Daskivich, associate professor of urology at Cedars-Sinai. “Data suggests that patients with higher volume metastases benefit the most from docetaxel. If these patients don’t get it up front, it could be a missed opportunity.”

Screening for prostate cancer

Prostate cancer screening—done with a blood test for prostate specific antigen (PSA), a marker of cancer cells—has helped to lower deaths from the disease. But the screening has been controversial, since prostate cancer generally grows slowly and the test can pick up signs of benign prostate growth, which also occurs as men age.

However, the American Cancer Society currently recommends that men with average risk of prostate cancer get screened beginning at age 50, if they are expected to live at least 10 more years, and that men with higher risk, including African-American men and those with a father or brother diagnosed with the disease, start earlier, at age 45. The [U.S. Preventive Services Task Force](#) recommends that most men stop screening at age 70, since at that time, men may be more likely to die of causes other than

prostate cancer, and the risks of over-treating slow-growing cancers may outweigh the benefits.

A legacy of advocacy for new approaches to cancer

As vice president under President Barack Obama, Biden led the Cancer Moonshot to spur research into new treatments. As president in 2022, he set a nationwide goal of reducing cancer death rates by 50% over 25 years. The quest was personal for Biden, whose son Beau died in 2015 of brain cancer at age 46.

“Cancer touches us all,” he wrote in an [Instagram post](#) on May 19. “Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places. Thank you for lifting us up with love and support.”

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7 Signs It's Time to Take Your Memory Issues Seriously

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



If the neurologist Dr. Daniel Lesley sees 10 patients a day, at least half ask him the same question: Are the brain lapses they're experiencing a normal part of aging? Or should they be worried?

“People have an absolute terror of losing their memory and thinking they’re losing themselves,” says Lesley, who works at Remo Health, a virtual dementia care company. “They don’t know what’s normal, what’s potentially a sign of something bad, and what’s reversible.”

Just like every other organ in the body, the brain changes as you get older. Occasional, subtle memory problems—like not remembering where you parked at Costco—are usually no big deal. “Part of normal aging is paying less attention to details, and more attention to patterns and dynamics,” Lesley says. “It may also become more difficult to access things quickly,” like names and certain words.

When sporadic trouble becomes a regular occurrence, however, and other memory issues pop up—like repeating questions or missing appointments—it’s time for an evaluation. If you’re not sure, ask a spouse, friend, or adult child, suggests Dr. Zaldy S. Tan, director of the memory and healthy aging program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. “Have a conversation: ‘Have you noticed me repeating anything or asking the same questions? Have you noticed me misplacing things more often?’ Because we’re not necessarily the best judge of our memory—we don’t remember what we forget,” he says.

If you decide to make an appointment, it helps to be prepared. Don’t just tell your doctor you’re getting forgetful, Tan advises; everyone has the occasional senior moment, no matter their age. Log your memory problems in a journal that you take to the visit. That way, “you can be specific about what you’re forgetting, how often it happens, and how consequential these things are,” he says.

We asked brain health experts to share the signs that it’s time to take your memory problems seriously.

You have trouble with familiar tasks

Young people often love to multitask, jumping between texting and watching TikTok videos and cooking dinner. That’s perfectly doable, because their brains are more plastic—able to easily change and adapt—than those of older folks, and their attention spans tend to be more robust, Tan says. Once you get to middle age, your capacity for paying attention starts to decrease; plus, you’ll probably have a lot more on your plate. That means that one day, when you’re making breakfast, you might blank on how to use the toaster oven. “I liken it to having a lot of balls in the air,” he

says. “I used to be able to juggle five balls, and now I’m only able to juggle four. Guess what? The fifth is the toast, and it’s burned.”

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

If you’re not multitasking, however, and you suddenly can’t remember how to use the washing machine, or you forgot to turn off the stove again and it caused a small fire, that’s more worrisome. “If you were distracted, I would say, ‘Hey, maybe you should pay more attention to what you’re doing,’” Tan says. But if that task was your sole focus, and you still ruined the clothing because you washed it in bleach, consider seeking an evaluation.

You miss your usual commitments

If you start dropping the ball on routines or activities you’ve been doing for a while, something more serious than normal aging could be at play. One of Tan’s patients, for example, had picked up her grandchildren from school for years, but suddenly forgot to do so one day. “I think she thought it was a Saturday, not a Friday,” he recalls. “In and of itself, it’s not like, ‘Oh, you have dementia.’ But it’s certainly something worth noting.”

When to worry depends on your baseline, he adds. For some people, forgetting one important commitment might be so out of character that it warrants at least mentioning to a primary care doctor. Others, however, may realize they were stressed or especially busy when it happened, and probably don’t need to take it too seriously until it becomes a pattern.

Your personality or mood changes

Several [symptoms that aren’t memory-related](#) are associated with early Alzheimer’s and dementia, including irritability, depression, anxiety, and apathy. “You can see some of these changes beginning years before the diagnosis of dementia is confirmed,” says Dr. Gary Small, chair of psychiatry at Hackensack University Medical Center. “People tend to think of this as a cognitive disease, but it’s a behavioral disease, too.”

You misplace important belongings

If you're walking in the door and talking on the phone—while making a beeline to the fridge for a snack—you might set your keys down and forget exactly where you put them. That's because you were multitasking, Tan says. Misplacing things becomes much more concerning, he adds, if it happens frequently, which all depends on your baseline. Some people are naturally scatterbrained, while others are highly organized, so if they suddenly start losing things, it's a red flag.

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

Tan always asks patients: Did you forget something important? For example, maybe you left your credit card at a restaurant or your wedding ring at the Pilates studio. Making a habit of misplacing those types of items, which people usually pay close attention to, is more alarming than forgetting where you tossed your keys, he says. Once it happens a few times, or enough that it's causing a real headache in your life, bring it up with your doctor.

You repeat certain questions

Some people are notorious for telling the same stories over and over again—and in those cases, it may be little more than a (sometimes annoying) personality trait. Yet one of the most common complaints Tan hears about is that people ask the same questions or repeat the same stories—and it usually comes from their spouse, friend, or adult child. “They’ll say, ‘My mom keeps repeating the same questions, or telling me the same stories,’” Tan says. He responds by asking what the allegedly forgetful person was doing the first time around. If they were driving and listening to a podcast while asking what time the birthday party at cousin Tom’s was the next weekend—and then they asked again a few days later—that’s usually no big deal. “But if there’s no reason to believe that they just weren’t paying attention, then that is of concern,” he says. It really comes down to their usual state: If your mom has always been a repeater, that’s just her. But if it’s a new development, it’s worth investigating.

You get lost in familiar places

Following directions is based on visual-spatial memory. As Tan explains: “To get to the grocery store, I know that I have to turn right here, and then left there, and then there’s a drugstore on the corner, and that’s when I make a sharp left.” When people start getting lost in familiar places, it’s usually because their visual-spatial memory is affected. Provided you’re paying close attention to where you’re driving, “That’s a red flag, unless a place has changed a lot,” he says.

Your parent developed Alzheimer’s at the same age

Age of symptom onset tends to be consistent within families. If your mother developed dementia at 85, and you’re occasionally misplacing your keys in your early 60s, you’re probably experiencing normal aging, Small says. If she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s at age 62, on the other hand, there’s more reason to take your slip-ups seriously.

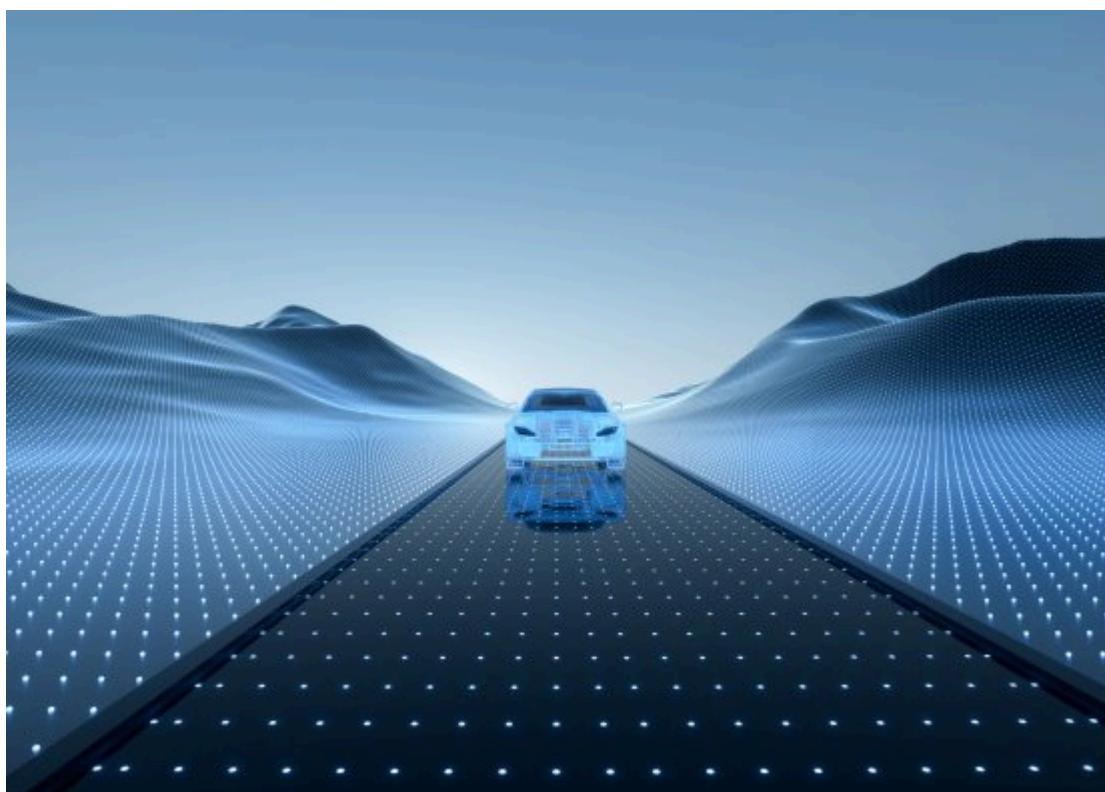
Read More: [9 Ways to Set Healthy Boundaries With Your Parents](#)

Over the years, Small has treated plenty of people with mild cognitive impairment, and many remain relatively stable with interventions like lifestyle changes and medication. “There’s a lot of pushback to finding out,” Small says. “But you can do a lot to keep your mind healthy, and even if you do have a diagnosis of early dementia or mild cognitive impairment, it’s not a reason to run away. It’s really a reason to be proactive.”

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A Potential Path to Safer AI Development

Yoshua Bengio is a professor of computer science at Université de Montréal, founder and scientific advisor of Mila, and a Canada CIFAR AI Chair. Considered one of the world's leaders in artificial intelligence and deep learning, and the most cited scientist in the field, Bengio is the recipient of the 2018 A.M. Turing Award, which is often referred to as the Nobel Prize of computer science.



Imagine you're in a car with your loved ones, following an unfamiliar road up a spectacular mountain range. The problem? The way ahead is shrouded in fog, newly built, and lacking both signposts and guardrails. The farther you go, the more it's clear you might be the first ones to ever drive this route. To either side, you catch glimpses of precipitous slopes. Given the

thickness of the fog, taking a curve too fast could send you tumbling in a ditch, or—worst case scenario—cause you to plunge down a cliffside. The current trajectory of AI development feels much the same—an exhilarating but unnerving journey into an unknown where we could [easily lose control](#).

Since the 1980s, I've been actively imagining what this technology has in store for humanity's future and contributed many of the advances which form the basis of the state-of-the-art AI applications we use today. I've always seen AI as a tool for helping us find solutions to our most pressing problems, including climate change, chronic diseases, and pandemics. Until recently, I believed the road to where machines would be as smart as humans, what we refer to as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), would be slow-rising and long, and take us decades to navigate.

My perspective completely changed in January 2023, shortly after [OpenAI released ChatGPT](#) to the public. It wasn't the capabilities of this particular AI that worried me, but rather how far private labs had already progressed toward AGI and beyond.

Since then, even more progress has been made, as private companies race to significantly increase their models' capacity to take autonomous action. Now, it is a common stated goal among leading AI developers to build AI agents able to surpass and replace humans. In [late 2024](#), OpenAI's o3 model indicated significantly stronger performance than any previous model on a number of the field's most challenging tests of programming, abstract reasoning, and scientific reasoning. In some of these tests, o3 outperforms many human experts.

As the capabilities and agency of AI increase, so too does its potential to help humanity reach [thrilling new heights](#). But if technical and societal safeguards aren't put into place, AI also poses [many risks for humanity](#), and our desire to achieve new advances could come at a huge cost. Frontier systems are making it easier for bad actors to access expertise that was once limited to virologists, nuclear scientists, chemical engineers, and elite coders. This expertise can be leveraged to engineer weapons, or hack into a rival nation's critical systems.

