

Our COVID Future

The Long Crisis Scenarios

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Prepared for

Local Trust






Foreword

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COVID-19 has ignited an urgent reassessment of the future. Anyone with a long-term plan has to **step back** and **think again**.

Local Trust believes there needs to be a **structural change** in our economy, society and politics, to shift power and control to **local communities**.

Will that happen in the current crisis? Or will the local be squeezed out? These scenarios look for **signals in the noise**. We don't agree with everything that's in here, but that's not the point.

These stories challenge our thinking and help us discover how we can **work differently**.

As we think about the long term implications for our Big Local programme and other communities, we hope these scenarios prove useful and help us **strengthen communities** in a way that prepares people to thrive, whatever the future holds.

Overview

You Are Here

COVID-19 marks a **turning point** in the 21st century.

Levels of uncertainty are off the chart, making **predictions impossible**.

The Long Crisis Network has created scenarios that imagine **what could happen**, allowing us to explore what different pathways into the future could look like.

By creating **plausible stories** about different futures, we create a foundation for decision makers, campaigners, and communities to **influence the process of change**.

“It’s extraordinary how quickly things move and turn... It sometimes feels like a game of whack-a-mole.”

UK Government Official

We start with the nature of the risks we face in the **long crisis of globalisation** – a turbulent period in which risks proliferate across borders as rapidly as opportunities.

We explore the difference between **high** and **low resilience systems**, and what it takes to respond to a crisis when events are running out of control.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest and greatest of a series of shocks to global systems.

It has three layers – **a public health emergency** that will continue for two years or more, an **economic disaster** that will take at least five years to unfold, and a crisis of **polarisation and insecurity** that could take a generation to play out fully.

Part 1 – The Long Crisis

Part 2 – Deep Uncertainty

Part 3 – Drivers of Change

Part 4 – The COVID-19 Scenarios

Part 5 – Worlds Compared

Part 6 – Towards a Larger Us

Two drivers will shape how societies respond to the emergency.

Will a crisis force people to work together or will it divide them? And will the response be centralised or distributed?

These drivers frame four scenarios.

1. In the [Rise of the Oligarchs](#), the dark phoenix that emerges from COVID-19's ashes is a government of the few. It's polarised, xenophobic, and corrupt.
2. [Big Mother](#) sees government take charge. The response is ambitious but uninventive.
3. [Fragile Resilient](#) is a future where things fall apart – with chaos tempered by innovation.
4. [Winning Ugly](#) sees an uneven process of renewal. No obvious victory but a steady increase in a society's ability to organise, learn, and adapt.

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We compare the scenarios across four dimensions.

Who has **power**? What do they mean for **prosperity**? What impact do they have on **people** and **places**?

And what are the **pathways** from one scenario to another?

Finally, we explore the implications of the scenarios for the **way forward** at local, national, and global levels.

How do we move from **Them and Us** to **Larger Us** thinking?

What do we need to do now to promote positive outcomes in the short, medium, and longer term?

Who are the **actors** in a Larger Us movement? And which **strategies** are mostly likely to be effective in the future described by each of the scenarios?

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Part 1

The Long Crisis

Ten years ago, we co-wrote a report called *Confronting the Long Crisis of Globalization* for the Brookings Institution.

It warned of a turbulent period for the world in which risks spread across borders as rapidly as opportunities.

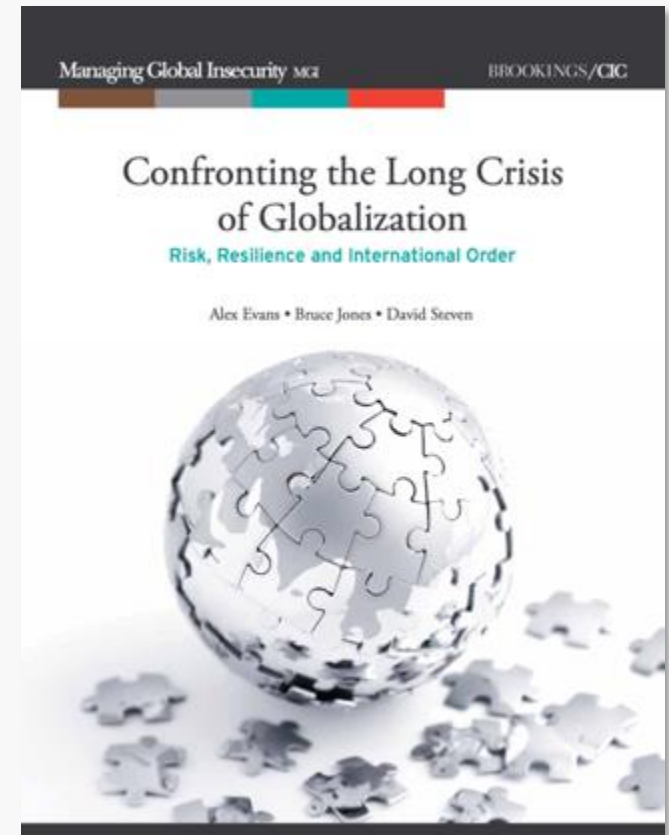
Pressure would build for long periods with no visible effect but, when released, it would trigger “abrupt shifts and cascading consequences across interlinked global systems.”

We called on leaders to take the prospects of failure seriously.

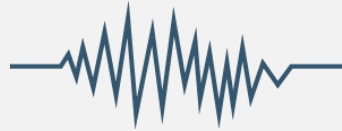
With inadequate capacity to prevent and manage risks, the most severe shocks threatened a breakdown that would have disastrous consequences for our wellbeing.



<https://bit.ly/confrontingthelongcrisis>



In the long crisis, we face **four categories** of risk: sudden **shocks**, longer-term **stresses**, deliberate **disruption** by others and our own **failure** to build resilience.



Acute shocks

which trigger sudden change, with consequences ricocheting through global systems



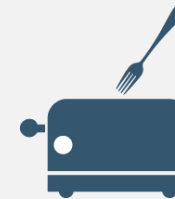
Longer term stresses

like demographic or environmental change – that grow inexorably over time



Deliberate disruption

as malign but innovative actors probe systems in search of vulnerabilities



Stupidity, ignorance, and neglect

our own tendency to weaken the systems we rely on

Navigating a crisis is like shooting the rapids.

Even though there are many routes we can take, it's the river, not us, that decides the speed and direction.

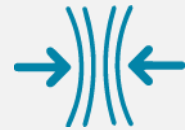
The boat can hit the rocks or capsize, with all of us tipped into the torrent.

There's no possibility of a pause to rethink strategy or reverse direction; the only option is to keep going.

And above all, it's essential for everyone to paddle together.

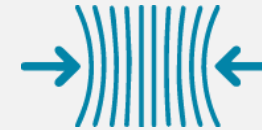


In the rapids, if we get it right, we **build resilience** – increasing foresight and spreading risks fairly. Life may still seem chaotic, but **success** breeds the **confidence** to tackle future challenges.



Low resilience

- Risks fall on those least able to mitigate them.
- No consensus, polarised responses.
- Future heavily discounted.
- Losing capacity and vulnerable to disruption.



High resilience

- Risks – and responses – distributed fairly.
- Shared awareness of problems and solutions.
- Short and long-term thinking. Innovation promoted, free-riding and predation resisted.

Get it wrong and we find it steadily harder to cope with current and future crises. **Resilience is lost** and outcomes are highly inequitable – with the **vulnerable** suffering first and hardest.

This pandemic is the latest in a series of 21st century **shocks**.

It was rooted in **stresses** that include loss of biodiversity, shifts in farming practices, increased urbanisation, and rapid travel.

Its impacts are being magnified by **disruptive actors** – both state and non-state.

And governments failed to prepare (**neglect**), failed to understand what was happening (**ignorance**), and have often displayed poor judgement in their response (**stupidity**).

