

The Six Megatrends That Define 2026



DEREK THOMPSON

MAY 14, 2026 • PAID



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Every week, I save dozens of screenshots of charts, essay passages, science and economics papers, and tweets. Every few months, I collect my favorite ideas, organize them by topic, and publish them in this newsletter.

In this edition, I'm trying something a bit more ambitious. I've organized the morsels of information under several themes—let's call them: "megatrends"—that define the 2026 new cycle and that I think will continue to shape the world in the months, and years, to come.

Today's megatrends span economics, health, artificial intelligence, culture, politics, and more. Free subscribers will get to read the first two megatrends, on economics and health—plus a "historical interlude" that was too interesting to leave out. Only paid subscribers will get to read more about the state of AI, a paradox in politics, and an eerie new trend in the media.

*Read more about AI, the frontier of science,
and cultural shifts, including "the anti-social
century."*



Photo by [Drew Beamer](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Megatrend #1: CULTURE

The Anti-Social Century

A little announcement that probably won't be surprising to folks who've followed my work in the last year: I've signed a contract for my next book, and it will be about the ideas I've worked on for the last year that I've been calling "the anti-social century." I see this as a natural follow-up to Abundance. If abundance is a critique of, and solution for, the problems of material flourishing—how do we build homes, reduce energy costs, power technology, and invent scientific breakthroughs, all of which can make people's lives easier and better?—the anti-social century addresses the cultural, or "post-material," problems that are often beyond

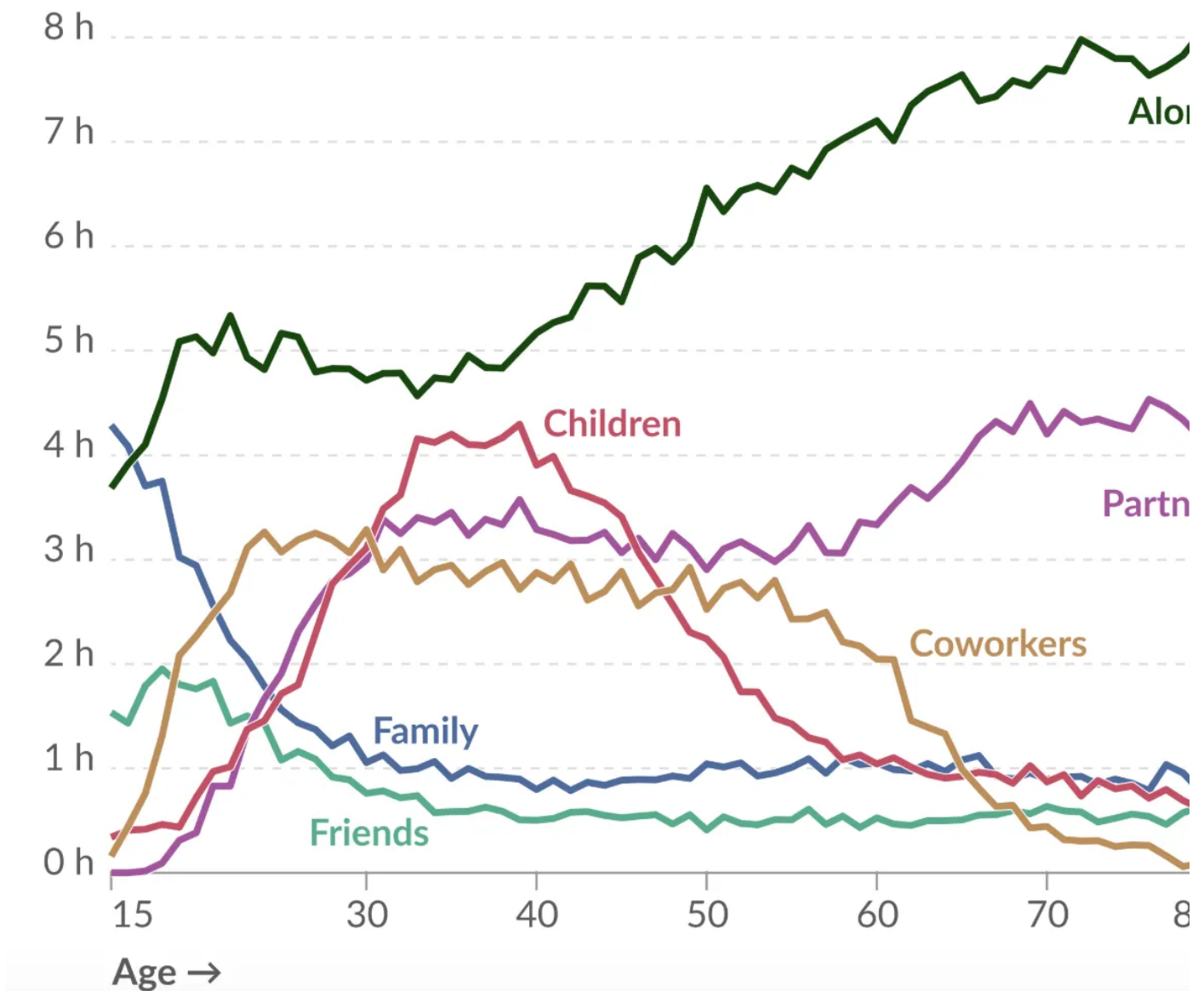
the scope of political economy. The last few years have seen [an astonishing decline in happiness](#) and sociality in the U.S., which has coincided with a rise in alone time, anxiety, mental distress, and a toxic form of individualism that I described in “[The Monks in the Casino](#).” I want to better understand how this happened and what “we”—at the level of individuals and institutions—can do to fix it.

1. **Life as “time spent with.”** One of my favorite graphs from the miraculous Our World in Data site is this breakdown of how the typical American spends their time between the ages of 15 and 80. One way to read this chart is that time spent with our parents peaks in our late teen years; time spent with friends peaks in our early 20s; time spent with coworkers peaks in our mid- to late-20s; time spent with our children peaks in our 30s and 40s; time spent with our partners peaks in our 60s and 70s, and time spent alone increases steadily as we get older. One way to think about the anti-social century is that it is a kind of society-wide conspiracy to increase alone time, due to a phalanx of forces that are reducing time spent with practically everybody who isn’t “just me.”

Who do Americans spend time with over their lives?

Our World
in Data

Hours per day, based on averages from surveys in the US in 2010–2024.



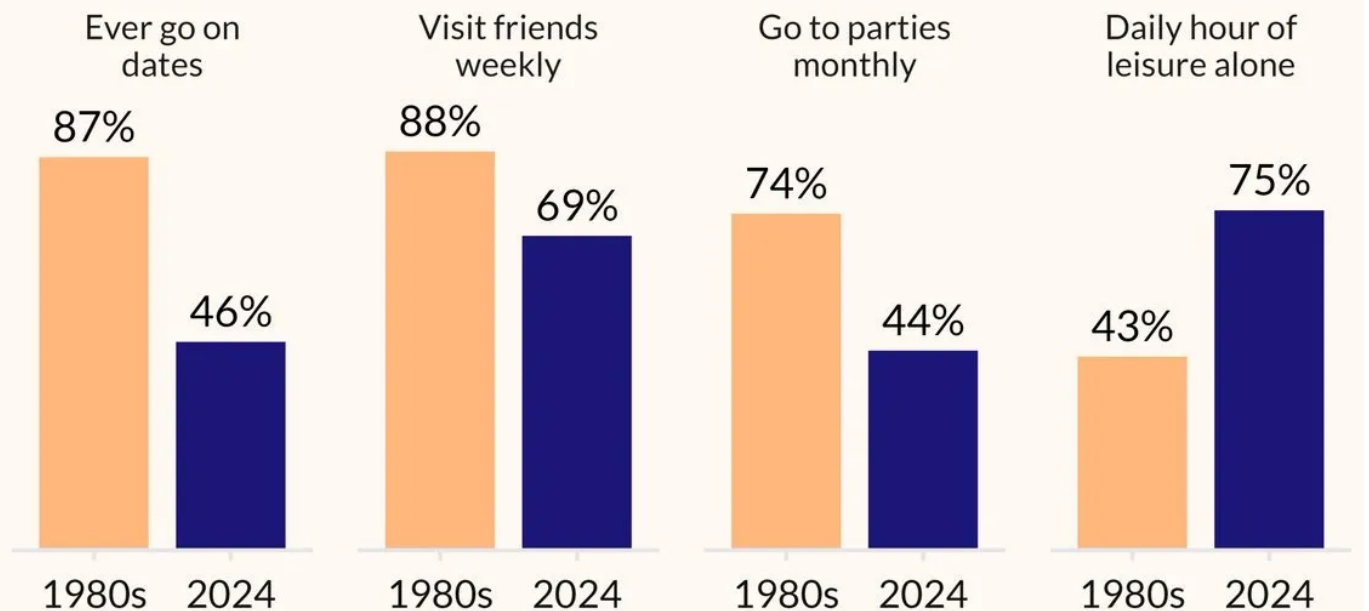
1. Time spent with partners, children, coworkers, and friends declines as Americans couple less, have fewer children, work alone, and spend less time with friends. Partner time declines as Americans are dating and marrying less.

While parents are spending more time with their children, fewer Americans are having kids in the first place. Between 1976 and 2024, the share of women 40-44 years old without children [increased by 80 percent](#) and the share of “never married” women increased by more than 50 percent. With the rise of remote work and [sole proprietor firms](#), or one-person startups, there is less time spent among coworkers. As for teenage friendship, the numbers are dire. The share of 12th graders who “ever go on dates” has declined by 47 percent since the 1980s; the share who “visit friends weekly” has declined 22 percent; and the share who “go to monthly parties” is down 40 percent, according to the Institute for Family Studies.

Teenagers are dating, partying less

% of 12th graders who do the following

1980s 2024



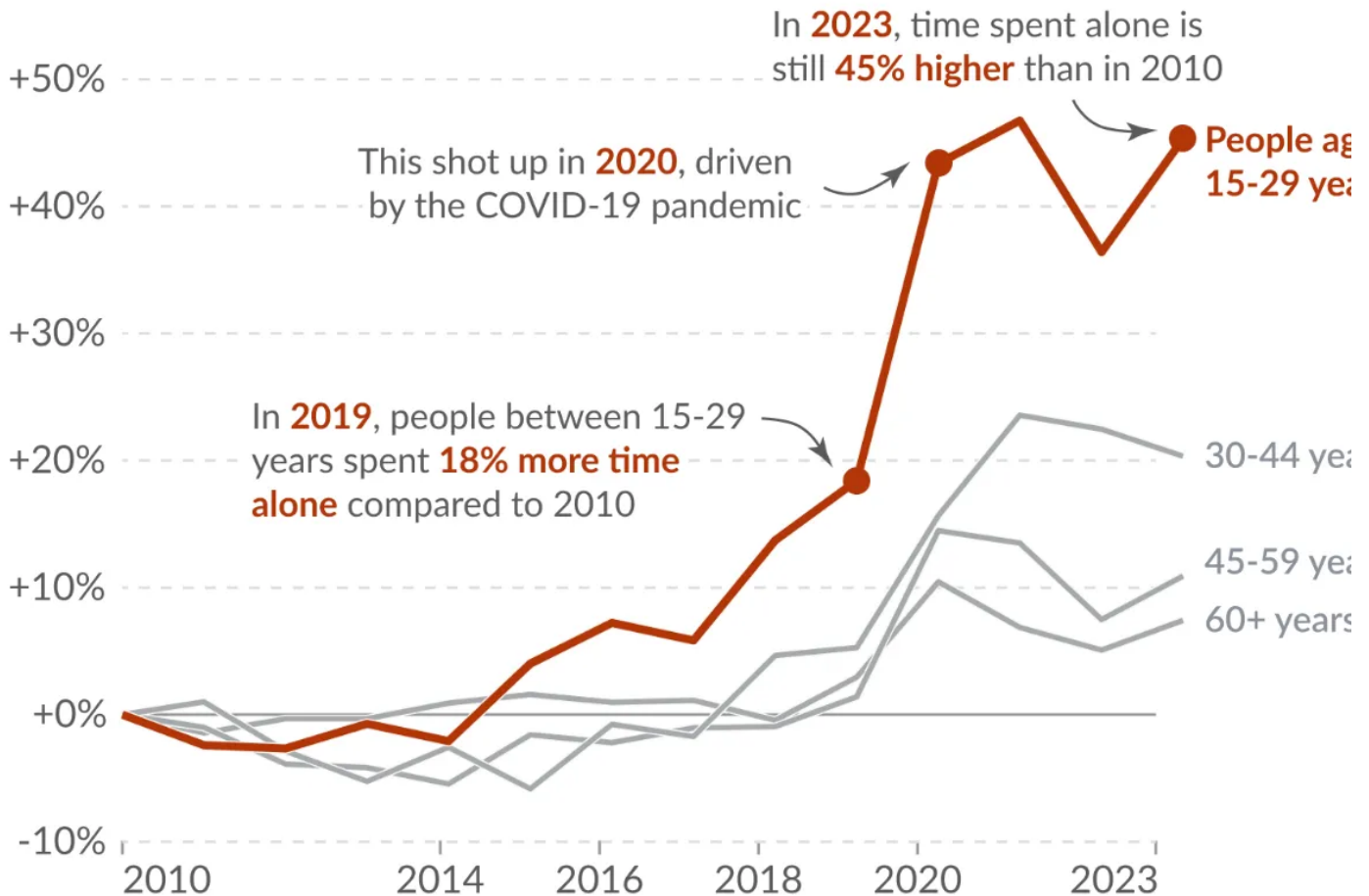
Daily leisure time alone includes near daily
Source: Monitoring the Future Study

family
studio

Put it all together and Americans are spending more time alone than in any period which we have good data. This is especially true for young Americans, who have historically been the most social group.

