

A N G L A I S

L V I

ORAL CONOURS 2015
ANGLAIS - LVI**The US is still the only developed country that doesn't guarantee paid maternity leave**

The US supreme court on Wednesday is hearing the case of 42-year-old Peggy Young, who sued her employer, UPS, for pregnancy discrimination. Young claims the shipping company refused to accommodate her pregnancy by giving her a temporary assignment to avoid lifting heavy packages. But as the case unfolds, the US continues to shirk an even more basic pregnancy accommodation: maternity leave.

The US is the only developed country that doesn't guarantee paid maternity or parental leave to workers. It's an often-cited statistic, but one which should continue to shock us.

Compared to other rich nations in the OECD group, America's outlier status is stark: the UK guarantees 39 weeks of paid leave for mothers, two of which are mandatory. Australia offers 18 weeks. And Mexico, the US's neighbor to the south, gives mothers 12 weeks of paid leave, reimbursed at 100% of their salary.

Most of these countries also offer paid leave for fathers, but the most comprehensive data we found counts maternity leave separately. In the US, paid parental leave is considered a benefit provided by employers. Yet, only 12% of workers reported having such coverage in 2013, according to an estimate from the Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey.

The US federal government has guaranteed "job-protected" at unpaid leave for both mothers and fathers since 1993 – as long as those mothers and fathers have been full-time employees for at least 12 months at a company with more than 50 employees. The Family and Medical Leave law, as it is known, gives at least some workers who need to take pregnancy-related time off a guarantee that their jobs – and health insurance – will stay put while they're gone. But it's little help to the many Americans who can't afford to take time off without pay.

Major roadblocks to paid parental leave in the US have come from business organizations, like the National Restaurant Association, who claim that the provision of such benefits doesn't apply to them, or that it will be a financial burden, said Eileen Appelbaum, a senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy research. This makes the issue difficult to get through Congress, especially when the T-word – taxation – is involved.

Last year, Representative Rosa DeLauro and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand introduced comprehensive legislation that would give workers 12 weeks of paid parental leave, funded by a 0.2% increase in payroll taxes. MSNBC declared it doomed on arrival.

Since 2002, four states – California, New Jersey, Washington and Rhode Island – have set up their own initiatives to increase access to paid parental leave through plans similar to DeLauro and Gillibrand's proposal, where funds for future leave are deducted directly from wages like a payroll tax. (Three other states, California and New Jersey also allow expectant and new mothers to go on paid leave through disability claims, under long-standing Temporary Disability Insurance laws.)

California now offers up to six weeks of paid leave for workers, at 55% of their regular weekly wage. That's still below the 12 weeks offered by Mexico, and certainly Britain's 39, but a big step above many other US states. The Obama administration has recently offered states support through the Department of Labor, which awarded money to Massachusetts, Montana, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia to study the feasibility of new paid leave policies.

"There's overwhelmingly support for these policies from the public," Appelbaum said, but added that it's the business owners and organizations who still need to be convinced. State initiatives help parents locally, but they can also put increased pressure on national policy by helping to prove that paid parental leave works in America and that it doesn't hurt business.

"No one would call California or New Jersey bad states for business, would they?" Appelbaum said.

"Pressure will finally grow for a national policy if states succeed," she added.

ORAL CONCOURS 2015
ANGLAIS - LVI**Immigration Is A Problem For Most GOP 2016 Hopefuls**

Now that Florida Senator Marco Rubio has officially entered the presidential foray, one issue that continues to plague his candidacy among conservatives is immigration. But should immigration really doom Rubio's presidential ambitions this primary season? Because most Republican candidates - or likely candidates - have their own inconsistencies.

Rubio's leading role in the Senate's passage of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in 2013 continues to be black cloud over the otherwise popular junior senator from Florida -- at least when it comes to the Republican primary.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker have backed a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. So has Kentucky Senator Rand Paul and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal has as well. Even Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas has not ruled out a path to legalization for some undocumented immigrants. And former governors Rick Perry of Texas and Mike Huckabee of Arkansas both backed their states version of the DREAM Act, a measure that gives undocumented youth access to in-state college tuition.

