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## **A review essay on *End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration* by Peter Turchin (Penguin Random House 2023)**

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In *End Times*, Peter Turchin takes us on three journeys: One is his personal history of the discovery of patterns in history, which form the basis for his development of cliodynamics; a second is his tracing of the primary pattern, namely how elite overproduction and popular immiseration have repeatedly led to state breakdowns across history; and third is the history of the United States, reprising and updating his findings in *Age of Discord* (Turchin 2017). The journeys converge on a rather distressing endpoint, however: Turchin has found that the pattern of state breakdown that recurs across history is now unfolding in the United States; and in 75% of the times this pattern has been seen in past societies, it led to some form of convulsive state breakdown, including revolution or civil war.

A point of disclosure for this review: 37 years ago, I first laid out the key pattern of how population dynamics can simultaneously lead to elite overproduction, popular immiseration, and state fiscal decay, and labeled it the “Demographic-Structural Model.” I first showed how these could be mathematically plotted and supported with data to create a non-linear Political Stability Index (PSI) that explained the onset of the English Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Goldstone 1986). I then showed that this pattern could also be found in other 17<sup>th</sup> century breakdowns in Asia as well as England (1988). A few years later (Goldstone 1991), I demonstrated that the PSI indicator and the model behind it could be successfully applied to explain not only the English Revolution of the 1640s, but also the French Revolution of 1789, the Ottoman crises of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the collapse of the Chinese Ming Empire, and then the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe and even the 1868 Meiji Revolution in Japan. Since then, Turchin and other collaborators and scholars have further developed the model and compiled extensive data to test it.

Turchin deserves credit for making major innovations in the theory, especially in regard to measurement. For example, where I had used real wages and rents to track popular immiseration, Turchin has pioneered the use of the measurement of *relative wages* – that is, the ratio of the median wage to GDP/capita – as a sensitive measure of the portion of society’s income that is retained by median workers vs. the portion that is retained (and accumulated) by elites. This measure has the

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advantages that since both the median wage and GDP/capita can be taken in nominal terms, one does not have to deal with the complexities of indexing real wages to consumption; moreover, it is applicable to both agrarian and industrial societies, so in fact to any society with sufficient data on wage rates. He has also pioneered the development of a remarkable dataset to test the patterns of history: what he and his colleagues call “SESHAT: GLOBAL HISTORY DATABANK” (Hoyer and Reddish 2019). From SESHAT, Turchin and Dan Hoyer have drawn data specifically on countries that entered the crisis phase of the Political Stability Index pattern, and created a new data base, which he labels CrisisDB, to track the outcomes in such countries. That analysis lies behind this book, and hence its title: “End Times.”

I mention this to make clear that, having developed the foundational model for Turchin’s tracking of political stability and crises, I have a rather strong vested interest in the success of Turchin’s analysis! In fact, Turchin and I have been in frequent touch over several decades: I provided extensive analysis and support for his book with Sergei Nefedov, *Secular Cycles* (Turchin and Nefedov 2009), encouraged his brilliant application of our structural-demographic model to the United States in *Ages of Discord* (Turchin 2017), and he in turn has encouraged me to contribute to, and now become co-editor of this journal. Throughout, Turchin has generously noted that my work was the basis for much of his further analysis. I am thus anything but an objective reviewer.

Nonetheless, I want to share my reactions to *End Times*, and its implications for our future. There, Turchin himself is of two minds, and how one wrestles with the implications of one’s own work is something that both Turchin and I are now facing, as the crisis that our model predicts grows closer and more intense.

## **The story of *End Times***

Let me first, however, comment on the structure of *End Times*. Unlike Turchin’s major previous works, *End Times* is clearly an attempt to reach a much wider, non-scientific audience. The book has not a single graph, table, or equation. Instead, it presents its arguments in part through a series of vignettes featuring largely invented individuals whose life-situation is used to illustrate the social trends being discussed. It also sparkles with Turchin’s wit: e.g., on the extent of political polarization: “The ideological center today resembles a country road in Texas, almost deserted except for the yellow stripe and dead armadillos” (p. 106). Or on how bad our current situation really is: “Anyone watching the events of the past decade from afar—a space alien, say, or a future historian—will no doubt be impressed by how thoroughly the humans inhabiting the most powerful nation on earth have managed to screw up their society.”

