

The 10 government trends reshaping the postpandemic world

What are the most transformational trends in the public sector today?

William Eggers, Mike Canning, and Beth McGrath

EVERYONE HAD HOPED that by 2022 the pandemic would be over and that nations would be getting back to normal—or at least establishing a new normal. But for many countries, the virus continues to create havoc. The pandemic continues to present unique challenges for governments: a health crisis coupled with massive economic disruption and unprecedented demands for social support.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) put it this way: “The biggest lessons of the crisis are that governments will need to respond to future crises at speed and scale while safeguarding trust and transparency.”¹ Even as the pandemic grudgingly recedes, governments have begun the work of building for the future.

Last year, our *Government Trends 2021* report focused on how governments were seeking to enhance agility, improve operations, and rebuild trust. *Government Trends 2022* continues to build on those themes, but with a strong focus on how governments are striving to become future-ready. The report captures 10 of the most transformative trends in government today, grouped under three themes:

- **Building resilience:** Focus on long-term resilience to future shocks

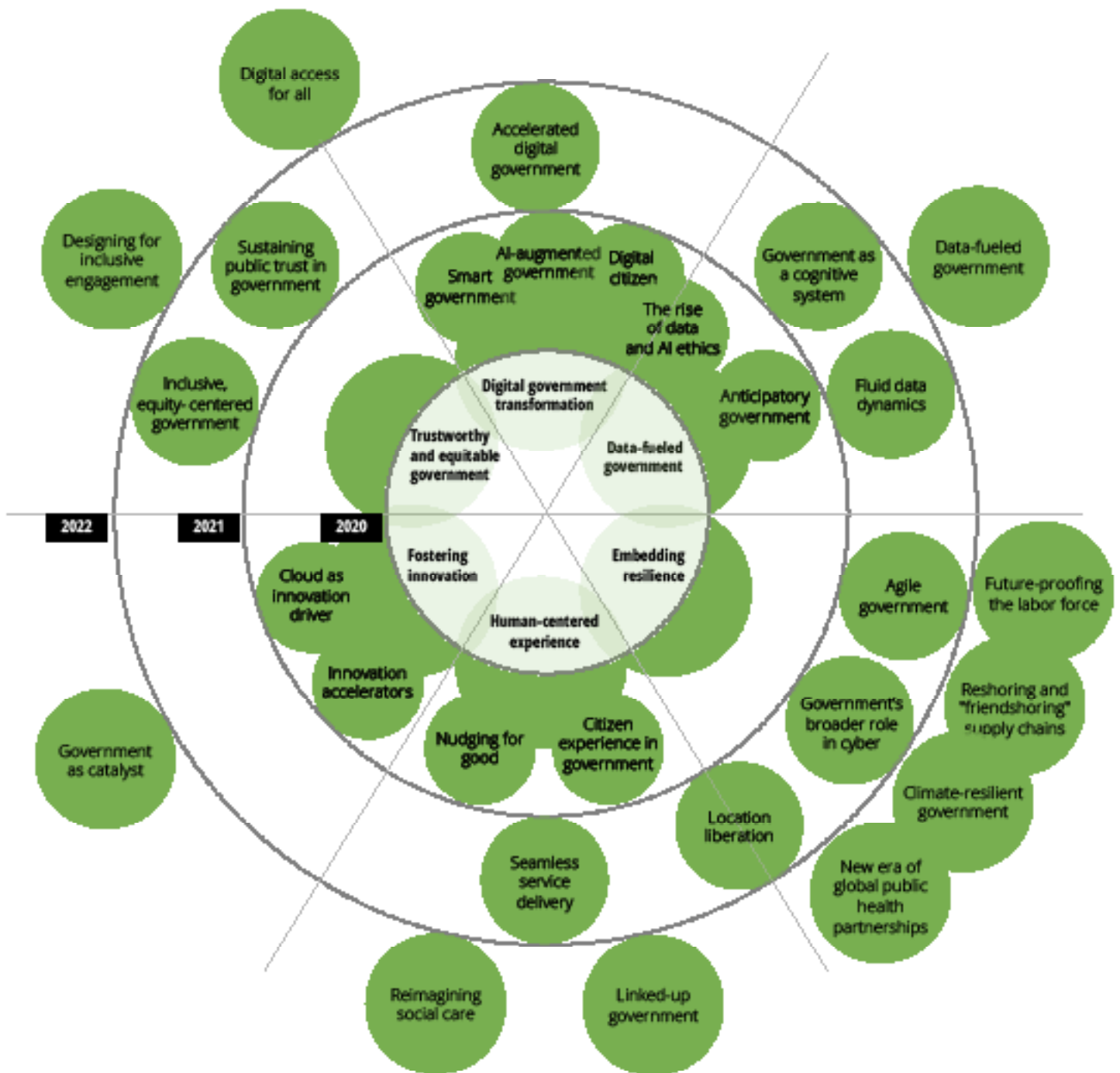
- **Connected for greater value:** Overhaul and integration of structures, systems, and data-sharing to drive greater impact
- **Government for all the people:** Making programs and services truly equitable and inclusive

