
Book Review:

**2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide
and Reshape the Future of Everything by Mauro
F. Guillén**

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Abstract

In a recent work of futurology, Mauro Guillén examines current trends in technology, demographics, and the economy to investigate how they might impact the future. The book urges the reader to “think laterally” to see some of the less obvious potentials of demographic shifts, an aging population, an expanding middle class outside of the West, the shift of wealth from men to women, the growth of cities, the emergence of the sharing economy, and emerging technologies such as blockchain. Though the book treads well-worn ground by authors as diverse as Thomas Friedman, George Friedman, Yuval Noah Harari, and Michio Kaku, there is enough new material and richness of analysis to make this book a worthy contribution to the genre.

1. Full Review

Mauro F. Guillén’s 2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything is a timely and thoughtful contribution to the genre of current affairs and futurology. Despite the numerous works that attempt to explain our current moment in history, this book manages to find new angles and insights on well-known trends. However, the book’s failing is its inability to have a dialogue with – and even its seeming ignorance of – the many great works that have appeared before it. This failure is especially prominent when the book deals with important topics such as inequality, polarization, and the impact of disruptive technologies.

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In no particular order, these books include George Friedman's *The Next 100 Years*, Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus And The Olive Tree* and *The World Is Flat*, Richard Baldwin's *The Globotics Upheaval*, Michio Kaku's *Physics of the Future*, Jared Diamond's *Upheaval: Turning Points for Nations in Crisis*, and the excellent trilogy of books by Yuval Noah Harari (*Sapiens*, *Homo Deus*, and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*). Of all these books, I believe that *Homo Deus* and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* are the most essential works for understanding our current moment.

Each of these books has contributed something to our understanding of emerging technologies, a warming planet, demographic shifts, the growing problem of inequality, and the changing geopolitical landscape. Many have also seen our current moment as a tug of war between tradition and stability and the potentials of modernity. These books help to explain how humanity can simultaneously be more technologically empowered and yet feel disempowered by growing inequality and the constant disruptions to our lives.

So, when reviewing a book of this nature, one must ask: What is new under the sun of this genre? To answer this question in short, the book is able to add important elements to this literature by focusing on less discussed global trends and discovering non-intuitive implications. These insights are complemented by a style that sticks close to the data and communicates ideas simply and clearly. The book excels at explaining population statistics, consumer trends, and other metrics in simple language while humanizing these insights through the occasional anecdote or intellectual detour.

Each chapter discusses an important trend that will impact the next decade: the impact of population growth in Africa, the growth in middle-class markets in Asia and other (non-Western) parts of the world, the growing importance of elderly consumers, the impact of urbanization, the shift of wealth and power toward women, the emergence of the sharing economy, and the less obvious uses of

technologies such as blockchain and 3D printing. By approaching the future “laterally” the author helps us think of trends we may not have considered.

Counterintuitively, the book benefits from neglecting certain hot-button topics: geopolitics, political polarization, global warming, post-trutherism, and to an extent artificial intelligence (AI). By focusing elsewhere and sticking to macro-trends that are unlikely to change, the book is able to provide useful insights without treading into polarized and polarizing intellectual territories. For example, by focusing on the potential applications of blockchain (rather than AI as many authors do) the author manages to add something new to the conversation beyond what has been discussed in books such as *The Globotics Upheaval*, *Homo Deus*, and *Physics of the Future*.

The book employs the term “lateral thinking” to describe its analytical approach. However, a better term might be “fuzzy thinking” or “non-linear thinking.” As I understand it, lateral thinking is a method of problem-solving, not prediction. That being said, I do believe that the best predictive analysis is creative and exploratory rather than parsimonious and rigid. But given the limited introduction readers are given to lateral thinking in the book, I was puzzled why the author didn’t use a more commonly known term such as “creative thinking” or “critical thinking.”

The author is most intellectually at home when discussing large trends supported by statistical data, but sometimes struggles when discussing issues that require political insight or nuanced multi-disciplinary theories. This is true of issues such as immigration and the political turmoil caused by disruptive technologies and globalization. For these issues, I would recommend the works of George Friedman (2009), Richard Baldwin (2019), Jared Diamond (2019), or any work by Yuval Noah Harari (2015, 2017, 2019). As Guillén discussed the growing inequality within societies and the clash of middle classes from around the world, I couldn’t help but think of Thomas Friedman’s writing from the early 2000s – *The*

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Lexus and the Olive Tree (1999) and The World is Flat (2005). With all these wonderful authors discussing the same topics, I was puzzled by the author's decision not to engage with this literature.

Mauro Guillén's book is not as bold and provocative as The Next 100 Years. It is not as theoretically rich as Homo Deus. Even so, the book is well-grounded in its data and extremely well-organized. It is an efficient book with wonderful insights. However, by not entering a conversation with prior works that debate our current moment in history, I believe the book leaves the reader worse off. In particular, I believe the book suffers by not engaging with Yuval Noah Harari's excellent trilogy of books Sapiens, Homo Deus, and 21 Lessons for the 21st Century. Harari's work gets one mention throughout the book and only on a relatively minor subject. In the future, I would like to see more awareness by authors of the works of others even when they do not share the same academic discipline. I would like to see authors engage more with the boundaries of the debate rather than reworking many of the same insights of others. However, that is a criticism that I could apply to many books.

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