Thoughts on Coming Apart and the Coming Great Reset

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer

Kit Webster

Themes and Theses

Why I'm Contemplating Out Loud

(Initially formulated in the early 90s, following decades of reading history, philosophy, religion, psychology and a lot of contemplation, particularly on the subject of cycles. In the end, this is a relatively straightforward story about human nature and of history rhyming.)

The US will enter a period of crisis in the early 2000s. In the late 90s, I incorporated Strauss' and Howe's terminology of the Fourth Turning (without incorporating their generations paradigm) and agreed with Howe that the end stage of the crisis began with the Great Financial Crisis and would last into the early 2030s. We are now at the beginning of the end stage of the crisis.

The crisis will be serious and could be existential.

Internal strife will increase, up to and including secession and civil war.

International conflicts will increase as the vacuum created by the weakening of the US is filled by other players.

There will be many threads to the crisis, but the primary thread will be debt, deficits and entitlements. Other factors include, eg, demographics, a loss of meaning and myth and a loss of self-discipline.

Politics will move leftward as citizens look for some refuge from the chaos. The US will become increasingly susceptible to a (man) on a white horse, who can come from either the left or the right.

Inflation, as the most likely way to address debt since austerity is not politically acceptable, will significantly lower standards of living, exacerbating the civil crises.

Eventually, the dollar will be inflated away and lose its reserve status.

Once the old rot is cleared out, and assuming continuity, there will be the basis for the establishment of a new order.

There will be what Strauss and Howe calls a First Turning . It will be constructed out of the physical infrastructure, wealth, energy sources, thoughts and values in the culture at the time. At this point in time, those components are unknowable. We can anticipate that the next five years or so will be increasingly chaotic. We can anticipate that there will be destruction, and then reconstruction from some level. We cannot yet anticipate the form of the reconstruction or the level from which it will begin.

(Added around 2020) The loss of faith by our youth in our founding principles means that the new order will at least partially be based on new principles. As yet, I have no visibility as to what those principles might be.

(Added in the early 00s) While humans are contributing to global warming, policies implemented to address manmade global warming will create a significant energy crisis, probably toward the end of the Fourth Turning.

(Added in 2023) The lowering / elimination of standards in education, the judiciary, law enforcement, the military and other segments of our society will create a population unable to adequately comprehend, do or respond to the challenges of democracy and culture.

How Do You Solve A Problem Like Mamdani?

October 31, 2025

Quotes to Contemplate

I am confident that the next 5-10 years will be a period of enormous changes in all the major orders, and that going from now until then will feel like going through a time warp into a very different reality. Many countries, companies, and people who are now up will be down, and those who are down will be up. How we think and what we do will be very different, in ways that we can't possibly anticipate. - Ray Dalio

Everyone wants to heal until the medicine shows up in the form of self-discipline. - Hippocrates

The further a society drifts from truth the more it will hate those who speak it. - Orwell

Summary of Primary Thoughts To Contemplate In This Issue

Xi and Trump reached an agreement. Tariffs have been reduced but remain high and soybeans will be sold. Still a lot to resolve.

It looks like Mamdani will be elected Mayor of New York City, and a grand experiment will begin.

Electric rates are increasing significantly due to a number of factors - this will get tied up in politics, sooner or later.

The US will begin testing nuclear weapons. Very destabilizing.

The government shutdown is now becoming serious with 40 million people coming off of food stamps.

Just in case you think we need more turmoil - A House committee has found that Joe Biden's autopen signatures were illegitimate.

Bill Gates has backed out of his climate catastrophe stance. Climate change remains a problem, but the level of hysteria should start coming down.

ObamaCare premiums are going up around 30% this year. The shutdown continues because Democrats want government subsidies for premiums for the Affordable Care Act. The act's passage was not one of our finest hours.

How Do You Solve A Problem Like Mamdani?

New York City - the nation's largest and the world's center of capitalism and a city having the largest number of Jews of any in the world - is probably about to elect a Muslim Mayor, perhaps overwhelmingly.

Of course, running against a crook and a disgraced person helps, but we elect crooks and disgraced people all the time - particularly in New York.

I think Mamdani's coming election as Mayor of New York City signifies three principal things:

- **We are spoiled rotten.**
- **We are very anxious.**
- **We actually think there is such a thing as a free lunch.**

He's a privileged guy who has never had a "real" job, and who promises rent control, free bus rides and city-run grocery stores. (He got an early start, running for vice president in high school with a pledge of fresh juice for all, squeezed from locally sourced fruits. His father said in a recent interview, "America is the root of all evil and was the inspiration for the Nazis. Hitler learned genocide from Abraham Lincoln.)"

I like Claude's summary: What makes this possible is fundamentally about generational change, economic anxiety about affordability, the

weakness of established politicians, and Mamdani's ability to build an authentic connection with voters through modern organizing methods.

Young people, bless their hearts, love him - in a Pied Piper kind of way.

This is a joke. This is absurd. But this is where we we are - one of the natural progressions of the Fourth Turning and of my contemplations from the 90s.

