



Demographic change

People power



原文阅读



我的笔记

It is not quite destiny, but demography is too powerful for politicians to control.

One clue to the character of a government comes from listening to what political leaders say about the national birth rate. Authoritarians such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin tend to complain about it, and urge women to have more (or, occasionally, fewer) babies. Outright dictators like Josef Stalin and Nicolae Ceausescu believed they could actually alter it. Grumbling resignation, or silence, is a mark of liberal democracy.

In truth, governments can do little to change people' s minds

about how many children to have. Even China' s one-child policy, introduced in 1979, probably only accelerated a drop in the birth rate that would have happened anyway. Two new books portray demographic change as an inexorable force that, rather than bending to leaders' whims, steamrolls politicians and can change the course of history. They also suggest that what one of them calls "the great fairground ride of world population change" is running out of steam.

Many people have heard of Thomas Malthus, the 18th-century English cleric who predicted that human populations would grow faster than food production, leading to calamity. The American demographer Warren Thompson is less famous. But Thompson' s theory of demographic transition, which he outlined in 1929, has held up much better than Malthus' s prognostications. To begin with, Thompson observed, a country has a high birth rate and a high death rate. As farming and health care improve, mortality falls. The birth rate stays high for a while, then it begins to drop, too.

Countries that have gone through this demographic

transition have lower birth rates and lower death rates than they began with—and many more people.

During the journey, countries acquire and then shed particular strengths and frailties, owing to the changing size and shape of the population. A country in the second stage, with a high birth rate and a low death rate, is young and fast-growing. When the birth rate falls, too, the country enters a wonderful spell. With fewer children relative to the adult population, but still not many retirees to look after, it becomes a nation of able-bodied workers. Then it grows old.

Paul Morland's "The Human Tide" is mostly about how this process has played out in Europe and Asia. Britain went first, to its great advantage. In the late 16th century England had 4m inhabitants—half as many as Spain, which helps explain why the prospect of a Spanish invasion was so terrifying. England's population doubled by the early 19th century, then went bonkers. By 1901 England not only had 30m inhabitants; it had also disgorged many people across North America, Australasia and Africa. The country dominated

partly through sheer weight of numbers.

The populations of Germany, Japan and Russia exploded a few decades later, causing others to worry (with some justification) that they too would try to grab more territory. Their swelling, young populations gave them clout at a time when war was largely a matter of flinging bodies at the enemy. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were an era of pro-natalism, and of fear that other countries were reproducing faster than one's own. As a British newspaper put it in 1903: "The full nursery spells national and race dominance."

That was never quite right, and seems even less true in the modern world of cruise missiles, international trade and soft power. But Mr. Morland argues that demography continues to shape events. The Middle East, he writes, is unstable partly because it has so many young people. Japan no longer seems destined to be "number one", as a book published in 1979 had it, because it has so few. Demography can heighten paranoia and resentment within countries, when

one national or ethnic group appears to reproduce faster than another. The former Yugoslavia, where Serbs moved to a low birth rate before Bosnian Muslims or Kosovan Albanians, is “an exemplary case of the destabilising impact of uneven demographic transition”.

In the final stage of that transition, the birth rate falls below the death rate. That leads to population decline unless countries accept lots of immigrants. In “Empty Planet”, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson maintain that this is the fate of the entire world. As countries grow richer and more urban, and as more girls go to school, children cease to be economic assets. People begin to have babies not because they need them, or because village elders bully them into parenthood, but because they enjoy bringing them up. That desire can be satisfied with just one or two.

Mr Bricker and Mr Ibbitson regard a sub-replacement fertility rate (in which every woman has fewer than 2.1 children on average) as Europe’s “natural state”. They call the post-war baby boom a blip. Their book argues that even baby-rich

sub-Saharan Africa will gravitate towards the one- or two-child norm faster than the sedate expectations of un demographers. This may be right. The demographic transition seems to be accelerating: Asia and Latin America went through it more quickly than Europe. To mangle a phrase of Francis Fukuyama's, the world could be heading for the end of demography and (eventually) the last man.

If so, it will reduce pressure on Earth's resources. But perhaps the cheers should be muted. Shrinking populations are hard to manage: towns must be replanned and pensions trimmed. And many people in the rich world do not actually desire one or two children. Fully 41% of Americans think the ideal number is three or more. Most families fall short because relationships prove too fragile, houses too expensive, bosses too inflexible and conception too difficult. Behind that supposedly "natural" rate lies much disappointment.

As more and more countries go through the demographic transition, something else is becoming clear. The challenges

and pitfalls of population change can be handled more or less adeptly. A bulge of young adults may have been a curse in the Arab world, but it was a blessing in China. Countries can adapt to an ageing population—by welcoming more immigrants and making it easier for mothers to do paid work—or they can stick their collective heads in the sand. Demography is a mighty force. It is not quite destiny.



我的总结



Childhood

The generation game



原文阅读



我的笔记

Childhood has changed out of all recognition, says Barbara Beck. What does that mean for children, parents and society at large?

“When i was a kid, we were out and about all the time, playing with our friends, in and out of each other’s houses, sandwich in pocket, making our own entertainment. Our parents hardly saw us from morning to night. We didn’t have much stuff, but we came and went as we liked and had lots of adventures.” This is roughly what you will hear if you ask

anyone over 30 about their childhood in a rich country. The adventures were usually of a homely kind, more Winnie the Pooh than Star Wars, but the freedom and the companionship were real.

