

2024

Year in Review

MacauDaily 澳門每日時報
Times

THE YEAR OF ALL ELECTIONS

In 2024, multiple elections took place, often bringing far-right and authoritarian politicians to lead their countries. Most notably, Donald Trump made a historic comeback to the White House against all odds. In Macau, we also had our own kind of election for the top job, which Sam Hou Fai won unopposed. ■ P2, P4



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ALL THE ELECTIONS

FROM JUDICIARY TO LEADERSHIP: SAM HOU FAI'S SURPRISING RISE IN POLITICS

RENATO MARQUES

THE campaign and subsequent election of Sam Hou Fai as the sixth Chief Executive (CE) of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) are significant milestones for the year 2024.

Relatively unknown to a large portion of the population, as he admitted during the launch of his official campaign, Sam's candidacy came as a surprise to many residents. For the first 25 years of the MSAR, well-known figures from the business sector had typically been promoted to the top position.

Sam, who comes from the judiciary, having previously served as the president of the Court of Final Appeal, emphasized that his reserved lifestyle and limited public appearances could work to his advantage. He argued that his detachment from public life, combined with his previous roles, would contribute to his impartiality and independence.

Notably, after 25 years since Macau's handover from Portuguese to Chinese administration, the MSAR has elected its first CE fluent in both official languages. Additionally, Sam is the first CE to come from mainland China (he is a native of Zhongshan City in Guangdong

Province) rather than from one of Macau's traditional local families.

In response to criticism regarding his lack of local roots, Sam said he moved to Macau in 1986, nearly 40 years ago, and has since built a family in Macau, now including not only his children but also his grandchildren, all born in the city. He argued that with three generations of his family living in Macau, he feels more "local" than many who were born and raised there.

During his brief political campaign, Sam held just one public hearing, a decision he justified by the limited time available for campaigning. He announced his candidacy Aug. 29, and the election took place on Oct. 13—exactly 45 days later. At the time, Sam said he preferred to use the little available time to engage with different sectors of society through representatives, such as associations and sector groups, rather than holding public events.

Sam's political platform did not introduce many surprises, largely continuing the policies laid out by his predecessor, Ho Iat Seng, while incorporating updates and adjustments aligned with Beijing's latest initiatives and the Central govern-

ment's vision for Macau's future development.

In this context, the ongoing commitment to diversify the economy away from reliance on the gaming industry remains the priority for the five years marking the second half of the 50-year agreement following Macau's handover. Sam's political platform mainly focused on the diversification of the local economy by reducing dependence on the gaming sector and boosting other industries in line with the "1+4" development strategy. This strategy aims to position Macau as a "One Center" for integrated tourism and leisure, while also fostering the development of four emerging industries: "Big Health," modern financial services, high and new technology, and convention and exhibition, sports and commercial trade.

Despite frequent references to these goals in his political platform launch, campaign, post-election speeches, and elsewhere, Sam has yet to present a concrete plan outlining the measures and strategies his government will employ to achieve these objectives. Further clarification on these matters is expected in March or April when Sam will deliver, for the first time, a policy address

at the Legislative Assembly for his first year in office.

For now, Sam has pledged to "unite and lead all sectors of Macau society, under the vision of 'Striving Together, Upholding Integrity, and Innovating,'" the guiding principles of his platform.

SMOOTH CABINET TRANSITION

Recently unveiled, Sam's cabinet appears to reflect a strategy of continuity and adjustment rather than any disruptive changes or sudden transformations.

Among the ten appointed officials in his administration, there are few new faces. The Secretaries for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, and for Security, Wong Sio Chak, both retain their positions. Raymond Tam, previously the director of the Environmental Protection Bureau and former president of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), has been promoted to Secretary for Transport and Public Works. O Lam, the former vice president of IAM and ex-Chief of Office to the former CE, Chui Sai On, has been appointed Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture.

Another key position carried over from the previous government is that of Leong Man