This is not about Mamdani. He is a manifestation of the Zeitgeist just as Trump is. They are emergent properties and two sides of exactly the same coin.

We are spoiled rotten. We have it so incredibly good that we will torque the whole system over gender. We take our good fortune for granted to the point that we will elect Mamdani.

We are very anxious. Even though we are at the very apex of material human existence, things feel wrong. We have no spiritual underpinning. Even though we are part of the problem, society is at war with itself. Someone has to restore order and peace, even though order and peace are historically very rare. So, we turn to the government and charismatic people like Mamdani, who promise that they can make the problems go away. No, he can't. Nobody can. The rot in our society, defined and enabled by debt, deficits and entitlements, is deep and pervasive. The forces at work are huge. People are right to be anxious, but they do not

understand what is going on. They don't understand that Mamdani is literally an empty shirt.

We actually think there is such a thing as a free lunch. While this is a common failing of modern humans, we have lost touch with basic civics, history and economics that tell us how things work. Mamdani literally has no plan to pay for his programs. The answer is obvious - less spending elsewhere or more taxes - tax the rich. As Margaret Thatcher observed, the only problem is that sooner or later you run out of other people's money.

Back to Mamdani - every now and then it is good to do an experiment and get a dose of reality. It is characteristic of humans that being told about things is far less useful than actually experiencing them. Sooner or later, the kid just has to touch the stove. So, we are going to run a grand experiment on New York where the outcome is almost certainly clear. My wife is from New York and I enjoy it one or two weeks a year. I remember the 70s and 80s in New York, and it was really ugly. It will take years to unfold and years to recover, if you are lucky enough to find another Giuliani.

You hate to see people suffer, but there you are.

Strap yourself in and hang on. Yet another wild ride is about to begin.

BTW, we are doing the same thing on a national scale as the rule of law is flaunted and political revenge becomes the order of the day - but that is a topic for another day.

This is an observation - a description of reality without judgement. One of the foundations of my thought processes was a realization that the average person has an IQ of 100. Therefore, simplistically, the average voter has an IQ of 100. In a democracy, again simplistically, you get the world a voter with an IQ of 100 wants. Ray Dalio has said that 60% of American population has below a sixth-grade reading level. So, again simplistically, you get the world a person with a below-sixth-grade reading ability wants.

And there we are.

Just to complicate things, I am a supporter of William F Buckley (I think) who said he would rather be ruled by random selections from the phone book than by members of the Harvard faculty. A high IQ means you know a lot of things, not necessarily that you understand them. Often that means you can come up with schemes to screw up things that most people wouldn't think about. And you have definitely lost touch with the "common man," which is the overwhelming majority.

Electricity Is Becoming A Political Football

I'm old enough to remember when we didn't think much about electricity. You flipped the switch and it came on. There were power outages during storms, and that's about it. Somewhere out there, coal-fired plants did their thing and the system just hummed along.

Regulation, nuclear, environmental and NIMBY issues arose and now our entire electrical grid is unstable and literally close to collapse. Actually, we have several grids close to collapse and others merely unstable.

Each winter there is now fear that the electricity will go out for days.

This is happening at the same time we are trying to electrify everything for environmental reasons and that huge data centers are being built to support AI.

I have addressed most of this before, so I want to move on to another side of this discussion - the cost of electricity will be going up. Increasing prices for fundamental needs like electricity will become politicized. Therefore, it will be increasingly difficult to actually address the problem.

The cost of electricity will be going up for three, principal reasons:

Inflation - the costs of components like transformers are increasing rapidly, both due to inflation and to supply and demand. Everybody wants transformers, for example, and there is not enough manufacturing capacity.

Environmental - this one becomes complicated because, say, solar, all by itself, is pretty cheap. Throw in batteries for when the sun doesn't shine, connection to the grid, and improving the grid to handle the solar, and the all-in cost can be significant. Almost all - no - essentially all of the analyses I read are fundamentally flawed and include a lot of axe-grinding and faulty assumptions. My best guess, and that is all it is, a guess, is that, all-in, solar will be roughly as expensive, or cheap, as natural gas (at its current price or somewhat more expensive) and perhaps a little more expensive than nuclear, assuming the US can get out of its own way in implementing nuclear. That is not a good assumption - we are really, really messed up in that area.

AI - also complicated. In general, you should get some economies of scale from increased usage. However, economies of scale are set back when you must add the next generator. You get a huge cost for which there is, at the beginning, little demand. Our entire electric system can be viewed as one, big system that needs a significant addition to capacity. In the short term, that will require a lot of capital and, most likely, an increase in rates.

Inflation will be a challenge in general, but energy inflation will be a particular challenge.

The bigger problem is that everybody, everywhere needs transformers and there aren't any.

Housekeeping Note

I got a little sloppy and some of the urls vanished and I did not keep up the past issues page.

Apologies.

The Updated Charts link now works and the Past Issues page has been updated.

Beth wants me to tell you that, How to solve a problem like Mamdani, is a cultural reference from Sound of Music.