The term amnesty is a loaded one with different definitions depending on who is asked. For the most ardent opponents of immigration, including the group Federation for American Immigration Reform, any way someone can come to the U.S. illegally and be permitted to stay, even after a long, arduous process, is considered "amnesty." But it can mean any form of giving immigrants an opportunity for staying in the U.S. legally.

Most of the candidates have shifted their position, saying that first the border must be secure before addressing the 11 million undocumented immigrants. - even though the group FAIR believes that the secure border position is a "red herring," noting that the border can never be completely secure and that as long as an incentive is provided for people to come to the U.S., immigrants will come. Immigration is not likely to be the hot button issue that it was in 2012 when it moved Mitt Romney so far to the right that he backed self-deportation. What could diffuse the issue even more is that the candidates have been on the same page - and not on the side of conservatives - at one point in their careers.

Conservatives who prioritize the issue say, however, that where they stand now and how they explain their "evolution" matters. The severity of the sin and subsequent redemption matters.

"It's not just taking a pure stance. It's not like people are never allowed to change their minds," Steve Deace, influential syndicated talk show host based in Iowa, said. "Is that a conversion on the road to Damascus of the road to Des Moines?"

The issue might not be as prominent it was in 2012 when Mitt Romney moved so far to the right he backed self-deportation, but the issue will still play a factor for some conservatives.

While Republicans hopefuls have not always espoused the correct position for their party every time, for many conservatives Rubio and Bush have done the most damage on the issue. They say Bush's position is problematic. While he has walked away from a path to citizenship, he strongly supports a path to legalization on the campaign trail.

"There's always something to be said about consistency of conviction unless the consistency of conviction is wrong," Bob Vander Plaats, president of The Family Leader, a socially conservative group in Iowa, said.

As for Rubio, a fellow Floridian, Rubio's leadership role and attempt to placate conservatives on the issue in the 2013 Senate debate is not much better.

"It's not just the position he took on the issue, it's the amount of political capital he expended to sell it - to be the face of it," Deace said of Rubio.

While Cruz never ruled out a path to legalization, his current tough talk about securing the border is pleasing to conservatives ears.

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Hacking for Humanity

CAMBRIDGE – “Life,” Oscar Wilde famously said, “imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” In the case of Sony Pictures’ movie *The Interview*, the world found itself confronted with a further iteration: life imitating art imitating life. The movie’s release sparked international intrigue, drama, and shadowy geopolitical power struggles. It even prompted a grave US Presidential address – all for a simple case of hacking.

Hacking into information systems is nothing new; it goes hand in hand with the emergence of telecommunications. One of the first attacks struck Guglielmo Marconi’s demonstration of radio transmission in 1903, when he communicated from Cornwall to London, 300 miles away. Nevil Maskelyne, a music-hall magician and would-be wireless tycoon, who had been frustrated by the Italian inventor’s patents, managed to take control of the system and broadcast obscene messages to the Royal Institution’s scandalized audience.

Though hacking is as old as wireless itself, much has changed since Marconi’s time. Information networks now blanket our planet, collecting and transferring immense amounts of data in real time. They enable many familiar activities: instantaneous communications, social media, financial transactions, and logistics management. Most important, information is no longer sequestered in a virtual realm, but permeates the environment in which we live. The physical, biological, and digital worlds have begun to converge – giving rise to what scientists refer to as “cyber-physical systems.”

Automobiles, for example, have evolved from straightforward mechanical systems into veritable computers on wheels. The same thing is happening to other consumer goods: We now have connected washing machines and learning thermostats, not to mention Bluetooth toothbrushes and computerized infant scales.

Indeed, cyber-physical systems range from the macro level (think urban transport, like Uber) to the micro (say, the beating of a human heart). [...]

All of this promises to revolutionize many aspects of human life – mobility, energy management, health care, and much more – and may point toward a greener and more efficient future. But cyber-physical systems also heighten our vulnerabilities to malicious hacking, an issue that is being discussed at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Far from being isolated in cyberspace, attacks can now have devastating consequences in the physical world. It is an annoyance when a software virus crashes our computers; but what if the virus crashes our cars?

