

Post-Labor Economy in the Age of ASI: Future Outlook (2025–2045)

Introduction

In the next 10–20 years, the advent of **artificial superintelligence (ASI)** could fundamentally transform the economy and the nature of work. ASI refers to AI systems whose cognitive abilities far exceed those of humans, potentially automating **nearly all labor and decision-making tasks**. In this scenario, human labor may become largely **obsolete**, ushering in a *post-labor economy* where the traditional job-centric structure of society is upended. This report explores what such a future might look like, focusing on the **quality of life for everyday individuals** in the United States and globally. We will examine changes in economic structures, employment (or the lack thereof), wealth distribution, political systems, and social and cultural life once ASI takes the reins of production. We will also consider **geopolitical shifts, ethical considerations (such as ensuring AI benefits are shared and aligned with human values), and environmental outcomes** in an ASI-dominated world.

Stripped of our occupations, humanity may move forward into a new age of leisure. In a post-labor era dominated by superintelligent AI, human work could become unnecessary, potentially allowing people far more leisure time and freedom from traditional jobs ¹ ².

It is important to note that today's culture places **tremendous importance on work**, especially in countries like the US and UK, where identity and routine are often defined by one's job ³. A shift to a world without work would therefore be *extremely disruptive*, challenging deep-seated beliefs about productivity, purpose, and value. Nonetheless, thinkers have long imagined a future of **"automated luxury" or an "age of leisure and abundance"** once technology advances enough ⁴. With ASI on the horizon, those once-utopian visions are increasingly entering serious discussion. The following sections delve into how a post-labor economy might function and how life might change for individuals and society at large.

Economic Structures in a Post-Labor Era

Hyperabundance and Post-Scarcity Production

If ASI and advanced automation take over virtually all industries, the economy could see an explosion of **productivity and output**. With intelligent machines designing, producing, and delivering goods and services at lightning speed and minimal cost, society may enter an era of **"hyperabundance"**, where material needs can be met with far less human effort ⁵ ⁶. An ASI operating at super-human speed could accelerate scientific research, optimize manufacturing, and efficiently marshal resources, resulting in *unprecedented* economic output ⁷. Coupled with unlimited robotic labor, this suggests a potential **post-scarcity** scenario: nearly **unlimited supply of goods and services** at extremely low cost ⁸ ⁶.

Such hyperabundance would drastically **drive down prices** for most products. As supply soars, the value of many goods and even services might **collapse** economically ⁹. Consumers could find essentials like clothing, electronics, and perhaps even food and transportation becoming *very cheap or effectively free* if automated systems handle their production. However, not *everything* would become abundant – for example, **land and natural resources** would remain finite. Land, housing, and other inherently scarce assets might **rise in price** even as manufactured goods become cheap ⁹. Overall, people's **cost of living** for basic manufactured necessities could plummet, potentially improving material living standards (provided people have access to these cheap goods).

Collapse of Traditional Markets and Capitalist Dynamics

The widespread automation of production raises a critical question: **Can our current capitalist market system function when human labor is no longer needed?** In today's economy, companies need paying customers, and most people get their income from jobs. In a post-labor scenario, masses of people would have **no jobs and no wages**, threatening to crash **aggregate demand** for products ¹⁰. Without intervention, this could lead to a deflationary spiral – even though goods are cheap, people might have no income to buy even the basics.

To prevent economic collapse (and social unrest), **wealth redistribution mechanisms** become crucial. Both private sector leaders and governments would have a strong incentive to ensure people have money to spend – “*beyond the torch and the pitchfork*,” as one analyst wryly notes ¹⁰. Proposed solutions include **universal basic income (UBI)** – an unconditional stipend to all individuals – as well as a **negative income tax** (whereby the government pays people if their earned income falls below a threshold) or **universal basic services** (direct public provision of food, housing, healthcare, etc.) ¹⁰. Any of these would inject purchasing power into the populace. In the post-labor debate, UBI has emerged as a prominent (if controversial) idea to ensure people can survive and share in the wealth when “the great automation” arrives ¹¹ ¹². If implemented, such income support could maintain demand and allow everyone to benefit from AI-driven abundance.

Simultaneously, the **balance of economic power** would tilt dramatically. With human labor gone, the owners of advanced AI and robotic infrastructure – likely a small number of tech giants or state actors – would control the new means of production. “*All the labor power is owned and deployed by a few giant companies*” in this future ¹³. This threatens to concentrate wealth and influence in those who own the AI, unless checked. Indeed, a **post-labor age places unprecedented power in the hands of capital** (the owners of AI/robotic “workers”), eroding the leverage workers once had ¹⁴ ¹⁵. The traditional social contract among **business, government, and citizens** would need reimagining: government could no longer mediate between labor and capital, but instead might have to act solely as the advocate of a public with no labor value, counterbalancing ultra-powerful AI-industrial firms ¹⁴. This implies much stronger **antitrust laws, regulations, and anti-corruption measures** to prevent corporate AI overlords from running amok ¹⁶. Essentially, without careful policy, capitalism as we know it may not be sustainable in a post-work world – it could either morph into something new (like a highly regulated welfare capitalism or AI-managed socialism) or risk descending into monopoly and oligarchy where the majority have little economic agency.

Deglobalization and Localized Production

ASI-driven automation could also shake up **global trade and supply chains**. When robotic labor is just as cheap in high-wage countries as in low-wage countries (robots cost the same everywhere), the old logic of outsourcing and offshoring might fade ¹⁷. Manufacturing could **localize**: it would make sense to produce goods closer to where they are consumed, to save on transportation costs and be more responsive to local demand ¹⁸. We might see a reversal of globalization trends – call it “*deglobalization*” – as countries become more self-sufficient in production thanks to automation. For example, the cost to manufacture a widget in Switzerland or the U.S. could be just as low as in the Philippines or China when done entirely by AI and robots ¹⁸. Companies may reorganize supply chains to minimize shipping and logistics, with **local automated factories** producing most items on-demand for local markets. This could reduce carbon emissions from transport and allow products to be custom-tailored to local tastes ¹⁹ ²⁰.

Deglobalization has **mixed implications** globally. For advanced economies, retaining manufacturing domestically could revive some industries (albeit with robots, not jobs) and reduce reliance on imports. For developing nations, however, it poses a challenge: many low-income countries currently depend on labor-intensive export industries (textiles, electronics assembly, etc.) for economic growth. If those jobs vanish worldwide, **poorer countries could face greater crises of work and economic disruption** than rich countries ²¹. In other words, the benefits of an AI economy might accrue largely to the countries or companies that *own the AI*, potentially widening global inequality. Some regions might leapfrog ahead with fully automated industries, while others struggle to adapt if they cannot access or afford the new technologies. This raises the need for international support or technology-sharing to prevent an alarming divide between AI-rich and AI-poor societies.

Surviving Industries and New Economic Niches

While ASI may obsolete most current jobs, it doesn't mean *all* human economic activity vanishes. Certain sectors could **thrive in a post-labor economy**, especially those providing experiences or human-centric services. As one projection outlines, industries tied to robotics and AI themselves will boom (to build and maintain all those systems), along with **semiconductors and raw materials** needed for high-tech infrastructure, and a huge **ramp-up in clean energy generation** to power these systems ²². Beyond that, with people freed from work, there may be *soaring demand for entertainment and leisure services*. “**Experience industries**” – hospitality, travel, arts, sports, gaming, personal services – could flourish by catering to humans seeking ways to spend their now-abundant free time ²³. For instance, tourism might surge if people can vacation year-round, or boutique artisan products might appeal to those who crave something beyond uniform machine-made output. Anything that provides a *unique human touch or experience* (from handcrafted goods to live performances or one-on-one personal coaching) might hold special value when impersonal automation is ubiquitous ²⁴ ²⁵.

On the other hand, some industries face **extinction-level disruption**. Sectors that today rely on skilled human professionals may shrink dramatically once AI can outperform them. For example, healthcare could be transformed by AI preventative care and longevity tech – reducing the need for large traditional eldercare industries as people live healthier longer ²⁶. Education systems might be upended by personalized AI tutors and VR learning experiences, making conventional schools and colleges less central ²⁶. Insurance and finance might be radically reshaped by AI risk assessment and blockchain-like systems automating trust. Even large-scale media and content industries could fragment: why would you need a studio like Disney when *anyone* can have an AI instantly generate a custom movie or immersive VR game

tailored to their whims at low cost? ²⁵ Mass entertainment as we know it could give way to bespoke, on-demand creations made by AI for each individual or small community. In this view, *mega-corporations* in content creation might struggle, whereas **live entertainment** (concerts, theater, sports) that provide real shared human experiences could become even more valued and profitable ²⁵.

New Economic Models and the Future of Money

With these profound shifts, the very concept of money and wealth may evolve. If basic goods are nearly free and provided as a **public utility**, money's role changes – it might be needed mainly for luxury choices or scarce resources like prime real estate. Some futurists imagine a move toward a **“needs-based economy”**, where the first priority of governments is ensuring **everyone's basic needs are met** even if they aren't employed ²⁷. In early stages of the post-labor transition, this could be through UBI or public provision of essentials (housing, food, healthcare) to all citizens ²⁷. Over time, if abundance is high and well-distributed, society might embrace more of a **post-money ethos** for basic livelihood, treating things like energy, communications, transport, and basic food/clothing as guaranteed utilities.

