

Data in key sector hints at weaker hiring ahead

Despite strong March jobs report, this downshift could signal trouble for labor market. **In Money**

'Sasquatch Sunset' follows lives of a Bigfoot family

Jesse Eisenberg, Riley Keough get hairy in film with no spoken words. **In Life**

Scheffler: After win, priorities changing

Golfer coasts to second Masters title, talks about shifting focus to his wife and the birth of first child. **In Sports**

ADAM CAIRNS/
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E2



Former President Donald Trump arrives for jury selection early Monday at Manhattan Criminal Court. THOMAS P. COSTELLO/USA TODAY NETWORK

Welcome to the unknown – again



Susan Page
Washington Bureau Chief
USA TODAY

Trump's NY trial is the real kickoff to this campaign

Donald Trump did not look chagrined as he prepared to walk into a New York courtroom and become the first former president in American history to be tried after being accused of a crime.

"This is an assault on America," he told reporters gathered in a hallway, calling the charges "nonsense" and "an outrage" and repeating his unfounded assertion that President Joe Biden was behind his prosecution on 34 counts of violating New York State law.

"This is really an attack on a political opponent, that's all it is," Trump said as a police dog barked in the background. "So I'm very honored to be here."

Never before has a former president faced criminal charges. Never before

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Each side has a sizable stake in sitting a jury

Aysha Bagchi
USA TODAY

Jury selection may seem like the boring precursor to a trial's juicier parts, but it can be crucial to the outcome. On Monday, the teams of lawyers in former President Donald Trump's criminal hush money trial began the process of finding 12 jurors – and several alternates – who will give them the best chance of winning.

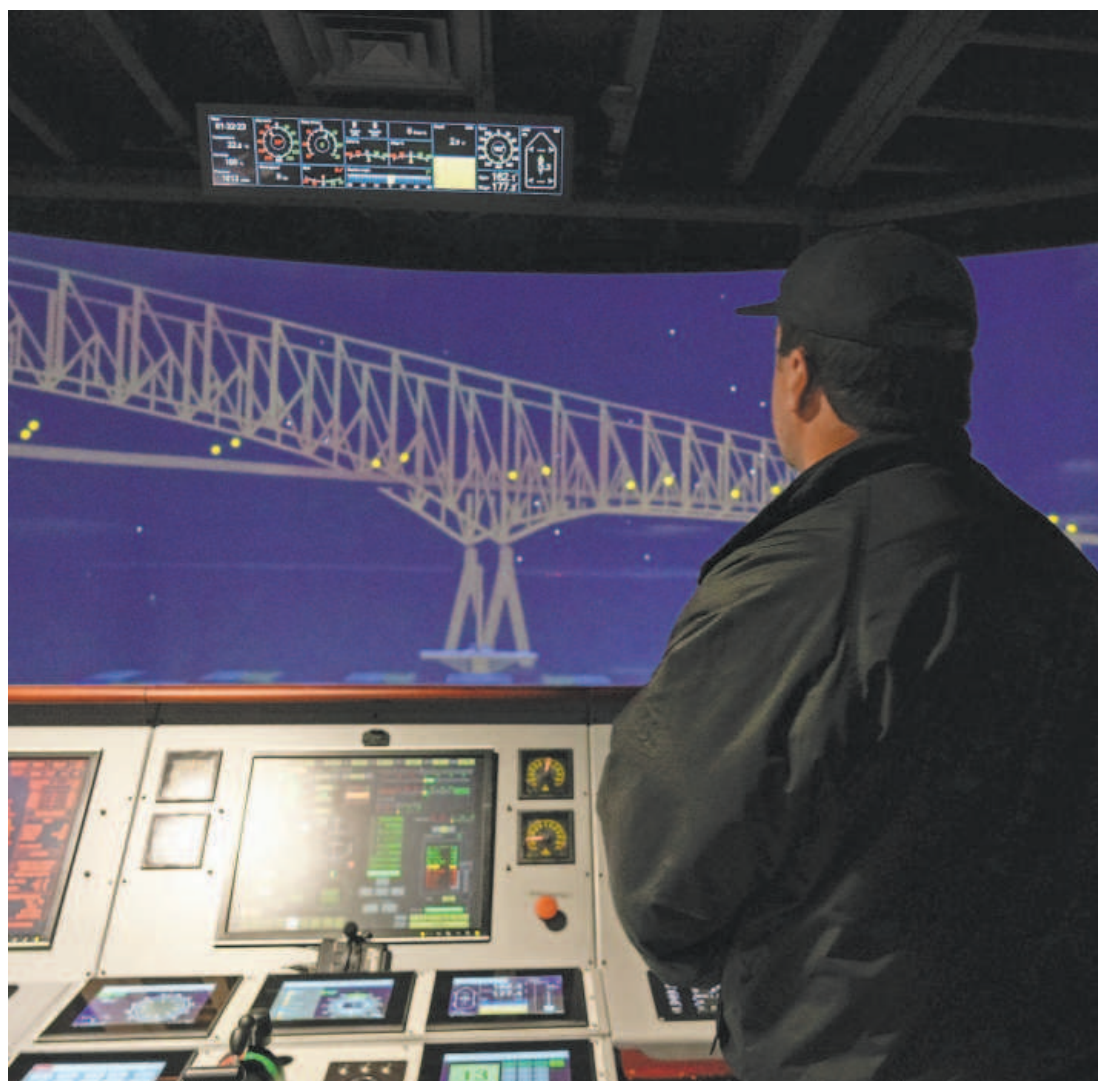
The process often involves weeding out jurors with opinions that might influence their decision. But how can you find anyone in Manhattan who doesn't have an opinion of Donald Trump?