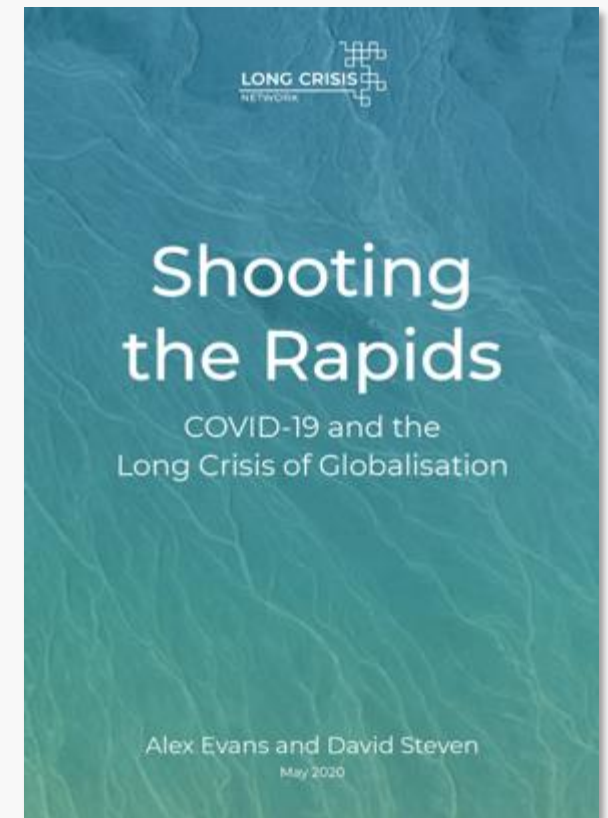
The risk of **breakdown** is therefore high.

“In this pandemic,” we argue in a sequel to the Long Crisis, “a good rubric for decision making is to **expect the worst**.”

So we need to be ready to work together for a **breakthrough**, where the toll of the pandemic is still heavy, but our capacity for collective action grows.



www.longcrisis.org/download



Part 2

Deep Uncertainty

COVID-19 puts us in **uncharted territory**. It's a public health emergency. An economic disaster. A polarisation and insecurity crisis. All at once.

On each of these layers, we find **uncertainty** everywhere we look. We must take this uncertainty seriously if we're to feel our way through the crisis.

We can react to deep uncertainty by **ignoring it** – pretending we know more than we do.

By **freezing** – panicking at the sense we have lost control.

By **distorting reality** – giving in to conspiracy theories and paranoia.

Or by **understanding** what we know and don't know, what we can control and can't control.

“It is not certain that
everything is
uncertain.”

Blaise Pascal

We find **deep uncertainty** at all three layers of this crisis. To understand what is changing, we need to track **what we know** and **what we don't know**.

Layer 1: the public health crisis (will unfold over at least two years)

We're only just finding out how, where, and why people are dying, who's infected, and how the virus spreads. We don't know whether a vaccine will be found, who will own it, and how well or long it will work.

Layer 2: the economic crisis (will unfold over five years or more)

We know that the economic damage is bad but we're only starting to see what happens when you power down a global economy. And whether it can simply be started up again.

Layer 3: polarisation and insecurity (will unfold over a generation)

We have little idea how people are thinking and feeling in homes and communities across the world, with health, wallets, and futures all under attack. Or how societies will react to a prolonged period of extreme stress.

1-2 years
Public health crisis

5-10 years
Economic,
employment,
and financial
crisis

A generation
or longer
Polarisation and
insecurity



Public Health

What we know

- Pandemic affecting all countries – millions of infections, 300,000+ deaths. Many countries reaching the peak of the first wave. Some countries already in a second wave.
- Half the world has been locked down. Four response models – eradicate (e.g. China, New Zealand), control (Europe), herd immunity (Sweden), erratic strategy (United States).
- Growing understanding of complexity of health impacts – pulmonary, cardiovascular, renal, intestinal, neurological.
- Race to scale up testing, number of intensive care beds, a community health response. Shortages of/competition for supplies of protective equipment, testing kits, etc.
- Mass displacement of people – both international and internal (e.g. in India). Sporadic protests and social unrest triggered by poorly designed lockdowns. Humanitarian crisis in prisons, refugee camps, other forgotten places.
- Systems weakened as people become infected – from political leaders to frontline critical workers.



Public Health

What we **don't** know

- How many infections we'll see (potentially 100m to 7bn), and how many will die (potentially 1m+ to 40m). How many people are now immune and how long that immunity will last.
- How the virus kills people, why certain groups are much more vulnerable (older people, men, poorer people, minorities), and what long-term health impacts to expect.
- Non COVID-19 burden of disease (untreated illnesses, missing vaccinations, health impacts of increased poverty and hunger).
- Whether countries will reduce infections to zero, control them at low levels, or manage successive waves. How public will comply with long-term public health restrictions.
- Whether a vaccine can be developed and when. How long it will take to distribute. Whether treatments will improve. Whether health systems will cope.
- Health impacts of interactions with other stresses and shocks – heatwaves, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.



Economic

What we know

- Economies frozen by lockdowns. Collapse in consumer demand. Global output projected to shrink by 3% or more. Negative growth in 170 countries.
- High and growing proportion of labour force unemployed or furloughed. Projections of 195 million job losses. Early wave of bankruptcies (but many more businesses probably insolvent). Corporate bailouts and some nationalisations.
- Sporadic panic buying, temporary shortages, elements of rationing especially when poorer communities are locked down.
- Financial market volatility in equities, bonds, commodities, at levels equivalent to or above the 2008 financial crisis. Record outflows from emerging markets.
- Huge government bailouts – where governments can afford it. Greater use of people-centred policies, including job guarantees, loan guarantees, increased unemployment benefits.



Economic

What we **don't** know

- Impacts of successive waves of COVID-19 infections on economic growth. Number of people pushed into poverty: 1-8% of global population.
- How well global supply chains function for food, etc. Ability to meet the food needs of 265 million people either already facing starvation or vulnerable to it.
- Impacts of commodity price volatility on energy, natural resource exporters. Number of new import, export, and investment restrictions.
- Systemic risks in the financial sector and potential credit crunch in non-financial sector. Number of sovereign debt defaults and extent of debt forgiveness.
- Whether countries sustain their bailouts and fiscal stimulus – and % that reaches the most vulnerable.
- Impact of lower tax revenues on public services and possible loss of core government functions (e.g. if health workers or teachers are not paid). Impacts on aid flows to poor countries.



Polarisation and insecurity

What we know

- Publics tiring of lockdowns as financial stresses, boredom, and anxiety mount up. Willingness to follow social distancing rules declining in many countries. Early signs of protest, unrest, rioting, in some cases with organised crime. Attacks on health workers in some countries.
- Abuses by police and security forces leading to loss of trust. Scapegoating of minorities such as refugees, homeless, prisoners. Spikes in domestic violence.
- Governments under strain and already losing trust, confidence, and goodwill. Polarised attitudes towards lockdowns. Politicisation of the World Health Organization.
- US, China, Russia, and other countries fuelling polarisation while seeking to shift blame and win legitimacy and power.
- Local self-organised responses and volunteering – from COVID-19 Mutual Aid groups in the UK to neighbourhood resistance committees in Sudan distributing food and protective equipment.



Polarisation and insecurity

What we **don't** know

- Levels of public support for emergency measures (public health, economic bailout, in a food crisis, if financial systems come under serious strain, etc.). Trust in government, police, other institutions.
- Extent to which psychological factors – stress, depression, loneliness, mental health problems – will fuel ‘fight or flight’ responses. And how this will impact on politics and security.
- Whether discrimination and stigmatisation of marginalised groups will increase and intergenerational rifts widen.
- Risk of state failures as states run out of money and/or bandwidth. How democracies will cope with delayed elections, etc. Attractiveness of authoritarian responses. Numbers of protests, levels of civil disorder. How armed or criminal groups use the crisis.
- Levels of trust between countries – at elite and public levels. Geopolitical tensions, including between China and the US. Divisions in or fragmentation of regional groupings, such as the EU.
- Possible new refugee crises, with spikes in anti-immigrant sentiment.

Part 3

Drivers of Change

The unknowns on the public health, economic, and insecurity layers of the COVID-19 emergency are compounded by equally deep uncertainty about **how we will react**.

At all levels, we face choices between **collective action** and **polarisation**.