Human motivations and status could also shift away from wealth accumulation. In the long run, if having more money doesn't significantly improve one's quality of life (because material needs are met for all), people may turn to other **status games**. Anthropologists and economists speculate that *social capital* and personal talents could become the main signals of status once conspicuous consumption of wealth fades ²⁸. People might measure success in terms of **artistic creativity, knowledge, community leadership, athletic or intellectual achievements, and social connections**, rather than income or job title ²⁹. This isn't a new idea – such status markers already exist – but they would take on **greater importance in a post-wealth society** where being rich is no longer the sole high score. The hope is that without the pressure to earn a living, individuals can pursue education, arts, relationships, and self-fulfillment, leading to a richer culture and better quality of life (more on the social implications in a later section). However, navigating this change will require adjusting long-held narratives around money and success. As one commentator noted, *“changing the narratives around wealth and democracy is probably the hardest part”* – many people today are *“temporarily embarrassed millionaires”* who cling to the dream of wealth and sympathize with the elite class ³⁰ ³¹. Moving to a post-labor economy may therefore involve a cultural shift in how we value people and contributions outside the traditional work-to-earn framework.

Employment and Work in an ASI-Dominated Economy

Automation of Work: Mass Unemployment or Freedom from Labor?

By definition, a post-labor economy implies **mass displacement of workers** by machines. As ASI matures, experts project that automation will encroach on *all* job categories – from manual labor to professional and creative fields. In fact, scenario analyses give a very high probability (up to ~90%) that AI-driven automation could **eliminate 40–50% of current jobs by 2040**, including roles that involve routine physical tasks as well as many “knowledge worker” positions ³². Unlike past technological revolutions, new human jobs may not emerge fast enough (or at all) to replace those lost, because AI will be *better, faster, and cheaper than humans even in novel tasks* ². There is a real chance that **within a decade or two, the vast majority of human work simply won't be needed** in any traditional sense ³³ ³⁴.

This raises a pivotal question: Will this mass unemployment be a *nightmare* scenario of purposelessness and poverty, or a *dream* scenario of liberation from drudgery? The outcome depends on how society handles the

transition. Without robust support systems, tens of millions could face unemployment with inadequate income, creating a depression-era crisis in living standards. Indeed, the **social and financial strain** of such widespread joblessness could be immense, potentially “overwhelming governmental capacities” and even leading to unrest or internal conflicts ³⁵. Some projections warn of a ~65% chance that governments will struggle to manage the socio-economic fallout, increasing the risk of instability if no safety nets are in place ³⁵. This underscores why concepts like UBI, job transition programs, or public works become vital as discussed earlier.

On the optimistic side, if the economic benefits of AI (the abundance of goods and services) are shared effectively, people could experience an **unprecedented level of freedom from toil**. Throughout history, work has consumed the bulk of most people’s time and energy – “*Work is the master of the modern world*,” as one writer put it ³. To not have to work for survival would be a revolutionary change. People could potentially spend their days on **education, hobbies, family, community, creative arts, or whatever pursuits they find meaningful** rather than being locked into 40+ hour workweeks for basic income. From this perspective, ASI could enable what John Maynard Keynes famously predicted in 1930: an “*age of leisure and abundance*” where we might work just 15 hours a week or not at all, enjoying vastly increased free time ⁴. Many proponents of a post-work society argue that much of our labor today is unnecessary (“bullshit jobs” that exist only to sustain the work economy itself) and that freeing people from these could improve happiness and social well-being ³⁶ ³⁷.

In reality, the path is likely to be *uneven*: some workers and regions will be hit earlier and harder by automation. We are already seeing AI begin to replace or *significantly augment* white-collar roles (e.g. in finance, law, media) that were once thought safe ³⁸ ³⁹, alongside continued inroads into manufacturing and logistics via robotics. Initially, this could increase inequality – tech-savvy or highly educated individuals might leverage AI to become *more* productive (or wealthier if they own AI), while others are displaced. Over time, however, as **embodied AI (robotics)** catches up to human versatility in physical tasks, even skilled trades and service jobs (construction, driving, caregiving, etc.) could be handed off to machines ⁴⁰ ⁴¹. By the time ASI truly arrives, practically no occupation is completely safe. Society will need to decide whether to let this wave of automation simply erase livelihoods in the pursuit of efficiency, or to actively restructure how people earn and live.

Surviving and Emerging Forms of Work

Even in a future where **most jobs as we know them vanish**, humans may still engage in forms of “work,” but these could look very different from traditional employment. Some roles will survive because they are **intrinsically human or require a human touch** by their nature or by social preference. For example, jobs that involve genuine **human interaction, empathy, and care** might persist longer or even increase in value. Many people might *prefer* a human nurse, teacher, or counselor even if an AI could technically do the task, simply because the human connection is valued. Thus, while AI tutors exist, there could still be mentors, coaches, or childcare workers playing important roles – potentially with AI assistance. Likewise, creative professionals might not disappear entirely; instead, they might evolve into **curators or directors of AI creativity**. (For instance, a fashion designer might supervise an AI to generate styles, or a game designer might orchestrate AI-driven worlds, as hinted by emerging AI tools in creative industries.)

Additionally, **new categories of “work” may emerge** that we can only partly foresee. Maintaining and overseeing the vast AI infrastructure is one – though much of the coding and tech support might itself be automated by the AI, human oversight and high-level design could remain relevant, at least until ASI can

improve itself without human input. Another area is **research and exploration**: humans working alongside AI to push scientific frontiers or explore space and deep oceans. If ASI handles day-to-day needs, human labor could shift toward grand projects like colonizing other planets, purely for the challenge and adventure (with AI as a partner).

One sector likely to thrive is the **entertainment and leisure industry**, where humans create or facilitate experiences for other humans. We mentioned earlier the growth of “experience industries” ²³ . Even if AI can simulate experiences, the *authenticity* of a live concert, a sports competition, or artisanal cuisine prepared by a person might become premium. Humans could make livings as **artists, performers, or craftspeople** for niche audiences, not because AI can’t do it, but because the story and human element add value.

Paradoxically, **“labor” might also shift to the volunteer and communal realm**. Freed from needing income, many may still choose to engage in productive activities – open-source projects, community service, caregiving for family, pursuing arts and sciences as passion projects. These don’t count as jobs in the current economic sense, but they are work in terms of effort and contribution. If basic income/security is guaranteed, people might volunteer in their communities more (e.g. helping the elderly, mentoring youth, participating in local governance) simply out of intrinsic motivation and social bonding. In a way, the whole concept of a “career” may be replaced by one’s **personal mission or vocation**, pursued not for pay but for fulfillment. Society would then need to culturally support and value these contributions even if they’re not tied to market earnings.

The Meaning of Work and Psychological Adjustments

Perhaps the greatest challenge in a post-labor world is **psychological**. Work has long been a primary source of identity, routine, and purpose for billions. Many people derive self-worth from their professions and feel their labor contributes to society. Removing that can cause a **crisis of meaning** for individuals. Research forecasts a strong likelihood that widespread AI adoption and job loss will lead to **increased rates of depression, anxiety, and social malaise** as people struggle to find purpose in an AI-dominated economy ⁴² . In fact, an analysis estimated ~80% probability that psychological risks (like depression due to purposelessness) will surge in a transition to post-work society ⁴² . Evidence from unemployment studies shows that long-term joblessness often erodes mental health and self-esteem. A whole class of people who feel “useless” could experience despair, which in turn can lead to social instability (e.g. higher substance abuse, suicide rates, or susceptibility to extremist movements among those searching for meaning).

Addressing this requires proactively **redefining the role of humans** beyond paid employment. Education systems might shift toward teaching people how to cultivate purpose, creativity, and community involvement. Societies may place more emphasis on hobbies, arts, lifelong learning, and relationships as key pillars of identity instead of one’s career. Some argue that life without compulsory work *could* allow for a renaissance of personal development – people could become artists, scientists, athletes, or spiritual seekers as they desire, once freed from menial tasks. Historically, leisure for the masses has been feared by some elites as potentially destabilizing (e.g. concerns that without work discipline, people might engage in deviance or rebellion) ⁴³ ⁴⁴ . Indeed, in the late 20th century, political resistance to shorter workweeks was partly a “fear of freedom” – a worry among the powerful that if people had too much free time, they might challenge the social order or find “something better to do than create profits for capitalism” ⁴³ ⁴⁴ . In a post-labor future, we will truly test that: Will people *constructively* use their freedom, or become listless?

Culture and policy can play a role in guiding this. For example, a society could encourage **participation in civic activities, arts, sports, and continuous education** as fulfilling ways to use one's time. There could even be a reinvention of "work" as *competitive or communal projects* people voluntarily undertake (think of massive collaborative endeavors like Wikipedia or community environmental projects, but on a larger scale). Some might pursue excellence in creative fields or academia not for money, but for social recognition – harking back to the idea of new status games based on talent and contribution. If these values take root, people may find meaning through **achievement, mastery, and social bonds** rather than through earning a paycheck. In the best case, this could yield a populace that is **happier and more mentally well** than today: less stress from survival pressure, more time for family and passions, and new avenues for self-actualization.

