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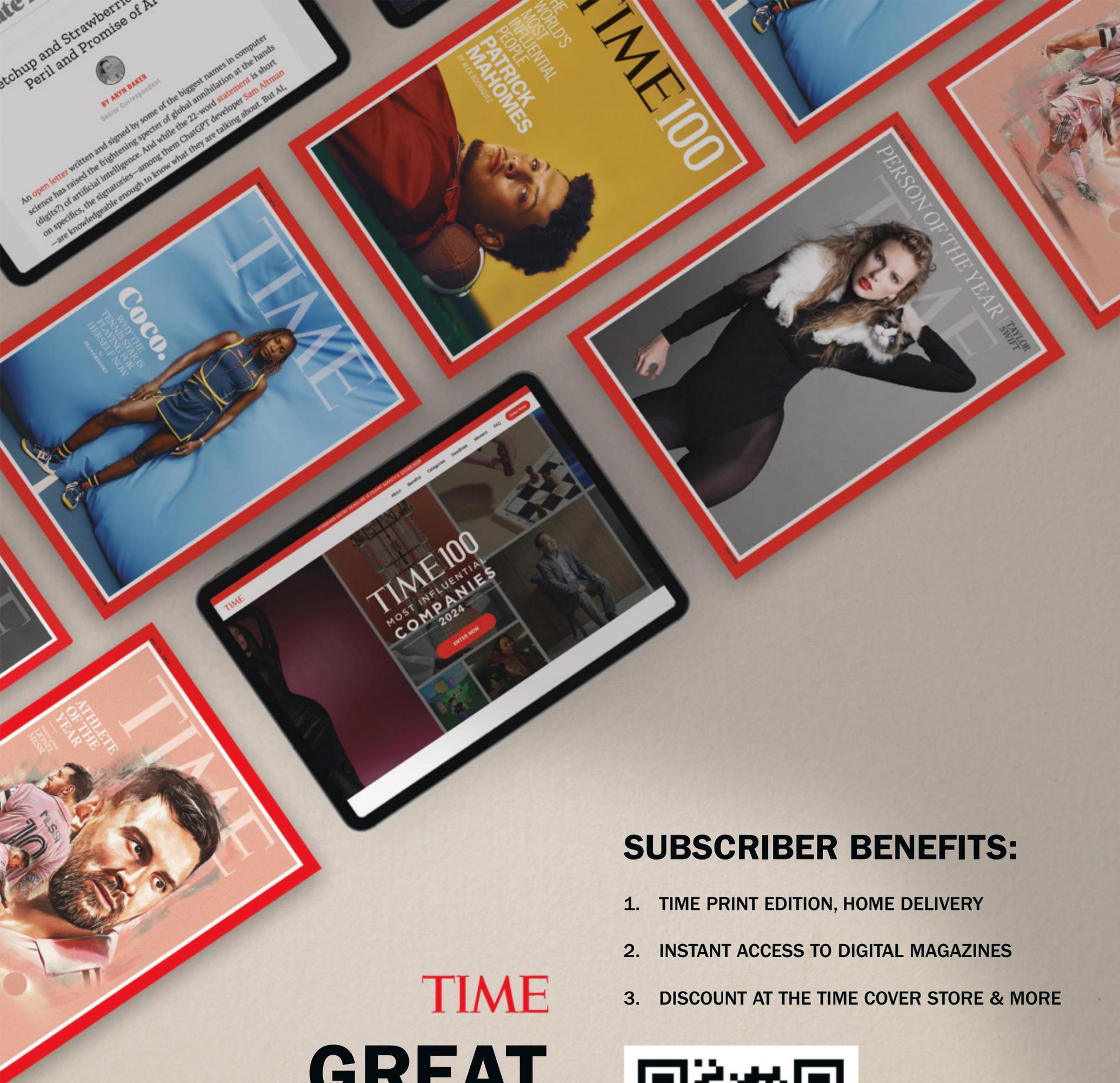
SIMONE
BILES
IS BACK

THE FLASH

THE WORLD'S FASTEST MAN
NOAH LYLES IS BRINGING HIS
SPEED TO THE GAMES

BY SEAN GREGORY





TIME
GREAT THINGS TAKE TIME

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By Sean Gregory

Plus: established legends, national pastimes, and new sports

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Unveiling Olympic rings on the Eiffel Tower on June 7

Photograph by Gao Jing—Xinhua/Getty Images



Gear for the Games

At time.com/uniforms, catch a video preview of the Ralph Lauren Team USA uniforms athletes will wear for the Summer Olympics, which kick off July 26. The looks for the opening and closing ceremonies feature recycled polyester, and the polos are made without plastics via a low-carbon process. If athletes like them, Ralph Lauren plans to incorporate the processes into all its lines.

On the covers



Photograph by Dana Scruggs for TIME



Photograph by Paola Kudacki for TIME



Photograph by Adam Ferguson for TIME



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Kudos

TIME scored two American Society of Magazine Editors honors: best news/politics cover (left) and as a finalist for best business/tech cover



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Reimagining the Future of Healthcare

TIME correspondent Alice Park led a TIME100 Talks panel on June 25 in NYC that addressed the latest research on heart attack and stroke prevention. Participants included (from right) Mayo Clinic's Andres Acosta; Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association (an event sponsor); and cardiologist Kiran Musunuru. Read more at time.com/heart-panel

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The Brief



THE KIDS ARE FAR RIGHT

BY YASMEEN SERHAN/BERLIN

Across Europe, right-wing parties have managed to find support among young voters

INSIDE

A NEW WAY TO STOP AI 'HALLUCINATIONS'

EXTREME HEAT'S IMPACT ON ENERGY BILLS

THE WORLD'S MOST SUSTAINABLE COMPANIES

THE WRITING WAS ON THE WALL—OR, AT least, in the polls. Despite the fact that young Europeans turned out en masse to prevent a predicted far-right surge during the 2019 European Parliament elections, they wouldn't be compelled to do so again five years later. If anything, analysts warned, many would end up voting for the far right.

And vote they did. While the June European Parliament elections ended in victory for Europe's center-right parties, the radical right made historic gains—enough to throw the bloc's biggest powers off-balance. In France, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally emerged victorious in the elections with more than 30% of the vote—an electoral blow so devastating that French President Emmanuel Macron called a snap legislative election expected to conclude on July 7. In Germany, the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) finished second only to the opposition center-right Christian Democrats, trouncing Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats and their coalition partners, the Greens and the liberal Free Democrats, and throwing the government's stability into doubt.

Young people played their part. Among French voters under 34, the National Rally was the most popular party, securing 32% of their votes. Though the AfD wasn't the most popular party among young Germans, it tripled its support among 16-to-24-year-olds from 5% in 2019 to 16% today. Germany lowered its legal voting age to 16 from 18 ahead of the European elections.

Such an outcome would have been unthinkable just five years ago, when young Europeans were thought to be more likely to throw a milkshake at a far-right politician than vote for one. While this shift to the far right can be explained by a number of factors—not least the cost-of-living and housing crises that have hit Europe's Gen Z and younger millennials particularly hard—many observers credit the far right's social media prowess for their success. Jordan Bardella, the National Rally's 28-year-old president and presumed successor to Le Pen, boasts 1.6 million followers on TikTok, a platform he has used to communicate with young voters directly. In Germany, “the AfD has more reach than all the other parties combined,” says Laura-Kristine Krause, the executive director of the More in Common think tank in Berlin.

This phenomenon isn't limited to France and Germany. Across Europe, far-right parties have been able to strike a chord with young voters—not only by appealing to them on their favorite social media platforms, but by tying the issues young people care about—like a lack of affordable housing—with their own signature policies: namely, restricting immigration. This was evident during

last year's Dutch elections, in which the far-right fire-brand Geert Wilders' anti-immigration Freedom Party won the largest share of votes, including 17% of voters ages 18 to 34 (up from 7% in the previous election). Far-right parties have made similar inroads with young voters in Portugal, Spain, and Finland.

THESE TRENDS PRESENT a stark shift from just five years ago, when the received wisdom was that younger generations were more politically progressive and environmentally minded than those that came before them. The reality is that younger people “are way more open in all directions,” says German political scientist Thorsten Faas. Indeed, the second most popular party among young French voters was Jean-Luc Mélenchon's leftist France Unbowed. Young German voters were split across various parties, largely the AfD, the Christian Democrats, and the Greens.

“There was this perception that young people are progressive, and they're not,” Krause says. But she notes that those backing the far right aren't necessarily doing so for purely ideological reasons. Rather, she says, young people tend to be overrepresented among what she dubs the “Invisible Third,” a segment of society that isn't as socially or politically integrated, and thus more susceptible to far-right talking points. “They don't feel like they're being talked to by politicians; like they don't have a seat at the table,” she adds.

None of this is to say that young voters represent a burgeoning far-right generation. “Youth support for the far-right parties likely stems from the same factors driving many of their peers to the left: frustrations with political establishments and policies seen as ill-equipped to address the structural causes of big issues,” says Lucas Robinson of the Eurasia Group's Institute for Global Affairs. The institute's recent study found that global challenges such as pandemics and climate change are considered to be the biggest threats among young adults (ages 18 to 29) in France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S.; political elites making decisions that hurt the public was deemed the second biggest, whereas immigration came in third. If there are any lessons more moderate political parties can take from the European elections, it's that they can no longer presuppose their support. “Gen Z and millennials are not monoliths,” Robinson says. “These election results showed that their views cannot be taken for granted.”

‘Gen Z and millennials are not monoliths.’

—LUCAS ROBINSON,
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS,
EURASIA GROUP

Reporting for this story was supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)



TECHNOLOGY

Scientists find a new way to spot AI ‘hallucinations’

BY BILLY PERRIGO

TODAY’S GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) tools often confidently assert false information. Computer scientists call this behavior “hallucination,” and it has led to some embarrassing public slip-ups. In February, Air Canada was forced by a tribunal to honor a discount that its customer-support chatbot had mistakenly offered to a passenger. In May, Google made changes to its new “AI overviews” search feature, after it told some users that it was safe to eat rocks. And in June 2023, two lawyers were fined \$5,000 after one of them used ChatGPT to help him write a court filing. The chatbot had added fake citations to the submission, which pointed to cases that never existed.

But at least some types of AI hallucinations could soon be a thing of the past. New research, published June 19 in the peer-reviewed journal *Nature*, describes a new method for detecting when an AI tool is likely to be hallucinating. The method is able to discern between correct and incorrect AI-generated answers approximately 79% of the time, which is about 10 percentage points higher than other leading strategies. The results could pave the way for more-reliable AI systems in the future.

“There’s a simple check for when [an AI] language model makes something up for no reason at all, which is if you ask the same question multiple times, it will give you different answers,” says Sebastian Farquhar, an author of the study and a senior research fellow at Oxford University’s department of computer science. AI researchers have long known this was true, but had struggled to turn it into a reliable algorithm for detecting hallucinations. That’s because chatbots might answer the same question (“What’s the capital of France”) in differently formulated sentences that still all mean the same thing. (“The capital of France is Paris” ...

“Paris is France’s capital city.”)

The innovation in the paper is to use a separate AI to group sentences with the same *meanings* (not just the same words) together. This clustering allows researchers to calculate a score indicating how consistent a handful of answers to the same prompt are. If the answers are all over the place, the chatbot is likely to be hallucinating.

It’s not a perfect solution: a chatbot can still be consistently wrong, for example because of bogus training data. (This method can’t help with that.) And it’s not cheap: because it requires prompting a chatbot multiple times to compare different answers, it uses about 10 times more computing power, and thus electricity, than usual. But unlike other ways of reducing hallucinations, it’s generalizable. That’s because it doesn’t rely on training an AI on sector-specific information—a strategy that, say, can make a chatbot smarter when it comes to medicine but won’t help it ace a sports quiz.

“My hope is that this opens up ways for large language models to be deployed where they can’t currently be deployed—where a little bit more reliability than is currently available is needed,” says Farquhar.

Some experts caution against overestimating the immediate impact. Arvind Narayanan, a professor of computer science at Princeton University, points out that the method may break down when applied to long strings of logic, rather than individual facts, and that its cost may be a barrier to integration into tools like ChatGPT. “It’s important not to get too excited about the potential of research like this,” he says. “The extent to which this can be integrated into a deployed chatbot is very unclear.”

But Farquhar has some ideas. ChatGPT’s creator OpenAI could, he says, theoretically add a button allowing a user to double-click on an answer and receive a certainty score. Or, it could be built into AIs used in high-stakes settings, where trading off speed and cost for accuracy may be more worthwhile. Of the lawyer who was fined for relying on a ChatGPT hallucination, Farquhar says, “This would have saved him.”

‘This would have saved him.’

—SEBASTIAN FARQUHAR, AI RESEARCHER, ON A LAWYER WHO WAS FINED AFTER RELYING ON A CHATGPT HALLUCINATION

GOOD QUESTION

How will extreme heat affect energy bills?

BY SOLCYRÉ BURGA

AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS CAN EXPECT TO SEE MORE than a rise in the mercury this summer. From June to September, the average cost of keeping a home cool is predicted to spike by nearly 9%—to \$719.

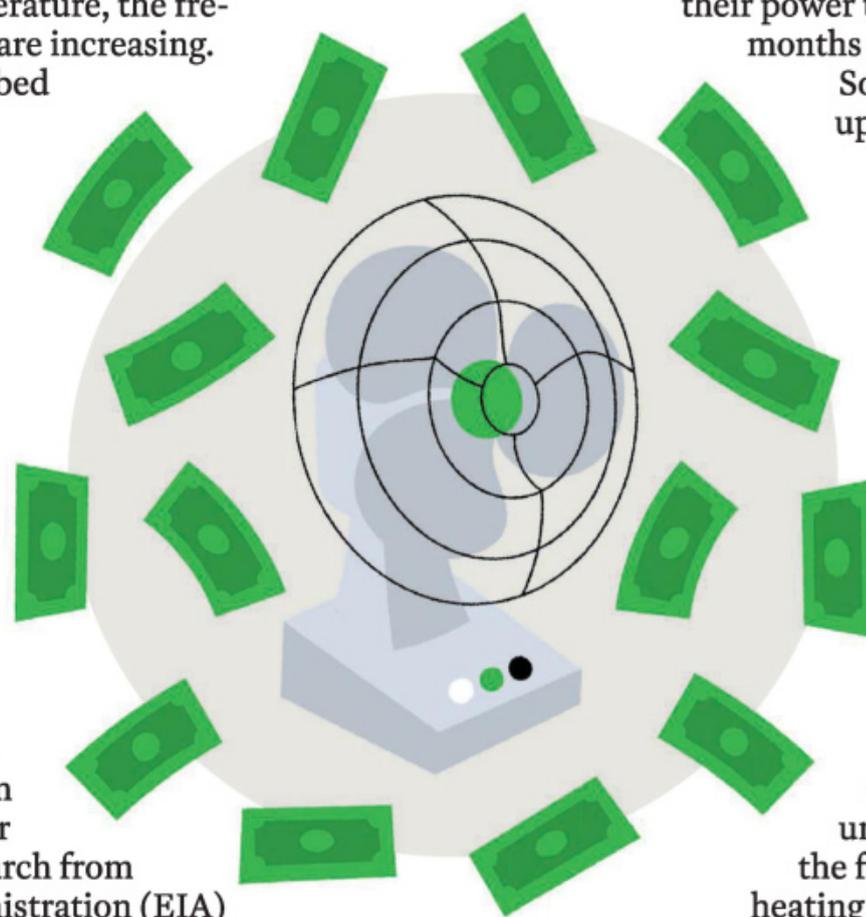
“There’s a cost to climate change,” says Mark Wolfe, the executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), which forecast the energy-cost rise in a report produced with the Center for Energy Poverty and Climate. “As temperatures rise, you need to use more electricity to run your cooling systems, and it’s becoming more expensive—and will be more expensive—as we go forward.”

With the rise in the earth’s temperature, the frequency and duration of heat waves are increasing.

And energy costs already have climbed over the past decade as people seek reprieve from the heat. The impact on household finances can be huge. “It’s very hard to get hit with a high bill,” says UCLA professor Alan Barreca, lead author of a study on the effects of increased summer temperatures and electricity disconnections. “You end up thinking, ‘Oh, do I have to cut back on other expenses, or do I just not pay and try to do some bill juggling?’”

Rising costs are particularly overbearing to low-income households, which the U.S. Department of Energy says spend a larger percentage of their income on home energy costs, or have a greater “energy burden” than others. Research from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) from 2015 shows that about 1 in 5 U.S. households reported reducing or giving up necessities such as food and medicine to cover their energy bill. About 14% of households surveyed said they had received a disconnection notice, and just over 1 in 10 said they keep their house at unhealthy or unsafe temperatures to avoid using more energy.

Forgoing air-conditioning could prove harmful for many—extreme heat is deadlier than any other weather-related cause of death in the U.S., resulting in 207 fatalities in 2023, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Southern states are disproportionately affected by extreme heat, topping the list of the states with the highest low-income energy burden.



‘There’s a cost to climate change.’

—MARK WOLFE,
NATIONAL ENERGY
ASSISTANCE
DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATION

And it’s not just a summertime problem. “When people think of extreme heat they think very contemporaneously, like, ‘Oh, it’s a hot August. We need to help people in August.’ But financial distress from electricity expenses comes after, in September and October,” says Barreca.

SOME SOLUTIONS HAVE been brought forward on a federal level through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps low-income families cover heating and cooling costs. But funding for that program was cut by \$2 billion for fiscal year 2024, limiting the number of families that receive aid. Only 17 states and the District of Columbia have some shutoff protections in the summer, preventing people from having their power turned off during the hottest months of the year.

Some local communities set up cooling centers for members of the public to escape the heat, a short-term solution at best. “Families can’t move into the library, and often their problem is getting to it,” says Wolfe.

Advocates are calling for bigger changes, including more local programs providing discount-rate electricity for low-income families, and upgrades to building codes to require air-conditioning in apartment units. “You don’t find 20% of the families in New York have no heating system,” says Wolfe. “That’s not possible, it’s not allowed by law. But many families don’t have cooling.” Wolfe is also advocating for increased funding for low-income households to install heat pumps or solar rooftops to create more energy-efficient homes.

“We need to think about how we retrofit homes so they can be more energy efficient and need less electricity for cooling,” he adds. “If you just focus on bill payment without addressing energy efficiency, then what you do is you make the situation even worse, because you’re creating more emissions for the production of electricity that contribute to climate change.” □



Pilgrims' peril

Muslims make their way to a stop on the hajj pilgrimage, using routes fashioned to prevent stampedes. This year, the main danger came from temperatures reaching 120°F in Mecca. Saudi officials said most of the more than 1,300 people killed by the heat lacked permits that would have given them access to refuge—exposing flaws in the system's safeguards.

THE BULLETIN

Chicago commits to explore reparations

BLACK CHICAGOANS MAY SEE SOME form of reparations, after the city's mayor signed an executive order on June 17 to form a dedicated task force.

"Chicago still bears the scars of systemic racism and injustices that have been inflicted on our communities," Brandon Johnson (*right*) said during a Juneteenth flag-raising ceremony. "It is now the time to deliver good on reparations for people of Chicago, particularly Black people."

Nearly 30% of Chicago residents are Black, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. During the Great Migration—which is regarded as one of the largest movements of people in U.S. history—about 6 million Black people relocated from the South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western cities, including Chicago.

POLICY STUDY The Black Reparations Co-Governance Task Force "will conduct a comprehensive study and examination of all policies that have harmed Black Chicagoans from the slavery era to present day," and will then draft recommendations for reparations, Johnson's office said in a press release. Johnson signed the order after \$500,000 in the city's 2024 budget was set aside to study reparations.

SELECTION Over the next three months, Johnson will work with the Chicago Aldermanic Black Caucus, comprising city council members who represent predominantly Black

communities, to decide how to select the task force, the executive order says. After its first meeting, the task force will have a year to write a report with "a series of recommendations that will serve as appropriate remedies and restitution for past injustices and present harm," and identify issues that may need "reparative action," such as housing and mass incarceration.

GAINING MOMENTUM Several U.S. cities have explored reparations programs. In 2019, suburban Evanston, Ill., became the first to enact a government-funded reparations program, offering \$25,000 payments to victims of redlining.

—CHANTELLE LEE



CLIMATE

The companies succeeding in sustainability

BY ALANA SEMUELS

IT'S ONE THING FOR A COMPANY TO GIVE LIP SERVICE TO HELPING the environment; it's another for it to make trackable, public commitments to doing better for the planet—and follow through on them. For the first time, TIME and data firm Statista have created a rigorous methodology with which to measure the world's most sustainable companies for 2024. The companies at the top of the list have signed on to some of the most respected climate programs, including the 1.5°C target from the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), and receive high scores from CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project). TIME and Statista further held companies to high standards for their Scope 1 and 2 emissions and energy consumption relative to company size, emissions reductions in 2021 and 2022 (the most recent years fully reported), and proportion of renewable energy used by the company's operations. And, perhaps most importantly, many of the top companies have incorporated sustainability into their business models. (Scope 1 emissions are directly caused by a company; Scope 2 are indirectly created when a company purchases power.)

Schneider Electric, for instance, which tops the list, creates software and services for energy management. It has not only set ambitious targets to reduce its own emissions—carbon neutral by 2025—but also helps its customers reduce emissions and become more energy efficient through its Sustainability Business. “We’ve positioned the company to be an impact company,” CEO Peter Herweck said on a recent earnings call.

While many companies that ranked highly are in industries that don't make many physical products—like banking, tech, and consulting—there were companies that showed sustainability is possible even if you make things. Illumina, the U.S. biotechnology company, recently debuted its most powerful gene sequencer while also reducing packaging waste by 90% from the previous model. Moncler, the Italian luxury fashion house, ranked third on the list by using recycled materials, recycling more than 80% of its nylon scraps in 2023, and using 100% renewable energy at its directly managed offices, stores, factories, and logistics hubs. “While we take pride in this achievement, we are aware much remains to be done,” said Remo Ruffini, chairman and CEO of Moncler S.p.A, when the company was named to the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices in 2023.

While impressive, Schneider's top score of 88.86 out of 100 on TIME's list shows the distance even the most dedicated companies have to go to be truly sustainable.

Brambles
Brambles makes sustainable supply-chain options for other companies

NRI
Japan has the second most companies on the list, behind only the U.S.

hp
HP is the top-ranked electronics maker for sustainability

TIME WORLD'S TOP 20 MOST SUSTAINABLE COMPANIES				
RANK	COMPANY NAME	HEADQUARTERS	SCORE	INDUSTRY
1	Schneider Electric	France	88.86	IT, Tech, and Software
2	NEC	Japan	85.71	IT, Tech, and Software
3	Moncler	Italy	85.66	Retail, Wholesale, and Consumer Goods
4	Brambles	Australia	82.98	Transportation, Logistics, and Aviation
5	Illumina	U.S.	82.63	Chemicals, Drugs, and Biotechnology
6	SGS	Switzerland	81.96	Professional Services and Consulting
7	Sanofi	France	81.22	Chemicals, Drugs, and Biotechnology
8	NRI	Japan	81.03	Professional Services and Consulting
9	Telefónica	Spain	81.02	Telecommunication
10	Cigna	U.S.	80.52	Banking, Insurance, and Financial Services
11	Siemens	Germany	80.52	Engineering
12	Cellnex	Spain	80.05	Telecommunication
13	MasterCard	U.S.	79.83	Banking, Insurance, and Financial Services
14	Stantec	Canada	79.63	Professional Services and Consulting
15	SAP	Germany	79.58	IT, Tech, and Software
16	PayPal	U.S.	78.75	Banking, Insurance, and Financial Services
17	Novartis	Switzerland	78.69	Chemicals, Drugs, and Biotechnology
18	Sonova	Switzerland	78.56	Health Care and Life Sciences
19	Agilent	U.S.	78.48	Manufacturing and Industrial Production
20	HP	U.S.	78.16	Electronics, Hardware, and Equipment

See the full list at time.com/most-sustainable-companies



Grande Torino in Antwerp Euroterminal

GRIMALDI GROUP – Green Ambassadors

Between 2025 and 2027, the Naples-based Grimaldi Group will take delivery of 17 pure car and truck carrier (PCTC) vessels from Chinese shipyards. Each of the ammonia-ready vessels will have the capacity to carry 9,000 electric and fossil fuel vehicles and will be equipped with shore connection capability. Ten of them will also feature mega lithium batteries, solar panels, and air lubrication systems.

China exports more than 400,000 electric vehicles (EVs) to Europe each year. The value of the worldwide EV market this year alone is a colossal \$624 billion, and it's growing fast. Clearly, it's a good business to be in, and the Grimaldi Group is already heavily involved both in the transport of Chinese manufactured EVs to the insatiable European markets and in the development and implementation of the cutting-edge technology to reduce the maritime industry's impact on the environment, including that of these new PCTCs.

The undertaking showcases Grimaldi's ability to combine a commitment to the decarbonization of the shipping industry with the acumen required to maintain profitability. This balancing act is a hallmark of the Italian shipping giant, which has been operating successfully since 1947 and traces its maritime roots back to the Middle Ages. Still wholly owned by the Grimaldi family, the company is now Italy's biggest ship-owning enterprise and the world's leading operator in the maritime transport of rolling freight. The company employs about 18,000 staff, and its 130-strong fleet sail to 150 ports in 50 countries.

Despite its long and traditional past, the company remains in an active state of evolution, always alert to the possibilities of new business opportunities. Between 2020 and 2023, Grimaldi invested more than \$2.5 billion on orders for the construction of 27 vessels at Asian shipyards. In addition to the 17 PCTCs from China, these



Dr Emanuele Grimaldi
Managing Director of Grimaldi Group

include six ro-ro multi-purpose vessels designed to carry containers, rolling freight and cars, and four hybrid ships equipped with "Zero Emission in Port®" technology. Notable among these are two ro-ro units for the transport of rolling freight and two ultra-modern ferries that can carry both goods and passengers.

Each commission is customized, with their specifications finalized only after a collaborative process involving the shipyard and Grimaldi's own in-house R&D team. "We never build a ship that isn't better than the previous generation," says Dr. Emanuele Grimaldi, managing director of Grimaldi Group. "The carbon footprint of the latest ships we have commissioned will be 50% less than most of the older vessels in our fleet."