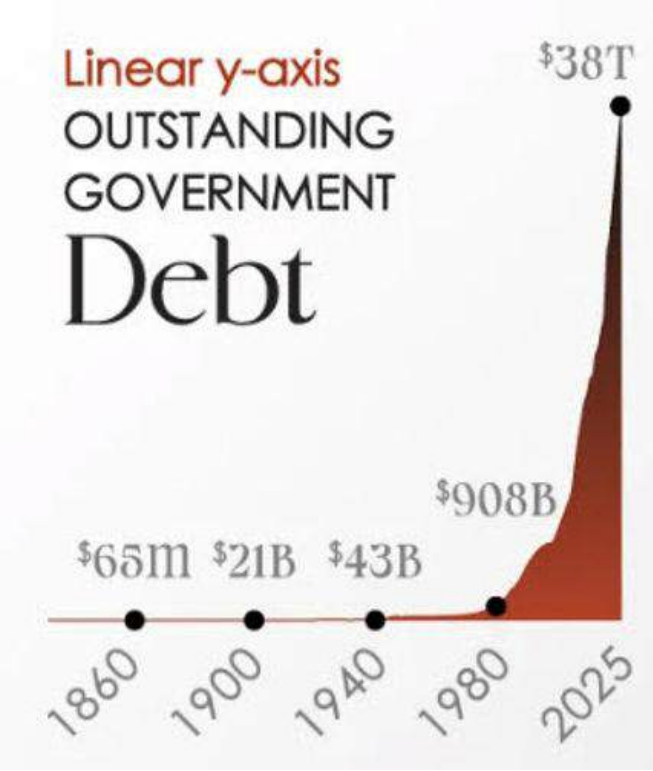
Three weeks, three cultural references from different decades - I'm on a roll.

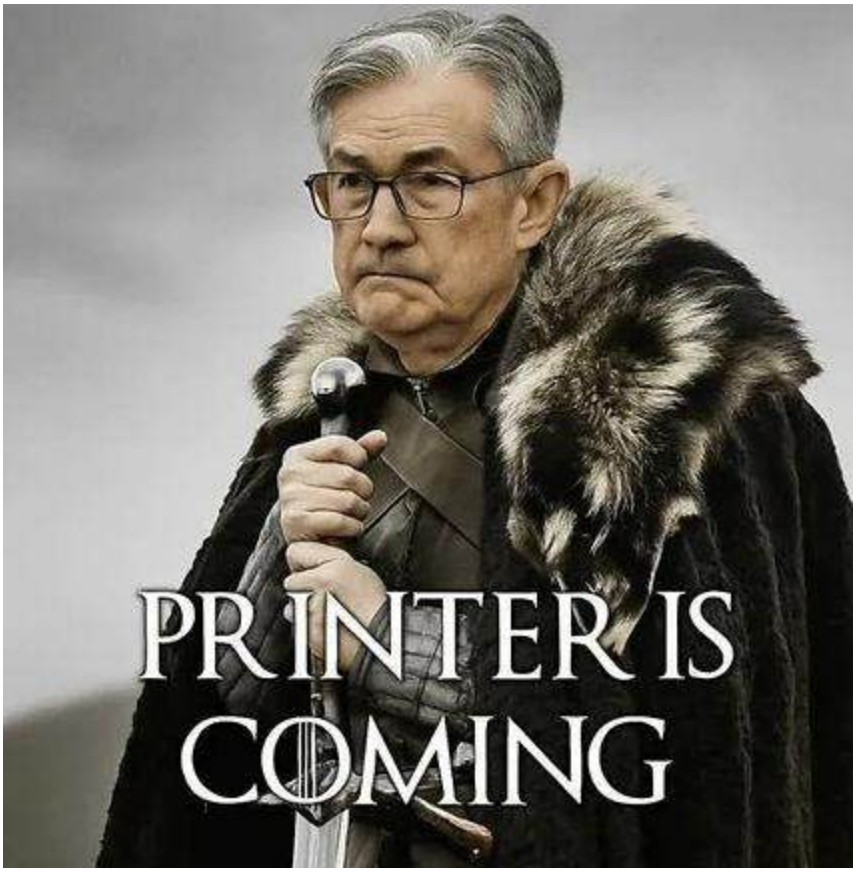
Markets

Updated charts

> The retracement in the stock markets is only days away - and may always be.

> Reader CH sent a reminder of how extraordinary our recent financial history has been.





So, You Say You Want A Revolution?

> Following a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Donald Trump announced he will cut tariffs on China and postpone export controls on chips in exchange for Beijing's commitment to buy U.S. soybeans and energy, allow exports on rare earth minerals, and crack down on fentanyl. China made its first 2025 purchase of U.S. soybeans on Wednesday. From The New York Times, "Technology competition now defines the U.S.-China relationship, and on this point President Xi secured key U.S. concessions."
Trump hinted that there may be a larger deal in the works.