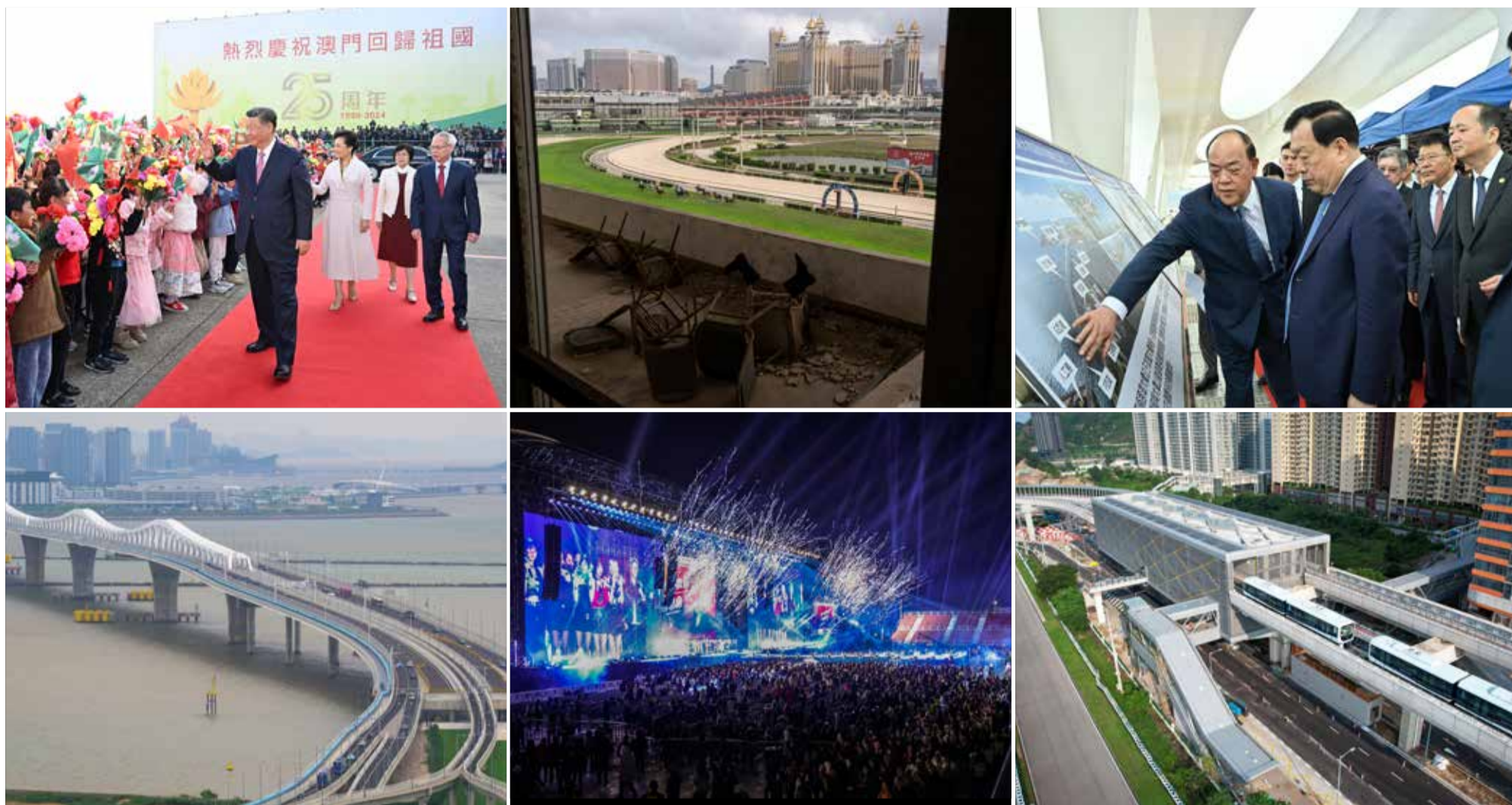
Cheong, who will continue as the Commissioner General of the Unitary Police Service.

Adriano Marques Ho, the former director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, remains in the administration but has been reassigned as the new director-general of the Macao Customs Service. Likewise, Elsie Ao Ieong, former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, will now take on the role of Commissioner of Audit.

Chan Tsz King, who had served as Commissioner Against Corruption, is another official making a leap—he will now assume the role of Public Prosecutor-General.

Perhaps the most notable shift from the previous administration is the change in the Secretariat of Economy and Finance. Sam has opted not to retain the politically embattled Lei Wai Nong, instead promoting Tai Kin Ip, the former head of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau, to the role.

During the announcement of the new officials, Sam said he had chosen "seasoned officials" with a "wealth of experience in administration and familiarity with internal procedures," as well as individuals who are "patriotic."



Timeline of events

JANUARY

- The Horta da Mitra Market reopens after a major revamp involving the preservation of its architectural appearance.
- 15-time Grammy Awards-winner, musician, and songwriter Bruno Mars performed his "The One & Only Night" concert at MGM Cotai.
- The public slammed the concert organizer who rented the Macao Stadium for causing the pitch to have mushy turf and damaged grass.

FEBRUARY

- Gov't spent at least MOP45 million on Sai Van Bridge amid public outcry over LED lighting.
- Newway outlet reportedly closed following MACA association's copyright complaint in a dispute that sparked public outcry.
- 1,600-signatures for petition opposing landfill off Coloane submitted.

MARCH

- New harbor bridge named 'Macau Bridge', amid indifference and criticism mostly concerning authorities' lack of creativity.
- Macau welcomes new entries but loses stars in 2024 "Michelin Guide Hong Kong Macau."
- Vietnamese consul Pham

Binh Dam urges Macau to restart and expand two-way tourism, relaxing visa policies for Vietnamese visitors.

APRIL

- Macau ranked fastest growing economy in Asia.
- The era of horse racing in Macau came an end after over 30 years of operation by the Macau Jockey Club.
- Macau hosted the ITTF Singles World Cup for the first time, putting the city on the map of world sports.
- Two customs officers accused of sick leave fraud costing MOP3 million in wages.
- Local ecological group slammed the government for failing to publicize the report of the dead finless porpoise found in Cheoc Van.