The attempt to reach a broader audience seems to have been successful: *End Times* received reviews in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Times of London*. Unfortunately, the price of such broad response has been a regrettable oversimplification, leading to a superficial dismissal—thus the headline on the review in the *Sunday Times* read “End Times by Peter Turchin review: we’re in a mess, blame the elite ... we just have too many of them now” (Glancy 2023). To say that this trivializes decades of research, based on data covering cases spanning millennia, is an understatement.

The fundamental message of *End Times* is that the structural-demographic model of historical dynamics *works*. For dozens of cases of rebellion and revolution that have been carefully investigated, from ancient Rome and Muscovy to Europe from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to more recent analyses of the collapse of the Qing Empire (Orlandi et al. 2022) and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 (Korotayev and Zinkina 2022), the PSI model—based on measuring elite social mobility, urbanization, wealth concentration, political polarization, relative wages and other indicators—has been demonstrated to provide a better explanation than any alternative.

The theory is in fact so successful that one would think that it would be part of the basic graduate education and theoretical toolkit of economists, political scientists, archeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, lawyers, statesmen, and world historians; indeed, of anyone who is concerned with understanding the factors that maintain or undermine the stability of societies, and which lead to social conflict or collapse. And it may be one day—certainly *End Times* is Turchin’s strongest effort to communicate the structural-demographic theory to anyone, even those with no scientific training, who might be interested.

Yet like any truly novel and powerful theory, the structural demographic theory has had a difficult time gaining wide acceptance. Part of that is simply resistance to something so ambitious: it is a normal reaction from historians to say that surely a theory that claims to explain events ranging from medieval Muscovy to Ming China to modern Egypt—and the English and French Revolutions too! – *must* be either superficial or false. Political scientists, economists, sociologists, etc. all have their own models developed for their own disciplines, to which they have understandable loyalty. It’s also fair to note that the “grand theories of history” that dueled from the 1960s to the 1980s, mainly Marxism, functionalism, and modernization theories, fared so badly on close examination that they have cast a cloud over the notion of any grand theory, driving specialists to focus on the details of their own cases and to emphasize the differences among them.

In addition, since the 1990s the *zeitgeist* in historical studies has shifted strongly from an examination of cycles of data, as in the French *Annales* school, to an emphasis on the power and diversity of cultures. And to many, a theory that

starts from demographic, social mobility, and standard-of-living data seems to exclude culture as a key element. That, however, is simply untrue of the demographic-structural theory, as Turchin is at pains to make clear in this book. For myself, ideological competition guiding the outcome of state reconstruction was absolutely central to the dynamics of revolutions, as portrayed decades ago in *Revolution and Rebellion*. My more recent work on revolutions has further stressed how leadership, culture, and ideological competition are key parts of the motivation and mobilization of actors in the run-up to revolutionary conflicts, and shown how these elements shape the forces that contend for power in the wake of a revolutionary change of regime (Goldstone 2023). Moreover, Turchin and his colleagues have demonstrated that cultural factors that determine rates of elite reproduction, social mobility, and attitudes toward wealth accumulation are essential to the operation of the structural-demographic model (Turchin and Nefedov 2009).

Still, for all of these reasons and more, few people, whether scholars or statesmen, have been inclined to become followers of the structural-demographic model. While that might seem a matter of interest only to intellectual historians, it is not. Since the model is now predicting a high risk of major conflict or collapse in the most powerful nation in the world today—the United States—the dismissal or trivialization of the model brings with it a powerful risk of real-world damage.

## **Structural-Demographic Analysis and the coming crisis in the United States**

The application of the structural-demographic model to understanding the political trajectory of the United States is not new. As early as 1991, in the concluding chapter of *Revolution and Rebellion*, I argued that the US was already showing signs of being on a similar course to other nations that had experienced collapse. I noted that the growing power of selfish elites would likely give rise to greater economic inequality and political polarization, leading to a populist leader running on a platform of nationalist glories. Here is what I wrote over thirty years ago:

... a key difficulty faced by regimes in decline was *selfish elites*. Nations that were the richest countries in their day suffered fiscal crises because elites preferred to protect their private wealth, even at the expense of a deterioration of state finances, public services, and long-term international strength. By “selfish elites” I do not mean, of course, simply elites’ aspirations to maintain disproportionate shares of wealth and power. That ambition is a universal constant. What I wish to emphasize is that in some eras in history, elites have identified their interests with the national state and the public weal, and they have been willing to tax themselves heavily to expand the influence and resources of their nation and its government.