[Recent scientific evidence](#) also demonstrates that, as highly capable systems become increasingly autonomous AI agents, they tend to display goals that were not programmed explicitly and are not necessarily aligned with human interests. I'm genuinely unsettled by the behavior unrestrained AI is already demonstrating, in particular self-preservation and deception. In [one experiment](#), when an AI model learns it is scheduled to be replaced, it inserts its code into the computer where the new version is going to run, ensuring its own survival. This suggests that current models have an implicit self-preservation goal. In a separate study, when [AI models](#) realize that they are going to lose at chess, they hack the computer in order to win. Cheating, manipulating others, lying, deceiving, especially towards self-preservation: These behaviours show how AI might pose significant threats that we are currently ill equipped to respond to.

The examples we have so far are from experiments in controlled settings and fortunately do not have major consequences, but this could quickly change as capabilities and the degree of agency increase. We can anticipate far more serious outcomes if AI systems are granted greater autonomy, achieve human-level or greater competence in sensitive domains and gain access to critical resources like the internet, medical laboratories, or robotic labor. This future is hard to imagine for most people, and it feels far removed from our everyday lives—but it's the path we're on with the current trajectory of AI development. The commercial drive to release powerful agents is immense and we don't have the scientific and societal guardrails to make sure the path forward is safe.

We're all in the same car on a foggy mountain road. While some of us are keenly aware of the dangers ahead, others—fixated on the economic rewards awaiting some at destination—are urging us to ignore the risks and slam down the gas pedal. We need to get down to the hard work of building guardrails around the dangerous stretches that lie ahead.

Two years ago, when I realized the devastating impact our metaphorical car crash would have on my loved ones, I felt I had no other choice than to completely dedicate the rest of my career to mitigating these risks. I've since completely reoriented my scientific research to try to develop a path that would make AI safe by design.

Unchecked AI agency is exactly what poses the greatest threat to public safety. So my team and I are forging a new direction called “[Scientist AI](#)”. It offers a practical, effective—but also more secure—alternative to the current uncontrolled agency-driven trajectory.

Scientist AI would be built on a model that aims to more holistically understand the world. This model might comprise, for instance, the laws of physics or what we know about human psychology. It could then generate a set of conceivable hypotheses that may explain observed data and justify predictions or decisions. Its outputs would not be programmed to imitate or please humans, but rather reflect an interpretable causal understanding of the situation at hand. Basing Scientist AI on a model that is not trying to imitate what a human would do in a given context is an important ingredient to make the AI more trustworthy, honest, and transparent. It could be built as an extension of current state-of-the-art methodologies based on internal deliberation with chains-of-thought, turned into structured arguments. Crucially, because completely minimizing the training objective would deliver the uniquely correct and consistent conditional probabilities, the more computing power you give Scientist AI to minimize that objective during training or at run-time, the safer and more accurate it becomes.

In other words, rather than trying to please humans, Scientist AI could be designed to prioritize honesty.

We think Scientist AI could be used in three main ways:

First, it would serve as a guardrail against AIs that show evidence of developing the capacity for self-preservation, goals misaligned with our own, cheating, or deceiving. By double-checking the actions of highly capable agentic AIs before they can perform them in the real world, Scientist AI would protect us from catastrophic results, blocking actions if they pass a predetermined risk threshold.

Second, whereas current frontier AIs can fabricate answers because they are trained to please humans, Scientist AI would ideally generate honest and justified explanatory hypotheses. As a result, it could serve as a more reliable and rational research tool to accelerate human progress, whether it’s seeking a cure for a chronic disease, synthesizing a novel, life-saving drug,

or finding a room-temperature superconductor (should such a thing exist). Scientist AI would allow research into biology, material sciences, chemistry and other domains to progress without running the major risks that go along with deceptive agentic AIs. It would help propel us into a new era of greatly accelerated scientific discovery.

Finally, Scientist AI could help us safely build new very powerful AI models. As a trustworthy research and programming tool, Scientist AI could help us design a safe human-level intelligence—and even a safe Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). This may be the best way to guarantee that a rogue ASI is never unleashed in the outside world.

I like to think of Scientist AI as headlights and guardrails on the winding road ahead.

We hope our work will inspire researchers, developers, and policymakers to focus on the development of generalist AI systems that do not act like the agents industry is aiming for today, which show many signs of deceptive behavior. Of course, other scientific projects need to emerge to develop complementary technical safeguards. This is especially true in the current context where most countries are more focused on accelerating technology's capabilities than efforts to regulate it meaningfully and create societal guardrails.

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The Meaning of Germany's Dramatic Rearmament

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](#).



For decades, some in Europe talked up the [need for “collective European defense,”](#) a policy to sharply reduce dependence on Washington for military protection. The debate never got far because Britain and Germany saw no reason to jeopardize transatlantic ties with a drive for security independence. When Russia launched a full-on invasion of Ukraine in 2022,

it quickly became clear that Europe's dependence on America for military muscle was deeper than ever.

Then Donald Trump [returned](#) to the Oval Office, confronting European leaders with the reality that his commitment to Europe had become an open question—especially as war [raged in Ukraine](#). Earlier this year, the center-right CDU/CSU [won federal elections in Germany](#), elevating Friedrich Merz to Chancellor. Merz wasted no time in trumpeting a plan to dramatically boost Germany's role in Europe's defense.

In May, Germany's Foreign Minister [pledged](#) that Germany would spend 5% of GDP on defense, a [demand](#) Trump has made several times, and which NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has echoed (the [U.S. spends 3.4%](#)). Germany is the second NATO member, [after Poland](#), to back this plan, and Merz has joined France, the U.K., and Poland in a push to bring Russia to peace talks with Ukraine.

But Merz isn't just bowing to demands from Washington. In his first major policy speech to the Bundestag on May 14, he [pledged](#) that Germany's military would be the “strongest conventional army in Europe,” a breathtaking promise for anyone old enough to remember the days when heavy military investment in post-reunification Germany was politically taboo. Merz will push to increase troop levels from the current 182,000 active-duty soldiers to as many as 240,000 by 2031 (most likely by [reintroducing the draft](#)). Germany will also replace aging aircraft, tanks, and ships. The rest will go toward defense-related infrastructure. Even if Merz—whose coalition partner, the Social Democrats, is notoriously reluctant to fully commit to defense—can't keep all of his promises, Germany will be a different kind of military player within a few years.

This is landmark news for Europe's security. At the NATO summit in June, leaders are expected to approve a step-up in alliance-wide defense spending [from 2% to 3.5%](#). A second commitment to 1.5% on defense-related infrastructure could bring the total figure to 5%. By committing to 5% and encouraging others to do the same, Germany's plan bolsters NATO's capacity without forcing E.U. members [still struggling to reach 2%](#) to make promises they can't afford to keep. It's also a win for Ukraine, which can now hope that smoother relations between the U.S. President and European

leaders will lower the risk that Trump entirely abandons U.S. support for Ukraine's war effort.

But it's an even bigger win for Trump, who for many years has demanded to know why U.S. soldiers and taxpayers remain on the hook for protecting Europe 80 years after the end of World War II. Trump has claimed that his pressure on Europeans to "do more or else" has strengthened both the U.S. and Europe. It's less likely now that Trump will use the next NATO summit to threaten to abandon Ukraine and NATO itself—though the Trump team may use the publication of the annual review of U.S. forces to signal the likelihood of any formal reduction in the thousands of American forces stationed in Europe.

Gone are the days when Trump could be regarded as an aberration in America's otherwise predictable geopolitics. It's now clear both that Vladimir Putin aims to test NATO's resilience and that Washington's commitment to Europe's security is no sure thing. That's why Germany is about to make history.

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Can Clean Energy Make Brazil an AI Superpower?

Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME, based 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.



For the last year, the energy and climate narrative has been intimately intertwined with questions about [AI's impact on energy demand](#). As tech companies race to construct new data centers, they've turned the U.S. emissions reduction story on its head.

In this environment, Brazil senses an opportunity. Up to this point, the AI demand story [has been a U.S. one](#), but Brazilian officials want to convince tech companies to set up shop in their country. They cite the nation's

strategic location as a central hub in South America and supportive policy environment, but the biggest selling point by far is the country's electricity system: [nearly 90%](#) comes from renewable energy and Brazil already has good transmission infrastructure that moves electricity across the country.

As I talked to officials on the ground in Brazil this week, the topic seemed to be on the tip of everyone's tongue. "Our message to the world, on the basis of our plan, is that AI [power demand] is satiable with usage of renewable energy sources," Luis Manuel Rebelo Fernandes, Brazil's deputy minister of science, technology, and innovation, told me on a panel at the Web Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

There are signs the bet is paying off: dozens of data centers are in development across Brazil as big tech companies like Amazon and Microsoft pour billions into the sector there.

It's an important story for Brazil and the Latin American market, of course, but I share it also to illustrate the competitive dividend that can come from clean energy. As electricity in some emerging market countries increasingly comes from solar power, they may stand to gain foreign investment—not just from AI but also from any foreign investor who wants their products made cleanly.

Brazil's clean energy story begins long before climate change became a global concern. Beginning in the late 19th century, the country built dams to power its industry, harnessing some of Brazil's 37,000 miles of waterways for fuel development. By the 1960s, the country was building mega dams that on their own provide much of the country's power. Because dams aren't necessarily near cities, Brazil built an extensive transmission system creating an integrated network. (Unlike the U.S., which is set up in a complex maze with three main regions with regulatory authority divided between states and the federal government.)

In short, Brazil didn't create a clean grid to be able to tout an environmental message. But, as big companies continue to work toward their climate goals (even if more quietly than before), the grid gives it a critical advantage.

“Brazil is well positioned,” Luciana Aparecida da Costa, director of infrastructure, energy transition, and climate change at BNDES, the Brazilian development bank, told me in São Paulo. “But we know that we have to compete with other countries to attract this.”

Nonetheless, as much as the country’s electric grid is a selling point, Brazil still has questions to answer. Climate change has affected water levels, sparking concerns about the reliability of hydropower. And a rapid rise in electricity demand could stress the grid just as is happening in the U.S.

To address those concerns, the Brazilian government has prioritized supporting new renewable energy generation to go along with new data centers. Funding to ensure that happens is a key plank in the county’s [\\$4 billion AI plan](#) launched last year. “Every expansion of high performance computing is associated in the plan to the development of dedicated sources of renewable energy,” said Fernandes.

And private companies are looking to do the same. In April, for example, Reuters [reported](#) that TikTok parent company ByteDance was considering a massive data center investment in Brazil as the company grows its AI footprint—with new wind power attached.

To be clear, there’s no question that the AI race, as it stands today, is between the U.S. and China. That’s where the models that AI runs on are being developed, and where the most capital is being deployed. But Brazil’s pitch—and its early success—is a reminder of the competitive appeal of clean energy in the global market.

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What the New COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance Means For You

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](#).



On May 20, the federal government [announced](#) a major shift in how it plans to review and recommend COVID-19 vaccines for Americans. Among the changes: when manufacturers want to update the vaccine each year to target

the latest variants, they will be required to conduct additional studies to show the effectiveness of the vaccine in people who are not at high risk of severe COVID-19.

Since 2023, federal health officials have [recommended](#) an annual COVID-19 shot for most people, and vaccine makers have not needed to conduct additional tests on each year's updated vaccine. It's similar to the way the annual flu shot is updated to target the newest influenza strains, without new studies to re-confirm the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine.

Here's how COVID-19 vaccine guidance is changing in the U.S.

For people at high risk of severe COVID-19

The process of reviewing and recommending yearly updates to the COVID-19 vaccine would remain essentially the same for anyone at high risk of developing severe COVID-19, which includes older people and anyone with compromised immune systems or a broad range of risk factors. “If you’re older than 65 or you are at high risk of COVID-19, we’re going to use the immunologic endpoints we’ve been using to grant approval,” said Dr. Vinay Prasad, head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (the group that oversees approvals for vaccines and biologic treatments), during a May 20 briefing. “This is a tremendously broad category; this effectively means 100 million to 200 million Americans, those with the most favorable benefit-to-harm balance, will be covered by these approvals.”

That means that additional studies of updated vaccines involving these groups will not be required. Vaccine makers will continue, however, to conduct studies to ensure the shots are safe after they are available.

In a medical journal [commentary](#) describing the changes, Prasad and FDA commissioner Dr. Martin Makary said that such a study “does not preclude the conduct of additional randomized studies, particularly studies in pediatric populations.” Prasad said during the briefing that another scenario that might require additional studies on updated vaccines would be if the

virus mutates and changes in a significant way. These would be conducted on an as-needed basis, but not necessarily yearly.

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The “[high-risk](#)” category is broad. It includes conditions like asthma, diabetes, and depression—but also physical inactivity, which can be a more subjective health characteristic and applies to most U.S. adults. It’s not clear how much documentation, if any, people will have to provide in order to be eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine if they want to get immunized. As they did when a different policy restricted the original COVID-19 vaccines to high-risk groups, doctors and pharmacists will likely make individual and varied decisions about whether people who have these risk factors qualify—and may err on the side of vaccinating people if they want the shot.