MAY

- Macau has been named second among the world's richest countries or regions, with per-capita purchasing power surpassing USD125,000 from 2019.
- Eligibility requirements at Macau New Neighborhood relaxed in bid to boost purchasing.
- Tender for 500 new taxis concludes
- Xia Baolong, director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, had a seven-day visit to Macau to

gain a better understanding of the latest developments in the society and economy

JUNE

- Mainland Chinese officials call for crackdown on illegal money exchanges in Macau.
- Pollution has increased after the pandemic years as the city resumes business activities mainly in the tourism sector.
- The SAR has established itself as the leading tourism revenue generator in China.
- Nearly 390,000 residents saw the return of MOP7,000 from the Central Provident Fund.

JULY

- Non-Chinese residents can apply for a multiple-entry visa valid for five years.
- The gov't debunks rumors over the condition of Ho Iat Seng, clarifies he is in 'good health' amid extended leave.
- Debt-ridden The 13 Hotel resumes limited operations.
- Suncity reflects on contributions in light of legal hurdles.
- Gov't announces plans aimed at enhancing community health, setting ambitious targets to be met by 2030.
- Gov't announces QR code technology to streamline entry process for Macau residents when entering Hong Kong

through electronic channels.

- Hotel Central reopens.

AUGUST

- MGTO reviews hotel swimming pool guidelines following death of drowned boy.
- Portuguese Education minister Fernando Alexandre criticizes leadership at EPM and renews contracts of dispensed teachers.
- SSM classifies Monkeypox as a mandatory reportable disease and secured vaccines.
- Ho Iat Seng announces he is not running for re-election.
- Sam Hou Fai announces his Chief Executive candidacy.

SEPTEMBER

- Typhoon Yagi disrupts travel and tourism in Macau, leaving a trail of death and destruction in Southeast Asia.
- Adele turns down a \$200 million offer which reportedly included a residency in Macau.
- IAM accuses a street sign company of fraud for using stickers; acknowledges oversight shortcomings.
- Islands Hospital officially opens.
- Sole Chief Executive candidate Sam Hou Fai unveils his ambitious vision for the city.

OCTOBER

- Macau's fourth bridge "Macau Bridge" officially opens to traffic.
- Zone D landfill preliminary work commences.
- China's State Council appoints Sam Hou Fai as sixth-term Chief Executive, as he garners

394 of 398 votes from local voters.

- Network grows with the opening of the Seac Pai Van line, linking Taipa to Coloane with a stop at the Union Hospital.

NOVEMBER

- Gov't unveils a revised urban plan for Ilha Verde, featuring fewer buildings and an expansion of recreational areas.
- Gov't kicks off new health center in Hengqin, marking historic first for mainland operations.
- Davey Todd named winner of this year's Macau Motorcycle GP amid the cancellation of the race, which was most affected by heavy rain.
- Gov't launches reproduction subsidy.
- The Macau University of Science and Technology expels 24 students who enrolled using fake Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education credentials.

DECEMBER

- The Coloane Village Municipal Market closes, following steady decline in recent years due to a decrease in the local population.
- Sam Hou Fai unveils 10 officials to round out his cabinet, hailed by Beijing as a 'strong and powerful' government.
- LRT Hengqin line opens.
- President Xi Jinping makes three-day visit to Macau for hand-over celebrations and Sam Hou Fai's inauguration.
- Cotai's new outdoor venue drew about 11,000 attendees for its inaugural concert.



ALL THE ELECTIONS

Democracies across the globe are at a crossroads, as authoritarians seek to chip away at freedoms

NICHOLAS RICCARDI, MDT/AP

IN November, the world's most powerful democracy elected as its next president a man who schemed to overturn its last presidential election. A month later, South Koreans swarmed their legislature to block their president's attempt to impose martial law.

The contrast sums up a year that tested democracy on all sides.

Incumbent parties and leaders were battered in elections that covered 60% of the world's population, a sign of widespread discontent in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. It also was a sign of democracy working well, as it continued its core function of giving citizens the opportunity to replace the people who govern them.

That made 2024 a year in which the state of democracy is both a glass half full and half empty.

From Asia to Africa to the Americas, it produced examples of democracy working and citizens standing up against attempted coups or authoritarians. At the same time, some of the new regimes ushered in are taking a distinctly authoritarian tack. And

the year ends with fresh turmoil in three prominent democracies, Canada, France and Germany.

CROSSROADS FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE US

Donald Trump ended his last term trying to overturn his loss to President Joe Biden and rallying an angry crowd of supporters, some of whom then stormed the U.S. Capitol in a violent attempt to block Congress from certifying Biden's victory. It was a shocking end to the U.S.'s long tradition of peacefully transferring power from one president to the next.

Nonetheless, voters in November agreed to give Trump another term in the White House, even as he increasingly embraced authoritarian leaders and promised to seek retribution against those who defended democracy in 2020.

Voters didn't heed warnings about Trump's threat to democracy and were driven more by frustration at inflation and a surge in migration during Biden's term.