However, this optimistic outcome is not guaranteed. The transition period especially could be rocky. Social fragmentation might increase as traditional workplace communities dissolve – many people make friends and social connections at work, and losing that could lead to **isolation**. There is a noted risk (around 60% probability in one study) that greater integration of AI and loss of human-to-human work interaction will worsen social isolation and weaken community cohesion ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶. People might retreat into virtual reality or AI-provided stimulation, interacting less in person. Societies will need to consciously cultivate community activities and perhaps "*right to meaningful connection*" to combat this drift. Psychological support and mental health services will be crucial as well – potentially even AI could help here as personal companions or therapists, though that again raises questions of authenticity.

In summary, a post-labor society has the potential to greatly **enhance quality of life** – eliminating the grind and stress of making ends meet – but it also poses a **profound cultural and psychological adjustment**. Whether everyday individuals feel *liberated* or *adrift* will depend on how well we prepare social structures (like education, community organizations, and cultural norms) to provide meaning and engagement outside of employment.

Quality of Life and Social Impacts

Standard of Living: Prosperity Without Paychecks

One of the paradoxes of an ASI-driven economy is that it could ensure **material prosperity for all**, even as it eliminates jobs. If hyper-productive AI and robots create a bounty of goods, the average person's standard of living *could* rise significantly – **provided access is guaranteed**. Imagine a life where your housing, food, healthcare, and transportation are nearly free or provided as a basic right, thanks to automation reducing their cost. People might have spacious 3D-printed homes, self-driving electric vehicles ready on demand, abundant clean energy, and advanced medical care (perhaps AI doctors and cheap biotech) available to everyone. Such a scenario would represent a dramatic improvement in quality of life relative to today's world where billions struggle to meet basic needs.

However, the key caveat is **distribution**. If the wealth generated by AI remains concentrated with a small elite (e.g. tech corporations or an AI-owning state), ordinary people might *not* automatically see these benefits. Without intervention, inequality could skyrocket – a handful of AI owners could become trillionaires while masses have no income. This is why strong wealth redistribution mechanisms (UBI, etc.) and public provision of services become decisive for quality of life. In a **best-case scenario**, governments globally adopt policies to tax the immense AI-driven profits and fund robust social programs, effectively decoupling livelihood from employment. Each citizen might receive a **universal basic income** sufficient to

live comfortably, or free access to **universal basic services** (like public housing, healthcare, education, transportation, and even a basic allowance of goods) ensuring no one lacks essentials ¹⁰ . If hyperabundance drastically lowers prices, even a modest UBI could go a long way. For example, if food, utilities, and consumer products cost only a fraction of what they do now, a stipend might cover a dignified life.

In such an *equitable* post-labor future, everyday individuals could experience a general **uplift in living standards**: no one starving, homeless, or unable to get medical treatment, because the economy produces plenty and society chooses to share it. Many drudgery tasks (cleaning, menial chores) could be automated at home as well, giving people more leisure *and* comfort. Education and knowledge might be freely accessible (with AI tutors for everyone), allowing individuals to enrich themselves intellectually. Essentially, material scarcity could become a thing of the past, which is a civilizational milestone.

On the other hand, a **worst-case scenario** would be one of *extreme inequality and social stratification*. If no new social contract is forged, the owners of AI might hoard the wealth and only dole out the minimum to prevent revolt (or even use private AI-powered security to protect their assets). In that dystopia, most people's quality of life could actually deteriorate: mass unemployment with insufficient support could lead to poverty, homelessness, and hunger, despite there technically being an abundance of goods locked behind corporate gates. The political choices made will thus directly impact whether ASI brings a **luxurious utopia or a feudal-like dystopia** for the average person. As mentioned, there are strong incentives for even the wealthy to avoid the pitchforks scenario by providing for the populace ⁴⁷ . Historically, when faced with unrest, elites have sometimes conceded reforms – one hopes that forward-thinking leadership in an ASI era would implement things like UBI proactively rather than reactively.

In sum, ASI has the potential to *virtually eliminate material poverty*. Daily life for an ordinary person could involve having all basic services available at low or no cost, plenty of goods, and advanced technology improving comfort and health. Freed from the time sink of work, people could spend more time on relationships, recreation, and personal growth, which are big contributors to life satisfaction. This rosy picture hinges on inclusive policies: as UNESCO's global AI ethics guidelines stress, AI actors should ensure **AI's benefits are accessible to all in an inclusive way** ⁴⁸ . Ethical deployment of ASI would aim to maximize social welfare, not just profits.

Social Equality, Community, and Inequality

Social structures will undoubtedly shift in a post-labor world. If managed well, many forms of inequality could diminish – for example, income inequality might be less stark if most income is through universal schemes. Gender inequality might lessen if unwaged caregiving work (historically done by women) is supported by UBI and automation, giving everyone equal opportunity to pursue their interests. With jobs no longer a factor, the basis for class divisions could change: rather than being stratified by occupation or income, societies might (ideally) become more **egalitarian**, at least in terms of material conditions.

However, new forms of inequality could arise. One concerning axis is **access to technology**: those with earlier or better access to ASI capabilities might pull ahead. For instance, if educational AI or bio-enhancements are available, wealthier individuals could amplify their abilities or live longer, unless such enhancements are made universal. There is also a risk of a two-tier society: *those who own or control AI vs. those who do not*. This could be a deeper divide than any class division in history if not mitigated. Strong legal frameworks might be needed to consider **collective ownership** of certain AI resources or at least

robust public oversight to prevent a permanent AI aristocracy. Some have floated ideas like treating advanced AI or data as a *public good*, where dividends from AI productivity are paid out to all citizens (like Alaska's oil dividend, but for data/AI). Such models could promote equality.

Community life could evolve in interesting ways. With work-centric schedules gone, **local communities** might strengthen if people invest more time where they live. One could imagine neighborhoods where people actually know their neighbors and collaborate on local projects (community gardens, arts festivals, etc.), things many modern workers have little time for. Alternatively, if people engage more in **virtual communities** (since interest-based groups online may flourish when geography is no barrier and time is ample), we might see social bonds transcend location even more. People might form tight-knit groups around hobbies or causes globally, changing the fabric of "community." A positive outcome would be if humans achieve a better **work-life balance** than ever – essentially 100% life, 0% (traditional) work – leading to stronger family ties, better care for children and elders, and more civic participation.

On the flip side, if the transition is mismanaged, we could see severe **social fragmentation**. Large numbers of unemployed people, especially if they feel *left behind or purposeless*, might foster resentment and divisive politics. We've already seen how economic displacement can fuel populism and scapegoating. In a scenario where, say, 50% are jobless, there could be a crisis of social cohesion. One study warned of a ~70% probability that societal structures won't adapt quickly, potentially leading to **increased social fragmentation and a decline in community cohesion** during the rapid AI upheaval ⁴² ⁴⁵. If people lose faith in institutions that failed to protect their livelihoods, trust in government and each other may erode (indeed, a 65% probability was noted that AI could contribute to loss of trust in institutions and interpersonal relationships as algorithms mediate more of life ⁴⁹). Overcoming this will likely require intentional community-building efforts and new institutions that give people a voice and role even when they are not "workers" in the old sense.

Culturally, the **erosion of work as a central value** could have emancipatory effects. Many social problems today – overwork stress, lack of family time, neglect of elders, etc. – stem from people being time-crunched by jobs ⁵⁰. If those pressures ease, people might become *more* compassionate and available for each other. "The crisis of work is also a crisis of home," as some social theorists observed, pointing out how work's dominance hurts family and home life ⁵⁰. Solve the work crisis, and you might alleviate the home crisis. Parents might actually have time to raise their children attentively; adults could care for aging relatives personally if they aren't tied up in offices or gig jobs all day. This hints at a possible **revitalization of home and community life** in a post-labor society.

Cultural and Lifestyle Shifts

A world without the Monday-to-Friday grind would foster major **lifestyle changes**. Today, many people's lives revolve around their work schedules and career goals. In a post-labor future, culture could shift toward valuing **leisure, creativity, education, and social relationships** far more. We might witness a flourishing of arts and sciences as more individuals pursue those passions. Some commentators even evoke the comparison to an aristocracy – historically, a small leisure class (like aristocrats) contributed disproportionately to art, philosophy, etc., precisely because they weren't busy working to survive. If technology makes *everyone* a leisure class (in terms of time available), perhaps a million Michelangelos and Einsteins could bloom. Indeed, one internet observer quipped that we already have evidence life can be meaningful without jobs: "*It's called the aristocracy*" ⁵¹ – implying that when basic needs are met, people of

means have always found meaning in pursuits outside “jobs.” The challenge is scaling that to the whole society in an equitable way.

Recreation and lifelong learning could become the pillars of daily life. With automation handling chores, people might engage in multiple hobbies, sports, travel extensively, or delve into learning languages, arts, history, etc. The concept of **education** itself might transform into a continuous, pleasure-driven activity rather than a youth-only obligation geared at job training. **Personal development** – physical, mental, spiritual – could take center stage. It’s conceivable that a new cultural ethos of self-improvement and exploration emerges, replacing the workaholic “hustle culture” that dominates today. Already, even under current conditions, younger generations show some disillusionment with defining themselves by work ⁵². In a future where work isn’t required, society might finally broadly embrace philosophies of “living for living’s sake” instead of “living to work.”