Malicious hackers are difficult to combat with traditional government and industry tools [...]. Hacking can be carried out anywhere and everywhere, potentially involving multiple networks in obscure locations. It defies conventional retaliation and protection strategies. As then-US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta warned in 2012, given its current systems, the United States is vulnerable to a “cyber Pearl Harbor” that could derail trains, poison water supplies, and cripple power grids.

So, how can such a scenario be prevented?

One option, surprisingly, could be to promote widespread adoption of hacking itself. Familiarity with hackers’ tools and methods provides a powerful advantage in diagnosing the strength of existing systems, and even in designing tighter security from the bottom up – a practice known as “white hat” hacking. Ethical infiltration enables a security team to render digital networks more resistant to attack by identifying the flaws. This may become routine practice – a kind of cyber fire drill – for governments and businesses, even as academic and industry research focuses in the coming years on the development of further technical safeguards.

In general, today’s defenses take the form of autonomous, constantly vigilant digital “supervisors” – computers and code that control other computers and code. Similar to traditional military command-and-control protocols, they gain power in numbers and can quickly react to a broad array of attacks. Such a digital ecosystem strengthens checks and balances, reducing the possibility of failure and mitigating the effects of an incursion.

In such a future scenario, a Hollywood blockbuster might be about networks of computers fighting each other, while humans stand by. It would portray the broader idea of “singularity,” a hypothetical turning point when the artificial surpasses the human. Fortunately, in this case, life is still far from imitating art.

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

The Horrors of Fishing With Dynamite

SAN FRANCISCO — Jessica Vyvyan-Robinson was diving off Borneo when she was struck without warning by shock waves.

“I could feel it in my chest — like a dull, booming sound,” she recalled in an interview. After surfacing, her group learned that fishermen had detonated explosives.

The incident, which occurred a year ago, was Ms. Vyvyan-Robinson’s first encounter with blast fishing, a highly destructive technique used in impoverished pockets of the world.

The blasts, often from dynamite, leave craters in coral reefs and kill far more fish than can be harvested, and in many places, the tourism industry serves as a powerful voice against blast fishing, which could scare divers and other visitors away. Some nations have successfully clamped down on the practice, which is generally illegal, but it continues in areas where explosives are available and people are desperate.

The effects of blast fishing can be horrifying. Ms. Vyvyan-Robinson, who wrote about her experiences for ScubaDiverLife.com, describes finding waters littered with dead or struggling fish. Only a portion of the fish that are killed is retrieved because many sink to the bottom. Their air bladders, which help fish remain buoyant, and other internal organs can rupture.

Blast fishing is not new. It was introduced to many parts of the world by European armies, said Michel Bariche, an expert on Mediterranean marine issues at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon.

“During the First World War, soldiers used grenades to catch fish for a quick and fresh meal,” he said in an email. In Lebanon, for example, blast fishing spread after French soldiers demonstrated the technique. [...]

The explosions are generally easy to spot — and thus, in theory, easy to police — but Dr. Bariche said that over the past decade or two, some fishermen had taken to dropping explosives deeper and at night, when detection is less likely. Some Lebanese anglers use lights at night to attract small fish before detonating the charge. As the small fish sink, he explained, they attract bigger fish, which can then be caught with the hook-and-line method. One problem with this practice is that shrimp, crab and lobster larvae are also drawn to the light and killed.

Tanzania has seen a resurgence in blast fishing over the last decade as mining and construction activity in the country have made it easier to obtain dynamite.

“It looks like an old World War II movie where they throw depth charges in the water,” said Marcel Kroese, who works on the SmartFish Program, an effort financed by the European Union to improve Africa’s fisheries.

Fishermen often resort to dynamite around coral reefs, where nets might snag, Mr. Kroese said. The Tanzanian coast also has relatively few fish, so anglers are desperate to harvest anything they can. A pilot acoustic study over six weeks last year in Tanzania for the World Wildlife Fund, an environmental group, estimated that 19 blasts per day occurred in one small stretch of water not far from Dar es Salaam, the largest city. More blast-detection microphones will be deployed soon, according to Jason Rubens, a W.W.F. Tanzania representative.

