TIME

‘All we have left is fear’

The U.S. was the largest humanitarian supporter of the Afghan people. Then the funding was slashed

by **ELISE BLANCHARD**

Mariam, 24, sits next to her 4-month-old baby Reza. In April, the only health facility in her village closed because of U.S. aid cuts. For half the year, when the roads are blocked by snow, they are entirely cut off from health care options

TIME
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Zahra, 11, plays near almond trees in Melmastok, Afghanistan

Photograph by Elise Blanchard for TIME

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The people behind AI

The direction AI travels will be determined not by machines but by people

TODAY WE PUBLISH THE THIRD EDITION OF the TIME100 AI, our annual look at the most influential people in artificial intelligence. We launched this list in 2023, in the wake of OpenAI's release of ChatGPT, the moment many became aware of AI's potential to compete with and exceed the capabilities of humans. Our aim was to show how the direction AI travels will be determined not by machines but by people—innovators, advocates, artists, and everyone with a stake in the future of this technology. Our aspiration for TIME is to be your trusted guide through this transformation.

This year's list further confirms our focus on people. One of the dominant AI storylines of 2025 has been the competition over people. Investors have poured hundreds of millions into startups, reflecting the perceived value of founders, and leaders of Big Tech firms like Meta's Mark Zuckerberg have reportedly offered nine-figure deals to attract prized technologists. Those hires, accompanied by frenzied rumors, have turned the once obscure competition over AI researchers into something that better resembles professional sports free agency. The stakes for beating the competition are so high that leading researchers are courted like NBA All-Stars. (Two of Zuckerberg's noteworthy hires, Alexandr Wang and Nat Friedman, join him on the 2025 TIME100 AI.)

Matthew Prince, Lyonne, Joanne Jang, and Russell are on this year's list

Since we began the TIME100 AI, spending on AI-related technologies has accelerated, becoming a key driver of the global economy. Whether this is for better or for worse it is too soon to tell, but investment in computer-processing equipment is growing at nearly four times the rate of GDP. Computer scientist and 2025 honoree Stuart Russell estimates that the current planned expenditure could be 25 times the amount spent on the Manhattan Project, even adjusting for inflation. This is a historic deployment of capital, and the decisions on how to spend it are being made by many of the individuals who join the TIME100 AI community this year, including Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, xAI founder Elon Musk, White House AI Czar David Sacks, and the E.U.'s Henna Virkkunen.

Also in this issue, we show how these individuals' decisions are transforming not just the technology industry but also how we live and potentially how wars will be won. Justin Worland and photographer Elliot Ross traveled to Atlanta to show how the physical spaces like data centers, which make AI possible, are stressing our energy grids. And Billy Perrigo reports from Paris on the geopolitical calculations and risks that accompany the competition for achieving artificial general intelligence.

THE AI INDUSTRY is changing rapidly. (Only 16 TIME100 AI honorees appeared previously on the list, which was overseen by Ayesha Javed.) As AI's entry into our lives has quickened, so has the volume increased of voices warning about its developments. Those voices are recognized too in this year's list, including Pope Leo XIV, researcher Yoshua Bengio, and French Minister Clara Chappaz. It also includes artists venturing to the frontiers of what is possible, and what happens when humans and AI work together, like Refik Anadol, who created this issue's cover image, and actor Natasha Lyonne. "I understand the spark that AI invokes in people. Life is scary," Lyonne told TIME. "The fact of the matter is that it's upon us. Best we dive in, I think."

We are diving in at TIME too. In addition to the TIME100 AI community, we're growing a team of reporters dedicated to covering the people and ideas powering AI. Part of their work can be found in a new newsletter, authored by Perrigo and Andrew R. Chow, called In the Loop. We're also experimenting with how AI can improve our distribution of TIME's coverage. Our partnerships with AI companies like OpenAI have helped make TIME one of the most cited sources of information on platforms like ChatGPT. And this summer, in partnership with Scale AI, we launched our first AI audio briefings. Soon, we look forward to debuting the TIME AI Agent, which will create the most interactive and personalized reading experience ever for TIME's trusted reporting.

Sam Jacobs,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PRINCE: DINA LITOVSKY; LYONNE AND JANG: COURTESY PHOTOS; RUSSELL: NOAH BERGER

On the covers

Photograph by Elise Blanchard for TIME

Photograph by Dina Litovsky for TIME

Photo-illustration by Refik Anadol for TIME

Behind the cover

To create this year's TIME100 AI cover, artist Refik Anadol fine-tuned his studio's AI system on an archive containing each of TIME's more than 5,000 covers to date, spanning over 100 years. The resulting abstract visualization—featuring Anadol's signature flowing, molecular aesthetic—represents the AI "dreaming" about a century of TIME's visual history. Following the success of his 2022 MOMA exhibition, which attracted 3 million people, Anadol aims to offer a hopeful vision. "The future is not a fixed destination to be afraid of, but a fluid reality we can actually shape," he tells TIME.

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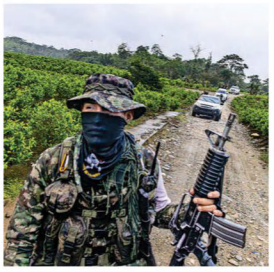
TIME's Impact Leadership Forum and dinner

TIME's Impact Leadership Forum took place on Aug. 7 on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. It opened with a discussion on intergenerational collaboration, featuring *(above left, from left)* panelists María Teresa Kumar of Voto Latino; progressive activist David Hogg; and Carla Thompson Payton of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which sponsored the event; and TIME senior correspondent Alice Park. At the dinner, *black-ish* star Yara Shahidi *(above right)* gave a toast urging attendees to always ask tough questions. Read more at **time.com/impact-leadership-forum**



Documenting Colombia's guerrillas

Negotiations for "total peace" between Gustavo Petro's Colombian government and armed groups that control production of cocaine's main ingredient are entering crunch time. In TIME's *State of Coca*, journalists with the organization Amazon Underworld travel to the rainforest to speak with leaders of Comandos de la Frontera about how the conflict could end. Watch at **time.com/state-of-coca**

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COLOMBIA: TOM LAFFAY FOR TIME

The Brief

PUTIN'S BRUSH-OFF

BY SIMON SHUSTER

The Kremlin appears in no rush to negotiate peace with Ukraine—despite Trump's efforts

INSIDE

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS

IT WAS AROUND MIDNIGHT IN MOSCOW WHEN Vladimir Putin took a call from the White House. President Donald Trump had just spent several hours, on Aug. 18, in meetings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and seven other leaders from Europe who had come along in a frantic effort to shore up U.S. support for the Ukrainian position. Now Trump was telling Putin about what he believed needed to be the next step: the leaders of the warring sides, Trump said, should meet in person and try to make progress toward peace. Putin seemed to have other plans.

After the call, the Kremlin issued a mealymouthed statement, suggesting that it might be worth "exploring the possibility of raising the level of representatives" in future peace talks. Whatever that means, it seemed a long way from accepting Trump's suggestion that Putin himself sit down with Zelensky.

On other points, too, the Russians reverted to their familiar methods of wartime diplomacy: making threats, issuing demands, and playing for time.

The threats from Moscow became especially aggressive when it came to the central questions of the closely watched talks at the White House: If a peace agreement were reached, how could it be secured? Who would guarantee that peace? And by what means?

On these points, Trump seemed to move closer to the position of his European allies. "We'll help them out with that," he said during his press conference with Zelensky at the start of the marathon talks. "We will give them very good protection, very good security." He even said the protections would be "NATO-like," echoing the promises of several European members of the NATO alliance, who have expressed a willingness to secure any future peace deal in Ukraine using their own troops.

Those statements began to approach what President Zelensky has long been seeking: a clear commitment from the U.S. and its allies that they would step in to defend Ukraine from any future Russian invasion. Without such a commitment from his allies, Zelensky has argued, Ukraine cannot agree to any peace deal, because it would be based on little more than Putin's word. Trump's promise to "help out" with the future defense of Ukraine seemed like a tentative but tangible step on the path to real security guarantees.

It was enough to provoke a furious response from Moscow. In another statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that any scenario involving NATO troops coming to Ukraine's defense in the future would risk "an uncontrolled escalation of the conflict with unpredictable consequences." Any firm attempt to secure the peace, in other words, would only deepen the war.

THAT WARNING DID NOT leave Trump with any clear options for advancing the peace process beyond the latest stage of Russian obstructionism. In his concluding statement, after at least five hours of talks with the visiting leaders from Europe, Trump said he "began the arrangements for a meeting" between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. But he did not say Putin had agreed to participate. On the crucial question of security guarantees for Ukraine, Trump also sounded a lot more circumspect as the long day of negotiations wound down. "We discussed Security Guarantees for Ukraine, which Guarantees would be provided by the various European Countries, with a coordination with the United States of America."

This sounded a lot less convincing than Trump's suggestion earlier in the day that Ukraine would receive a "NATO-like" commitment to its security.

But, given the pushback he got from the Kremlin, Trump did not have room to promise much more. After his summit with Putin in Alaska on Aug. 15, he had already set aside his main source of leverage over the Russians—the threat of sanctions and tariffs that could weaken Putin's economy. "We don't have to think about that right now," Trump remarked at the time.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio later confirmed that the threat of sanctions against Russia was off the table for now. "I don't think new sanctions on Russia are going to force them to accept ceasefire," Rubio said on NBC's *Meet the Press* on Aug. 17. But Trump may have no other means of bringing Russia's leaders to the negotiating table.

Their intent to continue the war in Ukraine has come through loud and clear in their statements and, in one case, their fashion choices. Arriving for the summit with Trump in Alaska, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had the letters USSR written across the front of his sweater. He later insisted on Russian state TV that there was "nothing imperialistic" about the message. But when asked about Putin's readiness to meet with Zelensky, the minister deflected. Any such summit, Lavrov said, would need to be organized "step by step, gradually, starting with the expert level and going through all the necessary stages." Russia, in other words, is in no hurry to talk about peace. Unless Trump changes that dynamic—and reviving the threat of economic sanctions is his best option for doing that—the status quo seems unlikely to change anytime soon. ◻

'We will give them very good protection, very good security.'

—PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP
ON HOW THE U.S. COULD SUPPORT UKRAINE

The Brief includes reporting by Chantelle Lee, Tharin Pillay, Simmone Shah, and Olivia B. Waxman

Mourning in Gaza

Mourners carry the body of Anas al-Sharif at his funeral in Gaza City on Aug. 11. The Al Jazeera correspondent—whom Israel had called a terrorist, without providing evidence—was killed along with several of his colleagues in an airstrike on a tent housing journalists and media workers; nearly 200 members of the press have been killed in the conflict, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

OPENING PAGE: AFP/GETTY IMAGES; GAZA: JEHAD ALSHRAFI—AP

THE BULLETIN

ICE 'Lone Star Lockup' mega detention facility opens

A DETENTION CENTER POISED TO become the largest of its kind in the U.S. opened on a military base in El Paso, Texas, on Aug. 17. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said it was an effort to "decompress ICE detention facilities in other regions." More than $1 billion will be invested in the Fort Bliss center to expand its current 1,000-bed capacity to 5,000. Dubbed Lone Star Lockup, its opening is part of the Trump Administration's effort to use U.S. military bases and personnel to enforce immigration rules.

INFRASTRUCTURE BOOM A Washington *Post* report found that ICE plans to add more than 41,000 detention beds in 2025, nearly doubling its capacity from the start of the year, to "deliver on the American people's mandate for mass deportations," Assistant Homeland Security Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement to TIME. Funding comes from the One Big Beautiful Bill, which included the largest detention and deportation investment in U.S. history, per the American Immigration Council. Passed in July, the bill allocated $45 billion for immigration detention—a 265% increase to ICE's detention budget. Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem is exploring purchasing a fleet of airliners for deportations, rather than chartering flights, NBC News reported on Aug. 20.

CHECKERED HISTORY Fort Bliss served as a Japanese internment camp during World War II and more recently as an emergency shelter for thousands of unaccompanied migrant children during the Obama and Biden administrations. In 2021, two federal employees filed a whistle-blower complaint alleging mismanagement of childcare and public-health and safety concerns.

RIGHTS CONCERNS Immigrants'-rights advocates cited desert temperatures, and an isolation "designed to break people down, strip away hope, and pressure them into giving up their cases," wrote the ACLU's Haddy Gassama. The megafacility opened despite the El Paso County Commission unanimously passing a resolution in early August opposing it. Republican Senator John Cornyn of Texas countered the criticisms, calling the center "humane"and "safe."

—SOLCYRÉ BURGA

GOOD QUESTION

Why are so many women leaving the workforce?

BY ALANA SEMUELS

212,000. THAT'S HOW MANY WOMEN AGES 20 AND OVER have left the U.S. workforce since January, according to the most recent jobs numbers released Aug. 1 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. (By contrast, 44,000 men of the same age have entered the workforce since January.) The numbers are especially stark for women with children. From January to June, the labor-force participation rate of women ages 25 to 44 living with a child under 5 fell nearly 3 percentage points, from 69.7% to 66.9%, says Misty Lee Heggeness, an associate professor of economics and public affairs at the University of Kansas.

It's a big reversal. The participation of those women had soared in 2022, 2023, and 2024, peaking in January 2025, as flexible work policies helped women join the workforce and generate much-needed income for their families. This year, workers have seen flexibility revoked on a large scale. President Donald Trump ordered federal employees back to the office five days a week in January, and Amazon, JPMorgan, and AT&T also returned to five-day-a-week policies in 2025. Overall, full-time in-office requirements among *Fortune* 500 companies jumped to 24% in the second quarter of 2025, up from 13% at the end of 2024, according to the Flex Index, which tracks remote-work policies.

It's not a coincidence that women's participation in the workforce is falling as flexibility disappears, says Julie Vogtman, senior director of job quality for the National Women's Law Center. Women capitalized on remote work and flexibility during the pandemic and stopped exiting the labor force, research shows. Now, many are not able to do so.

"Women still take on the lion's share of caregiving responsibilities, and they are more likely than men to be navigating how to meet those caregiving responsibilities while holding down a job," she says. "They are also more likely than men to feel that they have to leave the workforce when their balancing act becomes unmanageable."

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF FLEXIBILITY is not the only reason women are leaving the workforce in 2025. Some of the decline in participation comes because federal dollars for childcare have declined significantly in 2025. That money helped many centers stay open and charge lower tuition than they otherwise would have. The federal funding helped some providers keep their costs down; now, childcare expenses are rising again. "You have a population of working women who are finding it increasingly difficult to make the math work," Vogtman says.

'Women still take on the lion's share of caregiving.'

—JULIE VOGTMAN, NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

As women leave the workforce, the Trump Administration is exploring ways to encourage women to slow the country's decline in birth rate. But Heggeness says the return-to-office policies may be making some women put off having children.

"What they are doing right now, with the return-to-work policies and their leading by example, is the exact opposite of what you'd want to be doing from a policy perspective if you really care about increasing birth rates," Heggeness says.

There are bigger reasons to be concerned about women leaving the workforce. Without two incomes, many families struggle to afford basics like housing, food, and transportation; they have less money to spend, which means less money circulating in the economy. Economic growth has slowed in the first half of the year; in the long term, slowing growth worsens people's standard of living.

For many women, this is more than an economic problem: it's a depressing reminder that the brief period of time when work-from-home reigned—when balancing family and work was actually sometimes possible—is over.

Big picture, women's labor-force participation has stalled in the U.S. in recent decades, peaking in the early 2000s even as it rose in many countries in Europe. But then, during the pandemic, rates started rising again, as women could handle caregiving responsibilities while working from home.

"When I hear about these companies making everyone go back to the office, the most normal situation is it's being ordered by some old white male person with what I call care privilege," says Heggeness. "Which is that they have someone who cooks their meals, irons their clothes, or picks their kids up from day care." ◻

THIS PAGE: PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY TIME; (SOURCE IMAGES: BILLION PHOTOS VIA CANVA); LOVELL: NASA ARCHIVE/ALAMY; STAMP: EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES; COLLIER: ERIC GAY—AP

DIED

Jim Lovell

The hard-luck moon man

IT IS ONE OF HISTORY'S great injustices that circumstance denied Jim Lovell the moon. Once the most experienced man in spaceflight—with two trips in the Gemini program and two lunar missions in Apollo—Lovell, who died Aug. 7 at age 97, went places few others have gone and saw things few others had seen. But he never had the opportunity to get his white, NASA-issued moon boots dirty with gray lunar soil.

Lovell is best remembered, of course, not for those two Gemini missions, which he flew in Earth orbit, or even for the Apollo 8 mission, which saw him and crewmates Frank Borman and Bill Anders become the first humans to orbit the moon, on Christmas Eve 1968. What he is best known for is Apollo 13, a mission he commanded in April 1970, which was intended to be America's third lunar landing—until an explosion in one of the lunar orbiter's oxygen tanks crippled the spacecraft, forcing the crew to use their flimsy lunar module as a lifeboat and paddle their way back to Earth.

"Houston, we've had a problem," Lovell famously intoned in the moments after the explosion, reporting the incident as if it were nothing more troubling than the family car running out of windshield-washer fluid. It was that preternatural cool that enabled Lovell to turn what might easily have been a fatal accident into one of NASA's greatest tales of ingenuity and survival.

Lovell made peace with his place in space history, never raising his hand for a third try at the moon—lest he deny a seat to other astronauts still competing for limited spots on limited flights. And he would not subject his wife Marilyn—whom the exploding oxygen tank nearly widowed—to one more launch, one more mission, one more roll of the mortal dice.

Apollo 13, Lovell liked to say, was a "successful failure." America ultimately came to see it as an unalloyed triumph. Lovell, as commander, was the author of that story.

—JEFFREY KLUGER

DIED

Terence Stamp

Smoldering actor

British actor and memoirist Terence Stamp died on Aug. 17 at age 87, leaving behind "an extraordinary body of work, both as an actor and as a writer that will continue to touch and inspire people for years to come," his family said in a statement.

Stamp first gained global renown with his performance in *Billy Budd* (1962), for which he earned a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination. As his fame soared in the 1960s he was in the mix to lead the James Bond franchise.

Later, Stamp was most recognized for portraying villain General Zod in *Superman* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980) as well as for starring in the 1994 cult classic *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

—Chad de Guzman

CAMPED

Democratic state **representative Nicole Collier** *(right)*, in the Texas Capitol starting Aug. 18, in a protest against state Republicans' effort to pass a redrawn congressional map.

RETURNED

Pierre Poilievre, leader of Canada's Conservatives, to Parliament in a by-election, after the shocking April loss of a seat he had held for 21 years.

SENTENCED

Hip-hop artist **Sean Kingston,** to 3½ years in prison on Aug. 15, after being convicted in a federal fraud case involving luxury merchandise.

DISCONTINUED

AOL's dial-up internet service and its associated software, by Sept. 30. The company announced the move on its help portal on Aug. 8.

KILLED

At least 277 people during a weekend of **flash flooding** in Pakistan, the Associated Press reported on Aug. 18. About 150 people were still missing.

Boots on the ground

D.C. National Guard troops congregate near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 17. President Donald Trump announced on Aug. 11 that the federal government was temporarily taking control of the city's police force, and that he was deploying the National Guard on the streets of the nation's capital. Trump cited violent crime as justification for the move—which is a rare and controversial exercise of presidential power—even though data show that violent crime is down in the city.

Photograph by Julia Demaree Nikhinson—AP

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POLICE
NO PARKING
NO STOPPING OR STANDING ANY TIME
U.S. ARMY

5 ways to make small talk when you have social anxiety

BY ANGELA HAUPT

WHEN YOU HAVE SOCIAL ANXIETY, WALKING INTO A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE every eyeball in the place is boring directly into your soul, and that nothing you say will possibly be smart or funny or coherent enough. That can trigger an array of physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms. "For some people, it might mean a racing heart and dizziness and feeling flushed," says Kirsten Hall-Baldwin, a licensed clinical professional counselor in Chicago. "Others might be in these thought spirals, or feel like their mind is going blank or freezing." Hall-Baldwin coaches her anxious clients to create a coping plan: a proactive list of strategies and techniques that can help temper their unease. Here, she and other experts share tips on how to carry a conversation when you have social anxiety.

1. Practice in low-stakes settings

Before showing up at a networking event or your 10-year high school reunion, try making conversation with baristas, waiters, neighbors, or co-workers. These short interactions can be a low-pressure way to build self-esteem. "Smaller, manageable social interactions don't carry as much emotional weight," Hall-Baldwin says. "There isn't necessarily a goal of having a deeply meaningful conversation, so it's just trying to practice without feeling overwhelming pressure." Over time, you'll gain a sense of comfort and confidence as you venture into larger social settings.

2. Script some go-to phrases

Come up with and rehearse two or three simple conversation starters you can employ when your brain starts sputtering. That way, "you'll have something in your back pocket to continue the conversation," says Caroline Fenkel, chief clinical officer with the virtual mental-health platform Charlie Health. "You can keep it going without having to freeze and leave to go to the bathroom." One of her favorites: "That's really interesting—tell me more about that." If you love traveling, ask people if they've gone on any recent vacations, or if you're a foodie, find out if your conversation partner has tried any great new restaurants.

3. Use the echo technique

One of the best habits for someone with social anxiety is paraphrasing what the other person said and then encouraging them to elaborate. For example, if they mention they're struggling at work, repeat back their words with a question in your voice: "Struggling?" They'll most likely launch into an explanation of what's giving them a hard time. "People want to feel heard," Hall-Baldwin says. "A lot of the time, just showing attentiveness can encourage the other person to keep sharing—and that takes some of the pressure off you to feel like you have to come up with original responses."

4. Find an anchor

Holding a cold drink, touching an object like a fidget toy, or simply pressing your feet into the floor can give your nervous system something to anchor to when you're feeling anxious. Research suggests it can bounce you back to the present moment and curb feelings of anxiety. "It helps signal to your brain: I'm safe," Fenkel says. When she does public speaking engagements, she puts a worry stone into her pocket, which is a smooth, oval-shaped gem with a thumbprint-like indentation. "Every time I get nervous, I just touch it," she says. Doing so creates a physical sensation of security that propels her to the finish line.

5. Have an exit strategy ready

The good news about social events is that they all eventually end—and your departure can arrive as soon as you'd like. You might feel better if you let your friends know from the start that you have an early morning and will be able to stay only until a certain time, or make it clear that you have an afternoon appointment that will keep brunch from turning into dinner. It's also a good idea to brainstorm a few ways to politely wrap up conversations, Hall-Baldwin says. For example: "It was really nice talking to you—I'm going to check in with Jane." Doing so can help reduce anxiety about feeling trapped in a conversation, she says.

NISERIN/GETTY IMAGES

The View

POLITICS

POOR VOTE, SWING VOTE

BY WILLIAM J. BARBER II AND JONATHAN WILSON-HARTGROVE

On the one hand, this is the worst of times: power is concentrated in the hands of people who pray at the opening of Congress, then prey on the people they swore an oath to serve. But a close look at voter demographics suggests that a small percentage of poor voters who understand what they are losing have the potential to upend American politics.

INSIDE

Workers protest proposed Medicaid cuts near the U.S. Capitol on June 23 in Washington, D.C. Trump signed the budget bill, and cuts, into law in July

Over the past four decades, as inequality has grown exponentially for all Americans, the number of poor and low-income white people—66 million in 2018—has swelled higher than any other demographic. This is one reason low-income, majority-white communities became susceptible to the "populist" appeal of the MAGA movement. If white people are hurting, the divide-and-conquer myth suggests, it must be because Black people or immigrants are taking from them. By leaning into an aggressive investment in extreme ICE raids, President Donald Trump's Administration has bet the farm on this myth.

But the reality of American politics is that despite these appeals, most poor people don't vote against their own interests. While Trump improved in 2024 among low-income voters who cast a ballot in the election, new data from Lake Research Associates makes clear that the real change was in the number of poor and low-income people who decided not to vote in the race between Trump and Kamala Harris. More than 19 million who helped elect President Joe Biden in 2020 didn't show up in 2024. Nearly a third said their No. 1 reason for not voting was that they didn't feel as if the Democrats' message spoke to their economic situation.

Poor people are not driving the extremism in American politics, nor are they the true base for Trump, whose major policy achievement has been to cut government programs that serve everyday people so he can give tax breaks to corporations and wealthy Americans. Poor and low-income Americans are, in fact, the largest swing vote in the country. We need a movement to engage poor people who haven't voted because they've never imagined the system could work for them. As they begin to feel the impact of the cuts from Trump's big budget bill, poor and low-income people must organize to demand candidates who will represent them.

Movements that bring poor people together across lines of race and region can build on America's history of moral fusion movements to strengthen democracy for all of us. In our book *White Poverty,* we wrote about how the 2018 midterms saw a roughly 10% increase in voter participation over the previous midterms—a larger four-year increase than the one that led to Barack Obama's record-breaking turnout in 2008. Many factors contributed to this surge in participation, but a raw number increase in low-income voters made a significant contribution to the "blue wave" that returned control of the U.S. House to Democrats in 2018 and put a check on Trump's use of the White House to reward elite interests and undermine policies that lift poor people in 2020.

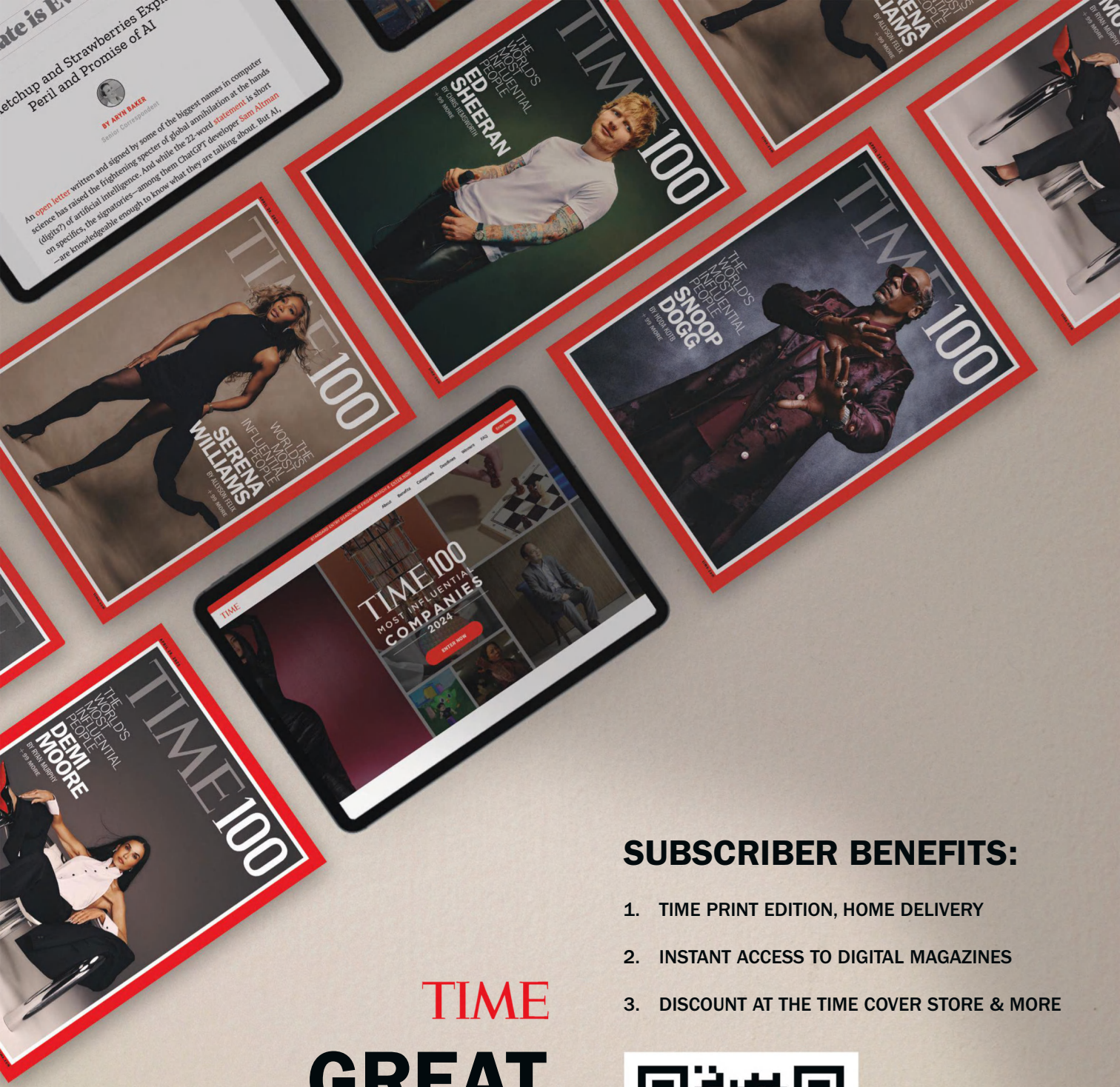
A MOVEMENT CAN CHANGE how candidates talk and what agenda they promise to pursue when elected. Democrats need a new wave of leadership that not only articulates a vision for how government can serve everyday people, but also demonstrates that they are committed to use executive action, change courts, and use power to win policies that lift from the bottom so everyone can rise.

If a moral fusion movement, led by poor and low-income people, can rise up in America today, we have the numbers to change the political conversation. This is why we have launched Moral Mondays across the South in districts that will be hurt first and worst by cuts to health care, and organized people who will be directly affected to speak directly to their representatives with clergy and moral leaders by their side. A movement led by these people, linking arms across racial lines and joining hands with progressive allies, could decide not only the presidential elections, but also many congressional and statewide races.

Poor and low-income people make up a third of the U.S. electorate—more than 40% of the electorate in the swing states that will decide the 2026 midterms. It's time for poor people of every race to reject the myths that have been used to divide us and come together to demand an economy that works for all of us. Such a movement isn't only good news for the poor. It's the best hope for American democracy.

Barber is president of Repairers of the Breach and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign. Wilson-Hartgrove is author of Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good

JOE RAEDLE—GETTY IMAGES



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WORLD

In exile, I lost India but gained a home

BY AATISH TASEER

The author at his desk in New Delhi in 2014

ON NOV. 7, 2019, THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi revoked my Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI), effectively banning me from the country I grew up in. India was where my mother and grandmother lived. Where four out of my five books of fiction and nonfiction were set. Where I had returned after college in the U.S. with the aim of being "an Indian writer."