To find out, USA TODAY talked to jury and trial experts, who said Trump's and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's trial teams may want

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Ships strike bridges, lose power every year

Disasters rare, but conditions for them frightfully common



Mitch Mathai, a second-class cadet at California State University Maritime Academy, monitors a screen onboard one of the academy's two 360-degree, full-mission simulators. PHOTOS BY SANDY HOOPER/USA TODAY



Kevin Calnan briefs students as they prepare for a simulation replicating the conditions March 26, when a cargo ship lost power and struck Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Emily Le Coz and Austin Fast
USA TODAY

An alarm wails onboard the container ship as it approaches the Francis Scott Key Bridge during what had until that moment seemed like a routine departure from the Port of Baltimore.

For the past half hour, the crew navigated the hulking vessel through relatively calm waters and lined it up to pass perfectly under the main truss of the steel bridge, softly lit in the early morning darkness.

Now, just a half-mile from the span, the vessel has gone dark – no power, no steering, no propulsion. Inside the ship's towering command center, the crew tries to reengage the system but with no luck. The nearly 100,000-ton ship is adrift.

"Captain, we are on a collision course with the bridge support," announces the officer of the watch, who recommends dropping its anchor. No

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At least 6,000 times

in the past 22 years – an average of more than five times a week – crews have reported what befell the Dali: a loss of power, loss of propulsion, loss of steering, or some combination of the three.

A dozen instances

– out of at least 900 that occurred near bridges identified by the U.S. Department of Transportation as spanning navigable waters – were labeled major or significant.

Three bridge strikes

occurring in U.S. waters since 2002 – out of 2,600 of them – were fatal, claiming 16 lives in all.

700 'casualty incidents'

were reported in the third quarter of 2022 – the highest in 14 years. Factors for the incidents included fewer ship inspections and internal audits, an unavailability of dry docks and technicians to perform maintenance and repairs, as well as supply chain delays in getting spare parts.

In free and easy Finland, happiness is a warm sweat

Kim Hjelmgard USA TODAY

HELSINKI – Juuso Raukola uses the sauna in his home every single day. So do his wife and children. Raukola's parents do the same with their sauna, in their house, his friends and work colleagues in theirs.

When Raukola and his two brothers met up last month in Finland's capital to catch up on the things brothers catch up on when they have not seen each other in a while, they did so in a quiet and unchanging place made of fragrant hard wood, warmed to 175 degrees and with easy access for a dip in the Baltic's icy waters.

"Saunas are where Finnish people go to calm themselves; to reset their minds to the 'zero point'; to process what has happened to them in the daytime and to think about solutions."

