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The State of the First Amendment

'Citizenship won't save you': Free speech advocates say student arrests should worry all

APRIL 8, 2025 · 5:00 AM ET

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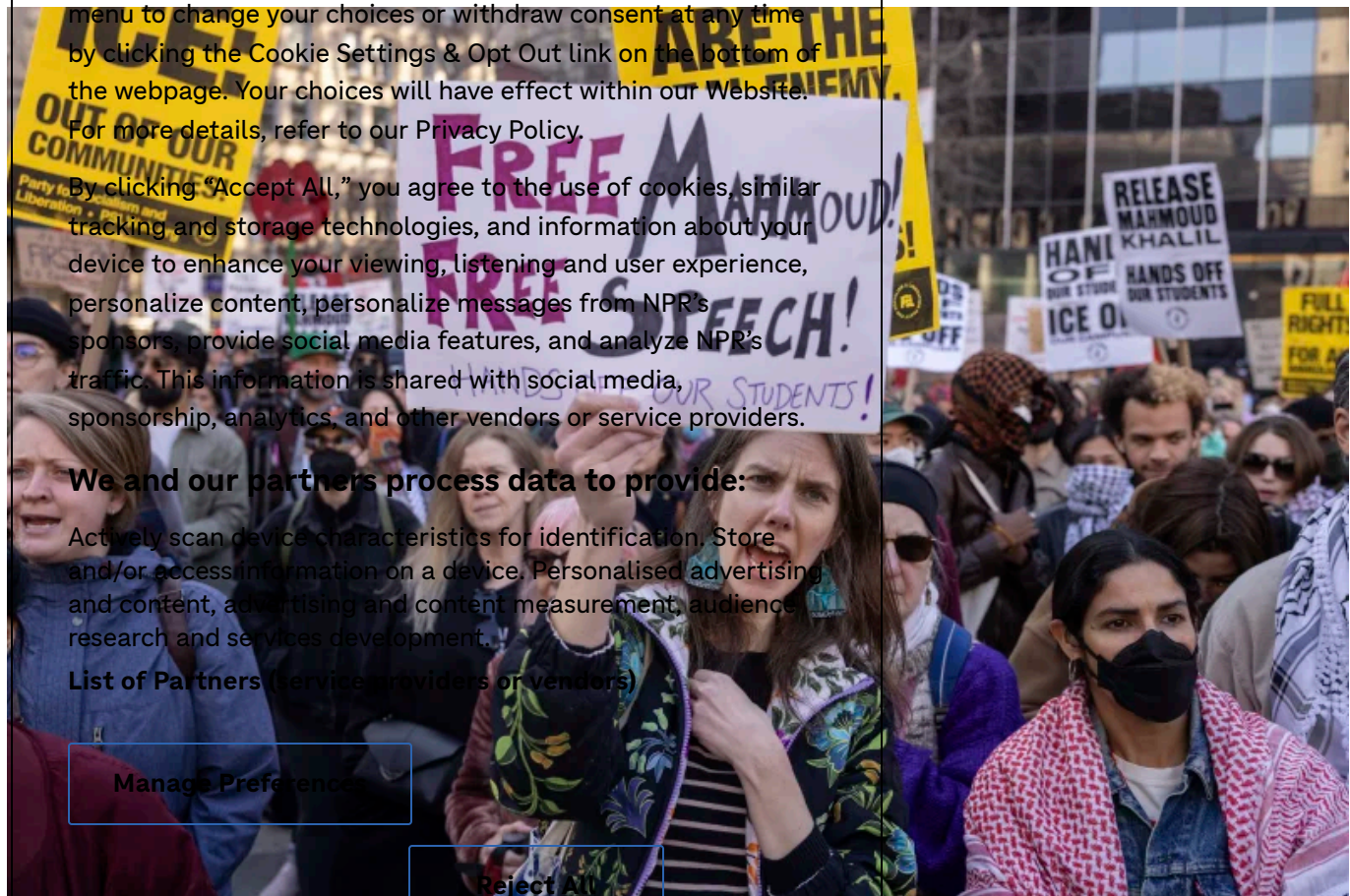
By [Lena Haber](#), [Taylor Haney](#), [Afroz Reza](#), and [Kyle Gallego](#) [Mackie](#)

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7 Minute Listen

PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



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Protesters attend a demonstration in support of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil in New York City on March 10.

Yuki Iwamura/AP

Accept All

In recent weeks, several international university students have been taken by immigration agents or had their legal status questioned.

Turkish graduate student Rumeysa Öztürk was detained by masked agents in plainclothes as she walked to meet friends for dinner. She says she is being targeted over an op-ed about Gaza that she wrote in the Tufts University student newspaper.

Columbia University graduate student Mahmoud Khalil was arrested in his university housing despite being a legal permanent resident. He says he was taken over his peaceful protests against Israel's war in Gaza.

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YouTube

Columbia University Ph.D. student Ranjani Srinivasan was accused publicly by the Department of Homeland Security of being a terrorist sympathizer, with no

evidence, when she got notice that her visa was revoked. She chose to leave.

Their cases raise concerns that more students could be targeted for their views. That paranoia is found among free speech advocates across the political spectrum,

including pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel groups that uphold the First Amendment for views they both agree and disagree with.

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Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he has revoked more than 300 visas and has defended the decisions.

"We gave you a visa to come and study and get a degree, not to become a social activist that tears up our university campus. We've given you a visa and you decide to do that — we're going to take it away," Rubio said in a recent news conference.

None of these students has been charged with a crime. Instead, the government is using a rarely invoked immigration act that allows the secretary of state to revoke immigration status if the secretary deems their presence a threat to U.S. foreign policy.