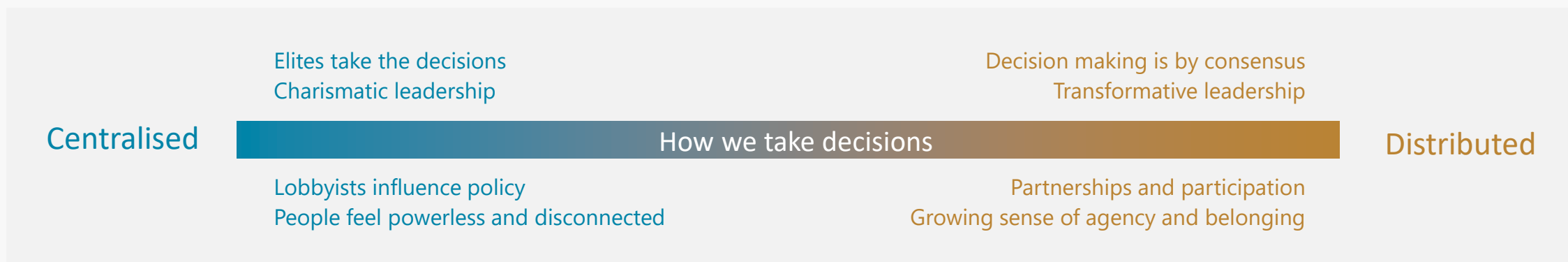
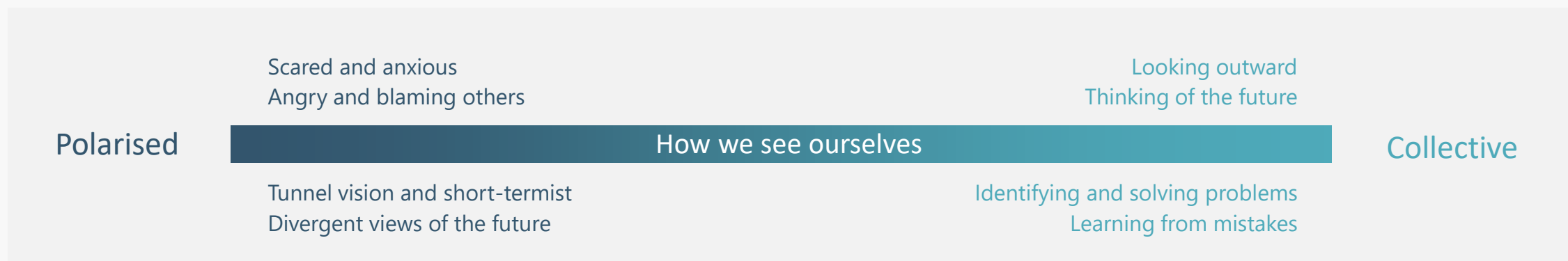
Millions of lives, billions of people's futures, and trillions of dollars depend on whether we act collectively in the face of crisis or instead polarise when under threat.

The response can also be **centralised** or **distributed**. In the rapids, does the captain steer the ship alone or does she also empower everyone to row?

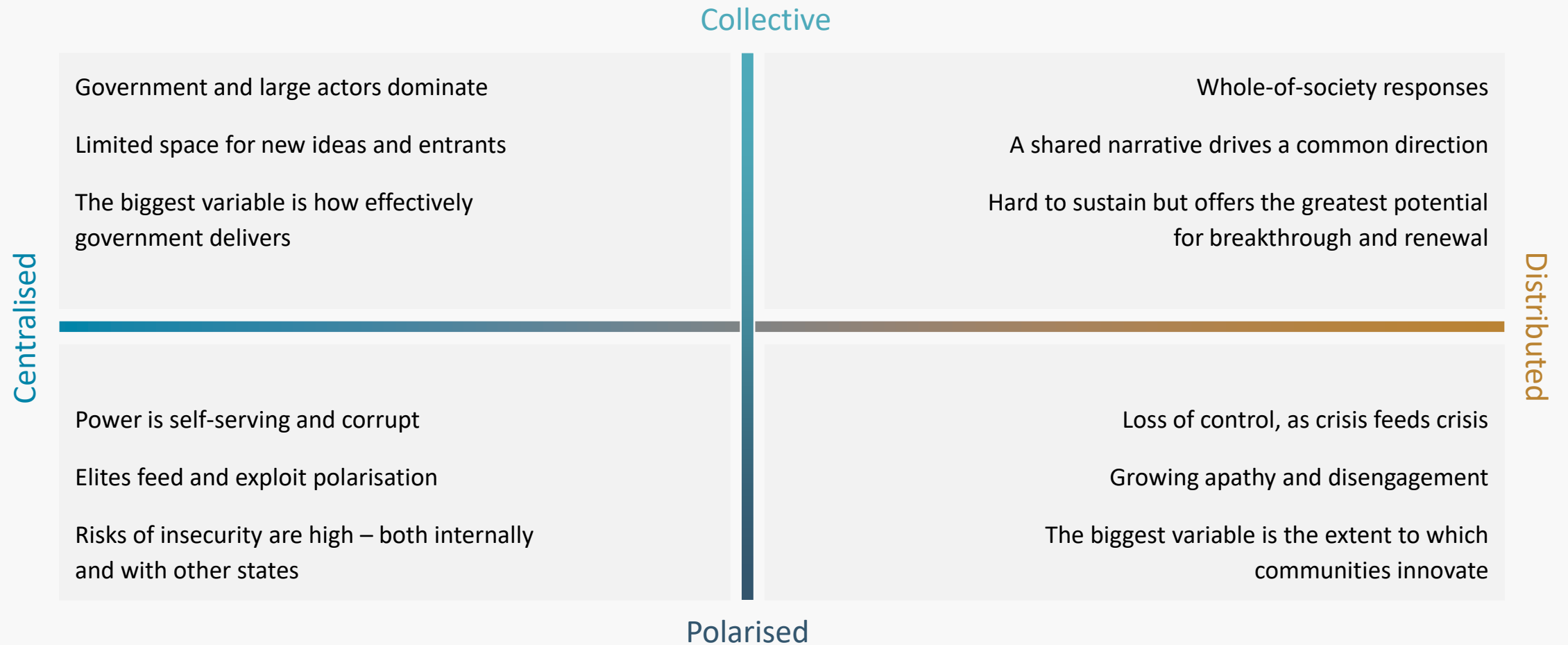
Four scenarios reflect these choices.

Drivers of Change
The Four Quadrants
Complicated Futures
Weak Signals

Two **drivers of change** shape how societies respond to an emergency – from **polarised** to **collective** action, and from **centralised** to **distributed** decision making. These drivers have political, economic, cultural – and psychological – dimensions.



The drivers of change create **quadrants** where we see stark differences in the **nature of society**, what **behaviours** are encouraged or sanctioned, and whether it **functions** predominantly in a Them and Us or Larger Us mode.



Four scenarios describe futures in which societies **fragment** in the face of crisis – or **pull together** in the common interest. And whether decisions are taken **at the centre** or the power to drive change is **shared more equally**.