That, of course, is democracy in action: Voters can choose to throw out an incumbent party even if the establishment warns that it's dangerous. Indeed, the glass half full position on Trump is that his

win was entirely democratic.

Trump's 2016 victory was due to a quirk in the country's 18th century Constitution that awards the presidency not based on a majority of the popular vote, but to whoever wins a majority of state-based Electoral College votes.

But in 2024, Trump won both the popular and Electoral College votes. He also expanded his margins among Latino and Black voters. He won with high turnout, debunking a long-held myth that U.S. conservatives struggle when many people vote. That belief has driven Republican attempts to make it tougher to cast a ballot.

AUTHORITARIANS GAINING ACROSS THE GLOBE

The quiet period after the election is to some extent an illusion. Had Trump lost, he and his allies were poised to contest a victory by his Democratic opponent, so it's not as if anti-democratic tendencies were erased by his win.

Trump's victory helped trigger turmoil in Canada, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government was rocked this week by the resignation of his prominent finance minister over disagreements on handling Trump's

threatened tariffs. And Germany's government collapsed ahead of elections next year, sparking turmoil in Europe's largest economy less than two weeks after a similar political meltdown in France.

The returning U.S. president is part of a wave of new leaders who have gained ground in Western countries, some of whom analysts warn are anti-democratic, even if popularly elected, because they seek to dismantle the system of checks and balances that has made it possible for voters to replace them or halt potentially dangerous policies.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a major Trump booster, is an icon of this movement after he revamped his country's judiciary, legislative maps and media to make it almost impossible for the opposition to win. Two years ago, European Union lawmakers declared that Orbán had transformed his country from a democracy into "a hybrid regime of electoral autocracy."

Analysts warn that Slovakia's leftist, pro-Russian prime minister Robert Fico is headed in that direction. Conservative populist parties also gained ground in the European Union Parliamentary

elections in June.

Trump also highlights another worrying trend for democracy — a surge in violence around elections.

The billionaire candidate, controversial for his own rhetoric urging violence on protesters or migrants, was the target of two assassination attempts.

According to Washington, D.C.-based Freedom House, 26 of the year's 62 elections across the world featured violence, including attacks on local candidates in Mexico and South Africa and violence at polling places in Chad. Slovakia's Fico was targeted, as well.

That comes as there is a notable dip in enthusiasm for democracy. A Pew poll of 24 countries released earlier this year found widespread dissatisfaction with democracy worldwide, with a median of 59% of voters concerned about how it is working in their country amid economic concerns and a sense of alienation from political elites.

SOME WINS FOR DEMOCRACY IN A YEAR OF SETBACKS

Still, there is a clear silver lining for democracy.

The same Pew poll that found its appeal slipping also found that it remains by far the preferred system of government worldwide. And people turned out to demonstrate that, during elections and in protest of anti-democratic moves.

South Korea was not the only foiled attempt to disband democracy. In Bolivia in June, the military tried to replace President Luis Arce, with armored vehicles ramming through the doors of the government palace. But the troops retreated after Arce named a new commander who ordered them back.

In Bangladesh, protests over limits on who can work for the government expanded into public frustration with the 15-year reign of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, toppling her regime and forcing her to flee the country.

In Senegal, the country's president tried to delay its March election but was overruled by the nation's top court, and voters replaced him with a largely-unknown opposition leader who had just been freed from prison. In Botswana and South Africa, parties that had ruled for decades stepped aside or shared power without incident after losing elections.

Democracy isn't static. Its health always depends on the next election. The fall of Germany's government and possible collapse of Canada's could just be democracy in action, giving voters a chance to elect new leaders. Or they could usher in more authoritarian regimes.

More will be revealed about how democracy did over the last year as its election results play out in 2025 and the years to come. **MDT/AP**

ALANIS THAMES,
MDT/AP SPORTS WRITER

SPORTS 2024

From Caitlin Clark and Simone Biles to a new hockey league, women's sports had a pivotal year

RECORD numbers of basketball fans filled arenas to watch the rookie seasons of Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese unfold. Simone Biles captivated the world at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Coco Gauff made women's tennis history.

It was all part of a pivotal year for women in sports, financially and culturally, and after a steady rise in popularity and reach in recent years, the women's game is more valuable than ever.

"(Clark)'s just moved the needle of the global movement of women in sports," said softball great and Olympic gold medalist Jennie Finch, "and what a thrill it's been to be able to see her rise."

The consulting firm Deloitte estimated in November 2023 that women's sports would generate more than \$1 billion in global revenue this year for the first time ever, which the company said is up about 300% from its last estimate in 2021. Skyrocketing viewership and corporate sponsorships were major factors.

The WNBA in July signed a historic 11-year media rights deal with Disney, Amazon Prime and NBC valued at about \$200 million — a jump from about \$60 million currently. Players hope higher salaries and a greater share of revenue could be on the horizon as parity, star power and competition in the WNBA continue to grow.