The Grimaldi Group is also a major provider of European passenger ferry services and has gradually moved into the operation and management of some of the ports and terminals that its fleet uses on a regular basis. As this role has developed, so too has its sense of environmental responsibility toward its onshore facilities. "We aren't just shipowners anymore but port and terminal operators too," Grimaldi says. "We burn energy on land as well as on board our vessels."

The company's involvement in port and terminal management is on a steady growth curve. Earlier this year Grimaldi took 100% control of Terminal Darsena Toscana (TDT) in the Port of Livorno as

the next stage in a program to develop it into a leading port of both origin and destination for the markets of central and northeastern Italy.

The transaction came hot on the heels of its announcement last December that it had acquired a 67% stake in the Heraklion Port Authority, manager of the largest and busiest seaport in the southern Greek island of Crete. Grimaldi considers the €85 million purchase to be an act of enlightened self-interest. "We are one of the port's major customers and as such its efficient management is important to us," he explains. "It is in our own interests to invest in Heraklion's logistical infrastructure, as this will guarantee the essential services that we offer our passengers."

With the same long-term, investment-oriented vision, in October 2023 Grimaldi finalized a deal in which it took over 67% of the share capital of Igoumenitsa Port Authority in Greece for \$90 million, while in February 2023 it acquired several strategic assets in the Amerikahaven area of the Port of Amsterdam through its subsidiary Amsterdam Multipurpose Terminal (AMT).

In addition to this proactive approach to both decarbonization and efficient shipping and logistics, the Grimaldi Group is also an early adopter of artificial intelligence. AI's potential to use big data to revolutionize customer-facing tasks like bookings and advertising is already underway in several sectors, but its possible application in the world of shipping is less advanced. "AI is going to prove useful in mapping out routes in relation to currents," Grimaldi says. "It could also be invaluable in locating cargo onboard a ship or anticipating a fire below decks."

Whatever its future use, the Grimaldi Group will surely be one of the first to embrace it.





RELEASED

Julian Assange

After a 14-year battle against extradition

JULIAN ASSANGE IS FREE after more than a decade spent holed up in a London embassy, then in British custody, largely to avoid extradition to the U.S. On June 26, the WikiLeaks founder appeared in a federal court in Saipan, a U.S. territory in the Pacific, following a plea deal with American prosecutors.

Assange pleaded guilty to a felony for conspiring to obtain and disclose classified national-defense information, in violation of the Espionage Act. In return, he was allowed to return to his native Australia without serving any more prison time. “I hope you will start your new life in a positive manner,” U.S. District Chief Judge Ramona Manglona told Assange.

U.S. authorities had pursued Assange since WikiLeaks published hundreds of thousands of unredacted classified U.S. government documents and videos, most about the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2012, he took refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in

London after the U.K. government ordered him extradited to Sweden to face separate sexual-assault charges. Those prosecutions were eventually dropped, but the U.S. charges remained in place and Assange remained a guest of Ecuador’s government until 2019, when it revoked his

‘I hope you will start your new life in a positive manner.’

U.S. DISTRICT CHIEF JUDGE
RAMONA MANGLONA

asylum. He was then arrested by British authorities and held in prison. Earlier this year, a U.K. court ruled that he could not be extradited to the U.S. unless prosecutors guaranteed that Assange, who is not a U.S. citizen, would receive First Amendment protections and not face the death penalty. He remained in custody until the plea deal with the U.S. government was reached in June.

<

Assange leaving the U.S. courthouse in Saipan on June 26

Supporters of Assange say that the footage and cables that WikiLeaks released with the help of former U.S. Army soldier Chelsea Manning revealed possible war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that his prosecution by the U.S. government is dangerous for press freedom worldwide. “We believe that the publication by WikiLeaks in 2010 of classified information was in the public interest and informed journalism around the world,” Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns for Reporters Without Borders, told TIME.

Vincent is concerned that the Espionage Act, which criminalizes sharing information that harms national security, does not contain an exception for details that serve the public interest. “Anybody who works on stories based on leaked information could find themselves targeted in this way,” she said.

However, Stuart Karle, a media lawyer who served as chief operating officer of Reuters News and general counsel to the *Wall Street Journal*, says that the Espionage Act has rarely been used against reporters, and Assange’s imprisonment has not to date led to a noticeable surge in prosecutions of journalists. He argues that some of the activities Assange allegedly engaged in, like conspiring to hack into government databases, are outside of the scope of journalism, making the case’s impact on press freedom unclear. “It’ll depend what WikiLeaks does now; does it continue?”

—ANNA GORDON

ISSUED

Arrest warrants for two Russian military officials, former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and current military chief of staff Valery Gerasimov, by the International Criminal Court on June 25. The officials are accused of war crimes for attacks on Ukrainian civilians.

FLOATED

An additional **350 balloons filled with trash, by North Korea** into South Korea on June 24, resuming a campaign of antagonism that has involved launching more than 1,000 airborne garbage parcels over the border since May.

NAMED

African elephants, by one another, according to a June 10 *Nature Ecology & Evolution* study that found the largest land mammals call and respond to individual names when they communicate.

DIED

▶ Civil rights strategist and pastor **James Lawson**, who taught nonviolence alongside Martin Luther King Jr., on June 9 at 95.

▶ French **actor Anouk Aimée**, who starred in the Oscar-winning *A Man and a Woman*, on June 18 at 92.





DIED

Willie Mays

The “Say Hey Kid” who inspired

MILLIONS OF KIDS WHO watched Willie Mays play during the prime of his major league baseball career, or were born after he retired from the game in 1973, practiced making “The Catch,” just like Mays—who died peacefully on June 18, at 93—did that afternoon back in 1954. Throw a ball up into the air behind you, turn around and chase it down, making an over-the-shoulder grab with your mitt, and conjure up the cheers of a packed Polo Grounds. Those imaginary screams filled the vacuum of countless young minds.

Such was the power of Mays’ iconic World Series play, in September 1954, against Vic Wertz of the Cleveland Indians in the eighth inning of Game 1 of

the World Series. The score was tied, 2-2. Mays, playing shallow in center field for the New York Giants, started running back toward the wall as soon as Wertz smashed a ball that would travel some 420 ft. Mays kept running, and running, and running, and made a miraculous basket catch with his back to home plate. The Giants won the game, and the World Series.

Mays was just 23 years old, the reigning National League MVP, and the most electric baseball player—if not athlete—of his time.

Mays was one of America’s first Black crossover stars

Only Cassius Clay’s emergence, in the 1960s, could overshadow Mays in the minds of Americans. Entering the majors in 1951, just four years after Jackie Robinson integrated the game, Mays roamed center field when baseball still reigned as America’s true pastime.

He grew up during the segregation era, in Alabama, and soon emerged as one of America’s first Black crossover stars. His talent, and effervescent presence, seemed to transcend existing prejudices. Fans couldn’t dare look away when he came to the plate or took the field, because something exciting was bound to happen. His appearances on otherwise lily-white TV programs like *The Donna Reed Show* played a landmark role in the culture. White America was willing to embrace a Black sports star in their living rooms—on television, at least. All in all, he helped America take some step forward. Said President Barack Obama in 2015 at the White House ceremony in which Mays received the Presidential Medal of Freedom: “It’s because of giants like Willie that someone like me could even think about running for President.”

A day after Juneteenth, Mays’ passing was announced in Birmingham, Ala., at Rickwood Field, where Mays once played for the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro League. The crowd and minor league players broke into a standing ovation and chanted “Willie, Willie!”

It was a fitting tribute to a man who moved generations. Mays, his “Catch,” and his memory will live on, never to be duplicated.

—SEAN GREGORY

DIED

Donald Sutherland

A profound talent

The Canadian actor Donald Sutherland, who died on June 20 at age 88, enjoyed such a long career that citing a definitive performance is impossible. He could be subtly menacing one minute, only to catch you short with his quavering vulnerability the next. That’s what made him so affecting in the 1978 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Once alien pod people subsumed his character, you knew humanity was over.

Younger audiences know Sutherland as President Snow in the *Hunger Games* films, just one indication of his range. In *Don’t Look Now* (1973) and *Ordinary People* (1980), he showed us what it means to stand up to the most challenging human circumstances and acutely feel every minute. And his performance as a dutiful, lovestruck detective in *Klute* (1971) is one of the finest of its era. Always, he made complicated human feelings feel like everyday stuff—probably because they are.

—Stephanie Zacharek



CHINA WATCH

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

Safeguarding a city treasure ensures it remains a vibrant testament to history

BY ZHAO XU

“When you arrive in Suzhou you’ll see homes nestled by the river’s edge,” Du Xunhe, a poet in the latter half of the ninth century, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), wrote to a friend. “The idle land is as scant as the waterways and bridges are abundant.”

Ruan Yongsan, a lifelong Suzhou resident who has spent the past 55 years trying to preserve the land’s memories — and his own as well — gets the drift.

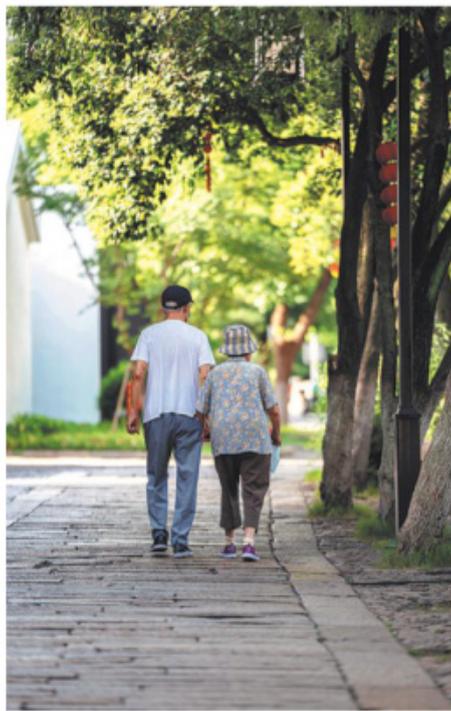
“Canals and bridges have visually defined the city for as long as Chinese poetry can remember,” he says.

Occasionally he takes people on tours that often start at the southernmost point of the Pingjiang River in the northeastern part of the Old Town of Suzhou, located in the heart of the city.

There, a small bridge named the Yuanqiao Bridge — *yuan* means garden and *qiao* means bridge — is fabled for being where Helyu, king of the vassal state of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), once lounged, presumably one agreeable spring day. In the fifth century B.C. the ambitious ruler built a grand city in what is now Suzhou, a watery land in the rice-producing Yangtze River Delta region.

A few steps away from the bridge, under a small, pagoda-shaped structure, stands a stone stele with a map inscription bearing the name *Pingjiang Tu* (The Map of Pingjiang).

“The map was first made in 1229 during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when Suzhou was known as Pingjiang,” Ruan says. “The area it covered essentially corresponds with that of our Old Town. For all its reputation as the earliest existing city map known to the world, it also serves as a comforting assurance that what we are seeing today is not so different from what people would



The Pingjiang Historic District in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, maintains a tranquil but vibrant atmosphere. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

have witnessed right here 800 years ago.”

Of the 360 or so bridges the map depicts, a dozen still straddle the 1-mile-long Pingjiang River, which is clearly shown, although not specifically named on the map.

The river, and Pingjiang Road that runs alongside it, form the core of Pingjiang Historic District, a 287-acre zone that is essentially, as Ruan puts it, “an authentic, boiled-down version of what Suzhou has been throughout history.”

Among other things, the 78-year-old surveyor-turned-preservationist is referring to what he calls “the double-chessboard layout” of the Old Town, which first appeared during the Tang Dynasty around the ninth century.

“Despite the region’s abundance of water, all the waterways you see inside the Old Town are artificial passages — canals built as straight as a ruler to a chessboard effect, with the ones running north-south intersecting with those running east-west. Upon this densely woven water network a

road grid was overlaid so that the road traffic and the water traffic always move hand in hand.”

These days those taking a boat along the Pingjiang River still look up to their pedestrian counterparts strolling alongside them on the stone-paved Pingjiang Road, the latter sandwiched between the waterway and a row of black-tiled, white-painted houses, most of which date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The best way to get an unobstructed view of the Pingjiang River is to stand on one of its dozen bridges, all of which are short, given that the canal’s width is no more than 16 feet. If poems are to be believed, in Tang-Dynasty Suzhou, red-painted wooden bridges contrasted beautifully with the green water running under them. This was before they were replaced by their stone successors of the Song Dynasty, some of which have survived, at least in part.

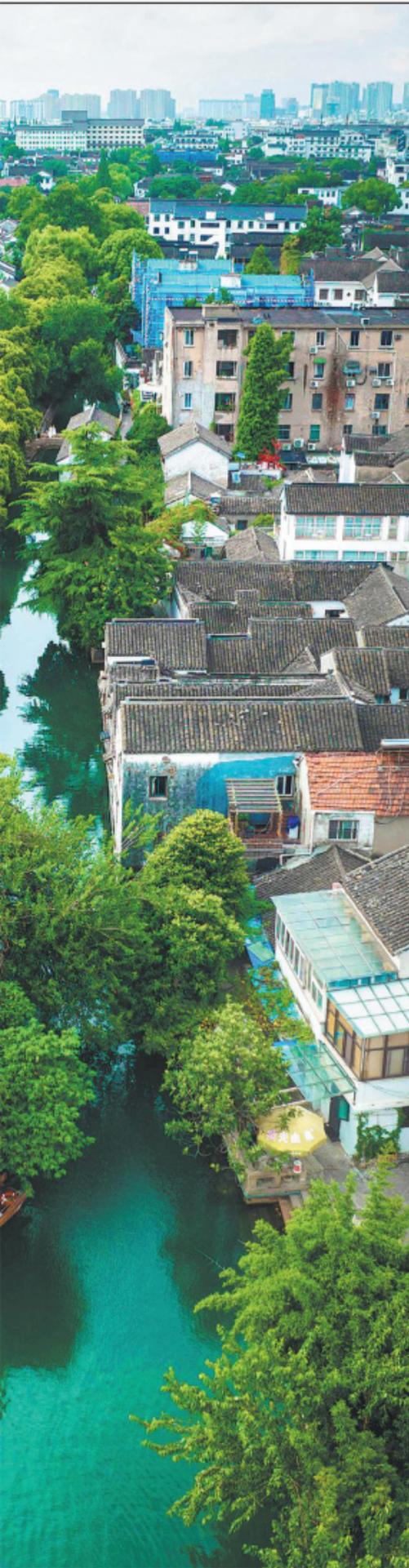
One example is Shou’an Bridge, which, on *Pingjiang Tu*, appears over the canal under a different name. Certain sections of the bridge are tinted by a slightly purplish hue.

According to Pei Hong, a local amateur cultural historian, the color is typical of a native stone material that was widely used for construction during the Song Dynasty.

Between 1034 and 1035 Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), a Song poet and politician, served as the governor of Suzhou, his ancestral home, where his flood-control efforts won wide acclaim. At a time when the only way for a commoner to enter officialdom was through excelling in exams at various levels, Fan set out to provide free education to poor school-age children.

Those who managed to battle their way to the very top were known as *zhuangyuan*, and of the 114 *zhuangyuan* of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), 26





From top: An aerial view of the Pingjiang Historic District of Suzhou, bisected by the Pingjiang River.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Tourists flock to the Pingjiang block neighborhood during the May Day holiday from May 1 to 5.

LENG WEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

were Suzhou natives. In 2014 a museum dedicated to their memory opened in Niujia Lane, one of the small alleys extending westward from Pingjiang Road, less than 330 feet from a two-story building in which Ruan was born in 1946.

"It's only fitting that this museum is housed inside the one-time residence of a man named Pan Shi'en (1769-1854), who became *zhuangyuan* at only 25, before going on to serve three emperors as a top cabinet member," Ruan says.

For Ruan Yisan, an elder brother of Ruan Yongsan and one of China's leading preservationists, the waterways are time tunnels leading to much-cherished childhood memories, when his family was living on Niujia Lane.

"In the summer, boatloads of watermelons would be arriving at our doorstep; in the winter, it would be stacks of soft hay which we put underneath our bedding," he says.

Ruan Yisan first became involved in the planning for the Pingjiang Historic District as far back as the late 1980s. Later, in the early 2000s, when work on the project was expedited, Ruan Yisan, who taught urban planning at Shanghai's Tongji University, started to spend more and more time in Suzhou.

"As an underwriter of the project, my brother makes sure that it's an ongoing process. What he has been trying to do consistently is to retain the area's many layers of history, without turning it into a showpiece trapped in a time capsule," says Ruan Yongsan.

"Around 20,000 people are today living inside the historical district, of whom 60% are long-standing residents," continues Ruan Yongsan.

It's true that the neighborhoods are no longer as quiet as they once were, yet, despite the availability of tap water, some still prefer the time-honored ritual of hoisting water from the depths of a well, knowing all too perfectly that Pingjiang Road was once named "Shi Quan Li," meaning "Ten Well Lane."

"Row, row, row your boat, to grandma's bridge ... that's the rhyme I grew up singing," says Ruan Yisan. "As long as the waters and bridges are here, we keep the memory of our grandmothers alive."

Brushstrokes and colors as a way of exchanges

BY CHANG JUN

Artists and community activists are using arts to try to connect people in China and the United States through exhibitions, seminars and paintings.

Song Min, president of the U.S.-China Culture & Communication Association in the San Francisco Bay Area, says art has played an important role in facilitating goodwill and dialogue between people.

Last autumn he led eight U.S. artists to visit the city of Xianning in Hubei province, and joined nine Chinese artists there for an activity, "Chinese in the Eyes of Americans — Telling the Story of Xianning, Hubei, with a Paintbrush".

During the week, the artists mingled with each other through paintings and artistic expressions, Song said.

"Together they toured scenic spots, visited schools and museums, checked street vendors, talked to locals and captured moments of significance. They reflected their findings on canvas through brushstrokes and colors."

The collective works of the Chinese and U.S. artists were displayed in Xianning first before they were shown at an exhibition in late May at a public library in Cupertino, California, which has been in a sister-city relationship with Xianning since 2018.

The Mayor of Cupertino, Sheila Mohan, said the exhibition will improve collaboration and exchanges between the two cities through the medium of art.

Olivia Edwards, one of the participating U.S. artists, said the Chinese artists impressed her with their "brilliant talents," and "getting to know them is the highlight of this trip." Being able to paint together and communicate through artwork is "something that connects us."

"I have loved art all my life, and I was further inspired when I visited Xianning," she said. "I remember the

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ALTHOUGH WE DON'T SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE, WE DO COMMUNICATE THROUGH THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF ARTS.”

REBECCA JO ALEX,
U.S. ARTIST

kindness, hospitality of the Chinese people there. Most importantly, I love the spirit of the people — their vision, their diligence, their hard work, their efforts to preserve the old neighborhood while building the new."

Rebecca Jo Alex, another participant, said there is no better way to see and visit a place than when it is being painted.

"I saw great details of the beauty of China," Alex said. "Their people are so warm; cuisines are diverse. The best memories are about the time with my fellow Chinese artists. Although we don't speak the same language, we do communicate through the universal language of arts."

Dacia Xu, director and co-founder of Qualia Contemporary Art, a gallery in Palo Alto, California, also believes in the enduring power of art exchanges in building relations.

On May 18, Qualia unveiled its first solo exhibition, *Beneath the Golden Antlers*, featuring the Chinese contemporary ink artist Yang Jiechang, which ran until late June.

Xu said: "While he works in a variety of media, such as painting, sculpture, installation, performance and video, Yang is best known for his mastery of traditional Chinese media — brush and ink painting, meticulous color painting and calligraphy. This is a legacy and (Chinese) cultural tradition central to his work."



Amber haze

Smoke from the South Fork fire in southern New Mexico blots out the sun in Lincoln National Forest, casting the area in an alarming orange glow on June 17. After the fire's discovery that day, officials in nearby Ruidoso implemented a mandatory evacuation order for thousands of residents.

By June 24, responders had contained 37% of the blaze, which had burned more than 17,550 acres and left two people dead. The FBI offered a \$10,000 reward for information about its origins.

Photograph by Kaylee Greenlee Beal—Reuters

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5 ways to stay hydrated if you hate drinking water

BY ANGELA HAUPT

FOR ALL THE HYPE SURROUNDING status water bottles—looking at you, Stanley and Owala—it turns out many of us aren't drinking nearly enough H₂O. "It's a struggle," says Vanessa King, a registered dietitian nutritionist with Queen's Health System in Hawaii. "We see thousands of people a month, and drinking enough water comes up all the time."

Exactly how much you need to drink every day depends on a variety of factors, including your age, activity level, medications, how much you sweat, and your health status. King says to get the number of ounces a person needs each day, divide your weight in pounds by two.

Besides feeling thirsty or dry-mouthed, there are ways to tell you're not getting enough water. Your pee will become darker than normal. You might get a headache or feel dizzy.

The benefits of hydration, on the other hand, tend to be subtler. Being well watered is linked to improved mood and cognition, as well as optimal physical performance. It can aid weight loss, alleviate constipation, and even make your skin look healthier. If you're drinking the right amount of water, "there's only positives," says Maya Feller, a registered dietitian nutritionist in Brooklyn.

But realistically, how do you plug all that water (especially if it's far from your favorite beverage)? Experts shared how they manage to drink enough every day.

1. Add one glass per week

Slowly increasing your water intake can teach your body to tolerate more. Start by adding a glass "as close to waking up as possible," says Feller, and after a week, add in another when you get home from work. Then, in week three, add an additional glass at any point during the day. "Keep going until you get to your desired amount," Feller says, giving your body a week to adjust to each new glass of water.



2. Start a 'water log'

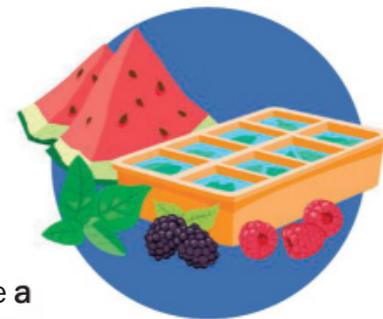
It can be hard to keep track of your intake throughout the day, so use a note-taking app to jot down how much you drank and at what time. That will reveal patterns and let you know where you could make changes, says Melanie Betz, a registered dietitian in Chicago who specializes in renal and geriatric nutrition; you might notice you don't drink much in the morning, for instance.

And remember, it takes time to develop a new habit.

"Give yourself some grace," Betz says—you're not going to jump from 16 oz. to 64 overnight.

3. Refresh the flavor with herbs

If you find water boring—and let's be real, it can be—experiment with ways to jazz it up. One of Betz's favorite concoctions is water infused with watermelon and basil. Blackberry and rosemary work well too, she says, and feel fancy. You can also treat yourself to herb-filled ice cubes. Choose a couple of your favorites, like basil and mint, and then mash them up or mince them before adding them to an ice-cube tray. Pour water on top, freeze, and enjoy. "It's so good, and it makes the drink pretty," Feller says.



4. Pretend you're a plant

The app Plant Nanny makes drinking water fun, says King, who recommends it to her patients. Once you download it, you'll become responsible for virtual plants; each time you log that you've had a glass of water, your plants will be watered too. "When I first tested it out, I turned it on and my plant was wilted," King recalls. "And it was super cute. I was immediately emotionally attached to it—you forget it's not a real plant."

5. Expand your definition of water

Chugging glassfuls of H₂O isn't the only way to hydrate. Dairy and dairy alternatives, like almond milk, also contain water, King points out; it's the first ingredient listed on labels. And don't overlook the role that fruits, vegetables, broths, soups, and stews can play in your daily hydration. Some of the most water-heavy choices include melons like cantaloupe and watermelon; berries like strawberries; and greens like spinach, cucumbers, and zucchini, King says. So if you can't stand the thought of one more glass of water, consider consuming it a tastier way instead.



The View

WORLD

CHINA'S ROVING EYE

BY SIMONE LIPKIND

It wasn't so long ago that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called his country's relationship with China "a marriage made in heaven." And when President Joe Biden told reporters in March 2023 that he wasn't inviting Netanyahu to Washington given his plans to undermine Israel's independent judiciary, Netanyahu planned a visit to President Xi Jinping in China instead. ▶

INSIDE

THE MEANING OF THE PUTIN-KIM CONNECTION

TEN COMMANDMENTS AND 231 TRUMP JUDGES

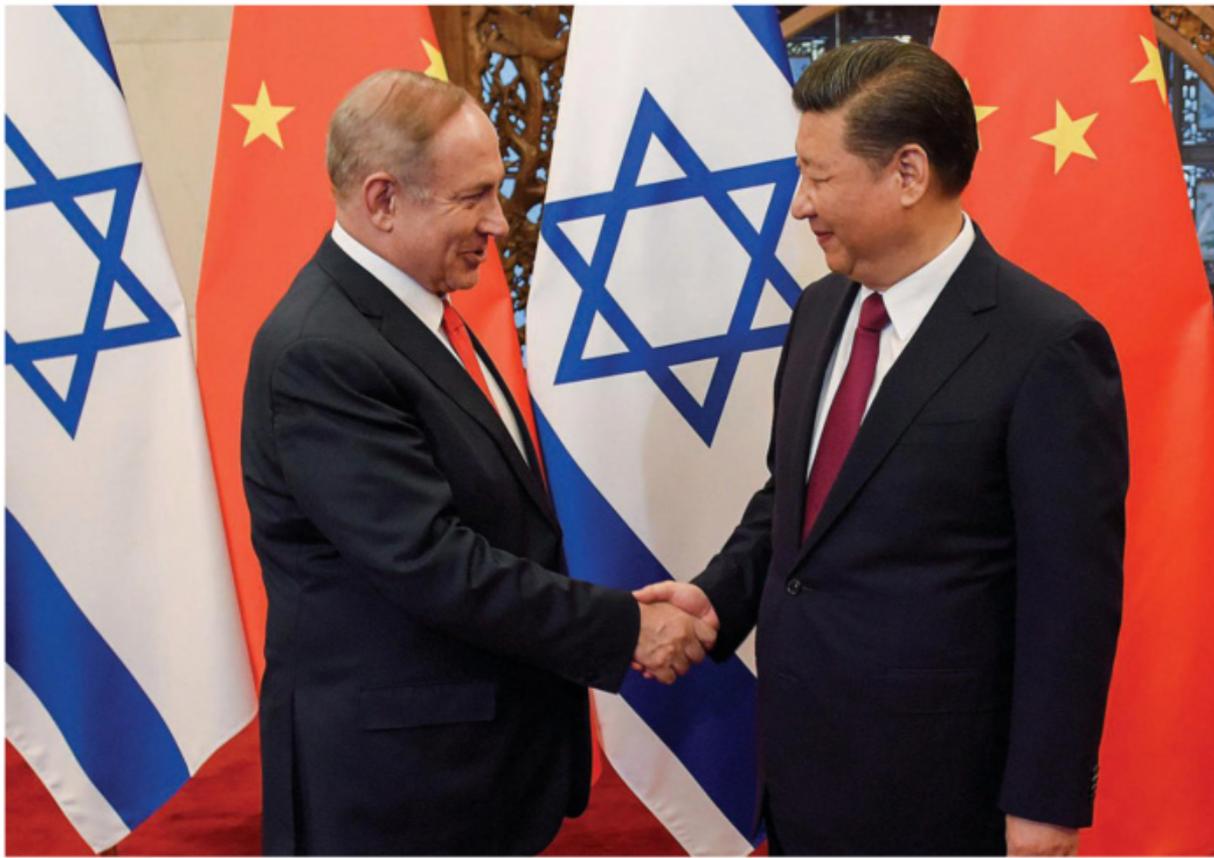
HOW PATRICK HENRY STOOD BY HIS WORDS

For Israel, the trip was a reminder to Washington that there are other superpowers looking to deepen their ties with Israel. For China, it was an opportunity to raise the costs of the U.S.'s pivot away from the Middle East to Asia by signaling that Beijing could fill some of the void. Netanyahu's ploy may have worked. Biden reneged in September and invited him to the White House.