This is the big deal that had to happen or else things would begin unraveling fast. China is not (yet?) ready for the unraveling. Xi called Trump's semi-bluff and they made the deal that had to be made.
There will be another blow-up, but for now, an unstable peace.
The Telegraph summarized it well,
"... In other words, you can call this entire arrangement a truce in a trade war that is still technically in effect. The outstanding, systemic problems – China's state-supported industrial policy; the dumping of cheap Chinese goods abroad; US semiconductor export controls; Taiwan – are still lurking in the wings. If you were a gambler, the smart money would be on this cooling-off period eventually evaporating into another round of rancour as the same old issues rise again to the forefront. ... But the blunt reality is that the United States is not the only superpower anymore. What Washington could get away with in the 1990s and early 2000s, when there were no strategic competitors to speak of and the US was basking in the aura of global hegemony, is no longer an option in 2025. The era of unrivalled dominance is gone; the time when US allies toed the line and adversaries were coerced into submission is over. The United States can no longer dictate; instead, it must negotiate, even if it leaves a bad taste in our mouths."
> During his trip to Asia, he made deals in Korea and Japan and minor agreements with other countries. Interactions with these countries were positive as they uniformly praised Trump.
> Trump said the US would begin testing nuclear weapons. The US has not tested a nuclear weapon since 1992 because of various treaties with the Russians, which are now going to the wayside.
> I kid you not. Trump cut off tariff negotiations with Canada for airing a Ronald Reagan clip against tariffs. It was an in-your-face, kinda juvenile act by Canadian authorities, followed by a classic Trump overreaction.
> The Washington Post on shutdowns -

Government shutdowns actually cost money — and a lot of it. The longest shutdown in U.S. history lasted 34 days, and it shaved $11 billion off the U.S.'s total economic output. The White House's Council of Economic Advisers, citing research from investment bank Goldman Sachs, says the current shutdown could cost the U.S. economy $15 billion per week.

When shutdowns end, it's also expensive to get the government fully operating again. Furloughed workers are entitled to back pay. They have to dig out from a mountain of tasks that piled up while they were away. The federal government may have forfeited fees or revenue when it was closed. And because the government didn't make some payments during the shutdown, it could owe late fees and interest.

> "I am not done." Kamala Harris gave her strongest indication yet that she was considering running for president again. According to prediction market Polymarket, The Rock currently has a three percent chance of being the next president, Harris is ranked below him with two percent.

> Food stamps go away tomorrow due to the government shutdown - very big deal. 40 million people! However, two judges ordered that the payments be made.

> This could be huge - A House committee has found that Joe Biden's autopen signatures were illegitimate.

> The Supreme Court will hear tariff arguments in early November. The case is complicated because Trump is relying on different statutes for different tariffs. The Supreme Court is considering only one of the statutes, so even if those tariffs are struck down, others will survive.

Short Takes

> Amazon plans to lay off up to 30,000 corporate employees starting Tuesday to reduce costs and address pandemic overhiring, sources say. AI is not included in the reasons for the layoffs. The cuts affect nearly 10% of its 350,000 corporate staff, marking Amazon's largest round of layoffs since 2022.

> Bill Gates: climate change "will not lead to humanity's demise."

Kit - climate change is real and over the long term will cause significant change. The panic and hysteria driven by climate change advocates were tools to attempt to create political urgency for a solution, and then Democrats and Europeans adopted it as a quasi-religion. Imo, Trump's dismantling of all things climate change is a mistake, but it is creating a space for reasonable discussion. And now, Democrats and Europeans are beginning to engage in that discussion.

See article at the bottom of this post, by Roger Pielke - one of the few good guys in the climate debate.

> AI has several advantages over humans - here's one - "60% of the American population has below sixth-grade reading level," Ray Dalio has said.

> Electric vehicles were left off the list of China's strategic industries as planning for the next five-year plan gets underway, a sign that subsidies for the sector will end.

> Younger generations are heading back to church.

> I'm not sure how she found out, but Kim Kardashian says the moon landings were a hoax. I knew I should have been paying more (any) attention to the Kardashians.

ObamaCare and the Shutdown

ObamaCare is in the news because premiums are going up dramatically - almost 30% - this year and the subsidies for ObamaCare premiums Democrats want to put into place are the primary reason the government remains shut down.

I detested ObamaCare , which I called an Obamanation - or rather the politics around it. The bill itself is meh - it really had no choice other than to be marginal.

The misrepresentations by the Democrats in enacting ObamaCare exceeded the usual quota of lies by a lot. The crowning glory was the forced passage shortly after the bill's publication and after Obama's promise that there would be time for deliberation. Democrats passed it without deliberation and with no Republicans voting for. And by Pelosi's classic remark, "We have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it." Obama's "You can keep your doctor," was another transgression.

Politics is ugly and nasty and while this was not a new low, you could see it from there.

Democrats have rightly demanded that Republicans come up with a better alternative - which they have relentlessly failed to do.

Healthcare is fundamentally broken and must be completely torn down and rebuilt in order to be a worthy system.

We are not going to do that, absent revolution.

To be fair, providing healthcare is an unsolvable problem. There is not an answer to an issue that has infinite demand and continually improving, expensive technology - particularly for an aging population. It is a discussion we have had before - you have to ration something, and that rationing creates insurmountable political problems.

Arguably, the best and most timely healthcare in the world is provided to people in the US who have good medical insurance. However, regardless of the formal name of ObamaCare, it is far from affordable.