The WNBA had its most-watched regular season in 24 years and best attendance in 22 seasons, and commissioner Cathy Engelbert said in a recent state-of-the-league address that players are getting a lot more marketing deals, turning them into household names. That includes Las Vegas star A'ja Wilson, who had one of the most dominant seasons in WNBA history, and Clark, who set numerous rookie records.

The decisive Game 5 of the WNBA finals between the New York Liberty and the Minnesota Lynx drew an average of 2.2 million viewers, peaking at 3.3 million, which made it the most-watched WNBA game in 25 years.

"We've been growing in popularity, endorsements, media rights, all of those things," said Amira Rose Davis, a sports historian and assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

"This period is one of rapid acceleration," Davis continued, "where all that growth seems to switch into overdrive, where the deals are getting bigger, where the visibility is stretching out."

Clark, the sharp-shooting Indiana guard became a phenomenon when she played at Iowa,

AP PHOTO



capitalized on a foundation laid by hoops stars such as Diana Taurasi, Candace Parker and Wilson, and turbocharged the visibility of women's basketball.

Ticket sales to Indiana Fever games were up 182% in 2024 from the previous season. The Fever also shattered the attendance record of 13,398 set by the Liberty in 1998 with around 16,084 tickets sold per game. And games featuring Clark and her on-court rival Reese of the Chicago Sky prompted social media debates about basketball, race and culture.

"Something that I always tried to do with me was rise and elevate the game," said Finch, now an adviser for the Athletes Unlimited Softball League. "And that's what (Clark)'s doing and her teammates. And just to be able to watch her do it and how humbly she does it, and the impact of not only domestic women's basketball, but women's athletics globally. It's a dream."

While many point to the WNBA as a blueprint for success in women's sports, accomplishments in 2024 went far beyond one league or athlete.

Gauff, the 20-year-old tennis

superstar, was the world's highest-paid female athlete this year with \$30.4 million in earnings, according to Sportico rankings. Gauff could not defend her 2023 U.S. Open title, but ended her 2024 season with a WTA finals title and a \$4.8 million check — the biggest payout ever for a women's tennis event, per Sportico.

The Olympics neared complete gender parity for the first time among the more than 11,000 men and women who competed in Paris this summer.

More than 34 million people across all NBC platforms in the U.S. watched Biles exorcise the demons of her surprising exit from the Tokyo games three years earlier. The 27-year-old shared a message of resilience and redemption as she added four gold medals to her resume. Nearly everything she did in Paris made headlines — a clap back at social media trolls, a revelation about her mental health, a moment of triumph. Her TikTok showing Team USA's gold medals from team competition has more than 139 million views.

"She became a symbol," Davis said. "Whether you wanted

to symbolize her as persevering, or talking about mental health or refusal, the politics of refusal. Or (whether) you wanted to symbolize her as being a quitter — being everything that you're bemoaning about the country. Either way, both projections elevated her even more."

And as Gauff and Biles soared, other women's leagues leveraged that visibility.

The Pro Women's Hockey League brought in 392,259 fans during its inaugural regular season, highlighted by a women's hockey record crowd of 21,105 at the home arena of the NHL's Canadiens for a Montreal-Toronto matchup. The league also reached sponsorship deals with Scotiabank, Air Canada and Hyundai.

The PWHL's strong first season showed its organizers and players that there's an appetite for women's sports, so much so that there are hopes to expand from six to eight teams in 2025.

"For many of us that have been in the game for so long, it's emotional to think about where the game's come from, where we've come to," said Jayna Hefford, the league's senior vice

president of hockey operations. "We spend a lot of time reading research and all these things that suggest the time is now and that the fandom is there. And to be able to live that and feel it in real time was pretty special."

Keith Stein and Justine Siegal want to capitalize on the women's sports landscape too.

Siegal, a former baseball player and coach, partnered with Stein, a lawyer and businessman, to create the Women's Pro Baseball League, which last month announced plans to launch in 2026 as a six-team circuit for female players. It will be the first pro league for women since the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League dissolved in 1954.

"Leagues like the WNBA and (National) Women's Soccer League have done a lot of the heavy lifting," Stein said, "and they're part responsible for the moment we're having right now where women's sport is a phenomenon."

"I think there's, in some ways, a lot more momentum behind the development of professional women's sports leagues than for men's." **MDT/AP**

2024 IN POP CULTURE

In a bruising year, we sought out fantasy, escapism – and cute little animals

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP

ILL get you, my pretty! And your little pygmy hippo, too!

Forgive us the shameless attempt to link the fantasy hit “Wicked” to the delightful Moo Deng. But, hear us out — there’s something the two have in common as the year draws to a close. Escapism. Whether we found it on the yellow brick road, or in videos from a Thailand zoo, or perhaps in unlikely Olympic heroes, we gravitated toward fantasy and feel-good pop culture moments this year.

There were new trends, as always. “Brat summer” became a thing, as did “demure, mindful.” And for some inexplicable reason, we became obsessed with celebrity lookalike contests.