The Tanzanian government and tourism officials would like to combat the problem, Mr. Kroese said, but have lacked the resources. The destruction of small fish and coral reefs receives far less attention than another environmental problem: the poaching of elephants and other wildlife. But this spring the Tanzanian government plans to begin a \$1 million initiative to reduce dynamite fishing, according to The Tanzania Daily News.

Kenya, concerned about terrorist attacks, has cracked down on the availability of explosives, and has essentially eliminated dynamite fishing, Mr. Kroese said.

Experts say that blast fishing remains common in parts of Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines, while other countries in the region have made progress in stamping it out.

In Cambodia, blast fishing has “pretty much been stopped around the major islands” and now can be found only in outlying areas, said Paul Ferber, who runs an environmental group called Marine Conservation Cambodia. [...] Cambodia encouraged fishing communities to manage their own waters, and those communities patrol and spread information about why the practice is harmful and why fishermen should prevent others from doing it. The idea was: “If you let these guys do it, it’s you guys that are going to suffer,” Mr. Ferber said.

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

The Hidden Cost of a Flexible Job

It's nice to be able to work from home once in a while, but workers wind up compensating with longer, more intense hours.

It's freezing and snowy. It's a million degrees and humid. Your kids are sick. The repairman is coming. You have a doctor's appointment.

Whatever the reason, many workers are lucky enough to be able to take advantage of workplaces that offer a bit of flexibility as to when and where they work.

But such affordances come with strings attached: Employees with this perk often wind up working extra hours at nights or on weekends. Why? Not to make up for lost productivity (studies show that workers are just as diligent if not more so when working from home) but in an effort to demonstrate their commitment to and passion for their jobs.

Researchers call the phenomenon "the flexibility stigma."

"In high-level, professional jobs, [the stigma] stems from what one sociologist called 'the norm of work devotion,' where you have to prove yourself worthy of your job by making it the central focus of your life—the uncontested central focus of your life," says Joan C. Williams, director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. For employees who occasionally would like to work from home, that means working ever harder and ever crazier hours, lest anyone think their jobs were anything but their top priority.

Women with children may be the most likely to take advantage of an employer's flexibility, and thus may experience the stigma most often, but Williams says that it hurts everybody—"everybody who is not a breadwinner married to a homemaker," because those lucky few are the only people who can realistically comply with "the norm of work devotion." Men, women, those with kids, those without—everyone who deviates from the "ideal-worker norm" will need to demonstrate their devotion in other ways. "It's equal-opportunity misery," says Williams.

Over the past two decades, increasingly sophisticated technology has meant that fewer and fewer people need to be in the office to get their work done. Between 1997 and 2010, the number of Americans who work from home at least one day per week rose by 4.2 million. As a percent of the total workforce, this is a jump of a bit more than two percentage points, from 7 to 9.4 percent.

Most of those workers—9.4 million—are people who work from home entirely. But a good chunk—4 million people—are what the Census Bureau terms "mixed": They have an office job, but they also work from home on occasion. These mixed workers are a special bunch. They are highly educated: Of "flexible workers," 63.3 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 50.5 percent of those who work solely at home and 29.7 percent of those who work solely on site. They are better compensated, bringing home an average earnings of \$52,800 a year, compared with \$25,500 for those who work at home and \$30,000 for those who work on site. And they work harder, putting in more than the 40 hours that's standard for other workers.

Why does this high bar persist? It's not because it makes business sense: Overworked workers are less productive. It's because, Williams says, those who have succeeded in this system don't want to see it any other way.

"One of the reasons that this [culture] has proved so unbelievably difficult to change is that the winners of the system are the breadwinners who saw very little of their children," she explains. "It's an identity-threat situation; they have an incredible amount invested in proving that's the only way to be a professional. Because, if it isn't, why did they do it? How come they don't know their children?"

It wasn't always this way. Once upon a time, the limitations of technology set a firmer boundary between work and home: If you weren't at the office, you often couldn't do your job. But that's no longer the case.

"Technology now sets no work boundaries," Williams says. "So we have to set these work boundaries through social norms."

The only problem, she says, is that we aren't doing that.

"I've been working on this problem for 25 years, and I actually have come to the conclusion that these organizations just aren't going to change."