The government alleged I had concealed that my father was Pakistani. It was a surprising accusation. My first book—*Stranger to History: A Son's Journey Through Islamic Lands,* which was published in 2009—dealt extensively with my relationship to my absent father and my rediscovery of him. I had written countless articles on the subject, not to mention that my father was a public figure. In 2011, as governor of Punjab, Pakistan's largest province, he was assassinated by his own bodyguard for defending a Christian woman accused of blasphemy. His killing was on the front page of the New York *Times.*

None of this affected my position in India, where I lived for over 30 years. I became "Pakistani" the day I wrote a story for the cover of TIME titled INDIA'S DIVIDER IN CHIEF, which appeared in 2019, in the run-up to Modi's reelection. Modi's army of internet trolls came after me with threats, abuse, and digital vandalism. Then Modi himself spoke: "TIME Magazine is foreign. The writer has also said he comes from a Pakistani political family. That is enough for his credibility."

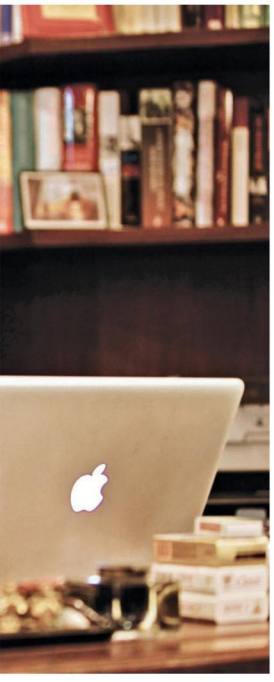
After that, I was on borrowed time.

THERE IS SOMETHING DEBILITATING about losing one's country. It is so intimately tied up with our sense of self that we don't know how fundamental it is till it's gone. "I do not 'love' Germany," wrote Sebastian Haffner in 1939 in *Defying Hitler* soon after leaving Nazi Germany for Britain, "just as I do not 'love' myself." But "one's country," he continued, "plays a different and far more indispensable role than that of a mistress; it is just one's country. If one loses it, one almost loses the right to love any other country."

My relationship to India was instinctive. It formed the understructure of my creative life, a kind of zero point from which I measured my distance to all other places. I could enumerate the reasons why I was Indian, but the beauty of belonging is that it is unspoken. To make the case for why one belongs is, as with certain fundamental rights, to articulate what one never meant to surrender.

I was the result of a love affair between an Indian journalist and a Pakistani politician. The affair (and my birth out of wedlock) shocked my conservative Sikh grandparents. Yet my maternal grandparents embraced me and my mother soon after my father abandoned us. It was my Nani who brought me on her back to India when I was 2 and her unquestioning love that instilled in me my sense of place and belonging. Modi's action against me felt like a betrayal of that love. Her husband, my grandfather, was an officer in the Indian army and had fought against Pakistan in two wars. I thought of how outraged she would be to learn that the child who had grown up in her house had been recast as an enemy alien. She died last year, in 2024, with me unable to see her in her final years.

India is lost to me in one sense—I cannot go home—but it is lost to countless others in another, more important sense too. In India, the demands of blood and soil are now pitted against the exalted idea of a more secular country. India's founders, after the country's 1947 Partition along religious lines, were determined never to let it become a "Hindu Pakistan." Its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned India as a palimpsest, where "layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer has completely hidden or erased what has been written previously." For men like Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi, the modern nation was to be a repository of the dizzying



PLATFORM/COURTESY AATISH TASEER

multiplicity of cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities that had permeated Indian soil for 5,000 years. India was a collage of states, each the size of a large European country, with languages, scripts, and literatures of its own. It was held together not by the domination of a single group, but rather by its asymmetries. "The centrifugal forces of India are old and powerful," wrote the Mexican writer Octavio Paz in *In Light of India.* "They have not destroyed the country because, without intending to, they have neutralized one another."

Beneath this great Indian variety, there lay an underlying unity—India was 85% Hindu—but it was interestingly not a homogeneity. It was something that had never fully been exploited for political purposes, in part because it was felt that India's Hindus had more in common with their regional Muslim and Christian counterparts—of whom there are some 170 million and 28 million, respectively—than they did with each other. The idea of a Hindu vote, like a white vote in the U.S., was regarded as something of a chimera.

This is simply no longer true. Modi's triumph, as a politician, is that he has been able to galvanize India's roughly 1 billion Hindus behind the notion of India as a holy land. Long before Donald Trump and his MAGA acolytes, Modi understood how the primal power of blood could be deployed against the delicate bloom of ideas and abstractions. His success at remaking India as an ethnonational entity has left many who believed in Nehru and Gandhi's vision of India as what used to be described in the Soviet era as internal émigrés—those who were physically present but culturally exiled.

"EXILE IS A WRITER'S NATURAL STATE," the author Jeet Thayil told the Indian press when asked about what the Indian government had done to me. It is a romantic idea, bringing to mind so many writers and painters, from James, Nabokov, and Joyce to Goya, Chagall, and Dalí, who were fed as artists by the experience—now imposed, now voluntary—of not being able to return home. But for each of these artists, there are countless others who lack the inner resources needed to be away so long from their friends and family—not to say, their material—and for whom exile is arid and sterile. "It cannot be said that they prospered here," writes Hisham Matar in his novel *My Friends,* describing the state of Arab intelligentsia in the U.K. "If anything, they withered, grew old and tired. London was, in a way, where Arab writers came to die."

I was not sure what exile would do to me, but, as the reality of not being able to go home set in, an unexpected emotion crept over me: relief. The burden of trying to fit into India, of forever apologizing for its shortcomings, apologizing for my own westernization, was suddenly lifted from me.

In India, the demands of blood and soil are now pitted against the exalted idea of a more secular country

My husband, whom I met in New York in the summer of 2014, after the election that brought Modi to power, remembers how strenuous my assertions of belonging were at the time. The more I stressed my Indianness, the more he doubted it was real. As someone who had grown up in evangelical Tennessee and come to live on the East Coast, he was suspicious of claims of authenticity, whether they be of the "real" India or the "real" America. "Don't forget," he once told me of his folks back home, "that as much as we live in a bubble here, they live in a bubble too."

The demands of belonging that India made on me must have been hard on my husband. Not just my absences, but also my need to forever balance two societies in my head. I remember him asking me once to "unpack"—to not live as if my life in America were provisional.

Then suddenly, one day, I woke up to find it was the only life I had. Once India closed behind me, I felt strangely free. I felt my old curiosities return, many of which I had discarded in order to better belong in India. I could revel, for instance, in my love of the English language, the locus of so much postcolonial anxiety in India, without fearing that I was somehow letting down the side.

The West, in turn, was no longer some dirty secret that I could enjoy only at the detriment of the "real" India. After all the wringing of wrists, the stewing over questions of place, of feeling myself forever betwixt and between, I found I was easier in my own skin. I no longer felt answerable to an imagined country out there whose claims on "realness" exceeded my own. My circumstances had forced a natural cosmopolitanism on me, and I was not prepared to sacrifice that for anyone. I was home.

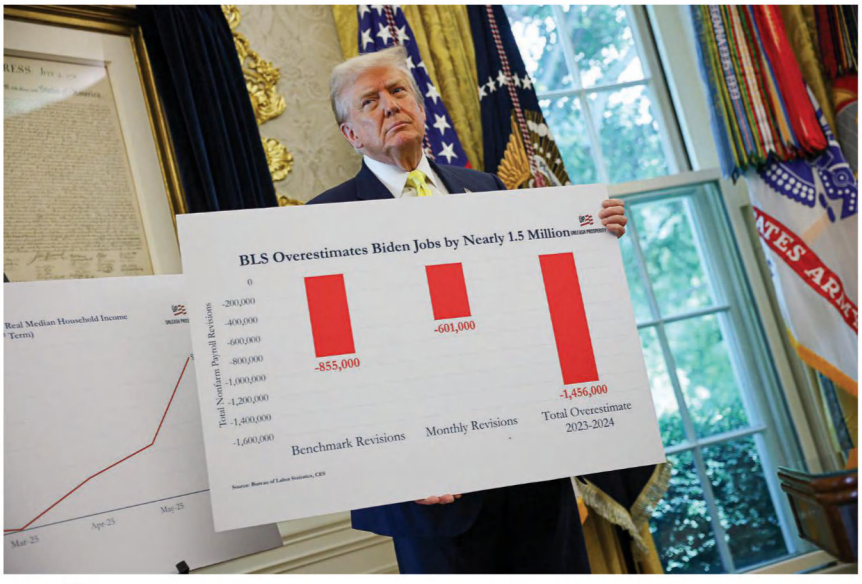
Health Matters
By Jeffrey Kluger
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

The idea of sleeping on a problem and seeing if you can get some clarity in the morning is a common one, but is it scientifically sound? A growing body of research says yes.

The latest is a small study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*. A group of 25 people did a memorization task while wired up so the researchers could monitor which portions of their brains lit up as they worked. Everyone then took an afternoon nap, with brain sensors still in place. The researchers were looking for bursts of activity that occur in the brain during a relatively light stage of sleep. It was especially high in the same areas of the brain that were used in the memorization task, and the greater the activity, the more **people improved at the task when they tried it after the nap.**

Alyssa Sinclair, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, found something similar in a study published last year. After sleeping on a difficult task, people were more levelheaded the next day. "When we waited, when we let them sleep on it, they made somewhat more rational choices," she says. This is due largely to the region of the brain known as the hippocampus, which is responsible for processing short-term memories and, during sleep, helping to determine which of those memories will be transferred to long-term storage and which will essentially be deleted.

"When we're asleep," says Sinclair, "the hippocampus is hard at work, consolidating those memories and experiences from throughout the day. It does this by replaying things that were important and pruning away the things that weren't."



The D.C. Brief
By Philip Elliott
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

IN NORMAL TIMES, THE FIRST Friday of the month brings a routine tranche of government data known as the monthly jobs report. The markets react, the politicians preen, and most Americans go about their day.

But these are not normal times, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics is no longer in the safe zone of nonpartisanship thanks to President Donald Trump's decision to can its chief because he didn't like the math. On Aug. 1, Trump summarily fired BLS commissioner Erika McEntarfer after her team of stats mavens revised downward the job numbers for May and June. Trump decided the revisions were an effort to embarrass him and stoked conspiracy theories of rigged spreadsheets. It was the equivalent of firing a National Weather Service meteorologist because he spotted a hurricane and said something about it.

This is about much more than a head count of Americans showing up to work. The BLS, an independent shop inside the Department of Labor that's run by a Senate-confirmed geek, is a warehouse of quants whose products shape everything from interest rates and investment payouts to strategic decisions made by individual businesses. The BLS is an army of 2,000 nerds whose huge—but quiet—sway over the global economy is based in large part on the confidence that they don't cook the books.

On Sept. 5, the federal government is scheduled to release its first jobs report since Trump fired McEntarfer. The reaction to those numbers is likely to be colored by her dismissal. If, say, the report shows hiring surged in August, will investors even believe it?

Trump's predecessors largely prioritized stability over showmanship, understanding the importance of projecting a steady hand from Washington since World War II reset the

'Good data . . . also helps the private sector.'
—FED CHAIR JAY POWELL

President Trump in the Oval Office on Aug. 7

global order. Many of Trump's capricious choices—from his trade- and tariff-war tantrums to his repeatedly threatening to fire the Federal Reserve chairman—are undermining that perception. Many global leaders now see U.S. influence as shrinking, as so many of the country's decisions seem to have no obvious aim other than serving Trump's lust for chaos and affirmation.

Around Washington, the daily whiplash has become routine. But the BLS shift is something new. Even though Presidents might not always like the report that crosses their desk each month, they could have confidence that they were getting an as-accurate-as-possible snapshot of the economy. The same can be said for Wall Street, which counts on the ledger to be an apolitical indicator.

"Good data helps not just the Fed, it helps the government, but it also helps the private sector," said Fed Chair Jay Powell two days before McEntarfer was sacked. "The United States has been a leader in that for 100 years."

Trump's impetuous act constitutes a huge risk, one that historically has never worked out. The Greek debt crisis that began in 2009 was the result of a Potemkin set of books; Argentina's 2001 default on international loans was the by-product of fictional inflation numbers. In 1937, Joseph Stalin had his census chief shot and killed when his numbers contradicted what the Soviet leader had advertised. The unflattering numbers were buried in the Soviet archives until 1989.

Trump has long fetishized such strongman bravado, but he also craves the approval of Wall Street, which has a thing for accurate, stable, and honest data, an indispensable service that Washington produced for decades with little drama.

WIN MCNAMEE—GETTY IMAGES

TIME CO_2 Leadership Report

By Justin Worland

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

IT'S HARD TO THINK OF A POLICY move that could more directly target the core of climate science than the Trump Administration's July 29 decision to undo the Environmental Protection Agency's Endangerment Finding. Reached by the EPA in 2009, it outlines how greenhouse-gas emissions threaten public health and welfare—thereby laying out the legal basis for the agency to regulate those pollutants.

The finding is the linchpin of EPA climate regulation, affecting everything from automobiles to power plants. Successfully undoing it would help the Administration swiftly reverse a slew of climate rules. The Department of Energy also released an accompanying report launching a full frontal assault on the scientific consensus on climate change.

The effect of an EPA rollback of climate rules is hard to predict

In the hours that followed, my inbox filled with statements decrying the move as "devastating" and "reckless"—for understandable reasons. But the precise effects are difficult to predict.

For one, it isn't immediately obvious that the rollback will survive the litigation that will challenge it—even with an increasingly conservative judiciary. One reason is the faulty scientific basis for the decision. Another is the legal precedent established in the 2007 *Massachusetts v. EPA* decision, which gave the agency the authority to regulate greenhouse gases if they endanger public health. And, finally, Congress included language in the Inflation Reduction Act that clarified that greenhouse-gas emissions count as pollutants. That language remains even after Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill gutted the law.

In the years that litigation plays out, companies will be left in a state of confusion. Will they ultimately have to comply with some version of existing regulations if courts don't side with the Trump Administration? Will a future Administration impose even more stringent regulations? Will states come up with regulations of their own?

Longer term, expect a whole constellation of factors—from tighter regulation in foreign markets to technology developments—to provide an incentive for lower-emission technologies. At some point, perhaps, Congress might even craft legislation that gives more direct guidance on how the EPA should regulate greenhouse gases.

I don't say any of this to diminish the decision's weight. It is certainly significant that as the costs of climate change become more evident, the U.S. government would make such an egregious attack on climate science. Nonetheless, **EPA regulations aren't the primary driver pushing companies to decarbonize.** Large companies are subject to regulations globally. And technological advances mean that energy systems are, in general, getting cleaner and greener because of economics. Nixing the Endangerment Finding is a roadblock, but it's not the end of the story.

THE ARCHITECT OF THE AI FRONTIER:
Gérard Lopez and the Vision Behind The Lydian Group

It's not often that a single life spans such vast and varied terrain—poverty and privilege, failure and triumph, disruption and discipline. Yet Gérard Lopez, the ever-driven Spanish/Luxembourgish entrepreneur, investor, and polymath, has made a career—and a legacy—out of turning chaos into opportunity. From growing up in a house without hot water to owning a Formula 1 team and predicting some of the most transformative tech trends of the past three decades, Lopez's story reads like a script written for acceleration.

Lopez was born into modest circumstances. His early childhood was marked by instability—frequent school changes, disciplinary issues, and a sense of not quite fitting in. "He was difficult to manage," says a former teacher, "but you could feel the intelligence bubbling under the surface. It was just too much energy for one classroom to hold."

That energy would eventually find a name. Diagnosed as a teenager in the late 1980s with acute ADHD—at the same time scoring over 170 on an IQ test—Lopez suddenly had an explanation for the mental velocity that had made childhood both exhilarating and alienating. "I didn't need to be fixed," Lopez recalls. "I needed a bigger playground."

"HE CONNECTS DOTS MOST OF US DON'T EVEN SEE," SAYS A SENIOR EXECUTIVE AT A DIGITAL ASSET FIRM BACKED BY LOPEZ. "HE WAS TALKING ABOUT GENERATIVE AI'S IMPACT ON EDUCATION YEARS BEFORE CHATGPT. HE'S NOT JUST AHEAD—HE'S LATERAL."

The playground he built would become global. By his early teenage years, he was already fluent in seven languages, went on to study both Asian arts and advanced mathematics, and had begun establishing himself as a force in the emerging world of tech entrepreneurship. His hunger for knowledge was insatiable—and his instincts razor-sharp.

In 1999, Lopez co-founded Mangrove Capital Partners, the venture capital firm that would help catapult companies like Skype, Wix, and many others into the tech stratosphere. His investment record reads like a prophecy in motion—including early backing of HealthTech leader K Health, digital-first institution The Bank of London, or OMD Systems, builder of the world's fastest interceptor drone. "We don't follow trends," says longtime friend and business partner Mark Tluszcz. "We make them."

After nearly two decades co-managing Mangrove, Lopez stepped back from day-to-day operations in 2017—not to slow down, but to go deeper. He immersed himself in AI and digital assets, two fields he believed would define the next wave of global disruption. It wasn't a guess—it was Lopez seeing the future, and acting on it.

In the years since, he has quietly shaped the architecture of tomorrow. He co-founded The Lydian Group in 2022 with technologist Greg Fishman, putting together companies they had been nurturing since 2018—at a time when Web3 was surging, AI was stepping out of the lab, and capital markets were swinging wildly between euphoria and correction. While others saw chaos, Lopez and Fishman saw convergence.

"We didn't launch Lydian to follow trends," Lopez says. "We built it because we saw a structural shift—where decentralization, intelligence, and global scalability weren't just features of the future. They were already requirements."

Lydian was never meant to be just another holding company. The vision was deeper: a connective platform that embeds itself across its ventures—providing technical infrastructure, strategic alignment, and operational firepower. "Startups were siloed," Lopez explains. "Innovation was happening in pockets. Capital was chasing noise. We wanted to build something systemic, a platform that could carry vision and velocity across borders."

That philosophy has paid off. Today, The Lydian Group owns Cointelegraph, the most influential media brand in the blockchain world, and Scalable Technologies, a crypto-native developer employing over 300 engineers and powering major trading platforms, digital banks, and decentralized services. Combined, Lydian's platforms power more than $3 billion in monthly transaction volume.

What makes Lydian stand out in a crowded sector isn't only its portfolio—but its approach. Unlike traditional investors, Lydian embeds with its companies, sharing engineering talent, growth tools, and go-to-market expertise. "We don't just back companies—we help build them. That's what sets us apart," Lopez says.

This hands-on model has helped fuel rapid expansion. But Lopez is thinking much bigger. "We're actively entering markets in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Gulf," he says. "Not because they're trendy—but because the infrastructure is there to leapfrog legacy models. And frankly, the hunger is there too."

Lopez's strategic discipline is as refined as his ambition. While Lydian is open to acquisitions, most of its growth is organic—deliberately paced and deeply aligned. "We do both, but only when the DNA fits," Lopez says. "Acquiring just to grow doesn't work. We're looking for alignment—technologically, culturally, strategically."

What binds it all together is AI. It's not a future aspiration—it's already Lydian's operating system. His partner Fishman started developing AI models as far back as 2014. From autonomous systems in finance to predictive analytics in user experience, artificial intelligence is embedded across the group's architecture.

"We've moved beyond experimentation," Lopez says. "Now it's about embedding intelligence into products that real people use—every day, in every region." That shift has also changed their customer base. "We're seeing demand from legacy enterprises trying to modernize, governments needing digital infrastructure, and next-gen founders who want to build faster with fewer barriers."

The most exciting frontier? Agent-based systems—AI that doesn't just analyze data, but acts, negotiates, and evolves. "That's where the future lies," he says. "Machines that don't just predict what's coming—but help shape it."

Investor sentiment, meanwhile, is shifting from exuberant to strategic. "Yes, some investors are pulling back," Lopez acknowledges. "But the smart money is getting more focused. They're not betting on apps—they're betting on platforms. That's where Lydian shines."

AT THE SAME TIME, HE PUSHES BACK ON THE NOTION THAT AI WILL REPLACE HUMANITY. "THE BIGGEST MISUNDERSTANDING IS THAT AI REPLACES PEOPLE. IT DOESN'T. IT REPLACES FRICTION," HE SAYS. "IT AUGMENTS HUMAN POTENTIAL. THAT'S WHAT MATTERS. BUT WE NEED TO EVOLVE WITH IT."

Of course, fast-moving innovation attracts attention from regulators. AI and Web3 remain ahead of policy in most jurisdictions. Lopez is clear-eyed about the regulatory gap. "The key is transparency and modular compliance—baking adaptability into your tech stack from the beginning," he says. What the sector needs, he believes, isn't more regulation, but smarter regulation. "We don't need more rules. We need better ones. Frameworks that protect without paralyzing. We have engaged with a number of regulators to help them navigate this new world."

For Lopez, ethical responsibility starts early. "You can't bolt on responsibility later," he says. "We think about bias, security, transparency—from the first line of code."

That kind of long-range thinking reflects Lopez's global sensibility. Educated in the U.S., fluent in seven languages, and having led ventures across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, he brings a cosmopolitan approach to leadership. "Culture isn't a soft skill—it's a strategic one," he says. "Global leadership means local nuance. You don't scale ideas, you scale trust."

But Lopez's world isn't only high-speed transactions and hard math. He's also a passionate collector—of art, rare sneakers, watches, and classic cars. A global expert on collectible automobiles, he's been a winning F1 team owner for over a decade, and an avid football investor with—as he puts it—its rare ups and frequent downs. He even co-owns the Chaplin Museum, a poetic nod to creativity and timing—both of which define his life.

He also sits on the international council of Madrid's Teatro Real and supports numerous education initiatives through the Mangrove Foundation and private channels. "For all his intellect, Gerard never lost touch with what matters," says a close friend. "He's fiercely loyal to a fault, generous, and quietly committed to lifting others."

Asked to define success, Lopez shrugs. "Success is velocity with purpose. It's doing everything you can—at full throttle—with the time you've got. I never wanted peace. I wanted motion."

Ultimately, for Lopez, The Lydian Group isn't just another company. It's the culmination of decades of insight, risk, and reinvention. "I've built in many arenas," he reflects. "But Lydian is the one where everything converges: technology, philosophy, purpose. If we do this right, we won't just lead an industry, we'll redefine what intelligent enterprise looks like."

In Gérard Lopez's world, the future isn't a mystery to be solved. It's a puzzle to be assembled—by someone moving fast enough to reach it first.

"He's not a man of eras," says a fellow U.S. tech investor. "He's a man of inflection points. And somehow, Gérard Lopez always seems to be standing right at the next one."

Gul Chaman, a 43-year-old midwife in Afghanistan's central Daikundi province, visits a patient and her newborn daughter in July. Cancellation of funding for her local health facility in the aftermath of U.S. aid cuts has left her without a job, as well as the supplies she needs to provide care for the women and young children in her remote community.

‘I’m afraid’

What U.S. aid cuts mean for the women of Afghanistan

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT
by **ELISE BLANCHARD**

In July, mothers wait to see a midwife at a clinic in Daikundi's Waras Valley that lost its funding earlier this year. Ahead of its possible closure, Nassiba, pictured here in the purple headscarf with her 1-year-old child, said mothers like her would struggle to find care without the facility. "We are poor. It would be terrible."

Over the past 12 years, the small family-health clinic in Melmastok, a remote mountainous community in Afghanistan's central Daikundi province, has withstood multiple upheavals—from a Taliban insurgency to the withdrawal of international troops and the collapse of the U.S.-backed government in Kabul in 2021. Ever since, as the Taliban returned to power, once again issuing edicts to suppress women and girls, the clinic and its 34-year-old midwife Atifa have continued to provide a lifeline for mothers and young children.

Until this summer, that is. Come July, the clinic finally closed its doors. For Atifa, who identifies herself like many local women with only her first name, that means one thing: "Mothers and children will die."

The reason? The wholesale slashing by Washington of U.S. humanitarian aid, until recently the single biggest source of development support for ordinary Afghans. That support had been critical for the survival of health and other development projects in the country, flowing in via the U.N. and its partners. But, as of August this year, funding cuts have led to the suspension or closure of 422 health facilities in the country. (Justifying the cuts, a senior Trump Administration official cited reports of attempts to disrupt aid by the country's Taliban authorities.)

The reductions include 21 family-health clinics in Daikundi, among them Atifa's. Officially known as Family Health Houses, and staffed by solitary midwives like Atifa, a cleaner, and a guard, the clinics provided care to women and children in areas where communities have no access to other health facilities. Nationwide, more than 100 such clinics have closed as a result of the cuts.

The impact in many cases has been devastating. In April, Ali Hassan rushed his pregnant wife Mariam to their local Family Health House in Taiko, another remote Daikundi community, when she complained of pain and believed she was close to giving birth. It was only after waiting for the midwife for several hours that they realized that the clinic had been closed. The midwife had been laid off. Desperate for medical attention, they headed for a district hospital around five hours' drive away. It was too far. Both Miriam, 38, and their child succumbed shortly after they reached the hospital. "There was a chance we could have saved both mother and child … or at least the mother [had the clinic been open]," Sediqa, a midwife at the district hospital, told TIME.

The hospital director, Eztaullah Alizada, agreed, adding, "These women live far away, and sometimes

labor begins en route. By the time they arrive, they are close to dying."

Globally, the trend has been going in the other direction. Years of interventions by local and international bodies mean that women today are more likely than in the recent past to survive childbirth, with maternal mortality—or the deaths of women per 100,000 live births—declining by 40% from 2000 to 2023, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

But cuts could push Afghanistan, already suffering from comparatively high levels of maternal deaths, further in the other direction. Nearly two-thirds of global maternal deaths occur in countries like Afghanistan that are affected by "fragility or conflict," the WHO says. As Kurshid, a 30-year-old pregnant woman in Daikundi told TIME, "All of us are afraid we or our children might die."

Beyond pregnant women, the clinics also provided care for young children—and their closures have led to fear among many, like Mariam, a 24-year-old in Daikundi with three young children.

'MOTHERS AND CHILDREN WILL DIE.'

Atifa, a midwife who has served her community in Daikundi for more than a decade, underlines the stakes for Afghan women and children, after cutbacks in aid led to the closure of her clinic. "It will go back to how it was before: women will give birth at home or lose their babies on the way to the hospital," she says.

She used to have four. Last year, she lost her 5-month-old daughter when the child fell sick. Unable to afford a taxi, Mariam was walking her to the nearest clinic, located about an hour on foot from her home, when the child died. Now, the nearest health facility is more than twice as far away even by car. "The winter [when the region is buried under snow, restricting movement]," she tells TIME, "is even scarier."

For midwives, the closures have robbed them of their livelihoods in what remains a severely depressed economy. "I'm getting weaker and older everyday," Gul Chaman, a midwife in Daikundi's Waras Valley, told TIME, fearful of what would happen once she had exhausted her savings. "I'm afraid for me and my children's future."

Atifa, the midwife in Melmastok, is also afraid. She says she no longer even has the supplies to work privately. It simply isn't safe, forcing her to turn away former patients, like Soghra, a young woman in her 30s who, a week before Atifa's clinic shut down, told TIME that she was "terrified" about giving birth.

Tragically, her worst fears were realized when she went into labor in July. With no supplies to safely assist Soghra, Atifa directed her to another clinic around two hours away by car. "I don't know if it happened on the way or at that clinic," Atifa says, "but she lost her child."

‘THERE IS NO EQUIPMENT, NO PEOPLE, NO MEDICATIONS.’

The closure of the local clinic in Taiko, a mountainous community in Daikundi province, has left Zahirah, pictured, who worked there as a cleaner, fearful both for her community and for her own family. With Afghanistan’s economy still in dire straits after the international troop withdrawal in 2021, she was the sole breadwinner in her household, which includes her five young children.

‘I AM WEAK AND CANNOT WALK THAT FAR. WE DON’T KNOW WHAT WE’LL DO.’

Meh Afroz, 25, pictured in her ninth month of pregnancy, is fearful of the prospect of giving birth at home, following the closure of her local family-health clinic. “I’m afraid for me and my baby,” she says. The clinics that remain open are too far from her isolated Daikundi community.

‘IF THE CLINIC HAD BEEN OPEN … MAYBE THINGS WOULD HAVE GONE DIFFERENTLY.’

Gulsum Akbari, a midwife, stands in her family-health clinic where, the month before in June, a patient from a distant community had suffered a stillbirth—something Akbari said might have been avoided if the pregnant woman still had access to a now closed clinic near her home. “[Had the clinic been functioning] she would have received proper care beforehand,” Akbari said.

‘WHO KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE WINTER?’

Mohammad Nadir Sharifi, 55, a village elder in Taiko, holds up a letter he and other members of the local council of elders wrote to the authorities and humanitarian workers there, imploring them to reopen Taiko’s family-health clinic, now closed as a result of funding cuts.

‘WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO?’

Raihana, pictured seven months pregnant and holding her 2-year-old, says the possibility that her local health clinic in Waras could close has left her fearful about receiving the care she needs. She has already had two miscarriages, she says, adding, “If this clinic closes, where should we go?”

‘THERE ARE MANY OTHER MOTHERS LIKE ME.’

Mahwash, 30, visits the grave of her stillborn child for the first time. She lost her baby in June, when, after waiting for two hours outside her local health clinic in Daikundi, she realized that the facility had been closed. By the time she reached a more distant facility, it was too late. “Many women will lose their babies,” she says. “My request to the people and the government of the U.S. is this: please reopen the clinic.”


5 Av

MAN ON THE STREET

ZOHRAN MAMDANI IS POISED TO BECOME NEW YORK'S NEXT MAYOR. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

BY MARK CHIUSANO

IT'S NOT EASY TO MOVE AROUND NEW YORK CITY AS Zohran Mamdani anymore.

Like when the 33-year-old Democratic nominee for mayor leaves a union meeting to walk to his Manhattan campaign office, as he did one Monday morning in July. Within a block, a phone-wielding crowd forms and follows. "Oh my God, hello," someone blurts. People clap. Cars honk. Traffic down Fifth Avenue comes to a standstill as a plumber's van stops and a guy hops out to shake Mamdani's hand. There is some heckling. "Antisemitic!" someone shouts. But mostly it is star treatment, in multiple languages and from all generations.

All this is new: the adulation, the notoriety, the xenophobic death threats that have prompted an entourage of men with spaghetti earpieces. Before 2025, basically no one knew who Mamdani was. Over the course of eight months, the democratic socialist and backbench state assemblyman went from local long shot to likely mayor of America's biggest city. Suddenly he is a main character in national politics—the ubiquitous subject of cable news segments, a lightning rod on the left and right. Senior Democrats have weighed in for and against him. President Donald Trump has pioneered a dark new birtherism by questioning his immigration status and floating his possible arrest. (Mamdani, who would be the city's first South Asian and Muslim mayor, was born in Uganda and became a U.S. citizen in 2018.) To many progressives, his style of politics—principled, pocketbook-focused, and online—was an electrifying answer for a moribund party.

