



Lab meat. Cyber terror. Influencer  
I.P.O.s. The Times asked  
13 public figures for their predictions on  
the best and worst to come.

# What Will the World Look Like in 2030?

A DECADE OF DISTRUST

**By The Editors**

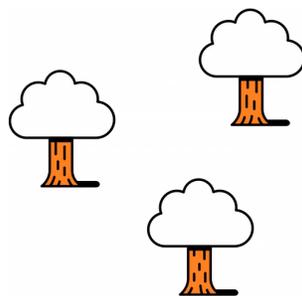
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The reviews are in for the 2010s and they are at best mixed. For good reason:  
You can stroll down the street talking to your far-flung grandmother on

FaceTime while corporations and governments use facial recognition technology to surveil you. There's been a multicultural renaissance in arts and culture and a sluggish, unequal recovery from the Great Recession. Donald Trump was elected president and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez emerged as a potential new face of the Democratic Party. Depending on who you are, some trends of this decade have delighted you, others filled you with dread.

The 2020s will surely be characterized by the same subjective mix of terror and excitement. But over what?

The New York Times Opinion section asked politicians, writers, technologists, thinkers and others what most excites or terrifies them about what will come between now and 2030.



## Edward Snowden

FORMER N.S.A. CONTRACTOR AND AUTHOR OF  
"PERMANENT RECORD"

The drowned cities of tomorrow will be founded on the conveniences of today. Electricity usage by data centers is enormous and expanding, threatening to top 10 percent of global electricity consumption within the next decade and to produce roughly five times the CO2 emissions of all current global air travel. As more power is required to cool these data centers, the warmer the planet will become; and as consumer electronics get cheaper and more disposable, the more they will leach their minerals into our groundwater, poisoning the future.

To achieve sustainability we will need to treat technological change and environmental change as symbiotic. If more efforts aren't directed toward

converting data centers to renewable energy, and innovating ecologically-responsible, recyclable machines and batteries, then the internet, too, will become a weapon of the rich, even more than it already is — a tool used to seize and control ever more scarce natural resources.

## Stacey Abrams

DEMOCRAT FROM GEORGIA

In 2030, America will be only a decade or so from becoming a majority-minority nation — a complicated transition fraught with challenges of identity and fraternity. In the meantime, the international community will also have to move toward net zero carbon emissions. Our only path to a thoughtful, responsive transition is a truly participatory democracy: Citizens will have to decide that we are something greater than a collection of individuals or political factions. Though we have been reminded in recent years that democracy is fragile, Americans are preparing for the challenge by participating in the 2020 census, registering marginalized communities and fighting voter suppression. By 2030, we'll see whether our nation has stood true to its pluralistic roots and used the climate crisis as an opportunity to restore alliances here and around the world.

## Caity Weaver

WRITER AT LARGE, THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

By the end of the decade, ads will be the highlight of my days. I might, by then,

have a child, who might occasionally behave in captivating ways — but it will be no match for my personalized ads. Mass customization is already, if not improving our lives, certainly making them more particular. Social media home pages auto populate with photos and videos (short videos, thank God) irresistibly similar to those we have previously clicked. And nothing is better attuned to our true selves than the tracking data that trail us like ducklings. Did you once consider buying a blanket online? You sound like someone addicted to blankets. Perhaps you'd enjoy seeing other blankets you could buy, in between images of friends?

I experience a Darwinian thrill observing my ads' coevolution with me in real time. They memorize my soul and in exchange teach me that, yes, I would like to learn about an Australian shoe brand I've never heard of. In 2030, the only ads I encounter will be for products I would kill to buy, with no filler of irrelevant medications or home décor that fails to complement my aesthetic. They'll be our new little loved ones.

## Andrew Yang

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

The greatest challenge of our time is automation, and by 2030 we'll be experiencing its full effects on our economy and society. Technology can improve lives. It can also take away jobs. This is in large part how we have already ended up in a world where 78 percent of people are living paycheck-to-paycheck, most new jobs are contract or gig work and recent college graduates are drowning in debt while also being underemployed. Children are experiencing depression and loneliness at record rates because of smartphones and social media. Without understanding and getting ahead of much of this, we'll end up at the mercy of the big tech companies. We need to re-evaluate the way we view work, put people over profits and create an economy that works for us instead of the other way around. I fear what will happen if we do nothing, but I'm excited by what could happen if we pick our heads up from our different screens and come together.

