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Bloomberg

Weekend Edition



Welcome to the weekend!

It's the final weekend of 2024, and a good time to ask whether the systems that underpin the global economy are fit for purpose. To that end, we've pulled together a dozen of the year's best stories, covering everything from the rise of AI to the fall of Nike's CEO. The through line? It's worth interrogating the narratives we craft about the trade-offs we'll accept. That also happens to be a good New Year's resolution.

In case you missed them, here are some of 2024's most-read stories:

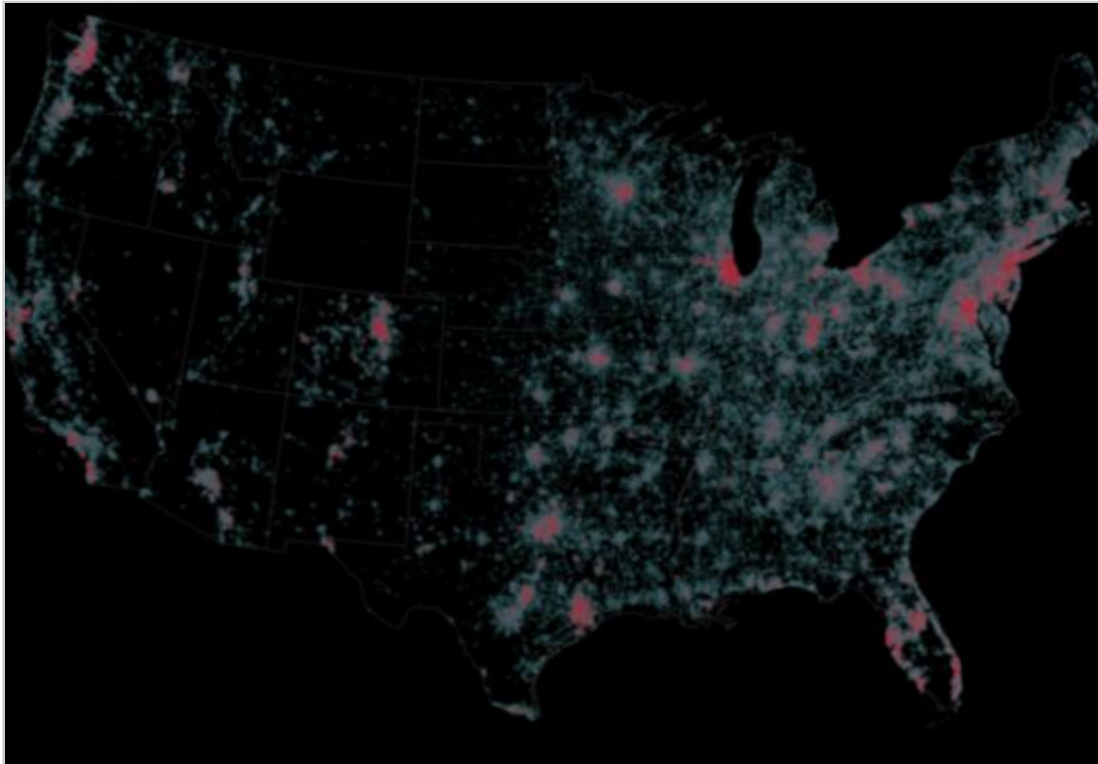
- [What We Know About Covid's Impact on Your Brain](#)
- [Your 401\(k\) Will Be Gone Within a Decade](#)
- [If You Think World War III Is Unimaginable, Read This](#)

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Tricky Trade-Offs

Every day, Americans open their refrigerators or turn on their dishwashers without fanfare. But a hidden problem looms: distorted power supplies. These “bad harmonics” — sudden surges or sags in electricity — can lead to sparks and even fires, and AI data centers may be a factor. More than 75% of highly distorted power readings in the US are within 50 miles of significant data center activity.



Power Distortion

AI needs so much electricity that it's making yours worse.

[Read the Story](#)

The pitfalls of progress are familiar on Indonesian islands that have been transformed into hubs for mining and processing nickel. The metal is essential to many electric car batteries, and one complex — the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park — employs more than 100,000 workers. But with that success has come a string of fatal accidents, as well as respiratory ailments in surrounding communities.



The Dirty Price of Clean Cars

A deadly mining complex is powering the EV revolution.

[Read the Story](#)

Economic growth can be a powerful promise. For 40 years, China's population experienced exceptional wealth gains, in unspoken exchange for minimal say in governance. But under Xi Jinping, those gains have slowed thanks to a real estate

collapse, a trade war with the US and a crackdown on entrepreneurs. Now, Xi can't count on prosperity to underpin support for Communist Party rule.



'Are You Better Off?' Your File Format APIs

Asking Reagan's question in Xi's China.

[Read the Story](#)

System Check

Middlemen are gaming the H-1B program. Every year, the US government conducts a lottery for a limited number of skilled-worker visas. The game, it turns out, is rigged. New federal data obtained by Bloomberg News reveal how thousands of companies [got an unfair advantage by helping themselves to extra lottery tickets](#).