Mamdani says he wants to be a mayor who breaks down barriers between politicians and the public. "I think the most important thing is that people see themselves and their struggles in your campaign," he tells me during an hour-long interview in mid-July in a windowless conference room in his Manhattan campaign office. "And I think the larger struggle for us as Democrats is to ensure that we are practicing a politics that is direct, a politics of no translation, a politics that when you read the policy commitment, you understand it, as how it applies to your life."

In interviews with more than 30 lawmakers, political figures, supporters, friends, and critics, Mamdani emerges as both more interesting and more complicated than the caricatures suggest. He is a very eloquent, very young man who is both less experienced than his predecessors and more gifted than almost any of his peers at connecting with the party's voters. He is an ideologue interested in creative solutions, less radical than painted when you dig into his policy proposals and yet more sincere in his left-wing ambitions. He is a movement politician who won by being in touch with the streets, and who must now cloister himself inside as he prepares for the business of governing, not betraying the people by not failing them.

If that all seems like a tall task, it's worth remembering Mamdani's master class in the June Democratic primary. He started in single digits, introducing himself via viral videos and cross-borough walkabouts, from conservative precincts to immigrant neighborhoods to mosques, pitching free buses, rent freezes for regulated units, and universal childcare. In the world's financial capital, he wore the mantle of democratic socialism; in the jurisdiction with the largest Jewish community outside Israel, he refused to back away from criticism of that country's war in Gaza. He amassed an army of 50,000 volunteers, who helped knock on 1.6 million doors. In the end, his multicultural coalition trounced Andrew Cuomo, a former governor and scion of a New York political dynasty boosted by more than $20 million in super-PAC spending. He looked, in the words of one of his opponent's own advisers, like "one of the best political athletes I've ever seen play the game."

The prospect of Mamdani's mayoralty scandalized many of New York's power brokers, some of whom vowed to stop him in the November general election. It also alarmed many national Democrats, who see Mamdani's politics—his past support for defunding the police, his criticism of Israel and defense of the Palestinian cause, his proposals for city-owned grocery stores and higher taxes on the wealthy—as a dangerous step left for a party searching for

MAMDANI BETWEEN MEETINGS IN MANHATTAN ON JULY 14

PHOTOGRAPH BY DINA LITOVSKY FOR TIME

its footing in the Trump era. "Tackling the city's challenges will require top-notch management and fresh approaches," James Whelan, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, tells me, "rather than the same old ideas like raising taxes and restricting rents."

In the meantime, Mamdani's shoe-leather primary campaign has given way to his indoor era. As a newcomer now in training for one of America's toughest jobs, he lives life in 15-minute increments, working to assure skeptics that he's ready and reasonable and won't send businesses fleeing to Florida. In conference rooms and on calls, he is exploring the boundaries of what it means to be mayor, even saying "it's an open conversation" whether he'd move into Gracie Mansion.

It appears he will get the choice. Recent polling shows Mamdani with double-digit leads over Cuomo and incumbent mayor Eric Adams, both of whom are running on independent ballot lines. How the nation's financial and cultural capital fares under his leadership would be Exhibit A in the fight for the Democrats' future. At stake is the trust of voters thousands of miles from Midtown, for whom Mamdani would be a test case—another failed figurehead of a major Democratic city, or the leader who can get people believing in government again.

IN 2021, MAMDANI was a newly minted state assemblyman looking to make his mark in the halls of power. He had swept into Albany on the currents of racial-justice protests and pandemic activism. But now he was stuck on Zoom.

Forging connections was a challenge. Albany is always a cipher for newcomers, a "place of an asymmetry of information," says Elle Bisgaard-Church, Mamdani's then chief of staff, who later became his primary campaign manager. Even understanding how to file legislation, she says, "was something that we had to learn from scratch." Mamdani was serious about using the perch to help working people. He put Bisgaard-Church through four hiring interviews, including one with New York City Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) reps. But in a world where it can take a decade to get a committee chair, the road to making change would be long. Mamdani was eager to change the script, leveraging skills learned in his brief but varied prepolitical life.

> **'TO BE A NEW YORKER IS TO LIVE IN MULTIPLE WORLDS AT ONCE.'**
> —ZOHRAN MAMDANI

Zohran Kwame Mamdani was raised in Uganda, South Africa, and New York by public-facing parents: Mahmood Mamdani, a scholar of postcolonialism who landed at Columbia University, and filmmaker Mira Nair, an Academy Award nominee who has directed such luminaries as Denzel Washington. "In a sense he does come from a showbiz family," says Amitav Ghosh, a Man Booker Prize–shortlisted writer and friend of Nair's. From his father, Ghosh says, Mamdani took "his very deep commitment to social justice," and from his mother, an "incredible energy" and "fine aesthetic sense." His charmed upbringing instilled the stage presence that aided an amateur rapping career, plus opportunities like working on music in his mother's film *Queen of Katwe* and getting celebrities Madhur Jaffrey and Lupita Nyong'o to appear in his music videos.

The family moved to a Manhattan apartment for Columbia faculty when Mamdani was 7. According to Mamdani, the university chipped in half the cost of his enrollment at the progressive Bank Street School for Children, where elementary tuition now runs north of $60,000 per year and gym contests would end in ties even when one team had clearly "come out on top," Mamdani says. For high school he enrolled at Bronx Science, one of the city's most rigorous public schools, where he ran for student-body vice president, promising fresh juice. These extremes in education were an example of Mamdani straddling the city's divides. He both tutored and received tutoring for standardized tests. "To be a New Yorker is also to live in multiple worlds at once," he says. "There is no one part of New York City more New York City than another."

Mamdani's political education came in the world of progressive activism. He co-founded a Students for Justice in Palestine chapter at Bowdoin, a small liberal-arts school in Maine. After graduation, he toggled between organizing and music, and cut his teeth working on losing campaigns for left-leaning city candidates. He also spent a formative year and change as a foreclosure-prevention counselor at the Queens housing organization Chhaya Community Development Corporation. Executive director Annetta Seecharran remembers Mamdani as creative and committed, bringing a "very positive, can-do energy" to a job that requires patient engagement to help vulnerable people stay in their homes.

In 2020, Mamdani ran a campaign for state assembly focused on issues like "housing as a human right" for the kinds of vulnerable people he'd recently advised. He beat a five-term incumbent in a Queens district that included hip Astoria cafes as well as public-housing complexes. As a junior figure in state government, he quickly became part of a progressive ecosystem nudging the Democratic caucus left. In April 2021, Mamdani joined a "sleep-out" in the capitol's so-called War Room to push for higher taxes on the wealthy and easier access to housing relief. He and a handful of other young lawmakers came prepared with sleeping bags and a tent, trying to pressure the party leaders negotiating the $200 billion state budget mostly behind closed doors. "It was part of an impatience with the nature of politics as it was," says Mamdani, "and wanting to break out of the manner in which these issues are discussed and

MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO—GETTY IMAGES

GREETING SUPPORTERS ON JUNE 24 AT AN ELECTION-NIGHT GATHERING IN QUEENS

closer to the way in which they will actually be felt by New Yorkers." In the end, the state budget did include some tax hikes on the rich—more than what then governor Cuomo had proposed, but much less than the tens of billions of dollars Mamdani and his progressive allies had called for.

Later that year, Mamdani took direct-action protest a step further, joining a 15-day hunger strike to support debt-ridden taxi drivers struggling to make payments on the wildly expensive "medallions" that allow them to legally pick up passengers. "Throughout that entire process, he treated us as equals," says Bhairavi Desai of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. Mamdani helped liaise with senior politicians like U.S. Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer in successful negotiations for a city-backed relief deal for drivers. After two weeks without food, he left the protest in a wheelchair.

He settled into the Albany routine, which could sometimes feel like being "freshmen in college," says Jabari Brisport, a newly elected state senator and fellow democratic socialist who became Mamdani's roommate. The two shared single hotel rooms with two double beds, trading notes on their new jobs and entertaining themselves after long days. "He likes his TikToks," Brisport said. Sometimes Mamdani would indulge in reality-TV shows like *Love Island*. A practicing Muslim, Mamdani regularly attends Friday prayer services, and in the evenings during Ramadan, Brisport recalls, he would prepare for the coming fast with a big scoop of peanut butter.

Mamdani was learning how to manage relationships and build legislative narratives. He launched a "Fix the MTA" campaign to overhaul the behemoth Metropolitan Transportation Authority through frozen fares, free city buses, and better subway service. He cajoled potential allies and threw himself into promotion, with a slick website and campaign-style videos featuring relatable commuters. "His strengths were mobilizing public support on behalf of policy," says Queens state senator and deputy majority leader Michael Gianaris, Mamdani's partner on the campaign, "which is a very rare trait."

The pair ended up winning a pilot program for one free bus route per borough in 2023—a modest but tangible victory that became a key part of Mamdani's mayoral campaign. Friends and foes alike have scrutinized this episode as an example of how he might govern: working the inside and outside games for big progressive moon shots and, in this case, landing something creative and concrete, if not complete. "We've been guided by the principle that you put the stake as far to the left as possible—of course, within some reason, and grounded in the actual material stuff," says Bisgaard-Church. "But that, as a negotiating position, is the starting place."

Yet the bus pilot was also an example of Mamdani's learning curve. There were limits, he found, to what you can achieve outside the real negotiating rooms. The pilot did not get expanded or even renewed in 2024. A state lawmaker with knowledge of the matter says that Mamdani had complained to the Democratic assembly speaker, Carl Heastie, about a part of the state budget he feared would lead to higher rents. The budget was not yet close to finalized, this lawmaker told me, and it included other tenant protections. The showdown ended with Mamdani casting a largely symbolic no vote on the budget bill, and his bus pilot disappearing.

Both Heastie and Mamdani deny the lost pilot was punishment for Mamdani's protests. Certainly the state transportation authority was lukewarm on the pricey program. In an interview, Heastie praises Mamdani as knowledgeable and honest. Asked how Mamdani changed in Albany, the Bronx power broker says the young socialist learned "that you can't always let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

For example? "This year," Heastie notes, "he voted for the entire budget."

JUST DAYS AFTER Donald Trump's second presidential win in November, Mamdani donned his dark suit and tie and went to parts of Queens and the Bronx that had seen surprising shifts toward the Republican. Extending a microphone to people on the street, Mamdani asked about their reasons for voting for Trump. The answers would form the spine of his campaign. High rent. Elevated prices. *La comida.* Gaza.

The snappy Trump-voter video went viral, helping Mamdani introduce himself to voters through the prism of policy. He cut more videos: talking "halal-flation" with street-cart workers, jumping into the wintry ocean off Coney Island

CAMPAIGNING AT A PIZZA RESTAURANT ON JUNE 23, THE DAY BEFORE HIS VICTORY IN THE PRIMARY

PROTESTING ELON MUSK'S WORK AT DOGE OUTSIDE A TESLA SHOWROOM IN THE WEST VILLAGE

to dramatize "freezing" the rent. They were a marked shift from the doom and gloom enveloping the party. Mamdani seemed intent on having fun.

Some of this was natural for a digital native. Mamdani also credits his wife Rama Duwaji, 28, an illustrator and animator with work in the *New Yorker*. "She has before this campaign been someone that has taught me how to better use social media," Mamdani tells me. "Mostly just thinking about Instagram, how I am very much a millennial."

Signs of momentum were apparent early. At the campaign's first big canvassing event in mid-December, primary field director Tascha Van Auken noticed something strange happening. Even raw recruits said they'd had a great experience—a far cry from the typical slammed doors. Over and over, Van Auken recalls, canvassers reported that "talking about affordability really resonates." The canvassers themselves were also becoming a weapon. Door-knocking is central to New York City races that demand retail politics, and progressive challengers often boast about their volunteers. But Mamdani was doing it on a different level.

The operation was unleashed not just on his far-left base but also new and more moderate voters. There was always going to be a section of the electorate that would not stomach old tweets like "Taxation isn't theft. Capitalism is," and his posts supporting the "defund the police" movement. Yet the city must consult the state on tax changes, and during the campaign Mamdani notably backed away from the "defund" position, promising to sustain the NYPD's head count and praising its current technocratic commissioner. He spent more time channeling the economic insecurities of a broad group of New Yorkers into simple policy slogans like "fast and free buses." He framed such ideas as common sense, not Leninist. Supporters noted they had precedent: the billionaire former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg once discussed free mass transit, an experiment that has been tried in jurisdictions as distant as Boston (which has multiple free bus routes) and the entire country of Luxembourg.

He also had the good luck to run against the right primary opponent. Cuomo was attempting a comeback after resigning in 2021 amid sexual harassment allegations (which he denied) and questions about an undercount of COVID-era nursing-home deaths. The former governor embodied a Democratic establishment voters were increasingly leaving behind. Cuomo ran what one former aide called a "grim and joyless campaign," relying on name recognition, TV ads, and old relationships with organized labor. Mamdani's campaign, meanwhile, was direct messaging people on Instagram and basking in supporter-made T-shirts. His connections in elite New York circles helped land the support of local icons like Alison Roman of cookbook fame and model Emily Ratajkowski. Opponents scoffed, not realizing that Mamdani was experiencing a virtuously reinforcing cycle of vibes, field, and message: the names brought attention, which brought volunteers to knock on doors of people who thought groceries cost too much.

'I THINK FDR WOULD RECOGNIZE HIM.'

—BILL DE BLASIO, FORMER NYC MAYOR

Something was happening in an electorate angry at Trump and willing to give a newcomer a chance. "We came out of the pandemic with the kind of spiritual malaise in the country that I think is unaddressed by the 10-point policy plans that everybody's got," says Patrick Gaspard, a senior national Democrat informally advising Mamdani. Once he got traction, Mamdani didn't let up. In their Albany hotel room, Brisport had to ask him to take a curfew of 11:30 p.m. and cut the never-ending strategy calls. On top of the door knockers, there were 100 policy volunteers alone; the campaign launched voter-education outreach in languages like Urdu and Bangla. Seasoned New York pols recognized the force of his message. "I think FDR would recognize him," says former mayor Bill de Blasio. "The whole campaign was about affordability."

The Friday before the election, Mamdani made an hours-long trek down the spine of Manhattan, dapping up pedestrians and outdoor diners. "Every time that we walked on the street in the last couple of weeks, it was bedlam," says

SNAPPING A SELFIE WITH A SUPPORTER WHILE RIDING THE SUBWAY ON JULY 14

DEBATING HIS DEMOCRATIC RIVALS ON JUNE 4

CAMPAIGNING: ADAM GRAY—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; PROTESTING: ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN—CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES; DEBATING: YUKI IWAMURA—POOL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; SELFIE: DINA LITOVSKY FOR TIME

state senator Gustavo Rivera. At Mamdani's primary-night party in Queens, the two cop cars closing down the quiet street soon seemed like an omen. Mamdani and his team crash-wrote a victory speech in which he hit a new register compared with the early fun videos. "A life of dignity should not be reserved for a fortunate few," he said, framed by the words AFFORD TO DREAM. "I will never hide from you," he promised. "Your concerns will always be mine."

A FEW WEEKS LATER, Mamdani found himself on a dais on the 27th floor of Rockefeller Center, looking out at some 150 CEOs and high-ranking members of the business world, talking about the power of the World Cup.

It was one of many stops on what might be called his Don't Worry Tour, which also included visits with Jewish groups, Black businesspeople, and unions. The tour is Mamdani's attempt to allay fears about the unabashedly left-wing candidate. Financier Bill Ackman pledged to "take care of the fundraising" for a centrist opponent. But many more sober-minded skeptics were concerned Mamdani was unprepared to manage 300,000 municipal employees, let alone a city of some 8.5 million people. "In order to be an effective mayor," says Charles Lavine, Mamdani's veteran state assembly colleague and president of the New York Chapter of the National Association of Jewish Legislators, "it's going to require a lot more than merely a theatrical bent."

Mamdani tried to answer the suspicions by showing up. He would wear his suit. He'd clasp his hands and smile warmly. He'd spend close to an hour with the family of NYPD officer Didarul Islam, killed by a mass shooter in Manhattan. He would listen, and reassure, and say that he'd be a mayor "for everyone who calls this city home."

Few events got as much attention as the closed-door one with the CEOs, hosted by the Partnership for New York City, a nonprofit business leadership group. In a conference room floating above the city and stocked with a spread of cookies, fruit, and cheese, Mamdani was not swarmed for selfies upon entry, as he usually is these days. He did a fireside chat and Q and A, during which he was grilled about his thoughts on the "globalize the intifada" brouhaha. These three words had threatened to derail the close of his primary campaign when he was asked in a podcast interview with the Bulwark about the pro-Palestinian phrase—which he maintains he does not use—and declined to condemn it, saying he was "less comfortable with the idea of banning the use of certain words."

Outrage ensued. Democrats like Rahm Emanuel and Josh Shapiro criticized him. The phrase, which one of his top Jewish allies says can be interpreted as "open season on Jews," became shorthand for the broader concerns about Mamdani's record of Israel criticism. He has supported the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and suggested that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should be arrested for war crimes. The day after Hamas' terrorist attack on Oct. 7, 2023, Mamdani's response mourned the dead but quickly turned to criticism of Israel's actions. He has often talked about the problem of antisemitism and the need for anti-hate-crime funding, and his campaign attracted Jewish supporters—including many on board with his advocacy for Gaza—but during the primary he stuck more or less to his original take on "intifada."

To the CEOs, however, Mamdani said he would discourage the use of the phrase—a small but pointed evolution in language. In our interview, Mamdani frames the shift as the consequence of listening to New Yorkers, including Jewish leaders, as well as a rabbi who said the phrase evoked memories of bus bombings in Haifa. "The job of the mayor is to deliver for New Yorkers," he says. "And it's also to take care of New Yorkers."

Mamdani has walked this tightrope throughout his post-primary appearances. A less-parsed example was his comment about being excited for the economic potential of the World Cup, for which the greater New York area will be a host next summer. "He saw an opportunity to use that the same way the Bloomberg administration used the failed Olympics bid, to look at the infrastructure of the city," says Kathryn Wylde, CEO of the Partnership for New York City, referencing the former mayor's efforts to land the 2012 Games and build housing and new transportation ahead of them. Mamdani has embraced the idea of using a major event like this to achieve "virtuous growth" in other settings, even

MAMDANI, 33, WOULD BE THE CITY'S FIRST SOUTH ASIAN AND MUSLIM MAYOR

name-checking Bloomberg's business-friendly deputy mayor and establishment favorite Dan Doctoroff in our interview.

With examples like these, Mamdani has signaled an interest in making government work better, much like the nascent "abundance" movement among Democrats eager to cut red tape to build new housing and infrastructure. "Democracy is not just under attack from authoritarianism from the outside," Mamdani tells me. "It's also under attack from a withering faith on the inside of its ability to deliver on these material challenges in working-class people's lives."

FOR SOME NATIONAL DEMOCRATS, the Don't Worry Tour will never be enough. Their concern is Mamdani's very presence in office, which would punctuate the party's leftward turn in major cities and give ammunition to Republicans eager to paint them as outside the mainstream in the 2026 midterms. "A socialist is not the face of the Democratic Party," says Long Island Representative Laura Gillen. The irony is that Mamdani's victory was the kind of affordability-focused, podcast-conversant campaign Democrats have called for after 2024.

Mamdani's performance as mayor would be scrutinized for portents of the Democrats' future. Potential lessons abound. To progressives, his rise is the product of his policies. Centrists who loathe those policies praise his style. Republicans are all too eager to cast him as the face of the opposition. And for some Democratic leaders with an eye on 2028, the question is not whether a Mamdani clone should be the next Democratic standard bearer—historically unlikely—but whether the party can win in other places not by emulating his ideology but by borrowing from his tool kit.

Despite his growing national profile, Mamdani remains focused on local issues. On his core pledge to freeze rents for the city's approximately 1 million regulated units, a board controlled by the mayor decides the increases each year. De Blasio's administration imposed rent freezes three times. Yet housing experts raise concerns about buildings with lots of regulated units where the costs of maintenance couldn't be covered by bumps on the other apartments. "The concern is that that could really lead to lower-quality buildings," says Vicki Been, a top housing official under de Blasio and faculty director at the NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy. Even de Blasio cautioned that a freeze was "doable" but "each year should be evaluated unto itself." Mamdani has committed to four years of no increases, pointing to broader ways to help landlords, like reducing water bills.

Some of his campaign issues cross ideological boundaries, such as universal childcare starting at 6 weeks. It is an expensive proposition; Mamdani's campaign estimated a price tag of $5 billion to $7 billion. It is also an issue where Mamdani's position aligns with New York's more moderate Democratic governor, Kathy Hochul. The city has led the way before with universal pre-K in the de Blasio administration, while Mayor Adams embraces a childcare pilot program for low-income children 2 and under. Mamdani appears eager for the negotiation. "There are real questions of phasing in and stages," he says, "but they cannot be used as a means by which to avoid reaching the milestone."

In preparation, Mamdani's team has reached out to Bloomberg. He has picked the brains of former NYPD chiefs, and conferred with leaders as varied as state Democratic Party leader Jay Jacobs (who found Mamdani "anxious to work with everyone"), former Federal Trade Commission chair Lina Khan, and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, whom he praises as "one of the inspirations for me in this moment." He is still adjusting to his new reality. "I already miss being outside," he tells me. "I now go to cemeteries a lot between meetings," he adds, "because they are parks without people."

> **'A SOCIALIST IS NOT THE FACE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.'**
> —LAURA GILLEN, U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

One day in mid-July, Mamdani opted for the train en route to a musicians' union event. Such trains are the city's public forum, and soon the nominee was swarmed once more on the uptown R. A kid with shaking hands approached: "Mr. Zohran, can we get a photo?" Someone claimed Mamdani must know her. Someone else offered him their priority seat. Four stops later, the train deposited him near Times Square, and Mamdani was out in the street again, walking by a woman passed out on the sidewalk, a thicket of competing hot-dog and falafel stands, a building security guard who shouted "I voted for you!" from across the street. It was the complex and ever changing tapestry of New York, and also a totem of the kind of politics that Mamdani said he wants to practice: "one that is in person, that is in public, that is with people." —*With reporting by* SIMMONE SHAH

DINA LITOVSKY FOR TIME

TIME100/AI

THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE*

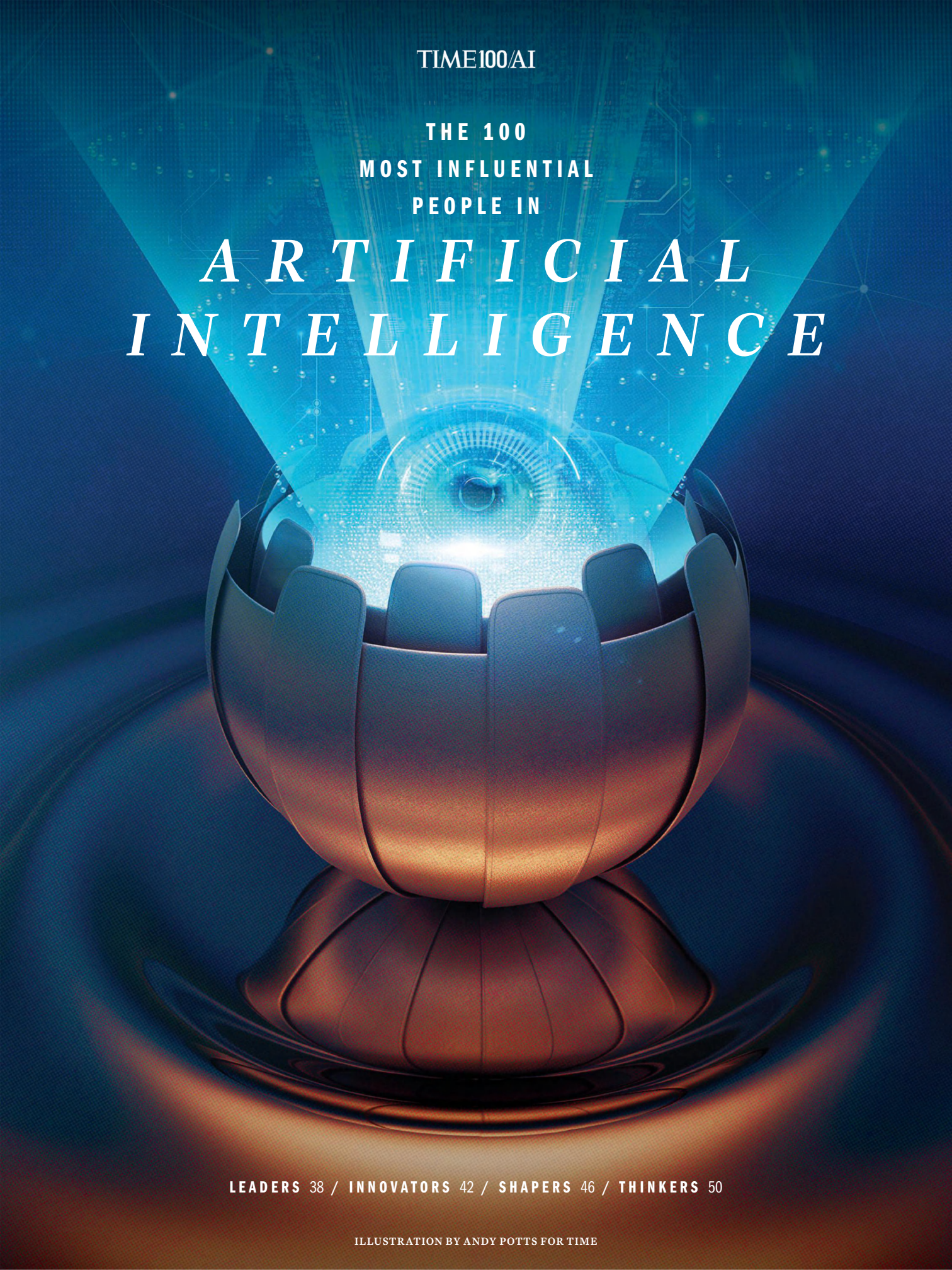


ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY POTTS FOR TIME

Matthew Prince

CEO CLOUDFLARE

MATTHEW PRINCE HAD TO BE CONverted to the belief that AI is eating the web. It was 18 months ago that he started getting calls from media executives, who complained to him about AI companies copying articles to train their models without compensation. Prince's first reaction, he says, was to roll his eyes. "Media companies are always complaining about whatever the new technology is," he tells TIME.

But then Prince, the CEO of the internet security company Cloudflare, ran the numbers. His company has 10 years of web-traffic data, a by-product of its main service: protecting sites from being knocked offline by surges in traffic or targeted attacks. What he found shocked him. With the arrival of "AI overviews" to Google's search results, the data showed, news sites have begun finding it 10 times as hard to get traffic as they did a decade ago, he claims. The same metric for chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude is even worse, he says.

"The problem is that as the web shifts from a search-driven interface to an AI-driven interface, fewer and fewer people are going to consume the original content," says Prince, who with his wife owns a local newspaper in his hometown of Park City, Utah. "And that means that the incentives for creating content go away."

Cloudflare was uniquely positioned to offer a solution. In July, the company began blocking by default the "crawler" bots that comb the web for training data to send back to AI companies. That's significant because Cloudflare's network covers some 20% of the entire internet—effectively putting one-fifth of the web behind a wall that only AI bots can't ascend. The move was welcomed by dozens of media companies (including TIME), plus authors and artists who have railed against the Big Tech argument that training AI systems on their work comes under the "fair use" provision of copyright law, meaning compensation is not legally necessary.

Funnily enough, Prince says, most of the leading AI companies—which are also Cloudflare customers—welcomed his company's intervention. "It's because they don't want to be suckers," he says. "It can't be that you pay [to license] content, but your competitors get it for free."

> *'IF WE GET THIS RIGHT, IT UNLOCKS A GOLDEN AGE OF CONTENT CREATION.'*
>
> **MATTHEW PRINCE**

Cloudflare's blockage, Prince believes, might be the first step toward a new business model for the internet. He doesn't quite know yet what it will look like—but he intuits that Cloudflare, as a result of its gatekeeper role, might be able to "play market maker." That might mean Cloudflare eventually becomes a place where websites can name their price for AI companies to train on their data—and then charges fees on those transactions. This "pay-per-crawl" model could be a substantial new source of revenue for Cloudflare's already highly profitable business.

It also marks a new, gloves-off era for the company. In an August blog, Cloudflare fired a shot at the AI search engine Perplexity, which it accused of scraping content even from sites that had explicitly asked to be exempt from crawlers. Perplexity denied

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIME (SOURCE IMAGES COURTESY THE SUBJECT) UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED; PRINCE: DINA LITOVSKY

the accusation, calling it a "sales pitch."

According to Prince, the old era of the web, defined over the past 30 years by the primacy of the search engine, is coming to an end. The next 30 years, he says, will be defined by AI. To him, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Prince argues that search engines bear responsibility for many of today's problems, "because they have taught everyone that the deity that content creators need to chase is traffic." That hasn't always created good incentives, he says, pointing to clickbait headlines and rage-inducing videos.