There were breakups — Bennifer is, again, a thing of the past — and reunions: Oasis, please try to stay together for the tour. And some things stayed, remarkably, the same: Taylor Swift and Beyoncé kept on breaking records and making history.

So, after a year where much changed but some things held steady, here’s our annual, very selective trip down pop culture memory lane:

JANUARY

It starts as a cheery tweet from a beloved “Sesame Street” figure: “ELMO is just checking in! How is everybody doing?” The answers hint at something deeper and more worrisome. “Not great, Elmo. Not great,” says one milder reply. Doing much better is the viral phenomenon called “BARBENHEIMER,” which makes its awards season debut at the GOLDEN GLOBES. But perhaps the most poignant moment comes from neither film: LILY GLADSTONE, first Indigenous winner of best actress in a drama for “Killers of the Flower Moon,” begins her remarks in the language of her tribe, Black-foot Nation.

FEBRUARY

Valentine’s Day — a perfect time to settle into a sweet love saga via TikTok. Only that’s not quite what we get with “Who TF Did I Marry?,” REESA TEESA’s depressing, fascinating, 50-part account of her disastrous marriage with a man who lied about absolutely everything. Meanwhile, if you’re looking for a single week that encapsulates peak SWIFT cultural dominance, try this: she begins with the Grammys in Los Angeles (becoming the first artist to win album of the year four times AND announcing a new al-

AP PHOTO



Miles Mitchell, 21, winner of the Timothee Chalamet lookalike contest near Washington Square Park

bum), then heads to Tokyo for four tour dates, then jets back just in time for the Super Bowl in Las Vegas — where she shares a passionate smooch with boyfriend TRAVIS KELCE on the field of victory.

MARCH

“What was I made for?” BILLIE EILISH sings at the OSCARS, channeling BARBIE. And what was KEN made for? Not entirely clear — but it’s clear RYAN GOSLING was made to play him. His singalong version of “I’m Just Ken” is one of the most entertaining Oscar musical moments in years. Still, Christopher Nolan’s “OPPENHEIMER” prevails, a rare case of the top prize going to a blockbuster studio film. Will it happen again in 2025? CYNTHIA ERIVO and ARIANA GRANDE sure hope so; as presenters, they make a sly reference to their upcoming juggernaut, “WICKED.” Speaking of marketing, people are obsessed with that bizarre “DUNE” popcorn bucket. And BEYONCÉ carves her space in country music with “Act II: Cowboy Carter,” which will make her the first Black woman to top the Billboard country chart.

APRIL

Tennis, anyone? The game’s been around for centuries, but it’s having a cultural moment right now, helped mightily by “CHALLENGERS,” the sweaty romance triangle starring ZENDAYA, MIKE FAIST and JOSH O’CONNOR (40-love? More like 40-sex.) Elsewhere, a new era dawns: At midnight, SWIFT drops “THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT,” then drops another 15 songs two hours later. The fascinating and disturbing “BABY REINDEER,” the story of a struggling comedian’s extended encounter with a stalker, debuts on Netflix.

MAY

It’s MET GALA time — or as it’s known in 2024, another early marketing moment for “WICKED.” ERIVO and GRANDE make fashion waves on the carpet and then musical ones at dinner, with a soulful performance of “When You Believe.” If the “Wicked” tour is in full force, another one stops in its tracks: JENNIFER LOPEZ cancels her summer tour amid reports of both poor ticket sales and trouble in her marriage to BEN AFFLECK. It’s been an eventful year for J.Lo, who’s released an album and movie called “THIS IS ME ... NOW” — both reflections on her renewed love with Affleck.

JUNE

Welcome to BRAT SUMMER! CHARLI XCX releases her hit “Brat” album, with its lime green cover, and launches a thousand memes. Collins Dictionary defines “brat,” its word of the year, as “characterized by a confident, independent, and hedonistic attitude.” At the celeb-heavy SWIFT shows in London, we see PRINCE WILLIAM shaking it off, which is either charming or cringe, you decide. Even better: KELCE dons a top hat and tux and performs for one night. At another stadium across the pond, METS infielder JOSE IGLESIAS delights the crowd with his cheery number “OMG.”

JULY

Bonjour, it’s OLYMPICS time! In Paris! An audacious opening ceremony along the Seine is punctuated by a fabulous CELINE DION, perched on the EIFFEL TOWER, singing her heart out — in the rain, too. Controversy swirls over a scene critics feel mocks Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper” (organizers say it does not). Olympic

stars are born — including French swimming superstar LEON MARCHAND, rugby player ILONA MAHER, and bespectacled “pommel horse guy” gymnast STEPHEN NEDOROSCIK, who nets two bronze medals and comparisons to Clark Kent. Also capturing hearts: yep, MOO DENG, born this month. Her name means “bouncy pork.”

AUGUST

This is them ... now: BENNIFFER is no more. After two decades, two engagements and two weddings, J.Lo files for divorce. One union dissolves, another returns: OASIS announces a reunion tour. Will they be “DEMURE, MINDFUL”? Everyone seems to want to get in on TikToker JOOLS LEBRON’S act — even the WHITE HOUSE press team. Back at the Olympics, in the new sport of breaking, we meet Australia’s RAYGUN, arguably neither demure nor mindful with her “kangaroo” move. Cute animal alert: It’s DECOY OHTANI’s Major League debut! SHOHEI OHTANI’s perky pooch does a great “first pitch.”