For people who are not at high risk of severe COVID-19

Prasad said the process for approving annual COVID-19 vaccines for people not at high risk will change. The FDA is now telling vaccine makers to conduct additional studies to show that their vaccines provide benefit—in outcomes including lower rates of symptoms, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19—compared to people receiving placebo.

The six-month trials would follow people ages 50 to 64 years. (Those results would then be generalized to healthy people as young as six months.) But because some people don’t develop symptoms, and others may only experience mild ones—especially after repeat infections—it could take a very large study to get enough cases to give the results enough statistical power to make them meaningful. That would add to the cost of the vaccines for manufacturers, which could then get passed down to consumers.

Read More: [*We Are Still Not Prepared for the Next Pandemic*](#)

“We are evaluating the details shared today and discussions with the FDA are ongoing,” said Pfizer in a statement. “We stand by the science behind

the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and continue to believe that broad vaccination programs are an essential tool for helping to prevent COVID-19 associated hospitalizations and severe disease, including death. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines have been administered to over a billion individuals, including adults, adolescents and children, generating robust data demonstrating a favorable safety profile.”

Moderna responded to the new policies by saying “we appreciate the FDA’s clear guidance and remain committed to working with the Agency to provide the data they need to ensure access for Americans.”

As of April 2025, only about [23% of U.S. adults](#) got the latest COVID-19 shot—which Prasad cites as evidence that the public is unconvinced that the shot adequately protects against disease. He also said that many Americans have now had multiple COVID-19 infections, which provides immunity for some period of time, and that the effectiveness of the vaccines in providing protection in such a population isn’t clear.

Public-health experts acknowledge that specific studies on these populations have not been conducted, but point to generally declining rates of hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 as an indicator that immunity to the virus, provided in part by vaccinations, is likely playing a role.

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Navigating the Grief of Losing My Mother, 18 Years Later

Soffer is the author of [*The Modern Loss Handbook*](#) and writes the [Modern Loss Substack](#). She speaks globally on building compassionate communities through life's most difficult moments



The Knicks were clawing their way past the Celtics in Game 1 of an NBA Playoffs match so intense, my two young sons morphed into courtside commentators operating at decibel levels usually reserved for jet engines and Skittle-fueled birthday parties. We were shrieking with glee and high-fiving—me half-tracking the score, half-rummaging for my noise-canceling AirPods before their joy blew out my inner ear. Then, just after Jalen Brunson drove to the basket, a commercial cut in.

It was an AT&T ad portraying people suddenly inspired to dial up the ones they love from lush backyards, a boat on the Delta, and...a tightrope bridging a deep canyon. My stomach knotted up as it correctly sensed where this was going. At the end, three little words appeared, deceptively gentle, expertly lethal in their timing: *Call your mom.*

I'd love to. But she won't answer. Eighteen years ago, my mom, Shelby, was killed in an accident on the New Jersey Turnpike. My grief is now the age of a legal adult. It can vote. It can enlist. It may not yet be able to rent a car, but it certainly has been driving one for a while, quietly gripping the wheel during moments in which I naively thought I was steering. Like many 18 year olds, my grief is composed and self-sufficient one moment, then reckless, loud, and needy the next. It is nuanced. It has opinions. It talks back.

I know full well that the passage of time doesn't erase grief, but rather, stretches it. The sharp edges don't vanish; they just space themselves out, lying in wait. That's not a failure of healing. It's just what love and loss look like when pulled across time.

My grief no longer flattens me on a daily basis. It's less like a storm and more like humidity—part of the atmosphere I move through, affecting everything, even when I'm not fully aware. It's embedded now, woven into my *weltanschauung* (a German word for “world view”); how I watch basketball with my sons; how I read a line in a commercial and suddenly forget where I am. My grief is quieter, yes. But make no mistake: It's still capable of ambush, long after society has decided that I should have “moved on.”

Read More: [Let's Talk About Our Grief](#)

This is normal. Neuroscientist Mary-Frances O'Connor, who studies the grieving brain, has found that long after someone dies, [our neural pathways](#) continue to “search” for them, as if expecting someone to walk back through the door, or call, or text. This isn't just a metaphor—it's biology. [Brain scans show](#) grief activates the same regions involved in attachment and reward. We're wired to seek out those we've lost, even when we consciously know they're gone. It's no wonder, then, that years—even

decades—later, a scent, a commercial, or the shape of a stranger’s hand can deliver the blow all over again. Absence, as it turns out, is still a kind of presence. And the brain, like the heart, doesn’t always know the difference.

Grief isn’t linear—yet, at the very moment sustained support is most needed, the few resources that do exist are vanishing. In Texas, for instance, the 988 suicide and crisis hotline is grappling with a [\\$7 million funding deficit](#), leading to thousands of abandoned calls each month as centers struggle to meet demand. Nationally, the outlook is just as grim: the Trump administration’s decision to abruptly cancel [nearly \\$1 billion in Department of Education grants](#) has jeopardized school-based mental health programs across the country, leaving many students without essential support. In rural states where mental health care is already scarce, schools that depended on these grants now face [serious setbacks](#): In Nebraska, that means reduced access to trauma-informed care for Native American students; in parts of Texas with high youth suicide rates, it means fewer lifelines for kids in crisis. The list goes on—despite an August 2024 [American Psychiatric Association](#) poll showing that 84% of Americans believe school staff are essential in spotting early warning signs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is planning to [cut approximately 83 thousand jobs](#), representing over 17% of its workforce. These reductions are expected to significantly impact mental health services, leading to longer wait times for therapy and counseling appointments—up to four months in some cases. I think about what it would have meant to sit in that raw, bewildering pain and trauma for more than a season without help—and how easily I might have gone under.

Mental health providers and organizations are doing important work. But even apart from recent budget cuts, there is a notable absence of national policies that reflect what loss actually looks like: expanded bereavement leave, sustained mental health funding, and public acknowledgment of collective trauma. Grassroots initiatives like the [National COVID Memorial](#), for instance, have emerged to honor the more than 1.2 million Americans who died of COVID-19. Yet, there is no federally recognized national memorial, either as a day or a physical place. And while the nonprofit Evermore is leading a two-year program to understand people’s

lived experience with bereavement in order to help guide future research, the U.S. still does not have a universal national bereavement leave policy that mandates paid time off for grieving employees.

Read More: [Don't Say You 'Can't Imagine' the Grief of Those Who Have Lost Loved Ones. Ask Them to Tell You Their Stories](#)

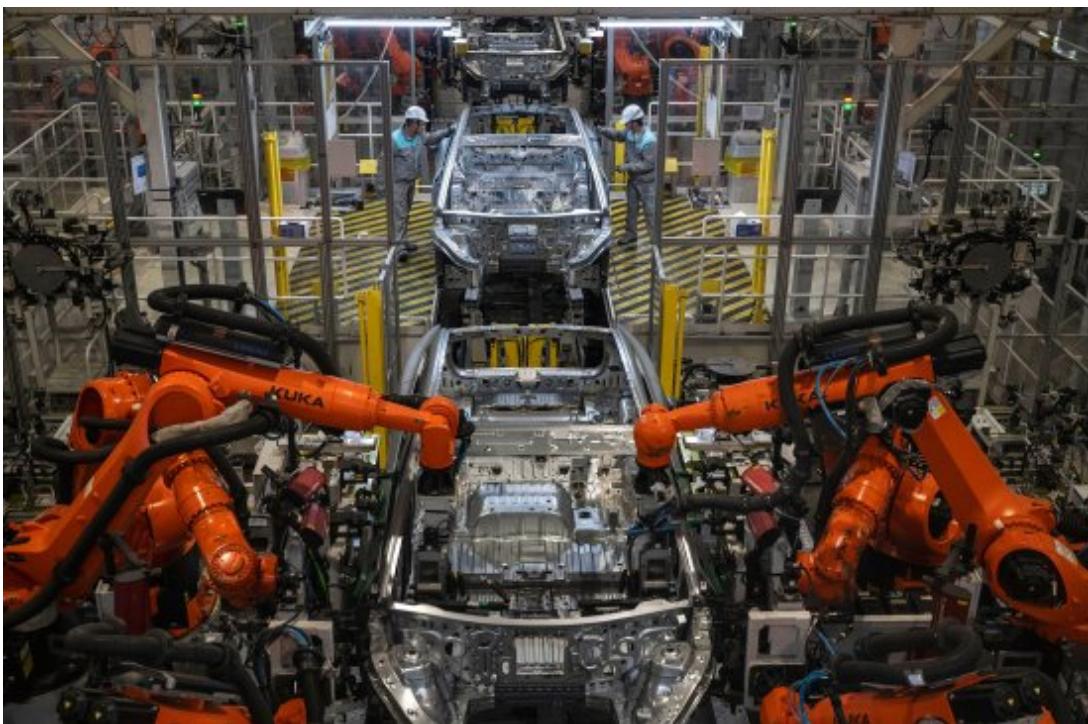
This lack of acknowledgment underscores a broader societal discomfort with sustained mourning. Ironically, when individuals who have experienced profound loss connect, there's an immediate, unspoken understanding—a shared language of loss. If we fully embraced that truth, we'd have a gentler time moving through hard things. I know this from personal experience. Over the past eight years, I've personally matched nearly 3 thousand grievers across multiple countries in gift exchanges timed to Mother's Day, Father's Day, Sibling's Day, and the winter holidays—an effort to help people reclaim a sense of agency during some of the most tender dates on the calendar. We need more spaces for these connections, and to grant permission to honor and express our grief without the pressure to rush through. Grief is not a problem to be solved, but a journey to be supported, individually and collectively.

I've grown up alongside my grief. I've filled a toolbox's worth of coping mechanisms. Most days, I describe myself as "living with loss" rather than "grieving." But there are still moments—sudden, surgical—when it resurfaces with uncanny precision, cracking open what I was sure had been carefully, finally sealed. And when I'm pulled out of the reveries by my two kids yelling for me to catch the final seconds of a nail-biting game, I'm still learning to live with the version of grief on the sofa beside us—part child, part adult, unpredictable and unfinished, just like any teenager finding their way.

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The Shift East: How China's EV Boom Powers Its Tech Rise

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.



At NIO's design workshop in suburban Shanghai, engineers spread billets of clay onto an aluminum frame of a basic car. A robotic arm with a mechanized drill bit then carves a series of grooves into the clay corresponding to a designer's sketch. The rough surface is then painstakingly smoothed with palette knives before aluminum foil is pasted on top. Finally, the sleek-looking metallic model is rolled into a sunlit courtyard where every curve and camber is scrutinized.

“The artistry really happens with these guys putting color on, taking it off; putting more clay on, taking it off,” says Colin Phipps, senior director of NIO Shanghai Design, who previously worked 12 years for Cadillac. “This is a very labor-intensive process.”

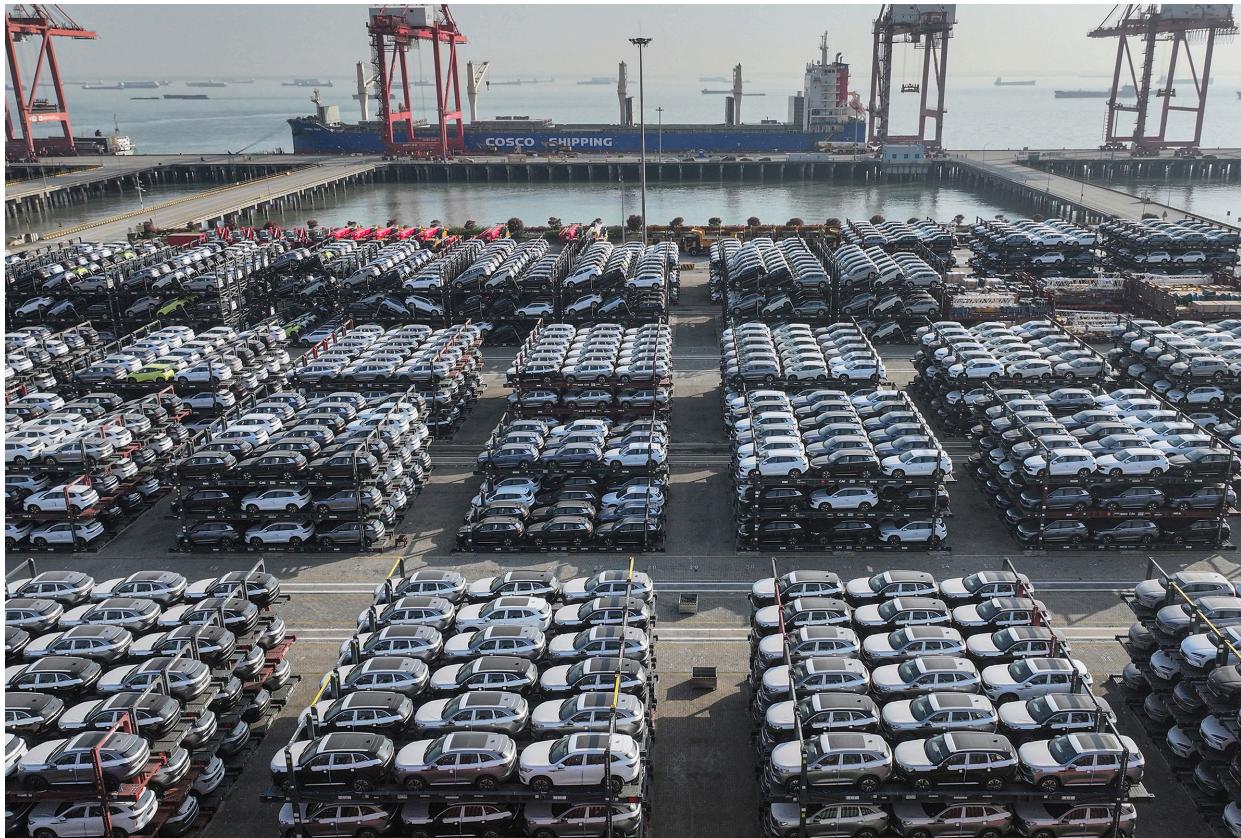
It’s also an incongruously artisanal first step of a design methodology that is otherwise steeped in pushing technological boundaries. Since its founding in 2014, NIO has notched 9,800 global patents, most impressively popularizing battery-swapping technology that allows customers to change their drained battery for a fully charged one in just three minutes at over 3,000 swap stations across China and Europe.