Young Americans are spending much more time alone

Relative change in average survey responses compared to 2010. Time spent alone means no one else was physically present and can still include phone or video calls.



Note: Activities such as sleeping, grooming, and personal care are not included in the data. Data for 2020 excludes the period March 18 to May 9 ("lockdown").

Data source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023)

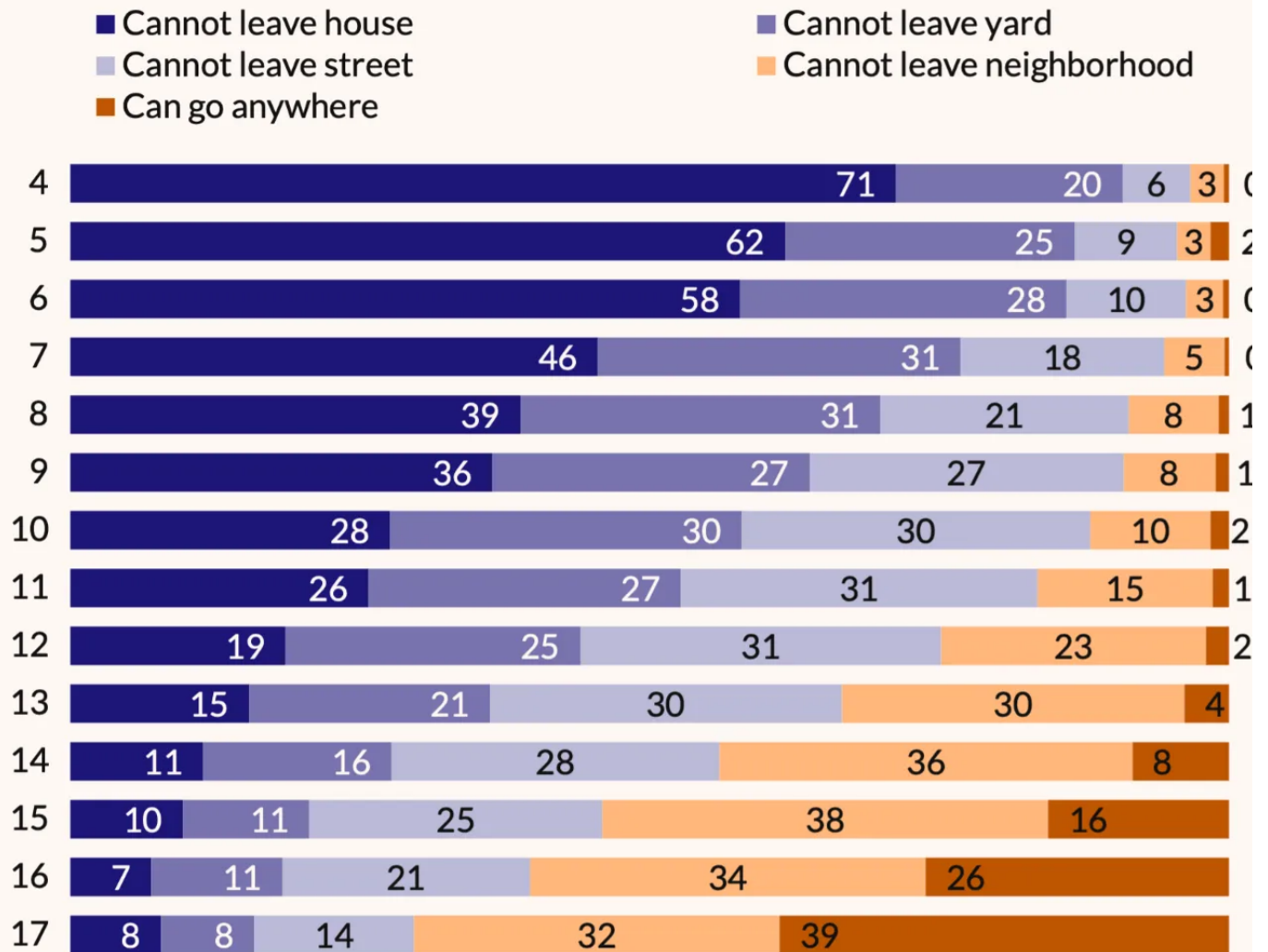
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- There are many forces to blame, but just for now, let's blame American parenting. According to the Institute for Family Studies, one in ten teenagers is allowed to leave the house without an adult companion, and 80 percent aren't allowed to leave the neighborhood without an adult. The [latchkey](#) generation of kids who came and went without supervision gave way to a [helicopter model](#) of

intensive parenting and strictly guarded childhood. Homebound and phone-bound, today's adolescents and teens spend more time in their rooms and less time playing with friends than any cohort ever studied.

American children are not allowed to go to many places

% children at each age allowed to walk, bike, or drive given distance, without an adult accompanying them according to parent



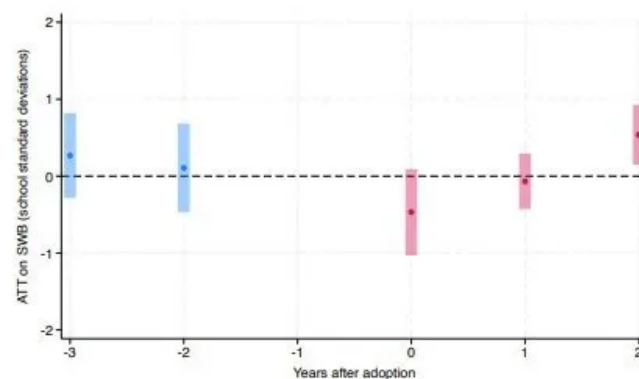
Source: IFS/Anxious Generation Survey of American Family Culture, 2025

family
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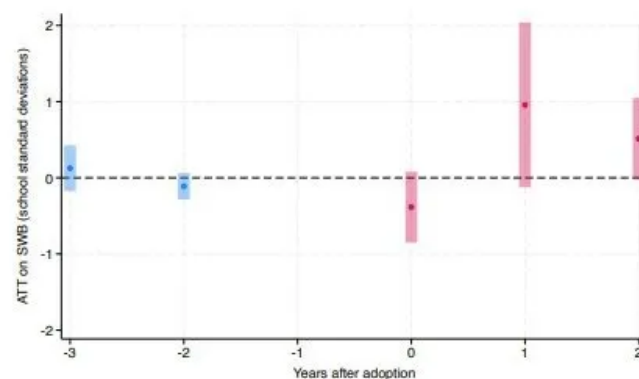
3. **There are some reasons to be optimistic.** I see more people paying attention to the problem of solitude and thinking about [socializing as social fitness](#)—something that you “should” do not only because it’s fun but also because it’s

[physically and neurologically good for you](#). I'm also seeing more policies to increase socializing. If the last 20 years has been an uncontrolled experiment to roll out phones to children without much care for how it would affect their mental health, we might be in a new phase of controlled experiments to deprive young people of those same devices. A [giant study of school phone bans](#) published in April found that “lockable phone pouches” did not significantly improve school attendance or self-reported classroom attention, while average effects on test scores were “consistently close to zero,” with high schools seeing modest positive effects. That all sounds rather dispiriting. But the lasting effects on happiness seemed real: phone bans seem to cause first-year disruptions followed by real increases in subjective well-being.

Figure A4: Event Study Estimates of Effects of Phone Pouches on High School and Middle School Subjective Well-Being



(a) High School



(b) Middle School

The philosopher Jacques Ellul wrote in *The Technological Society* that new technology shape us as much as we shape them; what they make efficient becomes what we value. A child, or an adult, or an entire civilization might think that they are using a new technology neutrally or instrumentally, but over time institutions reorganize themselves around what technology makes expedient. I think this is essentially what smartphones have done to the modern world. College students and study participants [consistently claim](#) that they regret much of their phone use, but the technological capability of the phone to command and hold attention consistently overrides the traditional communal value to spend more time with books, in nature, or around other people.

There is another way. Toward the end of my reporting for the anti-social century column story for *The Atlantic*, I came across a reference to the novel *Seveneves*, in which Neal Stephenson coined the term “Amisticks.” Derived from the notoriously anti-tech Amish, the word refers to the practice of carefully selecting which technologies to accept or reject. Far from dispensing with all new technology, the Amish take pains to adopt only those new products that uphold their existing values. So, solar and wind energy are allowed, because it enables useful work, but television is out, because it interferes with family time. [As I wrote](#):

If the Amish approach to technology is radical in its application, it recognizes something plain and true: Although technology does not have values of its own, adoption can create values, even in the absence of a coordinated effort. For decades we’ve adopted whatever technologies removed friction or increased dopamine, embracing what makes life feel easy and good in the moment...

We should ask ourselves: What would it mean to select technology based on long term health rather than instant gratification?

MEGATREND #2: HEALTH

Building the Do-It-All Drug

GLP-1 drugs like Ozempic (semaglutide), made by Novo Nordisk, and Zepbound (tirzepatide) made by Eli Lilly, have demonstrated extraordinary effects beyond the treatment of type-2 diabetes and obesity. In the last few months, randomized studies have shown GLP-1s can [reduce psoriasis severity by up to 80%](#), treat addiction disorders, ameliorate several kinds of mental distress, and melt fatty liver disease. New and better GLP-1 drugs are waiting in the wings. Let's review what these drugs can and can't yet do—and what's coming next.

1. **Help with addiction disorders? Yes.** A [placebo-controlled, double-blind trial of Ozempic](#) found that the drug reduced both heavy drinking days and overall alcohol consumption among people seeking treatment for addiction.