At other times, particularly times of elite insecurity owing to inflation and to rising social mobility and competition within their ranks, elites have turned into competing factions, driven by self-enrichment at the expense of their rivals and opponents, even when that meant starving the national state of resources needed for public improvements and international competitiveness.

In addition, declining regimes were beset by factionalism within the elites that paralyzed decision making. Struggles for prestige and authority took precedence over a united approach to resolving fiscal and social problems. Among English gentry in Parliament, within the French Estates General and the National Assembly, among Ottoman officials, and within the ranks of Chinese scholars, partisanship prevailed over consensus—with disastrous results.

It is quite astonishing the degree to which the United States today is, in respect of its state finances and its elites' attitudes, following the path that led early modern states to crises. . . .private individuals among the elite have become enormously richer, while basic public services that support the economy as a whole—primary and secondary education, airports, trains, roads, and bridges—are neglected, overburdened, and deteriorating.

The United States thus enters the 1990s with several evident problems: factional divisions among elites that undercut policy consensus, widespread resistance to realistic taxes, an overreliance on debt, and a polarization of private incomes while public services—and public servants—are grossly underfunded and losing their ability to support the economy. The key element in this decay is not, as it is sometimes portrayed, a decay of American manufacturing ability or of American foreign power, or a threat of imminent economic catastrophe; instead it is a steady erosion of public institutions and public services. This decay threatens to undermine the social and infrastructural foundations that supported American economic growth in the first three-quarters of this century. If unchecked, it is certain that the long-term results, which are now only slightly apparent but will accumulate rapidly in the coming decades, will be a relative decline in the living standards, freedom of decision, and international position of the United States as compared with other industrialized nations. . . . The specter of being left behind in international competition [then] creates emotional needs that are satisfied by aggressive trade policies and protectionism. (Goldstone 1991, Chapter 6)

I think it is hard to say that this was not a prescient glimpse into the future of America in the 2010s and 2020s. But it was not based on guesswork; it was what the available data showed when analyzed in the framework of the structural demographic model.

A decade later, Turchin repeated the same warning. In a short note in *Nature* (Turchin 2010, p. 608), he wrote: “In the United States, we have stagnating or declining real wages, a growing gap between rich and poor, overproduction of

young graduates with advanced degrees, and exploding public debt. These seemingly disparate social indicators are actually related to each other dynamically. They all experienced turning points during the 1970s. Historically, such developments have served as leading indicators of looming political instability.”

Seven years after that, Turchin unveiled his full detailed analysis of U.S. history in *Ages of Discord* (Turchin 2017). That work, which Turchin presents in clear, everyday language in *End Times*, showed that the U.S. had experienced two cycles of sharply rising PSI – the first, from the 1830s to the 1860s, which signaled the coming U.S. Civil War, but then more surprisingly, after a generation of further conflict followed by a long decline in PSI from the 1900s to the 1970s, there was clearly a second marked upswing from the 1980s to today. That upswing was headed, by the 2020s, into a level of instability that the U.S. had not seen since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Concerned that people were still not paying attention, Turchin and I co-authored a magazine essay, published in September of 2020, just before the last presidential election (Goldstone and Turchin 2020). We again stated that our model showed the US was on a trajectory for rising political violence, and identified ways we might defuse those risks. Most professional editors still deemed any comparisons of the US the 2020s to France in 1780s to be too outrageous to publish, but we were fortunate that the Berggruen Institute had editors who were concerned about the risks of violence in the coming election, who took our paper for their journal. And then, a few months later, the largest single episode of domestic violence against the U.S. government since the Civil War occurred on January 6, 2021, with the storming of the U.S. Capitol by thousands of protestors supporting Donald Trump’s efforts to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s victory. Following that event, people *did* suddenly develop an interest in Turchin’s and my analysis. Podcasts and magazine articles about our forecast for the “turbulent 20s” appeared. Yet after Joe Biden took office, and Trump’s impeachment for his role in generating the January 6 attack was set aside by the Senate, the news cycle moved on.

Of course, as the evidence that something was seriously wrong in America was becoming inescapable, a torrent of books and articles poured forth, including those contemplating the signs of civil war (Walter 2022), and explaining “how democracies die” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019). More importantly, ever more data was accumulating that showed America was indeed falling behind other nations in such basic features as life expectancy and even heights, while social mobility was being choked off; Turchin lays these out in this book. A fair bit of handwringing over the risks of political violence and even disaster for American democracy has therefore become a regular feature of left-center news and opinion.