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THE STATE OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

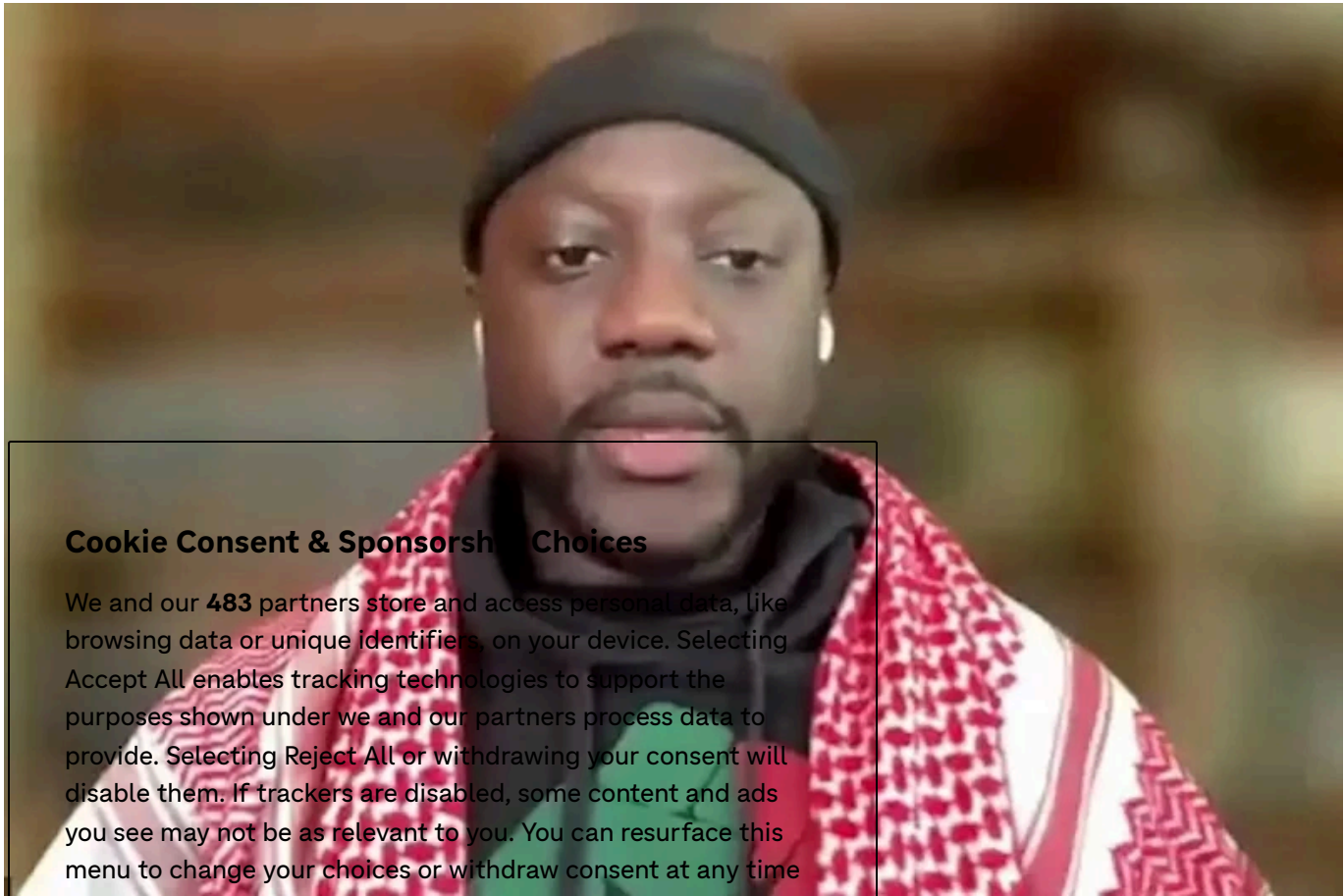
Freedom of speech is shifting under the Trump administration. We're exploring how

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"This is what happens in a dictatorship, and these are test cases," said Eric Lee, a lawyer who represents Momedou Taal, a Cornell University Ph.D. student and advocate for Palestinian rights whose visa was revoked. "If the government can get away with doing this to these students, it can do it to everybody in this country. Your citizenship won't save you. ... Your views will be next."

Taal sued the government on the grounds of free speech this year. After the case was filed, Immigration and Customs Enforcement called on Taal to turn himself in for deportation. Taal didn't turn himself in and continued the case until just over a week ago, when he issued a public statement on X sharing that he had left the country.



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Momodu Taal is a Cornell University Ph.D. student and advocate for Palestinian rights whose visa was revoked. *Via Eric Lee*

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"Given what we have seen across the United States," he wrote, "I have lost faith that a favourable ruling from the courts would guarantee my personal safety and ability to express my beliefs. I have lost faith I could walk the streets without being abducted."

The **We and our partners process data to provide** lawyers say the implications of this case go well beyond their client.

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"The First Amendment applies to people who are physically in the United States, regardless of their alienage, regardless of what country they were born in, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of their immigration status," Lee said. "By ... saying that attending a protest makes one a threat to American foreign policy, the administration is admitting that the Constitution is getting in the way of the fight for democracy. Something is not right there."

NATIONAL



'I think he knew': Mahmoud Khalil's wife on his detention and her search for answers

Defenders of the Trump administration's policy say it's about national security.

Critics of the detentions are using words like "abducted" and "disappearing" to describe them, calling them an affront to the Constitution, which protects free speech for immigrants and citizens alike.

The **cookie consent & sponsorship choices** immigration being used to censor viewpoints?

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That question goes beyond these students. Accepting our cookies and using our services support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to

A Nobel Peace Prize laureate and two-time president of Costa Rica recently had his visa revoked. Oscar Arias Sanchez was told it was because of his close ties to China. He resigned relations with the country in his second term as president from 2006 to 2010.