That dynamic was upended in the wake of the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. Lately, Sino-Israeli ties will not be a viable pressure tool for Netanyahu because China has other plans. Beijing has distanced itself from Israel amid marked international criticism of its bombardment of Gaza—and China's move is playing well around much of the world. It serves as a counterpoint to Washington's diplomatic and military support of Israel, and supports China's goal of challenging its own reputation as a largely commercial player and the U.S.'s as the Middle East's diplomatic heavyweight.

Since China successfully facilitated the restoration of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia last spring, it has sought out further opportunities to position itself as an alternative to the U.S.-led international order. In the Israel-Hamas War, Beijing has attempted to flex its diplomatic muscle, publishing a peace plan, hosting reconciliation talks between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, and holding summits with Arab and Muslim Foreign Ministers aimed at ending the fighting. None of these efforts have borne fruit, but they still look good in Arab and Global South capitals, allowing China to exploit the growing wedge between the U.S. and key global actors.

These moves have sparked fierce Israeli backlash. About a third of Israeli Jews have reported a negative change in their perception of China since Oct. 7, and some private-sector leaders have called for exacting financial consequences, such as temporarily prohibiting Chinese companies from operating in Israel's ports. Israel's government has communicated its "deep disappointment" to Beijing officials and taken measures that have undermined relations, sending a parliamentary delegation to Taiwan, where



Happier times: Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, greets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Beijing on March 21, 2017

chair Boaz Toporovsky said Israel and Taiwan "have much in common as small but strong democracies in a harsh environment."

ALL THAT SAID, other geopolitical interests could ultimately drive Beijing back toward Tel Aviv. China's desire to shore up ties with U.S.-friendly Gulf States has been a key driver of its Gaza policy. Yet its refusal to condemn Hamas and its labeling of Iran's missile attack on Israel as "self-defense" had the opposite effect, exacerbating concerns in the UAE and Saudi Arabia that the U.S. is an irreplaceable partner. To advocate for a Chinese-led world order that resolves conflicts without military force, Beijing casts the U.S. as a warmonger. But many Gulf countries see Biden's ironclad military backing of Israel as the U.S. support they have long desired. To strengthen its relationships with Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, China may adopt rhetoric more in line with theirs, and, in the process, the preferences of Washington and Tel Aviv.

China and Israel also have financial incentives to maintain a relationship. Israel's war has shrunk its GDP and hurt its credit rating. China is

the world's second largest economy and was Israel's third largest trading partner the year before Oct. 7. Today Chinese investors are facing a lagging domestic economy and pursuing investment opportunities abroad. The dynamic suggests a mutually beneficial interest to boost commercial ties.

For Palestinians horrified with the U.S. and its largely unconditional support for Israel, China's emerging interest in the conflict certainly seems like a positive development. But China's current pro-Palestinian stance may simply reflect that today, a public relationship with Israel is more liability than asset in another contest, the U.S.-China rivalry. Beijing's support for Palestinians appears to be mostly superficial; its vague peace plan puts most of the onus on the U.N., giving China the future flexibility to pivot on this issue and leave the Palestinians once more without a great power.

As Israelis have, Palestinians may too soon discover that China is a fair-weather friend—and that a relationship with it is a marriage that can always end in divorce.

Lipkind is a research associate at the Council on Foreign Relations

The Putin-Kim affair



VLADIMIR PUTIN'S recent trip to North Korea was a remarkable event for many reasons. It was his first visit there in 24

years, the pageantry was especially lavish even by Russian and North Korean standards, and Kim Jong Un and Putin seized the moment with a new mutual defense pact that echoed the Cold War era. But the upshot is a decidedly mixed bag.

On one hand, we shouldn't read too much into the rendezvous. Putin was perhaps keen to show he still has friends days after representatives of more than 90 countries, many of them deep-pocketed, gathered in Switzerland to forge a Ukraine peace plan. That summit came on the heels of new Western commitments, including by the U.S., to provide Kyiv with better weapons and more money. Putin's turning to the hermit Democratic People's Republic of Korea, by contrast, was not the most impressive optics.

In addition, the mutual defense pact that Kim and Putin announced—an "alliance," according to Kim, but not Putin—isn't worth all that much. Both Russia and North Korea have nuclear weapons. It's the nukes, not their new diplomatic partnership, that provide their best deterrent against attack.

There's also the fact that China can't be happy with this budding friendship. Beijing doesn't need Putin emboldening Kim to act more aggressively, further

destabilizing a region China would prefer to keep quiet. Threats from North Korea drive South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. closer together, creating problems for Beijing in East Asia.

On the other hand, top-level Russia-North Korea cooperation should concern Western governments. North Korea, like Russia, is a dangerous nuclear-armed country with sophisticated

carry nearly 5 million artillery shells.

Openly showcasing their ties underscores Putin's confidence. The Russian leader knows that when so many countries, including the U.S., are holding critical elections, the threat of energy and food crises will compel the West to limit sanctions. Creating an economic emergency for resource-rich Russia would trigger supply shocks and price surges that no one can afford—and Western nuclear plants still need Russian uranium to operate.

NOW TAKE a second look at that Swiss-sponsored peace conference. Putin knows Ukraine has (still limited) backing from the U.S. and Europe. But China didn't attend the event. India, the Saudis, and the United Arab Emirates sent lower-level delegations. The West may be firmly with Volodymyr Zelensky, but much of the Global South wants a cease-fire and a Ukrainian-Russian compromise that ends threats to



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un escorts Russian President Vladimir Putin in Pyongyang on June 19

cybercapabilities. If Kim is listening to foreign friends, America and Europe would prefer he turn to China's Xi Jinping, who wants more stability in the global order, than to Putin, who benefits from chaos.

Nor is the tightening Moscow-Pyongyang axis good for Ukraine and its Western backers, because North Korea has weapons that Russia badly needs and incentives to share them. Days before Putin's trip, South Korea's Defense Minister said Seoul had detected 10,000 shipping containers sent from North Korea to Russia that could

food and fuel supplies that risk a punishing global recession.

For these reasons, Putin believes he can wait to make a peace deal. Maybe for a long time—especially if Donald Trump wins the White House come November, and a friendlier far-right government takes power in France in the coming weeks. Such a scenario could undermine the West's support for Ukraine and force Zelensky, or his successor, to the bargaining table.

Materiel from North Korea can make Putin's waiting easier. For the West, that's the worst news of all. □



Repainting a billboard off I-71 in Ohio, on Nov. 7, 2023, Election Day

political callings rather than academic exercises—stand to shape American jurisprudence for a generation. And the Supreme Court is the most obvious and durable of any of those levels thanks to 56-year-old Neil Gorsuch, 59-year-old Brett Kavanaugh, and 52-year-old Amy Coney Barrett. Put plainly: this cohort reasonably can settle in for the long haul.

THAT TRUMPIAN TRIO is why Louisiana's Catholic governor sounded so excited about being sued. While the Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that a similar Kentucky law was unconstitutional, a majority of the current Justices may see things differently. They've already shown an openness to the Christian conservatives' argument that faith and government can co-exist if not thrive in a symbiotic relationship. Notably, in 2022, Justices sided with a high school coach who argued his players had the right to pray at the 50-yard line and ruled Maine could not block religious schools from receiving a state subsidy. A year earlier, in a unanimous ruling, the court said a Catholic group in Philadelphia could refuse to work with same-sex couples on fostering children.

By one study's count, parties arguing on the basis of so-called religious liberty found success 4 out of 5 times. That's no accident on a bench stacked by Trump with the explicit call to arms to blend religion—specifically Christianity—with law.

This, in no small measure, helps to explain how self-described “values voters” have fallen into line behind the less-than-pious Trump and his bid to return to power in this November's election. A Pew Research Institute study finds 43% of Trump supporters think government policies should support religious values, and 69% say the Bible should influence U.S. laws. A second Pew study finds Trump riding high among white evangelical Protestants by 2 to 1.

While the Ten Commandments



The D.C. Brief By Philip Elliott

WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR JEFF LANDRY knew the score when he signed into law a requirement that every classroom in his state—from kindergartens to college chemistry labs—must post a copy of the Ten Commandments. In fact, the ambitious Republican seemed to be trolling his critics even before he sanctified the work of the GOP-controlled legislature.

“I’m going home to sign a bill that places the Ten Commandments in public classrooms,” he said on June 15 as he headlined a Republican Party fundraiser in Nashville. “And I can’t wait to be sued.”

Lawsuits were at the ready as soon as Landry signed the bill on June 19, along with new laws that require schools to use the pronouns of students that match their gender assigned at birth and allow public schools to put chaplains on taxpayer-funded payrolls. It is abundantly clear this effort seems on a glide path toward the Supreme Court, which for decades has ruled such expressions

of faith collide fatally with the First Amendment’s prohibition from state-sanctioned faith. **But given the new tilt of the bench, conservatives’ credo might be reduced to a simple profession: In Trump They Trust.**

That’s right. Donald Trump has been out of official power since early 2021, but his presence continues to be felt at every level of government, from the halls of Congress to city commissions. His legacy is most firmly established through his three picks to the Supreme Court, part of the record-breaking 231 federal judges Trump successfully nominated to federal roles. The Trump cohort of judges—mostly young conservatives with a bent to treat the roles as

‘I love the Ten Commandments in public schools.’

—FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

are important pieces of Jewish and Christian teachings and compatible with Islam, the play in Louisiana—and elsewhere, to be clear—has clear linkages to the current Republican Party’s courtship of Christian conservatives, especially white Christian nationalists. That first Pew survey found 22% of Trump supporters say the government should declare Christianity the official national religion and 59% say the government should promote Christian morality.

So while Trump is out of sanctioned power—at least for the moment—there is still no credible way to argue that he’s without tremendous sway over the Republican Party and the laws it is passing. Louisiana and its GOP-supermajority legislature may be the first test case of these omnipresent reminders of religious teachings, but it most certainly will not be the last. Similar pieces of legislation demanding the Ten Commandments’ display were introduced in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Mississippi this year. A measure allowing the display passed the Arizona legislature but met the Democratic governor’s veto.

This isn’t simply a series of coincidences. The current political environment is one that rewards such audacious acts, and it’s no accident that Landry chose to taunt his critics while signaling his national ambitions during a dinner more than 500 miles from home. For any GOP politician looking to make inroads with the party’s conservative Christian base—be it a first-term governor or a convicted ex-President—pandering like this works to build lists, credibility, and fundraising tallies. If secular voters—or even those who think expressions of faith are better served in a sanctuary than a Nashville convention hall—stopped rewarding such trolling, perhaps the sanctimonious performance art would stop. One can only pick up a copy of the Constitution and pray.



CO₂ Leadership Brief By Justin Worland

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

AI CHIPMAKER NVIDIA BECAME the most valuable publicly traded company in the U.S. for a moment in June as its market capitalization topped \$3.3 trillion. As Wall Street cheered, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang was attending a conference of U.S. investor-owned electric utilities. “This is going to be the next driver of fairly significant energy consumption,” Huang told the audience at the June 18 Edison Electric Institute (EEI) conference in Las Vegas. “The challenge for us is to figure out how to go and create that energy.”

On the surface, pairing Nvidia and the utilities might seem odd. Nvidia is the trendiest company in the world as it maintains a firm grasp on the production of the chips needed for AI.

In the past five years, its market cap has grown more than 3,100%. Electric utilities, on the other hand, are not known for big shifts.

But it may be time to abandon that assessment of utilities—and AI is a key reason why. AI use has increased electricity-demand projections as companies build new data centers, a boon for power companies. But it’s not all upside: climate risk has hit the sector hard. **For market watchers, AI and climate are often seen as two critical but independent themes; utilities show where the two intersect.**

For decades, the investor-owned utility business has been fairly straightforward. Utilities function as a monopoly, and make more money when regulators allow them to build new infrastructure and raise rates. That model has

delivered consistent returns while limiting growth opportunities.

The evolving energy landscape has challenged the utility business model. The spread of rooftop solar’s undercutting utilities is one example. Another is lawsuits after wildfires linked to power lines. AI is yet another curveball—though thus far it has helped the financials as investors bet on continued demand. Stock in Constellation Energy, a low-carbon power company, is up nearly 100% this year.

Texas-based electric company Vistara is up more than 130%.

Beyond financials is the question of whether new energy infrastructure will be clean. While analysts expect more renewables, many utilities have pursued more natural gas

too. In the onstage conversation between Huang and Pedro Pizarro, the recently departed chair of EEI and the CEO of Southern California’s largest utility, emissions barely came up.

In April, I asked Pizarro about the changing demand picture. He acknowledged that growing demand complicates the path for clean energy, but said that he remains confident in the long term. “I think the long term stays the same,” he said. “But the near term will have these bumps in the road.”

One thing that gives confidence? The tech giants building data centers have shown no sign of backing down from clean-energy targets.

‘The challenge for us is to figure out how to go and create that energy.’

—JENSEN HUANG,
NVIDIA CEO



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The true meaning of 'give me liberty'

BY JOHN RAGOSTA

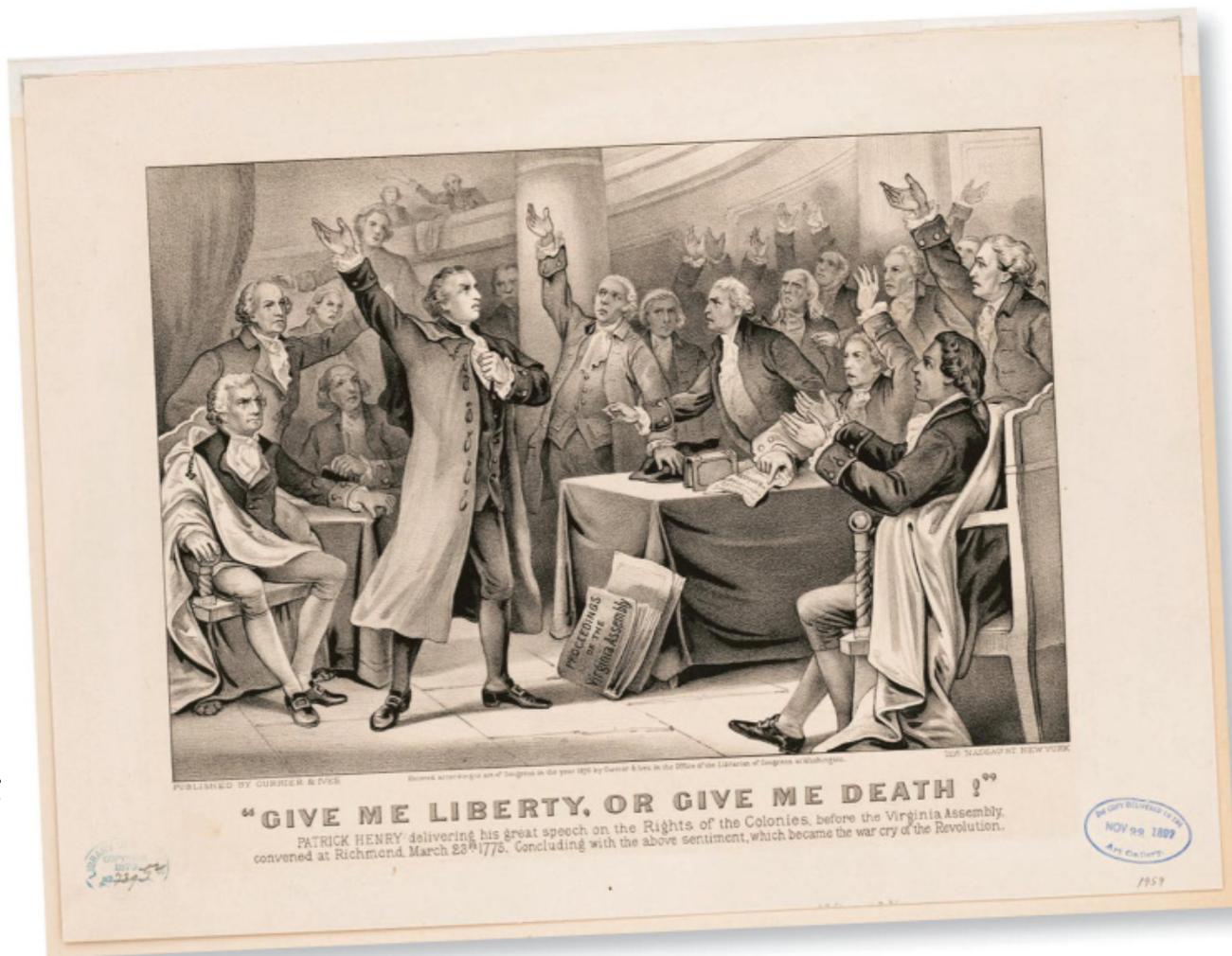
ALMOST 250 YEARS AGO, FOUR weeks before the battles of Lexington and Concord, Patrick Henry rose in St. John's Church in Richmond, Va., to urge Americans to arm for a war that he saw as inevitable. He famously concluded his call to arms: "Give me liberty, or give me death."

Patriots embraced the refrain, and militia members sewed it into their shirts. Since then, his words have echoed through the centuries. In 1845, Frederick Douglass referenced Henry when he wrote of the enslaved battling for freedom. In 1989, when thousands gathered for liberty in Tiananmen Square, his words were invoked. But they have also been embraced by some as a radical call for opposition to almost any government action. In 2020, signs attacking health regulations demanded, rather confusedly, "Give me liberty or give me COVID-19!" Protesters on Jan. 6, 2021, quoted Henry. His famous phrase has appeared on everything from AR-15 dust covers to a Tea Party manifesto.

Rather than a call for democratic freedom, Henry's mantra has become a radical screed. But wrapping anti-government campaigns in Henry's words demonstrates a fundamental historical misunderstanding.

HENRY WAS NEVER simply opposed to taxes or regulation. The problem was, as we learn in school, taxation *without representation*. Henry consistently recognized the right of government, empowered by the community, to make binding laws—even when he disagreed with the result.

In 1788, Henry led efforts to oppose ratification of the U.S. Constitution, because he believed that it would create a government too powerful and distant from the people. When it was ratified, some anti-federalists sought to undermine its implementation. When they called



upon Henry to lead their effort, he emphatically rejected such opposition, insisting that change must be sought "in a constitutional way."

Henry's commitment to the community's right to govern was never clearer than in his final political campaign. In 1798, in desperation over the Sedition Act that criminalized political dissent, Thomas Jefferson proposed that states could nullify federal laws. George Washington saw that anarchy or secession were the likely consequences of Jefferson's theories. He begged Henry to come out of retirement to oppose the dangerous doctrine. An ailing Henry agreed. In his last public speech, the great anti-federalist warned that if we cannot live within the Constitution that "we the people" adopted, we "may bid adieu

forever to representative government."

Even though his warnings had been ignored, even though he disagreed with the Sedition Act, Henry insisted that the people could not simply refuse to follow the law. The community had the right to voice dissent via elected representatives. That is the very nature of a democracy: joining with our co-citizens to govern, even when we disagree with their choice.

A modern fixation on "give me liberty" as a license for unbounded personal freedom is a historic lie, and symptomatic of a broader problem. The freedom that patriots fought for was not a ticket to do whatever one wanted, but the right to participate in a community that governed itself, a government—to quote the Declaration of Independence—"deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed." With such a government, Henry understood that a "loyal opposition" must seek reform "in a constitutional way": at the ballot box.

The famous phrase is on AR-15 dust covers and a Tea Party manifesto

Ragosta is the author of *For the People, For the Country*

The founders did not want a political gerontocracy

BY REBECCA BRANNON

AMERICA'S AGING POLITICAL class is hard to avoid noticing. Our presidency continues to be dominated by septuagenarians and octogenarians, and the Senate is not much better.

The founders did care about the implications of an increasingly gerontocratic government and sought to avoid it. In the colonial period, governors had often been drawn from the older set. In part, that was because it was considered a more ceremonial role. The European norm of governance was a monarchical political system that prized the wisdom of age—and therefore often allowed political figures who were far past their prime. In practice, Europeans had come to rely on the *de facto* separation of ceremonial power awarded by birth from the real power wielded by courtiers and advisers. The American colonial system re-created many of the more aristocratic features of government, like governorships that were advised by an appointed council. Elderly leaders were acceptable in these roles so long as their power was circumscribed.

After the Revolution, voters saw governors as democratic leaders of thriving representative governments. Leaders were no longer ceremonial, but were executives charged with military leadership, political planning, and financial acumen. Governors started getting younger. Stevens T. Mason, the first governor of Michigan, was the youngest of all at 24. There were similar expectations for the presidency. All but one of the first eight Presidents of the United States were elected in their 50s, with only John Adams stretching the boundaries at 60.

Younger men looked forward to holding office as well as rising in business at ever younger ages. A new generation saw themselves as the people ready to embrace the possibilities of democracy and freedom. They moved out of their parents' homes younger, started their own families younger, set out in new occupations, and forged a vibrant new media environment. The founding generation worried that older men were more inflexible, obstinate, uninterested in change, and stuck in their ways—all leadership qualities at odds with the experimentation needed for representative government. Cognitive decline was also a real fear. In a democracy, elected leaders hold real power. It was essential to make sure they were mentally competent to wield that power on behalf of the people.

But if the founders worried about the impact of political leaders of advanced age, why did they not enact guardrails? At the Constitutional Convention, the founders wrote in minimum age requirements for federal office, but rejected maximums because they believed in the discernment of the electorate. Initially, their belief worked. George Washington and others monitored themselves and fellow leaders. That's why we are left without a clear constitutional solution. But that lack is not because the founders did not see the problem. As we mark another Fourth of July, perhaps it is time to return to the problem of aging leadership with more than the strategy the founders left us with.

Brannon is the author of From Revolution to Reunion



Monument removals and revolutionaries

BY LAURA A. MACALUSO
AND KARIM M. TIRO

Four years ago, amid reinvigorated public debate about historical monuments, statues began coming down across the country. Columbus and Confederates were at the top of the list. New monuments were also created, adding American heroes such as Harriet Tubman and Barbara Johns to the commemorative landscape. Today, however, public opinion on the topic is still divided—and many monuments remain in limbo.

Consider Philip Schuyler, a Revolutionary War hero who was also a slaveholder. In 2023, Albany, N.Y., Mayor Kathy Sheehan ordered the removal of a bronze monument honoring him. Some welcomed the decision, while others accused Sheehan of “erasing history.” Is it unfairly modern to consider Schuyler's slaveholding against his achievements? Hardly. Many in his lifetime asserted the evil of slavery. Yet Schuyler's decisions contributed directly to the patriot victory at the Battles of Saratoga—a turning point in the war for independence. We continue to grapple with the fact that the things we admire about the revolution are intertwined with things from which we recoil.

Monuments have something to teach us, even when they are gone. Philip Schuyler might not appear again in front of Albany's city hall, and monuments will continue to go up and come down as Americans ask questions about history, identity, and shared memory. The upcoming 250th anniversary of the founding is a moment not only to remember revolutionary ideals, but also to confront failures to live up to them. Although Google Maps tells us the Philip Schuyler statue is “permanently closed,” it is still open for conversation.

Macaluso is editor of Monument Culture, and Tiro is a professor of history at Xavier University

MELINDA FRENCH GATES IS

On
Her
Own

READY TO TALK ABOUT

HER NEXT CHAPTER

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE/
KIRKLAND, WASH.

>
French Gates recently announced a billion dollars' worth of giving for women's causes

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAOLA KUDACKI FOR TIME



The early days of the pandemic were a complicated time for a lot of couples.

But it's fair to say that in the sprawling, Pacific lodge-style home of Melinda and Bill Gates, the complexity was particularly acute. The foundation the couple co-led had been running a flu study in their hometown of Seattle, which had detected early cases of COVID-19 in the region. There were video calls with infectious-disease specialists they funded, world leaders, epidemiologists, journalists, and public-health officials. Two of their three children were home from school full time. Plus, the couple was secretly separated, trading off who lived at the family house and who was elsewhere while they tried to figure out if they could stay married.

"It was a super intense time for us as a foundation," says Melinda French Gates, sitting in her industrial-chic office in Kirkland, Wash., three days after exiting the world-changing organization that bore her name for almost 25 years. "The other thing I would say, though, is, unusually, it gave us the privacy to do what needed to be done in private. You know, I separated first before I made the full decision about a divorce. And to be able to do that in private while I'm still trying to take care of

the kids, while still making certain decisions about how you're going to disentangle your life—thank God."

