

This edition of Global Trends constructs its analysis of the future in several stages.

First, we examine structural forces in demographics, environment, economics, and technology that shape the contours of our future world.

Second, we analyze how these structural forces and other factors—combined with human responses—affect emerging dynamics in societies, states, and the international system.

Third, we envision five plausible scenarios for the distant future in 2040.

The key themes discussed previously appear across these sections.

STRUCTURAL FORCES

DEMOGRAPHICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Slowing global population growth and a rising median age will help some developing economies, but rapidly aging and contracting populations will weigh on many developed economies. Decades of progress in education, health, and poverty reduction will be difficult to build on or even sustain. Pressure for migration is likely to increase.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate change will increasingly exacerbate risks to human and national security and force states to make hard choices and tradeoffs. The burdens will be unevenly distributed, heightening competition, contributing to instability, straining military readiness, and encouraging political movements.

ECONOMICS

Several global economic trends, including rising national debt, a more complex and fragmented trading environment, the global spread of trade in services, new employment disruptions, and the continued rise of powerful firms, are shaping conditions within and between states. Calls for more planning and regulation will intensify, particularly of large platform, e-commerce corporations.

TECHNOLOGY

The pace and reach of technological developments will increase, transforming human experiences and capabilities while creating new tensions and disruptions for all actors. Global competition for the core elements of technology supremacy will increase. Spin off technologies and applications will enable rapid adoption.

EMERGING DYNAMICS

SOCIETAL

Many populations are increasingly pessimistic and distrustful as they struggle to deal with disruptive economic, technological, and demographic trends. Newly prominent identities, resurgent established allegiances, and a siloed information environment are exposing fault lines within communities and states, undermining civic nationalism, and increasing volatility. Populations are more informed and have greater ability to express their demands.

STATE

Governments will face mounting pressures from the combination of economic constraints; demographic, environmental, and other challenges; and more empowered populations. A growing gap between public demands and what governments can deliver will raise tensions, increase political volatility, and threaten democracy. The mismatch may also spur new or shifting sources and models of governance.

INTERNATIONAL

Power in the international system will evolve to include a broader set of sources, but no single state is likely to be positioned to dominate across all regions or domains. The United States and China will have the greatest influence on global dynamics, forcing starker choices on other actors, increasing jockeying over global norms, rules, and institutions, and heightening the risk of interstate conflict.

SCENARIOS FOR 2040

RENAISSANCE OF DEMOCRACIES

The world is in the midst of a resurgence of open democracies led by the United States and its allies. Rapid technological advancements fostered by public-private partnerships in the United States and other democratic societies are transforming the global economy, raising incomes, and improving the quality of life for millions around the globe. In contrast, years of increasing societal controls and monitoring in China and Russia have stifled innovation.

A WORLD ADRIFT

The international system is directionless, chaotic, and volatile as international rules and institutions are largely ignored. OECD countries are plagued by slower economic growth, widening societal divisions, and political paralysis. China is taking advantage of the West's troubles to expand its international influence. Many global challenges are unaddressed.

COMPETITIVE COEXISTENCE

The United States and China have prioritized economic growth and restored a robust trading relationship, but this economic interdependence exists alongside competition over political influence, governance models, technological dominance, and strategic advantage. The risk of major war is low, and international cooperation and technological innovation make global problems manageable.

SEPARATE SILOS

The world is fragmented into several economic and security blocs of varying size and strength, centered on the United States, China, the EU, Russia, and a few regional powers, and focused on self-sufficiency, resiliency, and defense. Information flows within separate cyber-sovereign enclaves, supply chains are reoriented, and international trade is disrupted. Vulnerable developing countries are caught in the middle.

TRAGEDY AND MOBILIZATION

A global coalition, led by the EU and China working with NGOs and revitalized multilateral institutions, is implementing far-reaching changes designed to address climate change, resource depletion, and poverty following a global food catastrophe caused by climate events and environmental degradation. Richer countries shift to help poorer ones manage the crisis and then transition to low carbon economies through broad aid programs and transfers of advanced energy technologies.