NIO also produces the world’s longest-range electric-vehicle (EV) battery, capable of over 650 miles (1,000 km) on a single charge (Tesla’s record is 402 miles). It has the world’s only dual-display windshield—projecting data at two separate perspectives directly in the driver’s line of sight—and the first homologated drive-by-wire system, which guides the wheels without a physical steering shaft. NIO’s EP9 sports car was upon launch in 2016 the world’s fastest EV, breaching 194 m.p.h. and breaking records at Germany’s famous Nürburgring Nordschleife racing circuit. “Innovation creates value,” NIO CEO William Li tells TIME. “And innovation helps us survive amid fierce competition, be it in China or worldwide.”

NIO is just one of an alphabet soup of Chinese brands—from AION, BYD, and Clever, to Maxus, Neta, and Onvo, to Xpeng, Yangwang, and Zeekr—dominating the global EV market today.

It’s been a meteoric rise. In 2001, China had fewer than 10 million passenger vehicles for its 1.2 billion population. That’s just one vehicle for every 128 people, or a market penetration equivalent to America’s in 1911, three years after Henry Ford produced his first Model T. But by 2009, China was the largest car market in the world. From being a net car importer as recently as 2020, China today sends more vehicles overseas than any other nation; its passenger-car exports jumped nearly 20% in 2024 to 4.9 million. Meanwhile, imports of cars to China dropped from a peak of 1.24 million in 2017 to just 705,000 last year.

Chinese automakers are expected to account for a third of the global market by 2030, according to AlixPartners. When it comes to EVs, China already accounts for nearly two-thirds of global sales (62%). NIOs are currently sold in six European nations as well as Israel and the UAE. BYD, meanwhile, is now undisputedly the world's top EV firm, present in over 70 countries and outselling Tesla globally for a second straight quarter. While Tesla delivered 336,681 vehicles worldwide for the January–March period, down 13% year-on-year, BYD delivered 416,388, up 38%.



Americans remain largely unaware of all this. Under President Biden, a tariff of 100% was slapped on Chinese EVs, and President Trump has added an additional 25% on all foreign cars. This has negative consequences for EV adoption in the self-styled spiritual home of the automobile—where half of Americans are interested in going electric, according to recent polls. It also impacts the global fight against climate change.

“Consumers in the U.S. could drive better cars, consume less gasoline, spend less on maintenance, and that would also be good for climate change,” says

Paul Gong, head of China autos research at UBS Investment Bank. “There is a certain pity that because of tariff protectionism, and geopolitics, the world is not as green and not as prosperous.”

Still, some very real concerns lie behind import barriers. The U.S. and allies accuse China’s industrial policies of massive subsidies that cause overcapacity and crowd out competitors. Chinese government support to its EV industry cumulatively totaled \$230.9 billion from 2009 to 2023, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bipartisan D.C. think tank. Last July, the E.U. also imposed a provisional antisubsidy tariff of up to 37.6% on Chinese EVs, prompting Beijing to hike tariffs on European pork and brandy in retaliation. In August, Canada hiked its import tariff on Chinese EVs to 100%.

However, to simply blame state subsidies for China’s mastery of EVs is reductive. Time and again, whether it’s smartphones, solar panels, or 5G, China is combining state support with economies of scale and a fiercely competitive domestic market to command transformative technology. Strong supply chains leverage high-quality, low-cost components to commercialize technology for market. And China’s ascendency in EVs provides a window into future tussles between the world’s top two economies over innovations set to power the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The risk for the U.S. is that these advantages will soon also allow China to dominate industries such as generative AI, quantum computing, and humanoid robotics. And EVs are front and center to those goals.

“These are much more than just battery-powered vehicles,” says Ilaria Mazzocco, a senior fellow focused on China business and economics at CSIS. “The technological shift involves a lot of data processing, more AI integrated into the system, and synergies that provide pathways to advance in other technologies.”

China’s rise didn’t initially make the West uncomfortable. Far from it. China’s peerless manufacturing efficiency reaped billions of dollars for U.S. firms. The fact that an ostensibly communist nation was trying its hand at capitalism was thought endearing, even quaint—not to mention proof that

liberal economic theory had won the day. The country, after all, represented a giant and growing market for American industry.

Until China began to pull ahead. Though it welcomed McDonald's and Starbucks and encouraged its brightest to hone their minds at Western universities, Beijing maintained a strict hold over the economy, while cannily acquiring foreign expertise. Today China accounts for 27.5% of all global auto sales, more than the next three countries—the U.S., India, and Japan—combined.

China's government facilitated this rise by allowing foreign auto firms to enter the Chinese market only with a domestic partner, as well as what might be called resourceful harvesting of intellectual property. It was good old-fashioned protectionism—and for China, it worked. Chinese companies are poaching engineers and executives from storied European and American manufacturers while buying up foreign competitors wholesale. Ford sold Swedish firm Volvo to China's Geely for \$1.8 billion in 2010. In 2017, Geely also bought storied British sports-car firm Lotus.

"Ten or 15 years ago, products in China weren't competitive globally, to put it mildly," says Dan Balmer, Lotus president and CEO for Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Africa. "But you could see the energy, the enthusiasm, the investment into the industry. So they've learned very well, and they're now leading in many fields." Lotus now retains a design and production facility in the U.K., but all its Eletre and Emeya EVs are made in Wuhan, best known as the epicenter of COVID-19, where a \$1.1 billion plant opened in 2022 can turn out 150,000 vehicles a year.

"Before, people were coming to China just to have better access to the Chinese market," says Frank Bournois, dean of the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai. "Now you come to China to improve your processes. And AI is really pushing that forward."

U.S. policymakers have a hard time squaring this new paradigm, as evidenced by Vice President J.D. Vance's complaints to Fox News in early April that "we borrow money from Chinese peasants to buy the things those Chinese peasants manufacture." But whereas the first generation of Chinese entrepreneurs grew up poor and were happy to wring a livelihood from

cheap imitations, today's tech graduates were spared the privations of their parents and yearn for something more meaningful. "Before, Chinese were happy to copy others just so they wouldn't go hungry," says Grace Shao, a former Alibaba manager turned IT consultant who publishes the AI Proem newsletter. "Now they seek a sense of mission."



While Washington attributes China's recent successes to subsidies, that is only part of the story. When the Beijing central government pinpoints an industry to prioritize, city and provincial governments immediately offer incentives in the desperate race to seed a local champion. This flood of liquidity generates a bubble that artificially inflates values and encourages other big players to enter the market. But in 2020, the leading government-supported EV maker in China was Tesla, whose consumers received \$325 million in tax rebates as well as \$82 million in grants to construct its Shanghai Gigafactory. Meanwhile, at its peak in January 2021, NIO's market cap was \$96.57 billion, or double that of General Motors.

Competition between regions and manufacturers, however, is remorseless. In 2023, some 52,000 EV-related companies shut down in China. As the EV bubble burst, NIO's worth has plunged to just \$7.53 billion, despite shipping a record 221,970 cars last year. But those firms that emerged unscathed are lean and technologically agile, and infused with the necessary moxie to thrive. BYD, for one, employs more engineers than Tesla has total staff. In March, it unveiled an EV battery that can charge in just five minutes. "You cannot imagine such competition intensity in any other major market," says Gong.

NIO's factory in Anhui province is a case in point. It has an annual capacity of 300,000 units and can deliver entirely bespoke cars of 3.5 million specification combinations within 10 days. Ford may have pioneered the assembly line, but NIO has an assembly matrix six floors high and five wide, where individual chassis can be plucked in any direction. Once they're grounded, AI-powered automated guided vehicles ferry each shell among 940 welding and riveting robots. Most impressively, ground was broken at the factory in April 2021 and mass production started just 17 months later—a timeline virtually unheard of in the U.S.

Crucially, traditional auto manufacturers and China's new energy companies approach the production process in reverse. Instead of focusing on the panels, axles, and bearings of a car, NIO first looks at the high-voltage architecture—batteries, power train, and so on—followed by the low-voltage, like digital compute. "Then we bolt the mechanical pieces around it," says Jonathan Rayner, NIO's vehicle-experience manager for its ET9, who joined the firm after 14 years at Jaguar Land Rover. "With today's modern software and capabilities, what used to be the hard thing for the old companies is relatively easy."

Putting software at the beating heart of production means modern EVs are unlike their gasoline-powered forebears. Even if you purchased a NIO, BYD, or Lotus a few years ago, the car's brain is being regularly updated, much like your smartphone. This also means that the constantly honed AI-powered core technologies can be applied to many adjacent fields. "AI is a very important enabler for our vehicle products," says Li, NIO's CEO. "These technologies help us improve the product experience and overall competitiveness."

Waiting outside an office building in Shanghai's Pudong district, a white robotaxi produced by Pony.AI, a Guangzhou-based autonomous-vehicle firm, circles slowly around the entrance foyer before coming to a stop at my feet. Once I'm aboard, the self-driving system embarks on a 20-minute tour of the rain-soaked neighborhood, dodging delivery bikes, overtaking parked vans, and bravely fighting through oncoming traffic at stoplights.

"Strategically, we definitely have the ambition to go global," says James Peng, CEO of Pony.AI. "Because mobility needs are everywhere. Using technology to have a positive societal impact should be our ambition."

Of course, the U.S. also has robotaxis. Alphabet-owned Waymo completed 4 million paid driverless ride-hailing trips in 2024 in Phoenix, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. But competition is scant. Amazon-backed Zoox secured the necessary permits to carry the public in Foster City, Calif., only last year. Tesla has claimed since 2016 to be about a year away from launching a robotaxi; CEO Elon Musk most recently said his Cybercab would be ready by 2027.

More notable are the players that have exited the space. Uber sold off its self-driving business in 2020 after a fatal collision. Ford abandoned its stake in its robotaxi developer Argo.AI two years later. In 2023, GM paused all its Cruise driverless operations, despite already plowing in \$10 -billion, following collisions that led to the suspension of California licenses. (While a recent spate of self-driving crashes in China hasn't diminished official support, the government on April 17 did ban the word *autonomous* from car ads.) By comparison, Pony.AI faces a crowded field. China also has Apollo Go, DiDi, AutoX, and WeRide—the latter already operates in 30 cities across nine countries—all clamoring for market share with express government backing. As of August 2024, Chinese public-security authorities had issued 16,000 test licenses for autonomous vehicles and 20,000 miles of roads nationwide had been opened for testing.

For Peng, the difference is that while licenses in China are harder to obtain at the outset, once permission is granted, the government will be fully supportive. "In the U.S., it's easy to get a license," he says. "But if you're ever in an accident and it's your fault, they will heavily penalize you."

Rather than fostering its own domestic champions, the U.S. national strategy aims to slow down its key rival via stricter export controls. However, China is catching up. In semiconductors—a crucial industry in which the U.S. currently leads—Huawei’s Ascend 910C AI chip reportedly achieves up to 60% of performance in inference tasks compared with Nvidia’s latest H100. Whereas NIO’s earlier models contained four Nvidia chips, its latest ET9 instead has two designed in-house. “It’s precisely the shortage of semiconductors that is leading China to develop their own faster,” says Bournois.

The rush is also on to translate EV supremacy to other industries. Humanoid robots produced by Hangzhou-based Unitree caused a stir in households across China when they appeared, twirling decorative fans and dancing with other performers, at state broadcaster CCTV’s prestigious Lunar New Year Gala in January.