Today such children will spend most of their time indoors, often with adults rather than with siblings or friends, be supervised more closely, be driven everywhere rather than walk or cycle, take part in many more organised activities and, probably for several hours every day, engage with a screen of some kind. All this is done with the best of intentions. Parents want to protect their offspring from traffic, crime and other hazards in what they see as a more dangerous world, and to give them every opportunity to flourish.

And indeed in many ways children are better off than they were a generation or two ago. Child mortality rates even in rich countries are still dropping. Fewer kids suffer neglect or go hungry. They generally get more attention and support from their parents, and many governments are offering extra

help to very young children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As adolescents, fewer become delinquents, take up smoking and drinking or become teenage parents. And more of them finish secondary school and go on to higher education.

The children themselves seem fairly happy with their lot. In a survey across the oecd in 2015, 15-year-olds were asked to rate their satisfaction with their life on a scale from zero to ten. The average score was 7.3, with Finnish kids the sunniest, at nearly 7.9, and Turkish ones the gloomiest, at 6.1. Boys were happier than girls, and children from affluent families scored higher than the rest.

That is not surprising. Prosperous parents these days, especially in America, invest an unprecedented amount of time and money in their children to ensure that they will do at least as well as the parents themselves have done, and preferably better. Those endless rounds of extra tutoring, music lessons, sports sessions and educational visits, together with lively discussions at home about every subject

under the sun, have proved highly effective at securing the good grades and social graces that will open the doors to top universities and well-paid jobs.

Working-class parents in America, for their part, lack the wherewithal to engage in such intensive parenting. As a result, social divisions from one generation to the next are set to widen. Not so long ago the “American dream” held out the prospect that everyone, however humble their background, could succeed if they tried hard enough. But a recent report by the World Bank showed that intergenerational social mobility (the chance that the next generation will end up in a different social class from the previous one) in the land of dreams is now among the lowest in all rich countries. And that is before many of the social effects of the new parenting gap have had time to show up yet.

Tell me the ways

This special report will explain what has led to these momentous changes in childhood in America and other rich countries, as well as in middle-income China. They range

from broad social and demographic trends such as urbanisation, changes in family structure and the large-scale move of women into the labour force in recent decades to a shifting emphasis in policy on the early years and the march of digital technology.

Start with the physical environment in which children are growing up. In rich countries the overwhelming majority now lead urban lives. Almost 80% of people live in cities, which have many advantages, including better opportunities for work, education, culture and leisure. But these often come at a cost: expensive housing, overcrowding, lack of green space, heavy traffic, high air pollution and a sense of living among strangers rather than in a close-knit community. This has caused a perception of growing danger, even though crime in Western countries in the past few decades has declined, so statistically the average child is actually safer.

Even more important, the domestic environment for most children has changed profoundly. Families have become smaller, and women bear children far later than they did only

a couple of generations ago. In the vast majority of rich countries the average number of children a woman will have is now well below the replacement level of 2.1. Households with just one child have become commonplace in Europe and the more prosperous parts of Asia, including China. That means each child has more time, money and energy invested in it, but misses out on the hustle and bustle of a larger household.

Families have also become far more fluid. Rates of marriage have declined steeply, and divorce has become widespread. Many couples in America and Europe now cohabit rather than marry, and a large and growing proportion of children are born out of wedlock. Far more of them, too, are being brought up by lone parents, overwhelmingly mothers, or end up in patchwork families created by new sets of relationships. Again, this happens far more often at the bottom of the social scale than at the top.

At the same time the number of women going out to work has risen steeply, though in recent years the trend has

slowed. The post-second-world-war model of the nuclear family with a breadwinner husband, a homemaker wife and several children has become atypical. In America the share of women of working age in the labour force has risen from 42% in 1960 to 68% in 2017. To a greater or lesser extent the same has happened in other rich countries. Mothers now mostly return to work within a year or so of giving birth, not five or ten years later. In the absence of a handy grandmother, the child, even at a young age, will probably be looked after outside the home during the working week.

The first few years of a child's life are now receiving more attention as new evidence has emerged about its vital importance in the development of the brain. James Heckman, a Nobel prize-winning American economist, has suggested that early investment in a range of measures from high-quality child care to support programmes for parents offers excellent returns, far better than remedial interventions later in life.

Governments in many countries have started to increase the

number of public child-care and kindergarten places to supplement private provision, both to encourage more women to take paid jobs and to promote the development of young children from less privileged backgrounds. This report will look at the wide variety of early-years care on offer in different countries (ranging from plentiful and relatively cheap in the Nordics to scarce and often eye-wateringly expensive in the Anglo-Saxon countries, with most of the rest of Europe somewhere in between), and try to assess what difference it makes. In East Asia this is the first rung of a fiercely competitive educational ladder.

The report will also consider the effect on children of an array of screen-based devices, from televisions to smartphones, offering a feast of passive entertainment, interactive computer games and the opportunity to connect with peers remotely. Not long ago children used to rile their parents by declaring they were bored, but now “being bored is something that never has to be tolerated for a moment”, writes Sherry Turkle of mit, an expert on digital culture. In rich countries the vast majority of 15-year-olds have their own

smartphone and spend several hours a day online. There are growing concerns that overuse might lead to addiction and mental illness, and that spending too much time sitting still in front of a screen will stop them from exercising and make them fat. The digital world also harbours new risks, including cyberbullying and sexting. But the first thing this report will explore is the new face of the institution still central to any child's life: the family.