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Arias has been a vocal critic of President Trump online, comparing him to a "Roman emperor, telling the rest of the world what to do" in a social media post.

"I have to imagine that my criticism of President Trump might have played a role," he said in a recent interview with NPR. "The president has a personality that is not open to criticism or disagreements."

The detentions and visa revocations have some other green-card holders and visa holders, even those who are not students, watching and worrying.

Raymond, a lawful permanent resident from Hong Kong who asked us not to use his full name in case it impacts his immigration status, said he worries that

political opinions he has shared online might be used against him when returning to the United States. He's not a student, but he said he has started scrubbing his social media and he's considering hiding his Instagram app before an upcoming

trip abroad for a wedding. For the first time since he has been in the United States, he also thinks about what he says and does publicly.

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People hold signs showing support for Palestinians during a Fight for Our Rights demonstration by Shut It Down for Palestine and various local groups at the University of Washington campus in Seattle on March 15.

Jason Redmond/AFP via Getty Images

"I don't join protests now," he said. "I feel like it's a stupid thing because I feel like I'm now being compliant before the thing even hits me. But it also feels like the risk is higher ... that there's a higher chance that my legal status is going to be in jeopardy."

Nothing has happened to Raymond. But because of what he's seeing, he's choosing to be silent in public spaces to protect himself.

"The lack of due process is what concerns me more when it comes to freedom of speech," he said.

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first amendment

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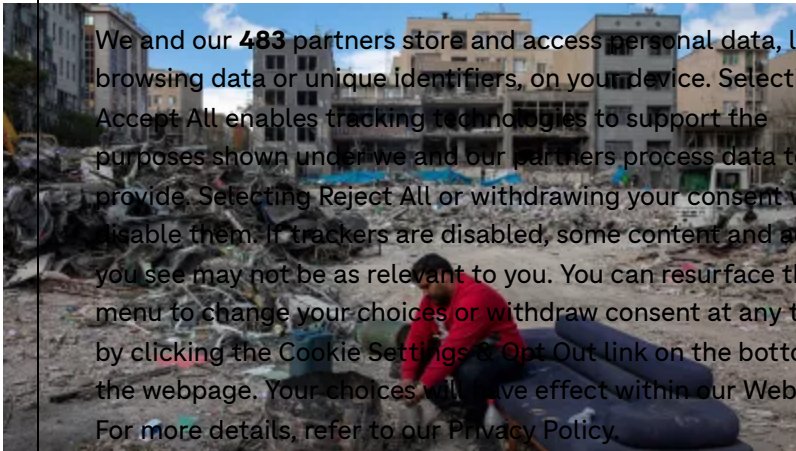
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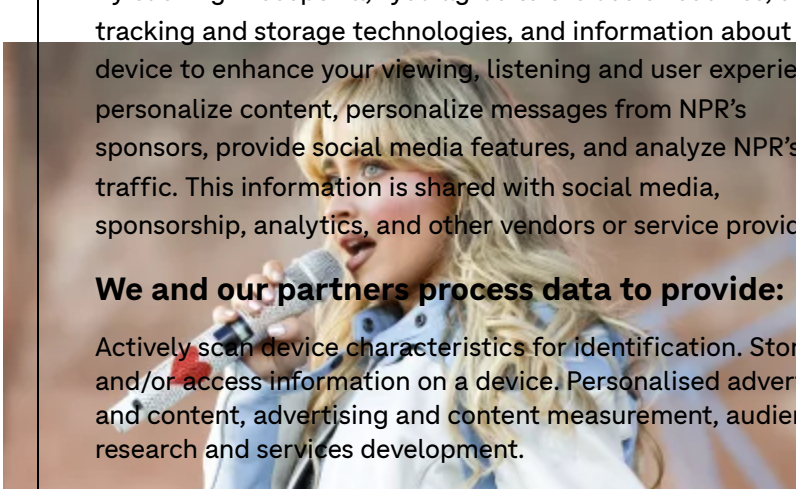
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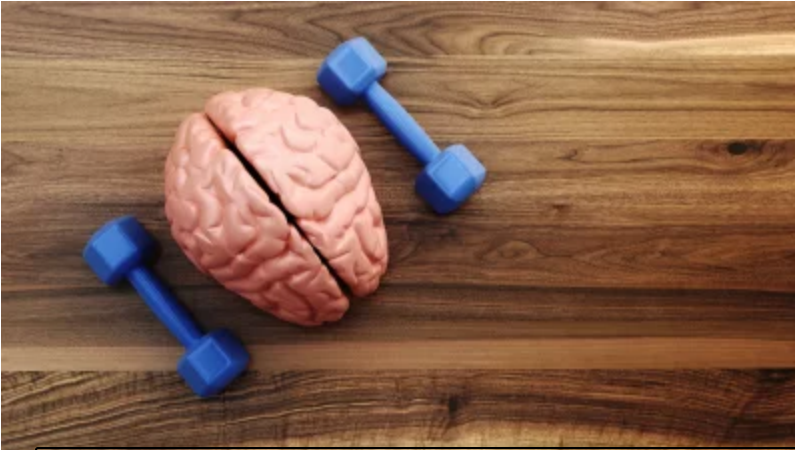
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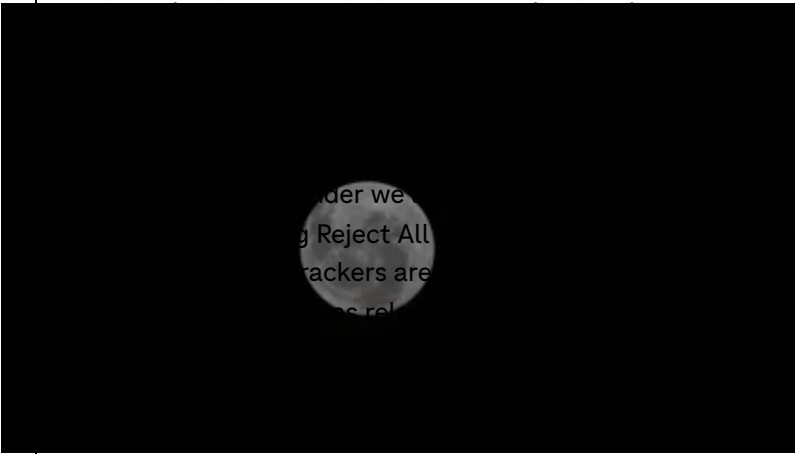
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The embarrassing truth of dating men : Pop Culture Happy Hour