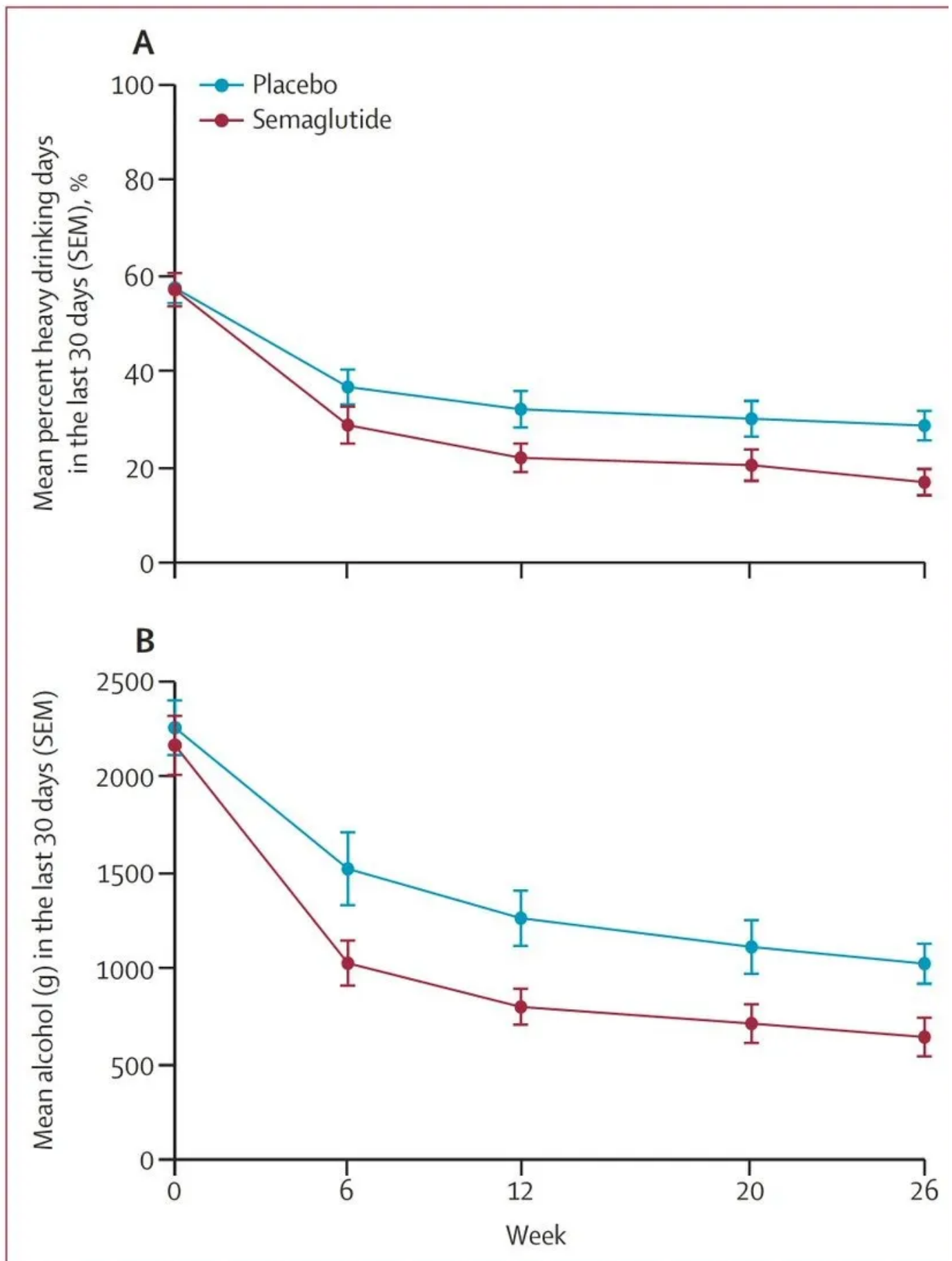
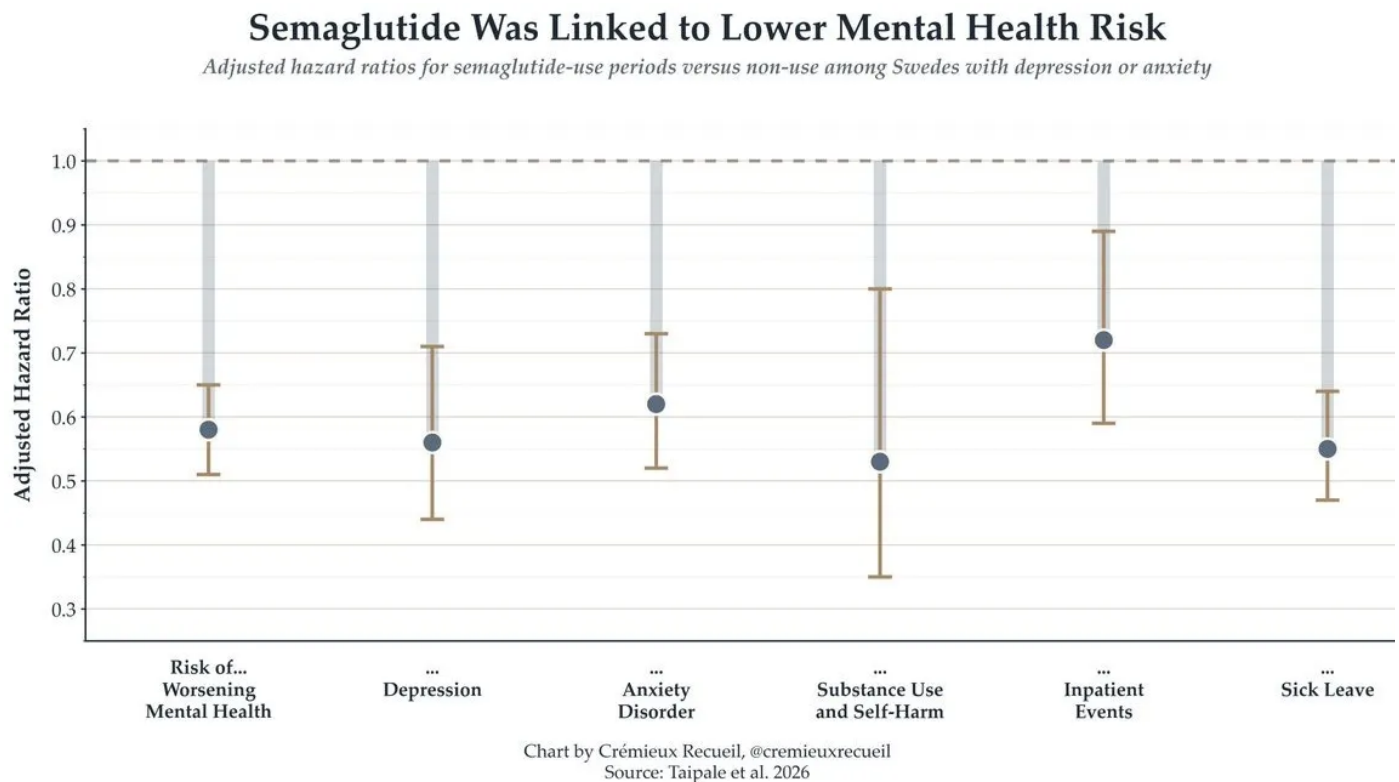


Figure 2: Effects of once-weekly semaglutide compared with placebo on reduction in heavy drinking days and total alcohol consumption

2. **Help with mental distress and anxiety?** Yup. An [April study of more than 100,000 people in Swedish electronic health registers](#) found that semaglutide use was associated with lower risk of worsening mental illness, self-harm, depression, anxiety, and worsening substance use disorder.

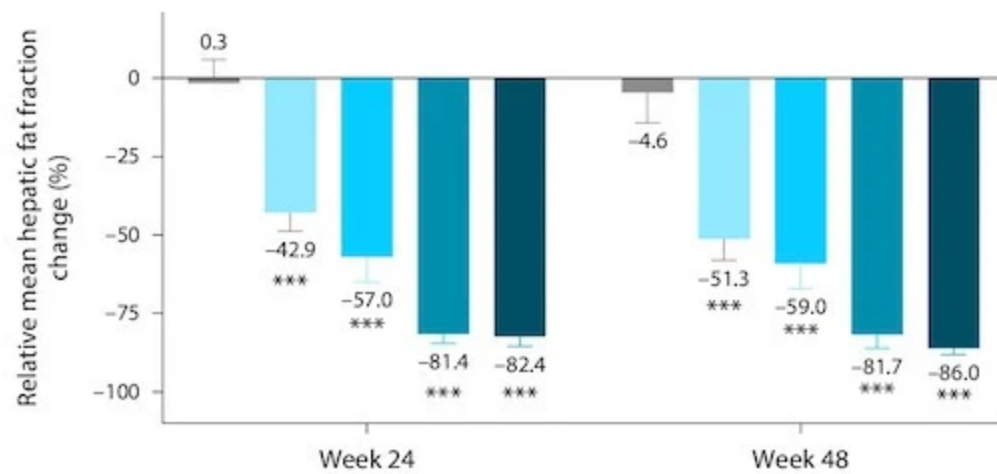


3. **Crush fatty liver disease? 100%. (Er, well, 80%.)** The next big GLP-1 drug coming down the pike is retatrutide. While the first generation of GLP-1 drugs targets GLP-1 hormone exclusively, Lilly's popular Mounjaro drug (a.k.a., tirzepatide) targets two hormones: GLP-1 and GIP. Retatrutide is a triple agonist that targets three gut hormones: GLP-1, GIP, and glucagon. Reta is most celebrated for its historic weight-loss effects, which seem even more dramatic than tirzepatide or semaglutide. But in a recent [study](#), patients on retatrutide saw an 80 percent reduction in liver fat. Fatty liver disease affects millions of Americans, and there's no FDA-approved treatment for it other than admonitions to lose weight. But

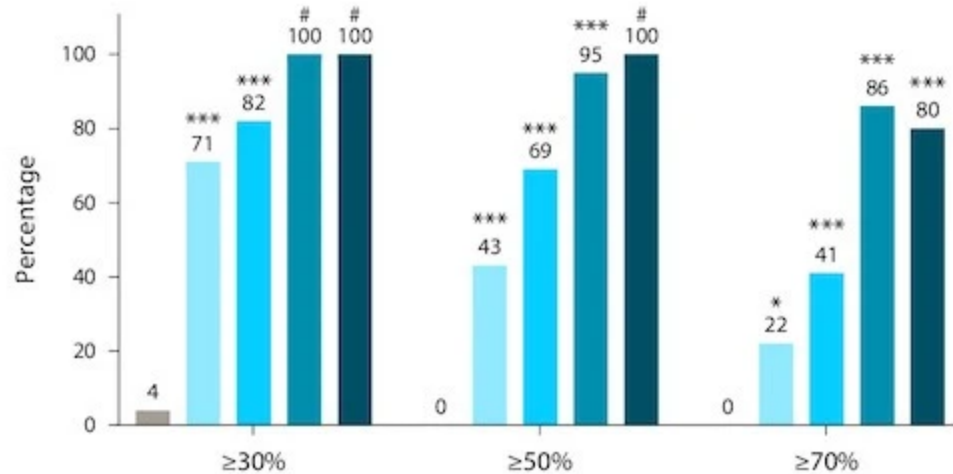
retatrutide's targeting of glucagon seems to melt liver fat even more effectively than it causes weight loss.

— PBO 1 mg RETA 4 mg RETA 8 mg RETA 12 mg RETA

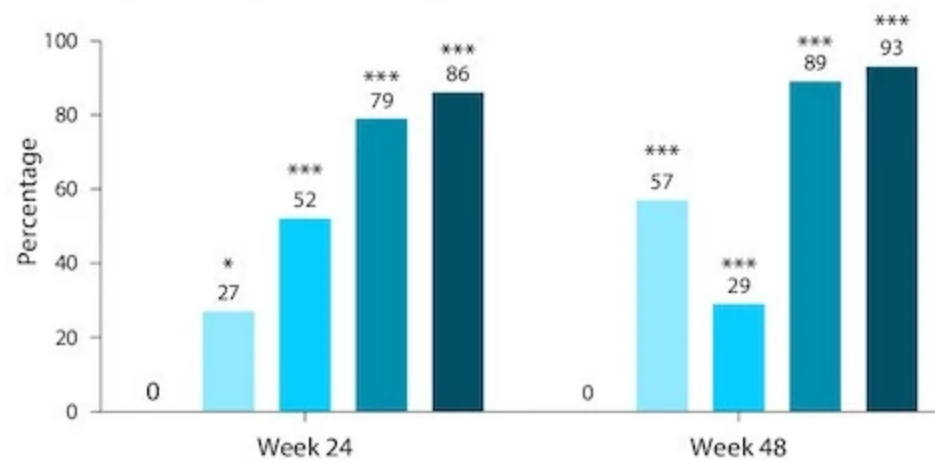
a Relative liver fat reduction



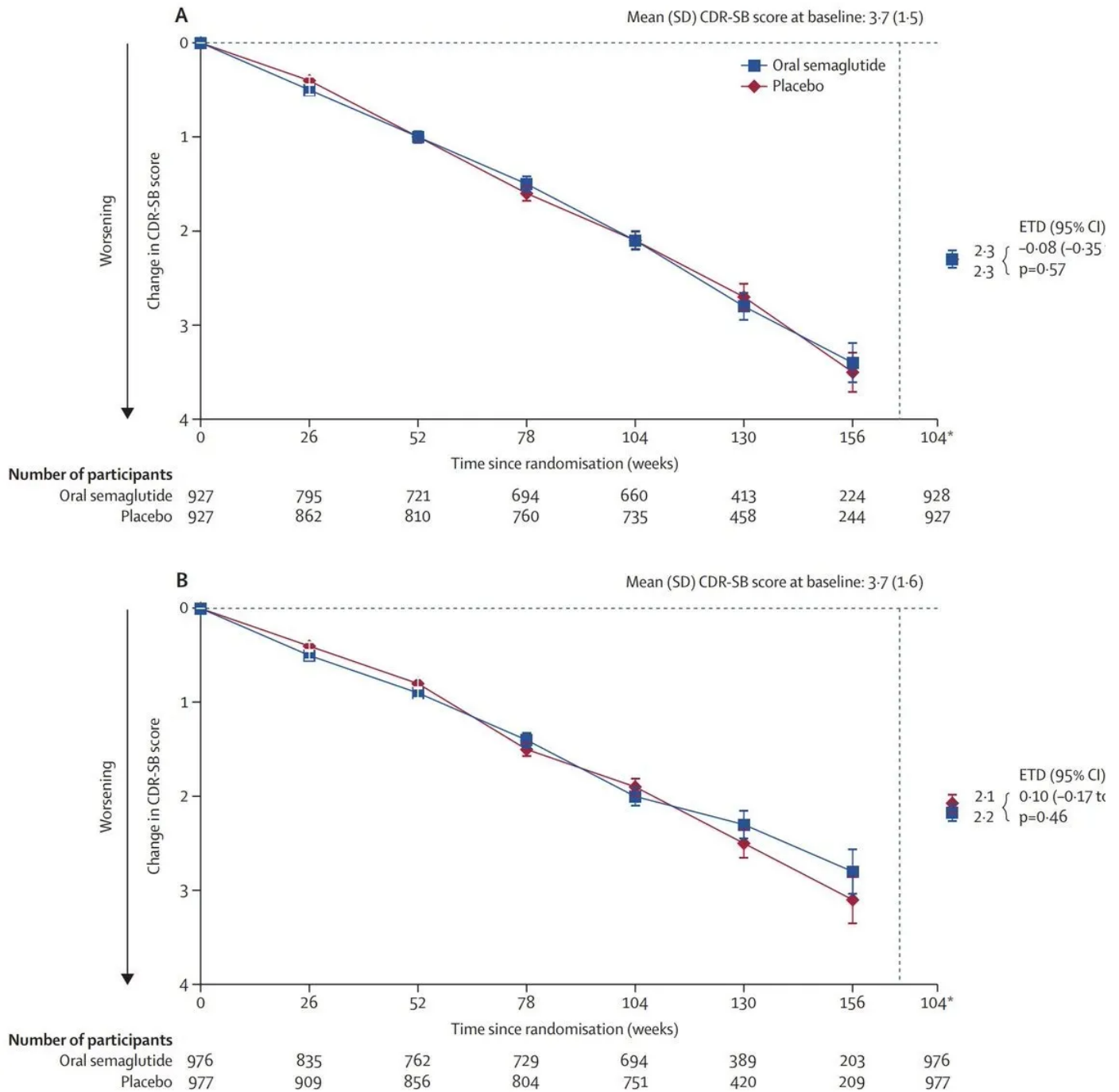
b Liver fat reduction targets at week 24



c Percentage of participants achieving liver fat content <5%



4. **Stop Alzheimer's? Not yet.** A [Novo Nordisk-funded trial](#) of oral semaglutide among elderly Americans found that the drug did not seem to slow worsening Alzheimer's symptoms. In the charts below, you'll see two groups—BLUE on semaglutide vs. RED on a placebo. The nearly identical declines on a cognitive over 156 weeks indicate that GLP-1s failed to make much of a difference in the progression of the disease. (It's still possible that the use of GLP-1s earlier in life reduces the likelihood of ever developing Alzheimer's, but this hasn't been studied yet, and a high-quality study could take many years, or even decades.)