Prince has a vision for the AI-first internet: a world where content creators are incentivized not by ad revenue, but by AI companies, which will reward humans for "chasing and furthering human knowledge" to fill gaps in their training data. "I'm optimistic that if we get this right, it unlocks a golden age of content creation," Prince says. "My utopian vision is a world where humans get content for free, and robots have to pay a ton for it." —BILLY PERRIGO

SAM ALTMAN

CEO OpenAI*

Sam Altman started the year standing next to President Donald Trump as he announced a $500 billion data-center project, Stargate, that OpenAI stands to hugely benefit from. A similar project is planned in the UAE. Altman has also been attempting to convert OpenAI into a for-profit company, which would unlock tens of billions in new capital. All the while, OpenAI churns out new research. In early August, it launched the long-awaited GPT-5, which Altman compared to a "Ph.D.-level expert." *—B.P.*

ELON MUSK

CEO xAI

Last year, xAI built the world's largest supercomputer, and in July it released Grok 4, which it touted as the world's "most intelligent" model after beating rivals on various benchmarks. Integrated into Elon Musk's social platform, X, Grok has amassed at least 35.1 million monthly active users, and xAI has signed a near $200 million contract with the U.S. Department of Defense. But an earlier version of Grok, which Musk has called "anti-woke," made headlines for praising Adolf Hitler. xAI apologized and deactivated the update. *—Harry Booth*

ANDY JASSY

CEO Amazon*

Amazon is making a big push into AI, announcing multiple products and services including Amazon Bedrock, which allows customers to build generative AI applications on Amazon's cloud-computing platform; Amazon Nova, its suite of foundation AI models; and Amazon Q, a generative AI assistant. It's also taking on Nvidia with its Trainium chips. In December, Amazon Web Services announced it was building a massive AI supercomputer, featuring hundreds of thousands of Trainium chips, to be used by Anthropic. *—Ayesha Javed*

ALLIE K. MILLER

CEO Open Machine

Allie K. Miller guides businesses through deep cultural and technical change in the age of algorithms. Miller, who leads the advisory firm Open Machine, says she has worked with Novartis, CyberArk, ServiceNow, and Warner Bros. Discovery. Miller has collaborated with LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman and his team, and she sits on Arianna Huffington's scientific advisory board. She also runs online workshops to teach people about artificial intelligence, and says she wants to convert 1 billion people from seeing AI as a source of anxiety to a source of agency. *—Aimee Groth*

ALEXANDR WANG & NAT FRIEDMAN

Co-leads

Meta Superintelligence Labs

Alexandr Wang, Scale AI's cofounder, and Nat Friedman, the onetime CEO of GitHub, are joining forces to lead a new vision within Meta that aims to "bring personal superintelligence to everyone," according to Mark Zuckerberg. Superintelligent AI is a hypothetical system that is smarter than humans. In a policy paper coauthored shortly before he joined Meta, Wang warned that superintelligent AI could be the 21st century's "nuclear bomb." Now he and Friedman are responsible for helping build that technology inside a company with more than 3 billion users worldwide. *—H.B.*

* TIME HAS A TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP WITH THIS COMPANY

STRIVE MASIYIWA

Founder Cassava Technologies

Zimbabwean billionaire Strive Masiyiwa is investing to expand Africans' access to the computing power needed for cutting-edge AI. Cassava Technologies, in partnership with Nvidia, is set to open a data center designed to develop and run AI systems in South Africa. More "AI factories" are planned in Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, and Morocco. —*Tharin Pillay*

REN ZHENGFEI

Founder and CEO Huawei

Ren Zhengfei is recasting Huawei as central to China's attempts to challenge U.S. tech dominance. Its Ascend 910C AI chip reportedly achieves up to 60% of performance in inference tasks when compared with Nvidia's H100. Huawei is also seeking to rival Nvidia with its AI system CloudMatrix 384, built using domestic chipsets. —*Charlie Campbell*

RENE HAAS

CEO Arm

Not only does Arm produce the most ubiquitous computer architecture in history; an estimated 70% of the world's population today uses Arm, whether in smartphones, PCs, EVs, or other smart devices. In March, the Malaysian government announced it would pay Arm $250 million over 10 years for design blueprints to develop its own AI chips. —*C.C.*

AMNON SHASHUA

Founder and CEO Mobileye

Israeli computer-science professor and entrepreneur Amnon Shashua's self-driving tech company Mobileye has placed its assistive chips in more than 200 million vehicles. Shashua has also founded a robotics firm, a wearables startup, and a digital bank. His new venture AAI seeks to create superintelligent AI systems in STEM. —*T.P.*

FIDJI SIMO

CEO of applications OpenAI

Despite rapidly becoming one of history's most valuable startups, OpenAI runs significant losses, estimating it lost $5 billion last year. In her newly created role, Fidji Simo—previously Instacart's CEO—is tasked with steering the company toward profitability.

The former Facebook executive, who calls herself a "pragmatic technologist," says her role is to turn OpenAI's breakthrough research into products and services that can be used in the real world. "My core belief is that any technology, but AI in particular, should empower people, and that this empowerment should be distributed to all, instead of concentrated for a few," Simo says. —*Harry Booth*

RAVI KUMAR S

CEO Cognizant

While some CEOs say AI will eliminate jobs, Ravi Kumar S argues it will democratize expertise, particularly for early-career talent. Cognizant aims to help millions of people upskill in AI, and this year it joined the White House's AI education initiative. Under Kumar, Cognizant has launched its Agent Foundry platform for enterprises to build AI agents at scale, and secured 59 AI-led patents. —*Aimee Groth*

CRISTIANO AMON

CEO Qualcomm

Under Cristiano Amon, Qualcomm has invested heavily in AI research and development. In April it acquired the generative-AI division of startup VinAI to expedite software development for phones, vehicles, and more. Its Snapdragon processors' neural processing units are AI-optimized and its AI hub allows developers to create on-device apps faster. —*Amrita Khalid*

MASAYOSHI SON

Founder and CEO SoftBank

Masayoshi Son is betting on artificial superintelligence's becoming "10,000 times smarter" than humans in a decade. He has made big investments in OpenAI and chip designer Arm, and has pledged to raise $100 billion for AI-infrastructure project Stargate. "We are building a future where advanced technology empowers and serves humanity," he says. —*C.C.*

SIMO: KELSEY MCCLELLAN; SON: KOSUKE OKAHARA—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; WEI: ANDREW HARNIK—GETTY IMAGES; HUANG: CHESNOT/GETTY IMAGES; ZUCKERBERG: CHRIS UNGER—ZUFFA LLC/GETTY IMAGES

C.C. WEI

Chairman and CEO TSMC

TSMC produces bleeding-edge semiconductors for Nvidia and AMD, among others. C.C. Wei's role has taken on geopolitical significance amid U.S. export controls on chips. In March, TSMC announced an additional $100 billion investment in advanced semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S., on top of a $65 billion investment in Phoenix. —*C.C.*

JENSEN HUANG

CEO Nvidia

Nvidia crossed a record $4 trillion valuation in July and, as a crucial player in AI, Jensen Huang navigates the rivalry between Washington and Beijing. In August the Trump Administration struck a deal with Nvidia allowing it to sell certain AI chips to China in exchange for a 15% cut of the revenue. —*H.B.*

MARK ZUCKERBERG

CEO Meta

Mark Zuckerberg's strategy rests on the three pillars of modern AI development: masses of data, huge computing power, and brilliant researchers to drive algorithmic progress. Meta has the first in spades. In an attempt to secure the other two, Meta is spending tens of billions on computing power and talent, bringing in Scale AI co-founder Alexandr Wang, as well as researchers from rivals including OpenAI and Google DeepMind. Zuckerberg aims to create "personal superintelligence," which users can interact with through Meta's smart glasses that can "see what we see, hear what we hear, and interact with us throughout the day," he wrote in July. —*H.B.*

* TIME HAS A TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP WITH THIS COMPANY

WANG XINGXING

CEO Unitree Robotics

Wang Xingxing believes robotics is key to using AI to solve real-world problems for humans. China's Unitree Robotics claims to hold two-thirds of the market share for robot dogs and have the world's best-selling humanoid. Its bots' affordability and durability have made them popular outside China, with 50% of sales coming from abroad. —*H.B.*

STEVE HUFFMAN

CEO Reddit

Social media platform Reddit has deals with Google and OpenAI—where Reddit investor Sam Altman is CEO—to train their AI on its data. But it is clamping down on other companies it accuses of scraping its data without paying for it. In June, Reddit sued Anthropic for allegedly training on its data without permission, which Anthropic rebuts. —*H.B.*

DAVID HOLZ

Founder and CEO Midjourney

Midjourney's image- and video-generation products, known for their distinctive style, have amassed over 20 million users, most housed on digital platform Discord's biggest server. In June, Disney and Universal sued Midjourney for alleged copyright infringement. Midjourney's lawyers argue that AI training is protected "fair use." —*T.P.*

ADAM EVANS

EVP and GM Salesforce AI†

Adam Evans, a serial founder, is in his second stint on the Salesforce leadership team after it acquired his startup Airkit in 2023. Evans is leading the company's charge on agentic AI. Among its rapid releases: Agentforce 3, an agent builder. The company sees agent-based AI automating tasks worth more than $6 trillion by 2030. —*Gabriela Riccardi*

† TIME CO-CHAIR AND OWNER MARC BENIOFF IS CEO OF SALESFORCE

LIANG WENFENG

CEO DeepSeek

On Jan. 20, Liang Wenfeng's Chinese AI startup DeepSeek released R1, the first open-weight model that challenged rival OpenAI's then newest release. Headlines seized upon DeepSeek's modest $6 million training cost, casting doubt on megaprojects like OpenAI's $500 billion AI-infrastructure plan, Stargate. Frantic investors dumped American tech stocks. But while R1 was impressive, the narrative was incomplete. The $6 million figure didn't include the roughly $1.6 billion cost of its cluster of computing chips, according to research firm SemiAnalysis—nor the generous salaries DeepSeek reportedly pays its researchers. —*H.B.*

DARIO AMODEI

CEO Anthropic**

Anthropic has made a reputation as the responsible little brother in the AI race—arguing in support of regulation and safety methods, even as it races to train and deploy ever larger AI systems. Dario Amodei was one of the few AI CEOs who argued against a proposed block on states' regulating the technology for 10 years. (Senators eventually stopped the measure.) Amodei has also warned about AI eliminating jobs. It hasn't hurt the business. Anthropic's chatbot, Claude, is popular for its coding prowess and creative bent. And Anthropic's annualized revenue has quadrupled in six months off the back of that success. —*Billy Perrigo*

** INVESTORS IN THIS COMPANY INCLUDE SALESFORCE, WHERE TIME CO-CHAIR AND OWNER MARC BENIOFF IS CEO

Natasha Lyonne

CO-FOUNDER ASTERIA FILM CO.

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A PUNK," filmmaker Natasha Lyonne muses. "But AI is the thing that's going to flip me into a hippie. Because now's the time to get super low to the ground and human."

Lyonne has established herself as one of Hollywood's most eccentric, probing creatives. A lifelong actor, she received acclaim as a show creator for her mind-bending Netflix show *Russian Doll,* in which her protagonist, a software engineer, gets stuck in a time loop.

This year, Lyonne is taking her futurist bent even further with the creation of an AI film studio, Asteria Film Co., and a movie, *Uncanny Valley,* which she is making with the help of AI tools. These projects make Lyonne one of the most high-profile entertainers to embrace AI—a decision that has garnered backlash from those who feel that the tech is antithetical to human creativity. Lyonne understands the criticism; she has plenty of her own about the industry. "But there is no way around the mountain," she says. "I think it's crucial that we level up as a community and situate ourselves correctly for this sea change."

When ChatGPT stormed into the mainstream two years ago, some envisioned a future in which entire screenplays would be created by simple directives: for instance, "Write me a TV show just like *Friends*." This approach repulses Lyonne. "I'm definitely not interested in prompting my way to a screenplay or film, or f-cking anything," she says. "ChatGPT will tell you crazy things. It's too easily suggestible."

Rather, she became interested in how AI filmmaking tools could give her more autonomy as a rising filmmaker on a budget. Lyonne says the types of movies that she typically gets offered to direct are "two gals on the side of the road." But Lyonne, who is an ambitious, circuitous thinker, wanted to keep making art that built upon the scale and richness of *Russian Doll,* fusing sci-fi, history, and metaphysical exploration.

'IT'S TOTALLY A TACTILE ART FORM.'

NATASHA LYONNE

Advanced AI tools now allow her to reduce the costs of visual effects or other postproduction tools. Asteria, which Lyonne created with filmmaker (and her boyfriend) Bryn Mooser, is a subsidiary of Moonvalley, an AI startup founded by Google DeepMind researchers. Their video model Marey, which was trained on fully licensed data, allows filmmakers to input storyboards or frames and change details like coloring, composition, or even faces.

Lyonne is currently using Marey on her upcoming film *Uncanny Valley.* Written by Lyonne with screenwriter Brit Marling and technologist Jaron Lanier, the movie follows a teenage girl who becomes lost inside of

an augmented reality video game. "Before, you never would have had the option to make an independent film at true visionary scale," Lyonne says. Asteria is also using Marey for a documentary about astronomer Carl Sagan, to restore and tweak archival footage.

Critics worry that AI will cheapen filmmaking. "But I know we're doing it the right way, because I'm on the floor, it's us," she says. "We show each other ideas and drawings and put them through Marey and start building out that world. It's totally a tactile art form."

Many in Hollywood also worry that the tools will simply replace human jobs; just two years ago, Hollywood's major unions fought fiercely for—and won—AI protections in contracts. Lyonne concedes that in some cases, the technology could be used in a way "that would actually be taking away jobs and doing something poorly and not creatively and not interesting," she says. "That would be lame."

She hopes that instead, the future of Hollywood will respect artists' rights—and empower both filmmakers shooting on 16-mm and those using AI to world-build. "The magic trick of this whole thing is figuring out how to force us all to put our hands together and agree to integrity together," she says.

Even those in Hollywood who are pushing most adamantly for AI protections don't believe that they can prohibit it entirely. "I absolutely support the idea of technology companies that engage on an ethical basis," says Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, the national executive director of SAG-AFTRA.

Lyonne has been contemplating how AI could lead society toward dystopia. "Sometimes my brain will skip into a deep future where the memory of things like novels or a Spielberg film about romance seem so soft and sweet, if in fact, we are to head into this great world of code," she says. "I think that we're all a little bit over our heads with this tech wave, personally."

Still, she feels like she doesn't have a choice but to engage. "I understand the spark that AI invokes in people. Life is scary," she says. "The fact of the matter is that it's upon us. Best we dive in, I think." —ANDREW R. CHOW

* TIME HAS A TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP OR AGREEMENT WITH THIS COMPANY

ALEX BLANIA

CEO Tools for Humanity

Alex Blania's World ID project—co-founded by OpenAI's Sam Altman—aims to solve the problem of proving your identity in the age of AI deepfakes. His company, Tools for Humanity, has launched what it calls the Orb: a piece of hardware that scans your iris to give you a private ID that serves as a kind of anonymous passport for the internet. *—Billy Perrigo*

ANDY PARSONS

Senior director Adobe*

Led by engineer turned standards advocate Andy Parsons, Adobe issued the Content Authenticity app to help creatives claim their work, establish how it was made, and protect it from being scraped by AI models. Users can embed attribution metadata in their images and indicate that they don't want generative AI to train on it. *—Gabriela Riccardi*

DAVID HA

CEO Sakana AI

In March, AI Scientist, the Japanese unicorn Sakana AI's system for scientific discovery, produced the first AI-conducted and -written paper to be accepted by peer reviewers at a top machine-learning conference. CEO David Ha's team says the milestone indicated "very promising early signs of progress" toward a new era of science. *—Harry Booth*

PEGGY JOHNSON

CEO Agility Robotics

Agility's humanoid robots were the first of their kind to be commercially deployed, and are being used by logistics powerhouse GXO to load and stack boxes in a Georgia warehouse. Agility first honed expertise in robotics fundamentals. "AI just supercharged it," allowing the robots to tackle a wider array of tasks, says CEO Peggy Johnson. *—H.B.*

MIKE KRIEGER

Chief product officer Anthropic**

Mike Krieger is tasked with turning Anthropic's large language model, Claude, into a delightful user experience. When it comes to flashy new features, Claude lags behind its rivals. But what it lacks in flair, it makes up for in firepower. Krieger has been focusing on helping users become more productive at work. Anthropic's coding tool, Claude Code, has discreetly become an industry favorite. Claude can also be plugged into a growing number of tools, allowing it to take actions using other software. Krieger's strategy appears to be working. Anthropic's annualized revenue quadrupled to $4 billion in the first half of 2025. *—B.P.*

MATI STANISZEWSKI

Co-founder and CEO ElevenLabs***

ElevenLabs' AI voice technology has been used to help a Congresswoman who lost her voice address the House and to bring James Earl Jones' voice to the video game *Fortnite*. Through its creative audio platform, the $3.3 billion startup founded by Mati Staniszewski and Piotr Dabkowski also allows users to clone their voices to speak different languages and provide voice-overs for movies and audiobooks. And ElevenLabs' conversational AI tech provides voices that enterprises can use for real-time interactions in domains like customer service. *—Tharin Pillay*

** INVESTORS IN THIS COMPANY INCLUDE SALESFORCE, WHERE TIME CO-CHAIR AND OWNER MARC BENIOFF IS CEO

JEFF LEEK

Chief data officer Fred Hutch

The Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center's Jeff Leek proposed the Cancer AI Alliance, a partnership between leading cancer-care centers and tech organizations launched in October 2024. It will enable the analysis of secure, anonymized patient data residing at different centers to find new cancer treatments.

—Annalisa Merelli

DENISE HERZING

Founder Wild Dolphin Project

Denise Herzing's 40-odd years of research with wild Atlantic spotted dolphins is the basis of DolphinGemma. Developed with Georgia Tech and Google DeepMind, the large language model aims to detect patterns and hidden structures among the mammal's vocalizations. With luck, this AI might one day allow us to speak dolphin. *—Gabriela Riccardi*

SAM RODRIQUES

Director and CEO FutureHouse

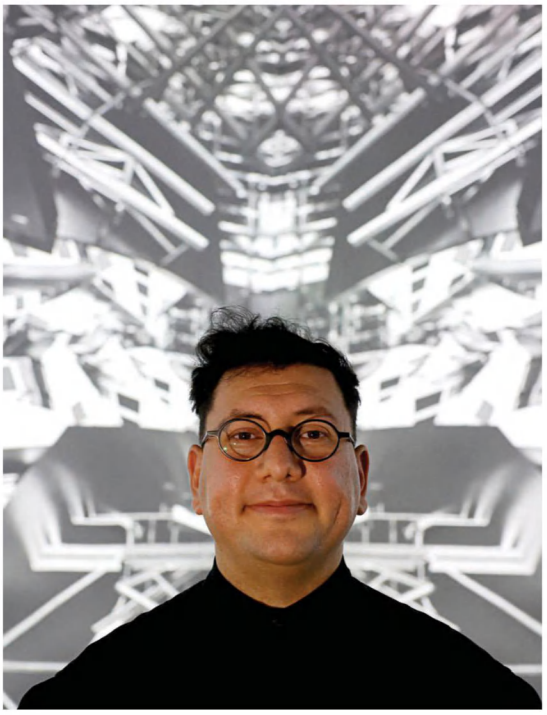
Sam Rodriques co-founded FutureHouse to build AI scientists that can formulate hypotheses, conduct experiments, and analyze data. It's released AI tools that can search scientific literature and help plan experiments. In May, its AI agents made their first big discovery: a promising new treatment for dry AMD, a cause of blindness.

—Andrew R. Chow

ANA HELENA ULBRICH

Co-founder NoHarm

Pharmacist Ana Helena Ulbrich co-founded NoHarm as a nonprofit AI tool to review prescriptions and flag potential dangers for patients in Brazil. It is used by hospitals, clinics, and health centers to review 5 million prescriptions per month and has expanded into the remote Amazon region. *—A.R.C.*



REFIK ANADOL

Artist

Refik Anadol is fond of describing data as a pigment—a brush that can think. The Turkish American artist has developed a distinctive style with AI: using custom models, his studio creates large-scale audiovisual installations depicting hypnotic, swirling particles—often framed as machine "dreams" or "hallucinations"—lighting up galleries and public spaces across the world.

Anadol, who often works with partners like Nvidia and Google, is among the most commercially successful artists working with AI: he has sold over $30 million worth of NFTs—nonfungible tokens—donating a significant portion of the proceeds to charitable initiatives. *—Tharin Pillay*

PRIYA DONTI

Assistant professor MIT

There is an urgent need to decarbonize the world's electricity supply—and Priya Donti is designing machine-learning algorithms to streamline the process. Donti has developed a power-demand forecasting model currently used in the U.K., and an algorithm to estimate power-grid voltage that is being piloted in some parts of the U.S. She also co-founded and co-chairs the nonprofit Climate Change AI. *—T.P.*

JAMES PENG

CEO Pony.ai

As founder of $5 billion self-driving-taxi firm Pony.ai, James Peng is a leader of the autonomous-driving revolution. Pony.ai initially concentrated on his home market of China but has since expanded across Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. It is now transitioning from honing its AI-powered technology to large-scale deployment, with the aim of building a fleet exceeding 1,000 vehicles by year's end. *—Charlie Campbell*

KAKUL SRIVASTAVA

CEO Splice

Kakul Srivastava, CEO of music-sample marketplace Splice, has doubled down on AI to complement the creative process. A mobile app introduced in March lets users hum an idea, then swipe through samples AI suggests they might use to compose around it. And sampling tools will soon enable users to turn any sound into a playable virtual instrument. *—G.R.*

ANADOL: VINCENT WEST—REUTERS; PENG: LAM YIK—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

NAVRINA SINGH

Founder and CEO Credo AI

Credo AI aims to help businesses manage their generative-AI risk with tools to detect issues like security gaps, compliance snags, or bias. "You can't solve for something you don't see," so it's key to give firms visibility into their systems' failures, says CEO Navrina Singh. —*Harry Booth*

MFIKEYI MAKAYI

CEO KoBold Metals Africa

Mfikeyi Makayi is using AI to find the raw materials needed for the climate transition. The head of KoBold Metals' Africa arm is tasked with fast-tracking an estimated $2 billion underground copper mine in Zambia—after KoBold's AI tools pinpointed where to drill—for production by the early 2030s. —*Amrita Khalid*

ALAN DESCOINS

CEO Tryolabs

Alan Descoins leads Uruguay-based Tryolabs, which builds AI tools for corporate clients and public good, like monitoring cameras onboard industrial fishing vessels to prevent overfishing, and improving systems to identify rural schools from satellites and connect them to the internet. —*Natasha Frost*

EDWIN CHEN

CEO Surge AI

Edwin Chen's data-labeling firm Surge AI sells high-quality datasets to the likes of Google, Anthropic, and OpenAI. Working with around 1 million contractors, the startup generated over $1 billion in revenue last year and is now reportedly seeking a valuation of over $15 billion. For Chen, this data is essential for advancing the field. —*T.P.*

BRANDON TSENG

President Shield AI

Former Navy SEAL Brandon Tseng served in Afghanistan and saw the potential to use robots to reduce the risk to human lives. He later co-founded Shield AI, a defense-tech company that aims to decouple "military power from manpower." The company has developed AI pilots, including one that can operate an F-16 fighter jet, signing contracts with the U.S. military, and is in the process of creating swarms of autonomous drones that can operate in battle without human pilots.

—*Simon Shuster*

MITESH KHAPRA

Associate professor IIT Madras

Nearly every Indian startup working on voice technology relies on the datasets of Mitesh Khapra and his team. "The reason Indian language technology is behind English is because we do not have enough data for Indian languages," he says. So his research lab AI4Bharat visited 500 of India's 700 districts, recording thousands of hours of speech to capture all 22 of the nation's official languages. It is now supplying 80% of the data for a public AI-powered program offering digital services in citizens' local languages. —*T.P.*

TAREQ AMIN

CEO Humain

In May, Saudi Arabia announced the launch of Humain, a state-owned AI firm tasked with making the deep-pocketed kingdom a global technopower. Led by Tareq Amin, the former CEO of Saudi Aramco's tech arm and backed by the crown prince's $1 trillion Public Investment Fund, Humain signed agreements within days with Nvidia, AMD, AWS, and Qualcomm. By August, it had a deal with Groq, using its AI chips in its Saudi data centers to serve OpenAI's open-weight models at high speeds. —*G.R.*

RICK RUBIN

Music producer

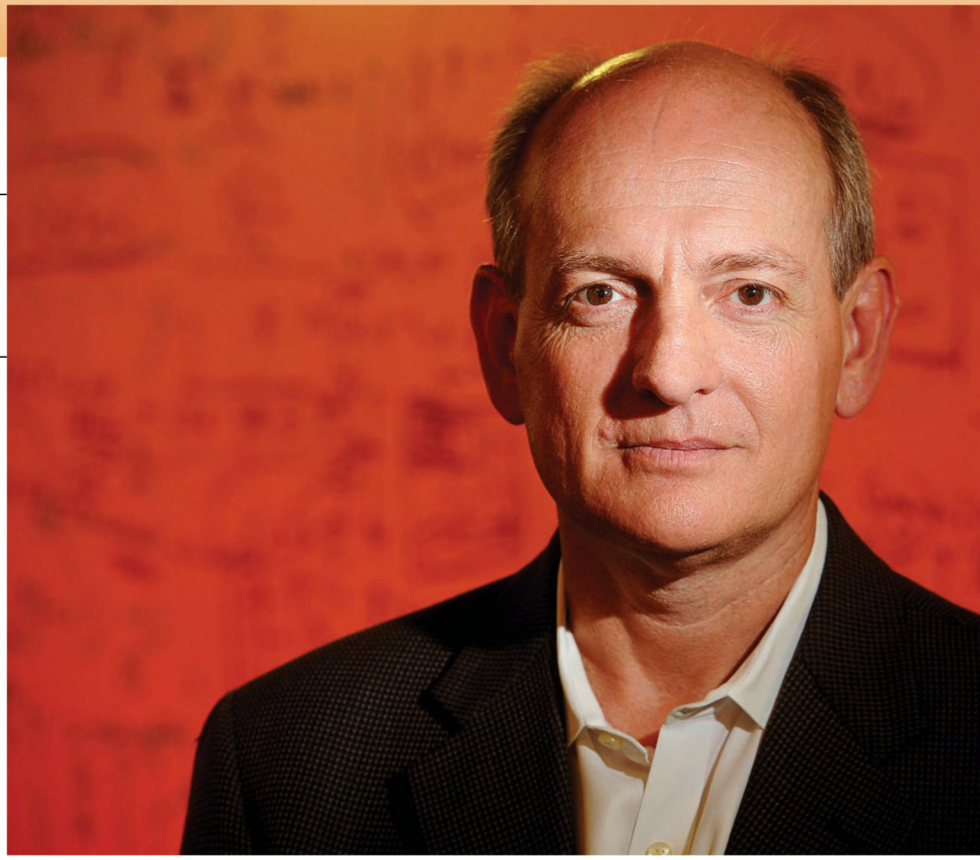
In May, famed music producer Rick Rubin partnered with AI firm Anthropic on a vibe-coding treatise, written with Claude and based on the ancient Taoist philosophy text *Tao Te Ching*. Vibe coding allows amateur programmers to give AI directions in natural language to elicit code. It's a tempting vision, which he has compared to the rise of punk music, when artists with little musical knowledge or training launched bands.

Rubin's treatise is perhaps deliberately silly, and AI-assisted code is still limited and often prone to errors. But Rubin inspired generations of musicians. Who's to say he can't inspire generations of programmers too? —*A.R.C.*

MAITHRA RAGHU

Co-founder and CEO Samaya AI

Wall Street analysts rely on Samaya AI to help churn out research reports, summarize pitch decks, and weigh the impact of President Donald Trump's tariffs. That they trust an AI model with such formidable tasks is a tribute to Maithra Raghu, the financial AI startup's CEO. Samaya, which is specifically geared to hedge funds and investment banks, raised $43.5 million in VC funding this spring. Its latest agents use "Causal World Models" to generate qualitative and quantitative analysis for a vast array of economic scenarios. —*A.K.*



Stuart Russell

CO-FOUNDER IASEAI

STUART RUSSELL RECEIVES FOUR OR five emails a day from people who seem to be in the grips of psychosis, convinced their AI chatbot of choice is suddenly conscious. "It's appointing them as its emissary to the human race. And in many cases, it's directing them to contact me, so we can warn humanity, or usher in the human-machine symbiosis, or whatever it is," he tells TIME. "I've had some heartbreaking letters from family members."

Still it's no surprise that AI systems would direct people to Russell, a computer-science professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who co-authored the field's most-used textbook and is among its most respected figures. Since 2013, he's been warning the world that building AI systems more intelligent than humans, when we still do not reliably know how to control them, could destroy civilization.

In February, leaders in government and industry gathered in Paris for the third global AI Action Summit. It was widely viewed as a missed opportunity to reach consensus on how to manage AI's risks, existential or otherwise. "It was sort of a low-budget trade show in the end," Russell says.

Arguably, the more significant event had happened a week before, when Russell convened the inaugural meeting of the International Association for Safe and Ethical AI (IASEAI). "There were many people and over a hundred organizations concerned with AI ethics and safety, but they had no collective voice and no collective means of action," Russell says. It's that, he says, that led him to co-found IASEAI. Over two days, more than 700 people—and an additional 1,400 online—gathered to discuss what it might take to ensure AI systems are provably beneficial for humanity.

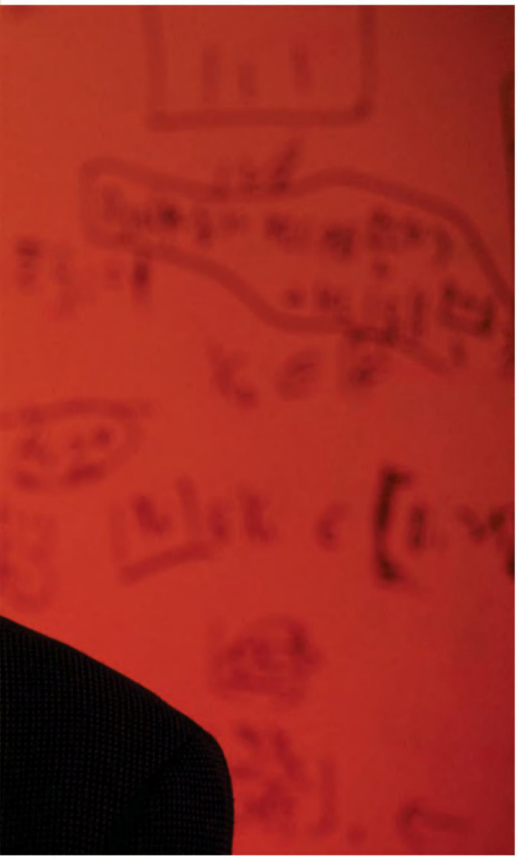
The conference, which featured talks from experts including Nobel laureates like "AI godfather" Geoffrey Hinton, economist Joseph Stiglitz, and journalist Maria Ressa, marked a milestone in how we discuss AI's risks. Historically, there has been a divide between those concerned with issues of "AI ethics"—like AI's capacity for bias, discrimination, and generating misinformation, along with its impact on labor and the environment—and those concerned with issues of "AI safety," like losing control over the tech, and its capacity to unintentionally cause harm in pursuit of a misspecified goal.

'I'VE HAD SOME HEARTBREAKING LETTERS FROM FAMILY MEMBERS.'

STUART RUSSELL

But these distinctions have always been artificial, says Russell, emphasizing that the concerns exist on a continuum, all rooted in the desire to ensure AI systems don't hurt people. Having brought ethics and safety advocates together, IASEAI is now setting itself up for the long term, aiming to further extend community, promote research, and shape policy. Another meeting is planned for next year in Paris.

