STATE OF THE NATION



SCENARIOS: 2029

GOOD FUTURES
FROM GOOD INNOVATION

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HOW TO USE THE CARDS

1. **Draw scenarios:** Pull 2-3 cards. Don't overthink the selection, unlikely combinations often produce the most generative thinking.

2. **Immerse yourself:** Read each scenario as if it's currently happening. If this were true, what would it mean for you and your organisation? Use the provocations on the back to open up the conversation.

3. **Stress-test:** For each scenario, consider: are you prepared for this? Would you see it coming? What would you wish you'd done differently? What could you do now to prepare for this future?

4. **Through-lines:** Which responses come up across multiple scenarios? Do any gaps come up across multiple scenarios? What could you do now to address and prepare for these combined futures?

2029

NEW ROAD TO HOPE



The 2029 election feels different. Expected turnout looks strong and there seems to be a renewed excitement to go to the ballot box. The National Care Service has clear timelines and deliverables attached. Sixteen and seventeen-year-olds are able to vote for the first time, and they are expected to come out in droves. The years of political chaos that made people check out haven't been entirely forgotten, but they're fading into the background. There's a cautious optimism in the air: people feel like the system might be worth participating and trusting in again.

2029

DEVOLVED POWERS



Devolution plans are now underway. Metro mayors and combined authorities are becoming significant political powers in their own right, with their own priorities, funding streams, and strategies. In some areas, systems have already been implemented. Others are still finding their feet, trying to identify what devolved power actually means for them in practice. Devolution plans have also brought with them a renewed conversation about national devolution in Scotland and Wales. For organisations, the operating context is increasingly changeable across the country. The funding and relationships that exist in one area may not exist in another. Running a national model, applied uniformly, is no longer what the system rewards. It's all about adapting to each individual area.

2029

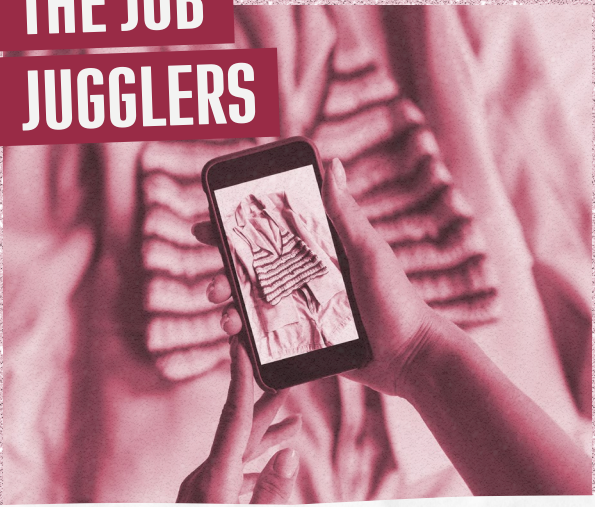
THE SQUEEZED SYSTEM



The cost of running things has continued to rise. Organisations and individuals that have been weathering the storm are running out of safety net. The gap between delivery costs and income keeps becoming slimmer. Meanwhile, demand has only climbed. Food bank usage is increasing, especially as harvest failures have pushed food prices to new highs. For charities, this situation is no longer about finding inefficiencies. Most of those had already been found. It's about making the difficult and deliberate choices about what they can and can't sustain.

2029

THE JOB JUGGLERS



The average person you manage now manages two or three income streams. Realistically, salaries haven't kept pace with inflation, with skyrocketing energy bills. They're no longer enough on their own. The free time after the 9-to-5 is now increasingly filled with side gigs, from data labelling for AI companies to Vinted sales. These additional income streams feel increasingly essential, despite the fact that they eat away any remaining time to rest and reset.