5. **Fuck everything, we're doing five agonists.** The Onion once published an article entitled [“Fuck Everything, We’re Doing Five Blades,”](#) in which an imaginary Gillette executive proposes adding a fifth blade to the company’s new razor. (“I don’t care if they have to cram the fifth blade in perpendicular to the other four just do it!”) Well, somebody from pharma took that essay as inspiration. While semaglutide, tirzepatide, and retatrutide target one, two, and three hormones,

respectively, scientists are now exploring a [quintuple agonist](#) “that combines the body weight-reducing and blood glucose-lowering effects of GLP-1R–GIPR co-agonism with the insulin-sensitizing and anti-inflammatory effects of lanifibran via its targeted delivery into GLP-1R- and GIPR-expressing cells.” As scientists add targets, one could imagine a GLP-1 drug that both melts fat, fights inflammation, and even preserves muscle tone. In other words, *I don’t care if the have to cram the fifth agonist in perpendicular to the other four, just do it!*

Historical interlude: Creativity secrets of Alexandre Dumas

Alexandre Dumas could write. What the man couldn’t do was stop writing. By his death, Dumas had produced more than 100,000 pages of book text, which is the equivalent of writing a novel the length of *War and Peace* every seven months, for four straight decades. In his miracle years of 1844 to 1846, Dumas wrote both *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*—the latter of which is both incredibly long (more than 1,200 pages in most modern editions) and also considered by many one of the greatest novels of all time.

How did he do it? Dumas was “often accused of operating a fiction factory,” Michael Dirda [writes](#). But the fact that none of his research assistants achieved anything of note on their own strongly suggests that Dumas was the final hand to put pen to paper. His workflow:

[Dumas’s] particular genius lay in transmuting dry historical records into vibrant page-turners through his mastery of dialogue, pacing, and dramatic confrontation. Dumas would first talk over a book with an assistant, perhaps ask him to do some research and prepare an outline, then follow up with further discussion of the action and plot, this time in more detail. Only when he had settled the whole in the novel in his own mind did Dumas put pen to paper. As he once said, “As a rule

do not begin a book until it is finished.” He then wrote fast, a single draft on blue paper, never bothering about accents, commas, and punctuation, working long hours at a time.

“Do not begin a piece of writing until it is finished” is a fun idea. Personally, I think my best essays are similarly “finished” before they are “started.” That is, if I begin the writing process without really knowing what I want to say, I wind up not saying much of anything but rather circling, circling, circling a strong contention that would have been better developed if I had done more research or talked to more people. My best essays are sometimes the ones whose theses I can describe in detail before I write the first sentence of the final draft.

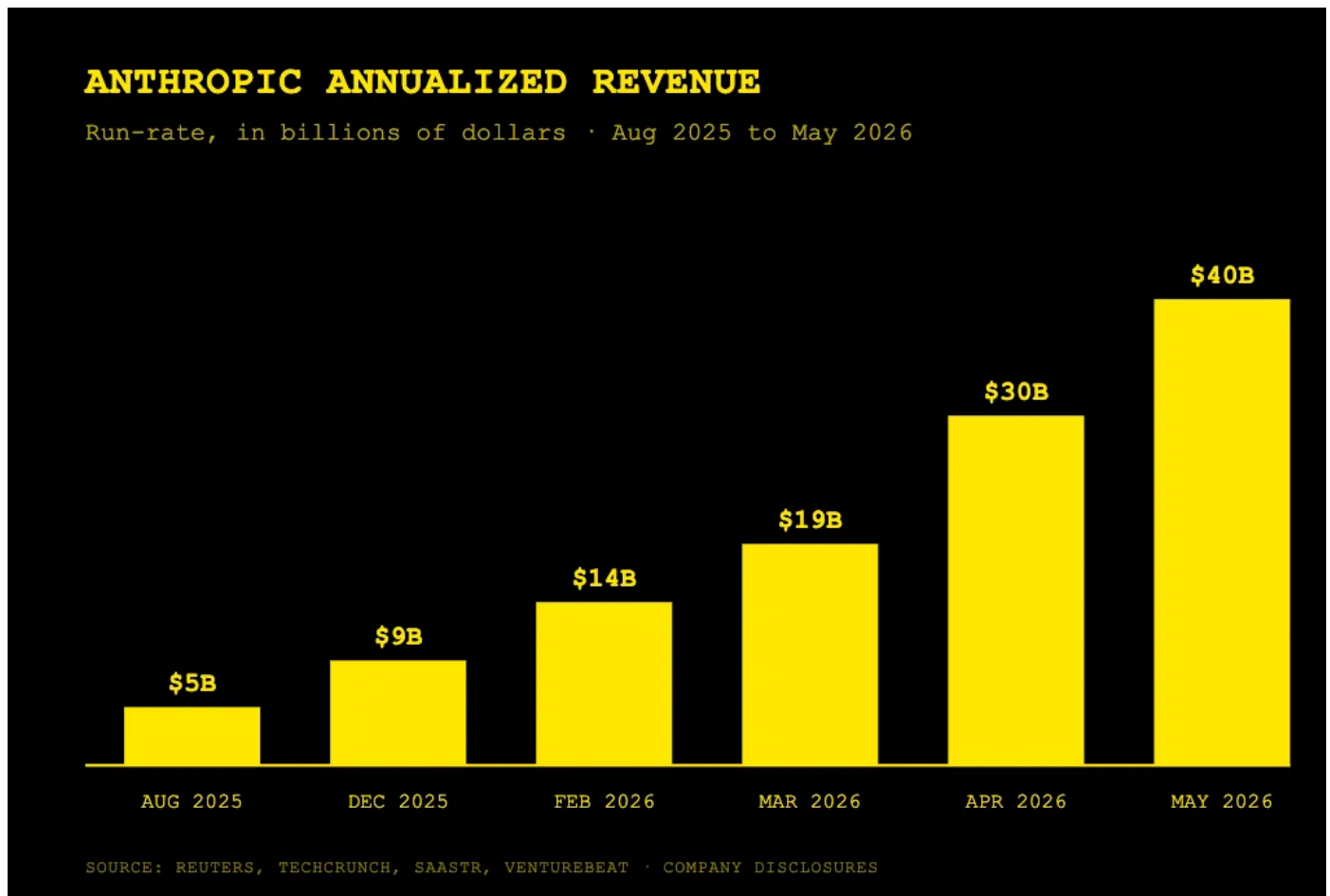
MEGATREND #3: THE STATE OF AI Apocalypse Nope

The artificial intelligence discourse is dominated by people predicting “the end of” things. Is AI a bubble, it’s the end of a bull market and a long economic expansion. If AI automate every cognitive task in the economy, it’s the end of work. If super-intelligence rises up to destroy its maker, it’ll be the end of the human race.

But sitting here in May of 2026, AI doesn’t yet seem to be the end of ... anything? Economic growth is slow and steady, the unemployment rate is still under 5 percent, and, as of this writing, people exist. Rather than evaluate AI as an imminent apocalypse, it makes more sense to evaluate it for now as a [normal](#) business cycle, with a set of tailwinds that indicate historical growth versus a set of headwinds that put expansion at risk.

The bull case for AI in a nutshell: This is a [rapidly improving technology](#), with a growing consumer base that is [paying through the nose](#) for a product it considers increasingly essential to its work, and whose revenue is growing at levels that surpass anything we’ve ever seen in the history of corporate accounting.

The factoid that has anchored the bull case for the last few weeks is that Anthropic annualized run rate has increased by a factor of seven since last summer to exceed \$40 billion, which is roughly what Netflix made last year. Let me say that again. In the 8 months between August 2025 (the month before Anthropic launched a paid plan for Claude) and May 2026, Anthropic's business transformed from an essentially revenue-free research lab into ... uh, Netflix. And it's not just Anthropic. The financial services company Stripe has announced that self-identified AI startups using its platform are [growing faster than any corporate category that they've ever tracked](#). It is becoming harder and harder to deny the business potential of this technology.



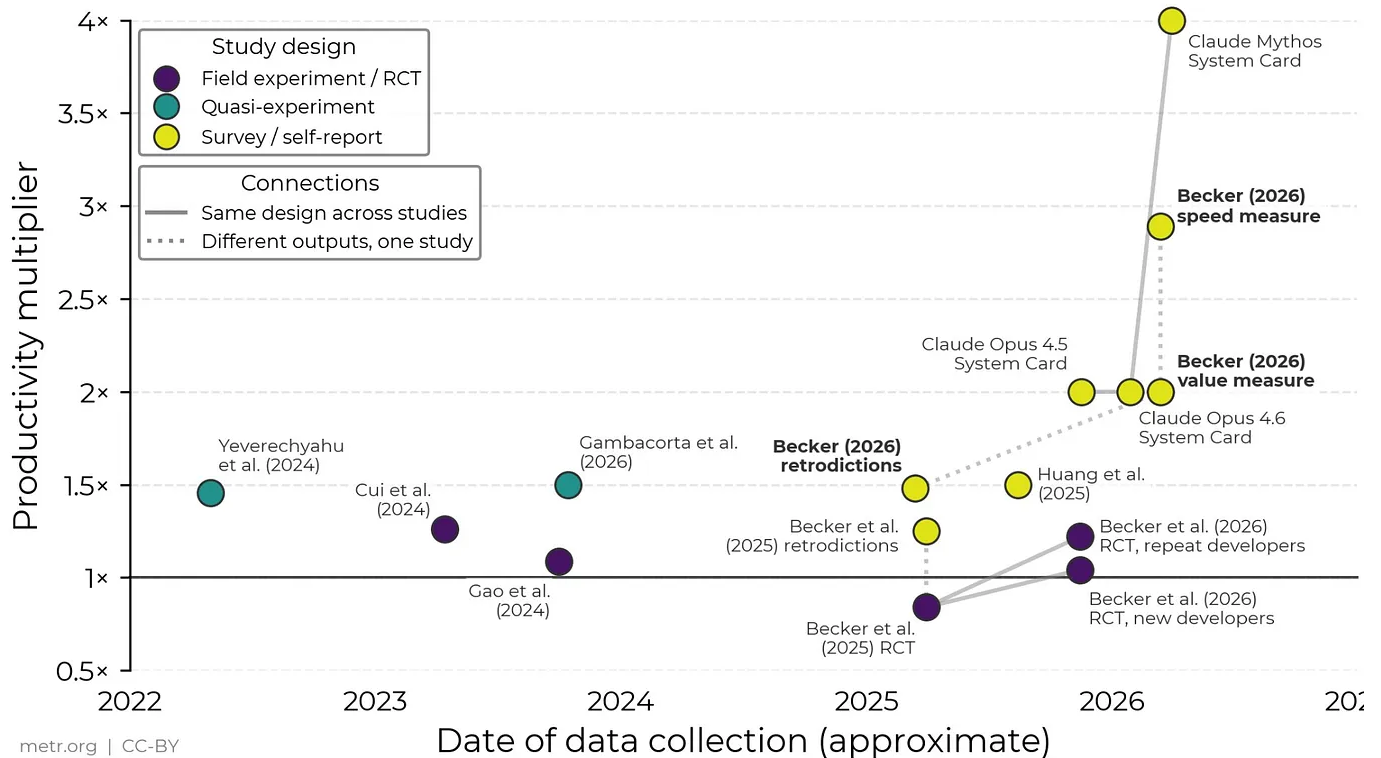
What's more, despite a handful of infamous survey results suggesting that most companies get zero return or negative productivity from AI—[that MIT study!](#) [that METR study!](#)—the best recent data suggests that software engineers are reporting

skyrocketing productivity gains from the latest coding agents. (Randomized control trials have not yet demonstrated the same level of productivity.)