One of my arguments at the time was that, under ObamaCare, medical insurance would become so expensive that there will be increasing demand for "socialized" medicine. I think we may be beginning that process now, unless the Democrats get their subsidies. Which, as I think about it, is also a step toward socialized medicine.

I still think socialized medicine is inevitable, but let's see.

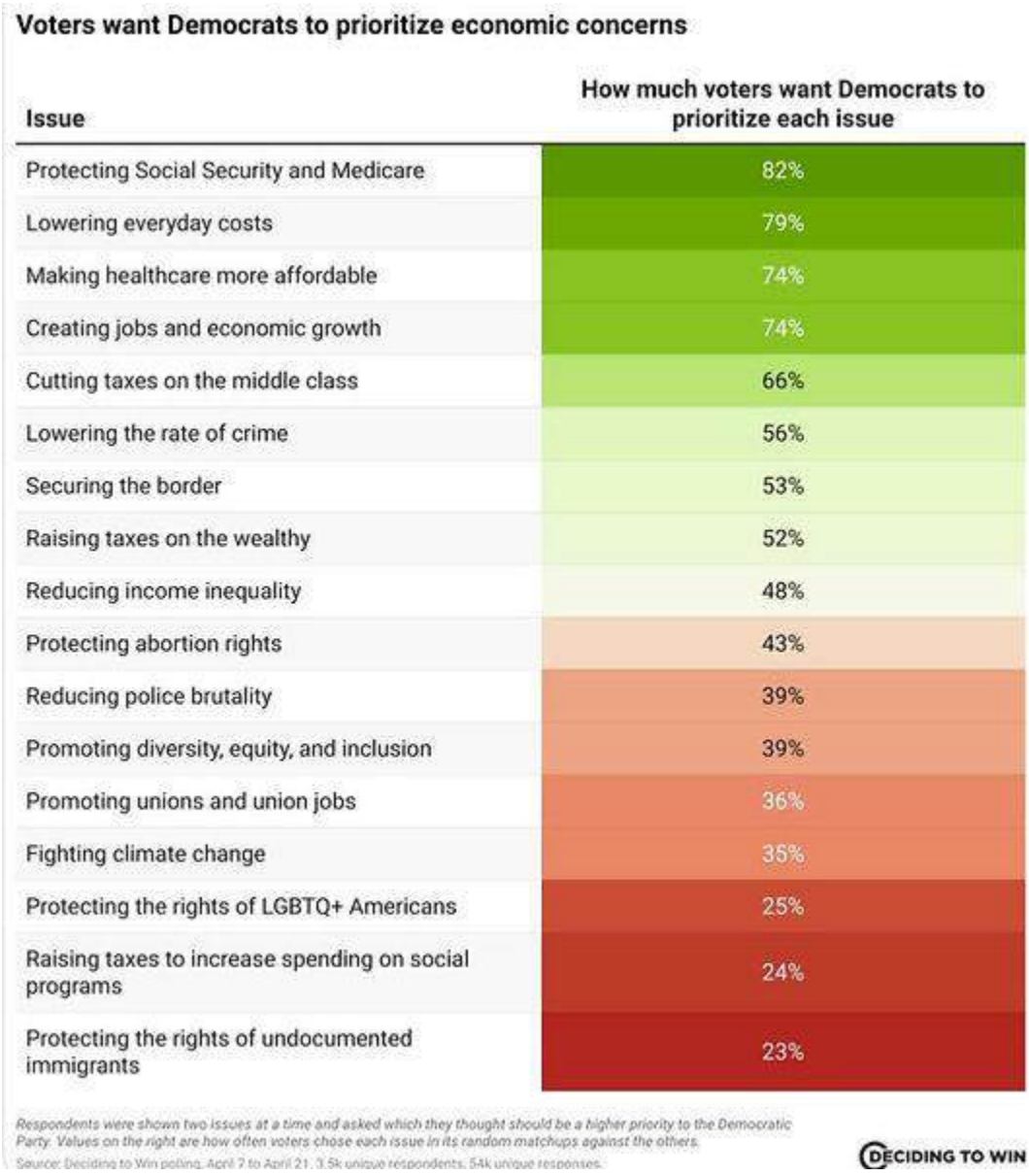
One of the ways that you tell that ObamaCare was not the cost saver it was cracked up to be / misrepresented to be is by looking at the share

prices of healthcare companies, which have done nothing but go straight up since it was enacted.

Here is a chart of a healthcare ETF, with the red line showing where ObamaCare was passed.

You do the math.