Most divorces are not undertaken lightly. They can blow a hole in a couple's finances and health, the happiness of their children, and each partner's self-esteem. French Gates didn't have to worry so much about that first issue. But unlike others, she did have to think about the effect her divorce, finalized two weeks before her 57th birthday in August 2021, might have on the world. It's not an exaggeration to say that if the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation were damaged by the collapse of the Bill and Melinda Gates marriage, it could affect the welfare of millions of people around the globe. How do you factor that in when you're figuring out if your marriage is over?

"I would say it's a personal thing," French Gates says, after a significant pause, of her decisionmaking process at the time. Her office, while lush, is not showy. All warm wood and eggshell, its most prominent feature is a large poster spelling out the word JOY. But there are hints of her influence—among the family photos are notes from Bono and Barack Obama. "I thought a lot about my

three children," she says. "But I certainly thought about the effect on the foundation. Those are the three biggest buckets: me, the kids, and the foundation. And I wanted to make sure that when we came through it to the other side—when I came through it on my side—all of those pieces were intact."

After a stint away from the spotlight, French Gates seems to have reached the other side. In May, almost exactly three years after news of the divorce broke, she announced her departure from the foundation that began above a pizza parlor with her and two other employees before it was officially launched in 2000. As she leaves, she wants to make a few things clear. She is doing well. She is not out of the philanthropy business; she just announced her second billion-dollar funding plan (her first was in 2019). And she's focused on one issue: helping women thrive.

French Gates no longer wants to be the soft humanist layer surrounding Bill Gates' hard-data-driven core or a modern Eleanor Roosevelt, well-meaning but powerful only because of her spouse. She has never wanted to ride anybody's coat-tails. On the cusp of turning 60, she's

both looser and more direct than in our interviews in prior years, maybe because she now has as unobstructed a view of her goals as she does of the yachts in the lake outside her office window. And she has her own wealth plus \$12.5 billion from her ex's personal stash to achieve them. "I feel like, Wow, I'm 60. I better surround myself with people and still travel [so that] I'm still absolutely learning, because the world is moving, the world is changing," she says. "I'm totally unencumbered to work in any way I want."

IN A WAY, French Gates' emergence as a woman making her own weather is a throwback to her Texan roots. Melinda Ann French, as she was known for her first 29 years, was a standout student at her all-girls Catholic school in Dallas. The nuns there were Ursuline, an order dedicated to educating young women, whose Latin motto translates to "I will serve." French Gates traveled to jails and hospitals and tutored at low-income schools as part of her education, and still feels that introduction to service shaped her.

She frequently tells the story of how a foresighted teacher, Mrs. Bauer, persuaded the head nun to buy a smattering of Apple II Plus computers in the early '80s and introduced them to 10 or so of her more math-minded students, including Melinda. She was immediately fascinated, she says, by the logic puzzles that coding presented.

French Gates went to Duke University for a bachelor's in computer science and an M.B.A. while interning over summers at IBM. When she went for her rubber-stamp interview before accepting a job there, she mentioned she still had an interview at a newbie company, Microsoft. The hiring manager told her to take that job, because there would be more opportunity for advancement.

All along the way, French Gates' path was lined by people who wanted a little more for women: a better education, access to more advanced knowledge, a less obstructed career path. And she was easy to root for. The second of four children, as a teenager she helped at her parents' side hustle, a 14-home rental operation, mowing lawns and "Easing-Off the ovens." She also campaigned to get the grading system changed at her high school. Young Melinda felt

students who took AP classes were penalized. She had clocked that, unlike at the more pricey all-girls school nearby, only the valedictorian at her school was accepted into a prestigious college. "I'm like, Oh my God, if I'm not valedictorian, I don't have a shot at getting in," she recalls. She got the scoring system changed. And she was valedictorian.

Perhaps it was that combo of pragmatism, ambition, and appreciation for data that drew Microsoft's founder to her the evening they took the last two seats at a company dinner in New York City in 1987. At first, says French Gates, she wasn't sure Bill was her type. He tried to schedule a drinks date two weeks in advance. After she declined what sounded like an appointment, he called and changed it to later that evening. They married in 1994.

It's a sad symptom of how little respect is given to parenting that French Gates, who ceased paid work and focused on raising the couple's children after 1996, has been accused of not deserving her wealth. Indeed, both Bill and Melinda have acknowledged that it's unfair for them to have so much money. They decided to give it away even before they were married and asked Gates' dad Bill Sr. to help. After the William H. Gates Foundation merged into the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000, French Gates began to take an increasingly large role, primarily championing the data

**'I'M TOTALLY
UNENCUMBERED
TO WORK
IN ANY WAY
I WANT.'**

that showed that investing in women—assisting them to stay healthy, get educated, and plan pregnancies—helped raise whole communities out of poverty.

Somewhere along the way, the Gateses became one of America's favorite couples. They were TIME's Persons of the Year in 2005, alongside literal rock-star philanthropist Bono. In 2006, Warren Buffett entrusted the couple with more than \$30 billion to disburse. In 2016, they were awarded

the Presidential Medal of Freedom; in 2017, the French Legion of Honor.

"She's a very substantial person, and she brings that to her work," says former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who first met French Gates at a U.N. function in 2019. "This isn't a side project. It's not a moment in time. Every time I have seen her over the years, she has had a laser focus on what she can do to improve areas of work that support women."

IF YOU HAD TO PINPOINT a moment when Melinda Gates, wife, mother, and philanthropist, began to turn into Melinda French Gates, powerhouse advocate for women, it was probably July 11, 2012, when she co-hosted, alongside the U.K. government, the one-day London Summit on Family Planning. More than 20 countries pledged \$4.6 billion to help increase access to birth control for women in developing nations. Three years later, French Gates started Pivotal Ventures, an investment and charitable firm focused on the issues she cared about. Four years after that, she published a memoir, *The Moment of Lift*. And now she's going it alone. "Once Pivotal Ventures was up and running for three years, I knew I could do this on my own," she says.

The first billion in giving since leaving the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation offers some clues as to the direction she now wants to go. Her focus is still getting women in power—in politics, in business, in tech, and, now, in media, but she's widening her lens to work more globally, and being bolder. She's spreading \$200 million among 16 organizations that work to advance the rights of women and other underrepresented groups, including the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund and the National Domestic Workers Alliance.

She's also offered \$20 million each to 12 individuals she believes are disruptors and charged them to pass it along to others. These include friends such as filmmaker Ava DuVernay, people she has worked with like Ardern, and people she has only met over Zoom, like Sabrina Habib, who runs low-cost childcare centers in East Africa. The recipients get to request up to \$5 million for their own institutions and invest the rest in other people or organizations they admire.

Two of these recipients are men, Richard Reeves and Gary Barker, who are trying to help prepare boys for a world where women are equal partners.

Ardern, who doesn't yet know how she will allocate the money she has been assigned, except that it's likely to be invested in the geographic region from which she hails, says the offer from French Gates came in mid-April, totally out of the blue. She was putting away clothes one evening when she glanced at her phone. "I got a personal message from Melinda saying, 'Here's my areas of interest. I believe you're someone who will have seen meaningful places where we could have an impact. Will you help me?' And 'I'm trusting you to hand this over,'" says Ardern. "Who does that?"

A further quarter-billion dollars is going to a kind of contest, for which people will pitch ideas, using Lever for Change, a model she used before with another woman giving away her divorce settlement, MacKenzie Scott (formerly Bezos). While French Gates no longer partners with Scott, she acknowledges there are now some similarities in their methods, which lean into trust in people rather than pure adherence to data. But she prefers to stay more involved than Scott. "MacKenzie will literally do the grantmaking to the organizations and then she's extraordinarily hands off," says French Gates. "I try and coalesce a group of organizations around moving something forward."

That leaves \$310 million to give away. "I don't know yet what I'm going to do with the rest," she says. "That's exciting. One of the things I feel like I'm on is a learning journey." She repeats those words, *exciting* and *learning*, often.

One of the things French Gates has learned is that she's more pro-choice than she thought. Previously, she had spoken in favor of—and funded—contraceptive access for women in countries where availability was low. Now, in part influenced by her daughters, she's funding abortion-rights organizations, which the foundation never did. This has put her at odds with some in the Catholic Church, a faith she espouses. "Melinda French Gates could do much to help women and their pre-born children on the national—and even international—level," Carol Tobias,



president of the National Right to Life Committee, told a Catholic news outlet. "Yet she has decided instead to pour money into the abortion industry."

But to French Gates, the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is a symptom of a bigger issue. "To have a law on the books since I was 9 years old, and to have it rolled back, and all the downstream consequences—like these women's-health deserts now when we already have one of the highest maternal-mortality rates of high-income countries—I can't not speak up about that," she says. "To see that my granddaughter will have fewer rights than I do? That doesn't make any sense."

Another topic that has really got her goat over the years is that the U.S. is the only Western nation with no federal

policy on family medical leave. One of the recipients of her largesse is New America, which does advocacy work in that area. "I want to push on that policy in a huge way," she says. Rich as she is, she knows she can't fund family leave for an entire nation; eventually the government will have to step in. She's just going to try to clear away the obstacles, including the elected ones.

Which is why, noting that 60% of Americans agree that women should have access to abortion and 80% of Americans agree that the U.S. should have a policy about family leave, French Gates is turning her attention to politics. She's funding centrist candidates from both sides of the aisle, especially women, and especially in local and state government, and putting



money into turn-out-the-vote efforts in swing states. And she's gone further. The Gateses long had a policy of not endorsing any politicians, on the theory that they must be able to work with any government that gets elected, but she's clear on whom she'll be voting for this year: President Biden. "There's no chance I could vote for Donald Trump. Not a single chance," she says. "Not after what he has done to women's reproductive rights, and not after the heinous things he has said about women."

AFTER 27 YEARS of marriage, the Gateses announced their divorce, midpandemic, in May 2021. It later emerged that Bill had had an affair with a Microsoft employee in 2000, leading to an internal investigation in

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"You think about all the factors," says French Gates, in her office, about ending her marriage. "But you also have to look at what happens if you stay, to you."

2019. He left the board in 2020. ("Bill Gates stepped down from the Microsoft board in 2020 to dedicate more time to philanthropic priorities including global health and development, education, and his increasing engagement in tackling climate change," a foundation spokesperson told TIME.) He also spent time with Jeffrey Epstein, even after the latter's first conviction. (Gates has said he regrets those meetings.) While both of those were factors, French Gates has said there was no one thing that led to

the dissolution of the marriage. Since September 2022, Bill has been seen frequently with Paula Hurd, the widow of former Oracle co-CEO Mark Hurd.

There is zero need to feel sorry for French Gates. By all accounts she's living her best life. "Getting a divorce is a horrible thing. It's just painful. It's awful when you realize you need one," she says, then asked to correct herself from "horrible thing" to "hard thing" a minute later. But now that it's over? "It has been wonderful," she says with a tiny chuckle. "I'll just leave it there." She doesn't leave it there. She's skiing. She's traveling to see her granddaughter and daughters (Jennifer, 28, and Phoebe, 21) in New York City and son (Rory, 25) in Washington, D.C. She's going to Paris to watch her son-in-law Nayel Nassar compete as an equestrian in the Olympics, and on safari in Africa, one of her favorite things.

She's allowing a few close friends to throw her a dance party for her 60th. She has two spiritual groups she loves (local mindfulness guru Tara Brach's podcast is a favorite topic of discussion) and a long-term walking group with a cluster of her besties. And she is smitten with her new house, having never been a fan of the massive one her husband had built. "I live in a neighborhood. Now I can walk to little stores. I can walk to the drugstore, I can walk to a restaurant," she says. "I absolutely love it." Alas, it was considered imprudent for her to go to any open houses—a favorite weekend hobby in her 20s. Instead, she did a lot of searching on Redfin.

French Gates might even be dating. She says "of course" she's willing to meet a new somebody, especially "somebody who's open to learning and who's vibrant, and who's smart, and somebody who challenges me and that I challenge." It seems a remarkably specific list, but when asked if there is somebody in the picture, she demurs. "Not that I'm ready to talk about."

The foundation French Gates has just left is richer than some countries. It had an endowment of \$75.2 billion in December 2023. It has given away \$76 billion or so since 2000, including close to \$8 billion in the past year. Its work reaches 48 states and 135 countries, and while its focus is global health, it also touches education, agriculture, water,



French Gates receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016; speaking out at the conference in London in 2012

climate, financial systems, gender equality, and family planning, among other things. Pivotal Ventures, on the other hand, is not a nonprofit and has no endowment, just whatever French Gates has. That's reported to be \$11.3 billion, on top of the \$12.5 billion she was given for philanthropic purposes when she left the foundation—a stipulation of her divorce agreement. It's not nothing, but scale is crucial in funding if you want to take big swings. Can she tolerate the downsizing?

"I don't see it honestly as a downsizing," she says. "I was just ready to be able to have full decisionmaking control about where all the funds go." She also felt the foundation was in a good place, and the work she was doing there on gender equity would continue. "I know it will continue because of the board, because of Mark [Suzman, the CEO], and Bill believes now fi..."—she seems to be about to say *finally*, but stops—"in women's health, so it will continue."

When she told her foundation colleagues she was leaving, she says, none of them tried to talk her out of it. Even Bill was resigned to it. "I think he said he would be willing to make substantial changes if it would help me stay," she says, but "they knew once I've made a decision, I've made a decision."

"I'm grateful to Melinda for all her contributions to the Gates Foundation, where she was instrumental in shaping our strategies and initiatives," Gates told TIME in a written statement. "I'm certain she will have a huge impact through her future philanthropic work. I'm impressed with many of the grants

she's already announced for women's health and economic empowerment, and hope we have the opportunity to collaborate again in the future."

THE STRUGGLE TO BRING equity to women was already under way before French Gates was born. It would be a mistake to call it a revolution, because it has been very slow and things have not fully turned around. But for many women in low-income countries, whose position was and is precarious, the foundation's programs made an enormous difference, especially to their health. No country has ceased being grindingly poor without improving the lot of women; it is now a tenet of international development that gender equality is macrocritical. French Gates is one of the engines that have driven this work.

People who have worked with the funding giant, who did not wish to be named because it might jeopardize their relationship, say she will be missed, both in the programming and the organization's culture. The Gateses' differing approaches made them a good team. Because French Gates was a co-chair, anybody coming to a meeting would know that in addition to bringing technological options, and data to support their approach, they'd be asked about how they were providing dignity, equity,

and access to tools and funding for all the people they were working with. And after the meeting, French Gates would be the one emailing them a thank-you note.

On the other hand, said one younger aid worker, it was inspiring to see French Gates embodying the autonomy she had been trying to provide for women by choosing to forge her own path, focus on issues she deemed most vital, and distribute money in a way she regarded as equitable.

French Gates' mother Elaine often told her daughter that if she didn't set her own agenda, somebody else would. Several decades later, French Gates may be coming to terms with what that looks like. She no longer talks, for example, about empowering women. "I've stopped using that empowerment language, because we aren't giving women their power—they have their power," she says. "What I'm trying to do is make sure that women can step into their full power, that women see their power. It's not something we give them. We have it. We're born with it."

When Bill and Melinda married, she wrote in her memoir, his parents gave them a sculpture of two birds "looking out intently toward an unknown place with their gaze eerily together." She loved it, she wrote, because it represented a married couple looking to the future together. She put it right by the front door of the home. When they were dividing up the assets, he got the sculpture. "I didn't ask for it," French Gates says. "I didn't want it." She's looking at a whole new horizon. —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN □

MEDAL OF FREEDOM: SAUL LOEB—AFP/GETTY IMAGES; LONDON SUMMIT: RUNE HELLESTAD—BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

WÄRTSILÄ – Shaping the decarbonisation revolution

From the European Green Deal to the COP climate talks, efforts to eliminate carbon from the way we live and work are accelerating. For the shipping and energy sectors – together responsible for 35% of the world’s carbon emissions – the 2050 net-zero target is now just the lifespan of a single vessel or power plant away, so action to decarbonize needs to be taken now.

“Fortunately, the technology to move to carbon-free shipping and a 100% renewable energy future already exists,” says Håkan Agnevall, president and CEO of Finland-based Wärtsilä, a world-leading supplier of innovative technologies and lifecycle solutions for the marine and energy markets. “But the transition will take time, probably decades, and we need to make sure it’s sustainable financially and socially, as well as environmentally. We are contributing our piece of the puzzle, and working with our customers to make it happen.”

A company with humble beginnings 190 years ago as a sawmill in rural eastern Finland is now shaping the world’s decarbonization revolution. Of almost 100,000 large vessels currently at sea, one in three carries Wärtsilä solutions on board. Meanwhile, the company’s track record also includes 79 GW of power plant capacity and 125 energy storage systems delivered to 180 countries around the world. With almost 18,000 staff generating annual net sales of \$6.4 billion and a pipeline of business orders amounting to over \$7 billion, Wärtsilä is at the heart of the green transition.

The decarbonization cause is close to Agnevall’s heart. “Working in a team to turn things around is what really excites me,” says the business veteran, who has led transformations in a string of blue-chip companies, including Volvo, Bombardier and ABB.

Wind and solar are rapidly emerging as the dominant sources of renewable energy, but one factor slowing their adoption is the intermittency of these climate-based sources. Hence the demand for Wärtsilä’s balancing power solutions, which can be ramped up and down in an instant, ensuring reliable supply at scale and helping consumers avoid expensive peaks.

On the maritime front, Wärtsilä researches and develops new technologies that run on low- and zero-carbon fuels, leads the industry

in electrifying vessels, and pioneers carbon-capture technology and other emission-reduction solutions. Optimizing routing and port operations using real-time data translates to tangible fuel savings for customers, and enhanced voyage performance.

FUELS OF THE FUTURE

Multifuel capability is at the heart of Wärtsilä’s technology. Vessels and power plants have the flexibility to run on the most sustainable and practical fuel option available, whether ammonia, methane, hydrogen or something else.

“We have a saying at Wärtsilä, that green is not black or white,” Agnevall says. “That means we are going to have to use all the tools in the toolbox to get where we need to be to create a decarbonized and sustainable future. Fossil fuels will remain in the picture as transition fuels while the infrastructure and supply develop.”

Key to Wärtsilä’s success is its tradition of customer collaboration. “The decarbonization of our two core industries is what motivates us deep down, but we can’t come up with all the answers by ourselves,” Agnevall says. “We are part of a larger ecosystem that involves many stakeholders who need to be talking to each other. Sustainable fuels need to be made available, and the vessels need to be built to run on them. Also, regulators and politicians need to be talking the same language.”

The fluid, incremental but fundamentally rewarding nature of this challenge was brought home to Agnevall in a recent encounter with the mayor of the Finnish city of Vaasa, home to Wärtsilä’s R&D and production hub. “A few years ago, the mayor visited us and asked employees about their role. ‘We build engines for ships and power stations,’ came the reply. Recently, the mayor visited Wärtsilä again and asked the same question. This time people answered: ‘We are helping to decarbonize the world.’”



Håkan Agnevall, President and CEO of Wärtsilä





*Asinate Lewabeka
burns trash near her
home on Viti Levu
island in Fiji on May 9*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADAM FERGUSON FOR TIME

A photograph showing a large fire burning in a field of trash. A person in a blue and white patterned dress stands on the left. A barbed wire fence is in the foreground. The background is filled with trees and more trash.

PLASTIC BURNOUT

*Fiji is ground zero for the planet's waste problem—
and the challenge of stopping it at the source*

BY ARYN BAKER/LAUTOKA, FIJI

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WHENEVER THE GROWING PILE OF PLASTIC waste in front of her door takes up too much space, Asinate Lewabeka has a simple solution. She sets it on fire. She prefers to do so at dawn when the air is still so that the smoke rises in a black column. She says any later in the day, the coastal breeze risks blowing the acrid fumes straight into her home, a modest shack built on the edge of the Vunato dump site in Lautoka, Fiji's second largest city.

Lewabeka watches in satisfaction as flames consume the haphazard pile of empty water bottles, travel-size tubes of shampoo, juice cartons, wads of food packaging, a broken plastic fan, and coils of copper wire coated in PVC insulation, reducing it all to carbonized lumps. "Plastic rubbish is the worst kind," she says. "It is everywhere. It makes our country look so bad. I don't want it to be a pollutant in our neighborhood, so I collect it and burn it so I can get rid of it."

It may no longer be an eyesore, but Lewabeka's problem is far from gone. Burning plastic releases toxic substances that will remain in the environment for hundreds of years, with deleterious impacts on human and ecosystem health. Yet open burning is one of the most common methods for eliminating unwanted waste in a remote island nation besieged by a plastic tide. Less than a third of Fiji's plastic waste is locally produced. The rest drifts in with ocean currents from as far away as South Africa and Mexico. It must be disposed of, wherever it comes from, and burning is often the simplest option.

After the final embers of Lewabeka's bonfire flicker out, the smoke sinks into a choking haze that irritates the eyes as it ripples through the community. Small breezes kick up the ashes, coating in an oily soot the chassis of a long-abandoned car that has become a playground for the neighborhood children. The afternoon rains sweep the partially burnt remains into a nearby stream that irrigates several modest vegetable plots before emptying into the bay. When washed into the ocean, what's left of the plastic detritus will break into microscopic particles that leach heavy metals and toxic chemicals into the marine environment, slowly poisoning the fish that residents reel in for their evening meals.

Lewabeka's bonfire is replicated dozens of times daily in communities around the world, and across the Fijian archipelago, creating a toxic burden on human and environmental health that is only starting to be quantified.

The evidence, however, is already apparent: microplastics found in the flesh of almost every marine species tested; certain plastic chemicals identified in drinking water; others in the leaves of plants irrigated by polluted streams. And while Fiji's high rates of cancer and diabetes have not been scientifically linked to the presence of plastic in the environment, there is research elsewhere suggesting that it might yet be the case. "The data is building that plastics have the potential to adversely impact human health," says Linda S. Birnbaum, a toxicologist and the former director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in the U.S. "Burning plastic waste releases dioxins that stay in the environment forever and are linked to cancers as well as reproductive and developmental impairments. We know plastics are a problem; we know we've contaminated our world."

HUMANS HAVE PRODUCED more than 11 billion metric tons of virgin plastic since 1950, when plastic first came into widespread use, according to Roland Geyer, lead author of one of the first scientific studies quantifying the global plastic habit.

According to his research, only 2 billion metric tons are still in use today, meaning the rest—some 8.7 billion tons—is waste. According to the U.N. Environment Programme, the world produces 430 million metric tons of plastic annually, two-thirds of which are short-lived products destined for disposal.

When researchers revealed the extent of the world's plastic-pollution crisis nearly a decade ago, they spread the word with evidence that packed a visual punch: dolphins entangled in plastic bags, a viral video of a straw being removed from a turtle's nose. The chemicals that go into plastic production, which are emitted when it breaks down, are harder to see, but they carry a far more pernicious threat to human life.

Cleaning up that pollution is all but impossible, and so a global movement is under way to stop production at the source. Fiji is leading the charge, championing a robust global treaty as countries around the world convene this year in a series of dedicated U.N.-sponsored meetings that will conclude in South Korea in November. Fiji, along with other so-called high ambition nations, wants to see the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC) produce a treaty that will substantially reduce the production of unessential plastics, minimize plastic's

**'WE KNOW WE'VE
CONTAMINATED
OUR WORLD.'**

—LINDA S. BIRNBAUM,
TOXICOLOGIST



chemical load, and hold manufacturers responsible for the sustainable disposal of their products.

Depending on how it is interpreted, such a treaty could deal a blow to the country's biggest export: Fiji Water. The premium bottled-water company produces, fills, and exports more than half a billion of its iconic square plastic bottles every year. Fiji Water, owned by the California-based Wonderful Co., is one of Fiji's biggest employers, its largest single taxpayer, and a primary foreign-exchange earner. Few would argue that the pricey bottled water, quaffed by celebrities and wealthy Westerners, constitutes an essential use of plastic. But for Fiji, it's an important financial driver.

Fiji's struggle to balance an economic need for plastic production with a public-health plea for its reduction illustrates a complex relationship with a product that has become the cornerstone of modern life. Fiji Water's appeal comes, in part, from the perception that its source is a paradisiacal land of pure waters, yet the very vehicle of that bottled dream is a global pollutant, says Rufino Varea, a Fijian environmental toxicologist and a member of Fiji's delegation to the treaty negotiations. "I know that it is a company that provides jobs to many Fijians. And we can see that

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*Children play
outside of
Lewabeka's
home*

*This story was
reported with
support from the
Pulitzer Center
Ocean Reporting
Network*

the business is important to a country like ours." But knowing the impacts of plastic pollution, he says that as a Fijian, he feels uncomfortable contributing to the cycle. "This plastic-water-bottle thing has to stop."

FIJI HAS MORE than 330 islands, one sanitary landfill, and two municipal dumps. While some high-end resorts ship their plastic waste back to the main island for disposal, few communities can afford to do the same. As a result, most of Fiji's plastic waste is burned, buried, or tossed into the environment.

Rising sea levels and heavy rainfall sweep the dumped refuse out to sea, where it joins plastic refuse drifting in from other regions and is swept back to shore by circulating ocean currents. There, it is collected in cleanup campaigns conducted by a hospitality industry eager to keep the beaches pristine for tourists—the mainstay of the Fijian economy. And so, the cycle continues. Burning is seen as the best option for stopping the endless return of a product that, while considered disposable, seems to last forever.

"It's just people trying to clean up their waste without realizing the damage that can be done,"

says Dr. Ane Veu, Fiji's leading oncologist. She understands the impetus to burn waste but worries that the invisible pollutants are taking a toll. Veu has seen firsthand how cancer cases, even once rare lymphomas and leukemias, have more than doubled over the past decade; rates of asthma and metabolic disease are also rising. While some of those numbers can be attributed to increasingly sedentary lifestyles, diet, and better monitoring, she suspects that increasing exposure to plastics plays a role. If research were formally undertaken in Fiji, as has been done elsewhere in the world, she believes it would likely "show that yes, there is a direct link between [plastic pollution] and the rising number of cancers."

She is not alone. A growing body of evidence is linking plastics to adverse human-health outcomes. Scientific research has long demonstrated that burning plastic emits toxic and carcinogenic gases. More recent studies show that micro- and nanoplastics—tiny particles produced when plastic breaks down—can be found everywhere on the planet and almost everywhere in the human body, from blood to breast milk.