Juuso Raukola, 35, mechanical engineer

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Finland

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“Sometimes Finnish people say saunas are like churches. I think that’s a really strong word. Maybe too strong,” said Raukola, 35, a mechanical engineer, as he or one of his brothers periodically stood up to pour water on hot wood pellets that created a burst of steam that raised the heat and humidity levels in Helsinki’s Kulttuurisauna.

“What I think they are trying to say is saunas are where Finnish people go to calm themselves; to reset their minds to the ‘zero point’; to process what has happened to them in the daytime and to think about solutions.”

A soak for everyone

Finland has a lot of saunas: an estimated 3 million for its population of 5 million, according to government figures. The Nordic country also routinely scores high in global surveys, indexes and reports that compare countries on various quality of life and good-governance metrics. Last month, Finland was crowned the happiest country in the world for the seventh year in a row by the United Nations’ World Happiness Report.

But ask a Finn what makes them seemingly so content with life, and while they may jokingly attribute it to some rare combination of steam and heat, they are likely to say happiness just doesn’t happen, it’s made. Kind of.

“It’s a bit of a mystery to me, but it’s always our saunas that get mentioned in the reports about how happy we in Finland apparently are,” said Teemu Tallberg, a professor of military sociology at Finland’s National Defense University. He and other researchers say Finland’s “consensus” society and general preparedness levels for achieving goals and managing unexpected crises – war, if it comes to it – may play the bigger role.

In fact, Frank Martela, a business professor at Finland’s Aalto University, has said it’s clear that Nordic countries such as Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Norway – which all regularly outperform other nations in international gauges that seek to measure how well societies function – are doing something right when it comes to engineering the conditions for happiness, even if “happiness” is a term that defies easy categorization.

The happiness ‘ladder’

All of these countries have well-functioning democratic institutions and relatively generous welfare services. They score well on surveys that track equality legislation, lack of corruption, social cohesion and trust, enjoy high levels of freedom, media literacy, human rights and access to public goods, and have low levels of income equality.

Martela has also noted that the U.N.’s World Happiness Report is actually based on one single question: “Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?”

After several thousand people answer this question about where they feel they are standing on the ladder, an average is calculated. The average is the happiness score for the given country. Of the more than 140 nations surveyed for the most recent happiness index, the U.S. landed in 23rd place, compared with 15th in 2023. A lot of Americans, in other words, placed themselves pretty far down the ladder compared with people in Finland.

Precisely why that is falls outside the scope of this story. But it may be worth pointing out, in an election year, that the movie “Civil War” just opened in the U.S. theaters. Its plot revolves around a U.S. government that has become a dystopian dictatorship and extremist militias who regularly commit war crimes.

Calm resilience is built in

Happiness in Finland, for historical reasons, may be closely linked to ideas about resilience, researchers say.

Finland became a full member of the NATO military alliance in April only last year, a direct reaction to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. But Finland has a long and strained relationship with its massive neighbor that has required it to adopt coping strategies, particularly military-related ones.

Not only does Finland share an 833-mile border with Russia, but in the 17th and 18th centuries various monarchs of the Russian Empire repeatedly tried to



Juuso Raukola’s home sauna is his haven. PROVIDED BY JUUSO RAUKOLA

At Helsinki’s Kulttuurisauna spa, steam is just another sign that everything is copacetic.

KIM HJELMGAARD/USA TODAY

900,000 people for a population of 630,000. But the Finns are nothing if not thinkers-ahead.

The extra space was created for any tourists who might happen to get stuck in the city during a war.

Happy doesn’t mean perfect

Still, Finland’s preparedness for war or disaster doesn’t mean everything in the country is rosy all the time.

Finland is trying to adopt temporary legislation to block asylum seekers from Russia after the Finnish border authority said more than 1,300 asylum seekers from nations including Yemen, Somalia and Syria entered Finland from Russia between August and December last year. About 900 of them entered in November alone. In comparison, the number before last August had averaged just one person a day.

One border police intelligence officer said Russia has “weaponized the use of migrants” on Finland’s border by canceling their Russian claims and busing them to Finland’s border. The officer, who did not want to be publicly identified because of the sensitive nature of his work, said the situation was likely to “worsen” in time.