Estimates of AI's impact on engineering productivity have been varied, but recent self-reports are very high

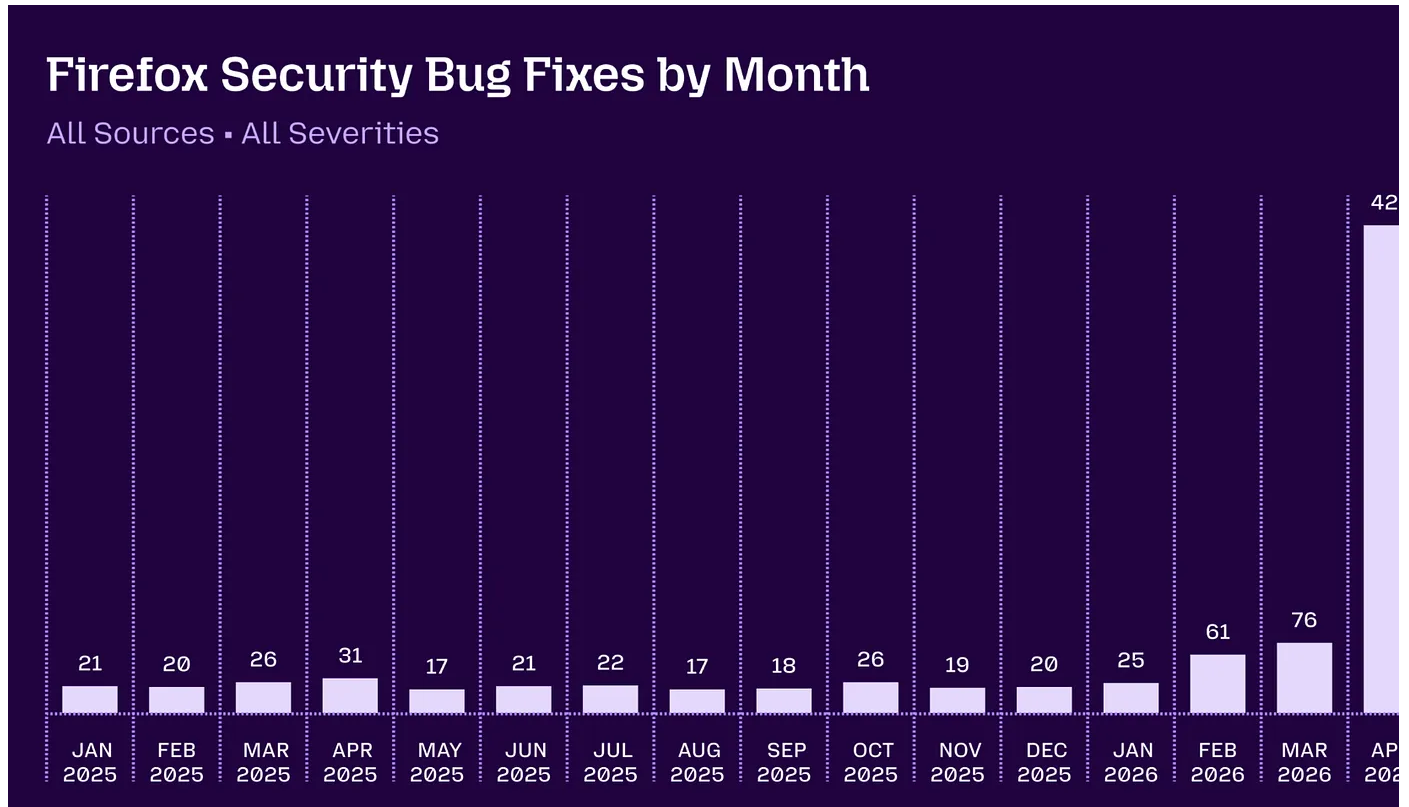


Restricted to studies most relevant to technical engineering and research work at major AI companies. The quantity being estimated varies substantially across studies — outcomes include task completion time, total PRs, and self-reported multipliers; statistics include medians, arithmetic means, and geometric means; populations vary by experience with programming and AI tools in particular.



Just as it was unadvisable to predict the future of COVID by scrutinizing January 2020 data, it's unadvisable to ignore the fact that, because AI capabilities continue to scale, the business opportunities of 2027 and 2028 might be very different from today's headlines. Cybersecurity is a multi-hundred-billion dollar global business, and the latest models from Anthropic and OpenAI seem remarkable at patching cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Don't take it from me. "Just a few months ago, AI-generated security bug reports to open source projects were mostly known for being unwanted slop," the Mozilla developer team [wrote](#) in a May post. But "it is difficult to overstate how much this dynamic changed" since the rollout of Claude Mythos, as both the models got more capable and coders got better at harnessing model capabilities—"steering the

scaling them, and stacking them to generate large amounts of signal and filter out the noise.” The upshot: the Firefox security team fixed more bugs in April using Mytho (423) than in the previous 15 months combined (420).



The bear case for AI in three points: There are at least three strong reasons to worry whether AI’s extraordinary last six months are indicative of sustainable future growth. While I’ve said on several occasions that I’m much less worried about a bubble in 2026 than I was in 2025, this is my attempt to ventriloquize the smartest case for skepticism.

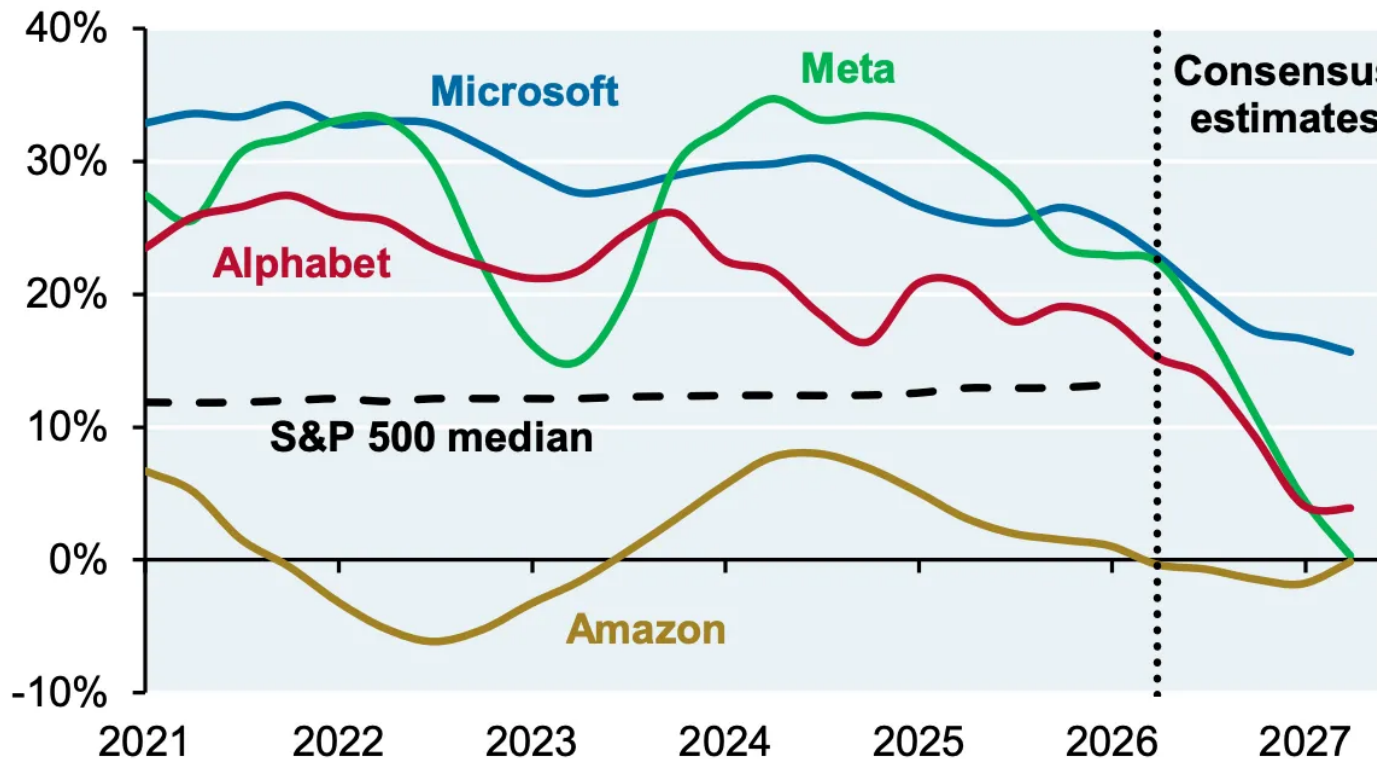
1. **What if the revenue boom isn’t real?** There are several reasons to worry that token usage is massively inflated at the moment. Many workers at major companies, [including Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft](#), are reportedly using AI for unnecessary tasks to inflate their internal usage scores. Other AI companies are buying billions of Anthropic’s tokens to power their own products, and [rival labs have been caught using fraudulent accounts](#) to “distill” Claude into their own competing models. Companies like Cursor, an AI code editor, are reportedly

operating at hugely [negative gross margins](#) by reselling tokens at a loss in order to keep growing. Anthropic, for its part, [reportedly prices Claude Code at roughly cheaper per token](#) than what Cursor pays to resell those same tokens, which seems like a deliberate effort to squeeze out a large reseller. Put it all together, the skeptics say, and when you see Anthropic with [\\$40 billion in annual run-rate revenue](#), you have to remember that a meaningful chunk of that growth might depend on a chain of VC subsidies and corporate warfare that can't continue indefinitely.

- 2. Could a free cash flow crunch stop the infrastructure boom?** In the last three years, the software giants that are funding the AI buildout have started to look less like asset-light goliaths with ginormous operating income and more like old-fashioned industrial conglomerates with heavy capex requirements and thinner profit margins. The hyperscalers are seeing their free cash flow plummet, with consensus estimates pointing to free cash flow margins at Meta, Microsoft, and Alphabet all falling below the S&P 500 median some time around the end of this year. At some point, investors are going to ask for a sign that these companies have a path toward hundreds of billions (or trillions) of dollars of revenue to make up for the hundreds of billions (or trillions) of dollars they're putting into AI.

Hyperscaler free cash flow margins (net of capex)

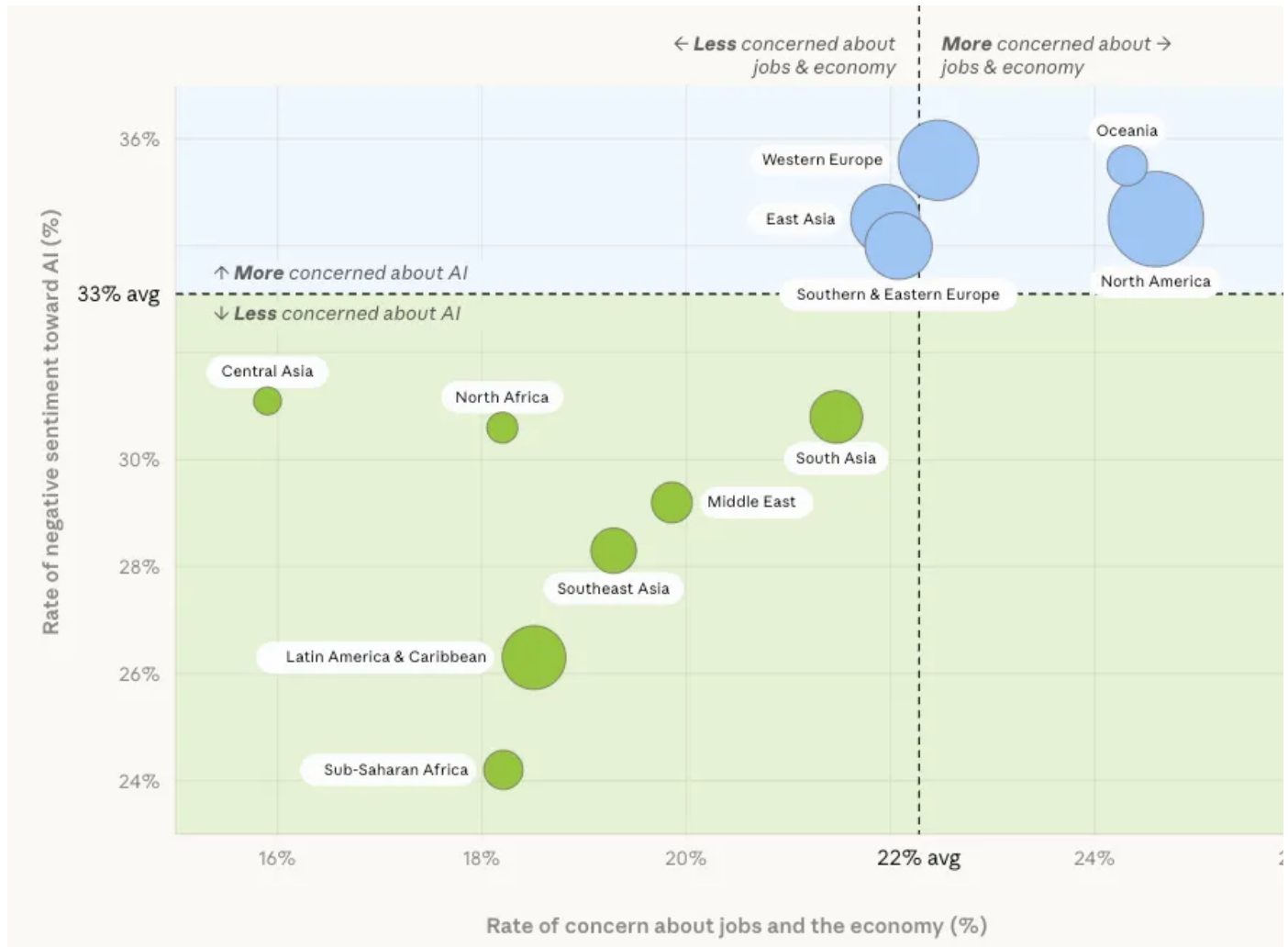
Percent, trailing 12 months



Source: Bloomberg, JPMAM, April 30, 2026

3. What if shortages and politics stop AI in its tracks? Even if the financial picture holds, there's a physical-world problem of securing all that compute to run training and inference for AI. The data center buildout that's necessary to train and run the most advanced AI models faces two challenges. The first is supply: Half of US data centers planned for 2026 are expected to be delayed or canceled mostly because of [a shortage of electrical equipment](#), such as transformers and batteries. The second is politics and popular sentiment: AI populism is on the rise across the country, and Americans have some of the highest negative sentiment toward AI of any country [surveyed by Anthropic](#). In fact, there is a troublingly linear relationship between AI exposure and negative sentiment toward AI as you look around the world. The AI industry has relied on government intervention to sustain its growth; for example, the AI chips industry depends on tens of billions of dollars of tariff exemptions, and Nvidia has succeeded in getting the Trump

administration to let them sell chips to China. A populist crackdown on AI could have a material impact on the technology's growth.