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Where Will All the Workers Go?

NEW YORK – Technology innovators and CEOs seem positively giddy nowadays about what the future will bring. New manufacturing technologies have generated feverish excitement about what some see as a Third Industrial Revolution. In the years ahead, technological improvements in robotics and automation will boost productivity and efficiency, implying significant economic gains for companies. But, [...] it remains uncertain whether demand for labor will continue to grow as technology marches forward.

Recent technological advances have three biases: They tend to be capital-intensive (thus favoring those who already have financial resources); skill-intensive (thus favoring those who already have a high level of technical proficiency); and labor-saving (thus reducing the total number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the economy). The risk is that robotics and automation will displace workers in blue-collar manufacturing jobs before the dust of the Third Industrial Revolution settles.

The rapid development of smart software over the last few decades has been perhaps the most important force shaping the coming manufacturing revolution. Software innovation, together with 3D printing technologies, will open the door to those workers who are educated enough to participate; for everyone else, however, it may feel as though the revolution is happening elsewhere. Indeed, the factory of the future may be 1,000 robots and one worker manning them. [...]

For the developed countries, this may seem like old news. After all, for the last 30 years, the manufacturing base in Asia's emerging economies has been displacing that of the old industrial powers of Western Europe and North America. But there is no guarantee that gains in service-sector employment will continue to offset the resulting job losses in industry.

For starters, technology is making even many service jobs tradable, enabling them to be offshored to Asia and other emerging markets. And, eventually, technology will replace manufacturing and service jobs in emerging markets as well.

Today, for example, a patient in New York may have his MRI sent digitally to, say, Bangalore, where a highly skilled radiologist reads it for one-quarter of what a New York-based radiologist would cost. But how long will it be before a computer software can read those images faster, better, and cheaper than the radiologist in Bangalore can? [...]

Job-reducing technological innovations will affect education, health care, government, and even transportation. For example, will we still need so many teachers in the decades to come if the cream of the profession can produce increasingly sophisticated online courses that millions of students can take? [...]

And, of course technological innovation that is capital-intensive and labor-saving is one of the factors – together with the related winner-take-all effects – driving the rise in income and wealth inequality. Rising inequality then becomes a drag on demand and growth (as well as a source of social and political instability), because it distributes income from those who spend more (lower- and middle-income households) to those who save more (high-net-worth individuals and corporate firms).

Obviously, this is not the first time the world has faced such problems, and the past can help to serve as a model for resolving them. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century leaders sought to minimize the worst features of industrialization. Child labor was abolished throughout the developed world, working hours and conditions became more humane, and a social safety net was put in place to protect vulnerable workers and stabilize the (often fragile) macroeconomy.

As we begin to seek enlightened solutions to the challenges that the Third Industrial Revolution presents, one overall theme looms large: The gains from technology must be channeled to a broader base of the population than has benefited so far. [...] In order to create broad-based prosperity, workers need the skills to participate in the brave new world implied by a digital economy.

Even that may not be sufficient, in which case it will become necessary to provide permanent income support to those whose jobs are displaced by software and machines. Here, too, we should attend carefully to the lessons of the past.

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Food Waste Is Becoming Serious Economic and Environmental Issue, Report Says

WASHINGTON — With millions of households across the country struggling to have enough to eat, and millions of tons of food being tossed in the garbage, food waste is increasingly being seen as a serious environmental and economic issue.

A report released Wednesday shows that about 60 million metric tons of food is wasted a year in the United States, with an estimated value of \$162 billion. About 32 million metric tons of it end up in municipal landfills, at a cost of about \$1.5 billion a year to local governments.

The problem is not limited to the United States. The report estimates that a third of all the food produced in the world is never consumed, and the total cost of that food waste could be as high as \$400 billion a year. Reducing food waste from 20 to 50 percent globally could save \$120 billion to \$300 billion a year by 2030, the report found.

“Food waste is a global issue, and tackling it is a priority,” said Richard Swannell, director of sustainable food systems at the Waste and Resources Action Program, or Wrap, an antiwaste organization in Britain that compiled the new report. “The difficulty is often in knowing where to start and how to make the biggest economic and environmental savings.”