Collective

Centralised

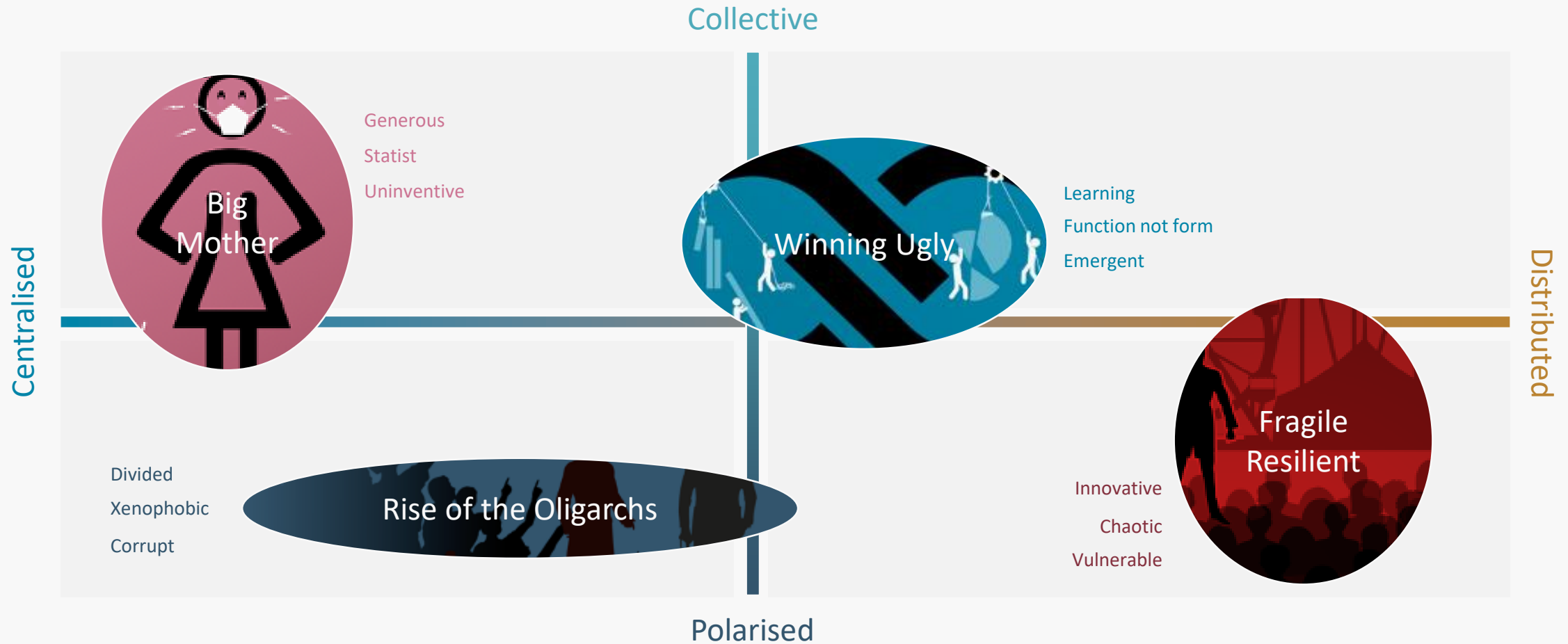


Distributed



Polarised

But the **future is complicated** – and our scenarios do not fall neatly into the quadrants. Governments can be more or less focused on **delivery** or holding onto **power**. People can play a **local role** or be active at **all levels of society**.



Weak signals show that all four scenarios are plausible. **Governments** are playing a dominant role, but also failing to deliver. Societies are **coming together**, but they are also **breaking apart**.

Big Mother

Governments have taken unprecedented powers to tackle the public health emergency, with publics calling on them to act more aggressively. Bailout packages have been more generous and innovative than in 2008, with a high proportion of workers and businesses now dependent on state support.

Winning Ugly

In the health sector, technological and scientific innovation has moved at an exceptionally fast pace. Bailouts have been more people-centred and creative than might have been expected. A surge of volunteering and community activism shows broadening participation in the pandemic response.

Rise of the Oligarchs

Most countries have taken a highly centralised approach to COVID-19 and 'big men' politicians have played a key role. COVID-19 has created new inequalities and lockdowns have increased polarisation. Geopolitical tensions are increasing (especially between China and the US).

Fragile Resilient

Public health and economic impacts have been consistently greater than expected, with policymakers struggling to keep up. A vaccine or herd immunity is a long way off and the economic pain is only just beginning. There are high risks of successive waves of crisis on all three layers (health, economic, polarisation and insecurity).

Part 4

The COVID-19 Scenarios

The scenarios tell very different stories. For each, a short **narrative** and a **graphic** brings alive its character and interdependencies.

For each scenario, we ask...

- Who has **power** and who doesn't
- Who are the **economic** winners and losers
- How **places** are changed, and whether they lie at the centre or on the peripheries
- What impacts there are on **people** – how they feel, what they think

And what are the implications of the scenario at **local**, **national**, and **global** levels.

Rise of the Oligarchs

Big Mother

Fragile Resilient

Winning Ugly



Scenario 1 Rise of the Oligarchs

Like a dark phoenix from the ashes, the winner from COVID-19's crises is a government of the few. It's inequitable, illiberal, corrupt, opaque – and ineffective.

No-one thought that it would be this bad: the spread of the pandemic, the economic pain, or the damage to people's lives. But through it all, the powerful – in politics, business, and the media – protect their own.

People are angry, but also scared and compliant. Stranded between apathy and the latest conspiracy theory. Risk takers live at the bottom, not the top of the pile.

International co-operation withers and geopolitical tensions proliferate. In a world of closed borders, racism and xenophobia flourish.

Divided

Corrupt

Xenophobic

In the Rise of the Oligarchs, power and prosperity are centralised and monopolised by elites, who adopt classic tactics from the populist playbook. Inequality is high, civil society is browbeaten, and communities are under pressure.



Power

A new breed of 'big man' politicians has close ties to the national security establishment and a pliant media. Internationalists lose influence. Independently-minded civil society groups find that government and the media make life difficult if they don't toe the line. Young, poor, and marginalised people are more excluded than ever.

Prosperity

Big business and government play the game of patronage and mutual enrichment. The government panders to its power base – older and richer voters. Independent businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs struggle. Wealth leaves local communities. There are few opportunities or prospects for young workers.

Places

Public space is constrained by a new surveillance state. The capital recovers fastest, but the countryside benefits as the government plays to its base. Devolution goes into reverse and local authorities lose autonomy. Regional inequalities increase and there is little investment in community resilience.

People

National solidarity has a Them and Us flavour. The government and its media clients fan apathy and fear (especially of 'outsiders'). Trust is low and inequality deepens, between and within communities. Fake news corrupts mutual aid networks. They wither away – or take on a darker hue, fighting crime or resisting immigration.

As the oligarchs rise, they erode the basis for collective action, blurring boundaries between public and private, right and wrong, and fact and fiction. To understand why someone is doing well, trace lines of allegiance and see where they lead.



Local

Well-connected communities lobby powerbrokers to protect their privileges. 'Robin Hood' civil society plays an influential role, delivering social goods informally, based on whim, connections or patronage. In less fortunate neighbourhoods, a few resilient people work long days to help the vulnerable with little support or pay.

National

Public service is an opportunity to receive and dole out patronage. Businesses use political connections to build monopolies they can exploit. Some subnational leaders try to forge a different path, but are fiercely resisted. Campaigners are ignored, harassed, or depicted as fronts for foreign influence.

Global

Hard security threats predominate as major powers clash over power and resources. COVID-19 shuts down borders and trade, with no route for globalisation to recover. While the UN was born from the ashes of the Second World War, it does little more than shuffle listlessly through this new global cataclysm.



The Rise of the Oligarchs



Scenario 2 Big Mother

Government is BACK and *it's here to help*.

Politicians are expected to deliver: *a vaccine, an income, a future*. To keep the lights on both literally and figuratively. People are told what to do by a state that promises to look after them. Lockdowns are sporadic but behaviour is constantly *monitored and regulated*.

The social contract is clear, but the strain is showing. The government has plenty of answers, but *seldom the most imaginative ones*.

And it continually increases expectations while elbowing others aside. When it gets it wrong, people feel betrayed and *anger surges*.

Statist

Ambitious

Uninventive

Big Mother centralises power and prosperity, but in the public interest. Society is regulated and rewards conformity. **Inequality declines** with the poorest are looked after. But **few have influence** over the country's direction, making people less willing to take action in their communities.



Power

The party that wins an election has unprecedented power, as do civil servants. Big business and large NGOs wield influence if their lobbyists are good enough. Voters have power – but only every five years, not as active citizens. Local government loses out, as do community organisations.

Prosperity

If they survive the crash, big businesses do well. Public sector workers and pensioners benefit, as do the poorest as safety nets become more generous. There are fewer opportunities (but better benefits) for the young. Life is tough for small businesses – and anyone with assets they can't hide away.

Places

Communities are a focus for ritual and celebration more than social or political organising. Peripheries feel excluded, threatening social cohesion. Places are regulated but below the radar, rebellious youth subcultures flourish. A libertarian 'awkward squad' provides sporadic challenge.

People

There's strong national cohesion, with a sense that 'we're all in this together' – and that sacrifices need to be made for the future. As people expect more from the state, volunteering declines and more charities become insolvent. Non-conformists and radical voices find themselves excluded.



Big Mother privileges the national over the local. One – generous – size is expected to fit all. At the global level, the focus is on ways back to business-as-usual, but it's hard to find common ground with countries that have plumped for a different model.