SEPTEMBER

One of the year’s biggest breakout artists, CHAPPELL ROAN, withdraws from a music festival after speaking out about frightening fan interactions. And more on the price of fame: In an excruciating moment, “Bachelorette” JENN TRAN, the franchise’s first Asian American lead, is forced to sit through a painful viewing of her proposal to her chosen suitor, after tearfully explaining how he’d later dumped her over the phone. Tran is keeping busy though — she’s announced as part of the new “Dancing with the Stars” li-

neup. Also on the list: rugby player Maher, and Pommel Horse Guy! Also, ANNA SOROKIN, dancing with an ankle monitor. Online fandom, meanwhile, is shaken when X is temporarily suspended in Brazil and celebrity stan accounts post tearful farewells, revealing to many across the globe that their favorite accounts are run by Brazilians.

OCTOBER

“Dune” Chalamets! “Wonka” Chalamets! Thousands gather in Manhattan for a TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET lookalike contest, and things really get interesting when Chalamet himself shows up. He doesn’t enter the contest, though, and with his mustache, he may not even have won. The trend continues with contests for JEREMY ALLEN WHITE, ZAYN MALIK, and — in a very Washington version — Kennedy scion JACK SCHLOSSBERG, who’s been gathering a following with some interesting social media posts. Turning to basketball, who’s that dancing with USHER? Why it’s ELLIE THE ELEPHANT, the now-viral NEW YORK LIBERTY mascot.

NOVEMBER

MAYA RUDOLPH does a pretty good KAMALA HARRIS laugh on “Saturday Night Live,” but you know who does it better? HARRIS herself. The Democratic candidate makes a surprise cameo three days before the U.S. presidential election, following in the footsteps of HILLARY CLINTON, SARAH PALIN and others. Elsewhere in television, Bravo announces that “VANDERPUMP RULES,” the Emmy-nominated reality show that has lived through countless scandals, is entirely recasting its 12th season — apart from namesake LISA VANDERPUMP! As for MOO DENG, she doesn’t have her own TV series yet, but our favorite pygmy hippo is generating plenty of merch. And THAT brings us back to

DECEMBER

“WICKED”! Director JON M. CHU’S emerald-hued fantasy remains very very popular, to quote one of its buzzy show tunes, dancing through life and defying gravity at the multiplex. Moviegoers also come for “GLADIATOR II” and, in a veritable tidal wave, Disney’s “MOANA 2,” which beckons us back to the seas of Oceania. Once again, 2024 seems to be telling us: Give people some whimsy, a place to escape, maybe some catchy tunes — and no one knows how far they’ll go.

FILMS 2024

The best movies of the year: a list

As much as theaters are humming right now, with “Wicked” and “Moana 2” bringing moviegoers by the droves, it’s been a fairly bruising movie year.

In between the blockbusters, though, the challenge of not just capturing the attention of audiences but of simply getting to the screen feels more perilous than ever. The year was marked by filmmakers who wagered everything from a \$120 million pile (Francis Ford Coppola’s “Megalopolis”) to their life (the dissident Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof’s “The Seed of the Sacred Fig”).

Considering the paths of the “The Apprentice” (about Donald Trump’s rise in New York) or the Israeli occupation documentary “No Other Land” (which still lacks a distributor), the question of what gets released was a common and chilling refrain.

That also made the movies that managed their way through — the ones that told urgent stories or dazzled with originality at a time of sequel stranglehold — all the more worth celebrating.

Here are picks for the best movies of 2024:

1. “BLITZ”

Steve McQueen tells a different kind of World War II story in “Blitz,” a powerful and clear-eyed odyssey through London during the German bombing raid. Structured around a 9-year-old boy (Elliott Heffernan) trying to make his way back to his mother (Saoirse Ronan), it is a sneakily revolutionary glimpse into and poignant elegy for worlds unexplored and stories untold. Streaming on Apple TV+.

2. “ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT”

Was this a great year for movies? The consensus seems to be no, and that may be true. But it did produce some stone-cold masterpieces, none more so than Payal Kapadia’s sublime tale of three women in modern Mumbai. It’s a grittily real movie graced, in equally parts, by keen-eyed documentary and dreamy poetry. Beguilingly, “All We Imagine As Light” grows more profound as it cleaves further from reality. In theaters.

3. IMMACULATE

It’s not your imagination: Sydney Sweeney has been everywhere this year. In the past months, she’s been in a romantic comedy that turned into a sleeper hit, a superhero movie that didn’t and a bloody horror. “Immaculate,” in which she brilliantly plays a young American nun, Cecilia, who’s decided to join an Italian convent. Her character found God after a near-death experience at a young age and, after her parish closes, she gets a lifeline to go abroad and help tend to older, dying nuns. The prettiness of the new surroundings is just a front, and she starts to discover some sinister happenings within the ancient walls.