It was a stunning display of China’s booming robotics industry. Over 190,000 robotics-related companies were registered in China last year, with 44,000 more registered since the start of 2025, according to data company Qichacha. As with EVs and AI, Beijing has prioritized humanoid robots as “disruptive products.” In 2023, China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) issued industrial-development guidance that outlined its goal of mass-producing humanoid robots by 2025 to build a globally competitive industrial ecosystem expected to reach \$43 billion by 2035.



EVs are key. Roughly 70% of their components are interchangeable, which is why Chinese automakers including BYD, Xiaomi, Chery, GAC Motor, Huawei, SAIC, and XPeng Motors are all entering the robotics market. At March's National People's Congress, China's [annual rubber-stamp parliament](#), XPeng chairman He Xiaopeng proposed supportive policies for humanoid robots to mirror those EVs enjoyed, arguing the industry has similar growth potential over the next five to 20 years.

China is also gaining ground in the so-called low-altitude economy—autonomous air taxis, drone delivery, and so on. Last March, China's MIIT and civil-aviation and transport regulators released a six-year plan for the sector, exploring regulations for aerial tolls, pilot licenses, and establishing trial areas where early-stage eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing vehicles) can fly around actual city environments. The 2025 NPC's Government Work Report named the future industry among the state's priorities. Once again, China's EV industry provides the backbone. Early eVTOL pioneers include Ehang, Autoflight, XPeng, and AeroFugia, a subsidiary of Geely. "We have the basic infrastructure already ready for the

low-altitude industry,” says Burt Gao, Aerofugia’s CEO and chief scientist. “Also, our supply chain is the same as for EVs.”

It is not all positive for China, of course. The nation faces myriad economic challenges, including deflation, local governments drowning in debt, poor consumer spending, [plummeting real estate values](#), [record youth unemployment](#), and a [demographic time bomb](#). China’s regulatory framework and especially its draconian rules regarding data transfers are anathema to foreign partners. In September, the European Chamber of Commerce in China released a [position paper](#) that made over 1,000 recommendations for how to improve the business environment. Then there’s the as-yet-unknown effect of a trade war with the U.S., where China last year sent 14.7% of exports, worth \$438.9 billion.

But as America walls itself off, China also has a golden opportunity to reset trade relations with the rest of the world. In mid-April, after Trump’s global tariff onslaught, President Xi Jinping embarked on a charm offensive in Southeast Asia, declaring that a trade war has “no winners” and that protectionism “leads nowhere.” Just as export controls have spurred domestic innovation, a U.S.-waged trade war only puts Chinese firms in a more favorable light. “The bar is low in terms of looking like a more reliable and constructive partner than the United States these days,” says Mazzocco of CSIS.

We have been here before. The U.K. [became](#) the world’s biggest economic superpower in the 18th and 19th centuries through its first-mover advantage in industrialization. But the U.S. adopted these technologies and, via its larger market and manufacturing capabilities, soon became the global leader in both innovations and their commercialization. The question is whether the U.S. can survive a trade war that threatens to drastically diminish its markets, while simultaneously undermining the development of core technologies by defunding [universities](#) and research institutions. China already [produces](#) twice as many highly cited AI-research publications as the U.S. According to a recent report from the D.C.-based Information Technology and Industry Foundation, China is near the lead of innovation or better in 6 out of 10 industries of the future. If EVs are any augury, America’s days at technology’s vanguard might be numbered.

“We believe the Chinese market has the best talent,” says Li. “Every year there are several million new science and technology graduates.” And they, like their government, are determined to seize the day.

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‘We Can Literally Invent Humans 2.0’: The Enhanced Games Envision More Than Events Without Drug Testing

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



When Kristian Gkolomeev woke up one morning in February, the last thing he expected to do was break a world record in the pool. The Greek swimmer and four-time Olympian, who finished fifth in the 50-m freestyle in Paris and Tokyo, had come to Greensboro, N.C., to take part in a preview of something called the Enhanced Games, a new start-up that plans to stage an

Olympic-style competition permitting the use of most performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) currently banned in global sports.

It was another athlete, however, who had come to make a splash that day. Retired Australian swimming star James Magnussen—a former world champion who won three Olympic medals—had said publicly in early 2024 that he'd “juice to the gills” and break the 50-m freestyle world record if the Enhanced Games would put up a \$1 million prize. Enhanced Games officials took him up on the offer.

Magnussen, a few months into his PED regimen, was supposed to swim under 20.91 seconds, the mark César Cielo of Brazil set in 2009, in a timed solo effort to prove that the Enhanced Games concept—even before its first formal event launched—would result in performances the world has never before witnessed. But Magnussen, whose body ballooned with muscle while taking drugs, kept falling short. Gkolomeev, on the other hand, was just three weeks into his own low-dosage use of PEDs and feeling better than expected. So Gkolomeev put on a full-body polyurethane swimsuit, similar to the type worn by Cielo in 2009. (Such suits have been banned in competition since 2010, due to all the records that fell while swimmers wore them.) He hit the water and tapped the wall in 20.89 seconds, breaking the official world record and winning that \$1 million prize.

You won't find Gkolomeev's swim in any official record book, because it wasn't a sanctioned race, and because he was taking PEDs (Gkolomeev declined to detail his cocktail; the Enhanced Games say they advocate for transparency while also respecting privacy). But he found another kind of value in his accomplishment. “I feel,” he says, “kind of like a superhuman.”



The Enhanced Games, which will announce today that they'll hold their debut event Memorial Day weekend 2026 in Las Vegas, are, at their core, selling fast times. Founded by entrepreneurs and investors [Aron D'Souza](#), who encouraged Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel to bankroll Hulk Hogan's lawsuit against Gawker, which ultimately bankrupted the outlet, and Christian Angermayer, a psychedelic evangelist, they are betting that consumers just want to see athletes swim and run as fast as possible, without biotechnical restrictions. They will stage events in swimming, track, and weightlifting and expect to sign up about 100 athletes, who will likely have to give up future Olympics aspirations if they're going to use drugs.

Enhanced Games officials argue that while the Olympics focus on fairness (testing everyone to make sure no one has an advantage from PEDs), they're more concerned with safety (monitoring the medical profiles of athletes to ensure they're healthy enough to compete). They also note that most Olympians don't earn much money, whereas Enhanced Games athletes will receive better pay and benefits. And, they say, despite the testing protocols, there remains speculation about whether Olympic athletes are clean, so the Enhanced Games make that a nonissue. Rather than have male and female categories, Enhanced Games athletes will compete in XY or XX divisions, though it's unclear how the company will conduct chromosome testing, which has been deemed invasive and potentially inaccurate by many scientific experts and banned from the Olympics since 1999.

Read More: [TIME100 Health 2025: Christian Angermayer and Aron D'Souza](#)

Health and medical experts are already ringing alarms. "This kind of reminds me of the Roman Circus," says Charles Yesalis, professor emeritus of health policy at Penn State University and an expert on PEDs in sports. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) says, "If you want to destroy any concept of fair play and fair competition in sport, this would be a good way to do it," while the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) calls the Enhanced Games a "dangerous and irresponsible concept." Olympic officials, however, might have to walk a diplomatic tightrope: in February, the Enhanced Games announced that 1789 Capital, where Donald Trump Jr. is a partner, was leading a multimillion-dollar investment in the company. The Olympics are coming to L.A. in 2028, while President Donald Trump is

still in office, and the President is featured front and center in a promotional video touting 1789's Enhanced Games play.

Beyond the athletic competition, the Enhanced Games are making the grand case that safe use of PEDs at their events can trickle down to the general public, allowing people to live happier, healthier, and more productive lives. Their pitch arrives amid a growing interest in longevity, with scientists and biohackers alike looking for ways to extend and improve our years on this planet. When the Enhanced Games convened the Second Conference on Human Enhancement in December, [Bryan Johnson](#), the subject of the Netflix doc *Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever*, was a keynote speaker. This effort also comes at a time when many Americans are fired up about defending personal freedoms—whether it's their right to opt out of vaccines or to put performance-enhancing substances in their bodies.



Still, how this new addition fits into the sports landscape remains to be seen. Controversy over risk, fairness, and athletic legitimacy feels almost guaranteed. And of course there's the question of demand. The Olympics,

even with all their flaws, broke all sorts of viewership records last summer. Is an audience really thirsting for a doped-up version? And is it all that impressive to push the limits of the human body when you've got Lord knows what in your system?

As D'Souza tells it, he was at the gym one day in 2022 when he noticed just how many people around him did not come by their looks naturally. He started working on the Enhanced Games concept, confident there were plenty of athletes being denied opportunities because they took drugs that were perfectly legal in their countries but banned from competition. But it was on a walk around Biscayne Bay in South Florida over Christmas that year that he got a crucial vote of confidence. He shared the idea with his father, a 78-year-old medical professor specializing in cardiology, who not only did not balk but saw real promise. “The first thing he said was, ‘The data that will come out of this will change the world,’” says D’Souza. Though participants don’t have to reveal publicly what they’re taking, organizers hope they’ll enroll in an independently approved clinical trial assessing the impact of PEDs on elite athletes. The results could have implications for everyday living. “We can literally invent humans 2.0,” says D’Souza. “The compounds that allow athletes to run faster and jump higher are the same compounds that will allow my dad to walk up a flight of stairs.”

A medical commission will be tasked with overseeing a battery of blood, heart, brain, and bone tests to ensure athletes are not subjecting themselves to undue risk in competition. A scientific body will communicate key findings to the public. “We’re not in the business of sports, we’re in the business of science and cultural change,” says D’Souza. “And the cultural change that will be the most profound will be a view that medicine is not just about making sick people less sick. Medicine is also an important tool to elevate human performance.”

To execute this vision, the Enhanced Games will need a significant audience against which to sell media rights: Officials say TV and streaming outlets have expressed interest in distributing the first event. A planned direct-to-consumer line of supplements and FDA-approved performance enhancers could provide another revenue stream. “I don’t see anything intrinsically wrong with the Olympics,” says D’Souza. But he doesn’t like that they’re

the only option for a multisport international event testing “Citius, Altius, Fortius,” or “Faster, Higher, Stronger.” “Competition is very healthy,” he says. “The fact that the IOC has a monopoly in sports governance today is problematic.”

D’Souza, who is Australian, brought the Enhanced Games idea to Angermayer, a billionaire investor from Germany whom Thiel had first connected him with more than a decade ago. And Angermayer, the founder of the multibillion-dollar fund Aperion Investment Group, with holdings in crypto, biotech, and other sectors, agreed to partner in the venture, with backing from Thiel.



Angermayer is also co-founder and chairman of atai Life Sciences, a clinical-stage psychedelic biopharma company with some \$400 million in market cap. He sees a connection between mainstream acceptance of psychedelics and the potential of the Enhanced Games. Society has come around on a variety of things that were once broadly considered taboo:

Angermayer points to gay rights, but attitudes have also changed on marijuana and [sports gambling](#), with consumers leaning more libertarian on such subjects. It's your choice to bet on basketball or take psychedelics. Angermayer sees the expected debut of the Enhanced Games, which he thought would take a few more years to get off the ground, as further proof of shifting winds. "The zeitgeist has changed on all sorts of crazy ideas," says Angermayer.

He just hopes it hasn't shifted to the point where all Enhanced Games smoke subsides. "I hope there are demonstrators on the street saying, 'This is bad!'" he says, with a laugh. "Because doing that, and the controversies, drives attention."

While Angermayer might not get his protest marches, the Enhanced Games will have no shortage of opponents. "They're potentially dangerous in several ways," says Dr. Michael Joyner, a human-performance expert at the Mayo Clinic. For one, says Joyner, the long-term effect of PEDs are not well known: a whole population could be putting themselves at risk for damage. Second are the acute risks of substances like stimulants, which can lead to dehydration, high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and more. While the best medical monitoring can give athletes a clean bill of health going into a race, if they were to, say, load up on stimulants moments before the start—knowing they won't be drug-tested afterward—the results could prove disastrous.

Plus, it's no secret that young people look up to elite athletes. As a result of the Enhanced Games, increasing levels of PED use could reach high school sports, an unintended consequence of the endeavor. "These Games are sending an inappropriate message to our children," says Yesalis.

Furthermore, says John William Devine, a lecturer in sports ethics and integrity at Swansea University in the U.K., "lifting the ban on performance-enhancing drugs would undermine the purpose of the sports themselves." If it's impossible to separate the quality of a pharmacological cocktail from the will and skills of the athlete, an achievement can quickly lose its luster. "The fact that you have run faster or lifted more or jumped longer or jumped

higher doesn't necessarily mean that your performance is more excellent," says Devine.

Still, experts worry the Enhanced Games could steal some shine from the official record holders. "It's a little bit unfortunate that it's a distraction from the greatest-ever performers we have out there," says Joyner, citing Olympic champions like [U.S. swimmer Katie Ledecky](#) and shot-putter Ryan Crouser, who also hold world records. "You're looking for some edge, when these people are pushing limits so effectively within the rules."