Local →

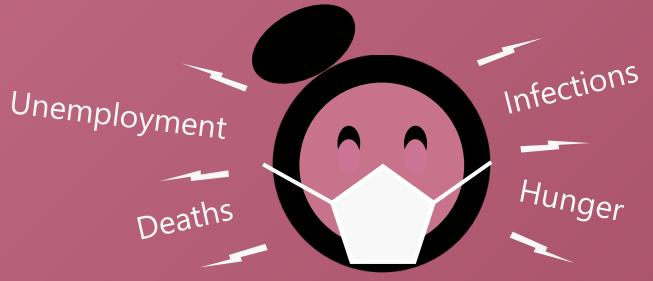
With so much commerce online, the high street has all but disappeared. Big businesses use branding, technology, and logistics to dominate. Smaller players struggle. Lots of money flows through local government, but the decisions are made centrally, with little leeway to tailor decisions to local needs and preferences.

National →

The grown-ups have taken charge. On Zoom interviews, biographies of Angela Merkel feature prominently on ministerial bookcases. Top tier public servants fancy themselves rulers of the COVID-era world. The government has a five-year industrial policy and it matters. Larger civil society organisations thrive, but as public sector service providers.

Global →

The international system plays a medley of greatest hits from the late 20th century – aspirational goals, landmark summits, and strongly worded declarations. The United Nations is taken seriously, but with the Secretary-General on a tight leash. Money is spent on resilience, but critics warn we're preparing for the last war, not the next one.



The COVID-19 Manifesto
Lockdown
Surveillance
Furloughs
Basic income
Bailouts
Nationalisation

Big Mother

Policies unsuccessful and are seen to fail

Policies work and are seen to succeed

Insecure
Distrustful
Angry

Secure
Content
Trusting



As expectations of government grow, does it have more right than wrong answers?



Scenario 3

Fragile Resilient

Repeated waves of COVID-19 – and a financial crash, food system crash, climate crash, energy crash, trade crash – **overwhelm the capacity of a state** that finds itself in the latter, more frenetic, stages of a game of Tetris.

Amid intensifying levels of **drama and chaos**, national politics increasingly becomes a competition for what is left of the spoils. Bubbles inflate and burst. Fortunes are made – and lost.

At the grassroots, there's a **surge of innovation** as communities fend for themselves. Like **Italian towns facing the Plague** – or developing countries today – people are fantastically inventive when making the best of a bad job.

Chaotic

Vulnerable

Innovative

In a future that is Fragile but Resilient, **islands of innovation** emerge from a tempestuous sea. Power is **diffuse** and often **illusory**. Society **as a whole** is poorer, even if **some** are richer.



Power

Politicians may look powerful in the new politics-as-soap-opera but the reality is that government can't solve much. Organised crime is ascendant, as are conspiracy theorists and charismatic leaders of new movements. Communities fend for themselves with whatever resources they have to hand.

Prosperity

There's space for entrepreneurs – both benign and malevolent. The informal sector grows and is a powerful source of invention and enterprise. Businesses reliant on globalisation do badly. There are fewer steady jobs. Retired people suffer as their savings are wiped out.

Places

Neighbourhoods can prosper – *if* they're able to self-organise and they have access to assets. Those that can't, do badly. Regional inequalities surge and many communities fall ever further behind. Black market and bartering economies grow. Cities are no longer the hubs they once were.

People

Horizons shrink. There's more emphasis on extended family and sometimes more community solidarity, but there's also more polarisation and tribalism together with growing distrust of 'outsiders'. Crime and corruption spike, and there's growing political unrest.

Where you live matters – as some communities self-organise and others fall away. Politicians promise stability and strong national government, but **no-one is listening**. Globally, it's all against all, as international co-operation wanes.



Local →

Communities with assets thrive as they nourish local economies, organise informally, and collect resources to pay for it – but have little influence on national or global challenges. Communities without assets suffer as life expectancy falls and education worsens. Levels of abuse are high as the powerful prey on the weak.

National →

Government teeters from crisis to crisis – and the spectacle is compelling. Media and social media are platforms for shouting heads and for telling people what they want to hear. Formal institutions become zombies – refusing to die, staggering forward, never getting far, unable to connect with the struggles of people and communities.

Global →

The global gravy train shudders to halt, as few countries refuse to pay their annual contributions. Every so often, a coalition of the willing will pop up to try and fix a global challenge, but without much success. The UN Secretary-General is well-known and liked. She is often seen on television failing to broker another ceasefire.

Fragile...

On the radar



UNEMPLOYMENT
HUNGER
DEATH
DISEASE
RIOTS

"The plan is to default on public problem solving, and then prevent the public from understanding the consequences of that default."



Local assets



Community organisation



Informal economy



Below the radar

"Looking after our own...
at least in some places and some of the time."

...Resilient



Scenario 4 Winning Ugly

Distributed

Function not form

Learning

Emergent

No-one said **it was going to be easy**.

No obvious sign the battle was won. No heroic moment of victory. Instead, an extended – and at times seemingly endless – attack on the pandemic. One that started in hospitals, moved into communities, and was driven by **a collective willingness to learn and adapt**.

The economic trauma was profound, but institutions held. Not just the organisations, but **our ability to organise**. To draw on reserves of community cohesion. To replace failed leaders with a new generation.

At first, we just threw money at the problem. But over time, this created space for smarter approaches to proliferate – and for the emergence of a **narrative** that promotes collective action to tackle other urgent risks such as **climate change**.



The pandemic creates a willingness to consider **radical change** and **big ideas** – but also to take on the hard work of building alliances capable of solving the hardest problems. Winning Ugly means being **ambitious**, but **pragmatic** – and doing whatever it takes to achieve a result.

Power

A different kind of state emerges – a platform for enabling, connecting, collaborating, and catalysing. The leaders that flourish excel at storytelling and building shared awareness and common purpose. Those that are slow to adapt or won't collaborate get left behind.

Prosperity

Business sectors – healthcare, logistics, technology – flourish if they build resilience, but the 'new frugality' is bad news for airlines, tourism, and high-end retail. Low carbon innovators also do well. Global just-in-time supply chains are displaced by local economic clusters.

Places

Life becomes more local. The virtual is the new norm as physical travel seems daunting. The most connected places are also the more vulnerable, as cities with hub airports find to their cost. Communities become more liveable and better at mutual aid, but we're still wary of public spaces.

People

This is an age of uncertainty. But as people accept that much won't go back to normal, they find new reserves of cohesion, determination, and shared purpose. A growing number of people act as agents of change, with risks and responsibilities widely shared.

When you're winning ugly, **platforms matter** – as a stage on which actors **collaborate**. They can be informal and dissolve when a problem is solved, semi-permanent where networks work together over a prolonged period, or architectural as a new institution or mechanism is created.



Local →

COVID mutual aid networks evolve into essential assets in most places, balancing flexibility and informality, even providing hardship funds and peer-to-peer loans. Local government is transformed. It doesn't always have the resources it needs, so it's often a facilitator of local action, rather than the sole provider of public services.