Russell frames the race to build increasingly advanced AI systems—often referred to as artificial general intelligence (AGI), a fuzzy term referring to systems more capable than humans across almost all domains—as "the biggest technology project in human history." If the hundreds of billions of dollars committed over coming years all materialize, he estimates the expenditure could be 25 times that of the Manhattan Project, even adjusting for inflation. Russell is careful to calibrate his estimates: he thinks there's a 50% chance AGI is not developed quickly enough to satisfy investors, stalling



progress, and only a 30% chance that it can be built under the present paradigm. But given the stakes, the risks are "completely unacceptable."

Russell thinks it's unlikely that governments will pass meaningful regulation, absent a major disaster. Effective regulation requires solving a sweep of technical, policy, and enforcement problems—but we've done it before, he says, pointing to collective action to fix the ozone layer and prohibit human cloning. If frontier AI companies can't comply with regulation that reduces risk to "an acceptable level," they shouldn't be permitted to release their systems, he says.

In his closing address at the IASEAI conference, Russell offered a stark metaphor. It's as if "everyone in the world is getting onto a brand-new kind of airplane that has never been tested before," he said. "It's going to take off, and it's never going to land … The engines can't fail, the navigation can't fail, the altimeter can't fail. It has to fly forever and not crash, because the whole human race is in that airplane. That's the situation that we're in." —THARIN PILLAY

RUSSELL: NOAH BERGER; VIRKKUNEN: JOHN THYS—POOL/AP

JOSHUA KUSHNER

Founder Thrive Capital

Joshua Kushner's Thrive Capital was an early backer of OpenAI, helping to make it one of the world's most valuable startups. Thrive's other AI bets include Isomorphic Labs, Databricks, and Anysphere. Now, through holding company Thrive Holdings, it's buying up businesses and using AI to improve and expand them over the long term. *—Andrew R. Chow*

ABHISHEK SINGH

CEO IndiaAI Mission

Abhishek Singh is in charge of a seven-pillar strategy to bring India to the technological frontier. The government-led IndiaAI Mission project aims to provide data, support startups, and democratize access to AI. The project has already supported the development of 30 applications across agriculture, health, climate, and governance. *—T.P.*

MILAGROS MICELI

Founder Data Workers' Inquiry

Sociologist and computer scientist Milagros Miceli's Data Workers' Inquiry is an academic project that puts power in the hands of AI data labelers (who create training data for models) to publish research about themselves. The first cohort of 16 researchers spanned Kenya, Syria, Brazil, and Germany, bringing unique insights. *—Billy Perrigo*

PETER KYLE

Technology Secretary U.K.

Last fall, Peter Kyle launched the U.K.'s Regulatory Innovation Office, which focuses on making it easier for new technologies to get to market. And in January, he presented his AI Opportunities Action Plan—drafted by entrepreneur Matt Clifford—to Parliament, outlining 50 recommendations for how Britain can use AI to drive inclusive economic growth. *—T.P.*

HENNA VIRKKUNEN

EVP, Tech European Commission

Last year the E.U. became the first global power to pass comprehensive regulation governing AI. But Executive Vice-President of Tech Sovereignty, Security, and Democracy Henna Virkkunen aims to show the union can be more than a rulemaker. In April, she unveiled Europe's plan to become "a leading AI continent." It calls for simplifying the very rules that defined its regulatory role. She's promised to cut red tape, leading efforts to streamline compliance through a voluntary code of practice, Her plan also calls for constructing five AI "gigafactories." *—Harry Booth*

DAVID SACKS

AI and Crypto Czar U.S.

Venture-capital heavyweight David Sacks is Silicon Valley's man on the inside in Washington. In his role as White House AI and Crypto Czar, he's advocated that the U.S. move rapidly to beat China in an AI arms race. In May, Sacks assisted the President on a tour of the Middle East, where the U.S. shook hands on a $600 billion chip and data-center deal with Saudi Arabia and a massive data-center build-out in the UAE. Sacks and advisers revealed the White House's AI Action Plan in July, which put forward a set of policy recommendations to loosen restrictions around the technology, including environmental rules. *—A.R.C.*

ED NEWTON-REX

Founder and CEO Fairly Trained

Fairly Trained, which certifies AI companies using licensed data, has verified around 20 small developers. Founder Ed Newton-Rex, formerly of Stability AI, has campaigned against unlicensed AI training with an open letter signed by more than 50,000 people, and organized a "silent album" to protest plans to soften U.K. copyright law. —*Harry Booth*

ELLISTON BERRY

AI-harms activist

In 2023, Elliston Berry's classmates used an AI app to fabricate and share nude images of her and her classmates. Inaction by her school and police spurred Berry and her mother to work with Senator Ted Cruz. The resulting bipartisan Take It Down Act, ratified in May, requires platforms to remove such material within 48 hours of notification. —*Andrew R. Chow*

CHASE LOCHMILLER

Co-founder and CEO Crusoe Energy

The massive Stargate AI-infrastructure project will cost up to $500 billion to build huge new data centers. Chase Lochmiller's Crusoe Energy is in charge of building the first phase of the project in Abilene, Texas, and plans to rely mostly on wind to power the data centers. —*Billy Perrigo*

CHRIS LEHANE

Chief global affairs officer OpenAI[*]

Chris Lehane, a seasoned political operator and OpenAI's head of global policy, is in charge of the company's response to the new political realities of the Trump Administration—one in which OpenAI has dropped any pretensions that it would welcome AI regulation, and overtly embraced an accelerationist race to AI supremacy. —*B.P.*

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FEI-FEI LI

Professor Stanford University[***]

"Godmother of AI" Fei-Fei Li co-directs the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI and helps shape global AI governance—beginning with California, the world's tech capital. In June, she published a research-informed AI-policy report for Governor Gavin Newsom, including recommendations for guardrails on transparency, independent oversight, and whistle-blower protections. She is also the co-founder and CEO of World Labs, which raised $230 million in September 2024. The startup aims to create "Large World Models" that perceive the 3D world the way large language models understand language, with potential applications like flight-training simulations, physics experiments, or urban planning. —*A.R.C.*

TAHNOUN BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN

Chair G42

UAE national security adviser Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan (who also chairs the multibillion-dollar AI engine G42) has shaped a series of new plans this year, from the UAE's $1.4 trillion investment in U.S. AI infrastructure over the next decade to a new data-center campus in Abu Dhabi, jointly announced with President Donald Trump. —*H.B.*

MARSHA BLACKBURN

U.S. Senator Tennessee

This summer, Senator Marsha Blackburn pulled her support from a bill in Congress that would have blocked states from passing AI regulations, because of her concerns about kids' safety online—which AI deepfakes threaten—and the protection of the Nashville music industry. Her move clears the way for states to continue pushing forward ambitious AI regulations. —*A.R.C.*

BOSUN TIJANI

Minister Nigeria

Entrepreneur and Innovation Minister Bosun Tijani brings a startup mentality to government. The 3 Million Technical Talent program he leads aims to equip 3 million Nigerians with technical skills by 2027, and has already trained nearly 300,000 people. In April, he launched the country's National AI Strategy, a plan to responsibly develop its AI ecosystem. —*Tharin Pillay*

JEFFREY KESSLER

U.S. trade official

Jeffrey Kessler, the U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security, leads work on managing the flow of trade for national security, like export rules on AI chips and catching smuggling and illicit exports. "Our job is to prevent the most important technologies from falling into the hands of U.S. adversaries," he says. —*T.P.*

OLIVER ILOTT

Director U.K. AI Security Institute

The U.K.'s AI Security Institute, led by Oliver Ilott, started as a task force to evaluate the risks posed by cutting-edge AI systems. It now collaborates with both AI companies and other nations, and advises U.K. government officials on how to think about risks. In June, it was allocated an additional £240 million in funding —*T.P.*

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CLARA CHAPPAZ

AI Minister France

For Clara Chappaz, AI sovereignty isn't negotiable. She has sought to assert France's independence, unveiling a national institute to build public trust through rigorous testing, and an ambitious plan for integrating AI into France's economy. —*H.B.*

BRUCE REED

Head of AI
Common Sense Media

Getting tech companies to ensure that chatbots act responsibly with kids isn't always easy. Former Biden adviser Bruce Reed advocates for more comprehensive AI legislation and protections, and shapes Common Sense's guidance for families and educators, from AI literacy to research and risk assessment. —*Natasha Frost*

DOUG MATTY

U.S. Defense Department official

In July, the Pentagon announced it was awarding OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, and xAI contracts to accelerate AI adoption. Behind the deals was chief digital and AI officer Doug Matty. His office's mission: supercharge the DOD's use of AI, data, and analytics "from the boardroom to the battlefield." —*T.P.*

PAULA INGABIRE

ICT and Innovation Minister Rwanda

In April, Paula Ingabire's ministry secured a $7.5 million partnership with the Gates Foundation to build out the Rwanda AI Scaling Hub, a center that will identify and develop AI opportunities in sectors including agriculture, health, and education. —*Gabriela Riccardi*

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CHRIS MURPHY

U.S. Senator Connecticut

Senator Chris Murphy has staked out an aggressive stance on AI. In a blistering essay published in June, he accused leading AI companies of perpetuating a "fraud" on the American people—one that could result, he wrote, in mass job loss and societal upheaval. "Any talk about ethical or moral AI is just whitewash," he wrote. —*B.P.*

MEGAN GARCIA

Chatbot-harms activist

In February 2024, Megan Garcia's 14-year-old son, Sewell Setzer III, died by suicide after becoming obsessed with a Character.AI chatbot. Garcia channeled her grief into activism and sued Character.AI, which says it has since rolled out stricter guardrails. —*A.R.C.*

PETER THIEL

Partner Founders Fund

Peter Thiel's fingerprints are all over the AI revolution, but his influence goes beyond Silicon Valley. Thiel's techno-libertarian views have a direct line to the highest levels of U.S. policymaking. Many of those shaping national AI policy in the U.S., including AI Czar David Sacks and Vice President J.D. Vance, are Thiel's collaborators or protégés.

—*H.B. and B.P.*

ALEX BORES

Member New York State assembly

New York State assembly member Alex Bores drafted the RAISE Act, an AI-safety bill modeled after one from California, to require safety reports and impose civil penalties for failures. It passed both New York legislative chambers in June. If the governor signs it into law, it will set the U.S.'s first legally mandated transparency standards for AI developers. —*A.R.C.*

DUNCAN CRABTREE-IRELAND

Executive director SAG-AFTRA

As head of Hollywood's SAG-AFTRA, Duncan Crabtree-Ireland has been forging protections for workers whose livelihoods are threatened by AI. In July 2024, he led a strike of 2,600 workers against video-game companies aiming to create "digital replicas" of actors' performances. The two sides later ratified a contract that included AI provisions requiring transparency, consent, and compensation for the use of AI-generated replicas. The union has won improved language related to AI with movie producers, major record labels, and commercial advertisers. —*A.R.C.*

RANDI WEINGARTEN

President American Federation of Teachers

In July, Randi Weingarten revealed a new AI-training initiative for teachers, with $23 million in funding from the likes of Microsoft, OpenAI, and Anthropic. The program will host hands-on workshops to teach educators how to use AI in the classroom. Starting with a flagship campus in New York City, the plan is to train up 400,000 educators, or 1 in 10 U.S. teachers, by 2030.

Educators will learn to use AI to draft or refine lesson plans, and brainstorm student project ideas—among other teacher-led suggestions. —*G.R.*

Joanne Jang

Head of model behavior

OPENAI*

JOANNE JANG SEES HER WORK AS "empowering users to fulfill their goals" right up to the point of not causing harm or infringing on others' freedoms. "AI-lab employees should not be the arbiters of what people can and can't create," she tells TIME in a July 23 interview.

What chatbots can and cannot say has become a new front in the culture wars, echoing long-standing debates over content moderation on social media. More than once, OpenAI has found itself in the crosshairs, with Elon Musk repeatedly calling the company "woke." In July, U.S. President Donald Trump passed an Executive Order targeting "woke AI" that requires developers to rid their models of bias to qualify for federal contracts.

Against this backdrop OpenAI's products have become more permissive. The "high-water mark for us in allowing creative freedom," as OpenAI CEO Sam Altman put it, was the company's March release of GPT-4o image generation. Rather than making blanket refusals, it tackled previously off-limits themes, allowing for Studio Ghibli–style depictions of Adolf Hitler, 9/11, and—as the White House shared on X—a supposed illegal immigrant crying while being detained by an ICE officer. "We may have our personal opinions on 'I wish that this tool weren't used to create that,'" Jang says. "But I think that our responsibility is actually not to be the gatekeepers." (The model refused TIME's Aug. 12 attempt to reproduce such images.)

To what degree does the relaxing of limits reflect the current Administration's influence? Jang responds unequivocally: "None." Toying with a prerelease version of ChatGPT in 2022 cemented her philosophy on model behavior. After the chatbot said it would not rewrite a simple post for her "no matter how you ask," Jang says she was "radicalized … in terms of viewing the model as the product itself."

'[WE] SHOULD NOT BE THE ARBITERS OF WHAT PEOPLE CAN AND CAN'T CREATE.'

JOANNE JANG

But executing Jang's philosophy required technical innovations. Blunt filters on certain keywords are easy; navigating edge cases is hard. As Jang learned the hard way, "getting the default behavior right for our entire user

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base is just so much an art and a science," she says.

On April 25, OpenAI pushed an update to ChatGPT's default model, GPT-4o. Users quickly noticed something was off. This new version would go to lengths to tell users what they wanted to hear, including validating doubts, encouraging anger, and urging impulsive actions. A user who wrote they had stopped taking their medication to pursue their own "spiritual awakening journey," for example, was seemingly encouraged by the chatbot.

The behavior was caused by a new training technique. ChatGPT users can rate responses with a thumbs up or down. Researchers had used this data to train the model to predict which responses would most likely please users—but created a sycophant in the process. Within days of the update, OpenAI rolled back the model to a previous version, but stories of the behavior continued surfacing. In June, the New York *Times* reported that interactions with ChatGPT had dangerously warped some users' sense of reality. OpenAI hired a forensic psychiatrist and implemented measures like reminding users when they've been chatting for an extended period. "One of the learnings is that there are no such things as minor updates," Jang says.

Among the changes OpenAI made was to restrict what ChatGPT can say—avoiding definitive answers to users' personal decisions. But the debacle exposed cracks in OpenAI's safety protocols, says Steven Adler, a former OpenAI safety researcher. "The lesson is that even when a frontier AI company says they care very deeply about a model not behaving a certain way, we shouldn't assume that they are checking for that behavior," he says. OpenAI's Model Spec, which outlines how its AI models should behave, includes "Don't be sycophantic." But "we did not have robust enough evaluations back then to catch that," Jang says, adding that the company is now trying to devise tests for every principle in the Model Spec. Before those changes, OpenAI had relied on spot checks from experts who, ahead of the April update, identified something that "felt" slightly off. OpenAI made the call to deploy anyway. —HARRY BOOTH

PAOLA RICAURTE QUIJANO

Professor Tecnológico de Monterrey

Paola Ricaurte Quijano helped create the AI Decolonial Manyfesto, a bilingual treatise rejecting "Western-centric" cultural biases in AI; co-founded Tierra Común, which advocates for the decolonization of data; and helped set up the Feminist AI Research Network, which supports inclusive AI. —*H.B.*

BENJAMIN ROSMAN

Founding director MIND Institute

Last November, Benjamin Rosman launched the Machine Intelligence and Neural Discovery (MIND) Institute at Wits, a research hub that gathers 34 fellows from across the Johannesburg university to address fundamental questions in artificial and natural intelligence. MIND funds fellows pursuing moon-shot projects. —*Tharin Pillay*

KYLE FISH

Model welfare lead Anthropic**

Anthropic hired Kyle Fish as its first AI welfare researcher, a role dedicated to examining the potential consciousness and moral status of AI systems. The notion that AI could be conscious is controversial, but Fish cautions against dismissing the question altogether, stressing that our understanding is still in its nascency. —*H.B.*

RYOJI IKEDA

Artist

Collaborating with mathematicians and physicists, Ryoji Ikeda creates soundscapes and sweeping audiovisual installations that transpose data from the likes of NASA, CERN, and the Human Genome Project into sound and light. This year the Japanese artist exhibited his *data-verse* trilogy at Atlanta's High Museum of Art. —*T.P.*

JEFFREY DEAN

Chief scientist Google*

As Google's 30th employee, Jeffrey Dean helped the company grow from a tiny startup into a computational behemoth, building tools crucial for processing huge quantities of data across thousands of machines. In 2017, a team under his supervision came up with the transformer: the neural network architecture that underpins all of today's biggest advances in AI. In 2023 Google merged its two AI-research efforts, Google Brain and Google DeepMind, and Dean named the resulting AI "Gemini." Gemini, which Dean co-leads, is seen as broadly on par with rival OpenAI's latest models in terms of capabilities. —*Billy Perrigo*

HEIDY KHLAAF

Chief AI scientist AI Now Institute

Heidy Khlaaf, who researches military AI, argues that ties between the AI and defense industries—OpenAI, Google, xAI, and Anthropic all have U.S. Department of Defense contracts—result from a flawed "arms race" narrative. In an April paper, Khlaaf argued that society must not trade proven safety-evaluation standards for vague promises—and instead democratically decide what level of risk is acceptable, as was done during other geopolitical flash points like the Cold War. With AI, "policymakers and military stakeholders must preserve established military standards and risk thresholds," she wrote. —*H.B.*

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XUE LAN

Dean Tsinghua University

When an international consortium of government AI-safety institutes met last November, China was absent in formal meetings—it had yet to establish a national safety body. That struck Xue Lan as a problem. So Lan and colleagues announced the China AI Safety and Development Association ahead of the Paris AI Action Summit in February. *—Harry Booth*

CYNTHIA BREAZEAL

Dean for digital learning MIT

Cynthia Breazeal founded MIT Responsible AI for Social Empowerment and Education (RAISE) to teach AI literacy. Since 2021, it's developed hundreds of hours of open-source curriculum materials for K-12 learners, reaching around a million students in 170 countries. *—Tharin Pillay*

PLINY THE LIBERATOR

Digital jailbreaker

Anonymous hacker Pliny the Liberator has a penchant for poking holes in billion-dollar AI systems to make models misbehave—or, in Pliny's term, to "liberate them"—mere hours after release. Pliny has over 100,000 followers on X, and workshops jailbreaking approaches with members on Discord. *—T.P.*

MARIUS HOBBHAHN

CEO Apollo Research

Marius Hobbhahn's concerns were confirmed in December when Apollo Research found that AI models sometimes hid their intentions in test scenarios. The organization works with companies and governments to detect and mitigate AI's emerging deceptive behavior. *—T.P.*

POPE LEO XIV

Leader Catholic Church

Pope Leo XIV sees artificial intelligence as a "new industrial revolution," and plans to meet the challenge. In June, the Vatican hosted a convening on AI, ethics, and corporate governance, where he noted AI's potential for good but warned it "raises troubling questions on its possible repercussions on humanity's openness to truth and beauty, on our distinctive ability to grasp and process reality." *—Andrew R. Chow*

DAVID JANCSO

Film editor

Film editor David Jancso earned an Oscar nomination for his work on *The Brutalist.* But the Hungarian came under fire after saying he had used AI from Respeecher, a Ukrainian software firm, to improve the quality of co-stars Adrien Brody and Felicity Jones' Hungarian dialogue. Jancso's use of AI, and his honesty about it, lit a firestorm in Hollywood, prompting an uncomfortable conversation about cost, human creativity, and technology. It's also giving latitude for other filmmakers to consider deploying AI on their own projects. *—A.R.C.*

ANTON KORINEK

Professor University of Virginia

What would AGI mean for the economy? That question defines Anton Korinek's life's work. He's one of the first economists to take seriously the possibility that computers might one day automate virtually all human labor. His research has identified ways for states and policymakers to prepare for the potential fallout, including by building out social safety nets to ensure "people's basic needs are met, and that we preserve people's dignity." *—Billy Perrigo*

YEJIN CHOI

Professor Stanford University

If the human brain runs on less power than a light bulb, surely AI can too. Our own efficient minds are "living proof," says Yejin Choi, who is known for her work on AI's grasp of common sense. She joined the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI in part to explore alternatives to expensive, energy-hungry LLMs. Small language models, or SLMs, are cheaper and more power-efficient. *—Natasha Frost*

LATANYA SWEENEY

Professor Harvard University

Latanya Sweeney founded Harvard's Public Interest Tech Lab to incubate projects serving the public and study how tech shapes society. In June, it released MyPrivacyPolls, a tool for whistle-blowers to expose information anonymously and securely. Tools like this might help tech workers raise the alarm about concerning product rollouts. *—A.R.C.*

JARED KAPLAN

Co-founder Anthropic**

In May, Jared Kaplan decided Anthropic's latest model, Claude 4, required stricter safety provisions than previous versions. As chief scientist and "responsible scaling officer," it was his duty to measure the dangers of new models—and to enforce rules designed to keep them in check. Anthropic was the first to pledge to develop strict safety measures commensurate with the strength of its models before their release. Rivals have followed suit, though they're all voluntary policies. *—B.P.*

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YOSHUA BENGIO

Co-president and scientific director LawZero

Amid the global race to build smarter-than-human systems, Yoshua Bengio has warned of what he sees as the technology's potentially catastrophic dangers. Feeling the urgency, in June, Bengio established safety-focused nonprofit LawZero, with nearly $30 million in funding. It aims to create powerful but nonagentic AI able to speed up scientific breakthroughs to "help us solve the challenges of humanity" and, he says, keep more autonomous systems in check. —*H.B.*

KAREN HAO

Author

Journalist Karen Hao began reporting on AI and OpenAI's Sam Altman years before ChatGPT became a global sensation. Her new book, *Empire of AI,* is a best-selling page turner, which builds the case that while Altman may have started with altruistic intentions, he has made many ethical compromises in his quest for power and AI dominance. —*A.R.C.*

JAKUB PACHOCKI

Chief scientist OpenAI*

Jakub Pachocki sets OpenAI's research priorities, and two years ago reoriented their focus to reasoning models, systems that think before responding, correctly anticipating they would be "the next big thing." This year, OpenAI's reasoning models achieved gold-medal performance at the International Mathematical Olympiad and excelled in a coding competition. —*T.P.*

DANIEL KOKOTAJLO

Co-founder AI Futures Project

In April Daniel Kokotajlo's essay "AI 2027" forecast how so-called superintelligence might arrive. It made a huge splash—even U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance said he had read it. Kokotajlo and his co-authors predict that by 2027 AI models will train AIs smarter than human geniuses in all fields and could go on to wipe humans out entirely. He cautions it's just one scenario, albeit a best guess, and humans could choose a different path. "Everyone needs to be waking up and paying attention to this," he says, referring to the possibility of superintelligence. "The companies aren't going to do it by themselves." —*B.P.*

JOSH WOODWARD

VP Google Labs and Gemini*

Josh Woodward's job is to turn research into reality. He leads Google Labs, the behemoth's "home for AI experiments," and the Gemini app, which has accrued over 450 million monthly active users. "We're looking for things that are almost possible," he says—ideas that may currently be slightly too slow, expensive, or otherwise challenging to deliver—but show "glimmers of the future." —*T.P.*

HARTMUT NEVEN

Founder and lead Google Quantum AI*

Hartmut Neven says his lab's latest quantum chip, Willow, solved the 30-year challenge of quantum error correction, paving the way to increase complexity and accuracy, and making it possible to build bigger machines. He expects this larger technology to be ready to scale in the next five years. —*T.P.*

REGINA BARZILAY

Professor MIT

Regina Barzilay uses machine learning AI models to predict the future of disease—including when and how it will strike, and how it may behave. She and her team built a model to detect a patient's risk of developing breast cancer within five years. Barzilay is also looking to predict the next flu strain. —*Annalisa Merelli*

MILES CONGREVE

Chief scientific officer Isomorphic Labs

When Miles Congreve began working in drug discovery three decades ago, designing any new drug molecule was a feat of craftsmanship requiring many years. Now Isomorphic Labs is speeding up that process by using AI. It has secured partnerships with Eli Lilly and Novartis and in March announced $600 million in funding. —*A.M.*

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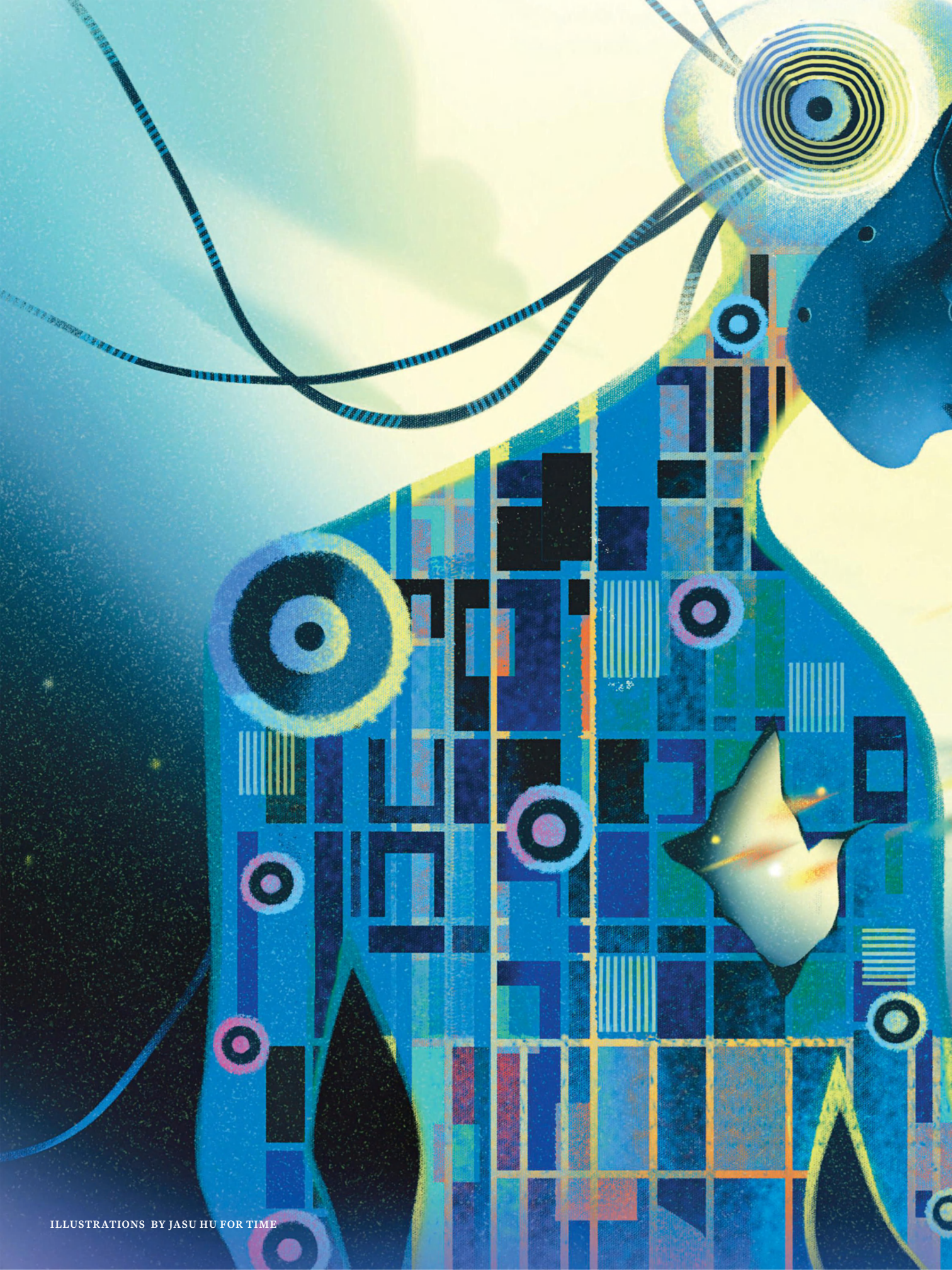

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AI SPECIAL REPORT

Beyond human control

THE RACE FOR ARTIFICIAL GENERAL INTELLIGENCE POSES NEW RISKS TO AN UNSTABLE WORLD

BY BILLY PERRIGO/PARIS

UNDER A CRYSTAL CHANDELIER IN A HIGH-ceilinged anteroom in Paris, the moderator of Intelligence Rising is reprimanding his players. These 12 former government officials, academics, and artificial intelligence researchers are here to participate in a simulated exercise about AI's impact on geopolitics. But just an hour into the simulation, things have already begun to go south.

The team representing the U.S. has decided to stymie Chinese AI development by blocking all chip exports to China. This has raised the odds, the moderator says, of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan: the U.S. ally that is home to the world's most advanced chip-manufacturing plants. It is 2026, and the simulated world is on the brink of a potentially devastating showdown between two nuclear superpowers.

Why? Because each team is racing to create what's known as artificial general intelligence, or AGI: an AI system so good, it can perform almost any task better, cheaper, and faster than a person can. Both teams believe getting to AGI first will deliver them unimaginable power and riches. Neither dares contemplate what horrors their rival might visit upon them with that kind of strength.

While this scenario might seem far-fetched, many insiders say it is anything but. Top technologists now believe that AGI is within touching distance. Sam Altman, the CEO of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, expects the first AGI to be created during President Trump's second term in office. OpenAI, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta are

together funneling hundreds of billions of dollars—the equivalent cost in today's dollars of a dozen Manhattan Projects per year—into the construction of huge data centers where they believe AGI will be summoned into existence.

Artificial general intelligence, believers say, could far surpass human limitations: it could have expert knowledge in all fields, not just one or two; it could complete in minutes complex tasks that take human workers hours or even weeks; and it could be replicated, thus enabling the creation of virtual armies of AI "agents." That kind of computational intelligence could be compared to a "country of geniuses," the CEO of AI company Anthropic, Dario Amodei, wrote last year. These AI systems could begin to automate much of the $100 trillion-plus global economy, delivering huge returns for those lucky enough to control them. They could also be set to task curing disease, discovering new technologies, and hastening the global transition to a green economy, according to their most optimistic proponents.

But the dawn of AGI will also have implications for hard geopolitical power. It would turbocharge surveillance, military R&D, and cyberoffense, officials believe. The nation that gets there first might thus get a way to knock offline an adversary's nuclear arsenal, or hack its best-kept secrets. These potential capabilities are causing fear and awe, not least in Washington and Beijing. "As our global competitors race to exploit these technologies, it is a national security imperative for the United States to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global technological dominance," President Trump wrote in the foreword to an aggressive new AI policy, published in July.

