

*Dreams & Nightmares in the*  
**EMPIRE OF AI**

**Karen Hao**

pire  
AI

Nightmares  
in Sam Altman's OpenAI

ren  
ao

Empire  
of AI

Dreams and Nightmares  
in Sam Altman's OpenAI

Karen  
Hao

Empire  
of AI

Dreams and Nightmares  
in Sam Altman's OpenAI

Karen  
Hao

MAY  
2025

EMPIRE  
OF AI

Inside  
the reckless  
race for  
total  
domination

KAREN HAO

EMPIRE  
OF AI

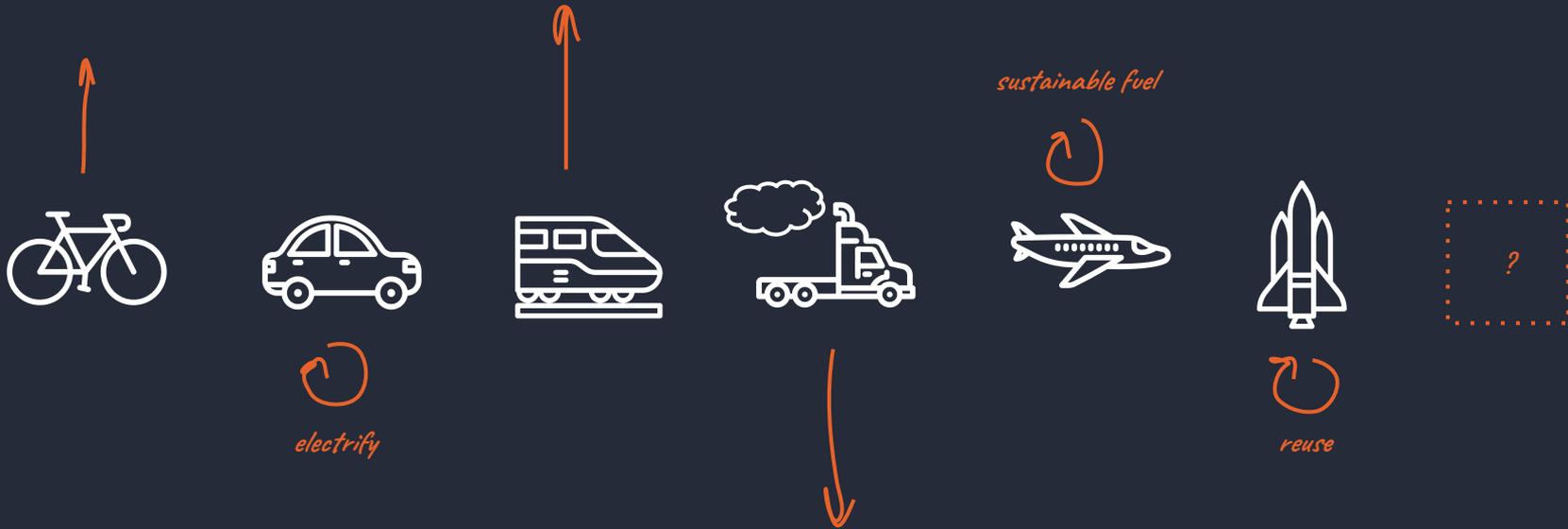
Inside  
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EMPIRE  
OF AI