MEGATREND #4: ECONOMICS The Peter Pan Economy

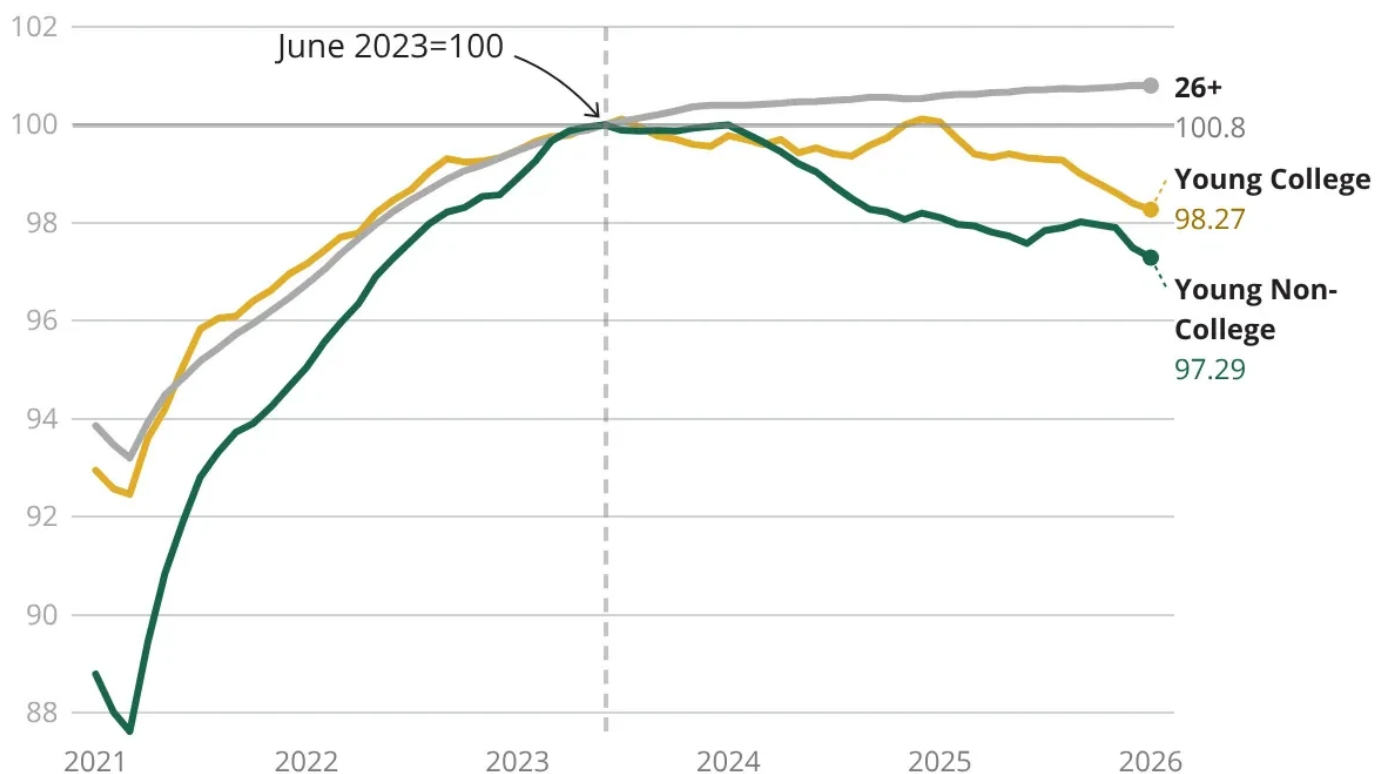
If it seems like young people are mired in an extended adolescence, it might be because the 2020s economy hasn't made it easy for them to grow up. This has been [the Tragic Twenties](#) with one crisis after another: the pandemic, inflation, rising interest rates, and a flurry of existential AI worries. Today young people are grappling with a declining hiring rate, lower employment levels, higher housing costs, unaffordable cities, a Boomer Bottleneck in the la

force, and overwhelming support for older Americans over younger Americans at the federal level and throughout the economy.

1. **It's a rough time to get hired.** For the last few years, the overall hiring rate has steadily declined. According to analysis by the Economic Innovation Group, the employment rate for young workers with and without a college degree has declined since the summer of 2023.

Figure 4: Young Worker Employment Rate, Excluding Enrolled

Excludes Those Attending High School or College



"26+" includes individuals 26 to 65 years old not in the armed forces. "Young College" includes individuals 22 to 25 years old with a BA or higher. "Young Non-College" includes individuals 22 to 25 years old with less than a BA. All series exclude those attending high school or college. All series are 12 month moving average, t-11 to t, indexed to equal 100 in June, 2023. The employment rate is computed as $(e)/(e + u + nil)$, where "e" is the count of employed individuals and "u" is the count of unemployed individuals, and "nil" is the count of individuals not in the labor force.

Source: IPUMS Current Population Survey, BLS

2. **It's a rough time to buy a house.** At the same time that hiring has slipped and employment rates have fallen, the cost of buying a new home has surged in the 2020s. Due to the surge in interest rates, the “penalty” for buying a home now versus already being a homeowner is higher than it's been in any period in the four decades.

The “new homeowner penalty” hit a 34-year high in 2024

Existing homeowners with a mortgage are paying near record-low housing costs as a proportion of their income, while costs for new homeowners continues to skyrocket

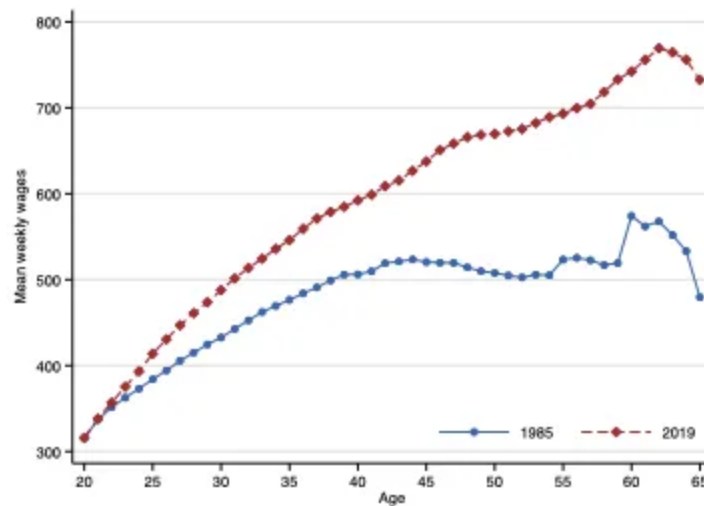


Source: ACS 1-year Monthly Homeownership Costs, 2000-2024 (includes mortgage, property insurance, taxes, utilities, and fees). 1990 decennial census. Household income.



3. **There's a Boomer bottleneck at the office.** Even after they get hired, many young people feel like they struggle to move up at their company, as older workers are retiring later and hanging onto jobs longer. In the 2024 paper [“Countries for Old Men,”](#) economists found that the pay gap between younger and older workers has

increased in older and larger firms. Think of it like a game of musical chairs: When companies don't grow quickly, and when Boomers are sitting in all the upper-level management positions, it makes it harder for young people to move through the company, and this can result in suppressed wage growth for Millennials and Gen Z.



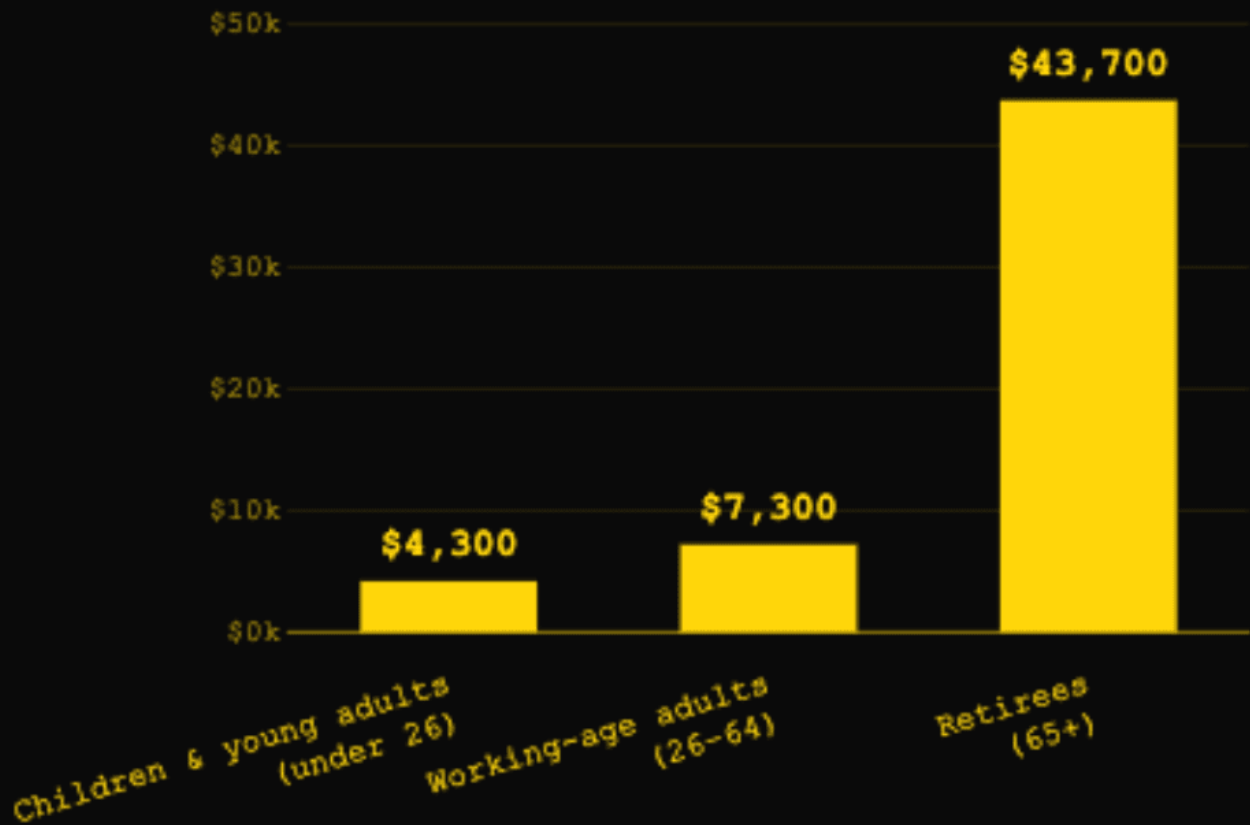
Panel B: Age profiles for mean weekly wages

4. **Childless cities are spreading.** Fertility has been declining in the U.S. for decades. But it's only in the last few years that we've seen the acceleration of what I've called ["the childless city."](#) Whereas the urbanist Sam Bass Warner once wrote that the "basic custom" of the American city was a "commitment to familialism," today's cities are increasingly inhospitable to children. Between 2010 and 2024, according to [an Economist analysis of Census Bureau data](#), the total population aged under 18 declined by 12% in New York City, 22% in Chicago, and 23% in Los Angeles. There are many reasons why today's young people are having fewer children, and one of those reasons is that millions of Americans in their child-bearing years like to live in cities that have a tendency to repel the very thought of family formation, whether it's because of costs, home sizes, safety fears, all three or something else.

5. **Old people's spending drives the economy, Part I.** While young people are struggling, federal spending is not well set up to ease their troubles. In fact, national spending on seniors is roughly ten times higher than average spending on children and young adults. An [analysis by the Penn Wharton Budget Model](#) finds that average annual federal spending on seniors is roughly \$43,000, compared to about \$4,300 for children and young adults.

Federal spending per person, by age group

FY2025, dollars per capita



Source: FY2025 federal outlays, age-assignable spending

\$7.01T total outlays

4. **Old people's spending drives the economy, Part II.** I once joked to my friend Conor Sen that the US economy was like a Friday night church service: *All old people plus an attempt to summon the divine*. What I meant was that the labor market seemed overwhelmingly driven by health care spending on old people while business investment seemed entirely driven by artificial intelligence spending.

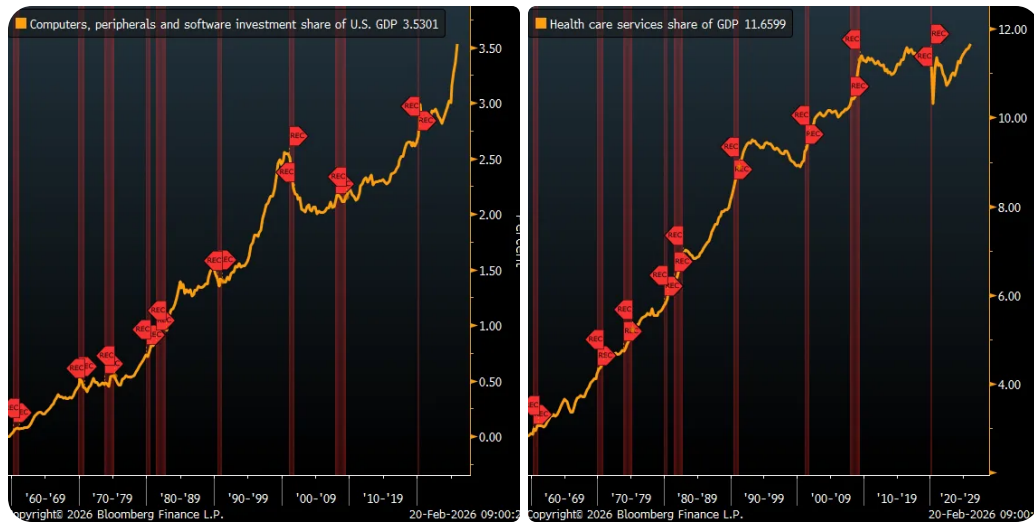
The Bloomberg writer Matthew Boesler makes this point even more concrete. While business investment in “computers, peripheral equipment and software” has increased to a record-high share of GDP, health care services spending has also reached a record high.