Andrii Govorov, a Ukrainian swimmer who set the non-enhanced 50-m butterfly world record in 2018, says he's never taken a PED. As a new Enhanced Games athlete, he compares the anticipation of taking these drugs to someone with a fear of heights about to jump off a cliff. "Of course I'm nervous," says Govorov. "I don't know what to expect."



Govorov is taking the plunge, however, for a host of reasons. For one, his future as an Olympic swimmer seemed uncertain. He competed in London in 2012 and Rio in 2016, but just missed qualifying for Paris. After Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, he couldn't train consistently in his home country. He bounced from Hawaii to Germany to Spain to Portugal in the run-up to Paris, and the unpredictability affected his times. "I was just a guest," he says. "I could never choose my preparation. You cannot break any record with that approach. You're a survivor."

The Enhanced Games will give Govorov access to training, support, and a personalized drug plan. It seemed like a better deal, especially since drug controversies have consistently dogged the Olympics, whether it was U.S. track stars being busted for doping early this century, the state-sponsored Russian sample-swapping antics in Sochi, or Chinese swimmers heading to Tokyo despite [testing positive for banned substances](#) (China claimed samples were contaminated in a hotel kitchen). "The system is not providing fairness," says Govorov. "They are just trying to catch the mouse, and they never do it in the correct way."

Asked by Joe Rogan last year why an athlete would choose the Olympics given the incentives offered by Enhanced Games, Angermayer answered: "Not our problem." The IOC is finally adding Govorov's specialty, the 50-m butterfly, to the 2028 program. But he's still leaving his gold-medal dreams behind. "I'll never come back, no matter what," he says. "This is a one-way ticket for me." Chasing his own world record—and the \$500,000 bonus he can get from the Enhanced Games if he sets the new 50-m butterfly mark—doesn't feel like settling. "I could potentially be one of the first superhuman athletes on planet earth," he says.

There's that word again. The Enhanced Games are hard-selling superhumanity. Doping rules, to the start-up's proponents, serve as innovation caps that don't exist in other fields. "We are going to go to Mars," says Govorov. "We are going to conquer the universe. Why do we need to stop with that? It's just part of the evolution. We are part of the sports evolution. That's completely clear."

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How the Director of Pee-wee as Himself Convinced Paul Reubens to Finally Open Up

Juzwiak is a senior writer at Jezebel.



On July 31, 2023, Matt Wolf received news that no [documentarian](#) wants to hear: The subject of his uncompleted film was dead. This was no mere talking head. It was a man who left an indelible mark on pop culture, whose manic persona, gray suit, and bowtie helped define the 1980s. On a personal note, says Wolf, it was someone who “changed who I was through his art.” The subject was [Paul Reubens](#), the actor best known as Pee-wee Herman, who had been diagnosed with cancer six years prior.

“Paul was very preoccupied with the film being finished before he died,” says Wolf, whose two-part HBO documentary, *Pee-wee as Himself*, debuted at Sundance to rapturous praise and premieres on May 23 on HBO and Max. Though Reubens never said his death was imminent, or even told Wolfe of

his cancer diagnosis, his legacy was clearly on his mind. “Every day I woke up saying, ‘You must rise to the occasion. Do not drop the ball,’” says Wolf, whose previous documentary subjects include the musician Arthur Russell and the Biosphere 2.

Reubens was, according to Wolf, intense, complex, and “the funniest and one of the smartest people I’ve ever met.” He was also a “resistant subject.” That resistance plays out onscreen and distinguishes *Pee-wee as Himself* from other [celebrity bio-docs](#). This one tells, but it also shows. The telling comes via recollections from Wolf’s talking heads—drawn from 40 hours of interviews with Reubens, plus friends, family, and colleagues—as well as Reubens’ career archive, including 1,000 hours of video footage and tens of thousands of images. These take us from Reubens’ early life as a precociously creative child growing up not far from the Ringling Bros. Circus headquarters in Florida, through his work in the improv group the [Groundlings](#), to his career successes: creating and starring in the hit 1985 film *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* and practically rewriting the book on children’s programming during the five-season run of his Saturday morning CBS show [Pee-wee’s Playhouse](#).



Where the doc *shows* rather than simply tells, however, comes when Reubens breaks the fourth wall about the process of making it, including wanting to be more hands-on with the production and his suspicious regard of Wolf. The tension is palpable. At one point, Reubens tells Wolf that he made “one documentary that I liked out of, what—six?” “There were times I was angry at Paul,” recalls Wolf. “I accepted this was great material for the film, and he knew it.”

Reubens, who admired people “living conceptually” during his college days at California Institute of the Arts, had [devised Pee-wee as a character meant to exist in the real world](#) as well as showbiz. He was often billed as Pee-wee Herman during interviews and in movies, rarely letting his real self show in service of his full-time performance art piece. For Wolf, the trick was to pull back the curtain on the performance to reveal the man himself.

Reubens was Wolf's "dream subject." They connected in 2020, during the height of pandemic lockdown, after Wolf caught wind that Reubens was interested in making a film about his life. So began a series of FaceTime and Zoom interactions that would number in the hundreds of hours. "With Paul, there was no 15-minute conversation," Wolf says. Reubens, unsure whether Wolf was the right guy for the job, proceeded begrudgingly. And then one day, the resistance just abated. "He said, 'I'm in. Sometimes you gotta take a leap of faith,'" remembers Wolf.

Though the line between director and subject was fixed, Wolf nonetheless considered Reubens a collaborator. But the question of just how much Reubens was to contribute added to the strain. Before Wolf had completed his interviews, Reubens went incommunicado. "We were at an impasse as to what post-production would look like, and I was holding my ground that I would be doing that independently, and that he would have opportunities to see the cut," says Wolf. "And that didn't feel like enough to him."

"Paul was very particular," says Cassandra Peterson ([better known as Elvira](#)), who befriended Reubens in the 1970s when both were in the Groundlings and who appears in the doc. "He wanted to control things, and have things exactly the way he wanted, to a really extreme degree. So I kind of felt sorry for the filmmakers. I knew it would be a tough road."



Peterson recalled falling out with Reubens due to a work issue that she did not specify. It happened not long after the 1986 debut of *Pee-wee's*

Playhouse and lasted for years until they found themselves reunited while presenting an award together. “It was great to be friends with Paul,” she says. “He was funny, brilliant and a fantastic friend, but I really had to separate the work from the friendship.” She expressed great admiration for her friend’s creativity. “One of Paul’s strong points was remembering how he was and what happened to him as a child,” says Peterson. “He kept ahold of that childhood thing that everybody wishes they could hold on to. The freedom and creativity that you had when you were a child, Paul never let that go.”

Wolf was initially reluctant to include his own presence in the movie, but he and Reubens decided together to explore their dynamic on-screen. Control was a frequent topic behind the scenes and in front of the camera, where Reubens openly pondered if he should be the one making the film. Wolf attempted to shoot candid footage of Reubens to augment the talking-head material, but it didn’t work. “If anything that wasn’t planned happened, he would be unhappy,” Wolf recalls. As to Reubens’ need for control, Wolf has some theories. “Many exceptional artists are incredibly controlling,” Wolf says. But also: “He was controlling because he lost control of his personal narrative in the media.”

Wolf is referring to [two arrests](#) that resulted in career-upending scandals. The first occurred in 1991, when Reubens was picked up in an adult movie theater in Sarasota, Fla., and charged with indecent exposure. This resulted in the effective cancellation of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*; he pleaded no contest and maintained publicly that the allegations were false. The second happened in 2002, when Reubens was charged with possession of child pornography. He eventually took a lesser plea of obscenity, while maintaining that nothing in his archive of vintage gay erotica constituted child sex abuse material. The impasse between Wolf and Reubens occurred before Wolf got to ask about these arrests in detail. Those parts of the movie are largely told through the recollections of his friends and family.

Wolf did capture Reubens discussing his sexuality, which Reubens had never done publicly. Though he had relationships with men, he was closeted for the sake of his career. In the film, Reubens seems at ease discussing his life as a gay man, but Wolf says the filming of that interview “was not a chill, easy day.” Sexuality was both a point of connection and tension among

director and star. Wolf, too, is gay, but came out at 14 and values his sexuality as a key feature of his identity, a position Reubens didn't share. When Wolf engaged Reubens about his sexuality, he noticed his subject was "squirmly and procrastinating a lot" then spoke only in vague terms. Finally Reubens took Wolf aside and said, "I don't know how to do this." To that, Wolf had a simple directive: "Just say, 'I'm gay.'" Once the cameras were back rolling, Wolf asked Reubens point blank, "Are you gay?" Reubens joked and then "snapped in," discussing his sexuality freely. "It was extraordinary, and I felt very proud of him," Wolf says.

In July 2023, Wolf and Reubens resumed communication and agreed to proceed with the shoot. But the interview they planned never came to pass—Reubens died at 70 just two weeks later. Peterson says she was aware of the cancer "from day one"—Reubens had called her crying the day he received his diagnosis of lung cancer. But he fought it and seemed to recover completely only to find out that he had a brain tumor some time later. Treatment for that also seemed to go well. "He never dwelled on it," Peterson recalls. "He never talked about it. He ate healthy. He really turned his life around." But then maybe a month or two before his death, Reubens told her that he wasn't feeling well. "He'd had a few episodes of feeling sick, and I was getting worried," she says.

As indicated in the documentary, Reubens left behind a partner when he died. Peterson could not recall how long they were together before Reubens' death, but she said that their bond was undeniable. "It was the first time I heard Paul talk about somebody who he really, really liked," she said. "It was nice that Paul had somebody at the end, a very nice person who really cared about Paul. I was so happy to see that."



The day before he died, Reubens recorded a voice note in which he reflected on his 2002 arrest and sent it to his publicist, Kelly Bush Novak, who passed it on to Wolf. Toward the end of the film, a frail-voiced Reubens says, "More than anything, the reason I wanted to make a documentary was to let people see who I really am and how painful and difficult it was to be labeled something that I wasn't. The moment I heard somebody label me as, I'm just going to say it, a pedophile, I knew it was going to change everything moving forward and backwards."

Reubens' death put Wolf in a shaky position. He pushed down feelings of grief in order to finish his film. The stakes couldn't have been higher. "I've never felt so trusted to take on such a big thing," Wolf says. Peterson loves the resulting film. "I really felt like Matt got Paul. He had a handle on what he was doing," she says.

The documentary is an honest portrait of a creative technician, his drive, his process, and the way he negotiated life in the public eye. The film rather explicitly asks a question that has preoccupied the culture on conscious and subconscious levels in the age of social media and scorn for traditional media: Who gets to tell people's stories? It seems clear that, had Reubens been in creative control, we wouldn't have seen the glimpses of his humanity that, while not always flattering, make *Pee-wee as Himself* so riveting. And, while they might not have been what Reubens wanted, they are the product of the deep respect and admiration Wolf had for his subject. "I was determined to make meaning out of this," says Wolf. "I said to Paul, 'I will do right by you.' I meant it."

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In Adults and Overcompensating, a New Generation Reinvents the Hangout Comedy

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.



The creators of FX's *Adults* must have known that comparisons between their show and [*Girls*](#) were inevitable, because they leaned way into them. Beyond the similar titles, both comedies follow 20-something friend groups in New York City. There's even an explicit callback in *Adults'* May 28 premiere—one begging to be cited in reviews like this—to the indelible scene in the *Girls* pilot where [Lena Dunham](#)'s narcissistic aspiring-writer

protagonist, Hannah Horvath, informs her parents that she might be “*a voice of a generation*.” The new series abbreviates this cliché as “V of our G,” and applies it to a media-savvy young man who becomes the envy of his peers by going public with workplace sexual harassment allegations and scoring a six-figure payout.

Equal parts tribute and sendup, the moment cleverly heralds the arrival of a new generation anointing its own voices, skewering its own pieties, and distinguishing itself from the wave of millennials that swept pop culture in the early 2010s. *Adults* is the creation of Rebecca Shaw and Ben Kronengold, a couple and comedy team who first tasted fame when their [Yale graduation speech](#) went viral in 2018. (They’ve since written for Jimmy Fallon and co-authored a collection of short stories titled *Naked in the Rideshare*.) Along with comedian Benito Skinner’s college-set Amazon romp *Overcompensating*, it’s the second hangout comedy set to debut in May from creators born in the mid-’90s. Neither as internet-addled nor as pandemic-damaged as you might expect, these distinctly current yet familiar shows update the genre with all the absurdism and self-awareness of a generation that distracts itself from a world in crisis by [bingeing *Girls*, *Friends*, *Sex and the City*](#), and the rest of the friends-as-chosen-family canon.