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KAREN HAO





## SHARED FEATURES

## EMPIRES OF OLD

## EMPIRES OF AI

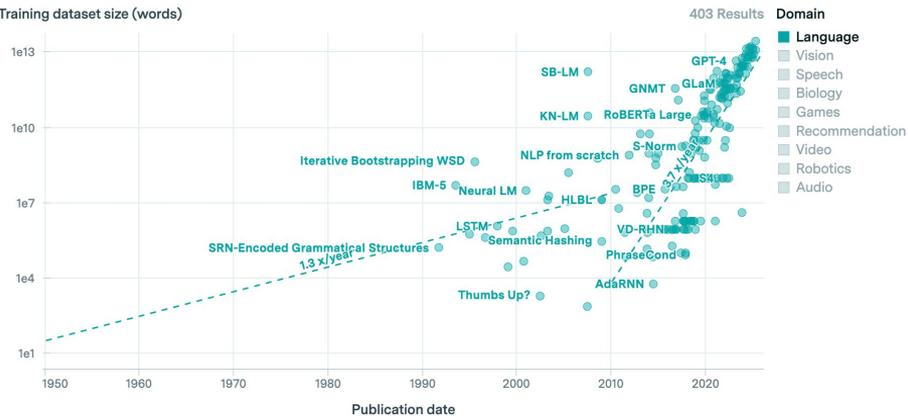
Seize resources	Land, minerals, art, etc.	Land, minerals, art, data, etc.
Exploit labor	Slavery, forced labor	Invisible, poorly paid outsourced work; labor automation
Monopolize knowledge production	Dominance in science, control of information flows	Dominance in AI research, censorship of inconvenient truths
Justify actions with moral/existential imperative	Each empire positions itself as morally superior, with civilizing mission to bring progress & God to humanity	Each empire positions itself as morally superior, with civilizing mission to usher in AI utopia / prevent AI hell

# data

# compute

Notable AI Models

Training dataset size (words)

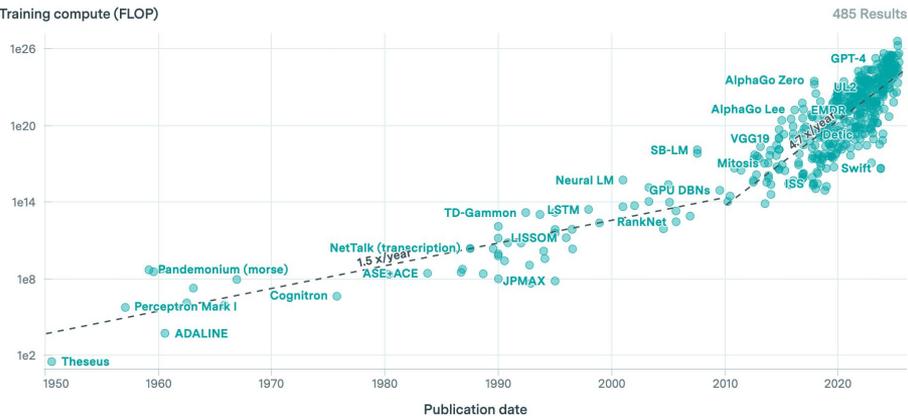


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epoch.ai

Notable AI Models

Training compute (FLOP)



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2019

## GPT-2

~8 million curated  
web pages

1.5 billion  
parameters

2020

## GPT-3

+ filtered  
Common Crawl  
  
+ pirated  
books

175  
billion

2023

## GPT-4

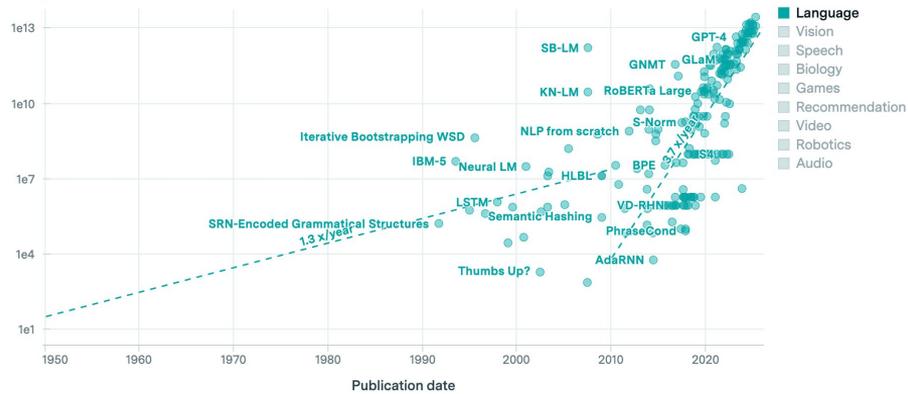
+ unfiltered Common Crawl  
  
+ transcribed YouTube  
videos  
  
+ textbook scans  
  
+ anything webpage, blog,  
forum, etc. that didn't  
explicitly warn against  
scraping

estimated  
1.8 trillion

# data

## Notable AI Models

Training dataset size (words)