The food discarded by retailers and consumers in the most developed countries would be more than enough to feed all of the world’s 870 million hungry people, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. But it is not just those countries that have problems with food waste. The report showed that it is also an issue in African countries like South Africa.

The problem is expected to grow worse as the world’s population increases, the report found. By 2030, when the global middle class expands, consumer food waste will cost \$600 billion a year, unless actions are taken to reduce the waste, according to the report.

Food waste is not only a social cost, but it contributes to growing environmental problems like climate change, experts say, with the production of food consuming vast quantities of water, fertilizer and land. The fuel that is burned to process, refrigerate and transport it also adds to the environmental cost.

Most food waste is thrown away in landfills, where it decomposes and emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Globally, it creates 3.3 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases annually, about 7 percent of the total emissions, according to the report.

The United Nations agency points out that methane gas from the world’s landfills are surpassed in emissions by only China and the United States.

“Seven percent is not the largest contributor of greenhouse gasses, but it’s not an insignificant amount,” said Helen Mountford, the director of economics at the World Resources Institute. “But this is one area — reducing food waste — where we can make a difference.”

Over the last several years, some cities and counties in the United States, including New York City, have started programs to tackle the issue. Hennepin County, Minn., the state’s most populous county, provides grants from \$10,000 to \$50,000 to local business and nonprofits to help recycle food products or turn them into compost.

“There is still a lot in the waste stream,” said Paul Kroening, supervising environmentalist at Hennepin County Environmental Services. “We are just scratching the surface.”

A coalition of food industry trade groups, the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, has also increased effort to combat food waste. Meghan Stasz, the director of sustainability for the Grocery Manufacturers Association, a member of the alliance, said the group was working with supermarket chains to reduce waste by clarifying expiration dates and selling smaller portions of food.

Ms. Stasz said the group was also getting its members to donate more food and make changes in manufacturing processes to reduce the amount of wasted food. One member, the giant food company ConAgra, changed the way it placed dough in shell for its pot pies and saved 235 tons of dough in a year.

Mr. Swannell, of the antiwaste group Wrap, applauded those efforts, but said more still needed to be done.

“Awareness of food waste has risen, but we need to do more to tie that awareness to actions on the ground,” he said. “We need to find better ways to deal with food waste, but we need to prevent it in the first place.”

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Britons Still Want a Global Role

LONDON — The British election is fewer than 100 days away, and it's a mess — at least five parties in a fragmented system designed for two, and absolute rule by the winner.

In 1951, the two main parties won 97 percent of the vote; current opinion polls suggest they will be lucky now to win 65 percent. No one expects any party to win an overall majority on May 7. The resulting hung Parliament will mean either a fragile minority government or another European-style (horrors!) coalition government.

It is not even clear whether David Cameron of the Conservatives or Ed Miliband of Labour will be the prime minister. So the election campaign thus far has been timid, with parties appealing to their core constituencies and trying to beat off their perceived threats in marginal constituencies. For the Tories, that is the anti-Europe, anti-immigration U.K. Independence Party; for Labour, that is the Scottish National Party, which endangers about half of Labour's 41 Scottish seats.

The campaign has focused mostly on personalities, who will cut the budget better, the dangers of Muslim radicalism and how everyone loves the National Health Service to death. There has been little discussion of foreign policy, other than caricatures of the European Union; there has been almost no talk of Russia and Ukraine, or of Syria and Iraq.

Nor has there been much of a debate on the impact of current and future spending cuts on the British military, on modernizing and retaining Britain's submarine-based nuclear deterrent and indeed on the country's shrinking role in world affairs, where Paris — despite its own economic troubles — can seem a more useful and capable strategic partner to Washington than London.

Still, underneath the political swordfights are some interesting trends in British attitudes toward defense and foreign policy, which have been laid out in a new study of popular and elite opinion done by Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Despite current trends, the study found that more than 60 percent of respondents from both the public and the elite believe that Britain should remain "a great power," the highest level since the survey was first conducted in 2010. Nearly 70 percent think Britain has a responsibility to maintain international security, while nearly 60 percent support providing troops for peacekeeping missions and a clear majority believe Britain should help lead the global response to climate change.