我的总结



Politics and sentiment

Utopia of reason



原文阅读



我的笔记

A moral psychologist argues for setting aside feelings in favour of facts

IN an age of partisan divides it has become popular to assert that the wounds of the world would heal if only people made the effort to empathise more with each other. If only white police officers imagined how it feels to be a black man in America; if only black Americans understood the fears of the man in uniform; if only Europeans opposed to immigration walked a mile in the shoes of a Syrian refugee; if only tree-

hugging liberals knew the suffering of the working class.

Barack Obama warned of an empathy “deficit” in 2006, and did so again in his valedictory speech in January: “If our democracy is to work in this increasingly diverse nation,” he said, “each one of us must try to heed the advice of one of the great characters in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, ‘You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’”

It is a piece of generous, high-minded wisdom with which few would dare to disagree. But Paul Bloom, a psychologist at Yale University, does disagree. His new book, “Against Empathy”, makes the provocative argument that the world does not need more empathy; it needs less of it. People are bingeing on a sentiment that does not, on balance, make the world a better place. Empathy is “sugary soda, tempting and delicious and bad for us”. In its stead, Mr Bloom prescribes a nutritious diet of reason, compassion and self-control.

To be clear, Mr Bloom is not against kindness, love or general good will toward others. Nor does he have a problem with compassion, or with “cognitive” empathy—the ability to understand what someone else is feeling. His complaint is with empathy defined as feeling what someone else feels. Though philosophers at least as far back as Adam Smith have held it up as a virtue, Mr Bloom says it is a dubious moral guide. Empathy is biased: people tend to feel for those who look like themselves. It is limited in scope, often focusing attention on the one at the expense of the many, or on short-term rather than long-term consequences. It can incite hatred and violence—as when Donald Trump used the example of Kate Steinle, a woman murdered by an undocumented immigrant, to drum up anti-immigrant sentiment, or when Islamic State fighters point to instances of Islamophobia to encourage terrorist attacks. It is innumerate, blind to statistics and to the costs of saccharine indulgence.

Empathy can be strategically useful to get people to do the right thing, Mr Bloom acknowledges, and it is central to

relationships (though even here it must sometimes be overridden, as any parent who takes a toddler for vaccinations knows). But when it comes to policy, empathy is too slippery a tool. “It is because of empathy that citizens of a country can be transfixed by a girl stuck in a well and largely indifferent to climate change,” he writes. Better to rely on reason and cost-benefit analysis. As rational arguments for environmental protection or civil rights show, morality is possible without sentimental appeals to individual suffering. “We should aspire to a world in which a politician appealing to someone’s empathy would be seen in the same way as one appealing to people’s racist bias,” Mr Bloom writes. Racism, like anger or empathy, is a gut feeling; it might be motivating, but that kind of thinking ultimately does more harm than good.

That is a radical vision—and like many Utopias, one with potentially dystopian consequences. Unless humans evolve into something like the Vulcans from “Star Trek”, guided purely by logic, it is also unimaginable. Reason should inform governance, but people tend to be converted to a cause—

gay marriage, for instance—by emotion. Yet Mr Bloom's point is a good one: empathy is easily exploited, marshalled on either side of the aisle to create not a bridge but an impasse of feelings. In a time of post-truth politics, his book offers a much-needed call for facts.



我的总结



The Atlantic

Educated Americans Paved the Way for Divorce—Then Embraced Marriage



原文阅读



我的笔记

The countercultural revolution of the 1960s and '70s didn't get rid of the institution of marriage. It transformed it along class lines.

The countercultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s threw the American family into chaos. Young adults—educated liberals especially—revolted against the constraints of 1950s family life, engaging seriously with formerly fringe ideas like

open marriage and full-time employment for mothers. The old rules were in tatters, and nobody really knew what the new rules were. The likelihood that a given marriage would end in divorce doubled, to 50 percent, between 1965 and 1980.

Academics and pundits of the era generally assumed that the retreat from marriage would continue apace. Some of these analysts focused on culture, arguing that the pursuit of individualism, personal growth, and liberation from traditional constraints would reduce marriage rates and increase divorce rates. Others focused on economics, arguing that the breakdown of traditional gender roles would undermine the division-of-labor benefits of marriage, rendering the arrangement less sensible and less appealing. Cultural and economic analysts often clashed, but they tended to agree that educated liberals would pave the path away from marriage.

Almost nobody anticipated what happened next. After 1980, the likelihood of divorce among college-educated

Americans plummeted. Despite their loosened romantic and sexual values, educated liberals became more dedicated to family stability and intensive parenting. They did adopt the beliefs that marriage is optional and divorce is acceptable, but in their personal lives, they also sought to build and sustain an egalitarian, mutually fulfilling marriage. Today, educated liberals certainly value individuality and self-expression, but they tend to pursue family stability as a primary means of realizing those values.

Poorer, less-educated Americans, especially those without a high-school degree, have exhibited the opposite trend. Although they are no less likely to cohabit today than in previous eras, they are less likely to marry. When they do marry, they are less satisfied and more likely to divorce.

Social analysts have offered three major explanations for these marital difficulties. The first—that less-educated Americans have lost respect for the institution of marriage—is refuted by data. The psychologists Thomas Trail and Benjamin Karney conducted a definitive study asking

Americans to indicate their agreement with the statement that “a happy, healthy marriage is one of the most important things in life.” The agreement rates were virtually identical among Americans of all income and education levels—and quite high all around.