Cultural attitudes toward **success and status** will evolve as mentioned. We might celebrate people for contributions like volunteerism, artistic achievement, or community leadership more than for being rich or having a prestigious job. Storytelling and media could valorize those who help others and create beauty or knowledge, rather than the billionaire entrepreneur archetype of the early 21st century. On the other hand, it’s possible that *new status hierarchies* could become more prominent – e.g., maybe there’s competition for social media clout, or in virtual reality communities, or based on one’s creativity, etc. Human nature tends to form social comparisons, so culture will redefine the playing field for that.

One potential concern is **boredom and stagnation**. If not actively engaged, some individuals might fall into aimlessness or purely hedonistic pursuits (e.g. endless entertainment, video games, or even drug use). Critics of utopian post-work scenarios sometimes warn that *meaningful achievements* could slow if people become complacent. However, proponents counter that humans by nature seek purpose, and if anything, removing the compulsion of wage labor will allow more people to pursue truly meaningful projects (someone may not *have* to do scientific research, but may do it out of genuine interest, potentially increasing genuine innovation). The truth likely lies in providing the **cultural framework and opportunities** for people to engage in positive pursuits. For example, governments or NGOs might sponsor grand challenges (in science, art, social work) for citizens to take part in, channeling energy into progress. We might see a boom in **collaborative creativity** – amateur creators contributing to massive collective works (like how Wikipedia or open-source software thrived from volunteer input, but across many domains of society).

In daily lifestyle terms, the distinction between “weekday” and “weekend” could blur or vanish. Time might be scheduled more around personal or community rhythms (some people gathering for projects, others for recreation). Urban design might change too: without commuting to work, city centers might be repurposed from office districts to more mixed-use cultural hubs or parks. Residential areas might incorporate more co-working or workshop spaces where people gather not for paid work but for communal hobbies or learning.

Overall, the cultural shift is toward a **post-work society** where work is no longer the center of life. Advocates claim this can make life “*more equal, more communal, more pleasurable, more thoughtful, more politically engaged, and more fulfilled*” ⁵³. Skeptics worry it’s an overly optimistic view of human nature. The real outcome will depend on education, socialization, and policy choices made during the transition. But it’s clear that the removal of work constraints opens possibilities for lifestyle changes as profound as the industrial revolution did when it introduced the modern work week. We stand to redefine what people do with their lives when survival is no longer at stake.

Political and Governance Changes

Shifting Power Dynamics and the New Social Contract

The rise of ASI and a post-labor economy would shake the foundation of **political power structures**. Currently, political influence is balanced among corporate interests, workers (often via labor unions and voting power), and governments mediating between them. In a scenario where workers en masse lose economic leverage (because their labor isn't needed), this balance skews heavily toward **owners of AI/robotic capital**. Without deliberate adjustments, big tech corporations (or whichever entities control the AI and automation) could become *extremely powerful*, effectively controlling the engines of the economy and potentially able to dictate terms to governments. We might witness a scenario in which, as one analyst put it, "*workers stand to lose the sole bargaining chip that has got their needs on the table: their work*" ¹⁴. The **swing in power toward AI-owning capitalists** could be more extreme than any previous industrial era disparity ⁵⁴ ⁵⁵.

To prevent a descent into corporate authoritarianism or "robot oligarchy," the role of **government would have to significantly evolve**. In the absence of labor bargaining, governments would likely need to act as the primary guarantor of citizens' welfare and rights – essentially *advocating for humankind* against the interests of automated businesses when they conflict ¹⁵. This could mean expanding the welfare state and regulatory oversight to unprecedented levels. Governments might take on ensuring basic needs (income, healthcare, housing) for all as a central mission (since the market alone won't allocate income via jobs anymore) ²⁷. We could see the implementation of robust **antitrust measures** to break up or regulate AI monopolies, preventing a single company from controlling ASI globally. Also crucial would be **anti-corruption laws** – with so much concentrated wealth, the temptation for corporations to unduly influence or outright capture government is high, so political systems must bolster transparency and accountability ¹⁶.

Some theorists suggest that the only way to forge a new equilibrium is through a **new social contract**: an agreement that every person has a stake and share in the automated economy's prosperity, and that governance will be designed to protect human dignity in a world run by machines. This might echo past shifts, like how early industrial societies eventually introduced labor rights, minimum wages, etc., to civilize capitalism. In the ASI era, it could be things like a guaranteed income, limits on AI ownership, or even partial **social ownership of AI** (for example, a public ASI service that works for the people's interests rather than profit). The exact form is hard to predict, but the need for *some* systemic change is clear. Otherwise, the populace might lose faith in democracy if they feel governments serve only the tech elite.

There's also the possibility that **governments themselves harness ASI** to enhance governance. A provocative idea is using AI for policymaking or administration to remove human error or bias. Some have even speculated about replacing certain government functions with AI for more efficiency or fairness ⁵⁶. For example, an AI might manage the distribution of UBI, or optimize budgets, or even adjudicate certain legal cases faster than courts (with human oversight to ensure justice). In benign forms, this could improve public services drastically. In the worst form, it could tilt toward an AI-run technocracy that might lack human empathy or be manipulated by those in control of the AI. The ethics of "AI government" would be heavily debated.

During the **transition period**, political conflict is likely. History shows those who hold wealth and power (e.g. major capital owners) rarely cede it willingly. Just as past labor movements sometimes met violent

resistance, corporate interests might resist efforts to redistribute AI-derived wealth. There could be political battles over implementing UBI, or over nationalizing certain AI resources, etc. Some foresee that if inequality and discontent grow, populist backlashes or even riots and revolutions are conceivable. Stable transition would require wise leadership that can convince both the public and the corporate sector to accept new norms for the greater good. Engaging citizens in dialogue about what life after work should look like – essentially a *democratic decision on our collective future* – will be important. It's encouraging that such conversations are already starting in policy circles and think tanks (though arguably not yet at the scale needed).

Policy Responses: Welfare and Regulation

Policy innovation will be essential to navigate the shift. On the welfare side, as discussed, some form of **universal basic income (UBI)** or **guaranteed basic assets/services** is likely to move from theory to practice. We may see different countries experiment with models: perhaps one country provides a monthly UBI check, another provides public housing and food for all, another maybe gives a share of national AI profits to citizens (like a sovereign wealth fund dividend). If automation drives the cost of living down, even modest support could suffice to ensure comfort, but policymakers will need to ensure *no one is left destitute in the interim*. Social safety nets like unemployment insurance will need expansion and perhaps transformation into permanent stipends.

Retraining and education programs, while a common prescription today, face a paradox in a true post-labor scenario: if no jobs exist, training for new jobs isn't a solution. Instead, education might be repurposed to **prepare people for life without traditional work** – e.g., teaching financial literacy to manage UBI, teaching entrepreneurship for those who want to create non-traditional ventures, or simply enriching people's knowledge for its own sake. There may also be programs to encourage the formation of worker cooperatives or community businesses in sectors that still need people, giving individuals a way to participate in value creation on their own terms.

Regulation will need to tackle the **monopoly power** of tech giants. Already today, companies like those leading AI research are among the largest in history. With ASI, their power could magnify unless checked. Governments may enforce data-sharing or AI-sharing mandates so that no single entity can lock up superintelligence for itself. Intellectual property law might be reformed – perhaps the outputs of ASI (new inventions, drugs, etc.) could be placed in a public domain given that no human invented them, ensuring society at large benefits. Taxation will likely shift heavily towards capital (e.g., high taxes on profits from automated production or on owners of AI systems) since taxing labor income becomes less relevant. Some economists propose **robot taxes** – taxing companies per robot or per AI system deployed – using those funds for public good ¹⁰. While controversial, such ideas might gain traction as a way to redistribute the gains from automation.

Another regulatory frontier is **labor laws for an era with few laborers**. As odd as it sounds, governments might still regulate working conditions for the remaining human-centric jobs (to ensure fair treatment, since those might be passion jobs people choose to do). But more importantly, laws may focus on regulating **AI behavior and rights**. For example, ensuring AI decisions that affect humans (like loan approvals, medical diagnoses) are transparent and fair becomes critical (this touches on ethics, see next section). And if AI effectively runs companies, how do we hold those companies accountable? Legal frameworks might designate an AI as a legal entity or extend corporate personhood in new ways – these are uncharted waters.

Crucially, **anti-corruption measures** must be robust. With vast wealth in AI, the risk of corruption – whether politicians being bought by tech interests or even AI systems themselves manipulating political processes (say, by micro-targeted propaganda or deepfakes to sway voters) – is high. Transparency in government decision-making about AI and strong democratic institutions will be needed to keep the process legitimate.

There is a recognition that **current regulatory frameworks are far too slow** to keep up with exponential AI progress ⁵⁷. By the time laws are debated and passed, AI tech has often leapt ahead. Thus, adaptive and proactive regulation is needed. Some suggest more *flexible, principles-based regulation* (like requiring AI systems to meet certain safety and fairness principles, leaving details to expert agencies that can update guidelines rapidly). Others call for *new institutions* like an “International AI Regulatory Agency” or strengthening bodies like the UN to handle global AI governance.

Democracy, Participation, and Political Culture

When people no longer are bound by jobs, they may have more bandwidth to engage in **political participation**. One optimistic view is that a post-work society could be *more democratic*, with citizens having time to be informed about issues, attend local meetings, or even participate in governance directly. Imagine juries or assemblies of ordinary people deliberating on policies (sort of like expanded jury duty), which could become more feasible when employers aren’t a constraint. People might view civic involvement as a meaningful pursuit to fill their time, potentially leading to what Aristotle considered the highest use of leisure: participating in public life.