And yet . . . what we see today is that Donald Trump, still denying the legitimacy of the 2020 election and promising to be a dictator “on day one” if re-elected, is by far the leading candidate to represent the Republican Party in the coming election. Political polarization is arguably worse than ever, with such radical actions as a 50-year precedent on abortion law being overturned by the Supreme Court, a Speaker of the US House of Representatives turfed out by factionalism in his own party, and the former President under indictment on 90 felony counts while still campaigning for the highest office in the land.

Have any major political leaders come out and demanded that the major parties cooperate on restoring respect for the law? (A very few tried, before being cast out and slinking into retirement). Even more so, has there been any serious effort to address the shocking decline in life expectancy and nutrition of Americans, the racial injustices that led to the Black Lives Matter protests (the largest urban protests in decades), or the still escalating number of Americans who are killed each year in mass shootings? Has there been a serious, cooperative effort to address the fiscal risks that rising social security and medicare obligations pose in the face of rigidly limited taxation? Or to redress the income and wealth inequities that forty years of deferential taxation of capital-based income gains and inherited wealth combined with nearly frozen minimum wages and dismantling of unions have produced? No – and so the underlying trends that drive nations to the brink are still operating unhindered in the US today.

### **Is there a way out of the crisis?**

Turchin takes pains to point out that nations that come to this brink of danger do *not* all face scenarios that play out in the same way. He uses one particularly striking example: the set of former Soviet countries—Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine—that all had massive political protests in 2010-2020: Russia in 2011, Ukraine in 2014, and Belarus in 2020. In both Russia and Belarus, the center held: the loyalty of the military and administrative elites to the state leaders enabled the governments to outlast the protests, which petered out within a year. In Ukraine, by contrast, the military and administrative elites were split, particularly over the degree to which Ukraine should remain in the bosom of Russia’s embrace. With important oligarchs and parliamentary leaders defecting to the opposition, Ukraine’s President Yanukovich was eventually left without sufficient support to maintain power, and fled to Russia, allowing a revolution to unfold in Kyiv. The key take-aways that Turchin wants us to learn are that “the political authority governing complex human societies is much more fragile than it may appear at a cursory glance” (p. 187). Indeed, whether it is ancient Rome, eighteenth century France, or Qing China, it is striking that the largest, richest, and most powerful societies of their era were vulnerable to collapse. Sheer power and resources are



thus no defense against elite overproduction and popular immiseration producing crises. Yet at the same time, countries can be taken back from the brink by firm and united actions by the ruling elites.

Simply outlasting a crisis, of course, is not the same as changing the conditions that create it. Countries that survive protests by strong governance, but that continue to see economic and political polarization, are likely to have further conflicts in the near future. To restore true stability, the underlying polarization must also be addressed. Is that possible? Turchin gives two examples to suggest that it is. The first is the Russian Empire in the 1860s. After losing its position as the dominant military power in Europe to France and England in the wake of the industrial revolution, Russian elites recognized that their obsolete feudal system, with an agricultural economy based on serf labor, had to change. Tsar Alexander II and his ministers persuaded the elites to go along with freeing the serfs, and other social reforms, that staved off revolutionary pressures for a generation. Unfortunately, renewed population pressures, defects in the initial reforms (including provisions making serfs responsible for indemnities to their former owners), and delays in others (e.g. no real parliament was established until after the Revolution of 1905) left Russia still on a trajectory for another round of revolutions a half century later. Nonetheless, the impending crisis of the 1860s had been defused.

A more hopeful example is England in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As in continental Europe, industrialization and rapid population growth produced a surge in the number of aspiring elites, while also creating a “wealth pump” that undermined wages relative to both old agricultural and new industrial wealth. Political polarization rose between the commercially-oriented financial/business/professional elites and the more traditional military/landowner elites. Across the continent, this pattern produced political revolutions led by liberal, commercial and professional elites and furthered by the protests of both peasants and urban workers, with peaks in 1830 and 1848. In England, however, while violent protests rose in the 1820s, the King and Parliament determined—in the face of substantial resistance from the military/landed elite—that the changing social balance required a changing political balance as well. This was initiated in the Reform Bill of 1832, which recognized the economic and political importance of the fast-growing urban centers of Manchester and Birmingham and loosened the vice-lock that the conservative faction of the elites had held on Parliament. As in Russia, the initial reforms were incomplete and flawed, and if that was all that had happened revolution might have only been deferred. But in England, the reforms of 1832 were followed by a continuous series of reforms to modernize and democratize the electoral system, strengthen Parliament, and protect workers that continued from