The second explanation is that poorer, less-educated Americans have a different, perhaps faulty, vision of how an ideal marriage should work. Given the marital turmoil that started in the 1960s, it was reasonable to hypothesize that different segments of American society would arrive at different visions of the optimal marriage, and that some of these visions might be more conducive to happiness and longevity than others. But here, too, the best evidence suggests that most Americans, across income and education levels, have adopted a new marital ideal in which spouses look to each other not only for love, but also for self-expression and personal growth. Most Americans agree, for example, that “understanding each other’s hopes and dreams” is essential for a successful marriage—much more important than having sufficient savings, sharing values, or

having good sex. Americans today want a partner who can help bring out their best self.

The third explanation is that building and sustaining a marriage that meets these lofty aspirations typically requires substantial investments of time, attention, patience, and responsiveness, investments that are harder for poorer, less-educated Americans to make. When life happens—when the car breaks down or a ligament snaps—they are at greater risk for unemployment, eviction, and destitution. They tend to have less control over their schedules and less money to pay a babysitter, so they may struggle to get regular time alone with their spouse. When they find such time, they are more likely to arrive to the conversation feeling emotionally depleted from other stressors, and the topics of discussion—how to stretch the money this month, how to wrangle child care with a demanding work schedule—are often thornier. The evidence is generally supportive of this third explanation: a major reason why the marriages of poorer, less-educated Americans are struggling is that economic realities make it difficult to live up to the new cultural ideal. This struggle is

leading many to opt out of marriage altogether and, for those who opt in, to make the path to marital success more challenging.

Education and income are not determinative, of course. Many people with college degrees and good salaries have terrible marriages, and many people without them have excellent marriages. But poorer, less-educated Americans will continue to struggle, on average, until their economic circumstances align better with the nation's new marital ideal.

Last Friday, the Labor Department reported that employers added over 300,000 jobs in December, and that wages have begun to rise at a good clip. If unemployment stays low and wages grow for the working class and poor, more Americans will be able to reap the benefits of our new marital ideal, enjoying a stable marriage that helps them pursue a meaningful life. If that transpires, educated liberals will indeed have paved the path—not to marital collapse, but to

a stable and more fulfilling approach to family life.



我的总结



The World in 2020

What will horrify your
grandchildren



原文阅读



我的笔记

What beliefs and behaviours, commonplace today, will be condemned by future generations?

Kids these days! Lamenting the loose morals and poor choices of the young is a timeless trope. They wear outrageous clothes! They listen to dreadful music! They have no respect for their elders! But inter-generational criticism is a two-way street: every generation also decries the unenlightened beliefs and behaviours of its elders. They owned slaves! They denied women the vote! They

criminalised homosexuality! The nature of social change means that some beliefs and behaviours that are common today are sure to be considered unacceptable within a few decades. So what aspects of the world in 2020 will horrify future generations?

The most obvious candidate is failing to do more to combat climate change. Future generations will surely ask why, given the abundance of evidence of environmental harm, so little was done about it for so long. Elderly people in the 2050s may find themselves hiding the digital evidence of long-haul air travel in their youth, and insisting that they only ever went on holiday by train. Even going on holiday at all may come to be seen as irresponsible and decadent at best, and immoral at worst. The ultimate form of ecotourism is to stay at home.

Another area where social attitudes are shifting rapidly, at least in the West, is eating meat. As meat substitutes such as the Impossible burger, which is made from plant-based protein but is indistinguishable from beef, improve and get cheaper, the case for giving up meat—in particular beef,

which has the largest environmental footprint—will get stronger. People who do not object to meat on ethical or animal-welfare grounds may opt to give it up for environmental reasons, particularly if substitutes allow them to have their steak and eat it. Consumption continues to rise in the developing world, but serving real meat at an Islington or Williamsburg dinner party may come to be considered beyond the pale.

But it's not all environmental. Widespread opposition to immigration may be seen as a moral failing in future. Workers become far more productive when they move from a poor country to a rich one; any loosening of restrictions on migration would help migrants and the countries they move to alike. People in rich countries claim to want to help the poor, but worry about the impact of migrants on jobs, security and social cohesion, prompting governments to limit migrant flows. Future generations may take a dim view of this.

Contemporary attitudes towards gender identity and

sexuality, which are evolving rapidly, will be considered hopelessly unenlightened at best, and deeply prejudiced at worst, as new family models and living arrangements emerge. Old assumptions (such as the notion that a child must have two biological parents) will increasingly be questioned as technology further separates sex from reproduction.

Our grandchildren will also decry the widespread overuse of antibiotics, which fosters the emergence of drug-resistant superbugs. As existing antibiotics become ineffective, even minor surgery could be life-threatening, as it was in the pre-antibiotic era. Future generations will ask why so little effort was made to develop new antibiotics, given that it takes at least a decade to bring a new drug to market.

Pretty much the only certainty about the future is that some aspects of life today will be condemned by generations to come. We should remember that before congratulating ourselves on being more enlightened than our ancestors.