Gallery



Voters want Democrats to prioritize economic concerns

Issue	How much voters want Democrats to prioritize each issue
Protecting Social Security and Medicare	82%
Lowering everyday costs	79%
Making healthcare more affordable	74%
Creating jobs and economic growth	74%
Cutting taxes on the middle class	66%
Lowering the rate of crime	56%
Securing the border	53%
Raising taxes on the wealthy	52%
Reducing income inequality	48%
Protecting abortion rights	43%
Reducing police brutality	39%
Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion	39%
Promoting unions and union jobs	36%
Fighting climate change	35%
Protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans	25%
Raising taxes to increase spending on social programs	24%
Protecting the rights of undocumented immigrants	23%

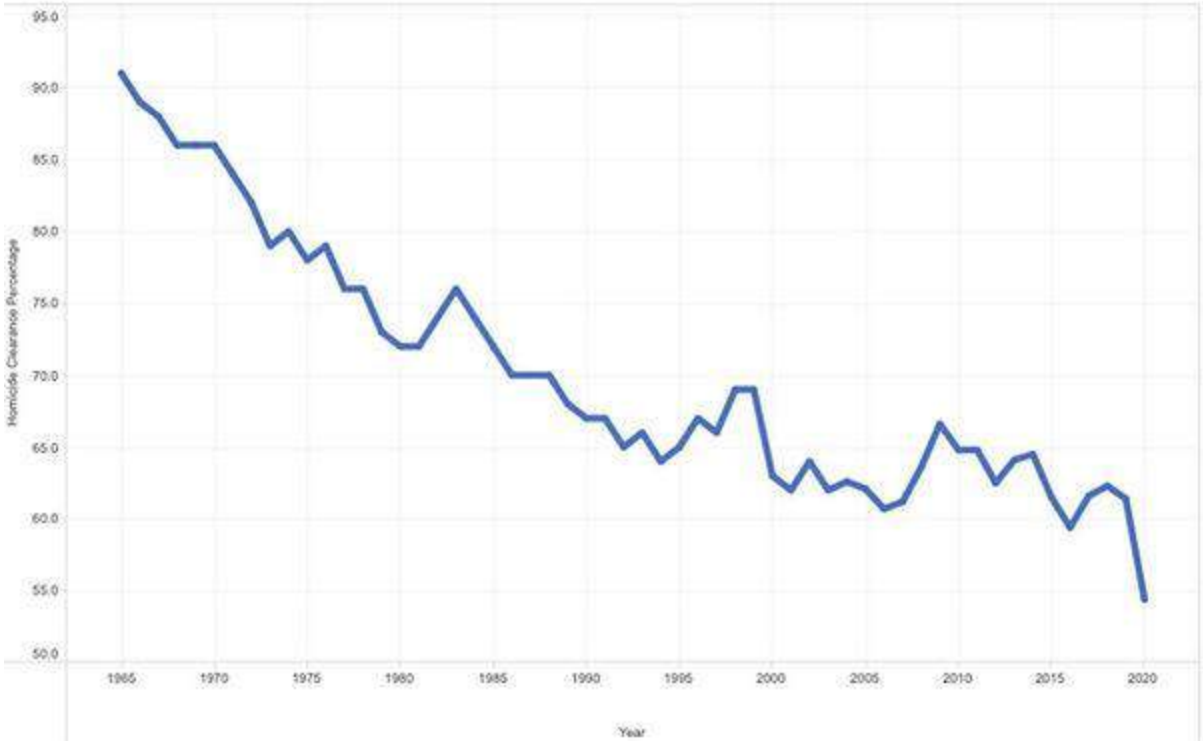
Respondents were shown two issues at a time and asked which they thought should be a higher priority to the Democratic Party. Values on the right are how often voters chose each issue in its random matchups against the others.

Source: Deciding to Win polling, April 7 to April 21. 3.5k unique respondents, 54k unique responses.