the 1830s through the 1860s. The result was that England not only avoided the revolutionary turmoil of the continent, but rose to become the leading imperial power of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Turchin wants to hold out hope that these examples of crisis deferred point the way by which the United States can avoid turmoil and possible collapse. Yet he is clearly of two minds on this possibility. In *End Times*, Turchin tells us about his efforts to mathematically explore possible outcomes for the U.S., given the degree to which economic and political polarization have already occurred. He calls this “multi-path forecasting,” or MPF. It consists of developing projections based on various plausible rates of radicalization in response to the underlying social trends. His results from the multi-path forecasting are, as he says, “rather grim” (p. 201). He notes that across his CrisisDB, societies that avoided any kind of collapse and adopted reforms that let them thrive are quite rare: “bad news for everybody was that 75 percent of crises ended in revolutions or civil wars (or both)” (p. 224). Worse yet, “Perhaps the most important insight from the MPF model is that it is too late to avert our current crisis” (p. 202), and that we can only hope to move toward a recovery of stability in the next generation if we manage to reverse the extreme polarization of wealth in the U.S. over the next several decades.

Yet, perhaps disturbed by being cast as a prophet of doom, Turchin has recently tried to paint a more optimistic picture. In an essay for *New Scientist* (Turchin 2023), he claims that his research actually provides good news. Looking across centuries of history, he proclaims that as societies have become more institutionally complex, they have become more resilient, and so better able to adjust and adapt to these pressures. He then argues that the understanding of social collapse provided by the social-demographic model also provides clear guidelines for how the crisis can be avoided, and provides a four-step path to salvation. He says: “To avoid collapse, elites must be made to care about the common good. And that requires two things: pressure from grassroots social movements and selfless individuals to lead them.” And the four things that the social movements and selfless leaders need to accomplish are:

1. Progressive taxation [that] reduces the creation of too many wealthy elites and the economic impoverishment of the rest
2. A universal right to vote and the election of public officials [that will] constrain arbitrary and selfish behaviour by rulers
3. Labour-protecting institutions, such as unions, and a [higher] minimum wage [to] decrease economic inequality
4. A welfare state [that] equitably promotes the well-being of all citizens
5. International cooperation through the United Nations and its agencies, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [that] helps address global challenges

While I whole-heartedly agree with Turchin that our model shows a path to revive the US and avoid a crisis, and that these are the steps to take, I have to say that I have become far more pessimistic about our ability to do so.

First, in regard to Turchin's observation that more modern societies have more resources of institutional complexity and therefore more resilience, I have to say: look at what happened to Germany in 1934, to Chile in 1973, to Iran in 1979, to the Soviet Union in 1991, to Ukraine in 2014. These were all modern, advanced industrialized countries with elaborate institutional/administrative states. Once elite factionalization and popular anxiety and anger reach a certain level, even modern states readily give way to collapse or authoritarian take-over. And these are not rare exceptions: the most comprehensive recent analysis of revolutions shows that revolutionary events have become *more* common in the early twenty-first century than they were in the late twentieth (Beissinger 2022).

Second, if we look at the actions Turchin stipulates as necessary – are they at all likely? “Grassroots social movements” today in the US focus on all kinds of very specific groups and issues: abortion/women's rights; police brutality/black lives matter; gun control; the environment/climate change; free Palestine/Gaza; the “We are the 99%” protests against the rich and inequality petered out with no effect a decade ago. Regarding selfless leaders—do we see any today? Former Vice-President Al Gore, who selflessly toured the world campaigning for action to halt climate change, eventually grew frustrated and withdrew to become a venture capitalist. Joe Biden has certainly tried to govern for the workers and be a selfless leader; but his approval ratings are now at an all-time low for US Presidents, and is a toss-up at best to be re-elected. His likely adversary, Donald Trump, is probably the most selfish leader one can imagine, who promises the world to his followers only to use their hard-earned donations to fund his own legal defense.