我的总结



Gender budgeting

Making women count



原文阅读



我的笔记

An idea to help governments live up to their promises

IT IS easy to be cynical about government—and rarely does such cynicism go unrewarded. Take, for instance, policy towards women. Some politicians declare that they value women's unique role, which can be shorthand for keeping married women at home looking after the kids. Others create whole ministries devoted to policies for women, which can be a device for parking women's issues on the periphery of policy where they cannot do any harm. Still others, who may actually mean what they say, pass laws giving women equal opportunities to men. Yet decreeing an end to discrimination is very different from bringing it about.

Amid this tangle of evasion, half-promises and wishful thinking, some policymakers have embraced a technique called gender budgeting. It not only promises to do a lot of good for women, but carries a lesson for advocates of any cause: the way to a government's heart is through its pocket.

What counts is what's counted

At its simplest, gender budgeting sets out to quantify how policies affect women and men differently (see page 60). That seemingly trivial step converts exhortation about treating women fairly into the coin of government: costs and benefits, and investments and returns. You don't have to be a feminist to recognise, as Austria did, that the numbers show how lowering income tax on second earners will encourage women to join the labour force, boosting growth and tax revenues. Or that cuts to programmes designed to reduce domestic violence would be a false economy, because they would cost so much in medical treatment and lost workdays.

As well as identifying opportunities and errors, gender budgeting brings women's issues right to the heart of government, the ministry of finance. Governments routinely bat away sensible policies that lack a champion when the money is handed out. But if judgments about what makes sense for women (and the general good) are being formed within the finance ministry itself, then the battle is half-won.

Gender budgeting is not new. Feminist economists have

argued for it since the 1980s. A few countries, such as Australia and South Africa, took it up, though efforts waxed and waned with shifts in political leadership—it is seen as left-wing and anti-austerity. The Nordic countries were pioneers in the West; Sweden, with its self-declared “feminist government”, may be the gold standard. Now, egged on by the World Bank, the UN and the IMF, more governments are taking an interest. They should sign on as the results are worth having.

Partly because South Korea invested little in social care, women had to choose between having children, which lowers labour-force participation, or remaining childless, which reduces the country’s fertility rate. Gender budgeting showed how, with an ageing population, the country gained from spending on care. Rwanda found that investment in clean water not only curbed disease but also freed up girls, who used to fetch the stuff, to go to school. Ample research confirms that leaving half a country’s people behind is bad for growth. Violence against women; failing to educate girls properly; unequal pay and access to jobs: all take an economic toll.

Inevitably there are difficulties. Dividing a policy’s costs and benefits between men and women can be hard. Sometimes, as with lost hours of school, the costs have to be estimated. Redesigning the budgeting process upends decades of practice. If every group pressing for change took the same

approach, it would become unmanageable. In a way, though, that is the point. Governments find it easy to pay lip-service to women's rights. Doing something demands tough choices.



我的总结



Bartleby

Get with the program



原文阅读



我的笔记

How an algorithm may decide your career

WANT a job with a successful multinational? You will face lots of competition. Two years ago Goldman Sachs received a quarter of a million applications from students and graduates. Those are not just daunting odds for jobhunters; they are a practical problem for companies. If a team of five Goldman human-resources staff, working 12 hours every

day, including weekends, spent five minutes on each application, they would take nearly a year to complete the task of sifting through the pile.

Little wonder that most large firms use a computer program, or algorithm, when it comes to screening candidates seeking junior jobs. And that means applicants would benefit from knowing exactly what the algorithms are looking for.

Victoria McLean is a former banking headhunter and recruitment manager who set up a business called City CV, which helps job candidates with applications. She says the applicant-tracking systems (ATS) reject up to 75% of CVs, or *résumés*, before a human sees them. Such systems are hunting for keywords that meet the employer's criteria. One tip is to study the language used in the job advertisement; if the initials PM are used for project management, then make sure PM appears in your CV.

This means that a generic CV may fall at the first hurdle. Ms McLean had a client who had been a senior member of the

armed forces. His experience pointed to potential jobs in training and education, procurement or defence sales. The best strategy was to create three different CVs using different sets of keywords. And jobhunters also need to make sure that their LinkedIn profile and their CV reinforce each other; the vast majority of recruiters will use the website to check the qualifications of candidates, she says.

Passing the ATS stage may not be the jobhunter's only technological barrier. Many companies, including Vodafone and Intel, use a video-interview service called HireVue. Candidates are quizzed while an artificial-intelligence (AI) program analyses their facial expressions (maintaining eye contact with the camera is advisable) and language patterns (sounding confident is the trick). People who wave their arms about or slouch in their seat are likely to fail. Only if they pass that test will the applicants meet some humans.

You might expect AI programs to be able to avoid some of the biases of conventional recruitment methods—particularly the tendency for interviewers to favour candidates who

resemble the interviewer. Yet discrimination can show up in unexpected ways. Anja Lambrecht and Catherine Tucker, two economists, placed adverts promoting jobs in science, technology, engineering and maths on Facebook. They found that the ads were less likely to be shown to women than to men.

This was not due to a conscious bias on the part of the Facebook algorithm. Rather, young women are a more valuable demographic group on Facebook (because they control a high share of household spending) and thus ads targeting them are more expensive. The algorithms naturally targeted pages where the return on investment is highest: for men, not women.

In their book* on artificial intelligence, Ajay Agrawal, Joshua Gans and Avi Goldfarb of Toronto's Rotman School of Management say that companies cannot simply dismiss such results as an unfortunate side-effect of the "black box" nature of algorithms. If they discover that the output of an AI system is discriminatory, they need to work out why, and then

adjust the algorithm until the effect disappears.