This form of mental exercise may cut dementia risk for decades



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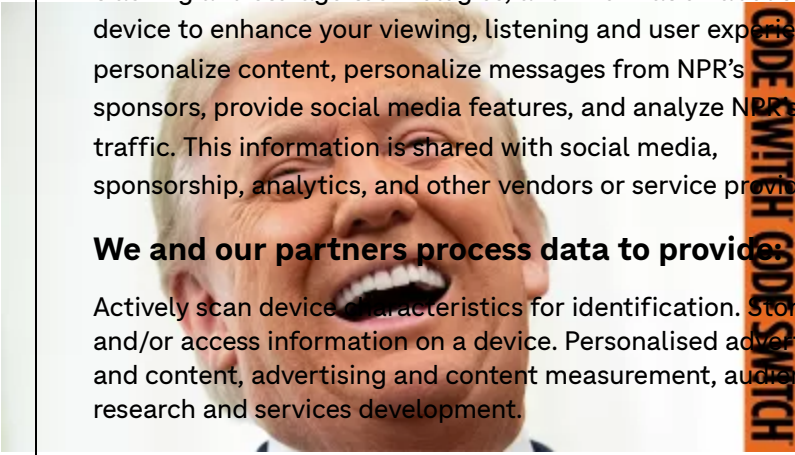
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What can Artemis II astronauts see that satellites haven't captured?