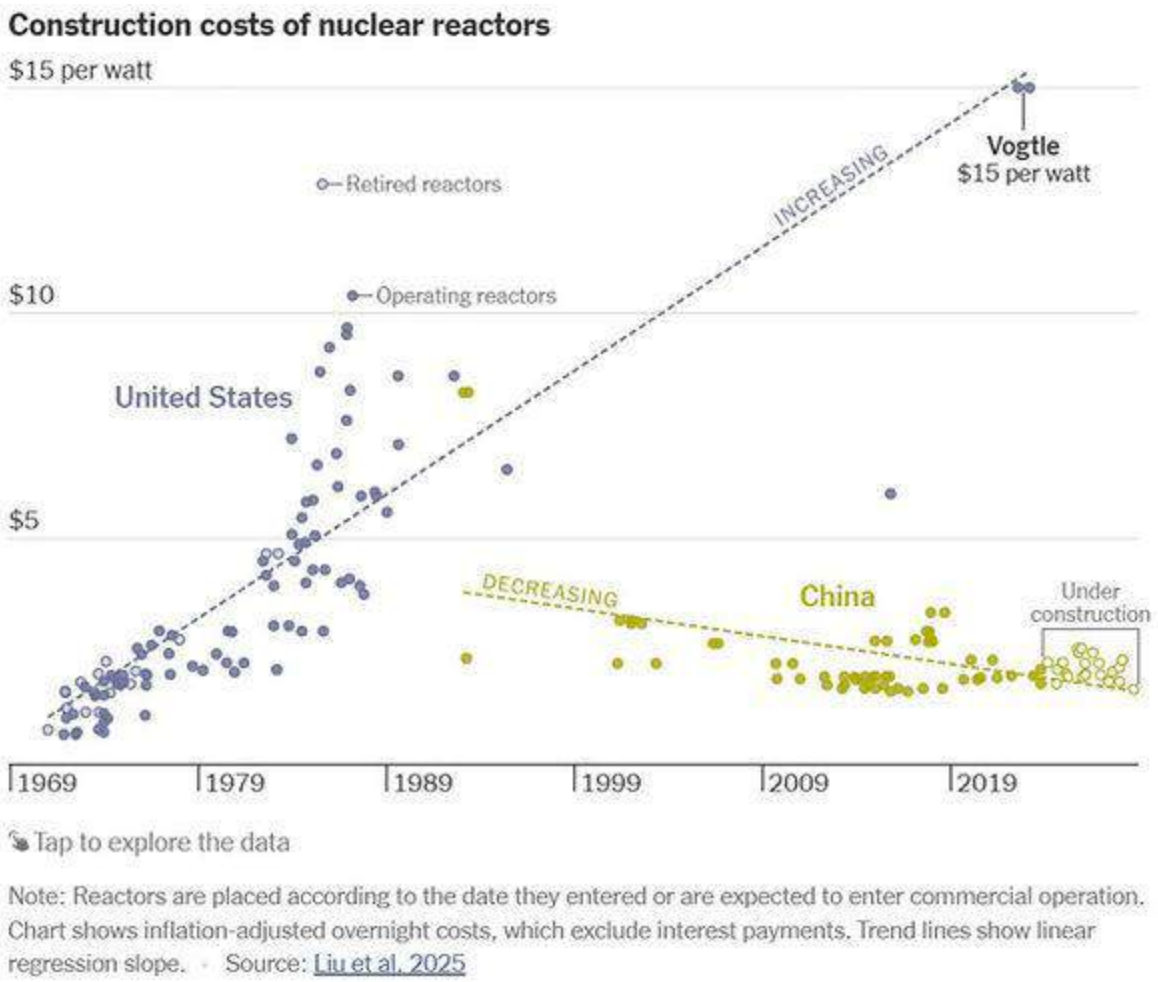
DECIDING TO WIN

America's Declining Homicide Clearance Rates 1965-2020

Source: FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS)



The robots are coming



Miscellany

Something to keep you up at night - In Star Trek, when ships meet each other in space, why are they the same way up?

The World Turns to Energy Pragmatism

The U.S. isn't the only country abandoning impossible climate policies.

Roger Pielke Jr. / October 30, 2025

Welcome to Dispatch Energy! Climate policies around the world are undergoing a remarkable reset. Just this week, Bill Gates rocked the climate discussion by arguing that a "doomsday outlook is causing much of the climate community to focus too much on near-term emissions goals, and it's diverting resources from the most effective things we should be doing to improve life in a warming world." Gates' voice is a welcome addition to a rapidly growing chorus of policymakers and researchers pushing for pragmatic climate protection goals.

A New Climate Consensus

A smoking chimney of a combined heat and power plant in Germany. (Photo by Patrick Pleul/picture alliance via Getty Images)

As my fellow Dispatch Energy contributor Alex Trembath has noted, talk of emissions reductions at any cost is out, and political and economic realism is in. The only surprise is how long the shift took.

Take Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, for example. A decade ago, while governor of the Bank of England, Carney warned that remaining fossil fuel reserves may become "unburnable" if the world wants to avoid a climate catastrophe. In stark contrast, Carney has in recent months fast-tracked approval of a new liquified natural gas export terminal in British Columbia, promising to "transform our country into an energy superpower."

Carney is far from alone. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Keir Starmer must soon decide whether to relax aggressive climate targets—including Britain's effort to rid its energy supply of fossil fuels by 2030—in the face of rapidly increasing energy costs. "There is a choice about what price you're willing to pay for the next [renewables] auction round, which is key to hitting 2030," a government insider told The Guardian. "If it comes to a choice between hitting the target and overpaying, or missing it and keeping costs down, we will miss it."

Even in Europe, which has promoted climate policy more than any other bloc, economic realities have crashed the climate party. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz recently acknowledged the competing economic objectives that accompany an ambitious climate agenda: "None of us are questioning the goal of climate protection. All of us are of the opinion that we must combine this with the competitiveness of European industry."

But Chancellor Merz is incorrect about the unanimity of European leaders. Earlier this month, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, writing for the Financial Times, argued in favor of a more pragmatic energy transition. "If we must accept some emissions for a bit longer to save our industries or to maintain social cohesion, so be it," he wrote. "We must have these debates honestly. We cannot begin with climate neutrality and hope everything else falls into place."

Mitsotakis walked the talk last week when Greece vetoed a European Union proposal to place a carbon fee on shipping emissions. Explaining his opposition to the levy, the prime minister said, "We want to be ambitious about the energy transition, but we must be realistic, not undermine the competitiveness of European industry, and certainly not cause social unrest by imposing unbearable costs on our households and businesses."

In the United States, much attention has been rightly paid to the Trump administration's hostility to climate science and outright opposition to solar and wind energy. But the climate conversation has changed among Democrats as well.