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infringements on data privacy  
erosion of intellectual property  
perpetuation of engagement-centric  
model of social media  
more polluted datasets  
labor exploitation



Photo: Natalia Jidovanu

# THE JOURNAL.



WSJ

GIMLET

# compute

accelerated mineral extraction  
increased energy & freshwater  
consumption  
utility price hikes  
strain on grid infrastructure  
greater carbon emissions



## Greening Digital Companies Report 2025

Monitoring emissions and  
climate commitments

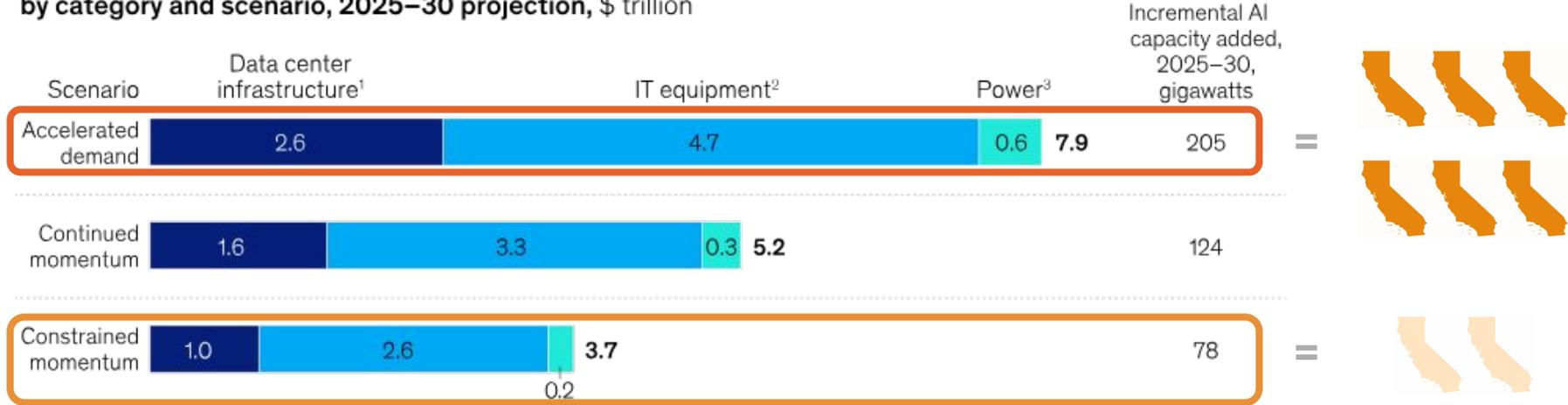
[www.itu.int/go/gdc-25](http://www.itu.int/go/gdc-25)



Key finding: Four leading AI companies increased emissions by **150%** since 2020