Matthew B
@boes_



Two charts showing how imbalanced the U.S. economy is becoming, from today's data: Business investment in computers, peripheral equipment and software on one hand—and health care services spending on the other—both rose to a record as a share of GDP ([bloomberg.com/news/articles/...](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/...))



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MEGATREND #5: POLITICS

The Paradox of Global Violence

The news media's negativity bias dictates that when crime spikes, everybody hears about it constantly; but when crime rates decline, practically nobody hears about it. So let's shout it from the rooftops: America is becoming historically peaceful! Ironically, this is happening a

the same time that global violence is rising, with a new technological revolution breaking in the mainstream.

1. **America (and much of the west) is experiencing an amazing peace wave.** The murder rate has plummeted to its lowest level in 60 years. As Jeff Asher [points](#) the number of murders in America's largest cities has declined by 70 to 90 percent since their most violent years. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, murders have declined 70 percent or more in just the last four years!

Murders Through April

Comparing 2026 to peak years

City	2026 through April	Peak through April	Peak Year	% Chg
New York City	76	709	1990	-89.3%
Washington, DC	27	165	1989	-83.6%
New Orleans	26	153	1994	-83.0%
Detroit	42	236	1974	-82.2%
Los Angeles	67	336	1993	-80.1%
Philadelphia	39	170	2021	-77.1%
Baltimore	33	116	2022	-71.6%

SOURCE: FBI, AGENCY DATA



I love this statistic from Kevin A. Bryan: Toronto, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore are all on pace for the lowest murder rate in their respective city histories. Canada, too, has seen violence plummet.



Kevin A. Bryan
@Afinetheorem



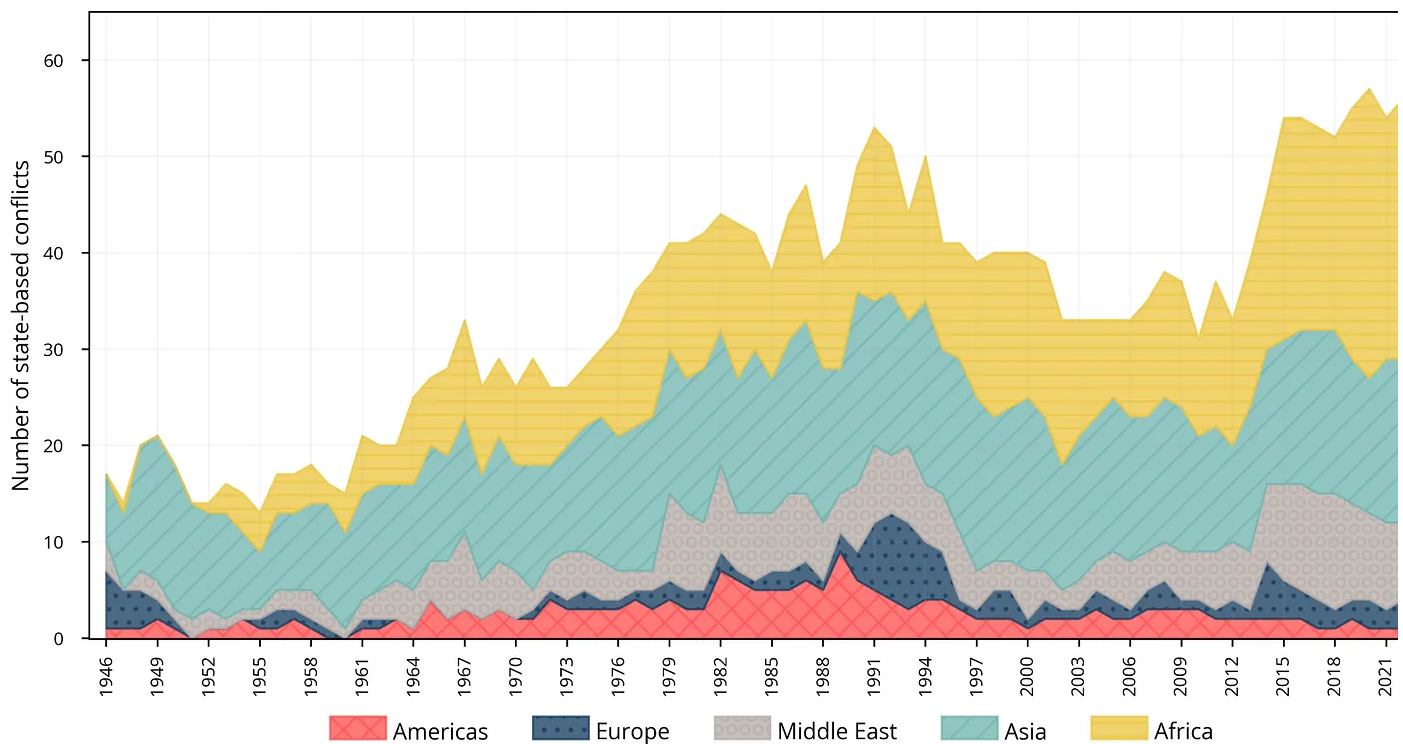
Continuing good news: 1/3 of the way through 2026, homicides still collapsing. Toronto had had *six*. Boston has had *three*. NYC down 27% from 2025. Philadelphia down 38%. Baltimore down 10%. Each on pace for literally the lowest murder rate of all time in their city. 1/3

5:43 PM · May 4, 2026 · 153K Views

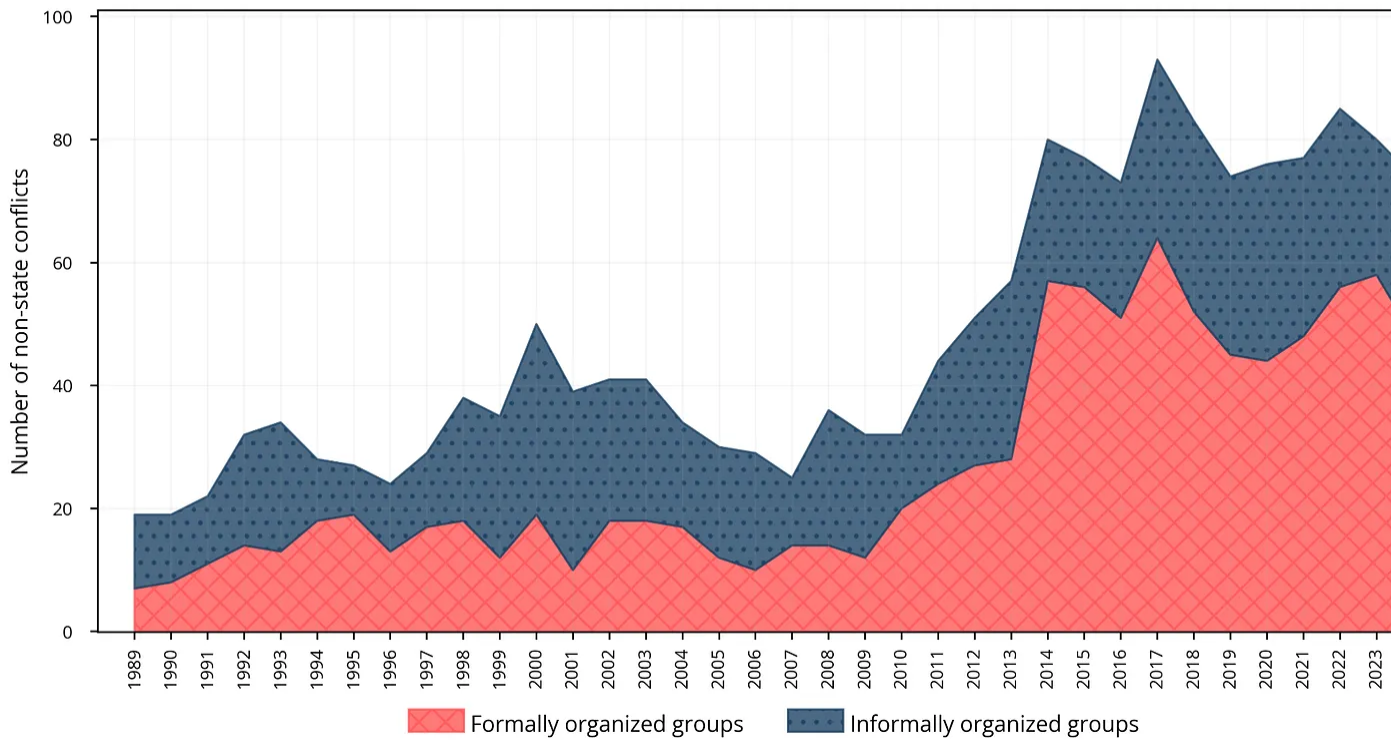
17 Replies · 93 Reposts · 1.26K Likes

2. **But the rest of the world is still awash in war.** According to analysis by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, the number of state-based and non-state conflicts is at or near a 70-year high. It's not just the wars that fill the front pages and homepages of American news, such as Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran. Post-Arab-Spring instability has spread across the Middle East and North Africa. The cartelization of Latin American violence has produced war-level casualties in the last few years. And ongoing warfare continues to roil Sudan and the Sahel in Africa.

State-based conflicts by region (1946-2024)



Non-state conflicts by organizational level of the warring sides (1989-2024)



Meanwhile, global warfare is being transformed by drone technology. In the Iran W drones allowed Iran to punish its Arab neighbors and terrorize shipping in the Stra of Hormuz, while in Eastern Europe, the *New York Times* [reports](#) that Russia “has ye solve the fundamental problem of how to make big advances on a battlefield saturat with drones.” The *Times* continues:

The days of sending masses of troops charging through front lines in armored vehicles are mostly over. Instead, the contest between Kyiv and Moscow is largel one of developing better drones, and better defenses against them. On certain pa of the front, Ukraine has gained the upper hand in recent months with rapid advancements in technology, production, and tactics. But Russia is working furiously to catch up, building out a bigger drone force after rolling out a succes elite drone unit known as Rubicon.

In theory, drones can both extend wars (they blow things up) and preclude wars (the can prevent attacks, if a state-level aggressor fears the counterpunch from a swarm

autonomous weapons along the border). It would be careless and premature to confidently predict that universal drones will do for small-scale conflict what nuclear weapons have done for large-scale conflict between major powers—that is, raise the penalty for offensive engagement so high that current borders are, more or less, peacefully respected. But it will be interesting to watch if autonomous death machines, which are now widely used within war, might progress to the point that they are so feared that they prevent wars, as well.

Megatrend #6: MEDIA Quantity Is Eating Quality

Large language models are talented at manipulating information to make “media”—paragraphs, articles, photographs, PowerPoints, video, code. As a result, today’s media consumers (and, especially, media gatekeepers, including at academic journals and publishing houses) should be on guard for a future in which there is not only more stuff but also more bad stuff. It’s not that all media touched by a large language model is bad, but rather that because it’s so much easier to make more things as opposed to good things, we should be prepared for a near future in which certain industries are overrun by quantity rather than quality.