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CODE SWITCH

Trump shared a racist "joke." That humor is an American tradition : Code Switch

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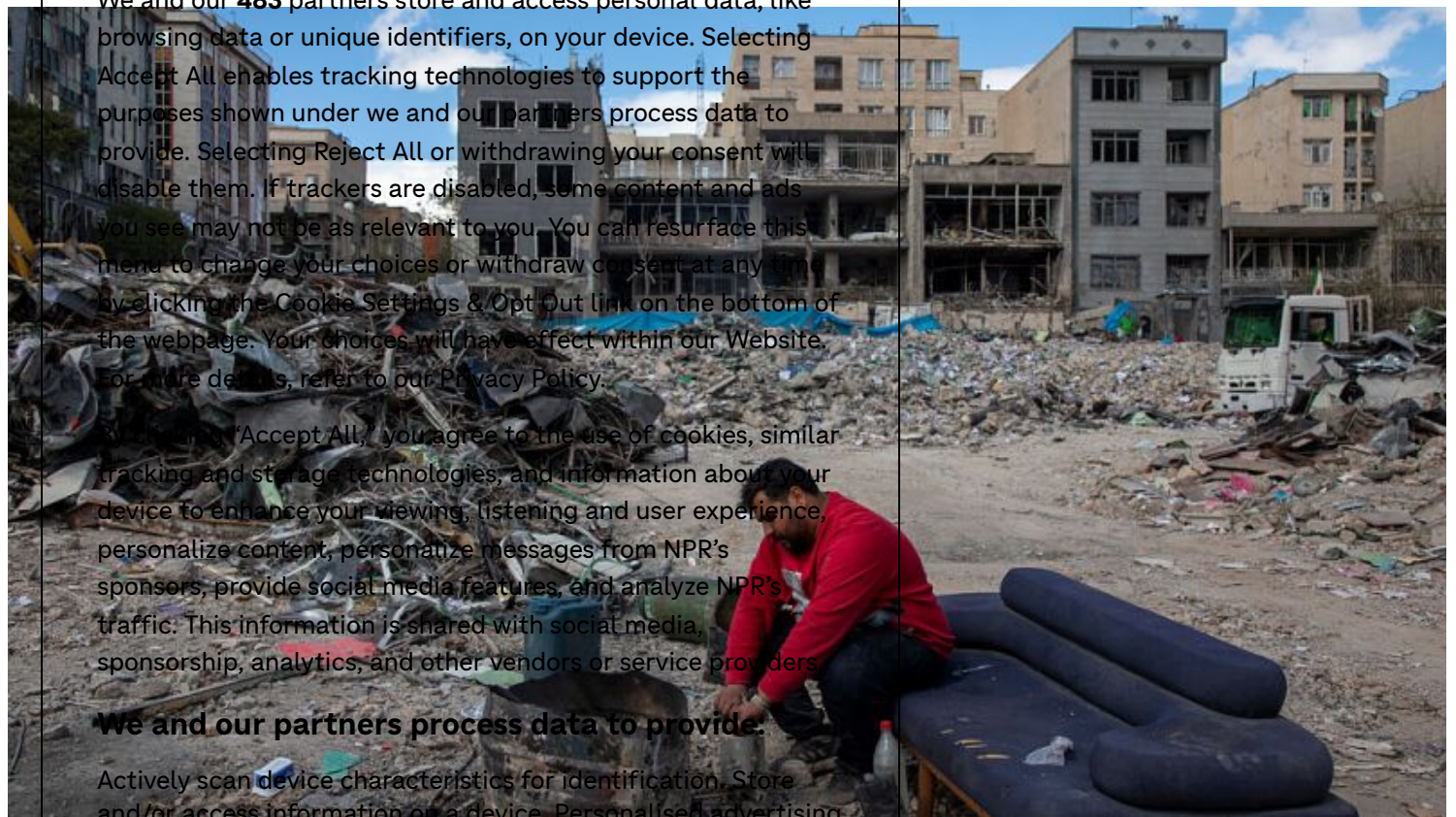
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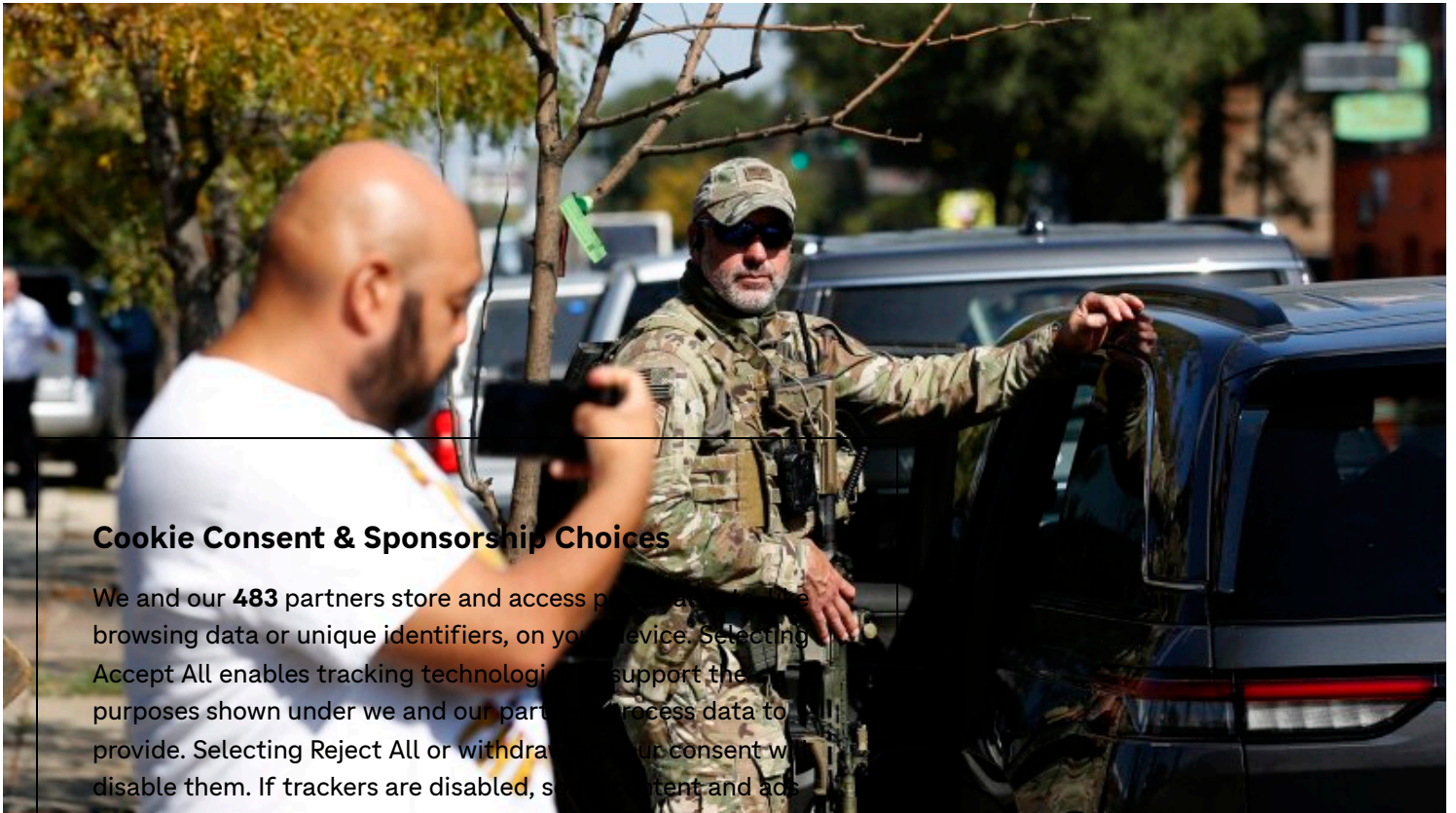
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MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran





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THE PICTURE SHOW
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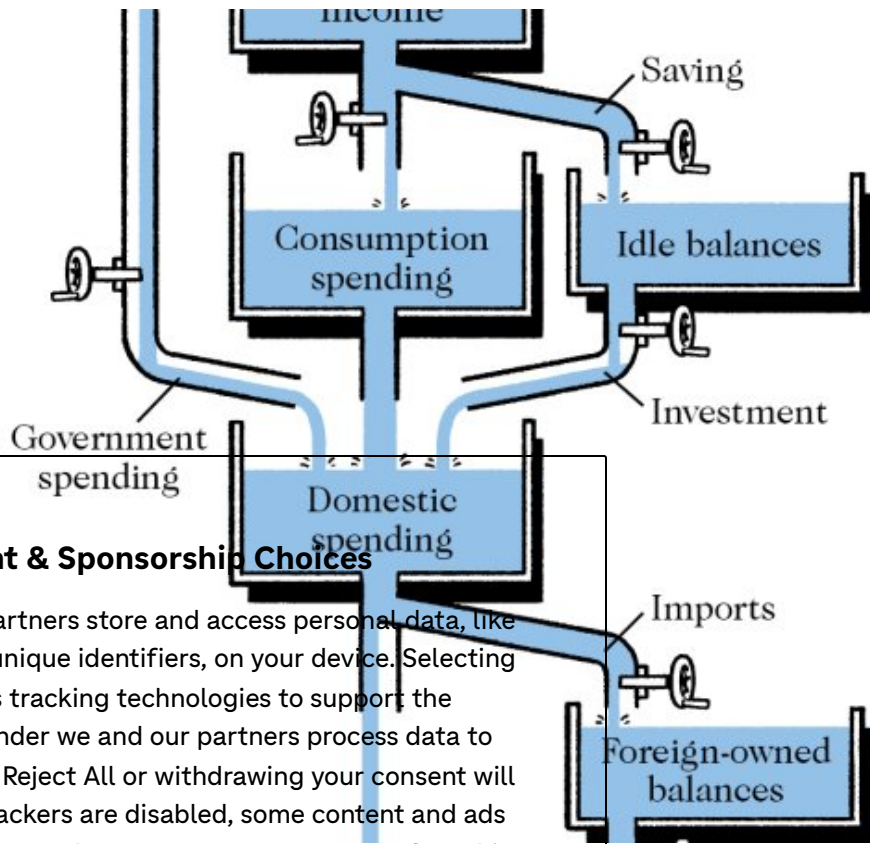
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HEALTH
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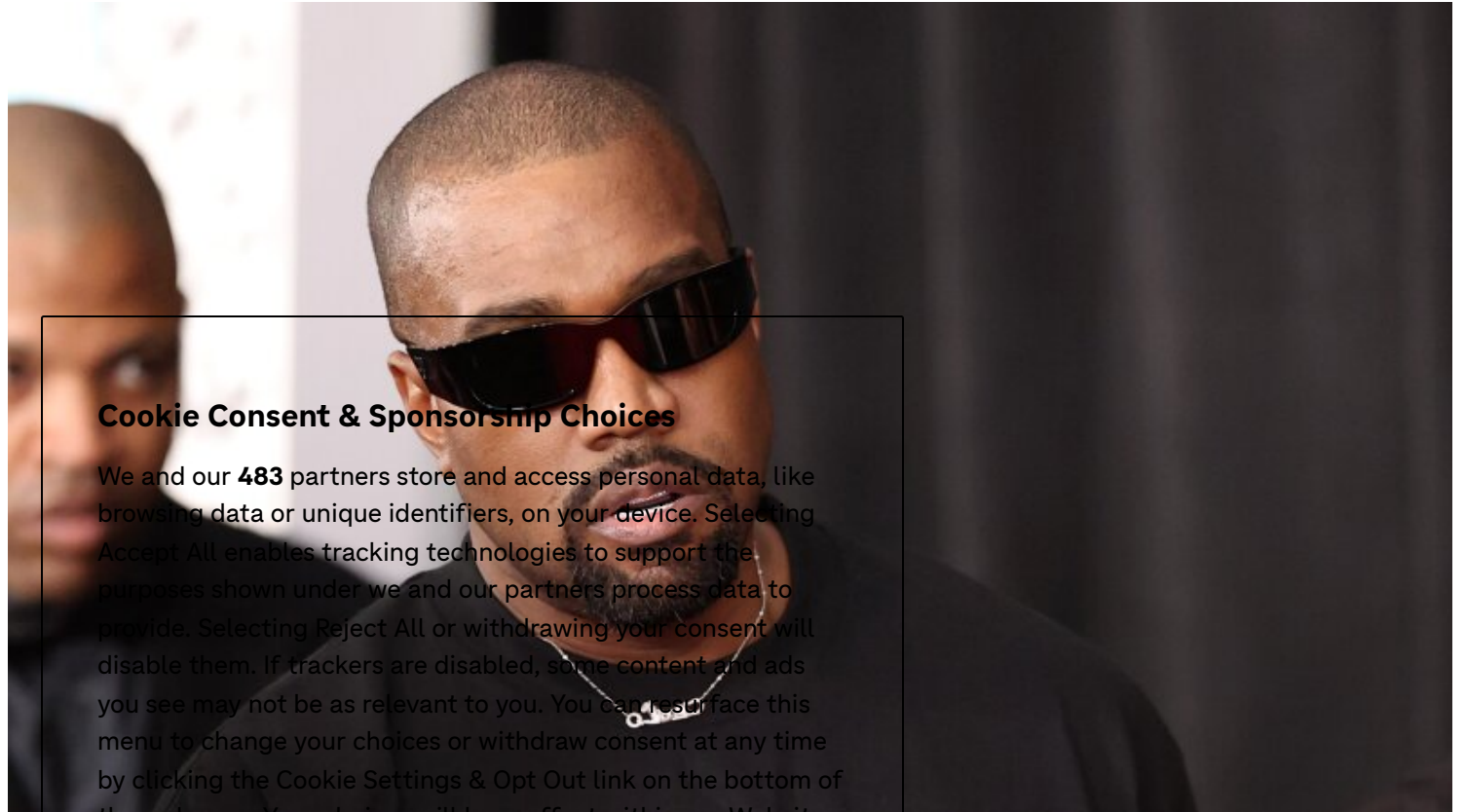
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POLITICS