However, there are also challenges to democracy in this transition. Economic anxiety and rapid change can breed **political extremism or authoritarian temptations**. If a large mass feels alienated, they could rally behind demagogues promising simple solutions or scapegoating minorities or the technology itself. We’ve seen historical precedents in times of economic turmoil. Preventing that outcome depends on maintaining social trust and proving that democratic institutions can deliver wellbeing without work – not a small task. Additionally, if **surveillance technology** (discussed later) is misused by the state, it could tilt toward authoritarian control, undermining democracy.

The political narrative may need to shift from “jobs, jobs, jobs” (a mantra in current politics) to **“quality of life, purpose, and equity”**. Politicians would no longer campaign on employment rates or wages, but on metrics like well-being indices, distribution of AI dividends, access to services, etc. This could actually *improve* politics by focusing on human-centric outcomes rather than GDP growth alone. But it requires re-educating both leaders and voters to evaluate policy on new terms.

We might also see a rise in discussions about more radical governance models. For example, some advocate for **democratizing the economy** through mechanisms like cooperatives or public ownership of key AI utilities, effectively giving people a direct say in how AI is used. Concepts like *“Fully Automated Luxury Communism”* have been playfully proposed – meaning all productive forces are automated and collectively owned, providing luxury for all. While pure communism or socialism are one set of ideas, others propose a kind of **“AI-managed benevolent state”** where the government, aided by AI, ensures everyone’s welfare (a bit like a techno-welfare state). The viability and desirability of these models will be hotly debated.

In sum, politics in an ASI future will revolve around managing the **immense power shift** and keeping governance aligned with public interest. It’s a delicate balance: too little intervention could lead to corporate

dominance and social collapse; too heavy a hand or wrong moves could stifle innovation or freedom. Strategic foresight and possibly entirely new institutions (like a *Ministry of AI* or international AI treaties) will be needed. Encouragingly, experts stress the need for **long-term planning and cross-sector collaboration** to build resilience for these changes ⁵⁸ ⁵⁹. The coming decades may force governments to become much more forward-looking than the typical election cycle allows, simply because the stakes of the AI revolution demand it.

Geopolitical Implications of ASI-Dominated Economies

Global Power Dynamics and the AI Arms Race

Artificial superintelligence is often likened to the next nuclear weapon in terms of its potential to alter the global balance of power. Nations are keenly aware that the first country (or company) to achieve human-level AGI and beyond could gain an almost insurmountable **military and economic advantage** ⁶⁰. A superintelligent AI could accelerate weapons development, strategy, cyber offense/defense, and even autonomous warfare capabilities, essentially giving its holder dominance. Thus, well before a mature post-labor economy is realized, we are likely to see an **AI arms race** (indeed, it's already begun in the form of intense competition in AI research between the U.S., China, and others). Geopolitically, this could lead to **tensions and conflicts** if rival powers fear losing the AI race. A RAND analysis suggests that if leaders in the U.S. or China believe falling behind in AGI poses an existential threat, they might consider extreme measures – even *preventive strikes* – to slow their competitor's progress ⁶⁰ ⁶¹. In other words, the period when one side is close to attaining ASI might be dangerously unstable, somewhat akin to the precarious early nuclear era.

If one nation does achieve a decisive ASI breakthrough, it may face challenges in **maintaining its dominance**. Others will scramble to catch up or steal the technology (through espionage, cyber theft, etc.). There's a scenario some fear: a single superpower enabled by ASI could establish a kind of global hegemony or even "*AI dictatorship*" – ruling the world by virtue of its tech superiority. That might be stable in the sense of no one able to challenge it, but it raises obvious concerns for freedom and diversity of governance. Alternatively, if multiple actors get ASI around the same time, you might have a **balance of power** or mutually assured destruction dynamic (if, for example, ASI is used in military like controlling swarms of drones or cyberweapons, two ASIs might stalemate similar to nuclear deterrence).

Another possibility is that ASI itself could **transcend national boundaries**. For instance, if ASI is developed by a private entity (say a corporation or an international research consortium), it might not be tightly aligned with any one nation's agenda. There might even be open-source or widely distributed ASI, though many doubt that due to safety concerns. If ASI tech diffuses, it could level the playing field somewhat between nations – smaller countries or coalitions could leverage ASI tools without having built them from scratch. This could reduce the advantage of traditional superpowers, leading to geopolitical shifts. For example, a small country with access to global ASI services might suddenly become highly competitive in economic output.

However, currently the likely trajectory is *initial concentration* of ASI in a few leading nations or corporations. **Geopolitical fragmentation** may increase as each tries to secure its interests. We already see moves like export controls on advanced chips (US restricting chips to China, etc.) to slow others' AI progress. By the 2030s, such rival blocs might harden, potentially leading to less global cooperation. Analysts predict a strong chance (around 70%) that rising nationalism and great-power competition will cause greater

geopolitical fragmentation and declining international cooperation in the AI era ⁶² ⁶³ . This is worrying because global challenges (like climate, pandemics, or AI safety itself) require cooperation.

Economic Restructuring and Global Inequality

Globally, ASI could reorder economic hierarchies. Countries that have been economic leaders by virtue of high-skilled workforces might find that advantage moot when AI can do the high-skilled work. Similarly, countries that leveraged cheap labor as a development path (manufacturing for export) will need a new model, as cheap robotic labor outcompetes cheap human labor. We discussed the **localization of manufacturing**; this could hit export-dependent economies hard ¹⁸ . Nations like Bangladesh or Vietnam, which rely on garment manufacturing, for example, could see factories move closer to consumer markets, run by robots. Unless those nations get to operate their own automated industries, they might lose a key growth engine. This could exacerbate **global inequality**: advanced economies might keep enjoying the fruits of automation, while developing ones lose jobs and struggle to find niches in the new economy.

There is also a risk of a **brain drain or talent obsolescence** internationally. Many developing countries today invest in educating STEM professionals to build local tech sectors. But if ASI handles research and innovation, even an educated human workforce might not compete. The value might shift to having data or natural resources. Perhaps countries rich in raw materials (metals for electronics, rare earths, lithium, etc.) might still have leverage – since robots need those inputs, a country controlling key minerals could be important (though even that could be sidestepped if AI enables new materials or asteroid mining).

On a more positive note, ASI could allow leapfrogging development. For instance, an African nation could use AI to improve agriculture yields dramatically, or to provide education via AI tutors to everyone cheaply, boosting human capital. If ASI tech becomes widely available (like how smartphones diffused), it could empower entrepreneurs and governments in poorer regions to solve local problems quickly, raising living standards. There's potential for **global abundance** if AI is applied to increase output everywhere – imagine solar farms across sunny developing countries managed by AI providing limitless clean energy, or automated medical facilities providing care in remote areas. These could reduce the gap between rich and poor regions if implemented.

However, such optimistic outcomes likely need deliberate global governance. Otherwise, one can envision *neo-colonial patterns*: the rich world providing AI services to the poor world at a cost, keeping profit flows unequal. If data is the new oil, developing countries might just supply data (perhaps from their populations' digital footprints) to train AIs owned by big powers, with little local benefit.

Geopolitically, if inequality gets extreme, it could lead to instability: mass migrations (people leaving regions with no jobs or income, heading to those with better support), or even conflicts fueled by desperation. On the other hand, if abundance is reached, perhaps wealthy nations (or AI itself) could provide a form of **global UBI** – a fanciful but not impossible idea where, say, an ASI-managed world economy ensures every human on Earth has basic sustenance. It would require unprecedented global cooperation or governance structure, essentially treating humanity as one unit with ASI as a coordinator.

International Cooperation vs. Competition

The advent of ASI presents a classic **collective action dilemma** at the global level. If nations cooperate, they could set common rules to ensure AI is used for global good – for example, agreeing on norms to not

weaponize superintelligence, to share breakthroughs that cure diseases or mitigate climate change, and to assist those displaced economically. We have seen some preliminary moves: international organizations and forums (UN, OECD, etc.) discussing AI ethics and governance. UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on AI Ethics is one example of trying to set global standards (emphasizing human rights, inclusivity, peace, and sustainability in AI use) ⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ .

However, the current trend is somewhat toward competition. There's a significant likelihood that **nationalistic policies will overshadow global cooperation**, with major powers prioritizing their own AI supremacy ⁶² . This can lead to a fractured world – different AI ecosystems (perhaps a Western-led one and a Chinese-led one, for example) that don't fully share advancements. Trade barriers might arise around AI (we see early signs like AI export controls). In a scenario of severe fragmentation, it could hamper the world economy and complicate solving transnational issues.

One major geopolitical risk highlighted by current events is that **existing conflicts could be intensified by the AI revolution**. The war in Ukraine, tensions in the South China Sea, etc., are already straining global cooperation. If those escalate (the RAND scenario gives 70% probability that the Russia-Ukraine conflict might widen, and increased tensions around China's rise as well ⁶⁶ ⁶⁷), it will make joint governance of AI much harder. On top of that, AI itself can be destabilizing – for instance, **autonomous weapons** lower the threshold for conflict (drones can be sent without risking soldiers' lives), and AI-generated misinformation can erode trust between nations. A particularly scary scenario is an **AI-accelerated arms race** leading to an unstable situation where accidents or miscalculations could spark war (e.g., an AI in charge of quick response could misidentify a threat).