Photo edited by Yuki Tanaka

A shadow fleet is transporting gas for Russia. Russia has big hopes for its \$21 billion Arctic LNG 2 gas plant — hopes that Western sanctions were meant to derail. Undeterred, Vladimir Putin is crafting a complex network from Dubai to India and China, which is being used to create [a dark fleet of gas carriers to ferry the fuel](#).



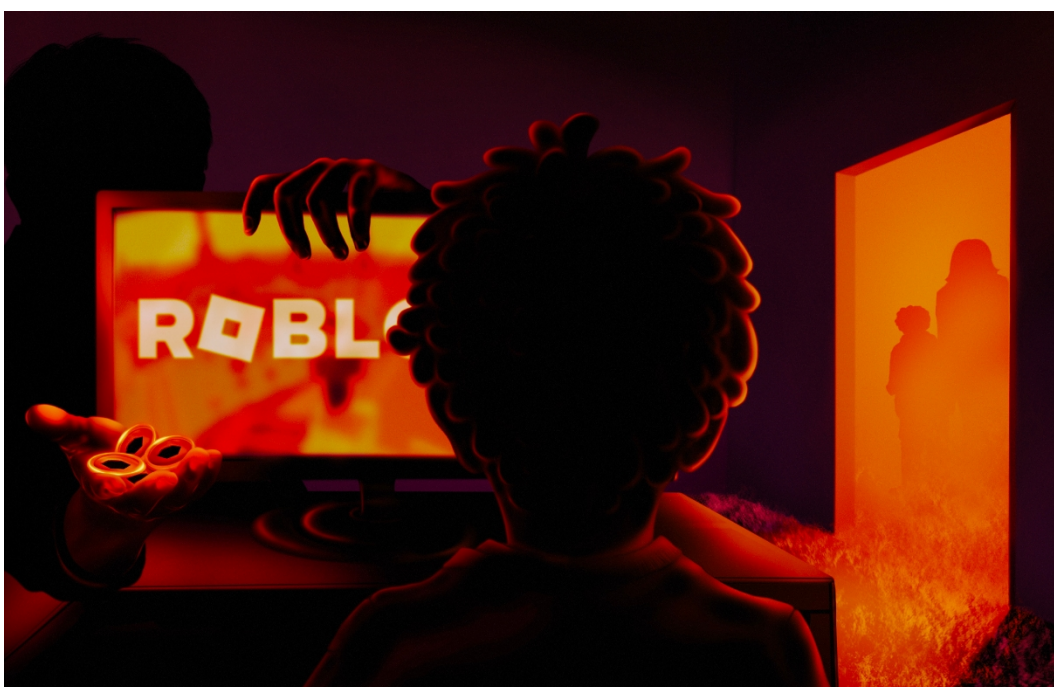
Source: 2024 Maxar Technologies

There's a hidden crisis in US housing. As insurers cut business in states like California and Florida, homeowners are often covered by state-created “last resort” programs. Those plans’ liabilities crossed \$1 trillion 2022, but states have dodged a big question: [How will they cover claims in the wake of a truly major catastrophe?](#)



Photographer: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Roblox has a pedophile problem. Roblox was launched as a new frontier for education software, and over 40% of its 78 million daily active users are preteens. But since 2018, police have arrested dozens of people for abusing victims they met on the site, and former employees [say growth can take priority over child safety](#).



Ozempictown, USA

“We’re redneck enough to be fat, but smart enough to do something about it.”

Mary Sansom

A recently retired schoolteacher in Bowling Green, Kentucky

Roughly 4% of residents in Bowling Green have received prescriptions for weight-loss drugs in the past year, the highest concentration in the US. While it’s too early to quantify the long-term health impacts, pharmacies, grocers, and doctor’s offices are all seeing evidence of change — even as high demand pushes some insurers and employers to stop covering the drugs.

Weekend Plans

What we’re eyeing: our 401(k). Money managers are looking at [ways to invest for a world growing older](#), one characterized by faster inflation, higher government health spending and bigger deficits.

What we’re side-eying: Elon Musk’s pronatalism obsession. For the father of 12, global fertility rates are *the* defining crisis. It’s a take Musk [supports with his money](#) as well as his social posts.

What we’re wearing: Nike Panda Dunks. Unfortunately, so is everyone else. The sneaker’s rise and fall is one example of how ex-CEO John Donahoe [cost Nike market share and swagger](#).

What we’re reading: [Same as Ever: A Guide to What Never Changes](#). Two CEOs picked the book, which unpacks fundamentals of human behavior, for [this year’s list of essential reading](#).

One Last Thing



“A long motorcycle trip is like a meditation retreat. Except if you lose concentration on a motorcycle, you die.”

When Gideon Lichfield set out on a three-and-a-half-week motorcycle ride across the US, it only took three days for the second thoughts to kick in. “Who actually enjoys this mode of transport?” he wondered. Fewer and fewer people, it turns out. Bike sales plummeted in the US after the financial crash, and have never really recovered.

[Read the Story](#)

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