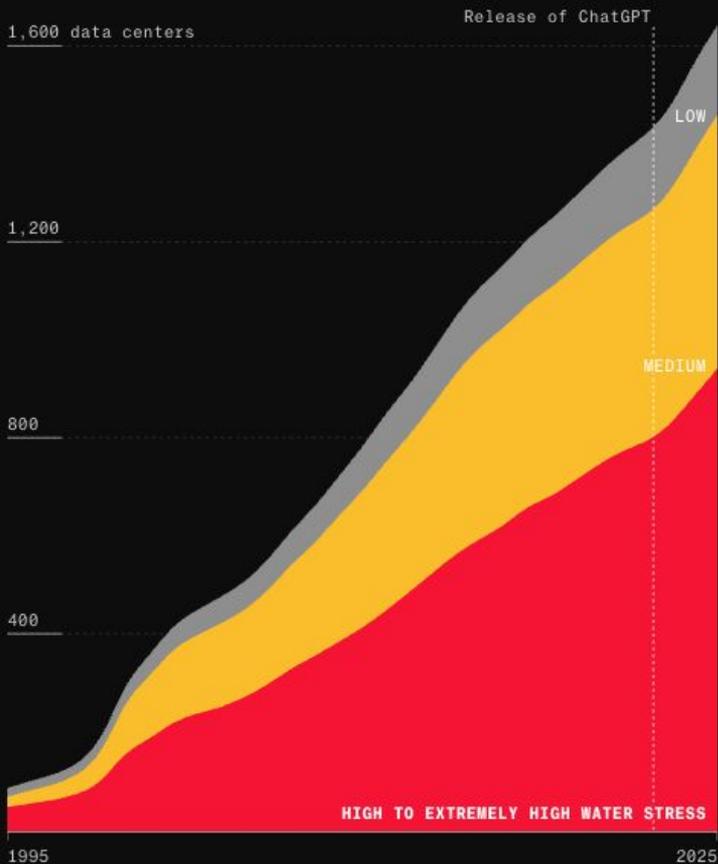
# Capital investments to support AI-related data center capacity demand could range from about \$3 trillion to \$8 trillion by 2030.

Global data center total capital expenditures driven by AI, by category and scenario, 2025–30 projection, \$ trillion



## As Data Centers Become More Ubiquitous, Water-Stressed Areas See the Most Growth

Number of facilities built in the US by year and water stress zone

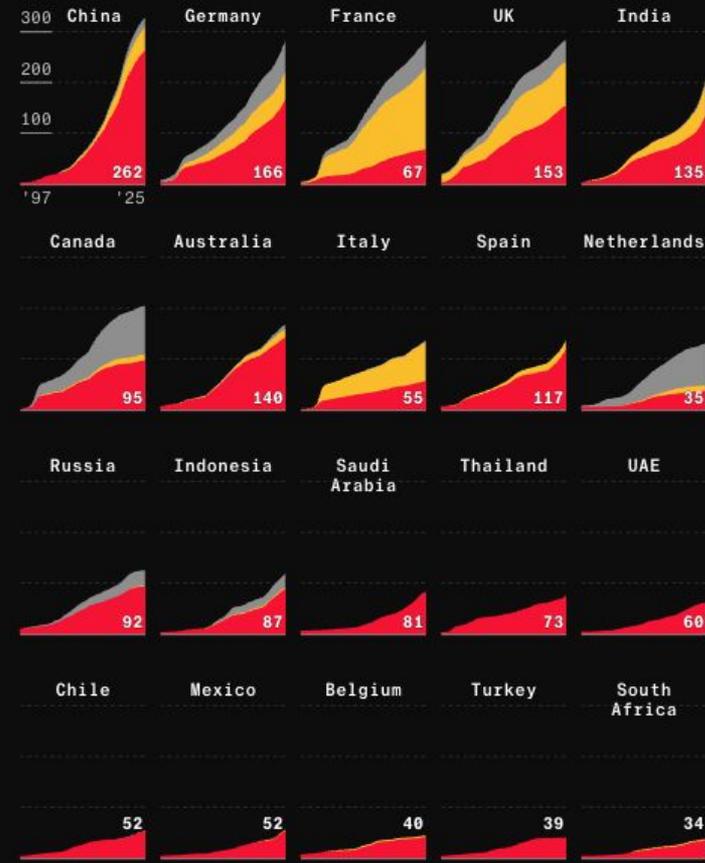


Sources: DC Byte, World Resources Institute  
Note: Data are through Q1 2025.

## Data Centers Proliferating Globally in Water-Stressed Areas

Number of facilities built in countries with the most data centers in high water risk zones

■ High to extremely high ■ Medium ■ Low



Sources: DC Byte, World Resources Institute  
Note: Data are through Q1 2025.