Scientific research on the effects of those microplastics in the human body is limited, at least in peer-reviewed literature. Still, the cumulative evidence is enough to raise an alarm, says Dr. Philip Landrigan, a professor at Boston College and the director of its Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good. He cites a recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that found particles of polyethylene (used to make plastic bags and bottles) lodged in the arterial plaque of 150 out of 304 patients participating in a cardiovascular study, correlating with a 4.5-fold increase in risk of heart attack, stroke, or death in those patients—"nearly on par with smoking a pack a day," he says. Another study in mice demonstrated that ingested particles can cross the blood-brain barrier, leading to behavioral changes similar to human dementia.

Most plastics are derived from crude oil, methane gas, or coal. Chemicals are added to create different characteristics, such as flexibility or water repellency. In March, a team of European scientists published a database of more than 16,000 chemicals found in plastics, only a quarter of which have been tested for health impacts. Almost all of those were found to be hazardous to human health, with links to inflammatory bowel disease, cancer, autism, and ADHD. PFAS—per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances that are often added for water resistance—disrupt the endocrine system with impacts on fertility, immunity, development, and increased risks of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Geyer says that he wouldn't be surprised if

"a couple of decades from now, researchers look back at us and say, 'They were so naive. There was this huge uptick in neurological problems, in cancer, autism, ADHD, and whatnot. At the same time, everyone was using these crazy pollutants they didn't understand and knew nothing about ... How could they not put one and one together?'"

VAREA, A PH.D. CANDIDATE studying plastic pollution at Fiji's University of the South Pacific, is from the northernmost island of Rotuma, a remote, palm-fringed paradise that, like every other paradise in the archipelago, is choked with plastic that has washed up on shore. Varea's research focuses on testing soil, water, shellfish, and fish samples from Fiji's coastal areas for microplastics. A "very high percentage" come up positive, he says. That is a concern for a nation where 60% of the population depends on the ocean for food. The most frustrating part, he says, is that most of the waste comes from somewhere else.

According to Eric Chassignet, an oceanographer with the Center for Ocean-Atmospheric Prediction Studies at Florida State University who models plastic-waste flows on global ocean currents, only 28% of the plastic waste on Fiji's shores comes from Fiji. A quarter comes from regional neighbors, and most of the rest comes from Latin America. As with the countries that suffer the most from climate change, while contributing the least, Fiji can't do much to stop the plastic tide. All it can do is clean up the mess. "We're doing what we can," says Varea. "But it needs to be a global effort, and most of this effort must come from plastic-producing countries."

Like most Pacific Island nations with limited land and small economies, Fiji cannot even handle its own plastic waste, let alone an influx from other countries. Only about a third of the population, concentrated in the urban areas on the main island, has access to garbage collection. That leaves residents and resort owners everywhere else to fend for themselves. A 2021 report commissioned by the International Union for Conservation of Nature estimates that a quarter of the country's plastic waste is mismanaged—either thrown into rivers or straight into the ocean. Either way, it eventually ends up back on shore.

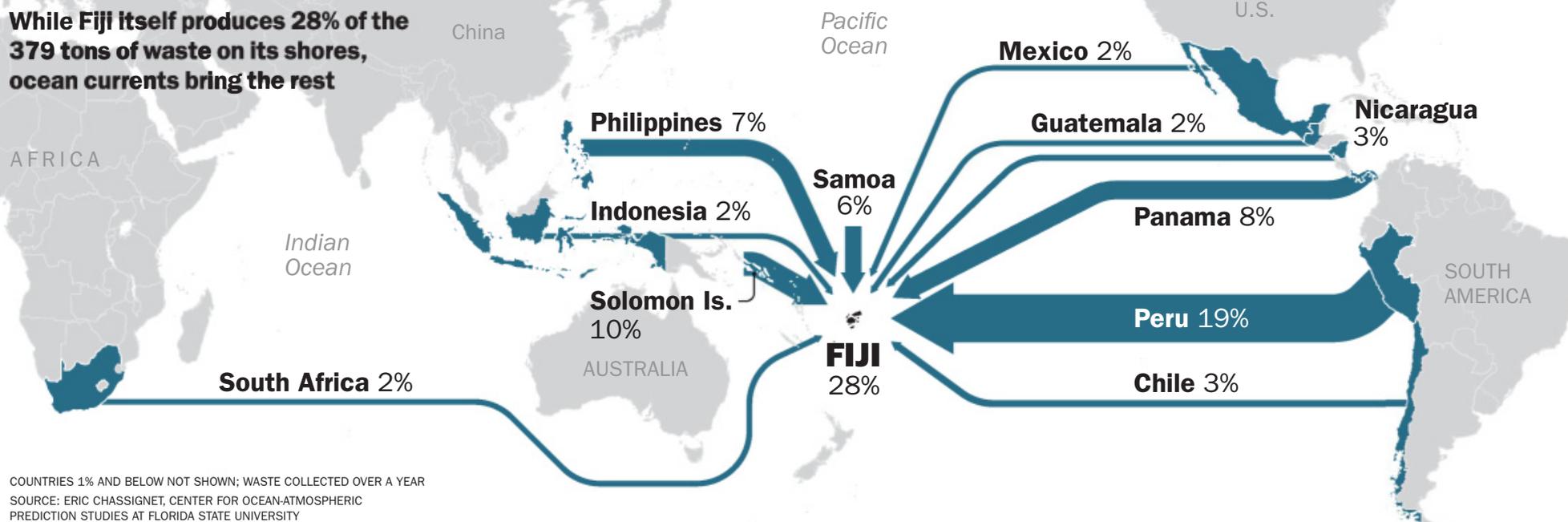
Shore cleanups can help reduce the plastic plague. However, local community organizations, international conservation groups, and resorts seeking to maintain their postcard-perfect beaches face the same conundrum: What should be done with plastic waste once it is collected? In some countries, it can be transported to recycling facilities on the mainland via boat. That's impractical, and expensive, for a nation comprising hundreds

**'WE'RE DOING
WHAT WE
CAN. BUT IT
NEEDS TO BE A
GLOBAL EFFORT.'**

—RUFINO VAREA, FIJIAN
TOXICOLOGIST

WHERE IT COMES FROM

While Fiji itself produces 28% of the 379 tons of waste on its shores, ocean currents bring the rest



of islands scattered over more than 500,000 sq. mi. For some communities, the nearest landfill is more than a day's boat journey away.

The thousands of small waste fires lit daily across Fiji are a sign that plastic pollution is beyond the country's ability to manage it, says Peter Thomson, a Fijian diplomat and the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean. "Nowadays, everything comes in plastic. And as we know, it doesn't degrade. So, what do you do with all that plastic? It's a huge problem for an island economy." He means that quite literally: for some island nations he has visited, landfills are the highest elevation. "The fact is, we just have to change the global plastic system."

DESIGNED TO LAST FOREVER but cheap enough to be thrown away, plastic has become an industry worth \$712 billion a year, with no signs of slowing down. The world is producing four times as much plastic as it did in the 1990s, and consumption—along with waste—is expected to nearly triple by 2060, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is by design.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that demand for fossil fuels will peak before the end of this decade as the world moves toward renewable energy. That makes plastic, which is derived from fossil fuels, a lifeline for an industry facing global efforts to transition away from oil and gas to combat climate change. Last year, Sultan Al Jaber, head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, told the *Guardian* that if the company's expanded production capacity of 600,000 barrels a day were not needed in a renewables-fueled world,

those hydrocarbons could be turned into plastics instead. "Everything around us is made from this finite resource. We have to accept that."

Not everyone does. To reduce the impact of what is rapidly becoming the planet's most ubiquitous manufactured material, 175 nations agreed in March 2022 to draft a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution on land and in the marine environment. The first four phases of negotiations have produced a draft, but negotiators are still divided over the treaty's scope: fossil-fuel-producing nations, including the U.S., say the solution to plastic pollution lies in tackling the mess through better recycling and cleanup efforts. But recycling is, at best, a stopgap measure—less than 10% of the world's plastic is currently recycled—and at worst a well-orchestrated public-relations campaign designed to put the onus of plastic's toll on consumers and communities, rather than producers.

The 127 nations that make up the High Ambition Coalition—of which Fiji is a member, along with the E.U., most of Africa, Japan, Canada, Mexico, and Australia, among others—are asking for restrictions on the use of chemicals in plastic formulations, limits on plastic production, a plastic tax, and bans on nonessential products like single-use items.

A strong treaty would curb the plastic flood by stopping it at the source, say proponents. A weak one focused on cleanup would be like bailing out an overflowing bathtub before turning off the tap. "Everybody's heard about how there's going to be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050 if we carry on with our current course," says Thomson. "The motivation of the plastic treaty is to make sure that does not happen." More important, he

says, is a treaty prioritizing human health, with wording in the text that outlaws harmful chemicals. “My prediction is that in 10 to 20 years’ time, we will be in the position we were in with the tobacco companies a few decades ago, where countries are starting to legislate against plastics [because of the public-health impact].”

The best way to reduce production is to start with figuring out what is, and is not, essential, says Bethanie Carney Almroth, a professor of ecotoxicology at Sweden’s University of Gothenburg and a member of the Scientists’ Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty, which advocates for a negotiation process informed by science. Medical equipment, like blood bags and flexible tubing, is vital. Disposable plastic forks, less so. The treaty, she says, needs to be flexible enough to adapt to a changing world. “If something is identified as essential right now, but still problematic, then that should trigger mechanisms to solve the problem and make that product obsolete.”

Eliminating disposable plastics would go a long way toward improving health, says waste-management expert Costas Velis at the University of Leeds. He estimates that some 2 billion people worldwide lack dedicated garbage-collection services. If space is limited, and there are no nearby rivers for dumping, many will resort to burning, in what he calls an overlooked health crisis. His research estimates that some 270,000 premature deaths result from the open burning of waste every year around the world. “Open, uncontrolled burning of anything is bad enough for the health, but open burning of plastics, with all their unknown chemistry, is possibly orders of magnitudes worse.”

IN 2020, TO MANAGE its own pollution problem, Fiji implemented a ban on single-use plastics. Water bottles were notably exempted, mainly because access to clean drinking water is limited outside the main cities. But also because banning bottles would be impractical for a country that exports them. Fiji Water directly employs some 800 Fijians; 300 suppliers employ hundreds more. The company also sponsors the national rugby team, and its philanthropic arm, the Fiji Water Foundation, spent \$1.5 million last year on health, development, and education projects within the country. That doesn’t mean the company should get a free pass, says Varea, the Fijian ecotoxicologist. “We need to weigh job creation and investment against waste production and management. Corporations that are involved in plastic packaging, including bottled water, need to have more accountability.”

Fiji Water argues that from a sustainability point of view, plastic bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate, or PET, are less carbon



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Fijians pick plastic out of the landfill at the Vunato disposal site

intensive when it comes to production and transportation than aluminum or glass. (This assessment is based on a study commissioned by the National Association for PET Container Resources). The company already uses recycled PET plastic in 70% of its bottles, and by 2025, it says, all bottles will be made from RePET. It also supports a bottle-buyback scheme with Coca-Cola in three main island cities, paying 5 Fijian cents (\$0.02) per bottle. “Frankly, nobody else in Fiji is doing as much as Fiji Water” in terms of managing their plastic footprint, says Ashneel Naidu, the director of plant operations. “Why should we, a developing island country, give up something that’s so important to us? Why can’t people in developed countries turn their lights off for a few minutes? Wouldn’t that have a bigger impact [on the planet] than us giving up one of our most economically important drivers?”

Sivendra Michael, Fiji’s Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and one of the lead voices calling for a robust plastics treaty at the INC negotiations,



recognizes that plastics have a role to play in the economic development of many of the countries that suffer most from its pollution, including his own. Bans on nonessential plastics with easy alternatives makes sense, he says. Replacing Fiji Water's plastic-bottle exports with glass may not. In cases where plastic alternatives are out of reach, another approach is needed: making manufacturers responsible for their products through the end of life, instead of just to the point of sale.

That is what Fiji Water is already doing, on a limited basis, with its bottle-buyback program. On a recent Wednesday, Lewabeka returned from the bottle-buyback center to her modest shack near the Vunato dumpsite with 300 Fijian dollars (\$133), proceeds earned from a few days' worth of sorting through the trash to find recyclables. When she started as a waste picker 27 years ago, glass bottles and aluminum cans were her primary source of income. Now, it's plastic bottles, but only ones from Fiji Water, Coca-Cola, and local drinks producer Sprint. None of the other companies pay for returns. "I will take what I am paid to take,"

Lewabeka, 64, says, hovering with her lighter next to a pile of plastic bottles from other brands. "Those people really should be paying for us to bring in their bottles too, because it's their bottles you see the most." She estimates that for every bag of Fiji, Coke, and Sprint bottles she takes in for recycling, she will burn another pile of trash at home.

LEWABEKA'S BOTTLES won't be recycled at the buyback center. Instead, they will be shredded, packed into pallets, and shipped to Australia, where they will be melted down and turned into RePET pellets, ready to feed the global demand for recycled plastic in new products. It would be better, of course, if Fiji Water could close the loop by using its own bottles (or others) to create new ones, but there is no recycling facility in Fiji. Meanwhile, the cost of shipping a ton of plastic abroad for processing far outweighs the price per ton of recycled PET on the market.

Only 23% of Fiji Water bottles are returned in Fiji. It's an abysmal rate, but still better than the global plastic-recycling average, and a model for how the country could start getting on top of its plastic-pollution problem—especially if it's implemented across all brands. Fiji Water's voluntary program is a precursor to a countrywide bottle-deposit scheme under parliamentary review. Kinks are still being worked out: 5 Fiji cents might be enough incentive for residents to return bottles if they live near collection centers, but probably not enough for remote island communities to bring their plastics to a centralized location. The alternative would be to build collection points on each island, managed by a regional waste-collection system—a costly investment.

If recycled plastic, like aluminum or glass, had a high enough value, a recycling system would pay for itself. The problem is that virgin plastic is cheap and abundant, so manufacturers have little incentive to opt for higher-cost recycled materials. One of the more contentious items supported by Fiji in the INC draft treaty to be finalized in November seeks to change that metric by proposing a per-ton tax on virgin plastic. Such a fee, paid by producers, manufacturers, or importers, would be used to fund waste-collection systems and recycling infrastructure in areas that need it most. It would, essentially, encourage producers to use less virgin plastic, while taking responsibility for their products.

For Lewabeka, it seems like an obvious solution. "The companies that are making this stuff should be paying to clean it up," she says as she sweeps a pile of ashes away from her front door. "If everything had a value, then I wouldn't have anything left to burn." —*With reporting by* LICE MOVONO/SUVA, FIJI, *and* LESLIE DICKSTEIN/NEW YORK □

The growing evidence that—even heading into this year’s election—Americans are less divided than you may think

By Karl Vick

IN JANUARY 2021, IN THE TURBULENT wake of the last presidential contest, a former professor named Todd Rose asked some 2,000 people a question. The survey was, at least on the surface, designed to deduce what kind of country Americans would like future generations to inherit.

Each person was presented with 55 separate goal statements for the nation—“People have individual rights” was one; “People have high-quality health care” was another—and asked to rank them in order of importance. Each person was also asked how each goal would be ranked by “other people.”

When the results were tallied, the surprise was not that “People have individual rights” came in first, or that “People have high-quality health care” finished second. The surprise was the third highest priority: “Successfully address climate change.” We know that’s a surprise because, on the list of what “other people” considered important, climate came in 33rd. In other words, no one thought their fellow Americans saw climate as the high-priority item nearly everyone actually considered it to be.

That gap—between what we ourselves think and what we reckon

others must be thinking—may hold the power to upend a great deal of what we believe we know about American civic life.

“People are lousy at figuring out what the group thinks,” Rose says. This collective blind spot is a quirk he would underline to students when he was teaching the neuroscience of learning at Harvard. At Populace, the think tank he co-founded to put such knowledge to practical use, the foible plays a prominent role in efforts to undo what Rose calls the “shared illusion” that Americans are hopelessly divided.

the **P O L A R I Z A**

And divided we certainly think we are. The only thing Americans seem to agree on is that Americans cannot agree on anything. It's hardly worth summarizing the headlines about doom and radicalization. In the prelude to a November ballot featuring the candidate synonymous with polarization, all the dapple and nuance of life is once again being reduced to a binary. Choose a side: red or blue.

Yet in the wintry interval between Jan. 6 and Inauguration Day 2021, that Populace survey, dubbed the American Aspirations Index, found “stunning agreement” on national goals

across every segment of the U.S. population, including, to a significant extent, among those who voted for Donald Trump and those who voted for Joe Biden. On the few points where the survey registered disagreement (notably, on immigration and borders), the dissent was intense. But intense disagreement was the exception, not the rule.

Much of what news reports, politicians, and pollsters call polarization, Rose understands as “learned divisiveness”—division propagated by the assumption that it exists even where it does not.

It's a bold, and boldly optimistic, notion, but a notion supported by more than just one survey. At universities across the U.S., researchers have been looking hard at the mechanics of polarization. Picture them under the hood, bent over the engine that's supposed to be driving us, possibly over a cliff. Every now and then, one reaches back with something they've managed to pry loose, sets it on the fender. These studies, hiding under titles like “Reducing Explicit Blatant Dehumanization by Correcting Exaggerated Meta-Perceptions,” together make up a growing body of evidence that challenges the received wisdom about this political moment.

Maybe, they suggest, America has the wrong idea about polarization. It may not be nearly the engine we thought. It's possible that what it produces, as much as anything, is noise.

► **CONSIDER:** Ordinary people in both parties turn out to like ordinary people in the other party well enough. In a 2021 study in the *Journal of Politics*, researchers found that when a person in one political party was asked what they think of someone in the other party, their answer was pretty negative. That certainly sounds like polarization. But it turns out the “someones” respondents had in mind were partisans holding forth on cable news.

If told the truth—that a typical member of the opposite party actually holds moderate views and talks about politics only occasionally—the animus dissolved into indifference. And

T I O N *myth*

if told that the same moderate person only rarely discusses politics, the sentiment edged into the positive zone. These folks might actually get along.

“There are people who are certainly polarized,” says Yanna Krupnikov, a study co-author now at the University of Michigan. “They are 100% polarized. They deeply hate the other side. They are extraordinarily loud. They are extraordinarily important in American politics.” But those people, she adds, are not typical Americans. They are people who live and breathe politics—the partisans and activists whom academics refer to in this context as *elites*.

“Elite politics is quite polarized,” Krupnikov says. “So the question is, does that mean everyone else is?”

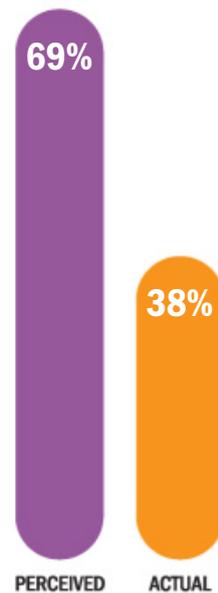
Why not ask “everyone else” whether America is really that divided? Pollsters do, all the time. But there’s a problem. **Ordinary folks think Americans are much more partisan than they are.** In the same study, people grossly overestimated (by 78%) the size of the most polarized group within each party—that is, Democrats who call themselves liberal and Republicans who call themselves conservative. At the same time, ordinary Americans grossly underestimated (by 77%) the share of the other party who are moderate. That share is, in fact, at least half of either party. “People probably are exactly right about how polarized their leaders are,” says Robb Willer, a sociologist at Stanford. “They get it very wrong for the general public.”

It gets worse: the more involved in politics a person is, the more distorted their view of the other side, a 2019 YouGov survey found. In other words, engagement in civic life actually serves to narrow one’s perspective on the world.

That hardly recommends today’s politics, and goes a long way toward explaining why many people avoid partisans. “They dislike people who are really ideologically extreme, who are very politically invested, who want to come and talk to them about politics,” says Matthew Levendusky, a University of Pennsylvania professor of political science. And it’s not as if they’re trying to avoid confrontation, he adds: “It’s also the case that people aren’t really

GETTING THE WRONG IDEA

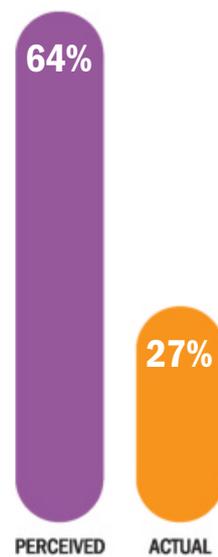
Share of the rival party assumed to be made up of intense partisans—liberals for Democrats or conservatives for Republicans:



Share of the rival party assumed to be moderate:



Share of the rival party assumed to talk about politics a great deal:



SOURCE: JOURNAL OF POLITICS: (MIS-)ESTIMATING AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

that fond of people from their own side who want to talk to them about politics.”

So people who do like to talk about politics talk to each other instead, and a striking social dynamic plays out: **political enthusiasts will pretend to be even more polarized than they are.** For a 2023 study published in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, people who described themselves as heavily invested in politics admitted that they would dial up their anger to impress fellow partisans. According to Elizabeth C. Connors, the University of South Carolina professor who conducted the study, the falseness partisans described about their own behavior reached levels “rarely seen in social sciences.”

Her takeaway: “If you’re a partisan and you’re going to say you’re a Republican or you’re going to say you’re a Democrat, you need to be a polarized one. Or else you’re not a good one.”

Such performative behavior of course complicates efforts to gauge how divided Americans have become. “If you ask a true racist their views, they’re going to lower the temperature, and report that they’re less racist than they actually are,” says Sean J. Westwood, who studies polarization at Dartmouth. “If you ask someone about partisanship and partisan hatred, they tend to do the reverse.”

► SO, YES, AMERICAN POLITICS HAS grown more divided—but largely among people who live and breathe politics. And these people exaggerate their own polarity to win the approval of other people who also live and breathe politics. It’s also true that the number of these people has grown over the past 40 years, as more Republicans identified as conservative and more Democrats as liberal.

That growth is a big reason that, for example, the U.S. House of Representatives is no longer actually representative. Most House seats—often by design—are for districts dominated by one party, so the decisive election is the primary, a low-turnout affair in which the enthusiasm of activists has out-size impact. And, once in Washington, studies show, the Congressperson routinely cast votes more ideological than their typical constituents. But, still, in



▲
STANDING FOR THE
NATIONAL ANTHEM
IN PORTLAND, MAINE,
ON JULY 4, 2017

neither party do the ideologues make up the majority, even if it sure can feel that way. **In truth, most Americans agree on most things.**

“That’s kind of surprising to a lot of people,” says James Druckman, a political scientist at the University of Rochester. “But it’s pretty well documented that the typical voter of each party is not that far from the typical voter of the other party on most issues. If you look at other countries, the distance is a lot greater.”

Yet that relatively modest distance seems like a chasm, in no small part because of what’s called “conformity bias.” Researchers have long known that when asked a question by a pollster, people tend to color their reply by what they think they’re expected to say. This idea can make it easier to understand why, when the national narrative is about extremes, as it is now, moderate people self-report as being less moderate than they really are.

“This tug toward the fringes,” as Populace’s Rose calls it, threatens to empty out the middle ground where many Americans might prefer to stay, but fear they’ll be alone there. Their isolation may be an illusion—like the idea that no one but you cares about climate change—but it can feel real enough.

Remember how bad humans are at figuring out what other people are thinking, at least as a group? It’s reinforced by another bug in our mental software. **Our brains mistake repetition for majority opinion.**

As the delightful subtitle on a 2007

study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* put it: “A repetitive voice can sound like a chorus.” The study gathered people in a group to discuss something, then asked individuals to state the majority opinion of the group. What people offered up was the opinion they had heard several times—even when it had been voiced by just one person, saying the same thing over and over. Other studies have documented the same phenomenon.

“Your brain has this stupid shortcut for how it estimates the majority,” says Rose. The shortcut sheds light on why people frequently mistake the views of political activists, such as those on Fox News Channel and MSNBC, for the views of most Americans. Regular viewers do appear to be genuinely polarized. But in a 2022 study, Fox News viewers who were paid to watch CNN registered a significant moderation in their views after just a few weeks.

‘PEOPLE ARE RIGHT ABOUT HOW POLARIZED THEIR LEADERS ARE. THEY GET IT VERY WRONG FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC.’

—Robb Willer, Stanford

“You change their media environment and their attitudes change pretty meaningfully,” says University of California, Berkeley, political scientist David Broockman.

▶ BUT FOR THOSE WHO DON’T embrace an ideology, the “tug toward the fringes” can be a source of stress. Populace figured out a way to measure this unease in another of its surveys—one that helps explain how we know moderates are inhibited about revealing their views to pollsters.

This survey, in 2022, aimed to avoid the distortions of conformity bias by masking both the respondent’s identity and, more subtly, the question being asked, by hiding the “target” among a series of multiple-choice questions. Because this method requires several rounds of polling to see which results are significant, it’s expensive and time-consuming—but it’s thought to reliably reveal information people might not consciously choose to share. (“The IRS uses this,” Rose says.)

Among the revelations of “Private Opinion in America” is that men are less supportive of abortion being a matter between a woman and her doctor than public surveys suggest, but also that people are less concerned than other polls suggest about the amount of time public schools spend talking about race.

On many topics, the gap was fairly small—a few percentage points—between the opinion someone held privately and the one publicly expressed. And the results varied by demographic and political party. Yet every group polled registered double-digit gaps on at least one issue.

One group in particular was revealed to have struggled mightily to be candid with ordinary pollsters. For political independents, people without a party, the gap between private thought and public expression ran to double digits on more than half the issues—a striking amount of dissonance. This discrepancy ought to seem odd. After all, political moderates still constitute the majority in the U.S. electorate. But in a public sphere dominated by extremes, independents are made to feel that they have no place.

A more striking measure of that distress popped up in Gallup's annual poll asking Americans, "What one country anywhere in the world do you consider to be the United States' worst enemy today?" One of the options is "the United States itself." This year, that was the choice of 2% of Democrats and 1% of Republicans. But 11% of independents judged the U.S. as its own worst enemy—more than selected either North Korea or Iran.

▶ PEOPLE DO, OF COURSE, DISAGREE.

If they didn't, there wouldn't be much need for democracy. There are real differences in opinion on topics that are, to many Americans, a matter of life and death. It matters that you vote. And there's a reason the past decade or so has been a time in which friendships, families, and civic life have been riven by politics. Which is to say, no discussion of polarization can ignore Donald Trump. Division is kind of his brand. Whether or not Trump deliberately exploited the national tug toward the extremes to get elected in 2016, the trend accelerated during his time in office.