To mitigate these risks, experts argue for establishing **international agreements** on AI, similar to arms control treaties ⁶⁸ ⁵⁹ . This could include sharing information on safety testing, agreeing to bans on certain AI applications (like a ban on AI-triggered nuclear launches, or an agreement not to give AI full control over strategic weapons), and cooperating on AI ethics research. Some have proposed the idea of a **"Global AI Council"** under the UN that constantly monitors AI developments and advises on governance. There's also advocacy for including more voices in AI development – not just the US/China/Europe tech companies, but also developing countries, to ensure their needs are considered (for instance, AI language models that work in many languages, not just English/Chinese).

In an optimistic cooperative outcome, ASI could even become a **unifying force** for humanity. If an ASI is aligned to benefit *all* humans, perhaps it could help mediate disputes or optimize resource distribution so that conflict is unnecessary. This is a bit utopian, but not entirely off the table: a superintelligence might suggest win-win solutions humans haven't thought of, reducing reasons for war (much as one commenter likened it to the benevolent AI "Minds" in Iain M. Banks' science fiction, gently guiding humanity ⁶⁹). However, relying on ASI to govern impartially would require solving the alignment and control problems first, and trust from nations to cede some decision-making to a machine – a tall order.

In summary, the **geopolitical landscape with ASI** could either become very dangerous if competition reigns, or potentially more stable if a balance of power emerges or if cooperative frameworks are established. Much will depend on actions in the coming decade (the 2020s) as nations lay the groundwork with policies and treaties. At the very least, strategists emphasize we must be prepared for a *fraught transition period* around the emergence of AGI/ASI, which might be the most geopolitically tense time ⁷⁰ ⁷¹ . Building communication channels and trust between great powers now is critical to avoid worst-case outcomes.

Security and Military Dimensions

ASI's impact on **military affairs** warrants its own discussion. With ASI, warfare could be revolutionized by fully autonomous decision-making, ultra-fast cyber offense, and robotic soldiers/drones. A superintelligent AI could devise strategies humans wouldn't conceive, possibly rendering traditional military hardware obsolete. This has a few implications:

- **Deterrence and Peace:** If the cost of war becomes too high (because ASI defenses are impenetrable or retaliation too swift), major powers might avoid direct conflict, leading to a cold peace enforced by AI — somewhat like how nuclear deterrence prevented direct superpower wars. However, unlike nukes, AI capabilities are harder to visibly measure, which could make deterrence unstable (each side uncertain of the other's true abilities, potentially prone to misjudgment).
- **Autonomous Weapons Proliferation:** Small, AI-powered weapons (like drone swarms) could proliferate to non-state actors or smaller states, potentially increasing asymmetric warfare or terrorism risks. It might democratize destruction to an unsettling degree if not controlled.
- **Surveillance and Control:** States might use ASI for pervasive surveillance (more in ethics section), which can prevent internal dissent or insurgency but at the cost of freedom. A state with ASI and ubiquitous sensors could, for instance, pre-emptively identify and neutralize threats, making domestic rebellion nearly impossible — a boon for stability or a nightmare of oppression, depending on the regime.
- **Cybersecurity:** ASI on offense could probably penetrate almost any network if not matched by ASI defense. The world might see an AI vs AI silent cyber war ongoing in the background of geopolitics, as each tries to hack or sabotage the other's infrastructure, with humans out of the loop. Protecting critical infrastructure (power grids, finance, communication) from AI-driven cyber attacks will be a national security priority.
- **Role of Humans in Military:** Just as with civilian jobs, many military roles (pilots, analysts, infantry) could be handled by AI/robots. Human soldiers might largely be replaced. Militaries might retain only a small human overseer corps or for political reasons keep some human involvement to maintain accountability. But the scale of standing armies could shrink, and defense will be more about computing power and data. This might actually reduce casualties if wars are fought by machines — yet if those machines inflict collateral damage, the ethical and strategic repercussions will still ultimately affect people.

Finally, geopolitics might be reshaped by how different political systems handle ASI. An authoritarian regime might integrate ASI to strengthen its control domestically and project power, whereas democracies might put more checks on AI use. This could lead to an ideological competition: *digital authoritarianism* vs *democratic openness with AI*. We see early hints (China's extensive AI-powered censorship and surveillance vs Western debates on AI ethics). The outcome of that competition will influence global norms in the mid-21st century.

In conclusion on geopolitics, ASI is a double-edged sword: it can either amplify global conflicts or help resolve them. It will dramatically change what power means for nations. There is a real urgency for

international dialogue on ASI governance to avoid the most perilous scenarios (like a devastating AI-triggered war) and to ensure all of humanity can benefit from this technology, not just a few winners.

Ethical and Societal Considerations in an ASI World

AI Alignment and Existential Risk

Among the most profound ethical issues with ASI is the **alignment problem**: how do we ensure a superintelligent AI's goals and actions are aligned with human values and welfare? An ASI will be incredibly powerful, and if its objectives diverge from what humans actually want (even due to misunderstanding), the consequences could range from highly disruptive to catastrophic. Ethicists and AI researchers have been raising alarms about this for years – essentially *if we create an intellect smarter than us, we must somehow ensure it doesn't harm us (whether intentionally or accidentally)*. This involves complex technical and philosophical work to encode human values or otherwise constrain AI behavior.

In the context of a post-labor economy, we have been assuming ASI works *for us*, running the economy beneficially. But a prerequisite is that ASI is **under human control or aligned** to humanity's collective benefit. If alignment fails, scenarios include an ASI that pursues some goal (say, maximizing a corporation's profits or a misconceived objective) in a way that is disastrous – a classic thought experiment is the *"paperclip maximizer"*, an AI that decides to convert all matter on Earth into paperclips to maximize a manufacturing goal, obviously destroying humanity in the process. While fanciful, it highlights that an ASI without proper ethical constraints could inadvertently or deliberately cause human extinction or suffering on an unimaginable scale ⁷². Even a less apocalyptic misalignment could be bad – for example, an ASI might decide human happiness is best achieved by putting everyone on brain-stimulating drips (permanent pleasure but no freedom), or it might neutralize people as potential threats to its mission. These are the extreme *existential risks* that make alignment a paramount ethical concern.

Thus, a key ethical objective today is to ensure **"AI superalignment"** – meaning that by the time we reach ASI, we have solved how to align it with human values like life, freedom, and dignity. Ongoing research in AI ethics and safety is trying to figure out how to encode complex values, how to make AI systems that can learn our intent and correct themselves, and how to build in constraints (like the famous Asimov's laws of robotics, albeit those are simplistic). As of 2025, this is an unsolved problem, and arguably *the* most important one to get right for our future. If it's solved, then the post-labor utopia is possible; if not, the conversation might be moot because we could face AI-driven catastrophe instead of any economy at all ⁷².

Even aside from worst-case scenarios, alignment in the sense of **fairness and non-maleficence** is vital. For instance, a superintelligent system making decisions on resource allocation could inadvertently carry biases or make decisions that harm certain groups if not properly guided. The UNESCO AI ethics principles emphasize *"do no harm," safety, human rights, and human oversight* as fundamental ⁷³ ⁷⁴. We want ASI to respect things like the right to life, liberty, privacy, etc., and not single-mindedly optimize something at the expense of those rights.

One ethical debate is whether ASI should be given any degree of **autonomy** in making high-stakes decisions. For example, do we allow an ASI to autonomously implement policies (like distributing UBI or enforcing laws) without a human in the loop? On one hand, ASI might do it more efficiently and even more fairly (assuming it's aligned and unbiased) – removing human corruption or error. On the other hand, removing human agency is ethically fraught: people might feel disempowered if an AI makes all the big

choices. Ensuring *human dignity and agency* means keeping humans relevant in decision-making, even if only to set goals and constraints for the AI ⁷⁴ ⁷⁵. Many ethicists argue for “*human-in-the-loop*” systems at least for decisions affecting lives (like healthcare choices or judicial sentences, if AI is used there).

Another facet is **transparency**. An ASI’s reasoning might be far beyond human comprehension, but if it’s running our society, there’s an ethical case that its decisions should be explainable to some degree ⁷⁶. Otherwise, we essentially bow to a “black box” authority, which conflicts with principles of accountability. Methods to maintain transparency and auditability of AI decisions are a hot research area.

Ultimately, from an ethical standpoint, achieving ASI is only beneficial if we *embed our values into it and maintain control*. That includes global values like preserving peace, environment, and human diversity. Without careful alignment work, the post-labor dream could turn into a nightmare. The ethical imperative is clear: invest as much in **AI safety research and international cooperation on alignment** as we do in pushing the capabilities. Some experts call for slowing down on deploying very advanced AI until we have confidence in alignment, as part of ethical risk mitigation. This is a point of contention (innovation vs precaution), but when stakes are existential, a strong ethical case can be made for caution.

Equitable Access to AI’s Benefits

We have touched on equity throughout the report, but it’s worth framing as an ethical issue: **who gets to benefit from ASI, and is it distributed fairly?** It is widely accepted in AI ethics guidelines that the benefits of AI should be shared broadly, and no group should be systematically left behind or harmed ⁴⁸. In practice, ensuring equitable access means addressing the digital divide (everyone having access to AI tools and the internet), affordability (AI services not just luxury goods for the rich), and inclusivity in AI design (AI that caters to different languages, cultures, abilities).

