America's next Formula 1 driver is still years away

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Fifteen. That is the number of drivers from the United States who have won a Formula 1 Grand Prix. Former driver Mario Andretti remains the country's most recent winner, taking his 12th and last win in 1978.

In more recent times, only three American drivers in the 21st century have participated in a Grand Prix. Driver Scott Speed competed in 2006 and 2007 for the Scuderia Toro Rosso team, driver Alexander Rossi got five races in 2015 for Manor and driver Logan Sargeant ran in 2023 and 2024 for Williams Racing.

Even now, with two American teams on the grid and American drivers Colton Herta in Formula 2 and Ugo Ugochukwu in Formula 3, I do not think Formula 1 will be seeing an American driver on the grid any time soon.

Before evaluating why I lack faith in both Herta and Ugochukwu, I want to first break down why it is so hard for Americans, and really drivers from all over the world, to break into Formula 1. It all comes down to the feeder series ladder, which is extremely Eurocentric. To have the best shot at making it to the top, drivers will typically have to commit to racing in Europe as early as their karting days, where they can be noticed by driver development programs run by Formula 1 teams.

Once they graduate to cars, the best place to be is still in Europe. The top feeder series teams are all based in Europe, and just like karting, the series that will gain a young driver the most exposure are all the European championships. While the United States has its own Formula 4 and Formula Regional championship, the drivers that win those series will not receive the same attention as the driver that wins GB4, the United Kingdom's Formula 4 series or the Formula Regional Europe Championship, often considered one of the last stepping stones before Formula 3.

Overall, the junior series ladder makes it monetarily and mentally taxing to chase a Formula 1 seat, with drivers spending long spans of time away from home competing and families doing their best to either find sponsors or pay out of pocket to keep their careers funded. While many talents, at least for a time, do attempt to make it in Europe, many return or simply stay in the United States. With NASCAR, IndyCar and IMSA, there are plenty of enticing motorsport opportunities at home for American drivers. As a result, most of the United States' most talented drivers stay in domestic series, rather than trying to race abroad.

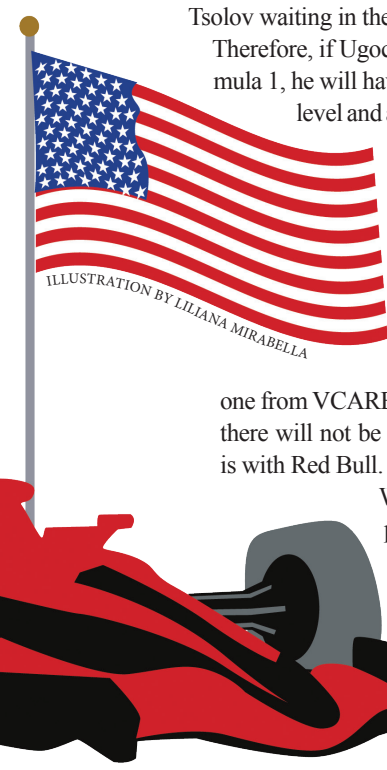
With that context in mind, Herta's story is a bit confusing. The son of IndyCar star Bryan Herta, he made his full-time debut in the series his father became famous in and won two races, becoming the youngest ever IndyCar winner in 2019. With a solid season, he ended up just five points shy of Rookie of the Year. With another five wins across the next three seasons and a third-place finish in the standings in 2020, Herta had cemented himself as one of the new young faces of IndyCar.

Yet in 2022, intense speculation suggested Herta would be making the switch to Formula 1, a rumor that went dormant only to re-emerge in 2025. In October, it was confirmed he would be contesting the 2026 Formula 2 season with support from the new Cadillac team to gain enough FIA Super License points to compete in Formula 1.

This season has been horrible for Herta, currently a distant P19 in the championship, ahead of only four other drivers. For 2027, it is rumored he will not be returning to Formula 2 or any category full-time, simply acting as a reserve driver for Cadillac. In fact, he seems committed to this as he reportedly turned down a return to IndyCar with championship-winning team, Chip Ganassi Racing. I don't think this is the way forward, as it likely means multiple years of sitting out of actual racing.

By looking at his IndyCar resume, you can see that Herta is undoubtedly a talented driver, but sometimes Formula 2 does not work out for drivers, and there is nothing wrong with that. I just do not see a scenario where, if Herta is the reserve driver at Cadillac, he can find a race seat in a few years, especially with the constantly shifting silly season.

As for the United States' other decent contender for a Formula 1 seat, Ugochukwu has a better, albeit not fantastic chance. Unlike Herta, he has followed the feeder series ladder much more conventionally, graduating from karts to run in British and Italian F 4 to Formula Regional Europe and moving up to Formula 3 in 2025.



This season, switching from Prema Racing to Campos Racing, Ugochukwu did take the Formula 3 title by 14 points, making him the first American to do so. However, while he scored a total of seven podiums, two wins, three runner-ups and two third-place finishes, he seemed to struggle toward the summer break, scoring only once between the three race weekends at Spa, Hungary and Monza, and a second place in the feature race in Budapest.

In addition, he was involved in controversy at Monza, when he was handed a five-place grid penalty for blocking another driver to the wall and running him off the track during practice. Such a move would be frowned upon during a race, but during practice, when positions did not matter, it made no sense at all.

Regardless, Ugochukwu likely will move up to Formula 2 for 2027, though he is currently unaffiliated with any of the Formula 1 junior programs. He was a McLaren junior but was dropped ahead of this season, though current rumors suggest he may be signing with the Red Bull junior program.

If he is with Red Bull, that will also present a challenge as drivers Max Verstappen and Isack Hadjar have re-signed, and then they have the likes of drivers Arvid Lindblad and Nikola Tsolov waiting in the wings for a seat.