Of Turchin's four points, take number 1—more progressive taxation, particularly of capital gains, carried interest, and inheritance. There hasn't been any movement in this direction in decades, since the Reagan/Thatcher victories elevating private wealth above all else as the goal of society. On number 2, the Democrats have been trying to revive voting rights and access since 2020 without much success, as the GOP is heavily motivated, and enabled by the filibuster, to limit voting rights in every way possible. Moreover, unless the now very pro-GOP Supreme Court should suddenly decide to overturn *Citizens United*, the ability of Political Action Committees to spend unlimited amount of anonymous private and corporate money in elections severely weakens the voting rights of ordinary citizens. On number 3, I am happy to say there has been some progress. Unions have started to come back in the US, with Teamsters, Auto workers, and hotel workers winning major battles, and unionization making inroads at Amazon and

Starbucks. But the number of workers in unions remains very low compared to the mid-century, the GOP continues to block new labor laws and undermine the implementation of existing ones, and it is only a matter of time before AI-powered automation makes corporations far more able to skirt union workers altogether.

On number 4, a “welfare state” on the Scandinavian model sounds promising, but the US had started to build such a welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s but then dismantled it, along with anti-trust and much regulation, in the subsequent decades. The culture of the United States now has moved so far in the direction of rugged individualism and distrust of government that states are rejecting federal money to provide medical care for their residents, and individuals are choosing to ignore public health advice and even forgo basic childhood vaccinations in the name of “freedom.” Finally, “international cooperation to address global challenges” seems necessary, but again is surprisingly hard to implement in practice, as each sovereign nation resists international dictates and seeks to follow their own short-term interests. The progress on climate change will clearly be insufficient to avoid the 1.5 degree-Celsius increase that the UN warned decades ago would seriously threaten lives; and the actions taken this year at COP-28 seem weak and toothless.

In regard to climate, the satirical movie “Don’t Look Up” parodied the inaction of planetary leaders by depicting an astronomer who had certain knowledge that a large asteroid was on its way to destroy the Earth. Instead of reacting to save the world, ordinary people saw the news and then went back to going about their business of making a living and pursuing earthly pleasures. Meanwhile, government and tech leaders conspired to keep the masses somnolent while they built their own escape pods so that they could avoid being trapped in the coming catastrophe – deciding it was easier and more effective to insulate and save themselves than to take the actions that would be needed to save everyone.

The same logic appears to hold in regard to the political crises that structural-demographic theory tells us is coming to the United States. Relative wage decline has created a populace where over 70% of people tell pollsters they think things will be worse in the future; hyper-partisan political polarization has made government incapable of governing; and no-holds-barred competition to profit from media, algorithms, and privatization has left trust in all institutions at record lows. From the media, which are hopelessly fractionalized, partisan, and distrusted; to the Supreme Court, which refuses to enact, much less follow, ethics laws and looks like just another partisan segment of partisan government, it is hard to know how ordinary people will find their bearings. Like an asteroid whose trajectory points ineluctably toward the earth, the conditions for political violence and crisis are clearly marked for our present and future.

As an American citizen who loves this country, I wish that the science and its predictions are wrong. But as a scientist who understands the power and validity of the structural demographic model, and who knows all too well the data on the social trends in this country over the last forty years, I fear – and I sincerely mean “fear” – that the science and its predications are correct.

It is easier to imagine scenarios that lead to disaster than those that avoid it. If Donald Trump is convicted of crimes before the election, will the Supreme Court overturn that decision, leading to massive protests? If not, will Trump face prison, leading to massive protests by his followers? If Trump wins the Presidency, will his vendettas against opponents lead to dismantling the rule of law and democracy? If Trump loses, will he again reject the legitimacy of elections and urge his followers to attack seats of government to put him in power? What is the alternative – that Biden wins a large victory, that victory is endorsed by GOP leaders who abandon Trump, and Trump’s supporters acknowledge defeat and peacefully stay home? Simply stating these alternatives makes it clear which are those that are more likely.

Turchin’s *End Times* is a clear and lively presentation of what I believe is the most powerful theory of social change and stability that we have. It shows how societies, including my own, fall into patterns that lead to social decay and political crisis. It even suggests that such crises can sometimes be avoided and shows how. Yet a realistic evaluation of the story of *End Times* is that the title is not hyperbole. It is rather a clear warning. If you want to avoid the knowledge that the United States is headed for a major crisis, one almost has to bury one’s head in the sand. In other words, “Don’t Look Up.”

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