Worries about potential bias in AI systems have emerged in a wide range of areas, from criminal justice to insurance. In recruitment, too, companies will face a legal and reputational risk if their hiring methods turn out to be unfair. But they also need to consider whether the programs do more than just simplify the process. For instance, do successful candidates have long and productive careers? Staff churn, after all, is one of the biggest recruitment costs that firms face.

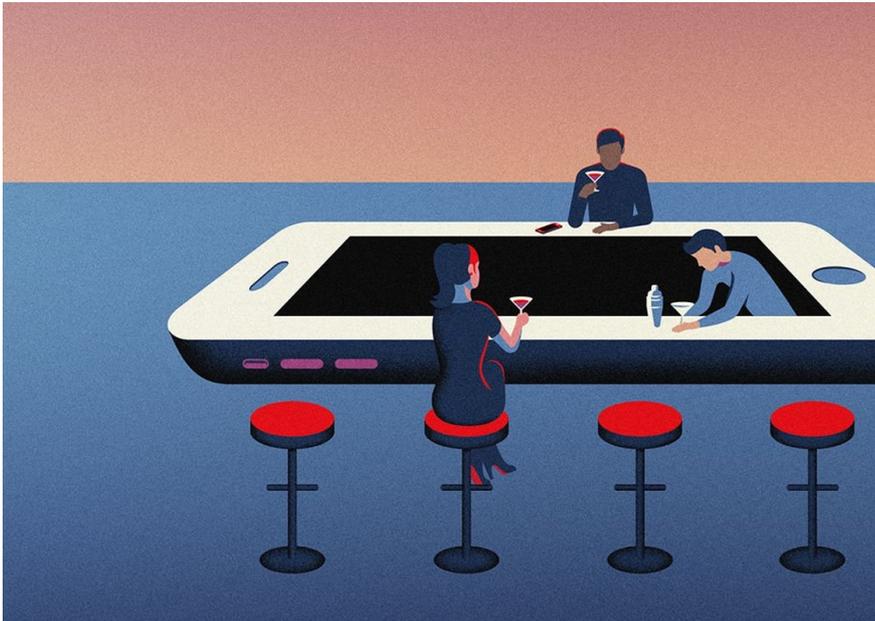
There may also be an arms race as candidates learn how to adjust their CVs to pass the initial AI test, and algorithms adapt to screen out more candidates. This creates scope for another potential bias: candidates from better-off households (and from particular groups) may be quicker to update their CVs. In turn, this may require companies to adjust their algorithms again to avoid discrimination. The price of artificial intelligence seems likely to be eternal vigilance.



我的总结

Romance in the digital age

Modern love



原文阅读



我的笔记

Online dating has changed the search for a mate, for better more than for worse

THE internet has transformed the way people work and communicate. It has upended industries, from entertainment to retailing. But its most profound effect may well be on the biggest decision that most people make—choosing a mate.

In the early 1990s the notion of meeting a partner online seemed freakish, and not a little pathetic. Today, in many

places, it is normal. Smartphones have put virtual bars in people's pockets, where singletons can mingle free from the constraints of social or physical geography. Globally, at least 200m people use digital dating services every month. In America more than a third of marriages now start with an online match-up. The internet is the second-most-popular way for Americans to meet people of the opposite sex, and is fast catching up with real-world "friend of a friend" introductions.

Digital dating is a massive social experiment, conducted on one of humanity's most intimate and vital processes. Its effects are only just starting to become visible .

When Harry clicked on Sally

Meeting a mate over the internet is fundamentally different from meeting one offline. In the physical world, partners are found in family networks or among circles of friends and colleagues. Meeting a friend of a friend is the norm. People who meet online are overwhelmingly likely to be strangers.

As a result, dating digitally offers much greater choice. A bar, choir or office might have a few tens of potential partners for any one person. Online there are tens of thousands.

This greater choice—plus the fact that digital connections are made only with mutual consent—makes the digital dating market far more efficient than the offline kind. For some, that is bad news. Because of the gulf in pickiness between the sexes, a few straight men are doomed never to get any matches at all. On Tantan, a Chinese app, men express interest in 60% of women they see, but women are interested in just 6% of men; this dynamic means that 5% of men never receive a match. In offline dating, with a much smaller pool of men to fish from, straight women are more likely to couple up with men who would not get a look-in online.

For most people, however, digital dating offers better outcomes. Research has found that marriages in America between people who meet online are likely to last longer; such couples profess to be happier than those who met offline. The whiff of moral panic surrounding dating apps is

vastly overblown. Precious little evidence exists to show that opportunities online are encouraging infidelity. In America, divorce rates climbed until just before the advent of the internet, and have fallen since.

Online dating is a particular boon for those with very particular requirements. Jdate allows daters to filter out matches who would not consider converting to Judaism, for instance. A vastly bigger market has had dramatic results for same-sex daters in particular. In America, 70% of gay people meet their partners online. This searchable spectrum of sexual diversity is a boon: more people can find the intimacy they seek.

There are problems with the modern way of love, however. Many users complain of stress when confronted with the brutal realities of the digital meat market, and their place within it. Negative emotions about body image existed before the internet, but they are amplified when strangers can issue snap judgments on attractiveness. Digital dating has been linked to depression. The same problems that afflict other

digital platforms recur in this realm, from scams to fake accounts: 10% of all newly created dating profiles do not belong to real people.