While rejecting isolationism, the British are more reluctant to pay the cost of their ambitions, reflexively euroskeptic and increasingly hostile to foreign aid.

They are also more ambivalent about Britain's "special" relationship with Washington, with some 30 percent believing that Britain's closest ties should be with the European Union rather than the United States (25 percent), a reversal of the position two years ago. That may indicate popular confusion or declining trust in Washington.

While some 60 percent favor an in-or-out referendum on membership in the European Union, as Mr. Cameron has promised if re-elected, the public is evenly divided on staying or leaving, with about 20 percent still unsure or unwilling to vote. The public also has a highly inflated view of the net costs of membership, and almost half support limits on the right of European Union citizens to live and work anywhere within the bloc.

Among opinion leaders, however, more than 70 percent favor continued European Union membership. And the elite are more concerned about promoting British trade than the general public, which prioritizes border protection and counterterrorism. "The public appears to reject ideas of decline and supports an ambitious British foreign policy," said Thomas Raines, who wrote the report. But the challenge to politicians trying to cut the budget is obvious.

The Chatham House study was based on a YouGov poll in August of a representative sample of 2,059 adults, using an online opt-in panel that does not meet New York Times methodological standards. But the results are indicative, and the poll of 704 "opinion-formers" was not designed, of course, to be random.

The New York Times, 29 January 2015

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Climate change triggered Syrian conflict: Study

Drawing one of the strongest links yet between global warming and human conflict, researchers said on Monday that a recent extreme drought in Syria between 2006 and 2009 was most likely due to climate change, and that the drought was a factor in the violent uprising that began there in 2011.

The drought was the worst in the country in modern times, and in a study published on Monday in "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences", the scientists laid the blame for it on a century long trend toward warmer and drier conditions in the eastern Mediterranean, rather than on natural climate variability. The researchers said this trend matched computer simulations of how the region responds to increases in greenhouse-gas emissions, and appeared to be due to two factors: a weakening of winds that bring moisture-laden air from the Mediterranean and hotter temperatures that cause more evaporation.

Colin P Kelley, the lead author of the study, said he and his colleagues found that while Syria and the rest of the region known as the Fertile Crescent were normally subject to periodic dry periods, "a drought this severe was two to three times more likely" because of the increasing aridity in the region.

Kelley, who did the research while at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and is now at the University of California at Santa Barbara, said there was no apparent natural cause for the warming and drying trend, which developed over the last 100 years, when humans' effect on climate has been greatest.

Martin P Hoerling, a meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration whose earlier work showed a link between climate change and aridity in the Eastern Mediterranean, said the researchers' study was "quite compelling."

"The paper makes a strong case for the first link in their causal chain," Hoerling said in an email, "namely the human interference with the climate so as to increase drought likelihood in Syria."

Some social scientists, policymakers and others have previously suggested that the drought played a role in the Syrian unrest, and the researchers addressed this as well, saying the drought "had a catalytic effect."

They cited studies that showed that the extreme dryness, combined with other factors, including misguided agricultural and water-use policies of the Syrian government, caused crop failures that led to the migration of as many as 1.5 million people from rural to urban areas. This in turn added to social stresses that eventually resulted in the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011. [...] The researchers said that there were many factors that contributed to the chaos, including the influx of 1.5 million refugees from Iraq, and that it was impossible to quantify the effect of any one event like a drought.

Francesco Femia, founder and director of the Center for Climate and Security, a research group in Washington that has long argued that the Syrian drought had a climate-change component, said the new study "builds on previous work looking at the impact of drought on agricultural and pastoral livelihoods."

"There's no question that the drought had a role to play in the mass displacement of people," he said.

The link between climate change and conflict has been debated for years. A working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wrote in 2014 that there was "justifiable common concern" that climate change increased the risk of armed conflict in certain circumstances, but said it was unclear how strong the effect was.

The United States military has described climate change as a "threat multiplier" that may lead to greater instability in parts of the world. Earlier studies trying to show a link between climate change and conflict have been rebutted by some scientists, and it is not clear how far this new study will go toward settling the issue.

Thomas Bernauer, a professor of political science at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich who has been critical of some earlier studies, said he was skeptical about this one as well.