For instance, Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware recently told Politico that climate is "not a top three issue right now." Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii went even further, arguing at a New York Times event last month that costs need to be front and center when talking about energy: "You could talk about the planetary emergency and mitigation and adaptation, and you could throw in some environmental justice rhetoric, and by the time you're done talking, people think you don't care about them." Instead, he added, "The way to victory is to talk about price."

China reached such clarity on energy and climate years ago. Since 2021, President Xi Jinping has often explained that China should "establish the new before destroying the old," invoking Mao Zedong from 1940, who cautioned to "build before breaking." China's logic of developing alternative energy technologies before shutting down the energy sources that power our economies has taken hold around the world. Since then, China has raced ahead to lead the world in many energy technologies.

For decades, conventional wisdom among climate policy elites was that deep decarbonization would be achieved by making fossil energy substantially more expensive—through policies such as taxes, tradable emissions permits, regulation, litigation, and supply-side constraints—thus providing fossil fuel alternatives with an economic advantage.

But there is little evidence that such efforts have accelerated the decarbonization of global or national economies. To the extent that efforts to make fossil energy more expensive have succeeded, when people notice higher priced energy, goods, and services, they do indeed respond—not by becoming champions of wind and solar projects, but by putting on yellow vests to protest, as happened in France in 2018 following a small increase in a fuel tax, and more generally by voting into office populist candidates who promise lower prices (recent examples include Donald Trump and Italy's Giorgia Meloni).

In my 2010 book The Climate Fix, I called this dynamic the iron law of climate policy. While some people have the means and interest to pay a

bit more in support of an energy transition, that willingness is limited, even among the wealthy.

Before the 2024 election, at the American Enterprise Institute along with electoral politics scholar Ruy Teixeira, I conducted a survey of how Americans viewed energy and climate issues. We asked if people would support a $40 monthly fee on their energy bills to support climate policies. Large majorities across demographics opposed such a fee; even those making more than $100,000 opposed it by almost three to one. Less than half of respondents favored even a $1-per-month fee.

The economics behind making fossil energy more expensive to motivate energy system transformation works in theory. However, theory fails when it encounters political reality. The iron law remains undefeated.

The sweetener that was supposed to help citizens swallow the costs of higher-priced energy has always been promises of the avoidance of the "existential threat" of climate change. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned last year, "The world must pay up, or humanity will pay the price."

However, science does not always conform to political expectations. Over the past 20 years, projections of massive future carbon dioxide emissions from a world powered increasingly and mainly by coal have faded away, as the world turns toward other sources of energy. Natural gas, solar, wind, and even nuclear energy are in the ascendancy. Apart from India and China, global coal consumption peaked almost 20 years ago.

About a decade ago, climate policy advocates adopted increases in global average temperatures as the central metric of climate policy. A 2 degree Celsius increase above 1850-1900 global average temperatures by 2100 constituted a "dangerous" increase under the architecture of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. Much higher temperature increases by 2100—warming of 4-5°C—were viewed to be both plausible and apocalyptic.

The projections of a global return to coal that have underpinned global climate projections for the past several decades have proven unfounded, as coal has fallen out of favor in most places around the world due to its high costs and environmental impacts. As a result, the most extreme temperature increases in modeled futures have become increasingly implausible with every additional year of unfolding reality.

Today, a consensus exists in the scientific community that on our current policy trajectory, the world is headed for less than a 3°C warming by 2100, and such estimates have been revised downward each year. For instance, the Norwegian group DNV projects that net-zero emissions by 2050 is impossible, but hitting that target later this century is "most likely" with an associated warming of 2.2°C—certainly disruptive, but not civilization-threatening.

Century-scale predictions are always highly uncertain, and often wrong, especially when it comes to energy futures. However, the momentum of the global energy economy is such that if most nations were indeed to return to carbon-intensive coal over natural gas, petroleum, nuclear, wind, solar, electrification, and other lower-carbon energy sources, we would have plenty of advance warning. At present, massive carbon

dioxide emissions from a coal-dominated future are not remotely plausible.

Rather than welcome the optimistic turn in the scenarios that underlie climate science, climate advocates have chosen to double down on the promised apocalypse. Not long ago, 4°C or 5°C were the thresholds of doom. Today, climate advocates hoping to sustain projected apocalyptic futures have repeatedly defined down the threshold of catastrophe as projected futures have become less extreme. We now see claims that 3°C, 2°C, 1.5°C, and even 1°C are the new demarcations of existential threat.

Human-caused climate change is of course real and poses risks worth mitigating. However, in a world that has already warmed by 1.5°C without apocalyptic consequences, extreme scare tactics have lost their potency. The rising costs of energy further erode support for expensive emergency measures to reduce emissions.

Climate change is not going to go away, and concerted action to continue or improve upon historical rates of the decarbonization of the economy makes good sense—so long as policies can be implemented in a way that enhances energy security, access, and reliability, and of course in a manner that contributes to growing wealth for people around the world, particularly those who have yet to reach a level of energy services enjoyed by the wealthy.

Effective climate policy is a marathon, not a sprint. The ongoing reset of expectations about energy and climate is an opportunity to reject apocalyptic fatalism and to embrace realism and pragmatism.