Uruguay

This article is more than 1 year old

# 'It's pillage': thirsty Uruguayans decry Google's plan to exploit water supply

Country suffering its worst drought in 74 years, with government even mixing saltwater into drinking supply

Grace Livingstone in Montevideo

Tue 11 Jul 2023 11.15 BST



People take part in a protest amid a shortage of drinking water reserves in Montevideo on 31 May 2023. Photograph: Eitan Abramovich/AFP/Getty Images

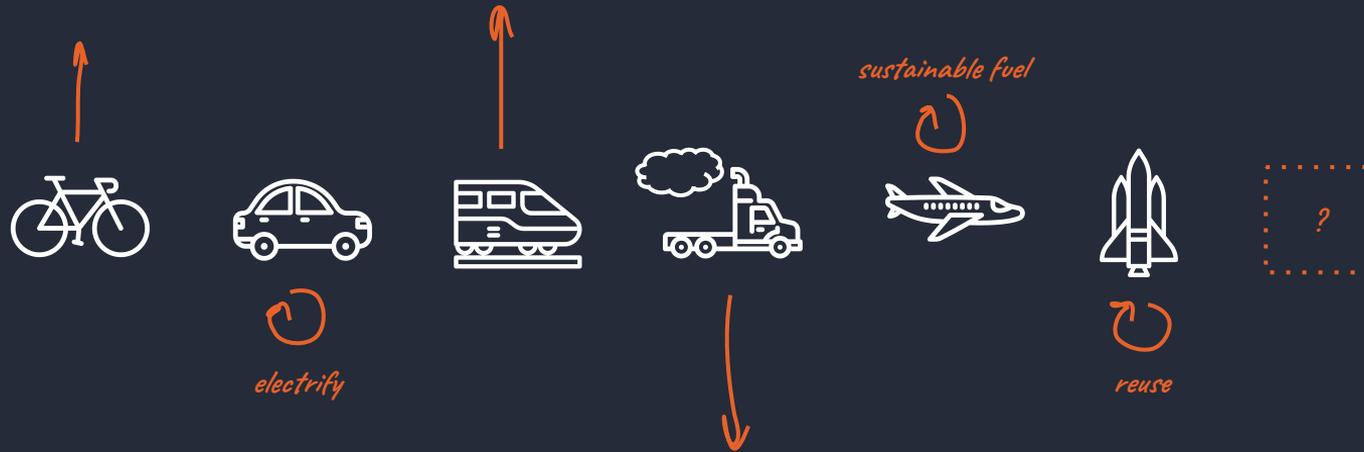
A plan to build a Google data centre that will use millions of litres of water a day has sparked anger in [Uruguay](#), which is suffering its worst drought in 74 years.

Water shortages are so severe in the country that a state of emergency has been declared in Montevideo and the authorities have added salty water to the public drinking water supplies, prompting widespread protests.



*"Salt water for the people  
Fresh business for capital"*

This scale is **unnecessary**.



It is **costing** us innovation.



The screenshot shows the San Francisco Examiner website. At the top, the logo "San Francisco Examiner" is centered, with a stylized eagle emblem below it. To the left of the logo are social media icons for Facebook, X, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. To the right, it says "NEWSLETTERS | E-EDITION | Q, A". Below the logo is a horizontal navigation bar with links for Politics, Technology, Climate, Housing, Transit, Education, Culture, Forum, Obits, Our Partners, and Advertise. The main content area features a "SPOTLIGHT" tag on the left and a "f" icon on the right. The headline reads "Two SF AI giants raised almost half of all Q1 venture funding". Below the headline, it says "By Troy Wolverton | Examiner staff writer | Apr 7, 2025 Updated Apr 8, 2025". At the bottom, there is a photograph of a man in a suit, likely a key figure in the article.

## 1. Return to **small, task-specific** AI:



computational biology

climate mitigation

- weather prediction
- renewable energy integration
- optimizing supply chains
- improving energy storage
- etc



## 2. Invest in **independent, basic** research:







Photo: MOSACAT



Photo: Reuters

When **people rise...**

**empires fall.**