The 2022 report distills extensive research on government, including what’s happening in the trenches. Our collaboration this year with Apolitical brings you voices from the frontlines—public servants who are pioneering these innovative trends.

We published the first *Government Trends* report three years ago. At the time, we noted the dizzying pace at which our world was being reshaped and the ways in which governments were adapting to these changes. Little did we know that the rate of change would drastically accelerate due to the pandemic. Three years is a relatively short period, and the themes covered in the first two reports are still relevant today. Figure 1 provides a look at all the trends covered in the first three reports, how they are related, and how they have evolved. Some issues, such as digital government, have been a constant theme through the years. Other issues, such as trust in government and ensuring inclusive services, have come to greater prominence more recently. The chart also shows the growing importance of a resilient government.

FIGURE 1

Government trends evolution 2020–2022



The 10 trends transforming government in 2022

What makes a trend a trend? To begin with, each trend must be evident in governments around the world—it doesn't count if it isn't happening in multiple places. Moreover, a trend must have relevance in governments and economies of various sizes. In addition, each trend must have moved beyond small pilots of experimentation and begun to penetrate the heart of government. On the other hand, they should still be emerging rather than a mature, universal practice.

THEME: BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to successfully respond to a disruptive event. Building resilience is a long-term exercise. The pandemic isn't the only disruption challenging government—technology shifts, climate change, economic disruption, and supply chain issues are just some of the areas in which governments are striving for greater resilience.

Trend 1: Climate-resilient government: How governments are addressing climate change

Climate resilience has risen to the top of government leaders' agendas, who are increasingly linking climate action to their mission. More and more government agencies, even those not directly linked to the environment, are making climate a priority. For example, city planners are looking at ways to use data analytics to prepare for climate-related disruptions. Governments around the world are also increasingly investing in resilient infrastructure, enhancing communities' capacity to withstand extreme weather events, and ensuring that disadvantaged communities aren't left to address climate-related risks on their own.

Trend 2: Reshoring and "friendshoring" supply chains: Reshaping supply chains to improve economic resilience

Supply chain problems are creating shortages for both suppliers and consumers, in some cases putting a nation's access to critical goods at risk. In response,

governments are encouraging the reshoring of critical supply chains to reduce external dependencies and increase resilience. Where reshoring is not possible, nations are "friendshoring" by creating a network of trusted suppliers from friendly countries.

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Trend 3: Future-proofing the labor force: Enabling the adaptive worker of the future

The COVID-19 pandemic massively disrupted the labor force. Even before that, exponential technological advances were constantly altering the labor landscape, widening the skills mismatch and demand-supply gap for specific jobs. Labor force participation rates are declining, and employee stress is growing, leading to what some have called the "great resignation." Governments are trying to bring labor policies in line with this new economic reality, with the broader aim of improving the labor markets' efficiency and future-proofing the labor force. These policies include changes to education, skills training, credentialing, and employment frameworks.