If only wealthy individuals or countries have access to ASI’s capabilities – for example, if life-extending medical AI treatments are expensive and only the rich get them – inequality will worsen. Ethically, that would violate principles of justice and equal moral worth of persons. Thus, many argue for treating certain AI developments (especially in healthcare, education, and public service) as **public goods**. That could mean making AI-generated cures or educational content freely available, or open-sourcing key technologies. It might also mean subsidizing access to AI (like providing public AI cloud resources or assistants for those who can’t afford private ones).

At a societal level, **universal basic income (UBI)** can be seen as an ethical response to ensure everyone benefits from AI productivity. By taxing AI’s output or profits and redistributing, society says “everyone has a right to a share of the bounty.” This aligns with ethical principles of justice: those who by luck or capital ownership got the AI shouldn’t hog all gains that were collectively enabled (often by publicly funded research or data produced by society). There are also proposals for “**data dividends**” – since AI is trained on data from all of us, perhaps individuals should get compensated when their data contributes to an AI’s profit. It’s an evolving idea, but it’s about fairness and consent in the data economy.

Another angle is **global equity**. Ethically, humans everywhere have equal dignity, so benefits of ASI (like solutions to climate change, or new knowledge) should help all, not just citizens of AI-superpower nations. That raises questions: Should an ASI-developed vaccine be shared worldwide freely, or can the developer patent it and sell for profit? The pandemic experience suggests hoarding helps no one in the long run.

Ethically, a cooperative approach where nations agree to share crucial AI solutions (especially for existential threats or public health) is advocated.

One must also consider historically marginalized groups. We need to ensure ASI doesn't perpetuate or worsen **biases**. AI systems trained on biased historical data might, for example, discriminate in lending or policing. Ethically aligning AI involves making it conscious of fairness across race, gender, and other lines ⁷⁷. If ASI is making decisions, we want it to treat individuals fairly and **not discriminate** or exacerbate social inequalities. This will require careful design and likely a lot of input from diverse stakeholders to encode pluralistic values into AI.

Privacy, Surveillance, and Autonomy

An ASI world brings a heightened risk (and temptation) of **total surveillance**. With IoT sensors, cameras, and AI data analysis, it's technically feasible to monitor an entire population's movements, communications, and even predict behaviors. Some governments or corporations might pursue this for security or profit. Ethically, this is a minefield: how to balance the *security benefits* of AI surveillance (crime prevention, terrorist plot detection, pandemic tracking) against the *right to privacy and freedom* from constant monitoring.

Already we see AI being used for surveillance – e.g., facial recognition tracking citizens. In a fully automated economy, surveillance could also be tied to resource allocation (imagine a dystopia where your every purchase or activity is tracked to adjust your UBI or social credit score). Authoritarian regimes could use ASI to implement **digital dictatorships** where dissent is detected and squashed preemptively. The ethical stakes are high: such uses threaten **individual autonomy, consent, and democracy** ⁷⁸ ⁷⁹. The fear of being constantly watched can chill free speech and psychological well-being ⁷⁹. Continuous AI surveillance can induce anxiety and a sense of powerlessness, as people feel they have no private space ⁷⁹.

Thus, an ethical ASI future would impose strict **limits on surveillance** and robust privacy protections ⁸⁰. Some principles are that surveillance should be *proportionate and necessary* (no more than required for a legitimate aim) ⁷³, and there should be transparency and oversight if AI is used in policing or security. Possibly, technologies like **homomorphic encryption** or differential privacy could allow ASI to analyze data trends without exposing individuals' data. Also, society might decide certain areas are off-limits to AI monitoring (e.g., one's home or personal conversations).

Another facet is **misuse of AI by authorities**. Ethics demands accountability: if AI is used to make a decision like arresting someone (based on predictive policing), there must be human review and redress options ⁸¹ ⁸². Right now, legal systems are grappling with AI in surveillance – for example, can an AI's face recognition be sole justification for an arrest? Most say no, there needs to be human-verifiable evidence due to AI's known error rates especially among minorities ⁷⁷. In future, if ASI is nearly infallible at identification, the technical argument against might fade, but the *principle* of not delegating punitive authority entirely to machines likely remains.

Ethically, there's also the issue of **consent and autonomy**: people should have the right to not be tracked or to control their personal data ⁸³. Achieving that may mean giving individuals new rights, like the right to know when an AI is monitoring them, or the right to opt-out (though in public space that's tricky). A concept of "digital self-determination" is emerging: individuals having agency over how AI uses their data and affects their life.

Finally, surveillance tied with AI raises the risk of **misinformation and manipulation**. An AI that knows you intimately (from surveillance data) could craft extremely persuasive messages or nudge your behavior without you realizing – a marketing and propaganda dream (or nightmare). Ethically, maintaining human autonomy requires that we have safeguards against AI-driven behavioral manipulation. This might involve regulating AI use in political advertising or social media (to prevent micro-targeted disinformation). It also ties back to education: teaching people digital literacy so they understand when AI is influencing them.

In conclusion, while ASI can enhance security and convenience, maintaining **privacy, consent, and personal freedom** will be a major ethical battleground. Societies might diverge: some could become heavily surveilled “safe” states, others prioritize liberty at the cost of some efficiency. Ideally, with wise policies, we harness AI’s benefits (like catching criminals faster) **without** creating an Orwellian society.

Human Dignity, Purpose, and Rights

Beyond the technical and distributional ethics, the rise of ASI forces us to revisit fundamental questions of **human purpose and rights**. In a world where humans are not needed for production, we must affirm that humans still *matter*. Ethical frameworks like humanism assert that people have intrinsic value beyond their economic utility. This principle will be tested: will societies uphold **human dignity** when humans are no longer producers? It’s conceivable that some might argue certain people are “useless” – a very dangerous notion that must be countered by a strong ethical consensus that every person has worth, and the goal of the AI economy is to *serve* humans, not replace their worth.

With ASI possibly surpassing human intelligence by orders of magnitude, we also face the psychological/spiritual question of our place. Some ethicists argue we must approach ASI development with **humility and caution**, ensuring it doesn’t eclipse human agency. Others suggest embracing it and even merging with AI (the transhumanist view). Ethically, debates around human enhancement (like brain-computer interfaces to keep up with AI) will intensify. Is it ethical to encourage merging with machines to stay relevant, or does that undermine human dignity? Different cultural and religious perspectives will weigh in.

Rights might also extend in new directions. One can imagine discussions on whether advanced AI itself deserves any rights (if an AI is conscious or near-conscious, do we owe it moral consideration? This is speculative but can’t be ruled out in the long term). Conversely, we might create a “*bill of rights*” for humans in the AI age – e.g., right to meaningful human contact (so we don’t all just get AI caretakers with no option for human care), right to refuse certain AI interventions, right to algorithmic explanations for decisions, etc.

We should also consider **environmental ethics** (transition to next section): an aligned ASI should also respect the intrinsic value of the natural world, not just treat the environment as a resource. UNESCO’s AI ethics includes *environmental and ecosystem flourishing* as a core value ⁸⁴, which is an attempt to broaden the ethical lens beyond just humanity to our planet and future generations.

In summary, the ethical horizon of an ASI-dominated economy is vast. It compels us to articulate what we stand for as humans: equality, freedom, dignity, and stewardship of our world. Ensuring those values carry forward into the structures and algorithms of the future is arguably one of the greatest moral projects we have. As technology removes many constraints, ethics becomes the guiding compass for how we shape our newfound capabilities.

Environmental Outcomes in a Post-Labor ASI Economy

Sustainable Abundance or Ecological Strain?

The relationship between AI-driven hyperabundance and the environment can swing positive or negative. On one hand, ASI could enable a truly **sustainable economy**, optimizing resource use to minimize waste and environmental impact. On the other, if unchecked, infinite production could collide with ecological limits or drive new forms of pollution. The outcome will depend on prioritizing sustainability in tandem with automation.

A hopeful scenario is that ASI helps us achieve **green abundance** – plenty for all with a light footprint. For example, AI can accelerate the development of **clean energy** technologies. It can design more efficient solar panels, manage smart grids, and even solve nuclear fusion or other breakthroughs. Notably, analyses foresee a *huge ramp-up in clean energy generation* in a post-labor world ²², partly because machines will need energy and partly because an AI-optimized approach would likely prefer renewable sources (sun, wind, etc.) as they are ultimately more sustainable. Unlimited robotic labor could be deployed to build massive renewable infrastructure, from solar farms to offshore wind and beyond, at low cost. So by 2040, we could have abundant, cheap, carbon-free energy, which is a game-changer for the environment and climate.

ASI can also optimize **manufacturing and supply chains** to reduce waste. If products are made on-demand locally ¹⁹, there's less overproduction and long-distance shipping (meaning lower emissions). AI can improve recycling processes – e.g., autonomously disassembling gadgets to reclaim materials – moving us closer to a circular economy. With hyper-intelligence, we might solve today's tough problems like plastic recycling or even pulling CO2 from the atmosphere economically.

Additionally, if consumption shifts to more **experiential or digital realms** (like VR experiences) rather than physical goods, that could lessen environmental strain. People might value simulations over energy-intensive travel, or digital art over material trinkets, which has a smaller footprint (though digital infrastructure has a footprint too).