National →

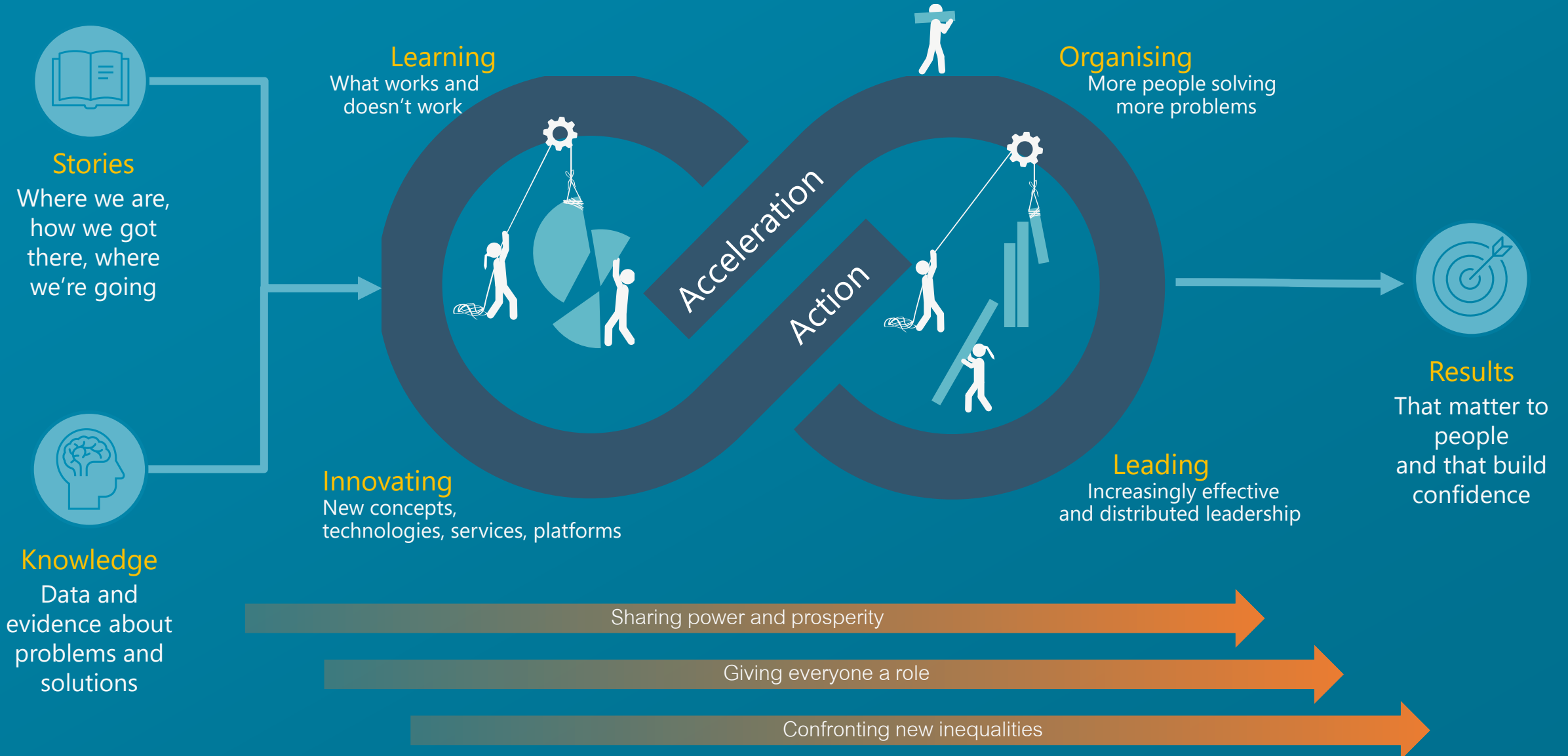
Government puts people and their needs at the centre, building partnerships between state and citizen, public and non-governmental actors. Data and evidence grease the wheels of change. Civil society is a platform too, as big networks of activists reach into communities and then share and scale innovations.

Global →

An international system emerges that gets the basics right – firefighting COVID, helping societies and people to feel secure, and protecting the critical global infrastructure on which we all depend. It also offers hope for the future, through a new deal for a new generation that promises education, jobs, and climate protection.

Winning Ugly

"means not worrying about how it looks and leaving no resource unearthed in order to accomplish the goal"



Part 5

Worlds Compared

The scenarios describe very different futures.

Power may shift between winners and losers – or evaporate altogether as a society loses control.

Prosperity is under threat in all scenarios, but may be shared more or less equally.

Places may see their fortunes wax or wane, affecting how we live, work, and gather.

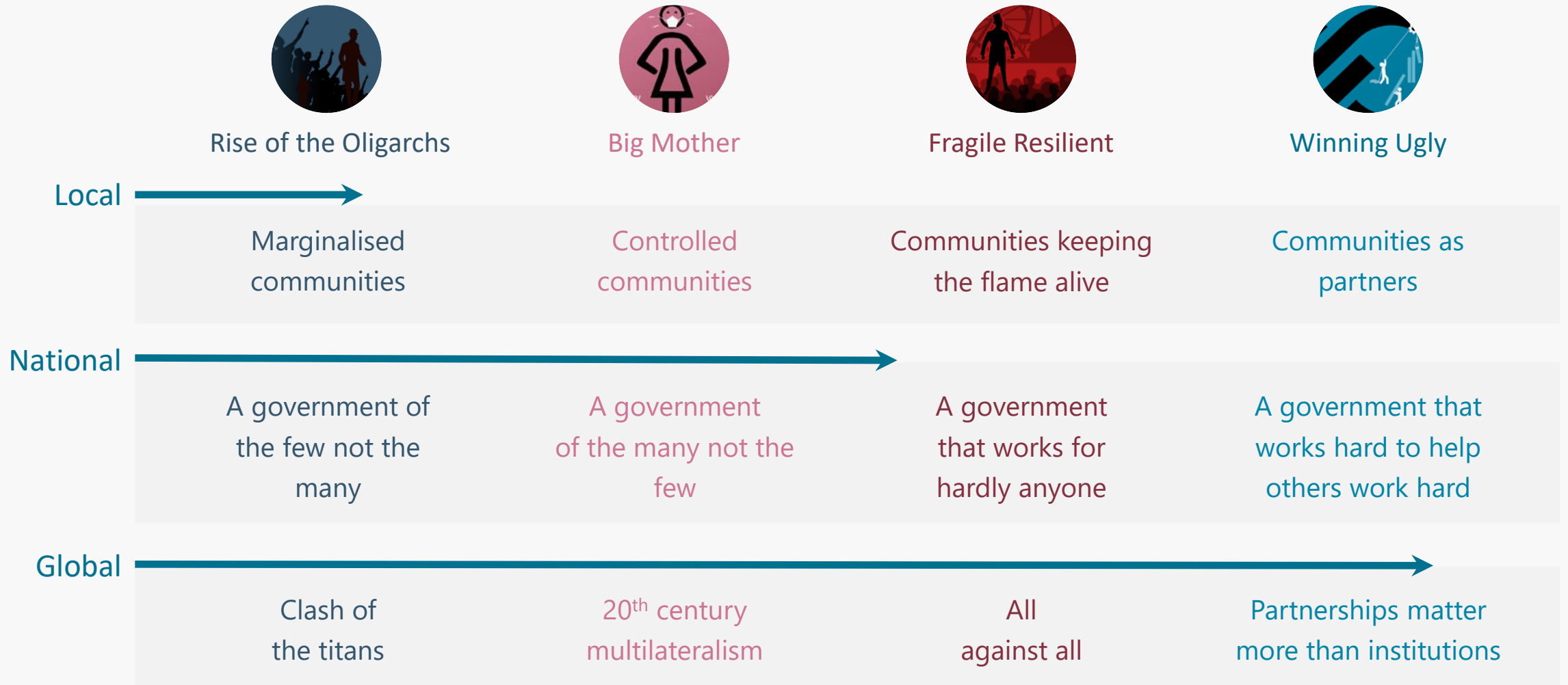
People will be impacted in all kinds of ways: wellbeing, trust, cohesion, and how we think and feel.

And while each future may become **path dependent**, there are still moments when it is possible to move from one scenario to another.

“The future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed.”

William Gibson

In **aggregate**, levels of power may **decline** as a society loses control or **increase** as it learns to solve problems. Power also shifts as **winners** exploit the opportunities found in each future, while **losers** are ignored or exploited.



Prosperity is **under threat** in all scenarios – but the response creates different patterns of **inequality** and **exclusion**. New models of **globalisation** and national **economic management** emerge, framing opportunities **enjoyed** by or **denied** to people and communities.