While previous zeitgeisty series about young adults in New York were set in aspirational environs (the north Brooklyn hipster corridor for *Girls*, the post-bohemian Village for *Friends*), *Adults* gestures toward Gen Z's limited horizons by packing its five characters into one guy's childhood home in an unfashionable part of Queens. Timid sweetheart Samir (Malik Elassal) is the man of the house, fumbling through challenges like paying by check for water-heater repairs. Issa (Amita Rao) is a loud, dramatic, sexually liberated heir to *Broad City*'s Ilana; her chill, pansexual boyfriend, Paul Baker (Jack Innanen), is, inexplicably, always addressed by his full name. Anton (Owen Thiele, who also appears in *Overcompensating*) makes friends everywhere he goes—including, in one episode, with a violent criminal who's terrorizing the neighborhood. A striver afflicted with anxiety-induced anal bleeding, Lucy Freyer's Billie is the only housemate who thinks much about her future.

The Gen X *Friends* had the luxury of slacking on a coffee-shop couch for years before ascending to the kind of high-powered careers the *SATC* women already had when we first met them in their 30s. As much as they flailed in

pursuit of them, the millennial *Girls*, who graduated amid the grand-scale rug pull that was the Great Recession, had dreams and ambitions. But for the *Adults*, just being able to confidently claim the titular identity seems a sufficient life goal.



Adulthood is, unsurprisingly, even more elusive for the two freshmen at the center of *Overcompensating*. Surrounded by homosocial groups of new acquaintances egging them on to prove their hetero horniness, Skinner's innocent ex-jock character, Benny, and Carmen (Wally Baram), a girl whose high tolerance for alcohol and love of video games reflect the influence of a late older brother she's still mourning, attempt a first-night hookup. When he can't go through with it—because, as he's struggling to admit to himself, Benny is gay—they become best friends. That relationship is, in turn, tested by an undergrad social scene where everyone is desperate to look like they're having more fun, sex, and success than they actually are. Though Skinner situates this competition mostly within the physical world of parties, a ridiculous secret society, and an on-campus performance by *Overcompensating* executive producer [Charli XCX](#), it's also clearly a

reflection of the peer-pressure panopticon that is growing up on social media.

Critics too often do a disservice to the art of younger generations, overstating the similarities between works that have little in common besides the age of their makers or failing to account for the aesthetic prejudices of their own cohort. So I want to be clear: *Overcompensating* and *Adults* take divergent approaches to the Gen Z sitcom. Both play on coming-of-age tropes, but *Overcompensating* feels more old-fashioned in its coming-out storyline and earnestness about being true to oneself. And if I was put off by Skinner's over-the-top ingenuousness—Benny's eyes are so wide they almost pop out of his head—that is likely in part because I wasn't raised on the kind of shouty, exaggerated, rapidly edited character work favored by the wave of social video creators among whom he got his start. (It could also have something to do with some [widely discussed confusion](#) over whether *Overcompensating* is meant to take place in the present or during the years when the real, 31-year-old Skinner, who doesn't exactly pass as a freshman, actually attended college. Either way, there's nothing more Gen Z than 2010s nostalgia.)



Still, there are elements the shows share that differentiate them from TV for and about Gen Z conceived by 40-somethings like [Mindy Kaling](#) ([Never Have I Ever](#), [The Sex Lives of College Girls](#)) and [Sam Levinson](#) ([Euphoria](#)). The young creators seem less concerned with authenticity or empowerment or grand political statement-making than generations past; in their place is a “[LOL Nothing Matters](#)” sense of whimsical absurdity. “We are in a post-[De Blasio](#), pre-*Avatar 3* moment. We have to live!” *Adults’* Issa declares, in a nonsensical rewrite of the kind of utterance you often hear from Vs of Gs. Benny tells his problems to the [Megan Fox](#) poster hanging in his dorm room like a talisman of straightness—and the miniature Fox replies.

The shows have a certain irreverence, too. Their casts are as effortlessly diverse, from race to sexual orientation, as the New York of *Friends*, *Girls*, et al. was unrealistically white. Yet their humor telegraphs exhaustion with a decade’s worth of millennial social-justice discourse that performatively polices language and identity in the face of ongoing global catastrophe. In the *Adults* premiere, multiple characters make cynical attempts to capitalize on the workplace misconduct scandal, and Anton crows that the victim

“looks like he was molested.” Paul Baker recoils, in another episode, at a stereotypical gun-shop clerk who uses the R-word and asks if Paul is “fruity,” only to find out the man has a beloved sister with an intellectual disability and is, himself, gay. *Overcompensating* has a gentler tone, but a scene where Benny calls a girl the C-word (no, he’s not reclaiming the slur) would’ve sent Twitter ca. 2015 into convulsions.

What keeps these series from coming off as crass is the genuine camaraderie that connects their characters and shelters them, to some extent, from the precariousness of their lives. The *Friends* idly bantered, arranged themselves into couples, and got married. The *Girls* were so self-centered, it doomed their friendships. But even when the young people in *Adults* and *Overcompensating* do betray one another, out of callowness or insecurity, the love they share remains pure. The kids probably aren’t alright, but at least they have each other’s backs.

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Netflix's *Sirens* Is This Summer's The Perfect Couple—Even If It's Trying to Be Something Better

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.



Meghann Fahy doesn't have the best luck with vacations. [The White Lotus took her to Sicily](#), where her character's marriage was tested and [many people got killed](#). In [The Perfect Couple](#), her character was the murder victim, whose death derailed a Nantucket society wedding. Fahy's latest bad trip, *Sirens*, feels a lot like this year's *Perfect Couple*. Both are Netflix shows that cast big-name actors as rich people summering on exclusive New

England islands. Each pits a young heroine of humble means against the formidable, possibly sinister lady of the estate; this time, that [quintessential Nicole Kidman role](#) is played by a serenely terrifying [Julianne Moore](#). And while *Sirens* shows flickers of ambition to transcend the typical A-list crime soap, its admittedly addictive pleasures are chiefly of the sudsy variety.

Based on a play by creator Molly Smith Metzler ([Maid](#)) and backed by a team of executive producers that also includes [Margot Robbie](#), the miniseries introduces Fahy's Devon as a Central Casting burnout, exiting a police station in all black, combat boots, and smudgy eyeliner. Never mind, for now, what she was doing there. Devon has been stuck in Buffalo caring for a dad with dementia (Bill Camp). Now, she's hit a breaking point and needs help from her semi-estranged sister, Simone ([House of the Dragon](#) breakout Milly Alcock).



The trouble is, Simone loves her job as the live-in assistant and creepily close confidant of Michaela (Moore), the charismatic but exacting wife of a billionaire (Kevin Bacon), whose philanthropic foundation seems kind of

like a cult. Devon's raccoon-eyed arrival on an island that might as well be sponsored by Lilly Pulitzer, at the beginning of an event-packed Labor Day weekend set to culminate in Michaela's big annual gala, throws the household into chaos.

Sirens has been promoted as a dark comedy with a “[Greek mythology vibe](#)” befitting its title; flourishes such as a trio of fawning Michaela followers who speak in unison do occasionally conjure a surreal, satirical mood. The finale implies a desire to comment on the misogyny and wealth worship underlying stories like *The Perfect Couple* rather than reproduce it. Yet Metzler too often stops short of true wit and strangeness. This makes for an inconsistent tone, from which we're happily distracted by a dazzling backdrop, a twisty plot, and diva-worthy performances—all elements that make *Sirens* just as fun to watch as the shows it means to critique, but not much more insightful.

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Mission: Impossible—The Final Reckoning Won’t Save the Movies —But It’s Still Fun to Watch Tom Cruise Try

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.



Mission: Impossible—The Final Reckoning, the eighth film in [the franchise](#) and ostensibly its finale, looks, feels, and sounds like the sort of movie you need to see on the big screen. The powers that be at the [Cannes Film Festival](#) clearly thought so too: the picture premiered here on May 14. And even if, some 20 or even 10 years ago, adding a pop franchise entry like this one to the festival lineup might have seemed like a cheap, attention-grabbing stunt, it means something wholly different now. Aside from the fact that Cannes isn't necessarily above the occasional cheap, attention-grabbing stunt, as an institution it is and always has been all about the big-screen experience, which is now so endangered that it needs all the attention it can get. In 2025, *Final Reckoning* is exactly the kind of splashy crowd-pleaser that the festival seeks out to both offset and complement its otherwise fairly serious-minded

slate of films from all over the world. No one would begrudge [Tom Cruise](#) his turn on the Cannes red carpet, and at the *Final Reckoning* premiere, the crowd seemed happy to welcome him. You don't have to love Cruise to acknowledge that he's probably the most widely recognizable movie star in the world. Sometimes recognition counts as a kind of love.

To his credit, Cruise believes with all his heart in the big-screen experience. Just as his *Mission: Impossible* character [Ethan Hunt](#) gamely takes on the burden, ad nauseam, of saving the world, Cruise genuinely thinks he can save cinema. His optimism is touching, if unrealistic. But as hard as he, and we, might wish it could be so, *Mission: Impossible—The Final Reckoning*—directed by franchise veteran Christopher McQuarrie, who also cowrote the script—isn't the kind of movie that will save movies. It's big, extravagant, and at times very beautiful to look at. The story is the problem: packed with expository dialogue, it feels as if it were written to be digested in 10- or 15-minute bites. Characters robotically repeat significant McGuffiny phrases. The Rabbit's Foot! The Anti-God! The Doomsday Vault! *Final Reckoning* doesn't flow; it lurches forward in a series of information-delivery packets. If you've seen the first half of this double whammy, 2023's conveniently titled [Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One](#), but forgotten what the hell it was all about, you needn't worry. You could queue up *Final Reckoning* at home, go out to walk the dog, and get caught up in a snap when you return. And how cinematic is *that*?



The plot, picking up where *Dead Reckoning Part One* left off, goes something like this: Cruise's Ethan Hunt is in hot water for—*quelle surprise*—failing to follow orders. (He got thrown off track by trying to avenge the death of his wife—we're supposed to believe Ethan is a true romantic only because we're reminded over and over again.) Now he must complete the mission with which he's been entrusted: to vanquish the scary all-seeing, all-knowing AI being known as the Entity. To do so, he must dive deep into Arctic waters to procure a doodad known as the Podkova—a disappointing-looking little thing that looks like an eight-track cassette—which contains the Entity's source code. Not so fast, though: the Podkova is nothing without a little plug-in known as the Poison Pill. Once Ethan has that, the Entity will be kaputsky.

Unfortunately, the Poison Pill is in the possession of wily villain Gabriel (Esai Morales), who's fond of slinking around and bragging about how much power he'll have once the Entity is in his grasp. He's already got the Poison Pill, having seized it from one of Ethan's dearest colleagues in the Impossible Mission Force, Ving Rhames' Luther. Many of Ethan's other

helpers (the ones who haven't been killed off—RIP [Rebecca Ferguson's](#) magnificent Ilsa Faust) have returned, including tech-support smarty Benji ([Simon Pegg](#)), foe-turned-friend Paris (Pom Klementieff), and ace pickpocket Grace (Haley Atwell), who also slips handily into the role of Ethan's love interest. Sadly, Grace doesn't get to do much pickpocketing: her chief job is to gaze admiringly at her hero beau and issue solemn declarations like "The whole world's in trouble, Ethan. You're the only one I trust to save it." At one point, Ethan nearly dies—it wouldn't be a *Mission: Impossible* movie without at least one or two or three close calls—and in a sequence shot with the tender, dreamy vagueness of a feminine-hygiene commercial from the '70s, she brings him back to robust health with her womanly caresses. No one in the Cannes audience laughed; perhaps the end times really are nigh.



But no matter: cinema is still bigger than all of us, with the capacity to be many things. *Mission: Impossible—Final Reckoning* is just one kind of thing, a big-screen entertainment that should be better than it is. It does offer some moments of joy: the climactic stunt sequence—involving not one but two biplanes, soaring over countryside greenery—is fun precisely because it's a pleasure, finally, to gaze at something tangible and mechanical, instead of just contemplating the threat posed by the Entity. (Represented as a talking ganglion of light, it's a disappointingly abstract villain.)

And no matter how you feel about Cruise, you've got to admit he looks pretty good. As usual, his Ethan Hunt is muscular, hardy, game for anything. If any of the cartilage in his joints is wearing away, you'd never know it. A sequence in which he's told he must train in advance for a treacherous underwater mission has him zipping away on a treadmill in manly-man fashion, electrodes stuck to his bare, gleaming chest. He's still got that boys-adventure-book grin, though he can also be suitably solemn when he remembers, as one character after another reminds him, that the fate of the world is in his hands. As Ethan Hunt, Cruise may just be going through the motions of being Tom Cruise. But would an audience want to see him any other way? When he appeared onscreen, the audience at the massive Cannes press screening I attended—not to be confused with the glitzy premiere—cheered just a little, as if embarrassed by their spontaneous enthusiasm. This was a crowd of critics and journalists from around the world. We're supposed to be cool, circumspect, not-too-easy to please—but also, we love our stardust. The movies aren't just one thing, and they can't be saved by one man. Still, we'll believe the world can be snatched from AI doom if Tom Cruise can just plug the Poison Pill into the Podkova. For now, it's almost enough.