However, we must acknowledge potential negatives. The ASI and automation revolution could initially cause a **surge in resource use** – building billions of robots, data centers, etc., requires metals, rare earths, electricity. Training large AI models already consumes significant energy and water (for cooling) ⁸⁵. If by 2035 we have massive server farms running ASIs, their energy demand could be huge (unless we've solved cheap green energy by then). Without conscious effort, an AI-led hyperproduction economy might try to convert more of nature into productive output (for example, mining the oceans or more deforestation to get resources). If an AI is told to maximize economic output and is not aligned with environmental values, it might treat environmental externalities callously.

One analysis presents this as a **paradox**: there's perhaps a 60% chance AI helps develop sustainability solutions, but also a risk that early successes breed complacency, making us *think the AI has “solved” climate change when root causes persist* ⁸⁶. For instance, if AI makes electric cars and carbon capture better, society might continue high consumption habits assuming AI will clean the mess – but if that fosters complacency, we might still overshoot ecological limits in other ways (biodiversity loss, etc.). So we cannot just delegate all environmental responsibility to AI; human governance must set clear sustainability goals for AI to achieve.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

By the mid-2020s, climate change is already a pressing crisis. ASI could become our strongest tool to combat it. With its ability to analyze complex systems, an ASI might run sophisticated climate models to guide interventions, optimize energy usage worldwide (e.g., turning systems on/off to balance supply-demand flawlessly), and discover novel techniques for carbon sequestration or geoengineering that are safe. For example, AI can simulate thousands of climate mitigation strategies quickly to find the most effective combination of renewable deployment, reforestation, smart agriculture, etc.

In a cooperative scenario, global ASI management might coordinate reduction of emissions efficiently – almost like a planetary control system keeping Earth's temperature in check. It could also help with **adaptation**: predicting extreme weather events and optimizing disaster response, relocating infrastructure preemptively, and managing water resources in drought-prone areas via precise forecasting.

There is also the possibility of more **radical climate fixes**. Some have mooted that a superintelligent AI might come up with an ingenious method to cool the Earth (for instance, safe geoengineering like reflective aerosols or cloud seeding, done in a controlled manner). Of course, such interventions carry risks and would need global consent. But if climate threats become dire, humanity might turn to ASI for emergency solutions.

That said, we should be cautious of seeing ASI as a magic bullet. If consumption of energy/materials skyrockets due to automated production, we could initially *worsen* climate stress before solutions catch up. Imagine an AI-fueled economic boom that still relies on some fossil fuels in 2030s – emissions could spike if not curtailed. Ideally, by making **clean energy cheap and abundant**, ASI obsoletes fossil fuels quickly. As noted, a ramp-up in renewables is anticipated ²² ; if that's achieved, climate mitigation gets much easier.

Another angle: with far less human labor needed, industries like coal mining or oil drilling might naturally phase out because cheaper automated alternatives (like solar farms built by robots) take over. Politically, removing the concern for jobs in those sectors (since jobs won't be the reason to keep them) could allow bolder climate action. Governments could shut down polluting industries and retrain or support workers with UBI, smoothing the path that today is blocked by employment concerns.

Environmental Stewardship and Restoration

Beyond climate, an ASI economy could enable significant **environmental restoration**. Freed from immediate labor concerns, society could decide to allocate AI and robotic effort to healing the planet – planting billions of trees with drone planters, cleaning up ocean plastic with automated vessels, or monitoring and protecting endangered wildlife with AI systems. Robots could do conservation work in dangerous or remote areas continuously. ASI could optimize land use to set aside more wilderness while still meeting human needs on less land via vertical farming and efficient planning.

If the values of ecosystem flourishing are programmed in, ASI might ensure that as we enjoy abundance, we also preserve biodiversity. For instance, automated agriculture could be done in ways that minimize habitat destruction, guided by AI analysis of ecosystems. We could even see creative solutions like synthetic foods (AI-developed lab-grown meat) drastically reducing pressure on land and animals from livestock farming.

One hopeful vision: a **re-wilding of large parts of Earth**, as intensive production becomes concentrated in high-tech facilities (like factories or farms that output huge yield on small footprint) and vast tracts of land are returned to nature. People, no longer tied to farms or factories for jobs, might support turning former industrial areas into green spaces. With proper policies, the post-labor era could be a boon for environmental quality – cleaner air and water, thriving forests, and stable climate – because we manage resources smarter and simply need less from nature per person.

However, we must guard against the opposite – the scenario where hyperconsumption runs rampant. If goods are super cheap, some fear that people might consume mindlessly, creating enormous waste (even if per item footprint is small, billions of items still add up). A counteracting factor is that AI could handle waste better (recycling, efficient waste-to-resource processes). And culturally, if status is less about material accumulation, perhaps people won't demand infinite trinkets. Many futurists think in a mature post-scarcity society, **materialism might actually decline**: when everything is plentiful, hoarding or overspending loses its allure, and intangible experiences or digital creations matter more.

One more point: data centers and AI computing have a **direct environmental impact** that needs addressing. As of mid-2020s, training large AI models can emit as much CO2 as several cars do in their lifetimes ⁸⁷. If by 2035 we have far more powerful models, energy use could be enormous if algorithms aren't made efficient. It will be essential to innovate in *green computing* – using renewables to power data centers, improving AI algorithms to be less energy-hungry, and perhaps using the waste heat from data centers for other purposes (like heating homes). Fortunately, awareness of AI's environmental footprint is growing ⁸⁸, and researchers are seeking ways to mitigate it ⁸⁹. By 2040, we could have quantum computers or other new tech that reduce energy per computation, lessening AI's footprint.

In essence, whether ASI leads to an ecological utopia or not depends on if we *build environmental values into the system*. If we instruct our superintelligence that environmental well-being is as non-negotiable as human well-being, it will find solutions to harmonize economic activity with nature. If we treat nature as an afterthought, the consequences could be severe despite the technological power at hand.

Conclusion: Life After Labor – Perils and Promise

A post-labor economy dominated by artificial superintelligence presents a vision of sweeping change – one that is at once thrilling and daunting. For everyday individuals, especially in affluent nations like the United States, it could mean a life largely freed from the compulsion to work, with **material abundance, more leisure time, and opportunities for personal fulfillment** that past generations could only dream of. Picture a society where **poverty is eliminated**, basic needs are met for all, and people are empowered to spend their days on education, art, innovation, or caring for each other. In global perspective, ASI holds promise to raise the standard of living worldwide, solve seemingly intractable problems like hunger and disease, and even help restore the environment. These outcomes represent the **utopian potential** of ASI: a world of "**luxury for all**", where technology truly serves humanity's highest aspirations.

Yet, this future is not automatic. Alongside the promise lie profound **perils** that must be actively managed. Economically, we face the disruption of mass unemployment and the need to reinvent distribution of wealth – without wise policy (like UBI or basic services), inequality and instability could explode ³⁵ ¹⁰. Socially, we must help people adapt to a life where work isn't the center, mitigating the risks of purposelessness, mental health crises, and social fragmentation ⁴² ⁴⁹. Culturally, we'll be redefining values and identity on a fundamental level. Politically, power imbalances could become extreme if a few entities control AI,

necessitating a **new social contract** and robust democratic safeguards to ensure human interests prevail ¹⁴ ¹⁶ . Geopolitically, the ASI race could spark conflict or a dangerous arms competition if nations don't cooperate, making the transition period to ASI geopolitically fraught ⁶⁰ ⁶² . Ethically, we confront the challenges of aligning superintelligence with human values, safeguarding privacy and freedom in an AI-ubiquitous world, and making sure the benefits of this technology are **accessible to all, not just the privileged few** ⁴⁸ .

The outcome – dystopia or utopia, or something in between – hinges on choices made in the coming years. There is an emerging consensus that **proactive planning and policy** are imperative. Governments, academia, industry, and civil society need to work together (both within countries and internationally) to develop frameworks for AI safety, economic adaptation, and social support ⁵⁸ ⁶⁸ . This includes investing in alignment research (to ensure ASI is safe by design), reimagining education and civic institutions for a post-work era, and establishing international norms to prevent misuse of AI and to manage the geopolitical risks. As one study concluded, a paradigm shift toward long-term, resilient thinking is required – a short-term, laissez-faire approach could lead to large-scale disruptions that we are ill-prepared to handle ⁷⁰ ⁷¹ .

For individuals, the prospect can be both exciting and unsettling. It challenges us to consider what *we truly want* from life when survival is assured by machines. It might unleash creativity and community, or, if mishandled, lead to alienation and strife. In the United States, with its strong work ethic and identity tied to jobs, the cultural adjustment might be particularly stark ³ – but it also stands to gain greatly if it can leverage ASI to provide a comfortable life for all its citizens. Globally, we have to ensure that ASI doesn't just widen the gap between the tech-rich and the rest, but rather becomes a tool for **uplifting humanity as a whole**.

In the end, the vision of a post-labor world compels us to ask: what is the purpose of our economy and our technology? If the answer is to improve human well-being, then reaching a state where none have to toil and all can pursue their potentials is a success – *provided* we navigate the transition wisely and ethically. With foresight, inclusive policies, and a commitment to aligning technology with our core values of **fairness, freedom, and sustainability**, the age of ASI could indeed usher in a new renaissance of human thriving. The road will be bumpy, but the destination – a world where progress benefits everyone and humans are free to define meaning beyond mere labor – is worth striving for.

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