Rise of the Oligarchs



Big Mother



Fragile Resilient



Winning Ugly

Local →

Pork barrel politics

Cash but no control

Islands of local prosperity,
deserts of left behind

Communities as
engines of renewal

National →

Business and
politics merge

Government
promotes strategic
sectors

Entrepreneurs –
both benign and
malevolent

Reshaping the
economy

Global →

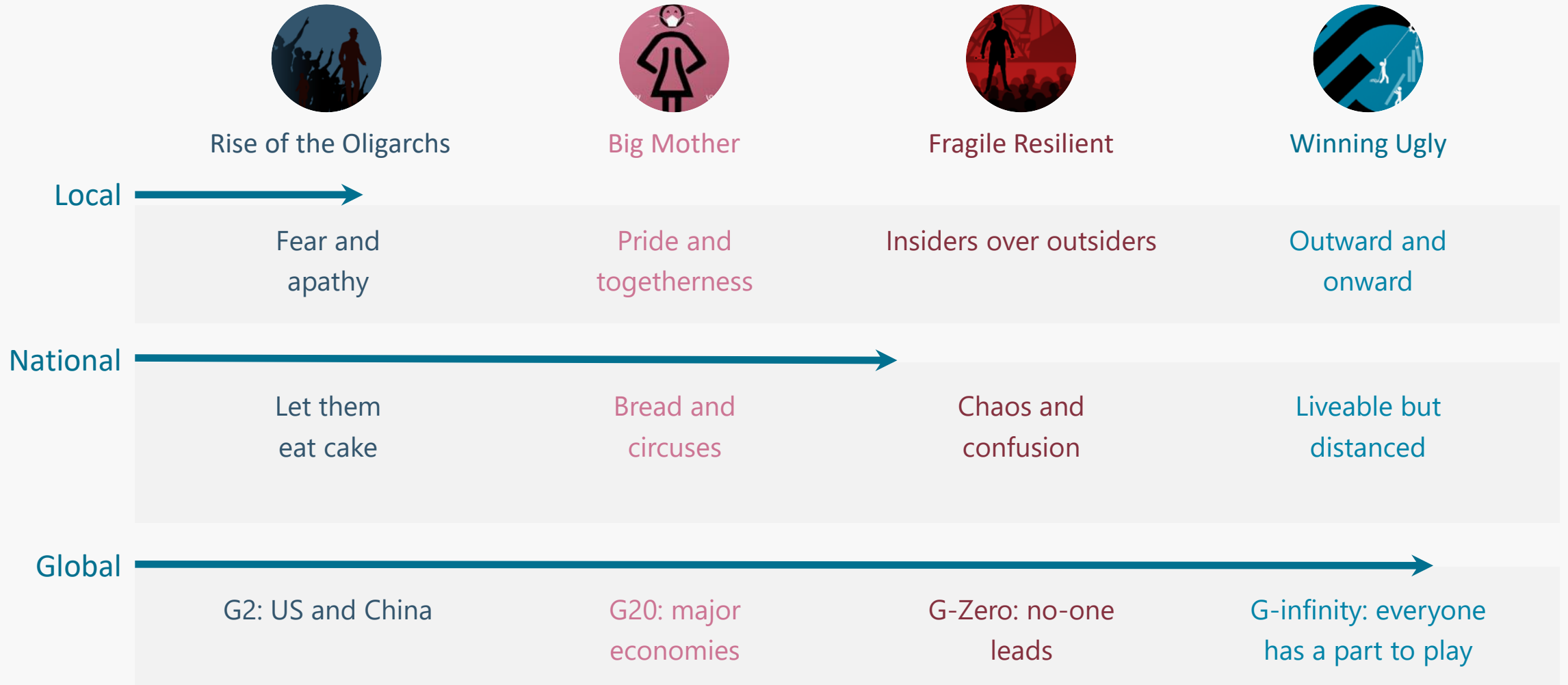
Networks of privilege
and tax evasion

Globalisation
lite

Transnational
criminal networks

Plenty-of-time
supply chains

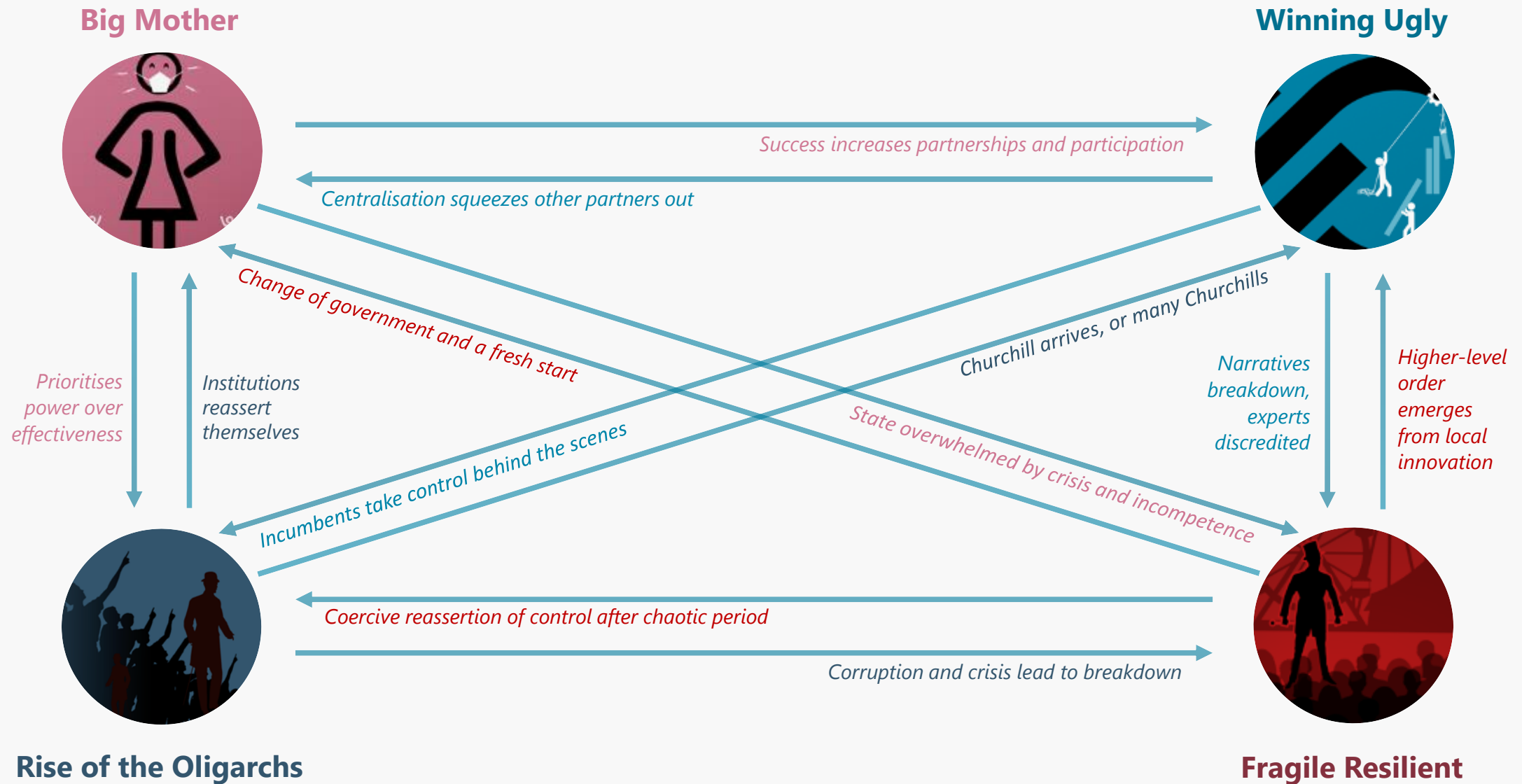
In each future, certain places **thrive** while others are **marginalised**. All layers of the crisis – public health, economic, and insecurity – influence how people **live** and **work**, and the patterns of **association** and **organisation** that prevail.



Finally, we see a range of different impacts on people – in their wellbeing and wealth, in levels of trust and cohesion, and in how they think and feel.



No future is immutable. There are always **opportunities** to promote collective action and broaden participation, and **threats** that increase polarisation and exclusion.



Part 6

Towards A Larger Us

Thirty years ago, a group of South Africans used scenarios to “think **creatively** about the future of their country.”

The Mont Fleur scenarios created a **shared language** for understanding possible futures, identifying dangers while mapping out what success would look like.

They were explicitly designed to help people who didn’t agree to find **common ground** and a **shared direction**.