THEME: CONNECTED FOR GREATER VALUE

Government is trying to overcome challenges that limit its ability to deliver greater impact and address critical problems, especially ecosystem challenges that cross interagency boundaries. Arranging agency structures around "problems" rather than simply

departmental boundaries allows governments to respond better to complex societal issues. Data-sharing plays a crucial role in this “silo-hacking” effort by becoming a connecting thread between agencies. Government is also acting as a catalyst in the innovation ecosystem to foster better collaboration and more inclusive societal problem-solving. Finally, international collaboratives are gaining momentum to help prepare the world for future health disruptions.

Trend 4: Linked-up government: Building connections for greater impact

Silos within and between agencies administering government programs have long been obstacles to addressing wicked problems, delivering services, and achieving collective results. In response to factors ranging from COVID-19 to rising public expectations for integrated services, governments are creating interagency structures that break down silos and connect government agencies to respond to complex citizen needs. For example, a growing number of states and localities in the United States have created “Children’s Cabinets,” through which the heads of related departments work toward collective goals on a range of issues, from early childhood education to disconnected youth programs.

Trend 5: Data-fueled government: Breaking down silos with turbo-charged data

The pandemic underlined the importance of sharing data. Effective data-sharing requires underlying infrastructure such as cloud and advanced data management tools—emailing spreadsheets just won’t cut it. Agencies that lacked these tools struggled to catch up, and many established a new role: the chief data officer. This trend toward data collaboration seeks to derive greater benefits from shared data.

Trend 6: Government as catalyst: Driving innovation ecosystems

Government doesn’t have to solve every public problem on its own. Some of government’s greatest

achievements have been through playing the catalyst role rather than attempting to do all the heavy lifting on its own. Governments can catalyze innovation in many ways, serving as enabler, funder, convenor, or ecosystem integrator. Governments can accelerate solutions by linking external innovation capabilities to public problem solvers or by advancing next-generation technologies.

Government is also playing a broader, catalytic role in the innovation ecosystem to foster better collaboration and more inclusive societal problem-solving.

Trend 7: New era of global public health partnerships: Collaborating for better health preparedness

The pandemic proved that as our world becomes more interconnected, we become at greater risk of pathogenic spread. But it also showed how interconnection could help develop a collective and coordinated response to tackle a crisis of this or even greater magnitude. Aided by increasing digitization, international collaboratives are gaining momentum to help prepare the world for future health disruptions. More and more governments are collaborating with international organizations to develop early warning capabilities, accelerate scientific research and development, and build health capacities in less developed nations.

THEME: GOVERNMENT FOR ALL THE PEOPLE

The pandemic has thrown a spotlight on diversity, equity, and inclusion. As governments moved services online during the pandemic, it became critical to improve digital access. Moreover, government leaders are reimagining social care

programs to improve the delivery of services and drive greater impact in disadvantaged communities.

Trend 8: Digital access for all: Equity in digital service delivery

Remote work, virtual classes, and telehealth represent just a few of the ways governments used digital tools to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this also brought forth the digital divide and equity issue. For example, 40% of the global population still lacks internet access. Governments are acutely aware that inadequate access to digital connectivity and tools could mean billions of constituents being left out of the broader digitization movement. In response, governments are improving digital access—availability, affordability, and adoption to bridge the digital divide. They are also redesigning digital platforms, ecosystems, and infrastructure to help disadvantaged populations access services and social care.

Trend 9: Designing for inclusive engagement: Digital communications for richer community connection

Government's ability to cut through the noise and deliver accurate, important messages to the people who need them is crucial to the success of public sector programs. Good communication can help build trust, which is important for driving

inclusive engagement. Governments are reimagining traditional methods of communication, focusing on how to engage marginalized communities, and doing so through new mediums.

Trend 10: Reimagining social care: Recasting the social safety net

The pandemic has put enormous pressure on social care systems. It has compelled governments to re-examine how they can provide equitable, seamless, and effective social care services. As a result, social care leaders are increasingly integrating data across multiple sources to develop early interventions, adopting a human-centered mindset to design and deliver programs, and providing more holistic “wraparound” support to help recipients quickly gain stability. Also, they're investing in building the resilience of individuals and communities.

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Endnotes

1. OECD, “Government at a glance 2021,” July 9, 2021.

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