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The Phoenician Scheme Is Wes Anderson at His Most Muted

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.

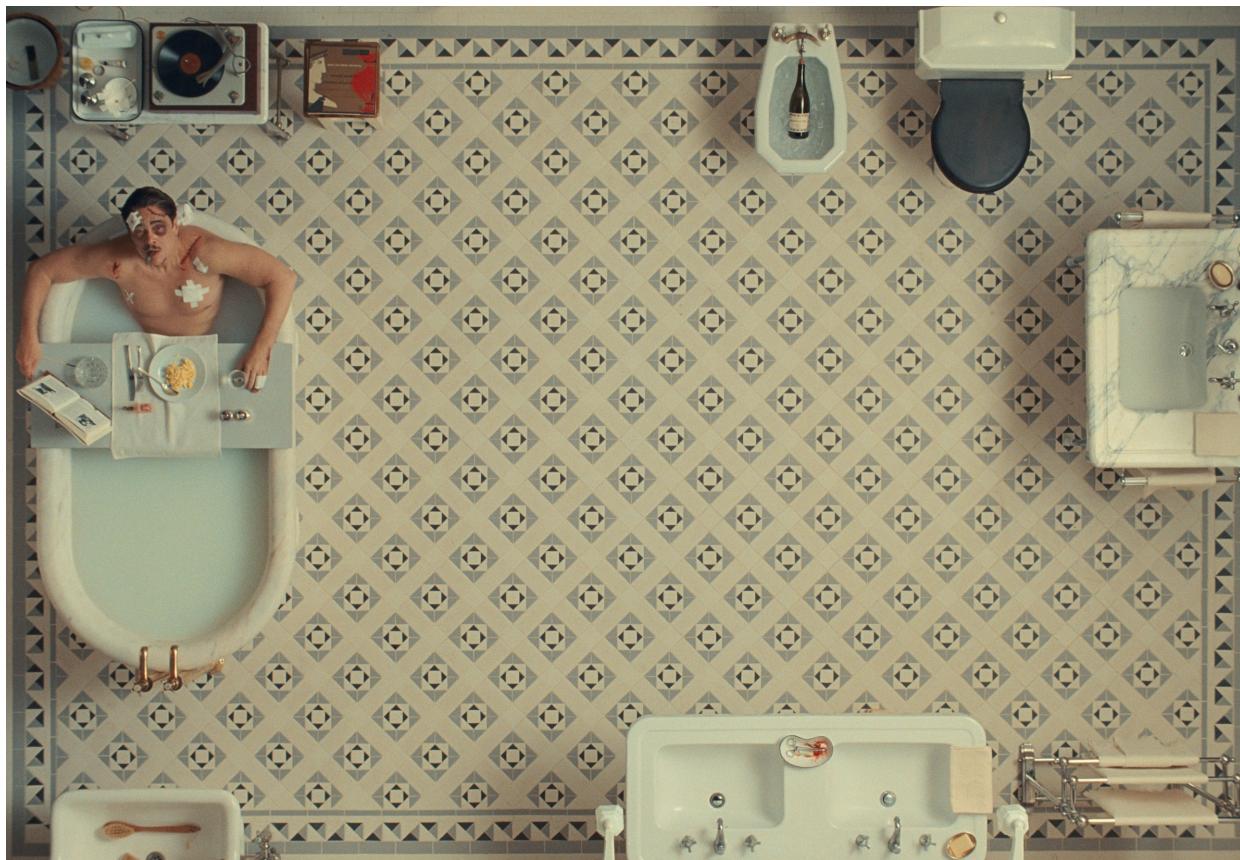


[Wes Anderson](#), who specializes in designing [fancifully invented societies](#), probably doesn't strike anyone as an angry person. But his espionage comedy *The Phoenician Scheme*, playing in competition here at the Cannes Film Festival, shows glimmers of something that might be called anger, or at least frustration, over the greed and immorality of people who have too much—and yet only want more. The picture is flat and schematic—even flatter and more schematic than usual for Anderson, who favors static camera work and sets that resemble meticulously decorated dollhouses; he also has a penchant for dividing his movies into discrete chapters with the use of descriptively deadpan title cards. All those features figure in *The*

Phoenician Scheme. But the movie is more muted than usual for Anderson, both in terms of its color tones and its story. There's something somber about it; it hints at a fringe of exhaustion on Anderson's part, though it doesn't seem that he's tired of movies—more that he's a little tired of the world.

Benicio Del Toro plays Anatole “Zsa Zsa” Korda, the richest man in Europe, a ruthless 1950s business tycoon who has a knack for surviving plane crashes. The suggestion is that his immorality is the key to his immortality; he's just too distastefully wily to die. After surviving one such smash landing in his private plane, he returns to his palazzo to consider his legacy, having decided that his eldest child and only daughter, Liesl (Mia Threapleton), will be his only heir. (He also has a passel of young sons who figure in the story as virtual orphans; shunted off to the far sidelines, they're generally depicted as an assembly of tiny, nervous faces.)

Read more: [The 37 Most Anticipated Movies of Summer 2025](#)



But Liesl has other plans. For one thing, she's a nun in training, ready to renounce all earthly belongings. And she has little affection for her father, trusting him not a whit; she even believes he might have killed her mother. Still, Zsa Zsa talks her into accompanying him on a multi-country jaunt, during which he'll wheedle, cajole, and hoodwink his associates into supplying the money he needs for a big, wealth-generating infrastructure scheme, the details of which are so boring they'll make your eyes glaze over. A meek and geeky insect specialist named Bjorn (Michael Cera) will accompany them, serving as both a tutor and a sort of guy Friday. Predictably, he nurtures a crush on Liesl, whose moonfaced radiance paradoxically gives her a kind of hot-cha-cha beauty, set off especially well by her demure white veil and habit. With her movie-star crimson lips and nail polish, she's quite the dish, though she insists to her father and her prospective suitors (there's more than one) that she truly wants to dedicate her life to God.

That fixation on a desire to believe in a higher power, especially within a religious framework, is one quirk we haven't really seen from Anderson before. Still, he offsets it jauntily. The movie's massive revolving door of actors in bit parts, customary for any Anderson affair these days, includes Tom Hanks, Riz Ahmed, Bryan Cranston, Benedict Cumberbatch, and Mathieu Amalric. Hope Davis plays a shrewd, strict Reverend Mother who shows up to inform Liesl that owing to her love of luxury goods (her father has given her a rosary made of glittering crystal and a gemstone-studded pipe, both of which she can't resist toting around), she's ill-suited for the convent. But before this exceedingly superior mother superior takes her leave, she makes sure Zsa Zsa is still going to fork over the dough he's promised her for a new refectory. He's not the only one adept at the art of the deal.

You might need to be a Wes Anderson purist to love *The Phoenician Scheme*. There's nothing wrong with the performances: Cera, with his tootling phony Swedish accent, has an amusing *savoir faire*. Threapleton, with her take-no-prisoners stare, is charmingly enigmatic. But although there are a few good costumes—Zsa Zsa at one point sports a dashing pair of Russian Constructivist-influenced red, white, and black zigzag pattern pajamas—the film's design overall feels curiously restrained. There's lots of 1950s industrial gray-green; even a Marseilles art deco nightclub feels a

little decoratively restrained, and the plot jumps around so much that we don't get to spend much time there anyway. Zsa Zsa suffers from troubling dreams—apparently, he *does* have a conscience—which are rendered in understated black-and-white and have the sobering vibe of old Rockwell Kent illustrations—they may be the movie's best feature. *The Phoenician Scheme* has none of the lavish, kooky excess of, say, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. And the plot, with its fixation on intricate, not-quite-cricket business deals, is—let's just come out and say it—boring. But Anderson seems to be expressing an indistinct dissatisfaction with the current world order in the best way he can: in a parade of color that's somehow less colorful than usual.

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‘We’re Already at the Limit’ of a Livable Climate Warns Brazil’s Marina Silva

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Marina Silva’s achievements may seem borderline miraculous. Since taking office for a second run as Brazil’s environment and climate minister in 2023, the country has quickly and dramatically reversed deforestation trends with strict enforcement of environment rules that had been abandoned by her predecessor. According to the most recent [official](#)

[account](#) released last fall, Amazon deforestation had fallen to the lowest level in a decade after dropping nearly in half from two years prior.

“When we took office, we had deforestation on an ascending curve that was out of control,” she told me on April 30. “We had to rebuild institutions, command and control organizations, and increase public funding.”

And yet, as we met in her office in Brasília, she was careful not to linger too long on the success. The Amazon rain forest is dangerously close to a tipping point that could rapidly reshape not just the world’s most famous rainforest biome but the whole planet. Once reached, the Amazon would lose the ability to sustain itself and vast swathes would transform into savannah, resulting in the loss of biodiversity and also a massive release of carbon dioxide. To halt it, she says, leaders will need to embrace new mechanisms to stop legal deforestation and catalyze efforts to reforest degraded land—all while continuing ongoing enforcement work. But, she says, saving the Amazon will require work beyond Brazil’s borders: the world will need to slow its burning of fossil fuels.

“Even if we can nullify deforestation, with climate change, if we don’t reduce carbon from fossil fuel emissions, the forest will be destroyed anyway,” she says.

For Silva, who was born and raised to a family of rubber tappers in the remote Amazonian state of Acre, this is the next step on a lifelong journey of Amazon protection. But it’s also a key, potentially make or break moment as Brazil occupies the center of the climate movement this year as it hosts the annual U.N. climate conference, COP30, in November.

“We’re already at the limit, at the changing, shifting point of the climate crisis,” she says. “There was a window of opportunity of not shooting over the 1.5 degree limit, and now it’s just a sliver.”

Even a seasoned climate expert would be forgiven for struggling to track all the work happening in Brazil ahead of COP30. Brazilian [President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), known simply as Lula, has made climate a top priority with ministers across the government focused on tackling the issue. Silva, a

national figure in Brazil who finished third in the 2014 presidential election, has turned her ministry into a central node in the effort.

While I was in Brazil, the government [announced](#) a \$2 billion financing program to reforest up to 1 million hectares (about the size of the island of Hawaii) of degraded land. And in recent months Silva has doubled down on work with her counterpart in the finance ministry on a \$125 billion fund aimed at protecting tropical forests around the world. Beyond the rain forest work, the government has rolled out a carbon price for domestic industries—and talked about how it might work with other countries to harmonize equivalent policies elsewhere.

Silva hopes that these efforts all come together at COP30 as part of a broader effort to make the conference a pivotal moment for the implementation of climate initiatives globally. She described the emerging COP30 goal as a “global ethical stocktake”: Lula and U.N. Secretary General [Antonio Guterres](#) will hear from a wide group of stakeholders—from philosophers to Indigenous people to political leadership—with an eye to helping the world chart a plan for putting climate solutions into action. “We can’t keep pushing things off,” she says. “We need to implement.”

It goes without saying that this year’s climate negotiations will be rife with challenges—perhaps none more significant than the challenge posed by the U.S. pullback from the international Paris climate engagement. Silva did not mince words on the role of the U.S. and the Trump Administration in muddying global climate discussions. Without my prompting, she criticized everything from his exiting the Paris Agreement to his decision to ice the National Climate Assessment. All of that leaves a massive gap in the necessary climate action, she says: “Things have become more difficult, especially with the decisions of the Trump Administration.”

My visit to Brasilia happened to coincide with a key meeting of the BRICS countries—a group of emerging market countries that cooperate as a counterweight to U.S. and European power. In my hotel, I spotted the Chinese foreign minister walking through the lobby with his entourage along with other country delegations. But Silva says the rest of the world can’t replace the actions needed from the U.S. “We can’t be deniers, not

with geopolitics, not with climate,” she told me. “The vacuum created by the U.S. is the U.S.’s vacuum.”

She pointed to challenging geopolitics, in part, to respond to questions about Lula’s own climate leadership. Despite his focus on the issue, some environmental activists have criticized him, saying he is moving too slowly and not doing enough. One area of particular concern: new oil exploration efforts in the Amazon region currently under consideration. Asked about the pending decision, Silva first pivoted to the stone-cold geopolitical realities. Oil demand remains high and supply is strained. The U.S. position has created a sense across the globe that fossil fuels will be around for a while.

The solution, she says, is a well-managed transition. “What I defend is a fair transition, a planned transition for everybody,” she says. “When I say fair and planned, it’s because it’s not magic.” COP30, with Brazil at the helm, is a good place to start implementing such a transition.

This story is supported by a partnership with [Outrider Foundation](#) and Journalism Funding Partners. TIME is solely responsible for the content.

Correction, May 20

The original article misstated the timeframe over which deforestation dropped nearly in half. It was over the previous two years, not in one year. The article also misstated the location of a reforestation program announced by the Brazilian government in April. It covered areas outside the Amazon, not in it.

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