4. “I SAW THE TV GLOW”

Jane Schoenbrun’s sophomore feature — a dramatic leap forward for filmmaker and a transfixing trans parable — is a chilling 1990s

coming of age in which a “Buffy the Vampire Slayer”-like series called “The Pink Opaque” offers a possible portal out of drab suburban life and other suffocations. It feels chillingly, beautifully ripped out of Schoenbrun’s soul — and it’s got a killer soundtrack. Streaming on Max, available for digital rental.

5. “GREEN BORDER”

The fury of Agnieszka Holland’s searing migrant drama is suitably calibrated to the crisis. Along the Poland-Belarus border, a small band of migrants from Syria and Afghanistan are sent back and forth across a wooded borderland — sometimes they’re even literally tossed — in a grim game of “not in my backyard.” It’s not an easy movie to watch, nor should it be. To keep up with the times, more uncomfortable movies like this may be needed. Streaming on Kino Film Collection, available for digital rental.

6. “THE FALL GUY”

We also need more big, fun movies with Ryan Gosling. David Leitch’s affectionate ode to stunt performers manages to celebrate behind-the-scenes crew members while simultaneously being completely carried by two of our most winning movie stars in Gosling and Emily Blunt. The societal value of watching Gosling cry to Taylor Swift’s “All Too Well” should not be underestimated. Streaming on Peacock, available for digital rental.

7. “THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG”

The way the Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof, who was forced into exile while editing this, condenses real-life social upheaval into a family drama makes this a uniquely disquieting film. Like Kurosawa’s “Stray Dog,” Rasoulof’s movie centers around a lost handgun. The subsequent search reveals just how deeply the Iranian government’s policies have seeped into the most intimate relationships. In theaters.

8. “GHOSTLIGHT” AND “SING SING”

We had not one but two movies this year that captured the therapeutic properties of theater. Each, almost unbelievably, deftly eludes tipping into cliché thanks to abiding compassion and authenticity in the performances. Alex Thompson and Kelly O’Sullivan’s “Ghostlight” is about a grieving father, a construction worker (an exceptional Keith Kupferer), who reluctantly joins a local production of “Romeo and Juliet.” “Sing Sing” dramatizes a real rehabilitation prison program. Its screening at Sing Sing Correctional, where many of its performers were once incarcerated, was easily the most moving moviegoing experience of the year for me. “Ghostlight” is available for digital rental. “Sing Sing” returns to theaters Jan. 17.

10. “A REAL PAIN”

Jesse Eisenberg grapples with modern and historical trauma in the disarmingly entertaining road trip film “A Real Pain,” which he wrote, directed and stars in alongside Kieran Culkin as cousins on a Holocaust tour in Poland. In theaters. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO

1. “Blitz”



2. “All we imagine as light”



3. “Immaculate”



4. “I saw the TV glow”



5. “Green border”



6. “The fall guy”



7. “The seed of the sacred fig”



8. “Sing sing”



10. “A real pain”



ASIA IN PHOTOS 2024

Changes in government, natural disasters and moments of joy

DOZENS of Rohingya refugees stood huddled on the remains of a ship days after it capsized at sea, seeing the Indonesian coast guard vessel that was approaching for a miraculous rescue. An Associated Press photographer was on deck to capture the moment, as others were at scenes of political turmoil, sudden tragedy and age-old traditions that played out across Asia in 2024.

AP photojournalists witnessed mass movements across Asia change governments, from student protests in Bangladesh that forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and flee the country, to Korean lawmakers and citizens gathering at the National Assembly

to reject President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law.

They recorded the toll of massive floods that struck countries including Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines.

And they documented moments of joy as people gathered in celebrations: a rider in Inner Mongolia performing on horseback at a sports festival, thousands gathering to observe the Hindu festival of Holi and Pope Francis' historic tour of the Indo-Pacific.

From the overthrow of a government to a leaf delicate cut into a work of art, this gallery records the region's biggest events of the year and the small things that defined life for its people. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Pope Francis arrives at the Holy Trinity Humanistic School in Baro, near Vanimo, Papua New Guinea, Sept. 8



Conservative groups supporting South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol rally denouncing opposition parties' lawmakers who demand impeachment of Yoon following his short-lived martial law declaration in Seoul, South Korea, Dec. 7



Russian President Vladimir Putin, right, and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un drive a Russian Aurus limousine during their meeting in Pyongyang, North Korea, on June 19



Local residents wade through flooded water at a broken bridge, in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, Sept. 17



Ethnic Rohingya refugees stand on their capsized boat as rescuers throw a rope to them off West Aceh, Indonesia, on March 21



Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina checks her watch as she waits for the official opening time to cast her vote in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Jan. 7



A swarm of bees attack a drunk man during celebrations marking Holi, the Hindu festival of colors, in Guwahati, India, March 25



An artist performs a horse riding skill in the "Historic ode to the horses", a traditional horse riding show in Hohhot, north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, May 3