Congressional Democrats raise alarm over Trump's comments on Iran



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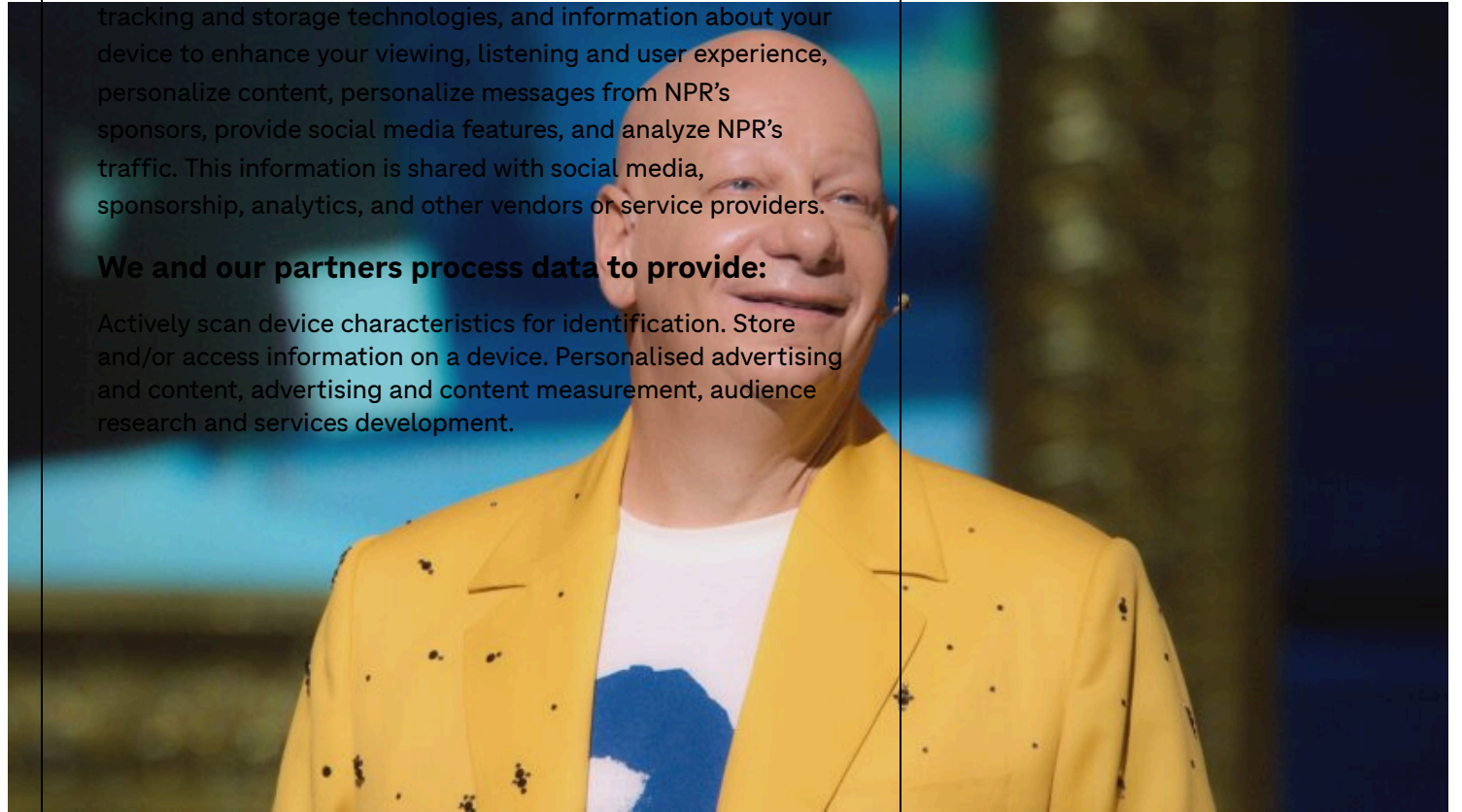
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U.K. issues Ye travel ban over antisemitism, leading to festival cancellation

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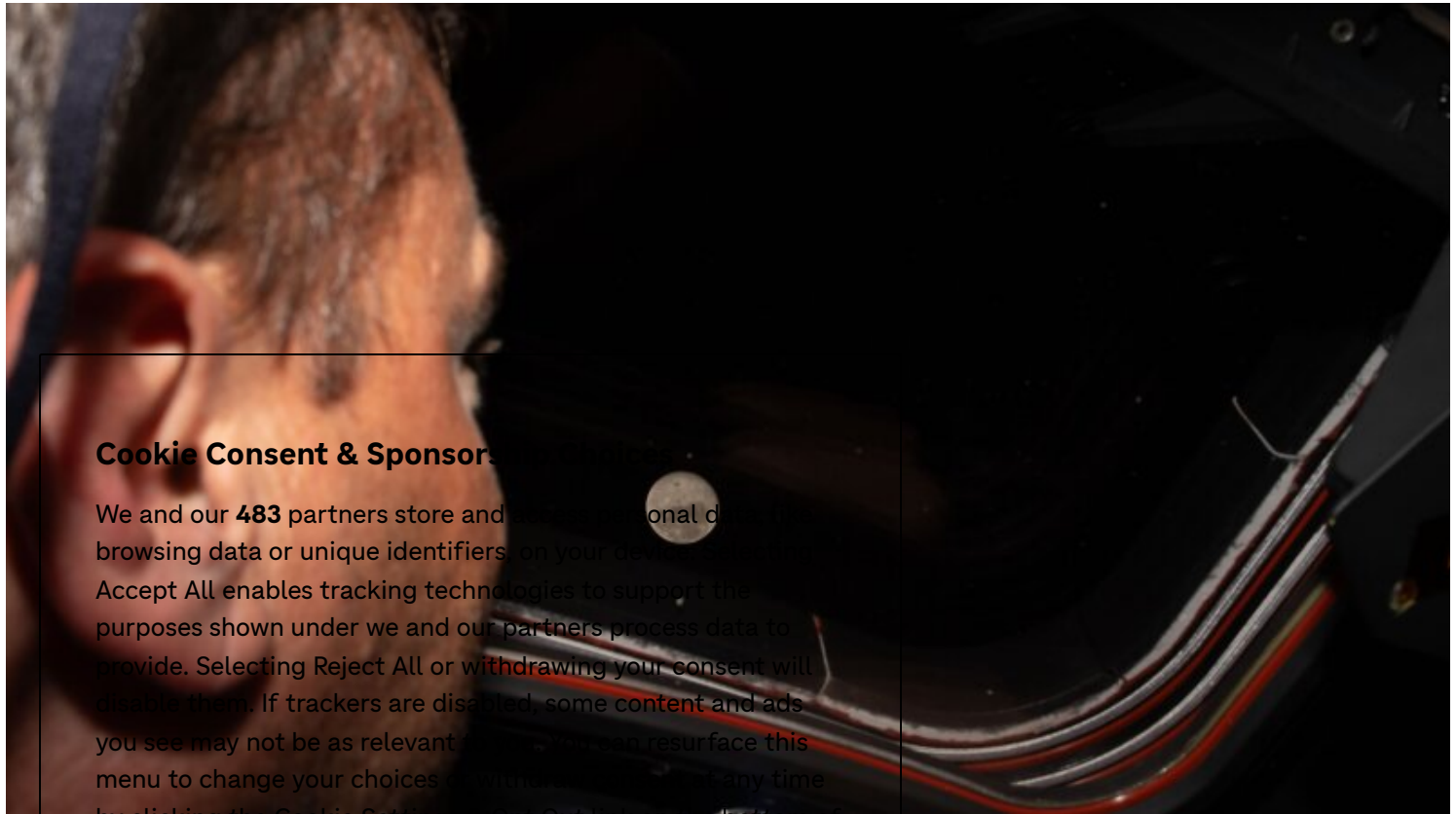
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TELEVISION