This new world of romance may also have unintended consequences for society. The fact that online daters have so much more choice can break down barriers: evidence suggests that the internet is boosting interracial marriages by bypassing homogenous social groups. But daters are also more able to choose partners like themselves. Assortative mating, the process whereby people with similar education levels and incomes pair up, already shoulders some of the blame for income inequality. Online dating may make the effect more pronounced: education levels are displayed prominently on dating profiles in a way they would never be offline. It is not hard to imagine dating services of the future matching people by preferred traits, as determined by uploaded genomes. Dating firms also suffer from an inherent conflict of interest. Perfect matching would leave them bereft of paying customers.

The domination of online dating by a handful of firms and their algorithms is another source of worry. Dating apps do not benefit from exactly the same sort of network effects as other tech platforms: a person's friends do not need to be on a specific dating site, for example. But the feedback loop between large pools of data, generated by ever-growing numbers of users attracted to an ever-improving product, still exists. The entry into the market of Facebook, armed with data from its 2.2bn users, will provide clues as to whether online dating will inexorably consolidate into fewer, larger platforms.

While you were swiping

But even if the market does not become ever more concentrated, the process of coupling (or not) has unquestionably become more centralised. Romance used to be a distributed activity which took place in a profusion of bars, clubs, churches and offices; now enormous numbers of people rely on a few companies to meet their mate. That

hands a small number of coders, tweaking the algorithms that determine who sees whom across the virtual bar, tremendous power to engineer mating outcomes. In authoritarian societies especially, the prospect of algorithmically arranged marriages ought to cause some disquiet. Competition offers some protection against such a possibility; so too might greater transparency over the principles used by dating apps to match people up.

Yet such concerns should not obscure the good that comes from the modern way of romance. The right partners can elevate and nourish each other. The wrong ones can ruin both their lives. Digital dating offers millions of people a more efficient way to find a good mate. That is something to love.



我的总结



War and farming

The food catastrophe



原文阅读



我的笔记

War is tipping a fragile world towards mass hunger. Fixing that is everyone's business

By invading Ukraine, Vladimir Putin will destroy the lives of people far from the battlefield—and on a scale even he may regret. The war is battering a global food system weakened by COVID-19, climate change and an energy shock. Ukraine's exports of grain and oilseeds have mostly stopped and Russia's are threatened. Together, the two countries supply 12% of traded calories. Wheat prices, up 53% since the start of the year, jumped a further 6% on May 16th, after India said it would suspend exports because of an alarming heatwave.

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The widely accepted idea of a cost-of-living crisis does not begin to capture the gravity of what may lie ahead. António Guterres, the UN secretary general, warned on May 18th that the coming months threaten “the spectre of a global food shortage” that could last for years. The high cost of staple foods has already raised the number of people who cannot be sure of getting enough to eat by 440m, to 1.6bn. Nearly 250m are on the brink of famine. If, as is likely, the war drags on and supplies from Russia and Ukraine are limited, hundreds of millions more people could fall into poverty. Political unrest will spread, children will be stunted and people will starve.

Mr Putin must not use food as a weapon. Shortages are not the inevitable outcome of war. World leaders should see hunger as a global problem urgently requiring a global solution.

Russia and Ukraine supply 28% of globally traded wheat, 29% of the barley, 15% of the maize and 75% of the sunflower oil. Russia and Ukraine contribute about half the cereals imported by Lebanon and Tunisia; for Libya and Egypt the figure is two-thirds. Ukraine's food exports provide the calories to feed 400m people. The war is disrupting these supplies because Ukraine has mined its waters to deter an assault, and Russia is blockading the port of Odessa.

Even before the invasion the World Food Programme had warned that 2022 would be a terrible year. China, the largest wheat producer, has said that, after rains delayed planting last year, this crop may be its worst-ever. Now, in addition to the extreme temperatures in India, the world's second-largest producer, a lack of rain threatens to sap yields in other breadbaskets, from America's wheat belt to the Beauce region of France. The Horn of Africa is being ravaged by its worst drought in four decades. Welcome to the era of climate change.

All this will have a grievous effect on the poor. Households in

emerging economies spend 25% of their budgets on food—and in sub-Saharan Africa as much as 40%. In Egypt bread provides 30% of all calories. In many importing countries, governments cannot afford subsidies to increase the help to the poor, especially if they also import energy—another market in turmoil.

The crisis threatens to get worse. Ukraine had already shipped much of last summer's crop before the war. Russia is still managing to sell its grain, despite added costs and risks for shippers. However, those Ukrainian silos that are undamaged by the fighting are full of corn and barley. Farmers have nowhere to store their next harvest, due to start in late June, which may therefore rot. And they lack the fuel and labour to plant the one after that. Russia, for its part, may lack some supplies of the seeds and pesticides it usually buys from the European Union.

In spite of soaring grain prices, farmers elsewhere in the world may not make up the shortfall. One reason is that

prices are volatile. Worse, profit margins are shrinking, because of the surging prices of fertiliser and energy. These are farmers' main costs and both markets are disrupted by sanctions and the scramble for natural gas. If farmers cut back on fertiliser, global yields will be lower at just the wrong time.

The response by worried politicians could make a bad situation worse. Since the war started, 23 countries from Kazakhstan to Kuwait have declared severe restrictions on food exports that cover 10% of globally traded calories. More than one-fifth of all fertiliser exports are restricted. If trade stops, famine will ensue.

