

SEPTEMBER 2023  
BENEDICT MACON-  
COONEY  
JEEGAR KAKKAD



# Reimagining Government for the 21st Century

The technological revolution is the single biggest force changing the world today. Yet just as with other big periods of upheaval – not least during the Industrial Revolution – political leaders and government have been slow to adapt.

Most politicians still treat technology as a side issue to be addressed once the “real” political debates have raged. Mainstream politics denies itself the enabling possibilities of technology (leaving the discussion to e-government bureaucrats) and so remains a 20th-century fight at the margins of tax and spend or welfare policy.

This presents concrete dangers. The current path of ever-higher taxes and increasing government costs – particularly when citizens get less in return – is unsustainable.

The real issue is how we harness the power of technology to revolutionise the way government serves its citizens. The technologies we have now – including artificial intelligence (AI) and digital identity – radically improve government capabilities. They offer a direct way in which government can give and receive information in real time to deliver better, personalised services and provide a platform for prosperity.

A new 21st-century strategic state would harness the benefits of these technologies to make government more effective and use taxpayer money more efficiently while constantly striving to improve outcomes.

## Three Fundamentals of a 21st-Century “Strategic State”

- A government that is open to deep partnership with the private sector, boosting innovation
- Improved service delivery, with more direct citizen engagement
- More data-driven and efficient decision-making, with reduced bureaucracy and costs

This new model of government requires a new politics, shunning the old debates of tax and spend and left versus right for a simple, single-minded, unifying question:

What do countries need to thrive in the future?

Answering this requires setting a higher bar of political leadership. The exercise of political authority has not changed: set a strategy that can prioritise challenges, define the policy actions that can solve them and adopt a delivery focus at the highest levels to get things done. What has changed is the potential for technology to enable that leadership.

For example, data and analytics can build a richer, more accurate representation of the problems for a country to solve when setting strategy. AI can identify more cost-efficient, higher quality policy interventions. And real-time delivery data monitored at the highest political level can ensure effective deployment of political power to unblock barriers to get things done.

Delivering this requires a new vision and framework including:

- A commitment from the highest political authority to leverage the transformative power of technology for a mid-21st-century version of government
- Far deeper public investment in technological and AI-era infrastructure, utilising cloud and modern software
- A more agile, responsive and targeted government, in which citizens have a digital identity and control their data
- A new treatment of data as a competitive asset, which can, for example, stimulate innovation in health
- A greater alignment between the public and private sectors to mobilise effectively behind clear purposes, such as around climate
- A greater appetite for risk and innovation, with greater expertise from the outside informing direction

Over the long run, a successful government will likely be smaller in scope but more effective in its delivery.

Reshaped by the technological revolution, government in the 21st century can reimagine how it operates, who it partners with and what it prioritises in order to transform public services and fuel economic growth.

Lead image: Getty

## Follow us

[facebook.com/instituteglobal](https://facebook.com/instituteglobal)

[x.com/instituteGC](https://x.com/instituteGC)

[instagram.com/institutegc](https://instagram.com/institutegc)

## General enquiries

[info@institute.global](mailto:info@institute.global)

Copyright © September 2023 by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change

All rights reserved. Citation, reproduction and or translation of this publication, in whole or in part, for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorised provided the source is fully acknowledged Tony Blair Institute, trading as Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (registered company number: 10505963) whose registered office is One Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7BL.