

Doomsday Clock at 90 seconds to midnight amid nuclear and AI threats



By [Adela Suliman](#)

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The world remains the closest it has ever been to the symbolic hour of the apocalypse, with the [Doomsday Clock](#) set once again to 90 seconds to “midnight” for 2024.

Wars in the Middle East, Ukraine, a spiraling climate crisis and the rise of artificial intelligence are among the threats continuing to put human existence under pressure, according to the people who run the clock.

The clock, which has been used for [seven decades](#), was created by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in 1947 amid Cold War nuclear tensions — and is seen as “a universally recognized indicator of the world’s vulnerability to global catastrophe caused by man-made technologies,” the group said Tuesday.

“Make no mistake: resetting the Clock at 90 seconds to midnight is not an indication that the world is stable. Quite the opposite,” CEO Rachel Bronson said in a [statement](#), a year after Russia’s war in Ukraine [drove the same dire forecast](#) in 2023. “It’s urgent for governments and communities around the world to act.”

The Chicago-based nonprofit focused this year in part on the rise of AI, saying in a [statement](#) that sophisticated chatbots such as [ChatGPT](#) “led some respected experts to express concern about existential risks arising from further rapid advancements in the field.” It called for greater global governance of what it termed a “disruptive technology.”

It also said AI had “great potential to magnify disinformation and corrupt the information environment on which democracy depends,” as well as exacerbate misinformation on topics such as nuclear risks, pandemics and climate change.

“Military uses of AI are accelerating,” it added. “Extensive use of AI is already occurring in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, simulation, and training. Of particular concern are lethal autonomous [weapons](#), which identify and destroy targets without human intervention.”

Other threats cited by the atomic scientists include the deterioration of nuclear arms reduction agreements as well as wars in [Ukraine](#) and the [Middle East](#). The [Israel-Gaza war](#) has left tens of thousands of people dead, according to authorities in both places, and the conflict threatens to [spill over in the region](#).

The Earth also experienced its hottest year on record in 2023, along with devastating floods, wildfires, and extreme-weather impacting millions of people globally, it added, which contributed to its decision.

Former California governor and executive chair of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Jerry Brown, likens the situation to being on the ill-fated Titanic ship.

“Leaders are steering the world toward catastrophe — more nuclear bombs, vast carbon emissions, dangerous pathogens and artificial intelligence,” Brown said. “Only the big powers like China, America, and Russia can pull us back. Despite deep antagonisms, they must cooperate — or we are doomed.” The Bulletin makes the annual decision in consultation with its board of sponsors, which includes several Nobel Laureates.

The clock was set at two minutes to midnight in 2019 and at 100 seconds to midnight in 2022. It was the furthest from “midnight” in 1991, when it was wound back to 17 minutes after the Cold War was officially declared over.

Science educator Bill Nye, who took part in the 2024 announcement, said it was “time to act.”

“For decades, scientists have been warning us of the dangers facing humankind. We could be facing catastrophe unless we better manage the technologies we’ve created,” Nye said.

Some have criticized the clock as fearmongering or questioned its usefulness. In a 2015 essay, a University of Oxford researcher in global catastrophic risk cast doubt on the clock as a measurement of “actual risk,” writing that it was more a reflection of the “strong feeling of urgency” about the risks among the team who operate it.

The group said there was always hope to prevent despair. “The Clock could be turned back,” the Bulletin said. It added that it felt particularly “inspired — in seeing the younger generations leading the charge.”

“Everyone on Earth has an interest in reducing the likelihood of global catastrophe,” they added. The group also pointed at leaders from the United States, China and Russia as global powers to “take responsibility for the existential danger the world now faces. They have the capacity to pull the world back from the brink of catastrophe. They should do so, with clarity and courage, and without delay.”