When it comes to measuring perceived polarization, political scientists regard the quadrennial surveys by American National Election Studies as the gold standard. Every four years, it asks members of one party how warmly or coolly they feel toward the other party. During Trump's term, the temperature dropped a record amount. Studies of presidential rhetoric note that he stood out among modern Presidents for seldom using language intended to unite the country.

And yet, at the end of those four years, moderates remained the majority, even as politics grew nastier. "National unity" actually turns out to be of scant interest to most people, finishing 50th in the American Aspirations survey. "Treating one another with respect," however, ranked 14th. In a country where most people agree on most things, the acid tone of public debate amounts to a paradox that Lilliana Mason, a political psychologist at Johns Hopkins, captured in the title of a 2014 paper, "I Disrespectfully Agree."

Mason says insult politics masks



▲
THE FOURTH OF JULY,
LONG BEACH,
WASH., 2018

the underlying congruity on most issues by stirring emotions attached to differences in sensibility or social identity—the "culture war" topics that animate activists on both sides. "Americans are, on average, moderate on most policy preferences," she says. "But one of the things that our current politics does is it makes us think the most about the policies that we get the most mad about."

Fortunately, when people learn the truth about the other side, they feel better.

"Polarization appears to be largely driven by misperceptions," Rachel Kleinfeld concluded in a sweeping survey of the topic for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Even the worst reports going around—that, for instance, significant numbers of Americans supposedly favor armed revolt—turn out to be misleading. Those polls reflect a perception that the "other side" is already planning violence. Informed of the actual situation, the re-

**'POLARIZATION
APPEARS TO BE
LARGELY DRIVEN BY
MISPERCEPTIONS.'**

—Rachel Kleinfeld, Carnegie
Endowment for International Peace

action recedes. Stanford's Willer says the propensity for political violence is overreported by 300% to 400%.

Mason agrees. In so many studies, people register surprise that their assumptions about their rivals are wrong. "They're like, 'Oh, I didn't know that,' and then they feel better about the other side," she says. "And then they go out into the real world and everything around them is like no, no, no, they're demons. And so the effect doesn't last, right? It has to be everywhere."

What looks like a gulf may be more like a flooded sidewalk—shared space that's still there, just really hard to see. In American Aspirations, more respondents said politicians should focus on finding common ground than said politicians should be fighting for them. But—sure enough—they also thought "other people" felt the opposite.

And of course November looms, with its promise of cleaving the nation down the middle with a this-or-that choice. Yet face to face, most people still get along, especially if they're polite enough not to talk only about politics all the time.

But even if they do, look: In 2022, a Berkeley study followed what scholars have determined are the most insular partisans of all—liberal Democrats—as they knocked on doors in conservative neighborhoods, canvassing for votes. The activists didn't change many minds. But afterward, many reported a new respect for people who saw things differently. —With reporting by JULIA ZORTHIAN □

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VOLODYMYR
ZELENSKY'S
ADVISER ANDRIY
YERMAK AT THE
PRESIDENTIAL
COMPOUND IN
KYIV IN 2022

A SHOW OF PEACE

Andriy Yermak has been President Zelensky's closest wartime adviser. Now he's trying to find an ending.

**BY SIMON SHUSTER/
BÜRGENSTOCK,
SWITZERLAND**

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MAXIM DONDYUK
FOR TIME

THE FLEET OF HELICOPTERS BEGAN TO ARRIVE at the Swiss resort around noon on June 15, shuttling world leaders toward the top of a mountain range speckled with grazing cows and wildflowers. The event had been sold to them as a global peace summit, the start of a process that would end the Russian war against Ukraine. But Russia and its allies, notably China, would not be represented. Instead, the Ukrainians would run the show, with President Volodymyr Zelensky in the starring role and his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, the impresario.

Zelensky and Yermak, old friends from their early careers in the entertainment business, have been inseparable since Russia launched its invasion in early 2022. For much of that year, they lived together in a bunker beneath the presidential compound in Kyiv, slept down the hall from each other, shared meals in the bunker's cafeteria, and lifted weights in its makeshift gym. They appeared side by side during trips to the front and meetings with foreign allies. That fall, when Zelensky launched a peace process to end the war, he put his chief of staff in charge of it.

Ever since, Yermak has tried to build the groundwork for a peace on Ukraine's terms, racing to outwit Russia on the diplomatic front even as his country's armed forces lost ground in the war. With his willful and often overbearing nature, he has succeeded in critical ways while failing in others. Ukraine, through his efforts, has managed to set the stage for talks, gathered a large group of allies around it, and avoided getting dragged into a peace process that Russia controls.

The summit that took place in mid-June at the Bürgenstock, an Alpine resort where the likes of Sophia Loren and Audrey Hepburn once spent their holidays, was the first real test of this strategy. More than 80 countries agreed to attend, representing every region of the world, but with a





ZELENSKY,
YERMAK,
AND U.S. VICE
PRESIDENT
KAMALA
HARRIS AT THE
BÜRGENSTOCK
ON JUNE 15

distinct preponderance of Western democracies. As they arrived in their helicopters, some noticed that the landing zone stood next to a rundown barn, its fence barely obscuring a large pile of manure. “It’s pretty symbolic,” remarked one of the American guests. “There’s a lot of sh-t to shovel here.”

Yermak has wielded the biggest shovel. He wrangled, shamed, and pressured foreign nations to make the trip to the Alps, all while rejecting the idea that Russia, as the war’s aggressor, should take part. What transpired from his efforts seemed bizarre on its face: a peace process with no mediators, no cease-fires, no actual talks between the warring sides. The U.N. kept a wary distance. Rwanda somehow found itself at the negotiating table. So did the tiny island nation of Cabo Verde. In Yermak’s telling, this was all part of the plan. “We want all the countries of the world to walk this path with us,” he told me while preparing for the summit last fall. “The whole world! Then it would really be hard for the Russians to claim the process isn’t fair. Then we can say, Excuse me, all the countries of the world already agreed that it’s fair.”

Well, not all of them. Some of the world’s most powerful nations, such as Brazil, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, sent envoys to the summit but refused to sign its final declaration. Other participants complained that the event felt less like a negotiation than an echo chamber for Ukraine’s existing allies. Russia dismissed the whole thing as a farce. The day before it started, Vladimir Putin issued his own demands for peace, a string of ultimatums that would have amounted to Ukraine’s capitulation in the war and the loss of one-fifth of its territory.

Ukraine rejected the offer out of hand, but Russia’s move underscored just how far this war remains

from any lasting conclusion. All along the front, the killing continues on a barbaric, industrial scale, as each side seeks to exhaust the other’s willingness to sacrifice its stocks of men and money. So far, the closest thing we have to a peace process in Ukraine appears to be the one that opened at the Bürgenstock, and its success will depend on President Zelensky and his indefatigable fixer, Andriy Yermak.

THOUGH THE UKRAINIANS may wish to forget it these days, their first attempt to sue for peace began as soon as the invasion started. At the time, Zelensky had two core priorities: appealing to the world to help Ukraine defend itself, and urging Putin to call a truce. “We need to talk about the end of this invasion,” he said the day after it began. “We need to talk about a cease-fire.” The following week, the first round of peace talks commenced in a secluded estate in southern Belarus.

The contrast between the two sides of the table could hardly have been starker. The Russians showed up in business suits and ties. The head of the Ukrainian delegation, Davyd Arakhamia, wore a black baseball cap, cocked slightly to the side. “Our thing was antidiplomacy, starting with the dress code,” Arakhamia, a senior lawmaker in Zelensky’s political party, told me at the time. “They would start with the legalese, and I’d be like, ‘I don’t need this bullsh-t, break it down in normal terms.’”

Within six weeks, the negotiators reached the outlines of a deal. In exchange for reliable “security guarantees” from Russia and other countries, Ukraine would agree to abandon plans to join the NATO alliance and accept the status of “permanent neutrality.” The offer gave Putin a chance to claim at least a partial victory. His main excuse for launching the invasion had been to stop Ukraine

FROM LEFT: URS FLUEELER—POOL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; EVGENIY MALOLETKA—AP



from joining NATO, and Zelensky offered to grant him that wish. He was also ready to give up territory in exchange for peace.

The Kremlin seemed willing to consider those terms. But, by the end of April 2022, the peace process broke down for several reasons. Ukraine's negotiators were horrified by the mass atrocities Russian forces had committed, especially in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, and they called on Zelensky to pull out of the talks. The position of the U.S. and Europe did little to keep them going. Ukraine's Western allies refused to make any firm promise to stop Russia from invading again in the future. "They actually advised us not to go into ephemeral security guarantees," Arakhamia later said. Without such guarantees from the West, the Ukrainians would be left to rely on the good faith of the Russians.

The other reason for the failure of those talks had to do with the state of the fighting. Ukraine's armed forces achieved some astonishing victories in the first year of the invasion. They defeated Russia in the Battle of Kyiv that spring, forcing the invaders to withdraw from roughly half the land they had occupied. In the fall, the Russians faced a fresh set of defeats in the northeastern region of Kharkiv and the southern city of Kherson.

As Ukraine gained ground, its allies urged Zelensky to resume the peace talks from a position of strength. "When there's an opportunity to negotiate, when peace can be achieved, seize it," U.S. General Mark Milley, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

A UKRAINIAN
SOLDIER AWAITS
AN ORDER TO
OPEN FIRE
ON RUSSIAN
POSITIONS
NEAR KHARKIV
ON MAY 19

of Staff, said after the Russians withdrew from Kherson in November 2022. "Seize the moment!"

But the Ukrainians rejected his advice. Milley's counterpart in Kyiv declared that peace talks could begin only after all Ukraine's territory had been liberated. Zelensky felt the same way: Why stop when he had the momentum? The string of victories in the first year of the invasion had convinced him the war would continue "along the same trajectory," the President told me that fall. Still, he could not ignore the pressure coming from his allies, who urged him to consider ways to reach a settlement with Putin. As a compromise, Zelensky proposed an ambitious plan he called the Peace Formula.

It consisted of 10 goals, ranging from the reasonable to the all but unattainable. Point four called for the release of all Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, including children, who had been abducted by Russian forces. Point seven called for all Russian war criminals, including Putin and his top generals, to be brought to justice. Perhaps most important, the formula demanded that Russia withdraw from every inch of Ukrainian land, including that which it had occupied since 2014. "I am convinced," Zelensky said in announcing the plan in late November 2022, "now is the time when the Russian destructive war must and can be stopped."

A FEW DAYS after that announcement, I went to see Yermak in his office on the second floor of the presidential compound, just down the hall from the Situation Room. Zelensky had placed him in charge of implementing the Peace Formula, a Herculean task that might have made Yermak concerned about his chances of success. But he seemed relaxed and confident. The day before, Yermak had celebrated his 51st birthday, and a bundle of balloons hovered in

**'WHEN PEACE CAN BE ACHIEVED,
SEIZE IT. SEIZE THE MOMENT!'**

—THEN CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS **MARK MILLEY**, IN LATE 2022

his office, the biggest one in the shape of a missile.

On a table near his desk, he showed me a ceramic skull he had received as a gift. It was painted with images of the Kremlin in flames. “That’s the goal,” he said with a smile. In other ways, too, he tried to project the image of a war fighter, not a negotiator, even as he became the architect of the negotiating process. The task was not foreign to him. Before the invasion, he held numerous rounds of talks with the Russians in the hope of forestalling the war.

Once the invasion started, Yermak negotiated with the Russians to secure prisoner exchanges, which brought thousands of soldiers and civilians home from Russian captivity. “These swaps were always on the edge,” he told me. “Always hanging by a thread.” The final sign-off on the Russian side would sometimes go all the way up to Putin, who could decide to cancel an exchange that had been months in the making. The biggest one, arranged in the fall of 2022, secured the release of 215 Ukrainian prisoners, including senior military officers, in exchange for 55 captives held in Ukraine. By all accounts, the swap was a coup for Yermak, who went to meet the Ukrainian prisoners upon their release. It demonstrated that he could outmaneuver the Russians at the negotiating table.

A childless bachelor, Yermak was born and grew up in Kyiv. His father Boris worked as a Soviet diplomat in Kabul during the 1980s, at a time when the Soviet Union was bungling through a hopeless war in Afghanistan. After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Yermak worked as a lawyer in newly independent Ukraine. He avoided criminal law, he says, because of the rampant corruption in Kyiv’s legal system. Instead he focused on intellectual-property rights and entertainment law. In 2010, he befriended Zelensky while they were both working for the TV channel that broadcast Zelensky’s comedy shows.

On the side, Yermak also dabbled in the movie business, earning credits as a producer on a couple of moody gangster flicks. Perhaps because of that experience, he often veers into movie references when describing his outlook on the war, sometimes casting himself and the President as the good guys in some Hollywood production. When I asked about his life with Zelensky in the bunker, he brought up one of his favorite films, a classic shoot-’em-up called *Heat*, starring Robert De Niro. “He does this monologue,” Yermak said of the lead character, who is a bank robber. “It’s about the samurai principle, when your life is devoted to some kind of goal. And our life right now is devoted to victory.”

YERMAK’S WORK on the Peace Formula took an unorthodox approach to wartime diplomacy. Rather than making any offers to the Russians, Ukraine set out to build a coalition of countries

to support its plan for peace. The goal was to give Ukraine more heft and control in the peace process and to deepen Russia’s sense of isolation. Every nation in the world would be welcome as a partner in the process, but not as a neutral observer or a mediator. “We don’t need mediators,” Yermak told me. “Mediators can no longer be allowed to take both sides.”

In order to broaden this alliance, Ukraine packed the Peace Formula with points that other countries could easily support. The first one calls for nuclear safety, the second for stable food supplies to Africa and Asia. The fifth references the founding charter of the U.N., which states that borders cannot be changed by force. “It’s very hard to argue with that,” Yermak explains. If foreign leaders did not want to support the entire plan, he encouraged them to pick and choose which points to endorse à la carte. “Every country can see their own leadership in at least one of the points.”

Starting last summer, Yermak convened a series of meetings with foreign officials willing to support the formula. The first was held in Denmark in June 2023, and it attracted more than a dozen countries, mostly members of the NATO alliance but also Brazil, India, South Africa, and others. After the talks ended, some of the participants went out to a French restaurant in Copenhagen. “There was a lot of optimism,” said one of officials at the dinner. “This was obviously Yermak’s baby, and he thought he could get the whole world behind it.”

At the next gathering, held less than two months later in Saudi Arabia, the number of participating countries more than doubled. Even China sent a representative, signaling that Beijing did not want to be left out. Yermak was ecstatic. “Nobody believed we could pull it off,” he told me afterward. Soon he turned his focus to the plan for hosting a global summit of heads of state in support of Zelensky’s formula.

But, as with every war, the terms of a possible peace were defined by events on the battlefield. Through the summer and early fall of 2023, Ukraine pushed ahead with its most ambitious counteroffensive, aiming to liberate vast stretches of occupied territory using the weapons it had received from the U.S. and Europe. Success would have given Zelensky a chance to negotiate with Putin from a position of strength, potentially dictating the terms of a deal to the Russians.

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‘[THE RUSSIANS] HAVE NO PRESSURE WHATSOEVER TO SIT AT THE TABLE RIGHT NOW.’

—CZECH PRESIDENT **PETR PAVEL**



By the middle of autumn, however, the counteroffensive stalled. Ukrainian forces took horrifying losses as they tried to break through Russia's stubborn defensive lines. When we met that October, Yermak seemed far less optimistic about the Peace Formula. "We'll do everything to ensure that this platform survives," he told me. But he knew the failure of the counteroffensive was not the only obstacle to peace.

Two days earlier, the world's attention had shifted to the Middle East as Hamas militants invaded Israel, killing some 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and taking around 250 hostages. Yermak sensed what the attack could mean for peace in Ukraine. "I really hope the situation in Israel won't get in the way," he told me. "But of course it has an impact." Arab nations were appalled by the brutality of Israel's response, which killed thousands of civilians in Gaza. Many countries in the Muslim world refused to back the peace plan in Ukraine as long as Israel pursued its war against Hamas. As a result, Yermak found it much harder to win broad support, and

YERMAK IN HIS OFFICE IN NOVEMBER 2022, WITH A CERAMIC SKULL DECORATED WITH A BURNING KREMLIN

Russia found it easier to undermine his efforts.

By then it was too late for Ukraine to call off the summit in Switzerland. Its Western allies had pledged to attend, and Yermak intensified his efforts to attract guests from other regions. He asked celebrities for help, securing endorsements from Bono and Madonna. Members of Yermak's team were assigned lists of countries to persuade, mostly in Africa and Latin America. "These were the difficult cases," one of them told me. "We had to work the phones, come up with arguments." A few of the targets were swayed by the chance to schmooze with powerful officials at a Swiss resort. Others were too afraid of getting drawn into a fight with Russia and its allies.

BY THE TIME the helicopters landed at the Bürgenstock, it seemed clear that Yermak's dream of a truly global coalition had been dashed. China didn't show. Saudi Arabia agreed to send an envoy only after Zelensky made a last-minute trip to the kingdom and appealed to its ruler. Yermak was undaunted. At the start of the summit, he declared, "It's already a success."

By his count, more than a hundred countries and international organizations were represented. Their final declaration, all 500 words of it, did not directly call on Russia to stop its invasion. Instead, the participants promised to avoid "the threat or use of force" against any states. Despite the cautious wording, key envoys from the Middle East and other parts of Africa and Asia refused to sign it. South Africa expressed outrage at Israel's participation in the talks. India and Saudi Arabia both said that without Russia, the process was not credible.

Only on the sidelines did the delegates debate the question on everyone's minds: What kind of peace will Ukraine end up with? Among the more sober projections came from Czech President Petr Pavel, a retired army general who has been among Ukraine's most dogged allies. In an interview at the Bürgenstock, he told me Russia would likely remain in control of the lands it had occupied, while the democratic world would continue to condemn the occupation for years to come. "Of course I don't see a chance that Ukraine would be able to turn the war into their fast success," Pavel said. The Russians, he added, "have no pressure whatsoever to sit at the table right now."

When the summit was over, perhaps its weightiest outcome was Ukraine's pledge to invite the Russians to the next one. They hope to organize it in Saudi Arabia before the end of this year. "No pauses now," Zelensky said after returning to Kyiv. "We have made the first tangible step toward peace." By then, Yermak was already preparing for his next big test—meeting the Russians face to face. □



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YOUR GUIDE TO THE 2024 GAMES

THE PARIS OLYMPICS

*FROM THE U.S. SPRINTER WHO COULD MAKE HISTORY TO
THE SPORTS THAT TAKE THE GREATEST TOLL*

*Noah Lyles at the
National Training
Center in Clermont,
Fla., on May 7*

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANA
SCRUGGS FOR TIME





THE FLASH

ALREADY THE WORLD'S FASTEST MAN,
NOAH LYLES IS BRINGING HIS SPEED AND
SHOWMANSHIP TO THE PARIS GAMES

BY SEAN GREGORY/CLERMONT, FLA.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANA SCRUGGS FOR TIME

THE
PARIS
OLYMPICS



NOAH LYLES SHOULD BE A MISERABLE HUMAN ON THIS SUFFOCATINGLY hot May morning near Orlando. Two nights earlier, the U.S. sprint star was up until 3 a.m. in the Bahamas, waiting on a delayed drug test after a race. You can still spot fatigue under his eyes.

Lyles, however, can summon social energy on command, and today he's yapping away between stretches and sprints: about his love of anime, how he needs a pedicure, how he's the most fashionable guy in all of track and field. He had been absent from the past few practices while running in Nassau, where he and his 4 × 100-m relay team took first place. "We did miss you," one of Lyles' training partners, Paralympic sprinter Nick Mayhugh, tells him. "But did we enjoy the peace and quiet of the past two days? Yes."

Lyles runs a 120-m practice sprint in 12.4 sec. "You don't have to run any faster than that," says his coach, Lance Brauman. "You ran fast twice this weekend. You don't have to do it again." Lyles isn't feeling this advice. "My body's turned on!" he says. "I can feel the rust coming out of the legs! These two are going to be faster." Brauman rolls his eyes. Lyles runs the next two in 12.2 and 11.9 sec., respectively.

Talk turns to Lyles' competitors, including Letsile Tebogo of Botswana, who won a silver in the 100 m and bronze in the 200 m at last year's World Athletics Championships in Budapest. Lyles won gold in both races. "He's definitely a once-in-a-generation talent," Lyles says. I ask Lyles if such a threat worries him. "I'm here to race anybody who wants it," he declares. "The deeper the field, the better I run. I know I'm going to win. Because I'm never going to break nerve."

The Paris Olympics, which begin on July 26, are set to go down as the Noah Lyles Games. If Lyles, 26, repeats his Budapest feats and wins the 100-m, 200-m, and 4 × 100-m relay golds, he'll be the first American track-and-field athlete since Carl Lewis, 40 years ago, to win that triple, and the first male athlete to do so since Usain Bolt in 2016. Now Bolt is no longer in the starting blocks, and Michael Phelps is out of the water. Katie Ledecky is in the pool but a more low-key presence, and everyone already knows Simone Biles is a legend. The stage appears set for the World's Fastest Man, the title Lyles took with his 100-m win at worlds, to steal the show. He's even made noise about chasing a fourth gold, in the 4 × 400-m relay. No male track athlete has ever won that many sprint golds at a Games. (Americans Carl Lewis, Jesse Owens, and Alvin Kraenzlein each won a fourth, but in the long jump.)

If Lyles piles up golds in Paris, "we may have to recalibrate who is America's biggest star," says NBC analyst and four-time Olympic medalist Ato Boldon. "With the Olympics being next in Los Angeles and him being right in his prime for those four years leading up to LA28, look out. He's going to be huge."

Lyles, who has shot ads for Adidas, Visa, NBC, and others, seems tailor-made for this moment. An outspoken extrovert with ICON tattooed on his torso, he's begun a tradition of walking into track events in splashy outfits to attract



Lyles celebrates winning gold in the 100 m at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest

attention. He's stronger, physically, than he was three years ago, when he won a disappointing bronze in Tokyo. More important, he's in a better headspace, no longer fighting the demons that haunted him during the pandemic Games.

"Being able to run with passion, and a smile on your face, and turning a race into something for everybody to enjoy, that's what I consider running with soul," Lyles says during an extended conversation in the living room of his four-bedroom house in Clermont, Fla., after training. He's sitting under a white blanket on his couch, legs stretched out. "It just means that I'm happy," he says. "I love to do what I do. And that's a dangerous guy."

LYLES' PARENTS KEVIN LYLES and Keisha Caine Bishop were both collegiate track stars at Seton Hall University. But they couldn't envision Noah,



the oldest of their three children, following in their footsteps—Lyles suffered from such severe asthma as a child that he didn't have plush toys or teddy bears, because they could gather dust and aggravate his condition. As he struggled to fill his airways, his cough sounded like a high-pitched bark. "One day I was on a conference call for work," says Keisha, "and the supervisor said, 'Could somebody take their dog out?'"

They eventually found a medication that helped him breathe comfortably. But as Lyles entered middle school, he faced another obstacle: bullying. His teeth had become discolored—Lyles believes the medicine caused them to yellow—and classmates, particularly girls, teased him. "They were ruthless," he says. "An emotional beating, that's the stuff that really breaks you down." Lyles was also diagnosed with ADD and dyslexia,

which made school difficult for him.

He gravitated toward art, drawing Spider-Man swinging down a cityscape and, later, designing the uniforms for his high school track team. Lyles attended church dressed as Peter Pan and climbed on the shelves at Costco. "He was that kid who was just always trying to test things out," says Kevin.

Lyles eventually found an outlet for his rambunctiousness: sports. After Keisha and Kevin divorced in 2008, when Noah was around 11, the kids moved with Keisha from Charlotte, N.C., to Alexandria, Va., where Noah and his younger brother Josephus attended T.C. Williams High School (now called Alexandria City High School) and ran track. Noah practiced longer and harder than anyone. "I have everybody else tired and throwing up, but I can't get him," says Rashawn Jackson, Noah's high school sprint coach. "This is not right." While watching the opening ceremonies for the 2012 London Olympics, Noah and Josephus, just a year apart in age, made a pact to make the team for Rio. Noah finished fourth in the 200-m trials in 2016, just missing the cut; Josephus was injured.

Noah and Josephus both turned professional in 2016: they're believed to be the first male sprinters in the U.S. to bypass college for the pros. (Josephus did not qualify for the Tokyo Olympics but is seeking to make the team for Paris.) Lyles broke the 300-m indoor world record in his first pro season, in 2017. But in the weeks before his first outdoor world championships in Doha in 2019, he grew homesick living out of hotel rooms in Europe. Keisha visited him in Amsterdam, bringing his favorite cereal, Raisin Bran Crunch. "I really learned at that point this is not a glamorous life," says Lyles. "This is a hard-fought, dog-eat-dog life that you've got to get through."

Winning the 200 m at those worlds did little to improve his morale. "I just remember crossing the line being so empty," says Lyles. Then the pandemic, which hit a few months later, left him isolated. "Noah has a twinkle," says Cheryl Tardosky-Anderson, his longtime therapist. "He didn't have that twinkle."

"I could barely talk," says Lyles. "I was so tired. All the time. Even thinking

was a drain. It felt like you were almost in a constant asthma attack. You know there's more room in your lungs, but you can't physically use the muscles to actually take that breath." George Floyd's murder, in May 2020, added to his angst. "I just remember constantly thinking, That could be me," Lyles says.

Lyles started taking Zoloft, which lifted his cloud that summer, but weaned himself off the antidepressant going into the next track season. He ran a world-leading 200 m at the trials for the postponed Tokyo Olympics and was the clear favorite for Olympic gold. But when he got to the Games, his knee started to swell up. Plus, there were no fans in the stands to provide electricity. "Noah thrives on crowds," says his sports psychologist, Diana McNab. "He's a performance athlete, meaning he loves the limelight, he loves showtime. There was none of that in Tokyo. So he was a fish without water."

"I was half-motivated," Lyles says. "I feel like we just walked into an empty room, and they said, 'Fight.'"