## Ezra Klein

EDITOR AT LARGE, VOX.COM

Every year, we kill more than 70 billion animals for food. The vast majority of them live lives of suffering, jammed into the grooves of our industrial agriculture system. But human beings aren't exempt from its costs. Our meat habit is responsible for almost a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions, a third of arable land use and more than 10 percent of the worldwide freshwater footprint.

Without the 20th-century advances in breeding, antibiotics, ventilation, transport and more, processing enough animals to feed the world would have been impossible. But the conditions were inhumane — and what that technology wrought, other technology may end.

The rise of plant and cell-based meat is the emerging trend that fills me with the most hope. The spread of Impossible Burgers and the soaring performance of the Beyond Meat I.P.O. have proven that there's a multibillion-dollar market for clean meats, only now in its infancy. It's entirely possible that by 2030 we'll be on our way to growing healthier, tastier, kinder, cheaper and more environmentally sustainable meat — at a mass scale, without all the killing. If so, we'll live through one of the greatest reductions in sentient suffering in history.

## Alexandra Scaggs

FINANCIAL JOURNALIST

Unless central banks decide to keep borrowing rates low indefinitely, by 2030 a roughly \$12 trillion corporate debt bubble will burst and break the economy as we know it.

That's when things could get weird: Americans will have to legally declare themselves to be businesses in order to find work — either contract work for a few surviving conglomerates or selling directly to customers online. Top influencers will fare better, raising millions of dollars in personal brand I.P.O.s. But most workers will live at the whim of sprawling, tech-led corporations —

even line cooks and dishwashers, whose apps schedule them for shifts with little notice. Bloggers and writers will try to survive by selling à la carte subscriptions through Facebook-owned platforms. A drive to organize incorporated bartenders will fail once the Supreme Court rules they violate antitrust law by colluding to raise prices — a precedent that will effectively kill private-sector unions. Only shareholder prudence and worker solidarity will be able to keep full-time work a norm. But who, after the 2010s, can count on that?

## Mike Gallagher

REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMAN FROM WISCONSIN

Here's a dystopian future of which we should all be afraid and do everything we can to avoid: The internet as we know it is largely American, but by 2030 the Chinese Communist Party will have built an entirely new internet where Beijing attempts to monopolize key supply chains, stifle free speech and hoard personal data. The menace is already real. The C.C.P. is increasingly exporting its model abroad. Huawei and ZTE seek to build the world's networks; WeChat and TikTok play a growing role in online discourse; Chinese cryptocurrencies could one day threaten the dollar. It's not too late to stop — but we need a sense of urgency.

## Mark Blyth

PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY,  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

Only one thing matters between now and 2030: climate change. Strange, then, that we will do nothing about it — for reasons of politics. The Republicans are denialists whose main constituencies are in states whose business model is carbon heavy. The Democrats are Green New Deal-ers at the grass-roots level, but the money people inside the party fear and distrust their base.

With that kind of split among the Democrats, it's easy to imagine the plausible: Trump wins re-election, leaving the Denialist in Chief to continue at the top of the world's most powerful government. With the Senate more or less structurally locked in their favor, Republicans will probably get one more clean

shot at the White House in 2024. But thereafter, climate change will be “Too Big to Ignore,” and boomers will no longer be a decisive electoral bloc. At that point, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is either a kingmaker or obtains the nomination herself, and perhaps even wins. But this will be 12 years after we were told we had 12 years to fix the problem. Oops.

## **Dambisa Moyo**

ECONOMIST, AUTHOR OF “EDGE OF CHAOS”

Forecasts suggest the world’s population could reach a staggering 9 billion people by 2030 — triple the population of the early 1960s. Much of this increase will come from the poorest regions of India, South America and Africa. Africa alone is expected to represent nearly half of the world’s population by the middle of this century; by some estimates, India is adding 1 million people to its working age population a month. If we don’t place international cooperation over national self-interest, the world will be unprepared for this population explosion, which could become a catalyst for greater global conflict with dire implications for the global economy, migrants and the environment.

## **P.W. Singer**

CYBERSECURITY SPECIALIST, FELLOW AT NEW AMERICA

Our cities, workplaces and homes will be “smarter” by 2030. That means nearly everything in our lives will be networked into profitable, energy-saving infrastructures — much of it prudently designed to ward off the worst of

climate change. But the transition to an autonomous, always-watching-us internet of things will be bumpy. The economy, politics and even family life will struggle to master a world of evermore intelligent systems that operate in ways we understand less and less. Don't expect the old sci-fi clichés of a robot uprising. Expect the rise of even more populist anger, driven by so much change so quickly; new crimes that exploit those very same networks; and a new generation of terrorists, able to hold an entire city hostage.