2029

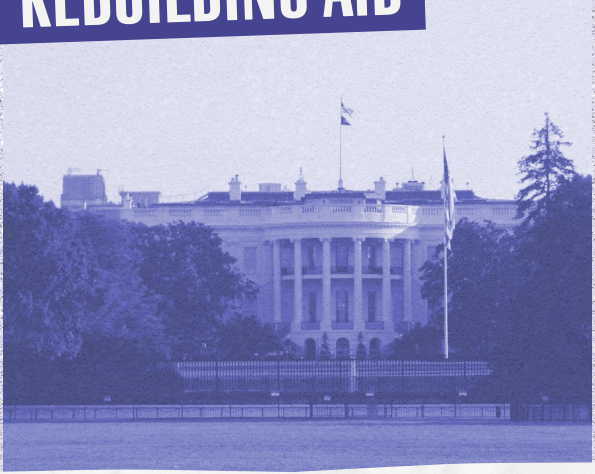
NEW NATIONAL SERVICE



A new national service has just come into force. Between a rising threat level and NATO's increasing defence spending commitments, the programme has felt like a long time coming. It places eighteen-year-olds across four tracks: defence and resilience, education support, health and social care, and environmental infrastructure. The response has been a mixed bag. On one hand, conscientious objectors have taken issue with compulsory service and legal challenges are in progress. Some young people, especially those worried about finding work in an unstable market, have welcomed it. A guaranteed structure, a salary, and a plan for what comes next.

REBUILDING AID

2029



A new President sits in the White House – one who is reversing the course on aid and enabling the global funding picture to recover. Investment is rebounding and UK aid is showing signs of stabilisation as well. The future is looking much rosier and more hopeful. That said, returning money doesn't undo the impact of the previous contraction. The relationships, trust, and presence built on the ground have been damaged by time away and the investment it will take to return to the previous baseline will be significant.

ELECTION DAY

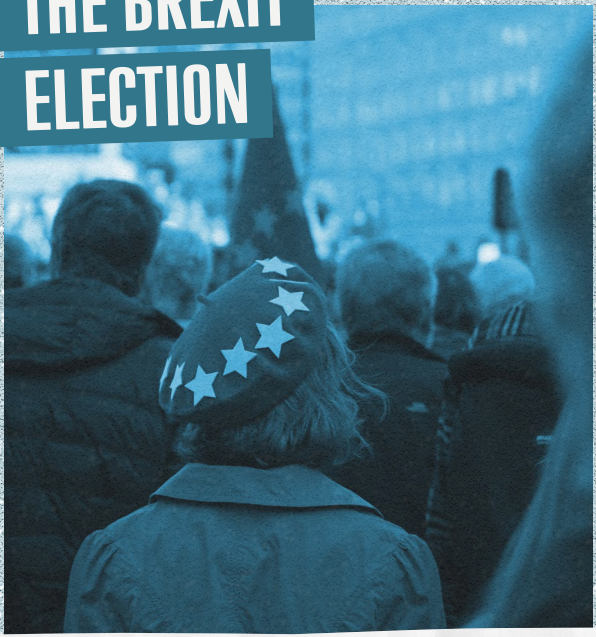
2029



Nobody is quite sure what to expect from this election. The two-party system that has historically structured British political life has been fragmenting for years, with the centre being squeezed from all sides. Proportional representation will fundamentally reshape the makeup of the House of Commons. A hung parliament looks likely. Meanwhile, the electoral reform that came with the Burnham government has changed the composition of the electorate. Polling models aren't entirely sure they're accounting for these changes.

2029

THE BREXIT ELECTION



Britain is talking about Brexit once again. Whilst there's no official referendum on the ballot paper, the 2029 election has become a proxy for it. Burnham's been pulling closer to the EU and it seems inevitable that, should this election be a triumph for him, rejoining will be high on the agenda.

THE IRL CLUB

2029



The retreat from legacy social media has continued and deepened, accelerated by a growing distrust of AI-generated content and influencers. Instead, people are showing up, in person, for things that are visibly and verifiably human. From run clubs to book groups to community gardens. The average park on a Tuesday evening is the meeting point for a hundred people in running gear, coming together to find community face-to-face. Being in the room is increasingly important for engaging these audiences.

2029

THE HUMAN PREMIUM



Human-made has become a quality signal, a bit like organic or artisanal used to be. It's something a growing number of people seek out deliberately and are willing to pay more for. Magazines with human-written articles. Therapy sessions that advertise as human-led. Product-packaging that tells you exactly who made it and where. As AI-generated content has become the default, the handmade has acquired new value. Increasingly, access to it is becoming a marker of privilege.

2029

THE NATIONAL CARE SERVICE



The government's new National Care Service is a year away from implementation. The legislation has passed and the funding is confirmed. For the families who have been paying for care out of hard-won savings, the arrival of this timeline means the world. It feels like a reason to believe that their realities are being recognised by the government. For the organisations working in this space, it's both opportunity and pressure: the context is changing in ways that will fundamentally reshape health and care.