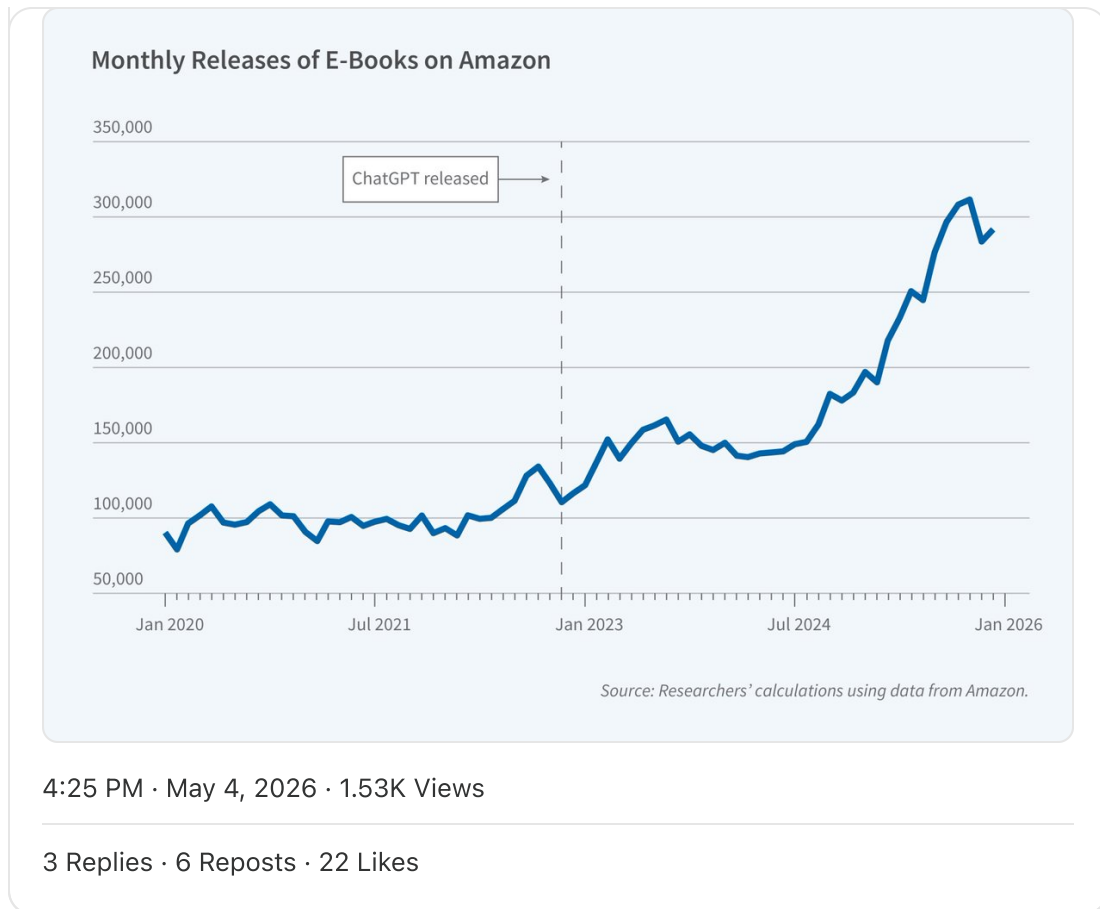
The number of monthly e-book releases on Amazon curiously doubled after ChatGPT was released. I am guessing that most of them will not be remembered as literature significant part because most of them won’t be remembered at all, on account of that they were written by GPT 4.



John Arnold
@johnarnold



hahahahaha



In the 2026 paper [“More Versus Better: Artificial Intelligence, Incentives, and the Emerging Crisis in Peer Review”](#), researchers analyzed paper submissions to a major management journal to track the rise of LLMs. They found that submissions skyrocketed by 50 percent, with the increase driven entirely by papers that were deemed at least half-written by AI. (Papers estimated to be less than 15 percent written by AI have actually declined.) As the writer and professor Ethan Mollick said, “AI can be used to do better science or it can be used to just do more stuff. The danger is that ‘more [stuff]’ is winning.”

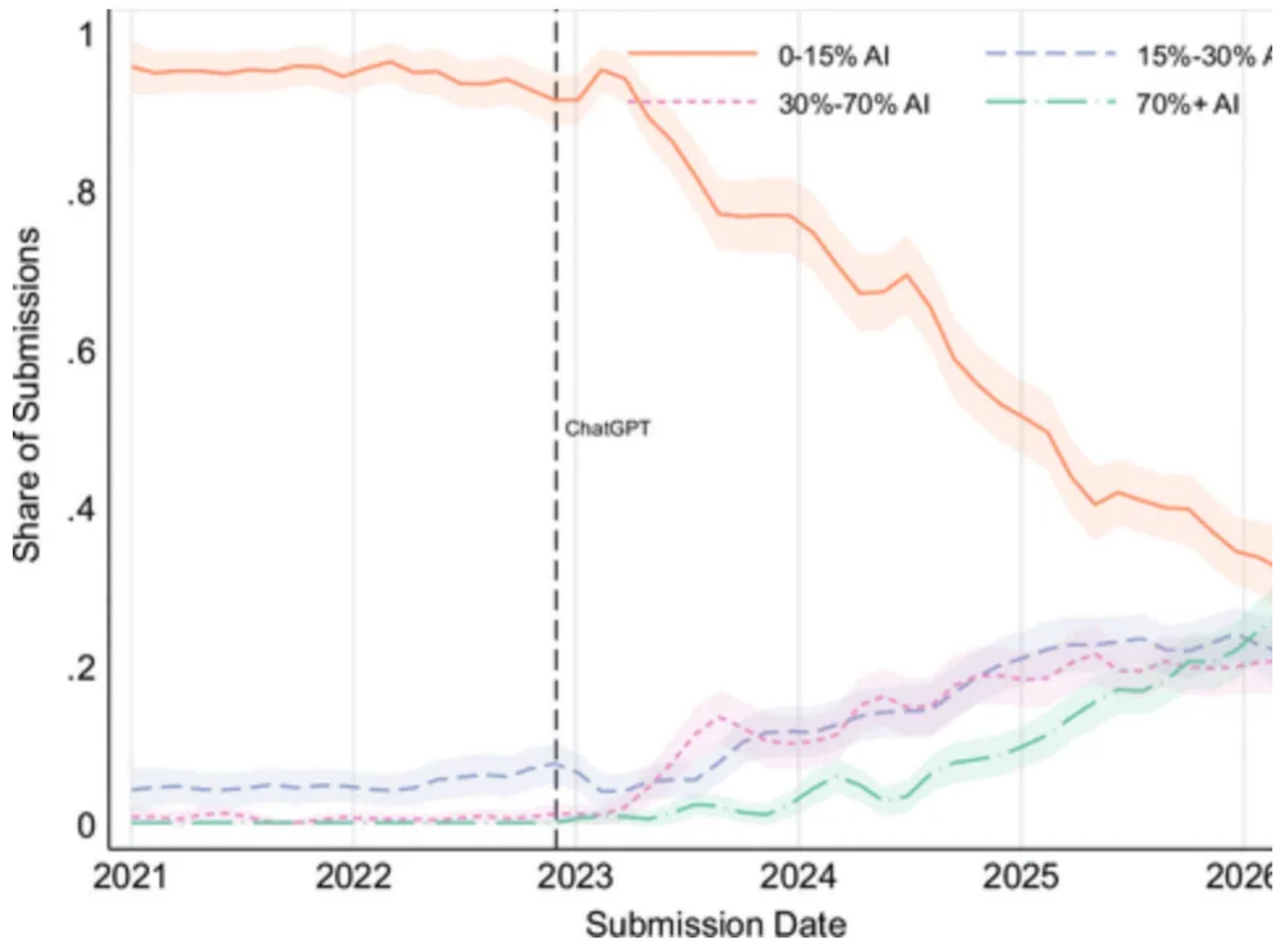
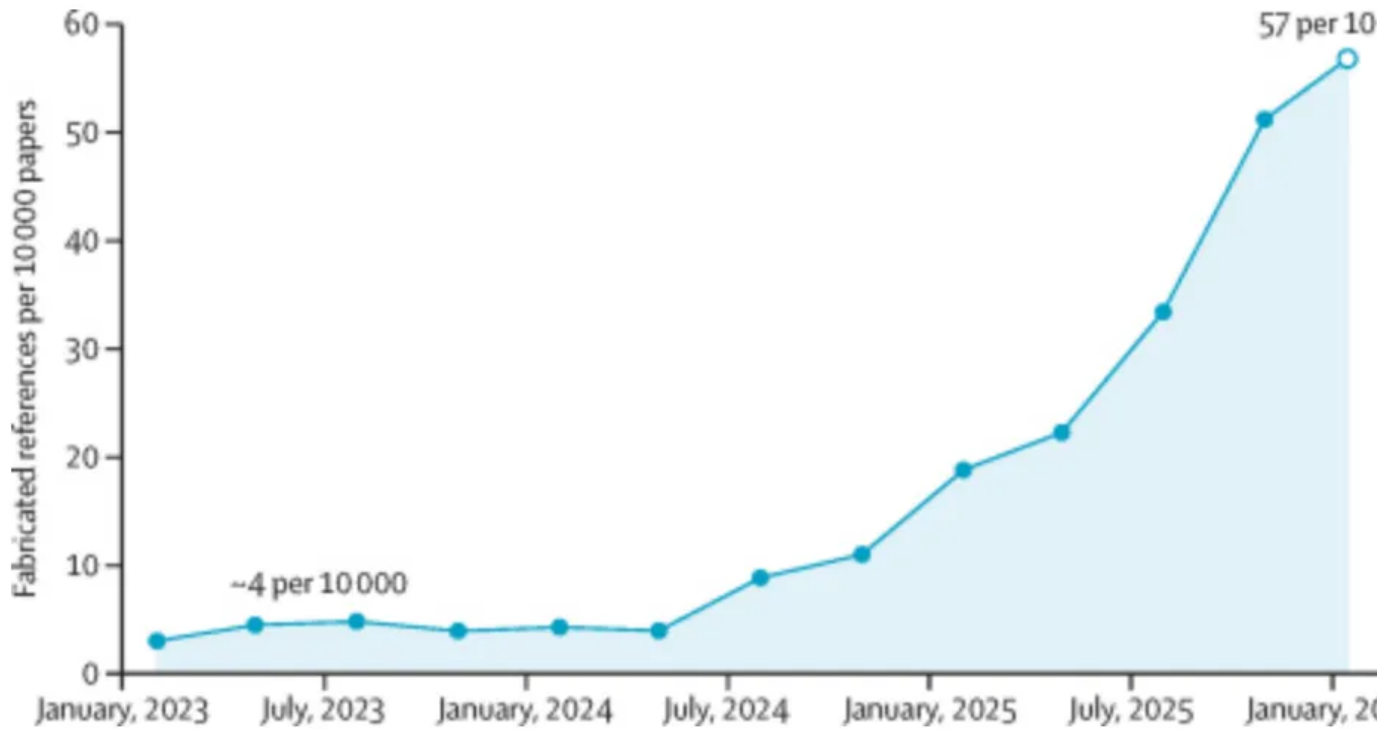
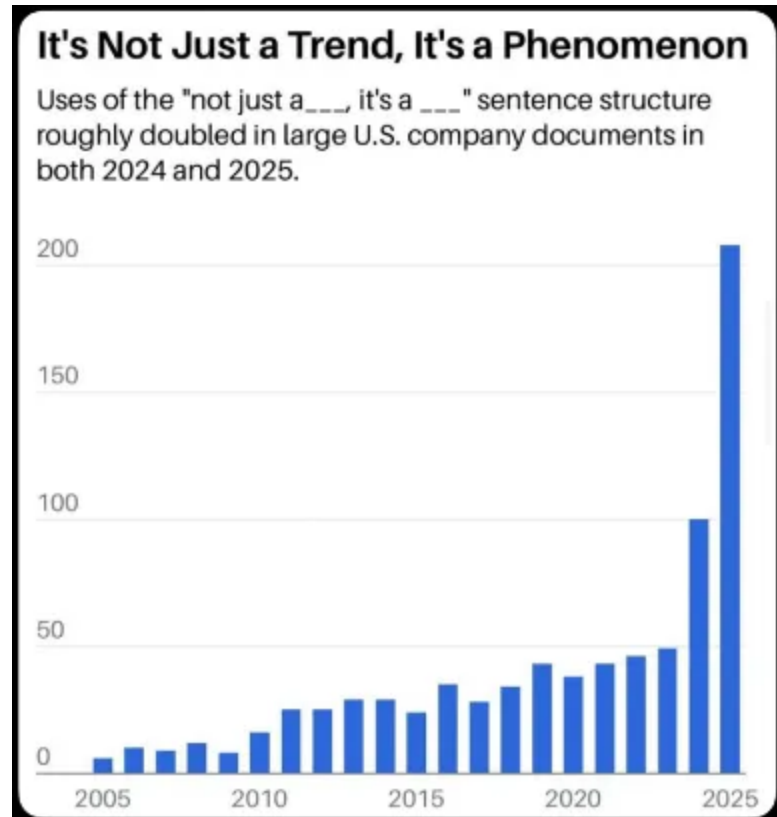


Figure 3. Trends in AI Use Categories over Time

And it's not just more stuff; it's worse stuff. Between 2023 and 2026, the frequency of made-up references in scientific literature increased by a factor of 12, according to [analysis published earlier this year](#). "The sharp inflection in mid-2024 coincides with the expected publication lag following widespread LLM adoption," the researchers said.



AI isn't just writing student essays, code, and science papers; it's writing corporate statements, too, as evidenced by the frequency of "it's not X; it's Y" sentence construction that you can also find ... at the beginning of the sentence that you're reading.



This trend is far from the most important on this list. It might even be the least important, on its own. But it brings us back to Jacques Ellul's observation in the first megatrend section above. Technology is not just a tool that we use; it is ... *oh god, I use it again* ... a tool that uses us.



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Sharon Mudgett 🌸 Sharon Mudgett 5d Edited

They tried the "spending too much on old people" argument in the 1980s. I bought it and shared that argument. Back in the day, you could talk politics at family gatherings. My grandmother told me I would like Social Security and Medicare when I got old. She was right. I do like it. Now, I agree the disparity in spending between the two groups is concerning. That said I worked continuously for years paying into the system. The "handouts" I got were my public education and two weeks of unemployment insurance. I bet there are a lot of people like me who want their due and deserve

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ANU 🟢 WHAT'S ANU 4d Edited

This is great work, and very useful, but I'm curious if you're aware of foresight methodology? These lean more towards "drivers." Drivers of change: social, political, economic, human, environmental factors of longterm impact that are driving the rise of cultural trends.

The anti-social century is definitely a megatrend. The drivers are the why (social media, covid). The macro trends are the percolating interest in offline connection and craving for community. The microtrend is "run clubs."

But GLP-1, for instance, is a driver. The megatrend would be health consciousness. The macro is optimization. The microtrend is looksmaxxing.

AI is a driver. etc.

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