As a consequence, Finland has closed its border with Russia, a move that has drawn pushback from humanitarian organizations who say denying asylum seekers access to a territory impinges on their human rights.

And some studies and reports have suggested that people of African descent consider Finland one of the most racist countries in the European Union, with nearly half of those surveyed experiencing racial harassment.

Guns laws, mental health and criminal responsibility in Finland have also been in the spotlight recently after a 12-year-old boy killed another child and injured two in a school shooting in a city north of Helsinki.

According to the Small Arms Survey, a Switzerland-based research project, Finland, which tightened its gun laws more than a decade ago in response to several school shootings, has the most guns per capita of any nation in the European Union at 32.4 per 100 inhabitants. It has the seventh-most in the world behind only the United States, Yemen, Montenegro, Serbia, Canada and Uruguay, according to the survey.

Raukola, the sauna enthusiast, said he appreciates how communication from Finland’s authorities is “transparent” on key issues. He also said his visit last month to Helsinki’s Kulttuurisauna with his brothers, intended to mark his older brother’s birthday, “was just somewhere to go.” He said it was not an “exceptional moment”; on the contrary, it was the most normal thing they could think of to do to have fun, relax and be happy.

Turnout in altered district in Ala. soars

2nd Congressional may be up for grabs in Nov.

Victor Hagan

Montgomery Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Voter turnout for the Democratic primary in Alabama’s 2nd Congressional District was remarkably higher in the first election since the district was redrawn in a way that could allow the party to pick up a key seat.

According to the National Redistricting Foundation, there were 57,129 ballots cast in the district’s Democratic primary election Super Tuesday with 95% of precincts reporting. This was a 133% increase over the 24,478 ballots cast in the 2022 Democratic primary. The GOP primary had 56,970 ballots cast.

“I’ve voted since 1976. I think people are willing to speak up by voting. I think if you get people hooked into voting, and they voted in the primaries then they’ll vote in the general, probably more so,” said Benny Newton, a Montgomery radio station owner.

The primary election for the district had 19 candidates in total. Eight were on the Republican ballot and 11 on the Democratic. Both elections went to a runoff.

“Voting in local elections is just as if not more important, and I’ve voted in every local election for the 2nd District since 2021,” said Emily Smith, a University of Alabama graduate student who drove four hours round-trip from Tuscaloosa to her polling place to vote in person.

“I think my generation has really seen the impacts of voting as well as not voting and make an effort to get their ballots in. Also, I think this election is more contentious than previous presidential elections in the 2nd District, so people are more inclined to vote.”

Last summer, in the case of *Allen v. Milligan*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that the proposed Alabama congressional district map was gerrymandered, discriminating against Black voters. The state initially refused to redraw the map, defying the federal court order. However, a new map was eventually drawn, giving an opportunity for a second minority district.

“It’s clear that Alabama’s representative map is a boon for political participation. That’s great news for democracy,” said Marina Jenkins, executive director of the NRF. “When voters know they have the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice, they are more motivated to show up to the polls and fulfill their civic duties.”

Dawson Wilcox, an incoming law student at Berkeley Law, said he believes the increased voter turnout comes down to general enthusiasm from the results of *Allen v. Milligan*.

“The Montgomery area is very politically diverse, and a vast swath of the population has never had a chance to make their voices heard at the federal level,” Wilcox said. “I’m super excited to see more people are getting representation in our government.”

Wilcox also said giving Black Alabamians more of a voice will improve voter turnout in November, saying that “apathy is the enemy of democracy.”

Bill Foster, executive director of Aframsouth Inc., said he believes having a “young guy who’s charismatic,” referring to Democratic candidate Shomari Figures, caused a lot of young people to vote in the primary. He also said some people are simply doing everything to vote against former President Donald Trump.

“This is showing what could happen if you had districts that were actually fair. When you’ve got an equal chance of winning, then you’re going to have people wanting to participate in work in elections and getting out there and voting,” said Kathy Jones, president of the League of Women Voters of Alabama.

Since the primary on Super Tuesday, the state has implemented a new law that criminalizes some aspects of absentee voter ballot assistance. Advocacy organizations are now suing public officials over the new law.

The Democratic and Republican runoff elections for Alabama’s 2nd congressional seat will be held Tuesday.