2029

LIVING INHERITANCE



The triple lock change, inheritance tax reforms, and the rising cost of later life care have combined to shift the financial patterns of older households with assets. The money that was initially earmarked for inheritance is instead being passed on now. Gifting while alive, helping children onto property ladders, funding grandchildren's education: the living inheritance has become a mainstream financial strategy, driven by a changing tax and pension environment.

2029

THE NEET GENERATION



The graduate labour market has not recovered in the way that was hoped. The entry-level roles that previous generations used as a foothold are few and far between. AI absorbed a significant amount of these, as did rising employer costs. The assumption that a degree provides protection from labour market exclusion no longer holds. The lack of entry-level roles has become a structural problem rather than a temporary squeeze. Not for lack of trying: the young graduates continue to apply persistently, all while picking up extra pub shifts and living in their parents' spare rooms. This is a cohort forming financial, civic, and relationship habits under conditions of prolonged job insecurity.

2029

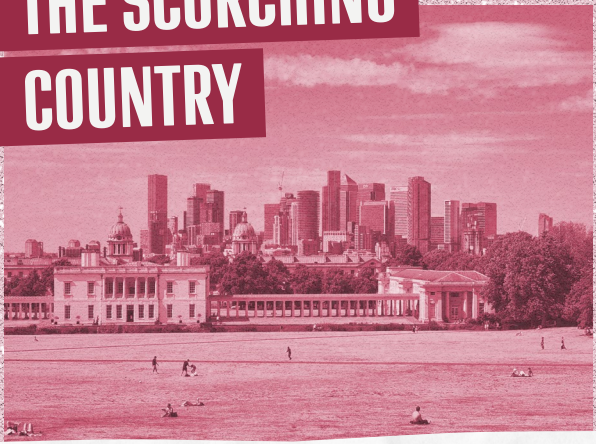
THE AI INEFFICIENCIES



AI is fully embedded in most workflows. In some areas, the efficiency gains are obvious. Case notes and referral letters draft themselves. Meeting summaries instantly land in inboxes. But all this new free time is being filled by managing the AI's work: checking outputs, correcting errors, prompting agents that have gone off track, maintaining ethical oversight. Management has become about managing the AI, rather than managing people. The cognitive load is just as high as it was before. But satisfaction of having done the work is no longer there.

2029

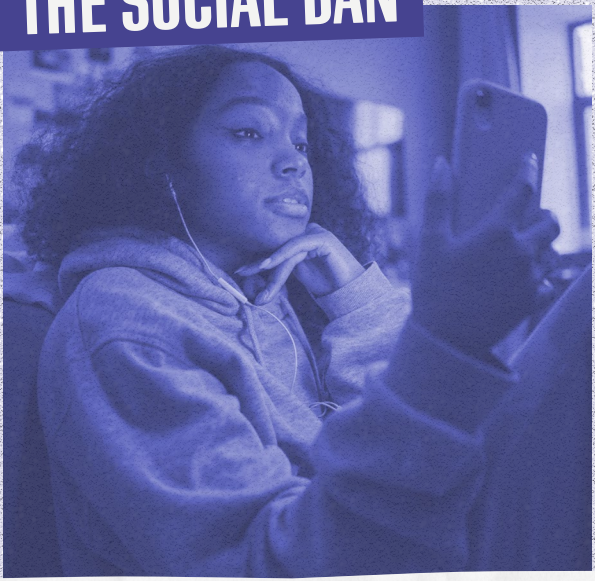
THE SCORCHING COUNTRY



Extreme heat has become the norm in the UK. Schools in the South East have shifted their hours in June and September, starting and finishing earlier. Some employers have followed suit or added siestas to the planning. The infrastructure is still catching up. New builds are required to meet rigorous thermal standards; the NHS has dedicated capacity planning due to the level of heat-related admissions; and insurance companies now price climate risk into coverage as the norm. Extreme heat is no longer a weather event. It is the new normal.

THE SOCIAL BAN

2029



The social media ban for under-sixteens is two years old. The headline finding is that it hasn't quite worked in the way its architects had initially hoped. A substantial amount of teenagers are managing to circumvent the age verification systems, through VPNs and borrowed accounts. The question now is: how effective is this ban actually? Does it need to go further and, if so, how do we police that?

THE AI SEARCH

2029



Websites are no longer primarily read by humans. The content that lives there is typically being processed by AI systems that synthesise and summarise it for a human audience. The information journey used to end with a click. It now lives entirely in a chat with an LLM. Companies and organisations have adapted. Websites have been redesigned accordingly, with structured content, front-loaded answers, and third-party citations.