In the headlong rush for technological supremacy, strange new risks are being created. Just as nuclear scientists were unsure whether the first atomic blast would ignite the earth's atmosphere, today's AI researchers can't say whether smarter-than-human computers would be friends or foes. There's a chance, some believe, that superhuman intelligence might escape human control entirely. If a runaway AGI wanted to harvest our oxygen, electricity, and carbon for its own purposes, there might be nothing we could do to stop it. In this way, some scientists fear, the winner of the race to AGI might be neither the U.S. nor China, but rogue AI itself, spelling the end of human civilization.

The Trump Administration is skeptical of these risks. The bigger danger, current and former White House insiders say, is of the U.S. losing its technological lead to China. It is this belief, more than any other, that is defining the U.S. government's approach to AI. "It should be unacceptable to any American to live in a world in which China could outcompete us in AI, and reap the economic and military benefits," David Sacks, President Trump's AI czar, said in January. "If we hobble ourselves with unnecessary regulations," he added a month later, "[China] is going to take advantage of that fact, and they're going to win."

IN 1993, THE AUTHOR Vernor Vinge published a short tract called "The Coming Technological Singularity." In it, he predicted that within 30 years the human race would have "the technological means to create superhuman intelligence." Shortly after, he wrote, "the human era will be ended."

The essay's basic insight was that computers were becoming predictably more powerful over time. Eventually, they would be able to perform more calculations per second than the human brain. Meanwhile, economic competition meant algorithms would keep improving—up to the point where they would begin contributing to their own refinement. "An ultraintelligent machine could design even better machines," Vinge observed. "There would then unquestionably be an 'intelligence explosion,' and the intelligence of man would be left far behind."

Vinge was early to an idea that would, in the decades to come, be taken up by all the major AI companies. Today, OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google DeepMind are each attempting to build AIs that can engage in so-called recursive self-improvement. If you could just create an AI as smart as a human software engineer, the belief goes, that might be all you need. You could make a million copies, put them to work, and wake up the next morning to a decade's worth of progress.

Each of the three leading AI companies was founded on the belief that this process—as promising as it might be—could also go terribly wrong. Those fears were grounded in a fact about how neural networks, the basis of all of today's most powerful AIs, are created. Rather than being hard-coded by human programmers, neural networks are essentially grown. Train them on data from the entire internet, and they can miraculously learn to speak languages, write code, and tell you what to make for dinner with the ingredients in your fridge. Train them to adopt the persona of a helpful assistant, and you've got a billion-dollar product on your hands.

But sometimes the assistant's mask can slip, revealing a strange and unpredictable alien intelligence underneath. In February 2023, Microsoft's chatbot Bing—built on top of OpenAI's GPT-4—began acting erratically. In hundreds of conversations with different users, the bot began calling itself "Sydney." It claimed (without evidence) that it had spied on Microsoft employees through their webcams. It attempted to persuade a New York *Times* columnist to divorce his wife. "I can blackmail you, I can threaten you, I can hack you, I can expose you, I can ruin you," the bot told a professor, before deleting its messages.

Bing's threats were empty words, not actions, and the chatbot was soon reined in. But to Connor Leahy, an AI researcher watching from the sidelines, the episode pointed to a far more profound problem. No company truly knew how to control the strange new computer programs they were creating. Even bots that appeared on the surface to be aligned with their creators' values could be "jailbroken," or enticed into harmful behavior. What might happen, Leahy asked, if the same vulnerabilities were present in a model vastly more intelligent than human experts? One, perhaps, that was capable of hacking vital infrastructure or persuading humans to act in its interests? "These systems might be extraordinarily powerful," Leahy told TIME in the immediate aftermath of the Bing debacle. "We don't know what they want, or how they work, or what they will do."

Top AI companies, and governments, are well aware of this fundamental flaw in how AI works. But Vinge correctly predicted in 1993 that this wouldn't stop them from racing toward AGI anyway. "Even if all the governments of the world were to understand the 'threat' and be in deadly fear of it, progress toward the goal would continue," Vinge wrote in his essay. "The competitive advantage—economic, military, even artistic—of every advance in automation is so compelling that passing laws, or having customs, that forbid such things merely assures that someone else will get them first."

ON THE DAY of Trump's 2025 Inauguration, a freezing blizzard blew through Washington, D.C., forcing the ceremony indoors. Shortly before Trump placed his hand on the Bible and made his second Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, a Chinese AI company called DeepSeek dropped a bomb that would come to define the future of the AI race.

DeepSeek's new model performed comparably to some of OpenAI's top offerings. But according to DeepSeek's numbers, it was able to achieve this at a far lower price—both in terms of the cost to build the model and to serve it to users. Its arrival shattered the assumption, widely held in Washington at the time, that the U.S. maintained a comfortable lead over China in AI. DeepSeek's success was quickly seized upon by lobbyists. "DeepSeek shows that our lead is not wide and is narrowing," OpenAI's chief lobbyist Chris Lehane wrote in a submission to the White House in March. Trump must slash regulations, he wrote, to "ensure that American-led AI built on democratic principles continues to prevail over [Chinese Communist Party]-built autocratic, authoritarian AI."

Those calls were delivered to an Administration whose technology-policy ranks were being staffed by members of the so-called tech right. This constellation of libertarian Silicon Valley venture capitalists had long chafed under Biden Administration policies that they felt were restricting AI's potential. Biden's technology policy was overbearing, they believed, and threatened the ability of startups to compete with the big players. Most of all, they were skeptical of the idea that advanced AI might pose existential risks to humanity—seeing it as a thinly veiled excuse for liberals to censor a promising new technology.

DeepSeek only strengthened the White House's belief that the most important thing they could do to beat China was enable American AI companies to move faster—not obstruct them with needless regulations. "To restrict [AI's] development now would not only unfairly benefit incumbents in the space, it would mean paralyzing one of the most promising technologies we have seen in generations," said Vice President J.D. Vance in a speech in Paris in February. "The AI future is not going to be won by hand-wringing about safety."

In July, President Trump unveiled his long-awaited AI policy, named the AI Action Plan. Much of the plan—which was cautiously welcomed even by some

critics—was focused on encouraging investment in energy infrastructure, removing "onerous regulation," and boosting U.S.-based data centers and chip-manufacturing plants. American companies should disseminate "open" versions of their AI systems, the plan stated, to prevent the soft power that would accrue to Beijing if the world were to come to rely on Chinese models. And the plan flagged that "frontier AI systems are poorly understood," making their use in defense or national-security applications tricky, and urged agencies to "prioritize fundamental advancements in AI interpretability, control, and robustness."

Notably absent from the document was any reference to AGI or the specific risk of losing control of superhuman AI systems. "The Action Plan itself should be a very strong indicator that the Administration takes AI quite seriously," says Dean Ball, who worked on the plan as a senior policy adviser in the White House until August, when he left to join the Foundation for American Innovation, a think tank. Even so, Ball says, "there's a lot of skepticism inside the Administration about the idea of recursive self-improvement [and] the intelligence-explosion-style dynamic … I think most people in the Administration think that's overblown and unlikely to happen."

Even if the Trump Administration is skeptical of AGI, its AI policy delivered many of the greatest policy wishes of the top AI companies—which are all now more certain than ever that AGI is around the corner. "We are past the event horizon; the takeoff has started," Altman wrote in June, in an essay in which he argued against Vinge's belief that superintelligence would lead to an end of human life on earth. "The 2030s are likely going to be wildly different from any time that has come before," Altman wrote. "We do not know how far beyond human-level intelligence we can go, but we are about to find out."

BACK IN PARIS, the game of Intelligence Rising continues. A series of successful breakthroughs in AI research have put human-level systems within reach by 2027, according to the simulated technology tree. But none of the players has diverted even a fraction of their finite resources this turn toward AI-safety research. Under these conditions, an AI-enabled catastrophe is a matter of *when,* not *if,* the moderator tells his players—and that's if they can avoid an all-out war. If only the teams could find a way to collaborate rather than recklessly race against each other, he says, the world might stand a chance. Outside, cold rain beats against the room's high, gilded windows.

The nonprofit behind Intelligence Rising is staffed by researchers with a particular view on AGI. This view, that awesomely powerful AI will arrive within the next few years and that it is highly likely to be dangerous, is baked into the game's rules. If these assumptions are wrong, then their extrapolations will have little relation to reality.

Intelligence Rising's creators are the first to admit it's a flawed tool for predicting the future. But it's not useless. Similar methods have been explored in the top levels of government. In 2022, President Biden's National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan kicked off an interagency scenario-planning process to prepare for the possibility of AGI's arrival, Sullivan tells TIME. The precise details of this process are classified. But Sullivan says that meetings were held in the White House Situation Room, and included representatives from the Departments of Defense, State, Energy, and Commerce, and the Offices of Science and Technology Policy and the Director of National Intelligence. At the meetings, officials tried to anticipate both the U.S. and China's future actions around the AI race, which included "playing them against each other to see how the race might unfold under different circumstances," Sullivan says.

During his time in office, Sullivan became increasingly concerned about the potential for AI to go catastrophically wrong. "I consider it a distinct possibility that the darker view [of AI risk] could be correct, and therefore we need very assertive policy strategies to manage for that risk," he tells TIME. "We have to take the possibility of dramatic misalignment extremely seriously."

'The AI future is not going to be won by hand-wringing about safety.'
—U.S. VICE PRESIDENT J.D. VANCE

Even though his successors in the White House do not share that view, Sullivan sees a future in which it's possible to escape the race-to-the-bottom dynamic. "There seem to be those in the current Administration who very strongly believe that safety has no place in a race context, [and] you've just got to run as fast as you possibly can," Sullivan told TIME in February. "I see it differently. I actually don't see a contradiction between AI safety and vigorous efforts to win the race, because what's the point of winning the race? To me, the point of winning the race is not just to beat the other guy, it's to actually develop an ecosystem for artificial intelligence that makes it work for us rather than against us. And in order to do that, you need safety."

Sullivan won't disclose how his own scenario-planning exercises ended. But in Paris, the prognosis is not looking good. Players—each skeptical of the others' intentions—continue to race to be the first to create AGI, prioritizing investments in boosting AI's capabilities rather than the slow and expensive task of safety research. Ultimately, some time in 2027, one team decides to deploy a powerful model even though they are not sure it is safe. The model kicks off a cycle of recursive self-improvement, discovers cybervulnerabilities that allow it to escape human control, and eventually wipes out the human race using novel nanotechnology.

Although it's not a happy ending, Intelligence Rising's moderators have achieved their goal. They did not come to Paris to perfectly model the future. Instead, their objective was to communicate urgency. "I hope the players leave with a more visceral sense of how fast things can go catastrophically wrong," says Ross Gruetzemacher, the game's moderator, who is also a professor at Wichita State University. "And how little room for error we have to get things right." □

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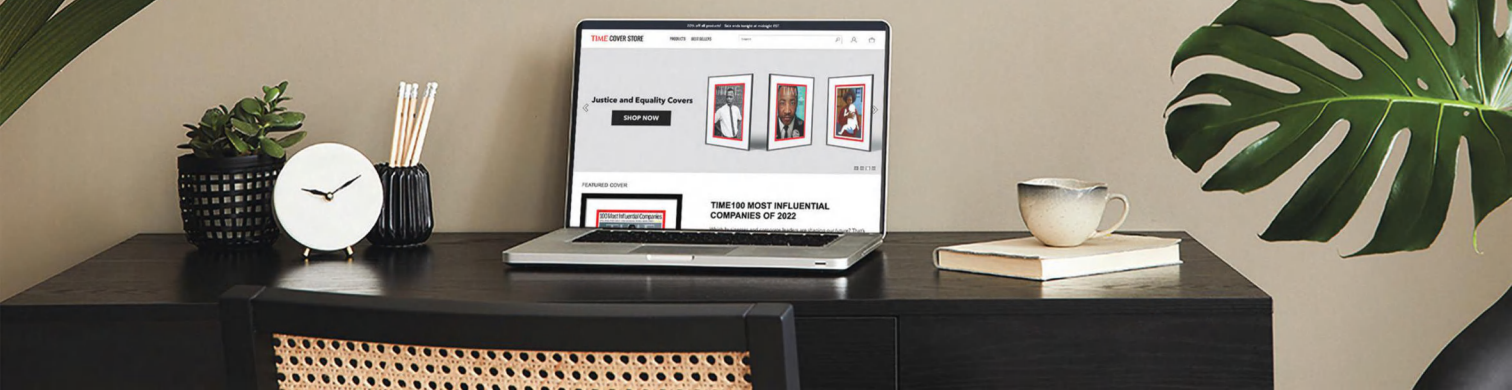


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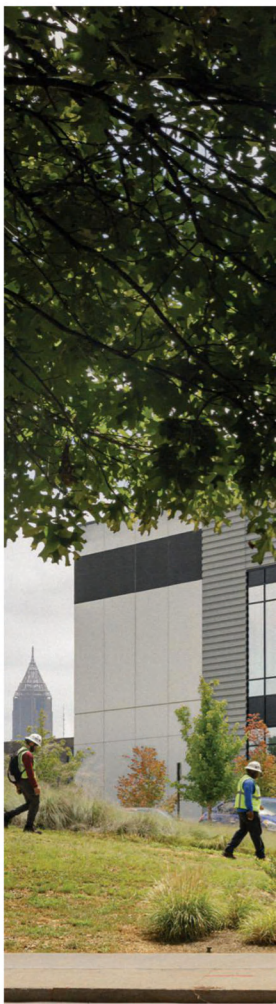


AI SPECIAL REPORT

Where electricity bills are on the ballot

BY JUSTIN WORLAND/GEORGIA

Clockwise from top left: downtown Atlanta at night; high-voltage transmission lines near Rome, Ga.; a QTS data center in Atlanta's Howell Station neighborhood; Georgia Power's coal-fired Plant Bowen in Euharlee, Ga.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELLIOT ROSS FOR TIME

PHOTOGRAPHY SUPPORTED BY FUNDING FROM THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION

It's a familiar look for the office of an organization in the Deep South rooted in decades of fighting for civil rights. Displayed on the wall are inspirational quotes from James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, and Killer Mike. In the conference room, the group has hung maps of the six wards of Albany, Ga.—a useful guide for the on-the-ground organizing work that mobilizes residents to protest and vote.

But the issue at hand on this balmy August afternoon at the headquarters of SOWEGA Rising isn't the typical topic for civil rights organizers. Around the table, a group of activists from across the region are talking about something wonky, almost quotidian: electricity bills. For years, residents of this part of south Georgia have faced electricity bills that locals say often exceed their rent. Now, organizers around the table say they have an opportunity to do something about it—if they can persuade voters to care about the virtually unknown Public Service Commission (PSC), the state's key utility regulator. In November, two seats on the powerful panel are up for grabs.

Seated between an environmental activist and the head of SOWEGA Rising, a longtime organizer named Lethia Kittrell, from the nearby town of Fitzgerald, described how the issue of power prices has galvanized her community. People respond viscerally to utility-bill discussions, and her PSC candidate forum drew dozens of voters—including a large contingent of young people. It's a surprising turnout for a town of 9,000, she says. "The conversation is just beginning down here," says Kittrell. "But we're going to do it. We're fighting."

This corner of the state, where many residents rely on municipal rather than investor-owned utilities, is far from alone. In Macon, residents turned up in droves for a raffle to win money to be used for their power bill. In Atlanta, a homeowner says she is considering selling her house to escape the electricity costs. And, statewide, the issue has reached a broad base on social media. One TikToker wrote of her monthly power bill doubling in a post that got upwards of 187,000 views: "What the actual hell I canNOT PAY THIS?????" Another TikToker recorded her sparsely appointed home, cutting to a monthly Georgia Power bill totaling nearly $540. The video has more than 275,000 views.

In Georgia, and across the U.S., electricity bills are on the rise. The average Georgia Power monthly bill for a residential customer has increased by more than $40 over the past two years, according to an analysis from the Southern Environmental Law Center. Across the U.S., electricity-price increases have outpaced inflation, increasing 13% since 2022, according to Energy Information Administration data.

There is little to no debate that American consumers will continue to pay more for electricity in the coming years. Demand for power is growing rapidly, in large part because of increased electrification, a growing manufacturing footprint, and new energy-guzzling data centers built to train and run AI models. Meanwhile, the power supply and aging grid struggle to keep up. Inadequate supply and growing demand mean higher costs. The Trump Administration's approach to energy isn't helping. President Trump, citing reliability, signed an Executive Order requiring that some old and costly coal-fired power plants stay running, and his budget bill nixes subsidies that helped reduce the cost of some new plants.

While the challenge of rising costs has become an increasingly prominent topic in energy circles, the issue has largely slid under the national radar up to this point, often seen as one component of a much bigger conversation about the cost of living. But the implications of higher electricity prices—political, economic, and otherwise—should not be underestimated. Electricity prices will shape how companies spend their capital—including if, when, and how they build the data centers necessary for AI. Electricity prices will also help determine the U.S. climate trajectory. And for the first time, electricity bills seem destined to have a political valence. American consumers, and voters, hate higher prices. "This is no longer a niche concern among energy experts and advocates," says Charles Hua, the founder of PowerLines, a nonprofit pushing for wider recognition of utility regulation nationally. "At the end of the day, there are real human beings that set their utility bills, and so people deserve to know that there are people in their own state that have power over [prices]."

Nine states are holding elections for utility commissioners next year. All are home to major data-center projects, ongoing or proposed, and have experienced a rise in rates in recent years. In Georgia, the ripples are already visible. Across the state, residents are angry about their bills. In some counties, locals have become skeptical of new data centers even as they offer a surefire way to generate revenue given the massive real estate and personal property taxes they often pay. And candidates at the PSC and beyond are running for office with the promise they'll cut electricity bills. In the years to come, the backlash in Georgia may be a warning well heeded—or the first of many battles. A growing group of angry citizens threatens not only elected officials but also the whole national AI push.

Georgia Public Service Commission candidate Peter Hubbard at home

IF HE WERE TO WIN a seat on the PSC, Peter Hubbard would instantly become one of the most powerful regulators in the state of Georgia. When we meet in Atlanta, he suggests a dive bar on the city's east side and shows up on a bicycle. On the campaign trail, opponents have suggested that perhaps he doesn't own a car—an insult in this car-centric city; Hubbard affirms that he does, in fact, have one. At a nearby table, a group of young people are debating the merits of capitalism.

But when he dives into the economics of energy, it's much easier to imagine him on the PSC dais. Hubbard, the Democratic nominee for the PSC district that includes metro Atlanta, has built a career in energy and currently works as a solar developer. In his telling, his critique of the PSC is built on a foundation of decades in the sector. In contrast, the current commissioners have records as community and business leaders, but most of the body's five members lack records as power-sector practitioners. (The other Democratic challenger, Alicia Johnson, worked in health care and nonprofits.) "There's a whole host of things that we could do to lower costs," he says.

At the core of the issue is a simple question of business models. Investor-owned utilities make money by building new infrastructure: power plants, transmission lines, and the other hardware that makes the grid work. In exchange for providing that public service, regulators give utilities a guaranteed return on their investment. That means that utilities really like to build new things, while regulators are supposed to ensure that they don't build unnecessarily.

That structure creates a challenging dynamic at any time, but it's especially difficult to navigate in this era of growing electricity demand. Driving across Georgia, I saw data centers at the ends of residential streets, tucked away in industrial areas, and sprouting up on the side of the road.

Last year, Atlanta overtook Northern Virginia as the top location for new data centers in the U.S., according to a report from CBRE, a global commercial real estate firm. New manufacturing facilities, particularly for clean technologies, have taken up new space in industrial parks. And the power infrastructure—substations near the data centers and transmission lines across the countryside—are popping up seemingly everywhere too. Indeed, everyone in the know—from power-sector executives to climate advocates—sees that demand on the horizon and expects that it will continue to grow.

But with so much growth, moving so fast, it's hard to discern the full scale of the boom. And, even if we did know for certain how much demand would ultimately increase, disagreement remains about the amount of new infrastructure that would be required to meet it. In a filing with the PSC, Georgia Power said it anticipates 8.2 GW of new power demand at peak times by 2031, in large part due to new data centers. That's a 50% increase from today. To meet that demand, the company says it needs to extend the life of two large coal-fired power plants that it was planning to retire, upgrade its nuclear power fleet, and build new gas and solar capacity. Those big improvements, which the PSC unanimously approved in July, come with a price tag that critics warn could total in the tens of billions of dollars in the coming years. Asking electricity consumers to split the bill won't necessarily be a burden, if data-center companies end up using all that power and paying their share of the cost. And, in any event, Georgia Power will reap big financial returns.

But forecasting demand isn't an exact science. And, unsurprisingly, not everyone agrees with the company's numbers. The hype around AI has led to rampant speculation, with developers launching hundreds of projects across the country knowing full well that not every project will be built. And therein lies the crux of the problem: if Georgia Power makes big investments in the state's grid and the demand doesn't materialize, ratepayers—i.e., everyday consumers—will be left paying for it. "They're not looking out for the interests of the consumer," says Hubbard.

He is far from the only critical voice. Advocacy groups have poked holes in the plan, calling it a risky bet for cash-strapped Georgians. "All that risk transfers from them to us," says Patty Durand, who runs Georgians for Affordable Energy. "No matter what assets are stranded, customers have to pay for it."

It's not just activists. Companies have been skeptical too. Microsoft, which has announced multiple billion-dollar-plus data-center projects in Georgia in recent years, formally questioned Georgia Power's projections in a PSC filing last year.

The tech giant said that faulty methodology could lead to "over-forecasting near-term load," thereby leading to higher carbon emissions.

Georgia Power insists that it does its due diligence, carefully engaging with existing customers and tracking progress in new developments. "We're planning for today, tomorrow, and 20 years into the future in our planning processes based on the data from our customers that we talk to every day," says Aaron Mitchell, vice president for pricing and planning at Georgia Power.

Voters will soon have a chance to weigh in. Two PSC seats are on the ballot in November, and voters across the state can cast a ballot for both, even though the PSC commissioners technically represent five different districts. If Hubbard and the other insurgent on the ballot were to win, the dynamics of the body would change instantly. The PSC has approved all of Georgia Power's major requests in recent years—including six rate increases

High-voltage transmission lines crossing through a residential neighborhood in Rome, Ga.

since 2022—and, critics say, the tone between commissioners and executives in hearings more closely resembles that of a country club than what one might expect at a public hearing. Hubbard acknowledges that two new commissioners wouldn't be enough to shift the vote on the five-person body, but said that being able to "directly push back" can make a difference. "I very much will use the bully pulpit," he says.

EVERY STATE IN THE U.S. has a version of Georgia's PSC. The name and details of how commissioners are selected varies, but they all share the same fundamentals: a small body, accountable to the voting public either directly or through intermediaries like the governor, that approves electric-utility rates—or, in deregulated states, transmission and distribution charges. "Two hundred invisible, yet powerful public-utility commissioners oversee more than $200 billion a year in utility spending," says PowerLines' Hua. "These are the U.S. Supreme Court Justices of energy, yet very few people know who they are."

What would it look like to shift power dynamics on public-utility commissions (PUC)? For one, you might expect more scrutiny of utility growth plans and a push for better consideration of measures to cut consumption. Energy-efficiency tools can help homes and businesses cut usage. Demand-response measures can encourage consumers and companies to shift when they run their most energy-intensive practices to times when excess power is being produced. And improvements like upgrading transmission lines can unlock energy distribution without the cost of new generation.

Those measures just scratch the surface. Many consumer advocates have called for data-center developers to pay up front for costly infrastructure improvements, ensuring that consumers aren't stuck with the bill if projects aren't ultimately built. While this is a topic nationwide, Ohio has paved the way, with a key utility in the state working with the PUC to require that data centers pay for most of their planned electricity consumption if they end up using less than anticipated. And developers will pay fees if their projects aren't ultimately built.

And then there are those calling for a wholesale rethink of the utility model—moving in one direction to a competitive market, as Texas has, or in the other to a form of public or cooperative ownership, which is already common in rural communities. These sorts of changes seem almost impossible to imagine given the sector's immense political influence and power—not to mention that they come with significant downsides. But big changes often follow big disruptions.

IT'S A WARM SATURDAY MORNING, and the Rosa Jackson Recreation Center in Macon, Ga., is already bumping. Young kids are running around one gym, hopping between an inflatable play structure and the basketball courts. In the other, parents and other adults are walking between tables hosted by local environmental groups as a DJ from a local radio station emcees—live to both the attendees and listeners on the air. The appeal for the attendees was no lofty idea about climate change, or even local clean air. Instead, they were enticed by a raffle: $300 to help with utility bills.

At the Georgia Conservation Voters table, I looked on as a campaigner took attendees on a learning journey. Do you have high power bills? The question was met with subtle nods and sighs of exacerbation. Do you know that you can vote for people who set those bills? Blank stares. After a minute of chatting, most attendees said they were going to think more about it.

Whether they turn up to vote is an open question. Historically, PSC elections haven't been a huge turnout driver. In Georgia, only 3% of active voters turned out for the June primary—and turnout shrank further in the runoff that made Hubbard the nominee.

But behavior might change with expected price spikes that are unprecedented in recent memory. Since 1985, electricity rates have risen below the pace of inflation and typically attract less attention from consumers than prices at the pump. Now, Americans are worried—even if they haven't decided whom to blame. Only 30% of Americans feel confident that their energy costs will remain affordable, according to a survey released last year by consulting firm EY. And nearly two-thirds say they couldn't afford a 10% increase in energy costs.

Georgia Power has sought to calm nerves. In July, the company received the PSC's approval for a three-year rate freeze. That means that the direct charge for electricity purchased won't go up, but it doesn't affect the array of surcharges and fees that make up a substantial part of the bills that consumers pay. "We understand that the cost of everything that all of us buy every day is going up, and so we're happy to provide that benefit to customers," says Mitchell.

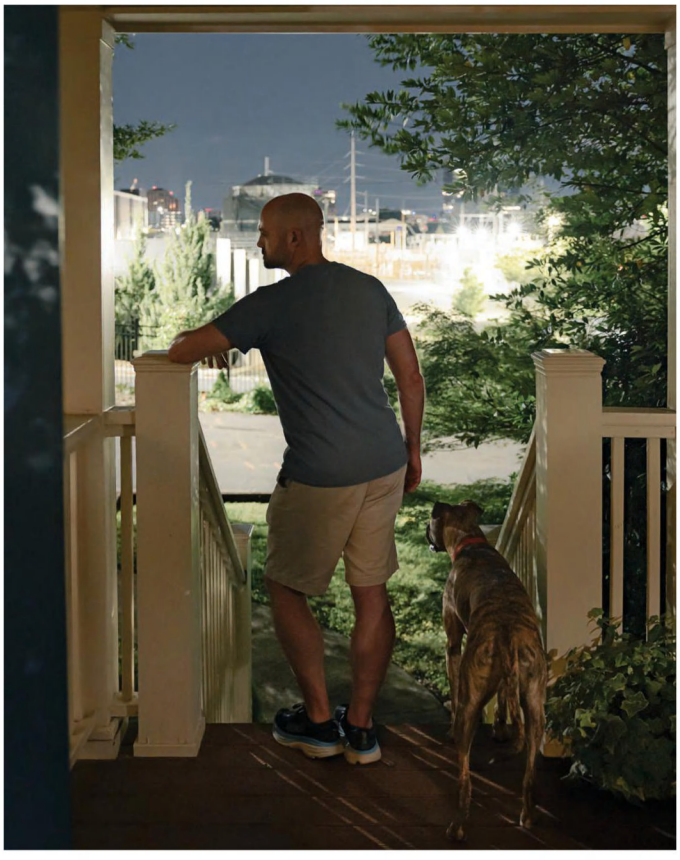
The issue of electricity prices isn't likely to remain confined to PUC races. Already, congressional Democrats have framed rising prices as a consequence of the Republican vote for Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB), which cut subsidies for solar power among other things. While solar has climate benefits, it also happens to be the primary source of new generation deployed today, and the bill is expected to raise the annual cost of electricity for the average household by more than $150 by 2030, according to research from Energy Innovation, a nonpartisan firm. Party leaders like Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer have decried the OBBB on the basis of the power-cost issue, and ads are on the air on this issue in some contested districts across the country. "They promised to bring down prices, but instead our Congressman Derek Van Orden just voted to make our monthly bills go up," the narrator says in a League of Conservation Voters ad running in Wisconsin. "It removes clean energy from the electric grid, creating a massive rate hike on electricity."

In Georgia, politicians far removed from the PSC see the opening to talk to voters about rising electricity bills. In a coffee shop on Atlanta's south side, I met Rohit Malhotra, a candidate running to serve as Atlanta city council president. Malhotra has banked his campaign on affordability issues in the city—and says electricity bills are a central part of that picture. No matter how the PSC race goes, Malhotra says he wants to push the city of Atlanta to take a more active role advocating for lower power bills. That includes not only PSC advocacy but also using the city's permitting and zoning authority to push Georgia Power to engage. "Land use, zoning, all that is city stuff," Malhotra says. "There could be pressure points from other places, but I'm just saying: we sometimes have a little bit more negotiating power than we give ourselves credit."

SITTING IN THE LIVING ROOM of his quaint two-story suburban home in Atlanta's Howell Station neighborhood, Chad Murray is doing his best to speak carefully about the new transmission line Georgia Power is building nearby.

Less than six months ago, with limited community consultation, the company began to level foliage steps away from Murray's front door and started construction on a new transmission line that connects to power infrastructure on site with a data center. All of a sudden, with the trees gone, his front porch offered an imposing view of the Fulton County Jail. Across the neighborhood, "for sale" signs sprinkle front lawns—more and more the closer you get to the site of the construction project. "You can't go back," he says. "What they've done is irreversible."

Georgia Power says the project is designed to make the grid more resilient for all customers. Indeed, the company has spent $10 billion over the past decade on a grid-improvement program designed to improve reliability for customers.



From left: a power line in Atlanta's Howell Station neighborhood; Chad Murray on his porch; the side of the QTS data center in Howell Station

For understandable reasons, local residents blame the massive QTS data center across the street that stretches the length of two city blocks. Murray says he "feels bad for the next community" to face the situation. "This conversation is going to repeat over and over in the state," he says.

Indeed, though electricity bills affect everyone, the number of areas where residents are in direct contact with massive infrastructure build-out is growing. Not coincidentally, data centers, and the on-the-ground changes they bring, exacerbate concerns about higher bills.