The scene is set for a blame game, in which the West condemns Mr Putin for his invasion and Russia decries Western sanctions. In truth the disruptions are primarily the result of Mr Putin's invasion and some sanctions have exacerbated them. The argument could easily become an excuse for inaction. Meanwhile many people will be going

hungry and some will die.

Instead states need to act together, starting by keeping markets open. This week Indonesia, source of 60% of the world's palm oil, lifted a temporary ban on exports. Europe should help Ukraine ship its grain via rail and road to ports in Romania or the Baltics, though even the most optimistic forecasts say that just 20% of the harvest could get out that way. Importing countries need support, too, so they do not end up being capsized by enormous bills. Emergency supplies of grain should go only to the very poorest. For others, import financing on favourable terms, perhaps provided through the imf, would allow donors' dollars to go further. Debt relief may also help to free up vital resources.

There is scope for substitution. About 10% of all grains are used to make biofuel; and 18% of vegetable oils go to biodiesel. Finland and Croatia have weakened mandates that require petrol to include fuel from crops. Others should follow their lead. An enormous amount of grain is used to feed animals. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation,

grain accounts for 13% of cattle dry feed. In 2021 China imported 28m tonnes of corn to feed its pigs, more than Ukraine exports in a year.

Immediate relief would come from breaking the Black Sea blockade. Roughly 25m tonnes of corn and wheat, equivalent to the annual consumption of all of the world's least developed economies, is trapped in Ukraine. Three countries must be brought onside: Russia needs to allow Ukrainian shipping; Ukraine has to de-mine the approach to Odessa; and Turkey needs to let naval escorts through the Bosphorus.

That will not be easy. Russia, struggling on the battlefield, is trying to strangle Ukraine's economy. Ukraine is reluctant to clear its mines. Persuading them to relent will be a task for countries, including India and China, that have sat out the war. Convoys may require armed escorts endorsed by a broad coalition. Feeding a fragile world is everyone's business.



我的总结



Leaders

Guns in America



原文阅读



我的笔记

Perhaps make it a bit harder to buy one.

In many states, it is easier to own a gun than a dog. That is absurd

In many states, it is easier to own a gun than a dog. That is absurd

The motives for mass murder vary. The teenager in Buffalo who on May 14th shot and killed ten people, most of them black, was driven by racial paranoia. The 68-year-old who killed one and injured five on May 16th in a Californian church hated Taiwanese people. What impelled Salvador Ramos to kill at least 21 on May 24th in and around a school in Texas may someday become apparent, though Mr Ramos is no

longer alive to explain himself.

What these horrors have in common, though, is the murder weapon. Guns are simple, reliable tools for killing. A man with a gun and plenty of ammunition can kill more people, more quickly and with far less physical effort than he can with a knife, a blunt object or his bare hands. The weapon Mr Ramos used—a military-style assault rifle with high-capacity magazines—allowed him to keep shooting until someone shot him. That most of his victims were children makes the crime unusually horrific. But it resembles countless other American tragedies in that the easy availability of guns made it deadlier than it might have been.

A robber who carries a gun is more likely to kill. Domestic quarrels are more likely to end in death if a firearm is handy. Suicide attempts with guns usually succeed. Police in England and Wales shot and killed only two people in 2021; American cops killed 1,055. The main reason for this vast disparity is not that English cops are gentler or less racist. It is that American police face a heat-packing public. Most of those they kill are armed; many of the rest are mistakenly believed to be so. The abundance of guns is also the main reason why the murder rate in America is four or five times higher than in a typical rich country.

By one estimate, Americans own 400m guns. If they were

evenly distributed, each family of five would have six. In 2020 more than 45,000 people in America died from firearm-related injuries. Guns now kill more young people than cars do.

The Economist believes it should be hard to own a gun. Farmers need them for pest control; hunters and other hobbyists may use them for sport. But each gun should be licensed and registered. Each owner should have to pass stringent background checks, and the process should be slow—no one should be able to buy a gun while in a fit of rage. Also, there is no good reason to let civilians own guns that fire rapidly, or magazines that let them kill a room full of people before reloading.

In America such strict gun control is unthinkable. The Second Amendment guarantees a right to bear arms, and the National Rifle Association promotes a maximalist interpretation of it. Politicians who hint that they might make it a little bit harder to obtain a firearm face a well-organised bloc of single-issue voters. In Republican primaries, especially, few dare offend the gun lobby.

Hence the steady loosening of rules in places like Texas, where 21-year-olds can carry a handgun in public without training or a permit (both of which are needed to cut hair); and where 18-year-olds can buy a handgun if they come from

a violent home (to defend themselves against abusive relatives); and where almost any adult can buy a rifle with minimal hassle. Mr Ramos bought two assault rifles legally as soon as he turned 18, and shot his grandmother before heading for the local elementary school.

This is not what most Americans want. Hefty (but dwindling) majorities favour some commonsense curbs, such as denying weapons to the mentally ill, creating a database to track all gun sales, and banning both assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines. Congress is unlikely to deliver such things, thanks to the Senate filibuster. So cities and states should step in, though guns will always flow illicitly from lax jurisdictions to stringent ones. Voters should reward politicians who think a gun licence should be at least as hard to obtain as a driving licence. Not all gun deaths are preventable, but many could be.



我的总结