"The evidence for the claim that this drought contributed to the outbreak of civil war in Syria is very speculative and not backed up by robust scientific evidence," he wrote in an email.

Mark A Cane, an author of the study and a scientist at Lamont-Doherty, which is part of Columbia University, defended the work. "I think there's a really good case here," he said. "But I think we've tried to explain that the connection from an extraordinary climate event to conflict is complex and certainly involves other factors."

ORAL CONCOURS 2015

ANGLAIS - LVI

Fewer Women Run Big Companies Than Men Named John

Fewer large companies are run by women than by men named John, a sure indicator that the glass ceiling remains firmly in place in corporate America.

Among chief executives of S.&P. 1500 firms, for each woman, there are four men named John, Robert, William or James. We're calling this ratio the Glass Ceiling Index, and an index value above one means that Jims, Bobs, Jacks and Bills — combined — outnumber the total number of women, including every women's name, from Abby to Zara. Thus we score chief executive officers of large firms as having an index score of 4.0. [...]

Even as this ratio falls short of the score among chief executives, it remains astonishingly high. It also understates the impermeability of the glass ceiling. After all, most companies understand that an all-male board looks bad, and so most of them appoint at least one woman, although only a minority bother to appoint more than one. Far fewer of these large firms — currently one in 25 — are run by a woman serving as C.E.O.

We can also use our index to compare the permeability of the glass ceiling in corporate life to that in the political domain. The United States, which has never had a female president, has had six named James, five named John and four named William. Thus, even if Hillary Clinton were to be elected, the Glass Ceiling Index would be 15.

Turning to Congress, there is a partisan divide in the Glass Ceiling Index. On the Republican side of the Senate, there are as many men named John as there are women. Add in the Senator Roberts, Senator Jameses and Senator Williams, and they outnumber their female colleagues by a ratio of 2.17 to one. The score in the House is slightly less unbalanced, but there are still 1.36 Jims-Bobs-Jacks-Bills for every woman.

By contrast, on the Democratic side, women outnumber the men with these particular names by quite a margin, and by my count, the Glass Ceiling Index suggests a ratio of 0.3 to one in both the House and the Senate. Likewise, within the executive branch, President Obama has appointed Secretary (John) Kerry and (Robert) McDonald, but they're still outnumbered by six women, yielding an index score of 0.33. (Treasury Secretary Jack Lew is a Jacob, not a John, and so not relevant to this index.)

Even the index for Democratic politicians and cabinet members remains more than twice as high as the benchmark for the population as a whole. In 1990 — the last year for which the Census Bureau published data on first names — Jameses made up 1.6 percent of the population, Johns were an additional 1.6 percent, and Roberts and Williams accounted for another 1.5 and 1.2 percent. The other side of our ratio is the share of women, who were 51.2 percent of the population. Putting these numbers together, the ratio of Jims-Bobs-Jacks-Bills to women is 0.12 to 1.

Other institutions are clearly in transition. For instance, Chief Justice John Roberts is the only John on the Supreme Court, and he is outnumbered by three women, which yields a score of 0.33. But this is a more balanced court than it has historically been, and before Justice Elena Kagan took over from Justice John Paul Stevens, there were as many Justice Johns as women.

Emboldened by this new approach to quantifying the glass ceiling, I felt compelled to also track progress within my own field, which is academic economics. I took a quick count of full professors in the "top six" economics departments — typically thought to include Chicago, Harvard, M.I.T., Princeton, Stanford and Yale — and discovered 1.12 Professors James, Robert, John or William for each female economics professor, suggesting that we are still a substantial distance from gender parity. Indeed, this is a setting where the index probably understates the problem, as economics faculty members are an internationally diverse group, and the index is unmoved by Jaimes, Robertos, Juans or Willems.

The Glass Ceiling Index is a fun but quite imperfect way of measuring the permeability of the glass ceiling. (Especially because in a few decades, the millennial Jacobs, Tylers and Zacharys will outnumber baby boomer Bills and Bobs.) But it does point to an important truth — that in many important decision-making areas of American life, women remain vastly outnumbered.

The New York Times, 2 March 2015