Now cancer-free, 'Roastmaster' comic Jeff Ross still finds humor in loss



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SPACE Astronauts suggest naming a moon crater 'Carroll' after their commander's late wife

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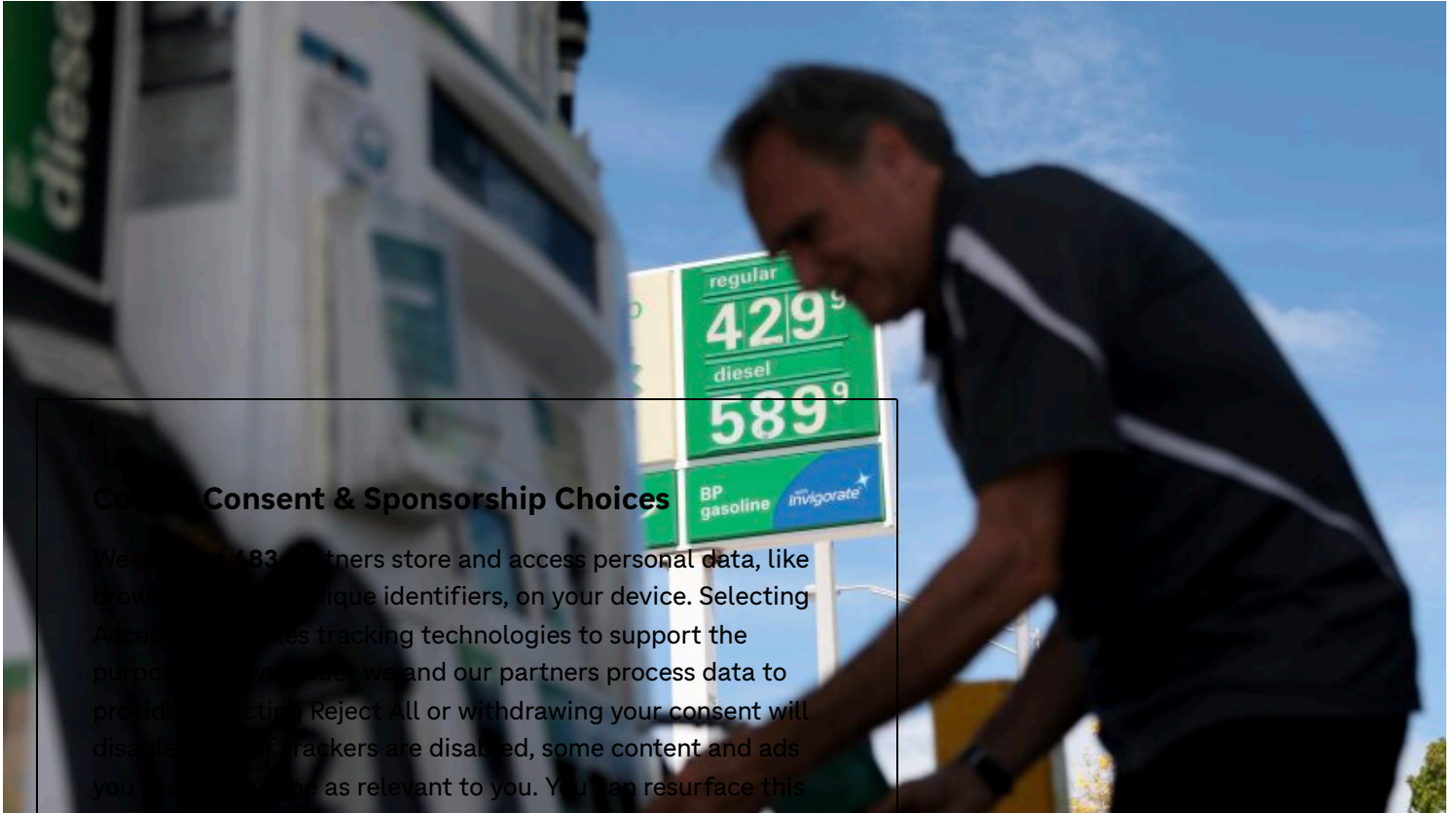
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Newsmakers

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CEO of nation's largest bank says Iran war raises risk of 'bad economic outcomes'



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