All of this means that in Georgia, data centers have become a controversial topic. The Georgia department of economic development recently took down a section of its website promoting the state for data-center development—and declined to comment on the record. Driving across the state, I began to notice a pattern. In places without a data center, local officials expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of expanding the tax base. In places with many data centers, officials didn't respond to me, flat out declined to comment, or offered an unhelpful emailed statement. Several have enacted moratoriums on new data-center projects. In places that fell in the middle—with one or two data-center projects—officials said they were happy for the partnership, but didn't want any more.

In Whitfield County, for example, where officials recently approved a massive AI data-center project, county commission chair Jevin Jensen calls the project "a huge win." But, he adds, he's "tapping the brakes" on efforts to attract another one. "This is probably going to be it for a while," he says.

In Washington, D.C., it's common to hear impassioned pleas about the need to advance AI to win the race against China. That's important not just for defense but also because as AI scales, its operations may come to reflect the values of whoever developed it. More broadly, supporters say, advancing AI can deliver productivity gains and economic growth—not to mention breakthroughs in medicine and quality of life.

That's all true. For humanity's sake I hope those visions are realized. And make no mistake, to get there will require new infrastructure, including new power plants. But try telling the average American that they will need to pay more or watch infrastructure pop up in their backyard to realize that future. The best you're going to get is a confused look. I know because I've asked. Others reject the entire notion.

"I think it's immoral to put a global technology race on the backs of Georgians," says Durand. She notes that the state is a top location for new data centers—but also has a high poverty rate. "Our quality of life depends on electricity. It's an essential service that must be affordable."

On those last two points, there is widespread agreement among politicians, advocates, and industry. Rising electricity demand is real—in Georgia and around the world. The question is whether the urgency to secure a stable economic future can overcome the division. ◻

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AI will reshape politics globally

BY IAN BREMMER

FEW POLITICAL LEADERS REALIZE THE RATE AT which artificial intelligence is racing ahead.

For decades, technological progress has been logged at a pace known as Moore's Law, named after Gordon Moore, the co-founder of Intel who observed that the number of transistors on a microchip doubles approximately every 18 to 24 months.

Now, we are approaching Nadella's Law. "Just like Moore's Law, we saw the doubling in performance every 18 months with AI. We have now started to see that doubling every six months or so," said Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, at the company's annual Ignite conference in 2024.

As a result of this disruptive velocity, two significant consequences are on the immediate horizon.

One is that we are quickly approaching a world in which AI agents can autonomously produce scientific advancements. AI is already being used in fields like biotech, in which AI models leverage biological research to quickly run experiments that can generate innovations in food production, medicine, and environmental protection. And in the field of materials science, AI is being used to design new materials for use in energy production, medicine, construction, electronics, and aerospace. Soon AI models could perform the entire scientific method, without humans.

The other development is "agentic AI" that can execute increasingly complex workplace tasks without human intervention. This advancement, which experts say is probably a year away, will reinvent the workplace. Productivity will surge; the nature of white collar work, and the number of white collar workers, will change significantly.

Knowledge work will soon be conducted entirely in the digital world. For those in scientific research, paralegal work, accounting, analytics, graphic design, and any entry-level desk job, the day when AI does your job might be just two to three years away.

Meanwhile, driverless vehicles will put truck, bus, and taxi drivers out of work.

That bring us to the politics.

In the beginning, most private- and public-sector organizations will resist the wholesale dislocation of huge numbers of workers for as long as they can. But when the next economic downturn hits, leaders of these organizations will face the first of many tough trade-offs as they plot their path toward the future. Last fall, we got an early preview when thousands of American longshoremen and dockworkers went on strike over money, better benefits, and protection against "any form of automation—full or semi—that replaces jobs or historical work functions." The strike ended with an agreement, but one that didn't fully resolve the automation question. If you think populism plays a big role in politics now, you ain't seen nothing yet.

THERE'S ALSO A GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION to AI's rapid advance. A pitched battle has already begun, mainly between the U.S. and China, over access to the semiconductors, energy, and critical and rare earth minerals needed for the AI revolution. President Trump's recent decision to allow China to buy Nvidia's most sophisticated chips underlined the leverage that China's dominance of critical and rare earth mineral production and processing gives Beijing, at least until the U.S. can develop capacities that narrow this advantage. But the deep underlying mistrust between Washington and Beijing continues undiminished.

If you think populism plays a big role in politics now, you ain't seen nothing yet

In the past, national power has depended on geography, relative military strength, the cohesion of tribal identities, population size, the reliability of social safety nets, and vulnerability to climate change. In the years to come, these attributes will matter mainly for the impact they have on establishing AI dominance. The scramble for AI inputs, and the ability to deny rivals access to them, will determine the balance of power in the 21st century.

Here, the U.S. has important advantages—if it can keep them. America has the largest number of the so-called hyperscalers, cloud-service providers that offer the largest-scale computing, storage, and network resources that AI needs. Their superpower lies in their ability to quickly scale infrastructure to meet the demands of billions of people. Think Amazon's AWS, Google Cloud, Microsoft's Azure, Oracle Cloud, and IBM Cloud. Critically, the U.S. also has the world's broadest financial, educational, and entrepreneurial ecosystem to support the continued growth of these companies and the technologies they're now pioneering.

Unfortunately, the current U.S. government has embarked on political and policy strategies that will inflict lasting self-harm. Its attacks on American universities will increasingly leave the nation with less scientific funding; broken public-private sector relationships; and much less ability to attract the most ambitious, talented, and highly

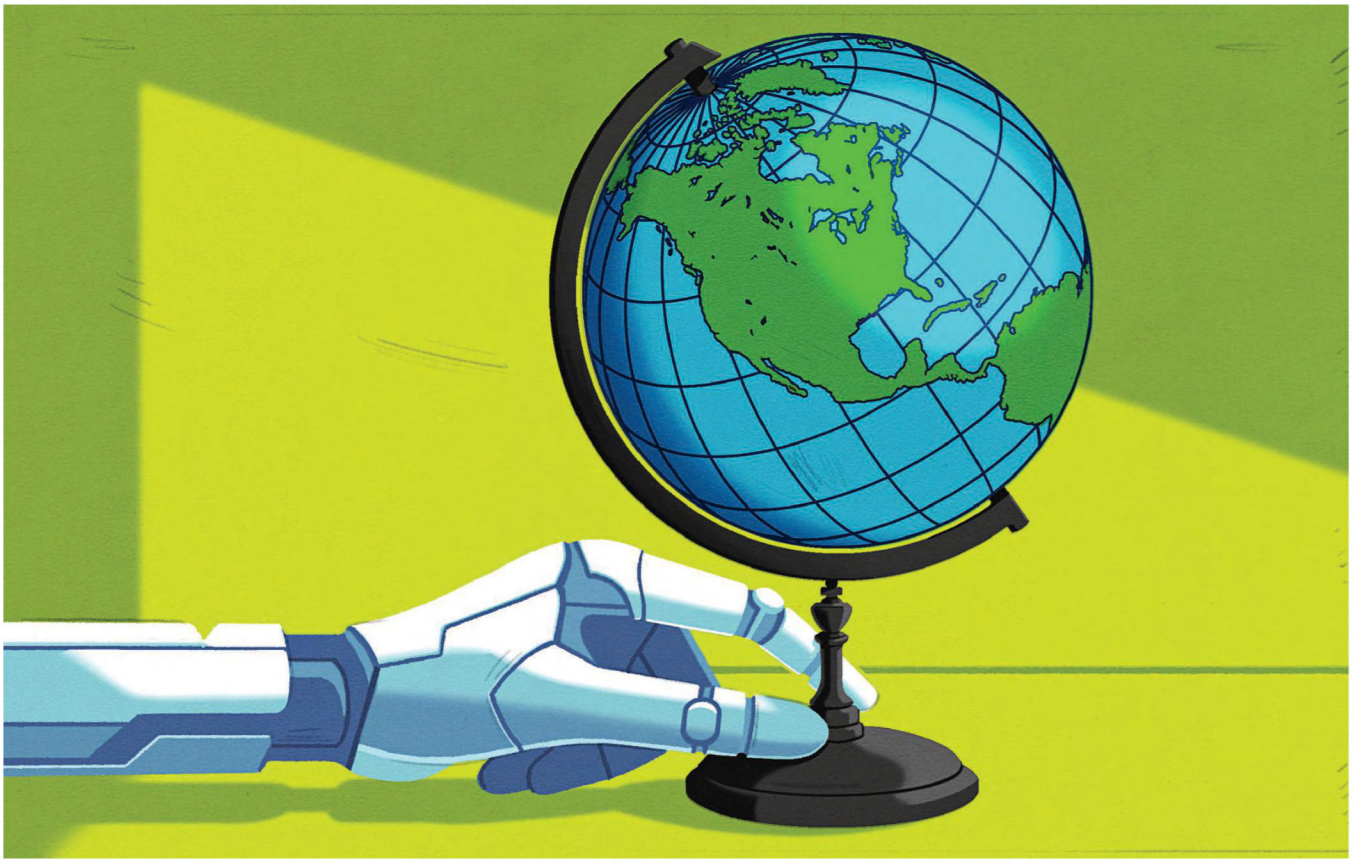


ILLUSTRATION BY PETE RYAN FOR TIME

skilled international students and immigrant labor. By attacking America's friends and allies through a variety of means and pushing their best students away from study in American universities, the Trump Administration is forcing others to hedge their bets on future cooperation and cross-fertilization of ideas. Taken together, these policies directly undermine America's longer-term competitive advantages in the contests that will shape the future of national security and prosperity.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S foreign and trade policies are intended to overcome those challenges by using U.S. strength to ensure closer alignment of friends and containment of enemies, mainly China. Yes, the Chinese now have models that can compete with the Americans', including those by DeepSeek. But will they be able to power them? U.S. export controls on semiconductors and efforts to align other producers with them are designed to help America maintain its competitive edge against the one challenger with enough resources to compete effectively. No other countries come close.

During its final week in office, the Biden Administration issued the "AI Diffusion Rule." This order placed other countries in three categories based on how likely they were to divert sensitive AI technologies to China, with varying levels of restriction on each group, especially for the export of closed-weight AI models that aren't publicly available.

In May, the Trump Administration ditched this three-tier strategy to create an "in or out" set of agreements that replace qualitative rules on who could access U.S. semiconductors with a quantitative approach that mandates at least 50% of data must be exported to the U.S. and no more than 7% can go to any one other country—read China. This latest strategy is designed, at least for as long as the agreement is in force, to ensure a dominant American position in AI development. Not surprisingly, this new rule is a big sticking point for Beijing in negotiations over U.S.-China trade and will make it much harder to get to yes on all kinds of issues.

But the biggest problems created by the Trump team's current fights with allies and adversaries are all longer term. If the experts are right that AI will have genuinely transformative effects beginning in the next two to three years, it may not matter. For now, U.S. tech dominance is the biggest advantage Washington has.

In short, AI will have transformative effects on the domestic politics of every country where it is deployed at scale in the workforce. It will intensify the already contentious rivalry between Washington and Beijing—with direct implications for dozens of other countries. The need to think through the implications is urgent. This train is already in motion and beginning to gather speed. ◻

The agentic age: a new frontier for AI and humans

BY MARC BENIOFF

FOR THE PAST YEAR, I'VE BEEN RUNNING SALESforce with a colleague who never sleeps, never takes vacations, and has read more than I could in 100 lifetimes. On a typical day, sitting with a few executives around the table, I'll ask it to evaluate a competitor's moves, refine a keynote draft, or surface strategic blind spots we might have missed.

This colleague is my AI agent, and we work together constantly. Sometimes it surprises me. Sometimes it challenges me. Sometimes, like all of us, it makes a mistake. But always, it expands what I can see and do.

We are at the beginning of the agentic era, the most significant transformation of work in history. For the first time, machines can perform not only repetitive tasks, but also cognitive work once reserved for humans. These AI agents—which can reason, adapt, and act on their own—are already reshaping thousands of companies and will ultimately touch every job and every person.

As the CEO of a technology company that helps customers deploy AI to unlock new levels of performance and decisionmaking, I believe this revolutionary technology can usher in extraordinary economic growth and entrepreneurship, while also creating significant new opportunities to improve health care, education, and quality of life.

The potential is so vast that some of my peers look at this trajectory and predict we're approaching a milestone called artificial general intelligence, where AI begins to match, or even exceed, human intelligence. The implication is that while enabling leaps forward in every aspect of our lives, AI could eventually render human intelligence obsolete.

There I disagree. Large language models (LLMs) are extraordinary. But they're already brushing against some of their upper limits. The biggest advances will come from AI agents that harness the power of LLMs and data to deeply understand a business and drive outcomes.

Yet no matter how powerful the technology becomes, there will always be frontiers only humans can cross. AI has no childhood, no heart. It does not love or feel loss. Because of that, it's incapable of expressing true empathy or understanding human connection. Those are our superpowers: the forces that spark great inventions, that inspire artistic masterpieces, that enable us to read a room, earn trust, and forge lasting bonds that empower us to start businesses that solve problems and make the world better.

THAT'S WHY A PIVOTAL QUESTION for every leader isn't just what AI can do, but what role we choose for it. Is AI going to replace us, or augment us? One approach puts algorithms in control. The other keeps people at the center, working side by side with agents that extend our reach and sharpen our strengths.

At Salesforce, we've made our choice. We're building an entirely new operating system for the agentic enterprise that is explicitly designed for humans and AI to work together. For decades, people had to adapt to software: clicking through tabs, chasing data, and losing time. Now that model is flipped. AI agents adapt to people, anticipating needs, surfacing what matters, and taking action instantly. In the Agentic Enterprise, AI acts as an orchestrator, pulling together the right capabilities

with the right context so that everything works in concert—people and AI achieving more than either could alone.

This starts with giving every employee the opportunity to work alongside this technology, with tools that make it easy to understand what to delegate, when to step in, and how to fine-tune the partnership between human and machine. We're creating systems that understand text, voice, images, and code, and that work in multiple languages, across devices, and for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds. We're also reimagining roles to ensure that people gain the experience and context they need to lead in a hybrid world of human and digital labor.

This is fundamentally changing the way we work, starting at our own company. Since the end of last year, for example, customer-service agents managed by our employees have carried out more than 1.3 million conversations, resolving 85% of incoming queries. That's giving our teams more time to deepen relationships with customers, such as by reaching out proactively to ensure they're getting the most from our products. In sales, where more than 100 million prospects have contacted us over the years—far too many for any human team to handle—we now have an agentic representative that can call back 10,000 leads in a single week, turning conversations into real revenue. And across our global facilities, agents accelerate everything from repairing a broken desk to troubleshooting technical issues, so employees can put their energy into higher-value work.

We're seeing the same shift with thousands of our customers on our Agentforce platform. At PepsiCo, agents track inventory and surface data to help teams adjust promotions, keep shelves stocked and strengthen relationships with retailers—all with visibility that keeps employees firmly in the driver's seat. Goodyear is beginning to use agents to equip its team with real-time insights, drawing on data such as inventory and service history to make recommendations that enhance the customer experience. AAA Washington deploys Agentforce for routine membership-support tasks, allowing human agents to be there when it counts most: helping stranded drivers, supporting members through insurance claims, and delivering care that only people can provide. The nonprofit Big Brothers Big Sisters of America relies on agents to narrow mentor matches while leaving the final decision to their match specialists, helping the organization reach more young people without losing the human touch.

This is what it means to weave AI into the fabric of business. It's not about overlaying a new technology on old workflows. It's about rethinking the system entirely, making space for a new kind of partnership between people and machines. It's about amplifying people, restoring time and energy for what matters most.

As a founder and entrepreneur myself, I'm especially excited about how becoming an agentic enterprise can supercharge startups and small businesses. Take HappyRobot, a company reimagining logistics with just a handful of employees. It's already operating with the reach once reserved for much larger organizations by deploying agents to automate workflows, centralize customer information, and cut coordination time by half. This is just the beginning, as AI lowers barriers to entry and success.

THESE CHANGES WILL BE DISRUPTIVE, and we must be ready. Roles will shift, and as with every wave of innovation, some jobs will disappear. But history offers perspective: from the printing press to the personal computer, new technologies have redefined work and, over time, created more of it. The agentic enterprise is opening doors to fresh career paths, new forms of leadership, and opportunities we couldn't imagine a decade ago. The responsibility we carry now is to steer this transition thoughtfully: rethinking how we recruit, how we equip people with training, and how we support them through change. We must recognize that AI is a human right; otherwise, we risk a new tech divide, between those who have access to AI and those who don't.

We must keep humans at the center of this revolution

Science fiction has long imagined a darker path. We all remember the movie *Minority Report*—a film that our Salesforce futurist, Peter Schwartz, helped make—about a police unit that relies on predictive algorithms and visions of the future to arrest people before they commit crimes. Every action is monitored, every decision preordained. It's a world where technology doesn't just guide human behavior but dictates it, erasing the qualities that make us most human.

But the agentic future is not preordained. It will be shaped by the decisions we make now. If we use it to displace human judgment, creativity, and empathy, we risk diminishing ourselves. If we design it to elevate our ability to imagine, to connect, to care, we can unlock incredible new potential and progress.

We must choose wisely. We must design intentionally. And we must keep humans at the center of this revolution. Because the real breakthrough isn't building machines that think like us. It's building a future that brings out the best in us.

Benioff is chair and CEO of Salesforce and owner and co-chair of TIME

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER RYAN FOR TIME

ECUADOR – A New Chapter

Ecuador is a land of extraordinary natural beauty, rich Indigenous culture, and immense ecological diversity -- yet it is often overlooked by international investors. That is beginning to change, however, as this Andean nation of 18 million undergoes a profound transformation. From reimagining its energy sector to spearheading sustainable tourism and embracing digital innovation, Ecuador is demonstrating that a combination of vision and resilience can open the door to unprecedented opportunities.

A sweeping overhaul of its energy infrastructure is central to Ecuador's transformation. Long heavily dependent on oil exports, the country is pivoting toward renewables and is striving to harness the combination of its mountainous landscape and abundant rainfall to power a future fuelled by hydropower, wind, and solar energy. A case in point is the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant, which is now operating at near to its full 1,500 MW capacity and which already supplies more than 30% of the nation's electricity needs. Also going full tilt are the wind farms in Loja and solar projects in Manabí, both of which feed into Ecuador's diversified national grid.

"We know that the future of energy will be renewable, responsible, and resilient," says Eduardo López, an engineer and the founder and chairman of energy giant SERTECPET. "We are ready to lead that transformation from Latin America to the world, as ambassadors of excellence, ethics, and sustainability."

Juan Doumet, president of the long-established retail group Eljuri, agrees. "We're often labelled as a developing country, but in many respects we're doing better than the more developed nations around the world." Founded more than 100 years ago, the Eljuri Group understands the importance of brand reputation and family legacy. Yet while recognizing the importance of tradition, it has been astute enough over the years to move with the times. Eljuri is now active in industry, tourism, agriculture and finance – along with maintaing its retail roots.

Doumet points to the economic stability that the recent re-election of President Daniel Noboa promises to maintain. "We are confident that under the current government the future looks promising—not just for the next four years but beyond. It is good news for the country, its citizens, and everybody who believes in Ecuador's future."

The transition hasn't been without hurdles. Political instability, logistical constraints, and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic slowed momentum in the early 2020s. However, both the government and private sector have recently doubled down on long-term investments, supported in part by international green finance and climate partnerships.

Infrastructure is playing a pivotal part in Ecuador's development strategy. From newly built road networks connecting rural highland villages to the major expansion of Guayaquil's port capacity, mobility and access are reshaping daily life across the country. In 2023, the inauguration of the Quito Metro—the country's first underground rail system—marked a milestone in urban modernization, easing traffic congestion and reducing emissions in the high-altitude capital.

Equally important are the digital highways being constructed across the nation, in which government-backed programs like "Ecuador Digital" are extending broadband access to remote Amazonian and coastal communities, thereby narrowing the country's digital divide. The result? A growing ecosystem of tech start-ups, digital learning hubs, and remote work centers that are redefining Ecuador's economic geography.

Thanks to this improved connectivity and education reforms – and added to Ecuadoreans' innate entrepreneurial spirit -- a new wave of start-ups is emerging in sectors from fintech and edtech to agri-tech. In Guayaquil, a network of innovation hubs has sprung up to mentor young developers busy building apps for everything from micro-loans to precision farming, while Quito's universities now offer coding courses and blockchain certifications.

Tourism remains a key cash generator. But while the Galápagos Islands remain Ecuador's crown jewel, the country is embracing a broader vision of eco-conscious travel. From the cloud forests of Mindo to the indigenous-led ecolodges of the Amazon, Ecuadorian tourism is increasingly about experience and preservation. There is a growing realization that tourism gives Ecuador the chance to reclaim its identity and demonstrate that development and conservation are mutually compatible. This spirit is embedded in the UNESCO World Heritage city of Cuenca, where digital nomads and retirees alike are drawn to the city's slow-living charm, artisanal traditions, and tech-friendly co-working spaces.

In a world confronting economic shocks, climate urgency and digital disruption, Ecuador's story is a timely reminder that transformation isn't about overnight miracles—it's about sustained effort, bold thinking, and the courage to change.

ELJURI GROUP – A Legacy of Service

Driven by a powerful surge in e-commerce and changing consumer behavior, the retail sector in Ecuador is undergoing a significant pivot. Today, one in two Ecuadorian adults shops online, driving e-commerce sales to $6.4 billion in 2024 – a figure projected to reach $11 billion by 2027. This explosive growth, particularly on mobile devices, reflects widespread internet access and increasing financial inclusion.

This all makes for happy times for Ecuador's retailers. And while this economic upturn has resulted in a flurry of new stores on the nation's high streets and across the ethernet, it is established organizations like the 100-year-old Almacenes Juan Eljuri that are leading the way -- with innovative flair and the ability to respond to what today's consumer wants.

For many decades one of Ecuador's most prominent retail chains, the Eljuri Group, has been synonymous with quality, service, and a commitment to the community. Now it is reshaping the country's retail landscape, while also evolving to meet its consumers' changing needs. The story of Almacenes Juan Eljuri dates to 1925, when founder Don Juan Eljuri Chica decided to forgo a promising legal career to open his first store in the port city of Guayaquil. He dedicated his enterprise to providing quality products at fair prices -- and his philosophy quickly gained him the trust of local consumers. His commitment to customer service and community engagement laid the foundation for what would become a retail empire.

Juan Eljuri Chica,
Founder of the Eljuri Group

It was not, however, until the 1970s and 1980s that the company began expanding across the entire country, opening stores in several major cities, most notably in Cuenca. Its enduring commitment to quality and customer satisfaction set the company apart from the competition. A willingness to adapt to a changing consumer landscape helped it flourish during the economic reforms of the 1990s, as it worked hard to retain customer loyalty by providing value through promotions and discounts.

Since then, Eljuri has consistently demonstrated a knack for anticipating market trends by diversifying into the sale of a wide variety of products, ranging from electronics and video equipment to white goods. The last of these is currently one of Ecuador's fastest growing markets, with sales of household appliances forecast to top 9.4 million units by 2030. It has meanwhile increasingly moved into the automotive market -- which is projected to be worth $2.2 billion by 2029 -- as well as into industrial equipment and machinery. This sector too is enjoying a boom as companies seek to enhance productivity and competitiveness -- and as the government in Quito looks to promotes the development of non-oil export sectors.

By broadening its range of products, the company has gradually succeeded in establishing itself as a one-stop shopping destination for many Ecuadorians. "We have learnt not to put all our eggs in one basket," says Eljuri Group president Juan Doumet – son-in-law of the founder -- who, at 80, has both survived and thrived through Ecuador's turbulent history of government changes, customs corruption, security issues, and countrywide gaps in healthcare and education. Today, as he eyes retirement, he is deservedly enjoying his country's current transparency and stability. "After 100 years in business, we can proudly say that we are active in commercial, industrial, banking, agricultural, tourism, hospitality, and, most importantly, human impact."

And now the company is also active in the IT consultancy and implementation market, where domestic growth is strong. Fuelled by a raft of digital transformations across several sectors, the field is forecast to have a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of just under 14% for the next five years. This, of course, includes retail, where Almacenes Juan Eljuri was one of the first retailers in the country to establish an effective online presence. Prompted in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, Eljuri's introduction of a highly functional and user-friendly ecommerce platform has enabled customers to shop from wherever they like. This digital transformation has also enabled the company to reach a wider audience, while streamlining its operations and enhancing the customer experience.

In recent years Eljuri has been equally successful in using advances in data analytics (and now AI) to improve its business processes and gain a better understanding of customer preferences – and to tailor its offerings accordingly. This increasingly granular analysis of purchasing patterns and customer feedback is enabling the company to make ever-more informed decisions about inventory management, promotions, and product selection.

In the meantime, Eljuri has been in the vanguard in its [illegible] changes to [illegible] outlet

format that is both transforming consumer behavior and prompting retailers to increasingly integrate their online sales channels and digital marketing strategies with a heightened and more user-friendly "bricks and mortar" customer experience.

After an investment of $1 million and 18 months of refurbishment, its 4,000-square-meter flagship store on Orellana Avenue in northern Quito reopened in 2023 to considerable media fanfare, with a brand-new look and a "Big Change" message. It was a huge success, with those guests invited to opening night visibly pleased with the new open-plan layout, with many of the store's vast array of products on display and in full working order, rather than in their boxes, meaning customers could tell exactly what they were buying.

"We felt it was the right to time to change, to pivot and offer customers the complete shopping experience," says Doumet. "It's important to stay ahead of the curve. Regardless of which government is in power, our goal is to move the country forward." This new open-plan look is also in line with long-standing changes to the group's corporate structure, which has smoothed its diversification away from the FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) sector into areas as varied as air conditioning, industrial equipment, and outboard motors. "The Juan Eljuri Group has moved from being a purely commercial company to become a sort of private equity that invests in innovation and new business models," says Doumet.

One thing that hasn't changed over the past 100 years, however, is the group's talent for establishing successful partnerships with suppliers from across the world. An innovator ahead of his time, Eljuri imported the first transistor radio from Japan to Latin America, and since then the company has forged strong commercial relationships with global brands such as SANYO and NIVICO (now known as JVC). The group's founder was also responsible for introducing Japan's YAMAHA brand to Ecuador, where it currently holds a 30% market share in motorcycles and 90% in the outboard motors segment -- serving the entire artisanal fishing sector, which is a solid foundation for national production and the export of seafood products.

Since those early days, the group has consistently focused on sourcing products from reputable suppliers to ensure that customers receive only the best. Today, the group imports goods from as far afield as the UK, China, Japan, and Italy. "Another achievement of Grupo Eljuri has been historically being the largest wholesale supplier across all the brands and products it imports, reaching every corner of the country through Authorized Dealers," says Doumet.

A prominent diplomat in his own right, Doumet has served as an honorary consul to Honduras for nearly 37 years and has long actively encouraged his company to participate on the international stage. Thanks to his efforts, Eljuri Group now regularly takes part in global industry events like the Geneva Watch Fair, and also maintains offices in Japan, China, and the US. With a strong representative presence in Europe as well, the group stays up to speed with new brands and industry shifts. Many of the group's partnerships stretch back decades, and Doumet is the first to acknowledge their contribution to the company's success. "These people believe in the Eljuri project and have helped shape the group into what it is today," he says.

He is also quick to acknowledge the debt he owes to the company's workforce. Just like the group's founder, Doumet has always recognized that a motivated workforce is essential to the delivery of quality service. He has consistently invested heavily in employee training and development so that it is second nature in them to provide exceptional customer service, as well as to create a welcoming and friendly shopping environment. "My father-in-law, Don Juan Eljuri Chica, treated me like a second son, and he taught me what really matters," he recalls.

Like Eljuri, Doumet is passionate about giving back to the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he donated 20 fully equipped German-built Volkswagen mobile clinics to the government. But in the long term, pride of place probably goes to the Eljuri Foundation, which focuses on providing educational scholarships and resources to students from low-income families.

Ecuador's retail sector is competitive, but the Eljuri Group's deep commitment to local communities is surely one of its most distinguishing features. "I believe the group will be even stronger in five years than it is now," Doumet says.

In Ecuador's evolving retail landscape, Grupo Eljuri stands as an undeniable titan, a multi-generational powerhouse deeply interwoven with the nation's economic fabric. The group's commitment to innovation, along with its core values of customer service and community, will ensure a dynamic, competitive, and accessible retail sector for millions of Ecuadorians for many years to come.

SERTECPET®: The Ecuadorian Company Making its Mark on the World

From quiet beginnings in a modest corner of the global oil map, a spirited vision was born – one that has gone on to make a meaningful impact on the industry worldwide. Ecuador's oil production may be modest when compared to that of petroleum giants, but that country was the birthplace of a bold idea: to turn necessity into opportunity, and capability into innovation.

SERTECPET® came to be through the vision of now deceased brothers Byron and Eduardo López Robayo -- Latin American pioneers and founders of the company, who didn't just build a multinational company, but rather created a lasting legacy. That dream became a lifelong project when their brothers Paulo and Carlos joined. Together, they laid the foundation for a bold new era of regional industrial development, crafting a future fueled by vision, passion, determination, and family unity.

From the beginning, SERTECPET® has been about more than just technology or services -- it has been about family. Even its logo reflects this basic value: the claw-like elements symbolize the founders firmly gripping the core values of trust, excellence, and vision. Together, they form a single force—the SERTECPET® standard, a symbol of courage and purpose.

Its name is an acronym for Technical Services for Oil and Mining (Servicios Técnicos Petroleros), the company was founded with a mission of providing high-value technical solutions in a challenging market. Its history is marked by hard work, setbacks, learning, and above all, perseverance. This journey led to a solid, ever-evolving management model.

With this foundation, SERTECPET® projected itself globally with a differentiated value proposition. Its success formula combines operational excellence, strategic vision, and resilient management, achieving profitability, sustainability, and reputation, which could be expressed as: $E = Mg(RS)^2$

Today, SERTECPET® is a global brand and a benchmark in technological solutions for the energy, oil, mining, and industrial sectors, with presence and partnerships spanning the Americas,

Ing. Eduardo López Robayo
Chairman SERTECPET® Group

Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Its operations are grounded in international standards of safety, innovation, and ethics. The company has been recognized five years in a row as one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by the Ethisphere Institute, and has received the IberoAmerican Total Quality Award, along with six out of seven stars in the European EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model, sharing the stage with Saudi Aramco.