## Jami Attenberg

NOVELIST, AUTHOR OF "ALL THIS COULD BE YOURS"

A decade ago, everyone was worried the internet would kill the independent bookstore. But nearly 1,000 new stores have opened in the United States since 2009. And the owners — in partnership with authors and readers themselves — are harnessing the dynamic nature of the internet like some wild and wicked young horse to promote their decidedly more fixed product.

"Bookstagram" and "book twitter" complement the bookstore, boosting retail sales and audiences for readings. For a recent book launch, I wrote postcards to readers who preordered my book through Books Are Magic then watched as the recipients posted images on social media, responding to what I sent. There is no playbook for any of this. We're operating on instinct and genuine symbiosis. And community-oriented bookstores are thriving. That will remain the case over the next 10 years. We're not letting go of these stores, or each other, anytime soon.

## Garry Kasparov

CHAIRMAN OF THE RENEW DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE AND  
FORMER WORLD CHESS CHAMPION

I've made my share of dire forecasts — and as quite a few of them have come to pass, I'm often called a pessimist. In reality, I'm an optimist, issuing warnings in the hope of being proven wrong. Despite my professional focus on A.I. and the human-machine relationship that will define our future, the emerging trend I'm most concerned about is purely human. The free world is

lurching toward a polarized, post-truth reality that reminds me of my life in the Soviet Union, where the truth was whatever the regime said it was that day. If the battle for a shared, fact-based reality is not fought and won, 2030 will make the outrages and demagoguery of 2019 look like a golden age of comity.

## Min Jin Lee

NOVELIST, AUTHOR OF "PACHINKO"

When I was in college in the late '80s, I went to chapel on Sundays. There were four or five undergraduates at the services; I didn't hang out with them. I'd sit alone in an empty pew, mumble the hymns, then right after the benediction, I'd dash to the dining hall. I wouldn't mention where I had been. As a Gen X liberal, I avoided talking to anyone about Jesus, God or the Bible. Going to church was awkward, isolating, uncool.

Campuses today seem to be blooming with faith groups. Jewish students can happily go to Chabad or Hillel House, and churchgoing Christians find support through a number of denominations without shame. Muslim and Hindu students are finding faith communities alongside students who identify publicly as Baha'i, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Mormon, Jain, Shinto, Tao and Unitarian. And respect for indigenous spiritual traditions is a norm on campus. The young people I meet around the country today are far more open about their religious practices than in years past. My guess? By 2030, religion will actually have a stronger hold on young people.

## Larry David

COMEDIAN, WRITER AND PRODUCER

Besides being a great bar mitzvah D.J. and amateur chemist, one of my unique talents is spotting trends. In 1964, I was the first to predict that jeans were going to be all the rage — and look how that turned out. That was also the same year I watched my friend get stoned and I immediately told everyone, "Hey, I think this marijuana thing could really catch on! People seem to love it!" Truth be told, I also predicted the demise of the bagel, but nobody's perfect.

Be that as it may, I am prepared to state unequivocally that the next big trend will be outright, brazen, shameless lying. This, of course, originated in the White House and I'm already seeing signs of it everywhere. Even I, heretofore the George Washington of comedians, have succumbed.

Here's just one example: Last week I attended the screening of a director friend's new movie, which I hated. The next day, when he asked me what I thought of it, I told him I hadn't seen it. He said incredulously, "What are you talking about? I saw you there." I said, "No, you must've thought you saw me. There are always a lot of old bald guys at these screenings." "But we spoke!" "Again, you're confusing me with someone else." At that moment, I saw him questioning his own sanity and I knew I was in. Three days later he was put in a straitjacket and taken to Bellevue. Yeah, this lying thing is going to be big.





**The 2010s Were the End of Normal**

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI

**My Decade in Google Searches**

By VAUHINI VARA

**Small Is the New Big Thing**

By RUCHIR SHARMA

**Twitter Made Us Better**

By SARAH J. JACKSON

**Milestones in Mistrust**

By EVE PEYSER and FRANK AUGUGLIARO

**The Cultural Canon Is Better Than Ever**

By AISHA HARRIS

**We Learned to Write the Way We Talk**

By GRETCHEN McCULLOCH

**I Can't Even Trust Myself Anymore**

By MONICA HEISEY

**What Will the World Look Like in 2030?**

By THE EDITORS

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