Therefore, if Ugochukwu wants a shot at Formula 1, he will have to perform at a very high level and avoid any repeats of Monza. While his outlook is more promising than Herta's, I feel like unless Verstappen pulls a surprise retirement or Hadjar's performances suddenly fall off a cliff, Red Bull will have little reason to promote someone from VCARB to the main team, and thus there will not be room for Ugochukwu if he is with Red Bull.

With Herta seemingly stepping back to an exclusive reserve driver role with Cadillac, I view his Formula 1 bid as close to, if not fully, dead in the water. An extremely talented driver, his gamble to try and make it to Formula 1 could not have gone much worse. For Ugochukwu, his time in Formula 2 will be critical, though depending on the young driver program he ends up joining, he could find himself in a talent logjam that prevents him from getting to Formula 1. All in all, the fourth American driver to participate in a Grand Prix this century is likely going to have to wait.

Congress shouldn't be a nursing home

By JAY BOOTH
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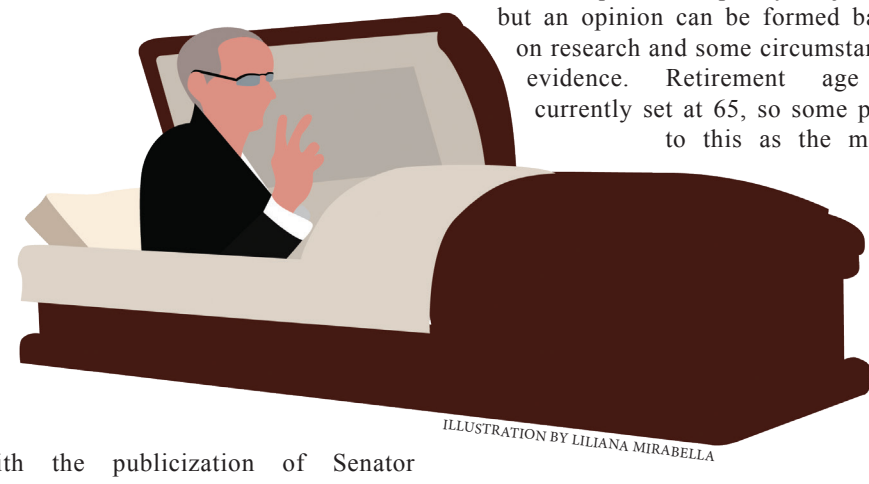
Senators Mitch McConnell, Bernie Sanders, Chuck Grassley, Dick Durbin, Chuck Schumer, Susan Collins, Mike Crapo, Jack Reed. All are over the age of 70, and some are even running for re-election later this year.

Politicians have generally been older than the median age since forever, with age requirements for Congress and the presidency both above 25. But our government hasn't ever been this egregiously old before, with eighty-plus-year olds dominating the chamber and running policy for the populace that includes people six generations below them.



With the publicization of Senator McConnell's most recent health episode, age in politics has again come to the forefront of the conversation about how we elect our lawmakers.

McConnell had an unspecified incident involving a fall and loss of consciousness in mid-June, and then dropped out of public view entirely for the next few months with no public communication to Congress, Kentucky governor Andy Beshear, his constituents or the general American public.

He remained out of the public eye until just two weeks ago, when he finally returned to the Capitol, in a wheelchair and seemingly almost catatonic, not giving any verbal responses, only small hand gestures.

This begs multiple questions: how old is too old? How do we keep electing and re-electing such old people into our government?

The first question is purely subjective, but an opinion can be formed based on research and some circumstantial evidence. Retirement age is currently set at 65, so some point to this as the magic cutoff. But age isn't a one-size-fits-all scale. Some people age physically or mentally faster than others. Take Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. He seems relatively sharp to this day, and he's 85. Meanwhile, someone like McConnell seems almost entirely gone, yet he's the exact same age.

This presents a problem, as a blanket age cap for positions such as senator or house representative may be unfairly limiting those who may not be as impacted by age, similar to Sanders. This could prohibit long-standing, experienced talent like him from staying in the Senate simply because of his age, not due to mental competence.

So the easiest way is to have some form of mental cognitive test available and required to be passed before being seated in a chamber, and re-evaluation required after a representative's hospitalization.

This would need to be a non-partisan position to test these politicians to ensure fairness. The test itself would need to be developed not only for accuracy but also speed and curated specifically for this purpose.

The more interesting question is how we keep electing these people into Congress who are so much older than the median voter, or who are even showing signs of aging that could impede regular activities of governance.

This comes down to the fact that incumbents have massive advantages, and there's a lot of pressure on candidates to stay in office. Their staffers don't want to lose their jobs; lobbyists don't want to lose the connection; fundraisers, the recognizable name and to constituents, a well-known face. Due to this, politicians tend to feel strapped to their spot for life and become "career politicians," even sometimes despite promises otherwise.

So the politicians then don't challenge themselves to leave or even necessarily try to. Instead, they stay put and usually win re-election due to the lack of competitiveness of most seats across the country in both chambers. Then they climb up in age and hold the office throughout their later years.

So where are the young people? The biggest issue here is that there's a minimum age requirement, and at 25, very few people are eyeing a political office.

Most are still building their resume or pursuing other endeavors, even if they intend to be in politics in their older age. Additionally, the Senate and House are hardly starting points for a fledgling politician. Younger candidates usually start in lower offices in their 30s and 40s, such as state legislative offices, the governorship or even more local governments.

By the time they climb the ranks, they're typically old enough to get Social Security benefits, and even have the money to retire, but simply will not leave due to the weight of outside influences and perhaps a learned personal stubbornness.

The solution isn't quite clear on how to fix this in one sweep, but the problem has presented itself time and again.

It's time to make Congress no longer be a nursing home.