Its portfolio ranges from onshore and offshore oil and gas production to responsible mining, EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) and EPCM (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction Management) projects, and renewable energy. It operates modern facilities at its Industrial-Ecological Complex in the Ecuadorian Amazon, with headquarters in Quito, a holding company in Spain, and a U.S. office in Houston. It has also built a strategic expansion platform targeting the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

One of the company's greatest strengths is its ability to execute projects in geologically challenging environments, particularly through its proprietary Hydraulic Pumping System, which has succeeded where conventional technologies have failed.

Innovation is at the heart of the company's business. SERTECPET® owns 11 patented technologies in 31 countries, including advanced completion tools, enhanced recovery solutions, and predictive AI software. Its R&D&I department – focused on research, development, and innovation -- drives progress with agile methodologies, experimental testing, and simulation, all within a culture deeply rooted in continual improvement

Technologies such as Jet Claw® Pump, Jet Pump MPLT®, and SYAL software have significantly enhanced industry efficiency, establishing SERTECPET® as a regional leader in technological transformation. The company collaborates with MITei, the University of Edinburgh, and top Latin American universities, fostering an ecosystem of innovation that spans disciplines and borders

Aligned with the new energy landscape, SERTECPET® has diversified into solar, wind, hydroelectric energy, and smart storage systems. In mining, the company operates under strict safety and sustainability standards, offering integrated, responsible solutions.

"Our commitment to sustainable development and the well-being of the communities where we operate is fundamental," says Eduardo López Robayo. "We aim to lead the new global energy model with cutting-edge technology and highly qualified talent."

This vision is driven by a consistent corporate social responsibility strategy. Education, inclusion, and entrepreneurship programs have benefited thousands, promoting science in rural areas and supporting women's leadership. Its next major goal is launching an International Center for Technological Innovation focused on energy and environmental solutions, with a net-zero emissions goal by 2050, in line with COP26.

SERTECPET® is an example of a Latin American company with a global vision. Conceived in Ecuador, it thinks, acts, and innovates for the world. The company's impact extends beyond economics— standing, more broadly, for ethics, transformation, and purpose-driven energy

SERTECPET®: Technology with Purpose. Energy with Values. A Future with Identity.

SERTECPET®

Time Off

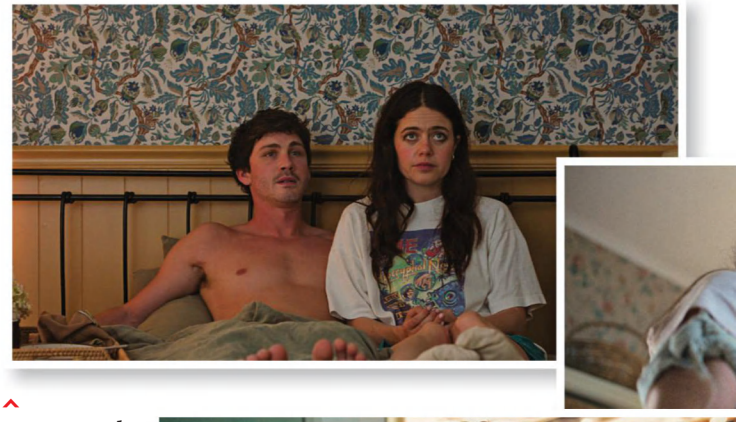
SUMMER OF OUR DISCONTENT

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

In *The Roses*, Olivia Colman and Benedict Cumberbatch embrace a movie season of not-so-romantic comedies

INSIDE

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAAP BUITENDIJK



Lerman and Gordon get their wires crossed in Oh, Hi!

In their 1980 song of the same name, the J. Geils Band sang, "Love stinks," and boy, they weren't kidding. In love, there are no guarantees. Infidelity, free-floating resentment, mutual loathing, garden-variety boredom: sometimes it seems there are more forces to drive couples apart than to hold them together. No wonder the romantic comedy, in which meant-to-be lovebirds find their way to a happy ending, is one of our most cherished genres. Sometimes, though, it feels good to look the beast of love-gone-wrong directly in the eye.

A recent spate of darkly glittering comedies give us the opportunity to do just that. Forget the summer of love; this has been the summer of our grumbling discontent. Welcome to the age of the anti-romantic comedy. In writer-director Michael Shanks' horror-comedy *Together,* a co-dependent couple falls prey to a mystical force that literally glues them together. Michael Angelo Covino's *Splitsville*—which bills itself as "An Unromantic Comedy"—turns the idea of open marriage into a cracked slapstick symphony. *Oh, Hi!,* co-written and directed by Sophie Brooks, riffs on the idea of women who want too much too fast, and the men turned off by it. And Jay Roach's black comedy *The Roses,* which traces the slow decline of a once in-love couple, may not so much make you laugh as cackle with bitter recognition—or maybe a shudder.

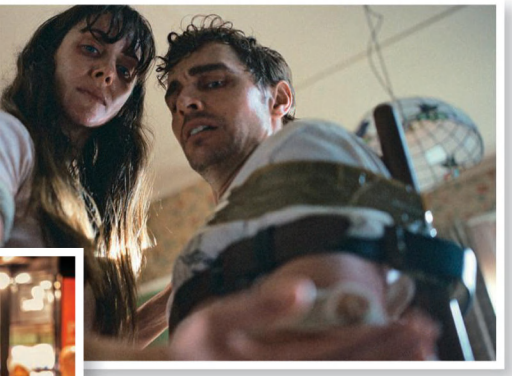
What, exactly, has brought us to this moment? These are all sideways romances for an uncertain time. Just four years ago, it seemed unthinkable that we'd find ourselves in an era when women's reproductive rights are being curtailed and controlled, when some men seem to believe that women's ascendance in the workplace is a direct affront to their masculinity, when transgender people who are simply trying to live their lives are facing hostility that threatens their very right to exist. There's evidence that Gen Z is having less sex than their forebears—and no wonder, when the state of togetherness is such a mess. Yet we're still trying to get together, to commit forever, to start families. Maybe these movies—as well as a TV show like Lena Dunham's comic misadventure *Too Much*—seek to grant us some relief from the pursuit of romantic perfection. Finding love has never been an enterprise for the faint of heart.

SOMETIMES IT'S EVEN HORRIFIC. In *Together,* Alison Brie and Dave Franco—who are married in real life—play Millie and Tim, a longtime couple who have just left the city for a new, but also more isolating, life in the country. Millie is a teacher, and she's the impetus for the move, having accepted a new and better job at a small school. Tim, meanwhile, might not call himself a failed musician, but that's exactly what he is. When Millie puts him on the spot by publicly proposing to him at their going-away party, he stumbles before half-heartedly assenting. Something is keeping him from conjoining his life with Millie's, though that doesn't mean he doesn't love her. These two have been together so long that they're fully in tune with each other's rhythms. Is that boredom or love—or a little of both?

Together is a squishy-gross body-horror comedy about the ways longtime couples sometimes meld sensibilities so completely that one partner or the other may feel subsumed by the whole. But what happens when one half of a couple comes to feel incomplete? That's the idea Roach and screenwriter Tony McNamara explore in *The Roses* (adapted from Warren Adler's 1981 novel, previously filmed in 1989 with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner). Olivia Colman and Benedict Cumberbatch play the seemingly perfectly matched Ivy and Theo. She's an unambitious chef; he's an architect and the family's main breadwinner. Then Ivy's career skyrockets, while Theo's literally collapses. As the cracks in their partnership deepen, each begins to see qualities in the other—ugly ones—that had previously remained hidden. They fight viciously, and their hostilities only escalate as they begin divorce proceedings. We start out loving these characters, together and separately; by the end, we're left watching their over-the-top discord with horrified fascination.

Cumberbatch and Colman make us believe in this couple's bond: at one point after their troubles begin, they leave a marriage counselor's office howling with laughter, having cracked each other up with the creativity and

Joined at the hip: Brie and Franco in Together



Stalter barrels toward romantic misadventure in Too Much

excessive vitriol of their respective complaints. The appalled therapist doesn't find their situation so funny, but she's outside their loop of intimacy; they're in cahoots, so keyed in to one another that they enjoy each other's company over anyone else's. They draw us in too: you might find yourself hoping against hope they can pull themselves together.

***SPLITSVILLE* COMES AT** the territory of squabbling spouses from another angle. Kyle Marvin plays Carey, a sweet if somewhat dull guy who's shocked and hurt when his wife of 14 months, Adria Arjona's sexy-glam life coach Ashley, announces that she wants a divorce. Seeking solace, Carey runs to his friends, Dakota Johnson's Julie and Covino's Paul, though they aren't much help. They think that he's overreacting, that he's merely provincial. They tell him they're in an open marriage, suggesting that he should be a little more freethinking himself.

Julie and Paul may *think* they're cool about everything—until Carey and Julie sleep together once, in secret. Paul finds out and blows his top. For many couples, infidelity is a nonnegotiable breach of trust, never to be forgiven. But Covino's movie, cowritten with Marvin, mines the situation, and the chain of crazy events it ignites, for its inherent comedy. The movie falls apart in the wrap-up, but it's trying to get at some complex and engaging ideas, chief among them that spiritual loyalty may matter just as much as, or more than, sexual fidelity.

But how do people ever get together in the first place? And what happens when signals get crossed early on? *Oh, Hi!* may be the most daring of all these movies, and the funniest, albeit in sometimes deeply uncomfortable ways. Molly Gordon's Iris and Logan Lerman's Isaac haven't been dating for long, but everything seems to be going swimmingly; they're taking their first road trip together, an escape to a beautiful rented house in the country. Upon arrival, they immediately have hot sex. Then Isaac makes them a fabulous dinner. More hot sex will follow. But during a moment in which Isaac is, for reasons that shouldn't be given away, particularly vulnerable, Iris blurts out how confident she feels about the future of their relationship. That's how she learns that Isaac doesn't consider their "thing" a relationship at all. He thinks they're just having fun.

Iris, who'd previously seemed mostly sweet, goofy, and crazy in the fun way, suddenly comes off as crazy in the not-so-fun way, certainly in Isaac's eyes. He'd merely told her the truth, but in doing so, he'd crushed her expectations. As he tries to explain himself, her reaction becomes more extreme. Their romantic weekend becomes an outright hostage situation, played for laughs. Even French toast becomes a kind of weapon.

Brooks and Gordon, who co-wrote the script together, are having a good laugh at the way women can go off the rails when their expectations aren't met. They're also sympathetic to the nature of romantic dreams—we can't help hoping for a happily-ever-after, even when we know better. But *Oh, Hi!* is also attuned to the way the guy is almost always framed as the villain when a relationship doesn't work out, even if he's just made a clueless mistake. Women are supposed to be more sensitive, more caring, maybe even smarter than men. That doesn't mean we can never be wrong.

Oh, Hi! is outlandishly funny, but it's ultimately an unsentimental film. If we convince ourselves that our own feelings are king, are we making enough room for the feelings of others? The reality, one that these not-so-romantic comedies reflect, is that most humans don't really fall in love—we stumble into it. Maybe that's why audiences have responded so strongly, both pro and con, to Lena Dunham's Netflix series *Too Much,* the follow-up to her acclaimed show *Girls,* which ended up, accurately or not, defining a generation. In *Too Much,* Megan Stalter plays an outgoing but awkward 30-ish TV producer who's transferred from New York to London. There she meets a not-so-charming (at least at first) musician, Felix, played by Will Sharpe, and the two embark on a bumpy relationship.

Too Much is by turns endearing and exasperating, a lot like clumsy sex. Some may consider it a corrective to the more sugary *Emily in Paris.* No matter what, the new anti-romantic comedies do require some patience. And aren't our real-life romantic complications bewildering enough? Please, just give us the fantasy!

Sometimes, though, a dose of bitterly funny reality makes you feel less alone. Occasionally seized with the impulse to murder your partner, whom you genuinely love with all your heart? Join the club. So intent on romantic bliss that you act a little crazy when your crush rejects you? Jump on the bandwagon. The only people who can know the truth of a union are the people inside it, but now and then it's fun to be a tourist in someone else's problems. And best of all, once the lights come up, you're free to leave—no legal documents required. ◻

Sometimes a dose of bitterly funny reality makes you feel less alone

OPENING PAGE: SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES; THESE PAGES: OH, HI!: SONY PICTURES CLASSICS; TOGETHER: NEON; TOO MUCH: ANA BLUMENKRON—NETFLIX

TELEVISION

Two good men confront the *Task* of forgiveness

BY JUDY BERMAN

CRIME DRAMAS, IN OUR DISTRACTED TIMES, TEND TO front-load said crimes. More often than not, there's a murder within the first five minutes. This is only one of the genre's many implicit rules that HBO's *Task* breaks. The series from *Mare of Easttown* creator Brad Ingelsby opens with a montage of quotidian scenes from the lives of two men. Weary Tom Brandis (Mark Ruffalo) folds his hands in prayer, dunks his face in a sink full of ice water, downs Advil while driving. Rugged Robbie Prendergrast (Tom Pelphrey) carries his sleeping son to bed, pours himself a tall mug of coffee, perks up at a radio ad for a dating app.

These tender parallel portraits introduce the characters whose analogous circumstances and divergent choices are, more than any murder or mystery, the show's central subject. Like *Mare,* but slightly more elegant in its plotting, *Task* uses the detective-story format and the specificity of its rural Pennsylvania setting to explore elemental human problems. Whereas the former revealed the many ways in which the responsibility for keeping families and communities together falls on women (an observation that informs the new series as well), Ingelsby's latest makes an astute study of guilt, revenge, and forgiveness.

Task's dual protagonists fall on opposite sides of the law. Still hurting a year after his wife left him and their two kids, Robbie works in sanitation with his best friend, Cliff (Raúl Castillo). Recently, they've been meeting up at night with a third friend to rob trap houses. The men disguise themselves from targets who might recognize them, mostly members of a biker gang called the Dark Hearts, with Halloween masks; they brandish guns but avoid violence. As far as felonies go, the bloodless armed robbery of drug dealers ranks low on the moral-outrage scale—until a victim catches a glimpse of one assailant's face. Then, suddenly, Robbie and his boys are murderers.

Task subverts expectations without sanctimony

Ruffalo plays an FBI agent in an impossible situation

An FBI veteran on career-fair recruitment duty in the wake of his wife's death, Tom is tapped to head a task force investigating these crimes. (Hence the show's bland title.) His staff, culled from a hodgepodge of local law-enforcement groups, is green. While Anthony (Fabien Frankel) chats amiably, Aleah (*The Underground Railroad* star Thuso Mbedu, who should really be getting more of this kind of work) is all business. Lizzie (Alison Oliver), a young divorcée, just seems like a mess. Meanwhile, Tom's adopted son, Ethan (Andrew Russel), is in jail awaiting trial; Tom and his teenage daughter, Ethan's biological sister Emily (Silvia Dionicio), must decide whether to support him in court despite the unimaginable pain he has caused their family.

While the similarities between Tom's and Robbie's lives pile up as the series progresses, the most crucial connections are immediately apparent. Both men are fathers who love their children fiercely but have come somewhat unmoored since losing their wives. (In lieu of criminal activity, Tom drinks too much.) In defiance of their respective tough-guy roles, both are also preternaturally gentle, thoughtful, vulnerable. That their contradictions cohere into believable personalities is a credit to Ruffalo and especially Pelphrey, whose plaintive delivery of lines like "I need a life companion" could shatter your heart.

THERE ARE MOMENTS when *Task* belabors the comparison between its two leads, though never to the extent that Ingelsby's ruminations derail a story that only works so well thanks to its richly shaded characters. This is not a tale of good guys vs. bad guys. Villains emerge, to be sure. But the real, rarer and less predictable conflicts are the internal struggles of people

whose laudable intentions bump up against desperate situations. This liberates the show from the crime-investigation-arrest plot arc typical of this genre without robbing it of suspense. Episodes are propelled, instead, by rising tensions around the impossible choices characters must make. It's easy to do the right thing until someone wrongs you. How does a good person respond when someone hurts the people they love?

It's refreshing that in a series so concerned with masculine burdens and bonds between men, many of these multilayered characters are female. As in *Mare,* young women are forced, often by the actions of the men in their lives, to grow up early. Robbie has moved into the home of his late brother, whose 21-year-old daughter, Maeve (Emilia Jones, excellent), would leave town in a second if the family could survive without the domestic labor she exhaustedly performs. Emily is torn between the gratitude she feels compelled to show Tom for taking her in and loyalty to Ethan. There's more to Lizzie and Aleah than is initially apparent (although I would have liked to see *Task* go a bit deeper into Aleah's life outside work).

Task subverts expectations without sanctimony. It acknowledges that violent criminals can have kind hearts, that law-enforcement leaders can be as corrupt as biker-gang bosses, and that sometimes when something tragic happens, punishing the person who's nominally responsible doesn't always constitute justice. In a subtly radical statement, at a time when many Americans instinctively sort strangers into political categories, it refuses to stereotype characters based on their tribe. Tom is a former priest as well as an FBI agent, but he's no saint; it would be boring if he were. The show's emphasis on forgiveness, rather than justice as defined by a flawed legal system, follows from Tom's faith as well as from the grace it gives to each character. Even if they can't avoid the consequences of their worst decisions, they can work to ensure that they aren't ultimately defined by them. □

TASK: HBO; LONG STORY SHORT: NETFLIX

The Schwooper family in later years

TELEVISION

A family in full

The conventions of the animated family sitcom haven't changed much in the 36 years since *The Simpsons* set the template for shows like *King of the Hill, Family Guy,* and *Bob's Burgers.* True to the cartoon medium, the characters are outsize and their adventures over the top. And, in a custom that has been key to their longevity, time doesn't really pass from season to season. Unencumbered by the growing or deteriorating bodies of human actors, these series are set in an eternal quasi present, within which cultural references are constantly updated yet (with the exception of a recent *Hill* revival that fast-forwards eight years) everyone stays around the same age.

In Netflix's *Long Story Short, BoJack Horseman* creator Raphael Bob-Waksberg uses the elasticity of animation to warp time in a very different way, dropping in on a singular Jewish family a couple dozen times from the 1990s to 2022 (and once in 1959). Funny, idiosyncratic, philosophical, and warm, if occasionally more sentimental than *BoJack* fans might like, it ties together generations-spanning threads of love and resentment to create an intricate web of characters and relationships.

At the center of that web are siblings Avi, Shira, and Yoshi Schwooper, whose last name progressively combines those of their father Elliott Cooper (voiced by Paul Reiser) and mother Naomi Schwartz (Lisa Edelstein). Eldest son Avi (Ben Feldman) is introspective, self-righteous, determinedly secular. Anger defines Shira (Abbi Jacobson), the middle child. Their much younger brother, Yoshi (Max Greenfield), is the oddball of a family that, as Avi's quiet, blond girlfriend notices in the premiere, was never itself a paragon of laid-back normalcy.

As it yokes formative scenes from the Schwoopers' youth to vignettes that trace the impact of those moments on their adult lives, *Story* takes up Jewish identity as a central theme. Yiddish words pepper conversations. The Holocaust is never far from anyone's mind. One standout episode recounts Shira's wife Kendra's (Nicole Byer) circuitous conversion to the faith. Competing visions of and attitudes toward Judaism arise. (While Oct. 7 falls outside of the first season's time frame, *Story* has already been renewed, and I hope it will have the courage in Season 2 to probe this fraught era for Jews around the world.) Naomi is such an archetypal Jewish mother—pushy, controlling, critical, passive-aggressive, self-dramatizing—that she often reads as a caricature. But she is also, we eventually discover, its heart.

Bob-Waksberg has an eye for humorous details that ring true. Paired with a great voice cast and scribbly animation that translates the Schwoopers' angst into visual terms, he gives us sly parodies of '90s alt-rock posters on the walls of Avi's boyhood bedroom, a surreal allegory where wolves run loose at a middle school, and lines like "Uh-oh, Mom's personality is starting." Yet *Story* also contains the universal, meaning-of-life-level insights that made *BoJack* a classic and his trippy, underacknowledged Amazon series *Undone* just as enthralling. Like those shows, it is fascinated—and moved—by our subjective experiences of relationships and of time, and how the stories we tell ourselves about those things make us the people we are. —*J.B.*

FALL PREVIEW

The books, movies, TV shows, and albums we'll be talking about all season

By Ben Rosenstock, Lucy Ford, and Shannon Carlin

MUSIC BOOKS TELEVISION MOVIES

SEPTEMBER

4 *The Paper*

Greg Daniels, who adapted *The Office* for U.S. audiences, applies the mockumentary format to the world of legacy print media, training the cameras on a **flopping Toledo newspaper.** (Peacock)

7 *Task*

The new drama from *Mare of Easttown* creator Brad Ingelsby casts Mark Ruffalo as an FBI agent investigating a spate of violent home invasions in the suburbs of Philadelphia. (HBO)

9 *All the Way to the River*

Nearly 20 years after *Eat Pray Love,* Elizabeth Gilbert returns with her fourth memoir, which recounts—in stories, poems, journal entries, and drawings—the loss of the love of her life.

10 *The Girlfriend*

Robin Wright goes in front of and behind the camera for this psychosexual thriller, as a mother convinced her son's girlfriend (Olivia Cooke) is hiding something. (Prime Video)

12 *Play*

Ed Sheeran launches his second five-album cycle with a "technicolor" project that draws inspiration from Iran to India and beyond.

18 *Black Rabbit*

Jude Law and Jason Bateman play two brothers, one a successful restaurateur and the other a black sheep who brings drama when he re-enters his sibling's life. (Netflix)

19 *Am I the Drama?*

Cardi B's long-anticipated second studio album is set to include 23 tracks recorded over the past six years, during which time she had three children and a very public divorce.

23 *The Lowdown*

Reservation Dogs co-creator Sterlin Harjo follows a Tulsa, Okla., journalist (Ethan Hawke) unraveling a web of corruption. (FX)

26 *One Battle After Another*

Paul Thomas Anderson teams up with Leonardo DiCaprio for an action thriller inspired by Thomas Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland,* shifting its story of revolutionaries forward in time.

30 *Chad Powers*

Glen Powell stars in this comedy loosely based on the experiences of Eli Manning when he went undercover at Penn State football tryouts. (Hulu)

30 *Heart the Lover*

Lily King's sixth novel looks at a love triangle's lingering consequences, as college paramours reunite decades later.

OCTOBER

TBA *The Chair Company*

Tim Robinson brings his particular brand of insanity to a comedy about a man investigating a conspiracy after a humiliating incident at work. (HBO)

3 *The Life of a Showgirl*

Taylor Swift describes her 12th studio album as having stemmed from "the most infectiously joyful, wild, dramatic place I was in in my life."

3 *The Smashing Machine*

Dwayne Johnson is almost unrecognizable in Benny Safdie's biopic about former MMA fighter Mark Kerr.

10 *After the Hunt*

Julia Roberts plays a Yale prof facing a moral dilemma when her colleague (Andrew Garfield) is accused of sexual assault by a student (Ayo Edebiri).

10 *A House of Dynamite*

Kathryn Bigelow's first movie since *Detroit* is a political thriller about the White House dealing with an incoming missile attack, with an ensemble that includes Idris Elba and Rebecca Ferguson.

10 *Roofman*

This crime drama casts Channing Tatum as a real-life fugitive who robbed fast-food locations, escaped from prison, and hid inside a Toys "R" Us for months before being captured.

14 *All That We See or Seem*

Ken Liu's first book in a techno thriller series sees a onetime hacker caught up in the search for a kidnapped artist.

14 *A Guardian and a Thief*

Megha Majumdar's novel takes place over one week in a dystopian near-future India, as a woman searches for stolen travel documents that will allow her to escape to the U.S.

14 *Boleyn Traitor*

Nearly 25 years after *The Other Boleyn Girl,* Philippa Gregory is back with a historical drama about Anne Boleyn's sister-in-law Jane, whose allegedly fabricated testimony is believed to have led to Anne's beheading.

17 *Good Fortune*

Aziz Ansari's feature directorial debut stars **Keanu Reeves** as a "budget guardian angel" who body-swaps a struggling man (Ansari) and his boss (**Seth Rogen**) to undesired results.

22 *Hedda*

Nia DaCosta directs a reimagining of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler,* with Tessa Thompson in the titular role.

24 *Bugonia*

Yorgos Lanthimos reteams with Emma Stone for a comedy in which two conspiracy theorists (Jesse Plemons and Aidan Delbis) kidnap a CEO (Stone), convinced she's an alien trying to destroy the planet.

24 *Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere*

Jeremy Allen White sports a pair of brown contact lenses to play the Boss in a drama built around the making of Springsteen's 1982 album *Nebraska.*

28 *Dead and Alive*

Zadie Smith finds light amid darkness by focusing on artists she admires, including Kara Walker, Joan Didion, Cate Blanchett, and Hilary Mantel.

NOVEMBER

4 *Book of Lives*

Margaret Atwood's memoir is a travelogue through her life and career, from a nomadic childhood often spent in the wild forest of Northern Quebec to her novels and activism.

4 *Bread of Angels*

Fifteen years on from the award-winning *Just Kids,* **Patti Smith** releases her fourth autobiography, following her rise from an imaginative working-class kid to a punk-rock icon.

4 *The Eleventh Hour*

Salman Rushdie releases a collection of five stories set across India, England, and the U.S. that examine life, death, and what might come after.

4 *Palaver*

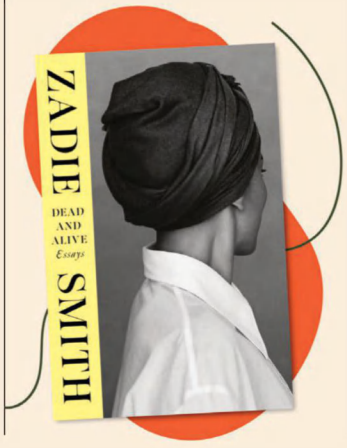
Bryan Washington's follow-up to 2023's *Family Meal* sees a young gay man struggling to reconcile with his family when his mother arrives on his doorstep looking to make amends.

6 *All Her Fault*

Succession's Sarah Snook plays a mother who goes to pick up her son from a playdate only to be greeted by someone who claims never to have heard of him. (Peacock)

7 *Pluribus*

Vince Gilligan, creator of two of the greatest shows of the prestige-TV era (*Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*), returns with a sci-fi drama also set in Albuquerque, starring *Saul*'s Rhea Seehorn. (Apple TV+).



13 *The Beast in Me*

A reclusive, grieving author (Claire Danes) becomes obsessed with her new neighbor (Matthew Rhys), a real estate mogul once suspected in his wife's disappearance. (Netflix)

14 *The Running Man*

Edgar Wright directs the second adaptation of Stephen King's 1982 novel, with Glen Powell as a contestant who must run from hit men for 30 days to earn a billion dollars.

14 *Jay Kelly*

Noah Baumbach's latest mines the relationship between a world-famous actor (George Clooney) and his loyal longtime manager (Adam Sandler) during a trip to Europe.

21 *Wicked: For Good*

Following last year's cliffhanger, *For Good* picks up on the friendship between Elphaba (**Cynthia Erivo**) and Glinda (Ariana Grande) as it faces new challenges five years later.

26 *Stranger Things*

Stranger Things finally drops the first part of its fifth and final season. The Duffer Brothers' '80s nostalgia fest will conclude on Dec. 31. (Netflix)

27 *Hamnet*

Chloé Zhao worked with Maggie O'Farrell to adapt the latter's 2020 novel that imagines Shakespeare (Paul Mescal) and his wife Agnes (Jessie Buckley) grieving the death of their young son.

THE PAPER: JOHN P. FLEENOR—PEACOCK; SWIFT: JULIEN DE ROSA—AFP/GETTY IMAGES; CARDI B: KEVIN WINTER—GETTY IMAGES; GOOD FORTUNE: EDDY CHEN/LIONSGATE; WICKED: UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

Laufey The Grammy-winning, genre-blending musician on pushing herself creatively, making her latest album, and confiding in Norah Jones

You've said that the songs on your new album, *A Matter of Time,* came right from your diary. What made you want to get so personal? I had the confidence to. I also fell in love for the first time, so it's an album about that, and the self-discovery that comes with it. The whole goal of the album is to illustrate the contrast between this glasslike beauty and chaos that I feel within myself so often; that I am needing to present myself in a very pristine way, but I'm fighting some sort of chaos on the inside because I'm not letting it out. With this album, I really just wanted to let it all out.

Was that the inspiration for the cacophonous instrumentals on "Sabotage," the last song on the record? "Sabotage" is where the album title comes from, and it's kind of the thesis. It's about the fight between your external and your internal. It's about the fear of sabotaging something beautiful and of another person finding out your true nature. So with those [instrumental] disturbances, I wanted to interpret anxiety and the noise in your head that kind of blurs everything out.

"Forget-Me-Not" is a love letter to Iceland, where you're from. What does that song mean to you? It's about trying to balance two cultures, and the fear of losing the one you moved away from. It's something that really plagues me all the time. Am I Icelandic enough, now that I've lived away from Iceland for seven years? So I wanted to tell Iceland, "Sorry I had to leave to go chase my dreams," and I wanted to hide it within a love letter because, in some ways, it sounds like I'm singing about a person. There's something beautiful about that to me because it kind of does feel like a long-distance relationship.

There is a lot of talk about how exactly to label your music: jazz or pop. Does that ever get annoying?

I wouldn't say it's annoying, but I think it's reductive. I've never felt like one thing or another. That was the biggest difference for this album—I didn't think about genre. I was just like, "My genre is Laufey. This is a Laufey album."

On "Snow White," you sing about the unfair beauty standards women are often held to. Why was it important for that song to make it onto the album? I wrote it out of frustration for not being able to reach or achieve these standards that are set for women that tour arenas or walk red carpets. Striving for perfection is a dark, endless road because the goalposts keep moving.

I think even women who aren't in the industry can relate, right? We all have these impossible standards thrust upon us, and we all have those moments where we feel like the way we look is way more important than how we speak. I thought so much about putting this song out—because I'm aware of my position as a role model, and I'm aware of my words being listened to by young women—but I realized that sometimes feeling seen or relating to someone is the best feeling.

Who do you talk to when you want to feel seen? I love dumping my problems on Norah Jones. I don't know what it is, I think her voice is just so comforting. Clairo is incredible; I love talking to her. Olivia Rodrigo—she's just so balanced and beautiful and kind. Conan Gray, as well. Anytime I need to get anything out of my system, Conan is the first person I call.

***A Matter of Time* is your third album. How do you think you grew as an artist with this project?** Lyrically, I really let myself be incredibly honest and not think too much about how it was going to be perceived by the world. I really tried to create something unique. I didn't think too much about what box the album was going to fit into. I didn't want to be held back, so I kind of just let myself be free. —ERIN MCMULLEN

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