In his postrace huddle with reporters after finishing third, Lyles broke down in tears. He opened up about his mental-health struggles and expressed sadness that Josephus wasn't with him in Tokyo. "It burns my chest every time I think about it," Lyles says now about his bronze. But in a way, he says, it's also "my greatest medal." The failure rewired Lyles' approach and set him up for the success of these past three years. He still rewatches that final on YouTube. "It is physically very hard for me to push play," he says. "But every time I look at it, I'm just like, 'Yeah, I am *not* that guy anymore.'"

POST-TOKYO, LYLES HAD to dig out of a malaise. A session with McNab helped persuade him to run a race in Eugene, Ore., a few weeks after those Olympics. "You get out there and just run for the joy of running and run your ass off," she told him. "If you can't do that, we're screwed for next season."

He won. He entered the next season vowing to train not harder but smarter. Lyles worked with a biomechanist to revamp the weakest part of his game, his start. "It's a constant science project," says Brauman, his coach.

Lyles added at least 10 lb. of muscle to his frame, which has allowed him to position his body at more efficient angles in the blocks, and generate more force and higher speeds at the outset of his races. Lyles already enjoys strong “top-end,” or maximum, speed: this weapon, combined with a more technical approach to the start, has produced startling results. He broke Michael Johnson’s U.S. record in the 200 m—19.32 sec.—at the 2022 World Championships, running a 19.31. He took the 100 m and 200 m double in Budapest and ran a personal-best 6.43 sec. in the 60 m at the U.S. Indoor Championships in February.

“Lots of guys want to be the man,” says Boldon, the NBC analyst. “Noah is the one I see going back to the lab to figure out what is going to make him the man. He’s going to be tough to beat, because he has improved his weaknesses more than anybody he is going to face in Paris.”

Lyles works with McNab to pen scripts detailing exactly how each part of a race—the warm-up, the start, the acceleration phase, the finish—should unfold. The night before an event, he calls her from his bedroom. She rings her Zen chimes three times, and he does a breathing exercise before visualizing each element of the script. Before Lyles ran a 100-m race in Bermuda, for example, they wrote, “You are ... driving your knees into the track like a jackhammer. Crushing it ... through the finish line.”

Lyles won, again.

OLYMPIC ATHLETES RARELY DRIVE the sports-news cycle in a non-Olympic year. Lyles, however, did so in August with comments he made at a world-championships press conference following his 200-m victory: “The thing that hurts me the most is that I have to watch the NBA Finals, and they have *world champion* on they head. World champion of what? The United States?” His point: Is it really fair for U.S.-based leagues, like the NBA, to call their title winners *world champs*?

NBA players took it in stride. Just kidding! “Somebody help this brother,” Kevin Durant wrote on Instagram. A furor ensued on talk shows and the web. “The problem with Noah is in the delivery,” says Josephus. “It’s not always the most finessed. I think that I probably would have explained it a little more than he did.” Noah stands by his words. He’s a world champion. The 2022–2023 Denver Nuggets, who never played a professional team from outside North America, were not.

Taming Lyles’ candor has been an ongoing project. “I do encourage him to use his filter sometimes,” says Tardosky-Anderson. A couple of years ago, Josephus brought a date over to the house he and Noah shared in Clermont. She made cookies. Noah tried one. “Whoa, that’s a bad cookie,” he said. “Really bad.”

I ask Lyles if, these days, he’d be less likely to offend his brother’s date. “You’d probably say it in a nicer way,”

says Jamaican sprinter Junelle Bromfield, Noah’s girlfriend, who’s sitting nearby. “Ahhhhhhhh,” Lyles responds. “Maybe. But probably not.”

Lyles is prone to impulse. After breakfast on the morning of the indoor national championships, Lyles insisted that he, Keisha, and her husband needed to stop by an Albuquerque motorcycle shop: he had to buy a helmet to go with the red racing outfit he was

‘TURNING A RACE INTO SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY TO ENJOY, THAT’S WHAT I CONSIDER RUNNING WITH SOUL.’

going to wear for his entrance. When Keisha questioned the wisdom of this move, Lyles told her she didn’t understand his vision. “I said, ‘You’re right, babe, I don’t get the vision,’” says Keisha. “I just roll with it. His sister said, ‘Next, he’s going ride in on a horse.’”

He’s promising new hair and nail styles at the Olympics. He wanted to decorate his cuticles for the relay in the Bahamas, but his nail tech, a high school student in Clermont, had her prom.

His house doubles as a dork shrine. Games are stacked near the entryway: Catan, Magic: The Gathering, the Chameleon (Lyles hosts weekly game nights). Upstairs, short, stout figurines—called Funko Pops—of characters from *The Office* line one shelf. Lego Bowser, playing a piano, sits below them. Lyles hasn’t opened his Princess Leia Lego set, but a Lego *Star Wars* Star Destroyer takes up prominent coffee-table space in the upstairs TV room. “I’ve been working on that thing for three months,” Lyles says. “Maybe four.”

At his training track, Lyles boasts that his “random-knowledge generator is very big.” He fills me in on the aye-aye, a lemur native to Madagascar. They have a middle finger, Lyles says, that’s

“literally long enough to stick it up their nose and touch their brain. They use it for getting insects out.” He’s also obsessed with ants and sings the praises of AntsCanada, a YouTuber and ant enthusiast with nearly 6 million subscribers. “It’s very interesting,” Lyles says. “I’ve always enjoyed learning about animals.”

“All right!” he says, his aye-aye and ants lecture a wrap. “Let’s get up to the gym.”

WHEN LYLES WAS negotiating an Adidas contract extension last year, the company, he says, threw him what it thought was a bone. Adidas invited him to the shoe-release event for Anthony Edwards, the rising Minnesota Timberwolves star who’s got plenty of talent but, unlike Lyles, isn’t a six-time world champ. “You want to do what?” says Lyles. “You want to invite me to [an event for] a man who has not even been to an NBA Finals? In a sport that you don’t even care about? And you’re giving him a shoe? No disrespect: the man is an amazing athlete. He is having a heck of a year. I love that they saw the insight to give him a shoe, because they saw that he was going to be big.

All I’m asking is, ‘How could you not see that for me?’” (Adidas declined to comment; in February, Lyles signed a new deal with the company, reportedly the most lucrative track-and-field contract in the post-Bolt era.)

This slight represents the problem with track and field in the U.S.: the sport’s low visibility outside the Olympics. Lyles can go to an Applebee’s or Texas Roadhouse in Clermont unrecognized. And the Texas Roadhouse even has a picture from the 4 × 100-m relay at the London Olympics, the Games that first drew Lyles’ attention, on the wall.

Lyles has designs on fixing this issue. He swears he can be bigger than Bolt. “Yeah, why not,” he says. “That’s my plan.” While Bolt is an icon, by dint of hailing from Jamaica, he couldn’t—or at least wasn’t willing to—grow track and field in the U.S. “I have the personality, I have the speed, I have the showmanship,” says Lyles. “I have the marketing mindset. I’m willing to be uncomfortable.” In March, he did a pair of shoots with Adidas, filmed a spot for Visa, and did another shoot for Omega, between training sessions and running in a meet. He wants to host *Saturday Night Live*.

The prerequisite for any track take-over, of course, is success in Paris. Lyles isn’t too concerned about that part. “I will definitely win my first” Olympic gold medal, Lyles tells me, legs still tucked under a blanket. How about two? “I definitely will.” Three? “I will definitely win three,” Lyles says. How about four? “That one is debatable!” Lyles says with a laugh. It depends on whether the coaches put him on the 4 × 400-m relay team so he can make history.

Most of all, he’s guaranteeing a good time. “I definitely advise you to indulge, because it’s going to be a lot of fun,” he says. “And I can promise you if you’re watching me, you will not be bored.”

“If you need somebody to entertain you for this Olympics,” says Lyles, smiling and pointing his fingers like a friendly bartender, “I got you.” —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN □

WITHIN REACH

Here’s how Noah Lyles would finish in a hypothetical race against history’s top 200-m sprinters running their personal bests



THE POLITICS OF PARIS

BY YASMEEN SERHAN

WHEN FRENCH HISTORIAN PIERRE DE COUBERTIN founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the governing body of the modern Olympic Games, in the late 19th century, he billed the competition as a peace movement that could bring the world together through sport. “Wars break out because nations misunderstand each other,” he said. Competition, the reasoning went, would foster greater understanding and reconciliation between adversarial countries.

More than a century later, Coubertin’s vision hasn’t exactly borne out. Far from bringing an end to wars, the Olympics have been embroiled in and even canceled by them. For while the Games are ostensibly apolitical, the world in which they operate is not. Indeed, authoritarians past and present have used the spectacle of the Olympics for their own political propaganda. And despite Olympic officials’ insistence that the Games be strictly neutral, the IOC has on many

occasions made decisions derided by some as partisan—most recently, its move to suspend the Russian Olympic Committee in the aftermath of Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The upcoming Summer Games are poised to be “the most politically charged Olympics in decades,” says Jules Boykoff, an international expert in sports politics. Set against the backdrop of two major ground wars—in Ukraine, where Russia continues to occupy 18% of the country’s territory, and in Gaza, where Israel’s ongoing war on Hamas has leveled much of the Strip and killed more than 37,000 people, according to figures from the enclave’s Hamas-controlled health ministry, which are deemed credible by the U.S. and the U.N.—the 2024 Games, he and others warn, cannot be held in a geopolitical vacuum.

Protesters stage a demonstration on June 12 in front of IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, demanding that Israel be banned from the 2024 Games

IF RECENT INTERNATIONAL competitions are any indication, they aren’t wrong. From the Eurovision Song Contest to the UEFA Champions League, global events have been subsumed by



the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. But the responses haven't been identical: while Russia was summarily barred from several international tournaments and matches following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine—including the Paris Olympics, where Russian and Belarusian athletes will be permitted to compete only as neutral participants—activists' calls for Israel to be similarly excluded have largely fallen flat. The IOC, which has previously dismissed such calls on the basis that the situation in Gaza is “completely different,” cites Russia's violation of the Olympic Charter—specifically, the Russian Olympic Committee's takeover of regional Olympic organizations in occupied Ukrainian territory—as the reason for its ban. “This situation cannot be compared with any of the other armed conflicts in our world,” an IOC spokesperson tells TIME in an email.

Still, some critics argue that the IOC's relative silence on Gaza represents a double standard. For while Israel hasn't annexed Gaza or taken over its sporting organizations, its military has destroyed much of its infrastructure, including its sports facilities. What little remains, like Gaza's iconic Yarmouk Stadium, has reportedly been converted by the Israeli military into a space to hold Palestinian detainees, a move the Palestinian Football Association denounced as a “clear violation of the Olympic Charter.” The Palestinian Olympic Committee estimates that at least 300 Palestinian athletes have been killed since Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7, including Palestinian Olympic soccer coach Hani Al-Masdar and karate champion Nagham Abu Samra. For those who have survived, the prospect of sports returning to Gaza is years, if not decades, away.

The war notwithstanding, a number of Palestinian athletes are expected to qualify for the Paris Games, as are athletes from Israel, Ukraine, and Russia. What remains to be seen, however, is how the athletes are received. “I think athlete activism will come out in ways we've not seen before,” says Shireen Ahmed, a journalist who writes on the intersection of sports and politics. “You will not only get athletes refusing to compete against Israeli athletes, you will get protests in the streets, you will get people talking about divestment. This is going to be incredibly polarizing, and in an event that's meant to unify, there will be push-back at every level.”

When asked about the prospect of athletes staging political protests or demonstrations during the Games, an IOC spokesperson tells TIME that “athletes cannot be held responsible for the actions of their governments” and that if anything deemed discriminatory does occur, the IOC will work with the national Olympic committee and the international federation concerned to ensure that “swift action” is taken. In a recent press conference addressing the potential impact the geopolitical landscape stands to have on the Paris Games, IOC president Thomas Bach referred to Coubertin's founding credo, noting that in times of conflict it is “more important to have this link and to give this symbol of hope.”

Boycott, for his part, isn't convinced. “If they think this is going away,” he says, “they are living in even a more insulated fairyland than I could even imagine.”



Hannah Roberts of the U.S. in midair at the Olympic qualifier series for BMX freestyle in Shanghai on May 17

THE HARDEST SPORTS ON THE BODY

BY ALICE PARK

Athletes are competitive by nature, so when they get together for a massive sporting event like the Olympics, there's likely a bit of good-natured one-upmanship over whose event is hardest. But while difficulty is somewhat subjective, there actually are ways to start isolating which sports take the biggest toll on the body—by the highest number of injuries racked up by athletes, for example, by what types of injuries they develop, or by which injuries have bigger impacts on their long-term health.

That data is not as complete as it could be. For one thing, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) doesn't track overall injuries experienced by Team USA athletes since those are collected by individual national sport organizations—USA Rugby, for instance. Still, during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the USOPC does have all U.S. athletes under its purview, and similarly, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) tracks injuries during the Games and reports them in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Sports physiologists divide sports into two broad categories: those that involve direct physical contact (the combat or collision sports), which can cause traumatic injuries, and those that test the body's endurance, which are more likely to cause chronic problems. Injury information collected by the IOC during the Games tends to be biased toward traumatic, or acute, injuries, says Dr. Jonathan Finnoff, chief medical officer of the USOPC. According to the IOC, at the Tokyo Olympics, the sport with the highest injury rate was boxing, with nearly 14% of boxers requiring medical care, followed by 12.5% of sport climbers and 11% of skateboarders. “Speaking generally, during

the Olympic Games, the high-speed, high-force and big-air or combat sports cause more injuries,” says Finnoff. At the Rio de Janeiro Games, BMX bikers topped the list at 38%, followed by boxers at 30% and mountain-bike cyclers at 25%. Among Team USA athletes, more than half of rugby players experienced injuries at recent Summer Games, while about half of wrestlers and divers did.

That doesn't mean swimmers or marathoners are in the clear—chronic injuries due to repetitive motions are more likely to cause problems that may not appear until years later, because they are more challenging to identify and treat. “Traumatic injuries like muscle tears and broken bones are fixable,” says Dr. Alexis Colvin, professor of sports medicine at Mount Sinai, “whereas chronic overuse issues sometimes linger and aren't necessarily something that can be fixed.”

Both types can have long-term effects, though it's hard to quantify since no sports group collects detailed information on Olympic athletes after their competitive careers end. Research shows, however, that even acute injuries can cause problems down the line, especially if athletes experience them multiple times. “Repetitive damage can lead to higher and higher incidence of long-term bad outcomes, including severe arthritis and even needing early joint replacement,” says Finnoff.

If you consider sports by how many body parts are at risk of being injured at any one time, says Dr. Robert Gallo, a professor of orthopedic sports medicine at Penn State University, gymnastics stands out for its potential for both acute and chronic issues. “You can land on your head, or land on your foot, and they also have a lot of chronic injuries that people don't see a lot,” he says. “Every single joint in gymnastics is subject to problems.” Plus, most gymnasts begin training at an early age. “If you're starting a sport when you are 2 years old and participating until you are in your 20s, that's a lot of wear and tear on the body,” says Mary Barron, associate professor of exercise and nutrition at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University.

But injuries are not necessarily inevitable. “We talk about the body of elite athletes in training in terms of green, yellow, and red lights,” says Dr. Matthew Silvis, director of sports medicine at Penn State University, referring to the amount of pain athletes feel and their ability to finish and recover from workouts. “Most athletes live in yellow—they feel OK even though they hurt and ache while they are working out, but they can complete their workouts and they don't feel worse the next day.” Knowing when yellow shifts to red is key to preventing injuries, and keeping the athlete training at optimal levels. Barron notes that better technology also helps athletes to protect against injuries.

“The model for sports is to be active for life,” she says. “The way we take care of and try to avoid injuries is very different now than it was four years ago. And that will help them to stay healthier even beyond their careers as Olympic athletes.” Which still doesn't mean any of this is easy.



HOW SIMONE BILES CHANGED GYMNASTICS

BY ALICE PARK

THERE ARE TWO MAIN FEATURES ANY ATHLETE EARNING the Greatest of All Time title needs to possess—longevity and ability. Think Michael Jordan's six NBA championships over 15 seasons, Tom Brady's seven Super Bowl rings across 23 seasons, and Michael Phelps' 23 gold medals over five Olympics. Then there is Simone Biles, who is not only training for her third Olympic Games as the most decorated



Biles prepares for a balance-beam routine at the Core Hydration Classic in Hartford, Conn., on May 18

gymnast in history—with 30 world-championship medals, nine national all-around champion titles, and seven Olympic medals—but also changing the sport itself.

Though Biles could at this point just continue competing with the skills she's perfected over her storied career, she keeps raising the stakes. She's had five gymnastics moves named after her because she was the first to perform them in international competitions. Her latest, also known as the Yurchenko double pike vault, had never been attempted before by any female gymnast, and by only a few male gymnasts, when she first

executed it in 2021. U.S. national-team member Paul Juda, one of the handful who competes with that skill, says “her ability to pop off the table—which is 5 to 10 cm lower than the one men use—and the fact that she is a couple inches shorter than me and she is still able to go higher than I do takes an immense, almost ungodly amount of power.”

Biles' influence on the sport goes far beyond the technical evolution she is leading. Since her early days competing at the national and international

lawsuits and an effort to decertify the organization as the sport's national governing body following the sentencing of national-team doctor Larry Nassar for child pornography and sexual-abuse crimes. Biles was among several hundred gymnasts abused by Nassar, and her testimony, and comments about the culture that discouraged gymnasts from speaking out, in part triggered a shift to a more democratized system for team selections, one that is less reliant on the subjective opinions of a few. She also became

‘THE FACT THAT SHE IS A COUPLE INCHES SHORTER THAN ME AND SHE IS STILL ABLE TO GO HIGHER THAN I DO TAKES AN IMMENSE, ALMOST UNGODLY AMOUNT OF POWER.’

—U.S. NATIONAL-TEAM MEMBER PAUL JUDA

level, her gregarious personality and nurturing instincts helped catalyze a much-needed culture change in the elite program in the U.S. When Biles entered those ranks, Martha Karolyi, then the national-team coordinator, discouraged lighthearted interactions, let alone smiles, at competitions, and instead urged the athletes to remain focused and serious. Biles was different, however, and couldn't help laughing and joking between events—it was who she was, and she and her personal coach at the time didn't think she needed to change. “I think she's allowed everyone around her to have a little more fun, smile more, and enjoy gymnastics,” says Jordyn Wieber, 2012 Olympic gold medalist and now the head women's gymnastics coach at University of Arkansas.

Biles' accomplishments are all the more impressive given that they've occurred under the pall of one of the biggest sexual-abuse scandals in sports. The Paris Olympics will be the first after USA Gymnastics weathered

a role model for mental-health awareness after she suddenly developed the “twisties,” in which she lost her sense of orientation in the air, and withdrew from most of her events at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. “I felt no, the mental is not there,” she said at the time. “I need to let the girls do it and focus on myself.”

It's that ability to see the bigger picture that will also be Biles' legacy. “She was open and vulnerable in talking about putting her mental health and safety first,” says Nastia Liukin, 2008 all-around Olympic gold medalist. “I'm inspired by the strength and humility she was able to show when faced with the immense amount of pressure she felt that I don't think anybody fully understood.”

Biles has said that she instantly fell in love with gymnastics and continues to compete because it's still fun, and because of everything the sport has given her. But it's clear that this GOAT is already gifting the sport with so much more—and she's not done yet.

WHY HUNGARY IS SO GOOD AT WATER POLO

BY SEAN GREGORY

ARRIVING HOME A WORLD champion in the summer of 2023, Hungarian water-polo player Vince Vigvari got a taste of the rock-star life. After a long flight from Fukuoka, Japan, Vigvari and his teammates hopped on a bus to a victory rally at a Budapest pool. A few weeks later, he attended a music festival at Lake Balaton. “At least 50 people came up to me to take a picture,” says Vigvari, 21. “Young girls and guys,

Hungary battles the U.S. in the men’s quarterfinals at the 2023 World Aquatics Championships

middle-aged women, men. I can’t lie. It was a good feeling.”

Water polo, a sport that receives scant attention in most countries, is a national pastime for Hungarians. Hungary has won nine men’s Olympic gold medals, more than twice as many as the next most successful country, Britain (four, most recently in 1920). It also owns four world championships, tied with Italy for tops on the planet.

How did a landlocked Eastern European country become so good at an aquatic sport that plays like soccer on water, except that players can use their hands to pass and shoot, saving their feet for kicking in chlorine? A key factor was its abundance of thermal springs. “If you can stay in the pool to practice when the water temperature is 80, 85 degrees, your fundamentals, movements, and coordination will improve a lot,” says Denes Kemeny, who coached the team to three consecutive Olympic gold medals from 2000 to 2008. “We had this advantage over countries who could play in sea, lake, or riverside only four, five months a year.”

Hungary also innovated. According to Gergely Csurka, press officer for the Hungarian Water Polo Federation and author of a 500-page book on the history of the sport in the country, in 1913—a year after Hungary competed in its first Olympic water-polo tournament and lost in the first round—some players went to a circus in Budapest. They saw the performers catching and throwing plates with their wrists and decided to apply that technique to their sport; at the time, players stiff-armed shots and passes. The next year, the Hungarian team toured Britain playing exhibition



matches. “The Brits were Olympic champions,” says Csurka. “And Hungary beat them like hell.”

Hungary first won Olympic gold in 1932; from 1928 to 1939, it won 110 straight international matches. After World War II, Hungary became an Iron Curtain nation, and in the weeks before the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, the Red Army brutally suppressed an uprising in the country. Some 2,500 Hungarians were killed. It was amid such geopolitical tension that Hungary and the Soviet Union played the most famous game in water-polo history: a violent clash called the “Blood in the Water” match, in which a Soviet player punched Hungarian star Ervin Zador in the face and blood poured into the pool. The ref called the match, which Hungary was leading 4-0. Then Hungary beat Yugoslavia in the gold-medal game.

This legendary contest—also the subject of a 2006 documentary, *Freedom’s Fury*—inspired future national-team players. The gold-medal three-peat from 2000 to 2008 also had a profound influence. “Everyone loved that team,” says Vigvari. “Even if water polo is not a big sport worldwide, in Hungary, we had a team we could root for that was successful internationally. It’s a big thing, and a lot of kids start to play water polo because of that success.”

The Hungarian government has also chipped in. Since 2011, companies have been able to write off donations for sports infrastructure, equipment, and youth-athlete training as tax deductions: water polo got some \$270 million in investment during the first 10 years of the program. “In my experience, and I have traveled a lot because of water polo, we have the best pools in all of Europe,” says Vigvari.

A 10th Olympic gold for Hungary is no sure thing. Vigvari calls Spain the favorite; many Spanish players play for the same club team in Barcelona, giving them a chance to develop year-round chemistry. And Italy’s got speed. But Hungary can hang with anyone. “For Hungarian players, making big things happen comes naturally,” says Vigvari.



Montalvo competes in the Red Bull BC One world 2022 final in New York City

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT BREAKING

BY SEAN GREGORY

The sport of breaking—competitive breakdancing—will make its Olympic debut in Paris. “Breaking is awesome because it’s part of hip-hop culture, and [in] hip-hop culture, it doesn’t matter what color you are, who you are, where you’re from, it’s inclusive,” says U.S. breaker Victor Montalvo. Here’s a primer on the sport.

When’s the competition? The B-girls battle on Aug. 9 starting at 10 a.m. E.T. The B-boys go the next day, also at 10 a.m. E.T.

Where will breaking be held? At the Place de la Concorde, the largest public square in Paris, which is also hosting BMX freestyle, skateboarding, and 3x3 hoops.

How will it work? Unlike many Olympic sports, breaking is pretty easy to follow! On both the men’s and women’s sides, 16 breakers face off in a one-day tournament. They’re broken into groups of four, and each breaker battles the three others in their pool. The two best in each pool advance to the quarterfinals, which is when the knockout phase begins. There, competitors face each other head-to-head. Each breaker alternates spinning, flipping, and shuffling their feet for around 30 to 50 seconds. A panel of nine judges decides who wins each round, based on a combination of five factors: technique, vocabulary, execution, musicality, and originality.

The gold-medal matches will take place a little after 3:20 p.m. E.T. on Aug. 9 (B-girls) and Aug. 10 (B-boys).

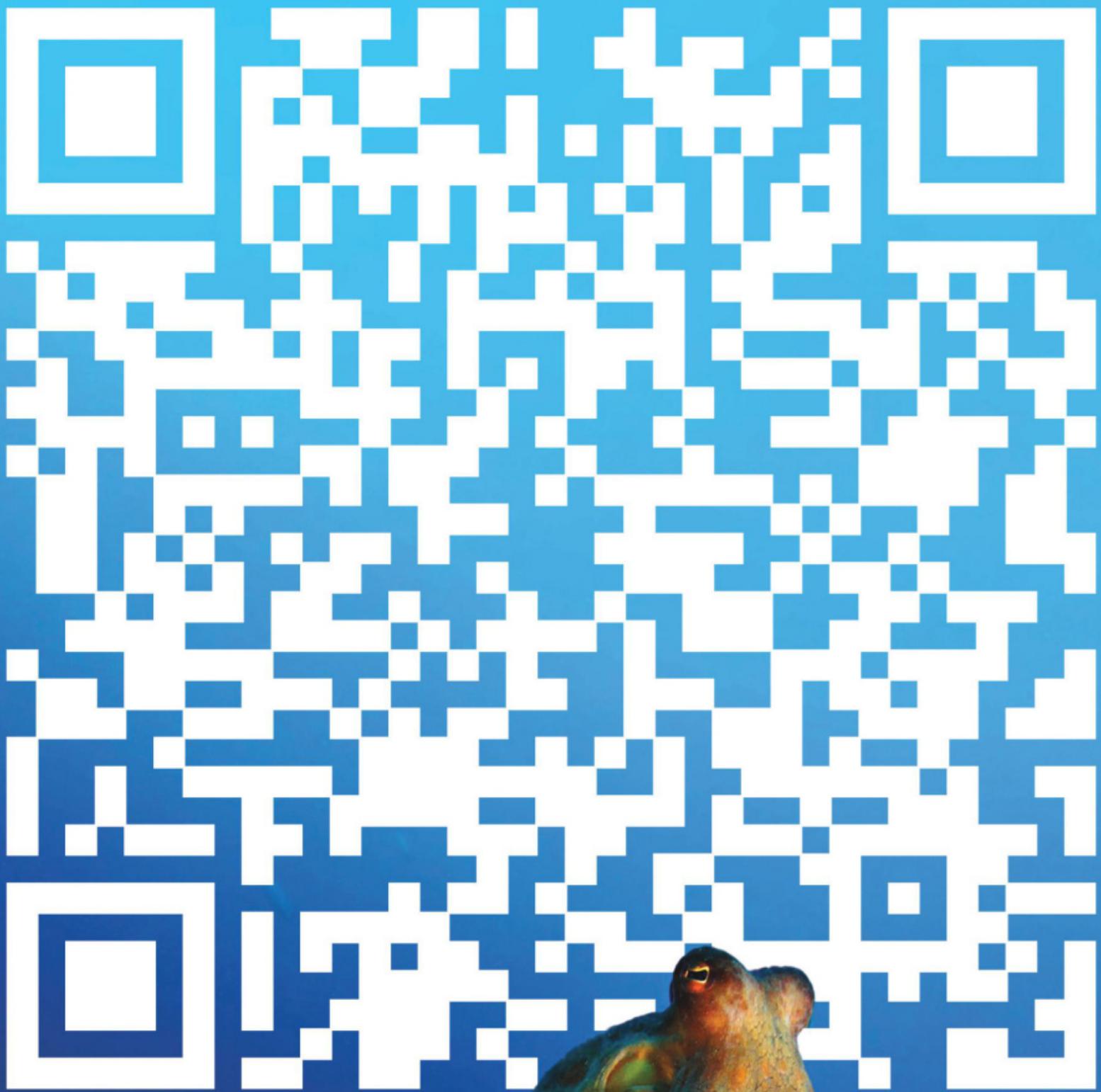
What are some breaking terms to know? Top rock is the foot-shuffling and arm-moving a breaker does standing up. Down rock is the action on the floor. Freezes are when dancers pause midroutine, often in a difficult position, like on their heads. When I asked Montalvo to define a power move, he did a little top rock, spun on his hands, and froze upside down. In other words, it’s a maneuver that requires impressive strength. If a B-girl slaps the floor, she thinks her opponent is crashing, or screwing up. If a B-boy positions his arms parallel across his body, and moves them up and down—like teeth chomping—he thinks his opponent is biting, or copying moves. If breakers point to their ears, they’re saying an opponent is dancing off-key. The smoking gesture is self-explanatory. “That means,” says Montalvo, “I smoked you.”

Do the breakers pick their own music? No! The DJ selects the music for a round.

Who are the breakers to watch? For the B-girls, keep an eye on Sunny Choi (U.S.), Dominika Banevic (Lithuania), and Fatima Zahra Elmamouny (Morocco). For the B-boys, Montalvo is a threat, as are Nakarai Shigeyuki (Japan) and Philip Kim (Canada).

So where will breaking take place at the L.A. Olympics in ’28? Surprisingly, breaking is not on that Olympic program. Flag football will make its debut there. But if it’s a success in Paris, breaking could return in 2032, in Brisbane. Start top-rocking now to qualify.

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Time Off

SUMMER SCREAM QUEENS

BY RICH JUZWIAK
AND MEGAN MCCLUSKEY

Mia Goth and Maika Monroe anchor two of the season's most anticipated horror movies



INSIDE

INMATES BECOME
CASTMATES IN *SING SING*

A SEARING NEW SEASON
OF *HOUSE OF THE DRAGON*

RASHIDA JONES TAKES
ON GRIEF AND ROBOTS



PROFILE

Mia Goth prefers to live on the edge

BY RICH JUZWIAK

IT'S ONE OF THE MOST INDELIBLE IMAGES IN recent cinema: "Please, I'm a star!" wails the title character of Ti West's 2022 cult horror film, *Pearl*, after she's been rejected for a role at an audition. But the actor behind *Pearl* cuts the precise negative of that widely memed viral image inside a Manhattan production studio one evening in mid-June.

"I don't feel famous at all," says Mia Goth. This despite having worked with auteurs like Luca Guadagnino and Lars von Trier (2013's *Nymphomaniac* was her debut); despite a bevy of accolades for her alternately fragile and furious work in *Pearl*; and despite the paparazzi shots of her walking in L.A. with the father of her child, Shia LaBeouf, published days earlier. All of which is to say nothing of the hot anticipation for *MaXXXine*, out July 5, ostensibly the last film in the series that began with 2022's slasher *X*, continued with prequel *Pearl*, and made Goth one of the pre-eminent contemporary scream queens.

West's horror franchise, which almost im-

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Goth as
MaXXXine's
hardened but
haunted starlet

mediately cemented its cult status and counts Martin Scorsese among its fans, has implicitly argued that Goth is like something out of another era. *X* is set in the '70s, *Pearl* in 1918, and *MaXXXine* in 1985, with Goth in a voluminous blond wig. In person, Goth seems more Gen X in spirit than the younger millennial she is at 30. Unlike many of her generation who are outspoken about boundaries on set, the British actor likes to "romanticize" fraught stories of directors pushing their actors, as Stanley Kubrick did to Shelley Duvall—to whom Goth is frequently compared—on *The Shining*. "Art needs to be a little dangerous, and to get genuine moments, you have to blur the lines a little," she says.

Her effectiveness onscreen is reinforced by her conduct off of it. She doesn't use social media, cultivating a "veil of mystery" that will make her more believable in roles. (There's much she is tight-lipped about—from her relationship with the embattled LaBeouf to an ongoing \$500,000 lawsuit filed against her, West, and A24 in January by an extra who accused her of kicking him in the head while filming and then taunting him. "I can't talk about that because it's an ongoing lawsuit," she says. "But I'm grateful for A24's support.") She claims to have no awareness of her steadfast gay following. And despite

her rising star—she’s now in production on Guillermo del Toro’s *Frankenstein* remake—she’s not worried about keeping her ego in check. “My sense of self is actually quite low,” she says. “I’m actually trying to build myself up a little more.”

MAXXXINE IS A CITY SLASHER bookending *X*’s rural spin on the genre. It finds Goth’s porn-star character embarking on a horror sequel. She’s mysteriously trailed by a PI (Kevin Bacon) and haunted by accumulating deaths around her, while the city is terrorized by real-life serial killer Richard Ramirez, known as the Night Stalker. Hardened but still reeling from surviving the porn-set massacre of *X*, she assumes an offensive stance. Damsel-in-distress tropes are inverted; in one scene, she is chased down an alley then exercises brutal vengeance on her assailant.

“Playing Maxine and Pearl has been the most creatively fulfilling experience of my life,” she says. “And one of many reasons why it’s been such a gift is because I’ve been blessed to play

‘I’ve been blessed to play these characters that are so fearless.’

these characters that are so fearless and have such agency. Whereas in my day-to-day life I need a lot of validation, I don’t need that on set. It’s a way for me to feel liberated.”

West says Goth’s appeal comes down to authenticity. “Part of the allure is that it’s not pretend for her,” he says. “She finds a way to connect to the material. Sometimes it’s larger than life and crazy, but she finds a way to ground it within herself.” He recalls that when he told her he wanted her to play two parts in *X*, “she just stopped and I could see the wheels turning. Then she was just like, ‘I could kill that.’ And I totally believed in her confidence.”

Goth’s career-defining trilogy may be winding down—*MaXXXine* is being marketed as the “final chapter,” though West has an idea for an additional film. Either way, she’s ready to move on from horror. “I’m tapped out in that area,” she says. “I’d love to make a romantic movie. I’ve been so focused on this end of the spectrum of violence and gore, but I love love too.”

Still, she’s grateful for the experience. “There’s a reason certain characters come into your life,” she philosophizes. Plus, Maxine taught her a lot. When asked what she takes a beat for nearly 30 seconds. And then, finally: “Just like, ‘You got this.’”

PROFILE

Maika Monroe is giving evil a run for its money

BY MEGAN MCCLUSKEY

LIKE A SHAPE-SHIFTING SPECTER LURKING just out of frame, the title of “scream queen” has been trailing in Maika Monroe’s wake since her starmaking turn in the 2015 breakout horror hit *It Follows*. As Jay, the unassuming teenage protagonist of filmmaker David Robert Mitchell’s indie cult sensation, Monroe cemented her place in the horror pantheon playing a young woman pursued by a lethal supernatural entity after contracting a sexually transmitted curse. It’s a bizarre premise that initially gave Monroe pause. “This can’t be good,” she remembers thinking after reading the script.

And she was right—in a sense. It wasn’t just good. It was a commercial and critical smash, grossing \$23.2 million worldwide against a \$1.3 million budget and earning acclaim as a highly original genre gem. “I don’t think any of us expected *It Follows* to blow up the way it did,” Monroe says. “Never in a million years.”

Nearly a decade later, Monroe, 31, is again in the limelight as the lead in one of the year’s most anticipated horror films, *Longlegs*, in theaters July 12. With early reviews praising it as “a disturbing descent into hell” and “the scariest film of the decade,” the new feature from writer-director Osgood Perkins (*I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House*) debuted with a perfect 100% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes ahead of its U.S. release—a rare feat for any film, but especially a horror movie.

Starring opposite Nicolas Cage, who is *Longlegs*’ titular menace—a disfigured, rasping serial killer with mysterious means to his ends—Monroe plays Lee Harker, a talented and reserved FBI recruit whose cryptic psychic abilities give her strange insight into her target’s methods. “It was one of those scripts where I was like, ‘I need to be a part of this,’” she says. “I was obsessed with the world that it’s set in.”

That sinister setting, built around a series of occult murders, reminded Monroe of two iconic ’90s titles she came to love when she was old enough to start watching horror herself, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Se7en* (1995). She recalls the visceral reaction she had watching that type of truly terrifying film for the first time. “I would close my eyes a lot, but I just love that feeling,” she says. “You don’t really get it from anything else.”

▼
Monroe’s rise has been tied to a string of cult horror hits



Despite her early admiration for the power of cinema, Monroe didn't grow up wanting to be an actor. Born and raised in Santa Barbara, Calif., she spent her preteen years pursuing dance and learning how to kiteboard with her dad. It wasn't until a local film production reached out to her dance company looking for extras that a then 13-year-old Monroe took an interest. "Fun- nily enough, it was a really terrible horror movie," she says. "I just fell in love with being on set."

From there, Monroe got a manager and an agent and began to audition. But her attention was divided. Even as she pursued acting, she was proving to be an unusually talented kiteboarder. When she was 17, she moved with her mom to the Dominican Republic to train in the sport professionally (ultimately ranking as high as 32nd in the world). But she kept up with auditions here and there. "I probably sent in four tapes during that nine-month period, and I ended up booking one of them," she says in reference to her debut feature, the 2013 family drama *At Any Price*, which took her back to Los Angeles.

Within the year, she had appeared in both Sofia Coppola's *The Bling Ring* and Jason Reitman's *Labor Day*. But it was the one-two punch of Adam

'It was one of those scripts where I was like, I need to be a part of this. I was obsessed with the world that it's set in.'

Wingard's 2014 horror-thriller *The Guest* and *It Follows* the subsequent year that linked her to the genre and carved a path forward. While Monroe has since taken on studio blockbusters like *Independence Day: Resurgence*, it's her enduring success in the indie horror world—think 2019's *Villains* and 2022's *Watcher*—that's built the foundation of a career.

THANKS TO ITS somewhat reductive history, the scream-queen label isn't always a welcome one—'80s gore-fest icon Barbara Crampton notably derided the term as implying "that you're good at two things: howling at the top of your lungs and being a woman." Still, Monroe says she feels "incredibly grateful" to be playing a part in the moniker's evolution.

"I think back to some of the horror movies I would watch [as a kid] and it would be hot, blond girls with half their clothes falling off

covered in blood and running and screaming," she says. "Then all these movies like *It Follows*, *The Babadook*, *The Witch* started coming out and completely changed the genre. Now those are some of the best roles out there."

Monroe is slated to star next in Maxime Giroux's crime thriller *In Cold Light* before reuniting with Mitchell for *They Follow*, a long-awaited sequel to *It Follows* that she promises is going to deliver "what people want and more."

Then, she says, she'd love to do something more lighthearted, like a rom-com. "There's a lack of great rom-coms right now," she says. "It's time for another *When Harry Met Sally*."

But as the buzz surrounding *Longlegs* builds to a crescendo, Monroe's main (spoiler-free) takeaway from the film speaks to why she'll always be able to return to her roots in horror: for better or worse, the pool of inspiration is bottomless. "Evil isn't going anywhere," she says. "That's just the reality. There really is no end."

▼
In *Longlegs*, Monroe plays an FBI recruit with psychic powers



MONROE: COURTESY OF NEON; SING SING: COURTESY OF A24



REVIEW

In a maximum-security prison, the imagination flies free

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND IS how most Americans probably think about incarcerated individuals—until an acquaintance or a loved one lands in a correctional facility, after plotting a crime or perhaps just acting impulsively in a heated moment. It's easy, and comfortable, to pass judgment. But Greg Kwedar's true-to-life prison drama *Sing Sing* asks more of us: If we believe in our own capacity for growth and change, how can we not extend that good faith to other individuals who have made mistakes?

Colman Domingo stars as John "Divine G" Whitfield, serving time at the infamous New York prison Sing Sing for a crime he didn't commit, though he's hopeful that an upcoming clemency hearing might clear his name. In the meantime, he's become deeply invested in a prison theater program, not only performing but also serving on its steering committee, helping to determine who joins the program and what productions get mounted. He's also written a play himself, one that he hopes might someday make it to the stage.

He and his closest friend Mike Mike (Sean San José) are always

looking for new men who might benefit the group—and benefit from it. They approach Clarence "Divine Eye" Maclin (a real-life alumnus of a similar arts program, playing himself), who has a reputation as a tough guy around the yard. Divine G knows his instincts about Divine Eye are right when the latter rattles off a passage from *King Lear*, proving he's taken the play to heart. But it takes a while for Divine Eye to recognize that part of the troupe's aim—which it achieves through a mix of acting exercises and just plain yakking, led by the group's coach, Brent (Paul Raci)—is to get the men to explore feelings they usually keep locked down tight. He resents Divine G's efforts to help him open up, and the two clash, though Divine G's ego is part of the problem too.

Prisons are self-contained societies, and *Sing Sing* underscores just how complicated interpersonal relationships can be when you're being watched every waking and sleeping moment. Even the movie's production design suggests how these men strive to preserve their individuality: their cells' narrow windowsills might be stacked with books or small boxes of favorite foods;

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Domingo and Maclin anchor a story of redemption through self-expression

the drawings they've hung on their walls may have been done by their kids, or by themselves. Even the smallest assertion of self has meaning and value.

Kwedar co-wrote the *Sing Sing* script with Clint Bentley (the duo also made the affecting 2021 drama *Jockey*), and the story they tell is drawn from the real-life Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) program. The film features several actors who got their start through that initiative, including Maclin. His performance has a nervy kind of electricity: Divine Eye has been bruised by life, and by the system, but we can see his desire to climb back into the world as a new person, a more open and self-aware one. Domingo gives Maclin all the air and space he needs to create that character. That's what a truly terrific actor does: he steps back and listens, instead of merely relishing his own lines.

AND EVEN IF *SING SING* shoulders some heavy-duty ideas about forgiveness and redemption, Kwedar also recognizes the value and delight of pure play. The troupe prepares a nutty, clever comedy Brent has written for them (adapted from a work that real-life RTA teacher Brent Buell developed for his students) that's peopled with pirates, Egyptian kings, gladiators, and more—basically, a part for everybody. To watch this movie's actors, many of them playing versions of the men they used to be not so long ago—to see them incorporating classic pop-locking moves into their swordplay, or tinkering with the phrasing of Hamlet's soliloquy until it rings true to their experience—is to witness a cautious but joyful reawakening. If a group of forgotten men can pull this sort of thing off, then what excuse do the rest of us have? Outside prison walls or within them, those who stop growing have only themselves to blame. ▣

REVIEW

House of the Dragon's song of grief and guilt

BY JUDY BERMAN

“THERE IS NO WAR SO HATEFUL TO THE GODS AS A WAR between kin,” a wise character observes in the second season of HBO’s *House of the Dragon*. “And no war so bloody as a war between dragons.” Sadly, by the time those words are uttered, both kinds of war have come to seem inevitable. King Viserys I Targaryen (Paddy Considine) is dead, and his bratty son Aegon (Tom Glynn-Carney) has usurped an Iron Throne that rightfully belonged to his older half-sister, Rhaenyra (Emma D’Arcy). Season 1 ended with the spilling of first blood, when Aegon’s brother Aemond (Ewan Mitchell) watched his dragon, Vhagar, devour Rhaenyra’s son Lucerys (Elliot Grihault).

It doesn’t matter that Aemond didn’t intend to kill the boy. Lucerys’ death, which came so soon after that of his peace-loving grandfather, sets off a wave of violence that mounts as the second season of the *Game of Thrones* prequel progresses. As Rhaenyra’s Black faction and Aegon’s Green slide slowly toward all-out civil war, *House of the Dragon* cements its place in George R.R. Martin’s dark universe by rejecting platitudes about honor and bravery that suffuse so many fantasy epics. Instead, this harrowing season exposes the unique forms of grief and guilt that result when one nation—and the family that leads it—declares war on itself.

In a welcome break with the relentlessly expository first season, which raced through decades’ worth of traumatic births and deaths at a pace that made it tough to feel immersed or even invested in the palace intrigue, the first half of Season 2 unfolds patiently, in the immediate aftermath of Lucerys’ fatal flight. His older brother, Rhaenyra’s heir Jacaerys (Harry Collett), is at Winterfell, confirming the loyalty of the Starks. (Would they even be Starks if they weren’t loyal?) At the Blacks’ home base of Dragonstone, Rhaenyra’s bellicose husband and, er, uncle, Daemon (Matt Smith), is restless to storm King’s Landing and exact revenge on Aemond and Vhagar. Meanwhile, the valiant Rhaenyra—who suffered a devastating stillbirth just before losing Lucerys—has traveled to the site of her son’s death to wail over his remains. Daemon isn’t particularly sympathetic. “The mother grieves as the queen shirks her duties,” he sniffs.

While the Blacks mourn, the Greens splinter into factions as the implications of what Aemond has unwittingly done sink in. Impressionable, insecure, and bitterly competitive with his warrior brother, Aegon rebels against a mother, Alicent Hightower (Olivia Cooke), and a grandfather, Otto Hightower (Rhys Ifans), who had taken his obedience in the wake of Viserys’ death for granted. Rather than heed their self-serving but politically prudent advice, he allows the most hawkish members of his council—and



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Rhaenyra (D’Arcy) spends early episodes of Season 2 consumed by grief

his own out-of-control emotions—to push him toward war. In between trysts with a new lover, Alicent agonizes over the choice she made, years earlier, to support her father’s ambitions over those of her childhood best friend, Rhaenyra.

IN A SURPRISINGLY SUBTLE variation on the first season’s obsession with the ravages of reproduction—one that takes the show out of tiresome Feminism 101 territory—generational divides emerge. Elders like Otto and Rhaenyra’s cousin and ally, Rhaenys (Eve Best), preach caution. Eager though they are to prove themselves on the battlefield, young men raised in peaceful times remain ignorant of the true costs of war. Innocent children become cannon fodder in a conflict they didn’t choose and are often too young to even understand. In a sane world, parents would sacrifice themselves to save their kids, but here that dynamic is inverted. Caught in the middle are Rhaenyra and Alicent, whose disinclination to murder each other’s families seems insufficient to prevent an explosion of violence.

Indeed, the outbreak of civil war is depicted as something both horrific



and unstoppable—as simultaneously natural and unnatural as Cain killing Abel. Twin brothers in the Kingsguard, Arryk and Erryk Cargyll (Luke and Elliott Tittensor), end up in opposing palaces. The accidental slaying of Lucerys triggers more deadly mistakes and misunderstandings. Far from King’s Landing and Dragonstone, we meet two clans whose feud long predates the war of the Greens and Blacks. The factions use their split loyalties as an excuse to tear each other to shreds. We don’t see the battle that escalates out of their confrontation. What’s more salient is its outcome: hundreds of lifeless bodies piled up on their adjoining properties.

The Cargylls aren’t the only ominous doppelgangers we encounter this season. Rhaenys, a would-be queen passed over for an inferior man, has always been a mirror for Rhaenyra. Aemond resembles a younger version of his similarly pugnacious kinsman Daemon; their names are anagrams. In fact, Aegon and Aemond’s relationship echoes that of Viserys and Daemon: the weak king and the brother who makes up in terror what he lacks in official power. The Targaryens are also, of course, an incestuous family, which

COURTESY OF HBO (5)

NODS TO FUTURE WESTEROS

BY MEGAN MCCLUSKEY

Game of Thrones fans will enjoy plenty of callbacks



THE RETURN OF THE STARKS

The Starks have more to do this season, like guarding the Wall and supplying soldiers for Rhaenyra’s army



THE POWER OF THE DRAGON

The dragons are bigger, badder, and more plentiful on *House of the Dragon* than they ever were on *Thrones*



THE TARGARYENS (AND THEIR WIGS)

The Targaryens are as hotheaded as always: just look at Daemon’s response to Lucerys’ death



WITCHY WOMEN

Much like Melisandre, Alys Rivers is a mysterious figure with supernatural abilities

helps to explain why the names of just about every platinum-haired character sound alike. These multiples reinforce the impression that civil war is an obscenely intimate tragedy, waged among inbred aristocrats who couldn’t be more alike, for a cause that is largely irrelevant to the armies of commoners who will die fighting. As one character points out: “When princes lose their temper, it is often others that suffer.”

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON excels, in its much-improved second season, at keeping those anonymous hordes the royals call “little people” in mind even as it sharpens its focus on the fluctuating relationships between a few key characters. Rhaenyra, wounded by grief but resolute in her decision to defend her claim to the throne, is becoming more than just a generic strong female lead. Alicent’s guilt may not redeem her, but it does humanize a woman who betrayed her dearest friend in order to align herself with powerful men. Daemon is brash but haunted. For all his aggression, Aemond, who spends idle hours curled up in the fetal position in the lap of a favorite prostitute, remains the same isolated, brittle child who lost an eye to gain a dragon.

Showrunner Ryan Condal’s talky, character-driven approach has its downsides. There are still too many names and subplots. To let so much political and personal friction develop requires slowing the action to a pace that might frustrate anyone who’s mostly here to watch dragons brûlée people. (For those who might be wondering, the dragon riding still looks as goofy as ever.) But by de-emphasizing—and deglamorizing—combat, in favor of enriching central characters, closely tracking each side’s machinations, and questioning the very premise of a just war, the series harkens back to the early seasons of *Game of Thrones*, before the plot was reduced to filler between episode-length battles. Whether it takes place in our contemporary world or a fantastical medieval Europe, a solid political thriller is worth a thousand big, dumb, fiery special-effects spectacles. □

Rashida Jones The multihyphenate creator on her new dark comedy *Sunny*, the complexity of grief, and whether a robot can find its motivation

In *Sunny*, you play an American woman in Kyoto, reluctantly bonding with a “homebot” gifted to her by her husband’s company after he and their son disappear following a plane crash. What about grief were you hoping to explore in this story? When you grieve, there is this sense that there’s so much left unsaid. There’s regret and confusion, this lens looking backwards at your entire relationship. I lost my mom a couple years ago, and it was the most complex emotional experience I’ve ever had. I had a baby, and then seven months later, my mom passed away. There’s the Kübler-Ross stages of grief, but it’s not cyclical. It’s not linear. It’s just chaotic.

Was the parallel cathartic, or do you draw a line between your experience and the character you’re playing? I’m not the kind of actor who’s like, “I want to go and leave it all on the field.” But I think there is something I wanted to process, or else I wouldn’t have picked it. It’s not the easiest thing to show up every day and scream and cry and have to access that place in real time. But there was probably something in me that wanted to sit in it a little bit more.

The show’s themes around our relationships to technology are very timely. Your character can’t trust the intentions of Sunny, her robot. What is your relationship to technology? Are the robots out to kill us? With so many innovations in the past, there was a sense of ownership, a person using a tool. I don’t think anybody thought the printing press was going to become sentient. I’ve always had a little bit of a nihilistic idea of the world since I was a kid. For all of humanity, as soon as our needs were met, we tried to figure out why we’re here,

You’ve acted opposite Muppets. What was it like acting opposite a robot?

It took so many people to make the robot move. But it felt pretty real, pretty fast. I felt that way on *The Muppets* movie—on the second day, I wasn’t even talking to Steve [Whitmire], who plays Kermit. I was just having full, off-camera conversations with Kermit.



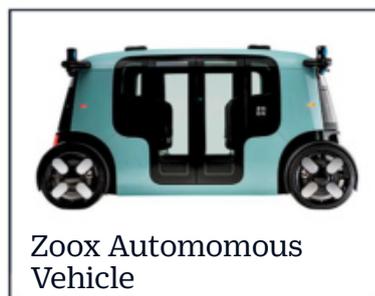
why we’re special. We can’t figure it out, so we’ve gone so far as creating something that’s so much like us that it might kill us, to see if we can figure out what makes us human. It’s such a weird Greek tragedy.

You’ve directed, produced, written, acted in every genre, worked in podcasting and animation. Is there a place where you feel creatively most at home? When I get to write with [writing partner] Will McCormack, immediately it feels like home, because we’ve been friends for 25 years. It’s like the coziest couch that ever was. The last couple things I’ve done have not felt like home, and I purposely pushed myself. I also feel very at home sitting at the monitor, whether in a writing or producing or directing capacity, and seeing the thing come to life. You know when something doesn’t quite work. And when an actor really has a great moment, you’re there to see it.

In this age of reboots, is there a project you would want to revisit? Actually, three. *Parks and Recreation* was the best job that ever was. We’re still super close, and everybody would be so excited—it just has to be right, and has to come from Mike [Schur] and Amy [Poehler]. *I Love You, Man* was so much fun, but we might be too old. People might not care. And *Celeste & Jesse Forever*. Will and I have talked about some sort of spiritual sequel because it defined an era of relationship, and now we’re in a different era we have a lot to say about—kids, marriage, staring down the barrel of your back half.

Sequels get a bad rap, but they really do justify their existence sometimes. It’s a great joy. All you’re trying to do as a writer is get to know the characters, and you never have enough time. —ELIZA BERMAN

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