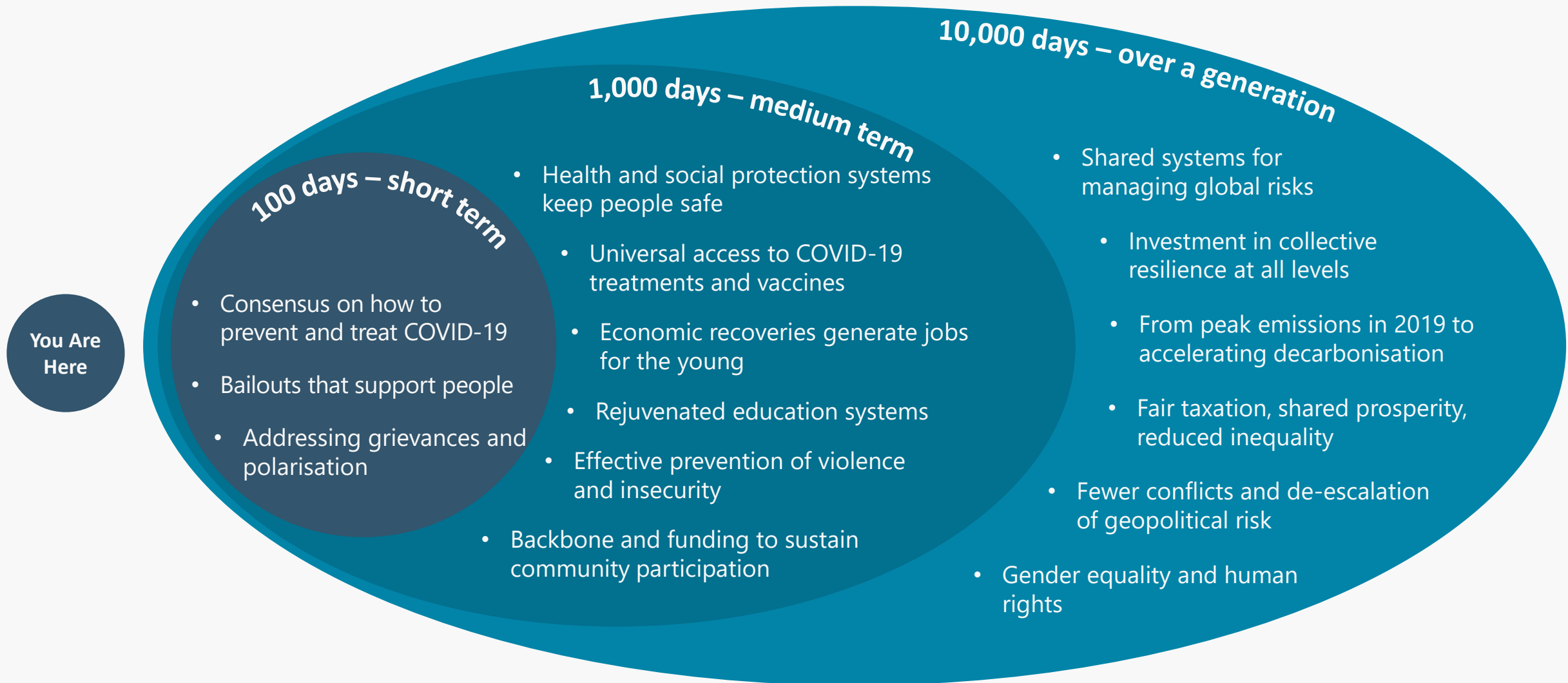
Now, we are at another point at which **the future is up for grabs**. **Them and Us** thinking could drive us further towards breakdown – but a **Larger Us movement** still has everything to play for.

A future where the toll of the pandemic is still heavy, but our capacity for **collective action** grows.

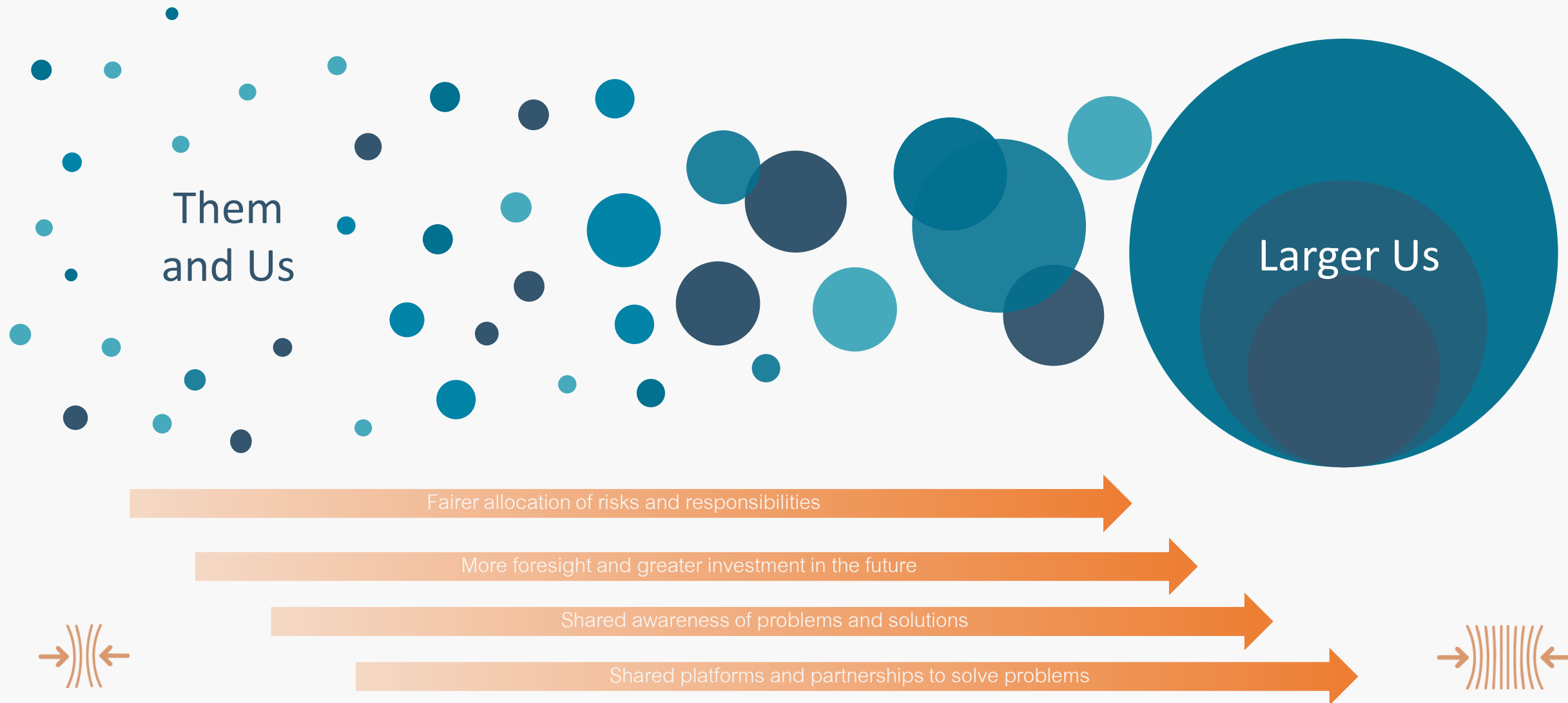
“We captured the way forward of those committed to finding a way forward.”

Mont Fleur participant

In the rapids, decisions made **upstream** have huge implications for what happens further down the river. On every layer of this crisis – public health, economic, and insecurity – today’s strategies have the power to create space for **transformative change** over the short, medium, and long-term.



But transformative strategies will only be possible if we build the foundations for **collective action** and **broad participation** from across society in creating a better future. This is the shift from **Them and Us** to a **Larger Us** mindset, strategies, and alliances.



Different **strategies** will be needed in different futures, building on **what is going right** and confronting **what is going wrong**. Locally, priorities may range from **protecting communities** from economic and political failure to enabling them to play the **fullest role** in building a better future.



Local



Big Mother

Lobby for decisions to be taken by and with the communities they affect. Build strong links between local authorities and citizen groups. As investment in public services grows, promotes alternatives to one-size-fits all approaches.



Winning Ugly

Build a narrative demonstrating the power of collective action at the grassroots and position communities as drivers of transformative change. Invest in community leaders, linking them to government at all levels, and to business and civil society networks.



Rise of the Oligarchs

Provide a platform for mayors and other subnational leaders to show that better alternatives exist. Lock in power at a local level, strengthening networks and helping communities take control of their assets. Defend grassroots activists who face attack.



Fragile Resilient

Foster innovation at local levels and knowledge sharing between communities. Build skills in governance and local partnership development. Scale more successful community businesses. Build the asset base in left behind communities and support their change makers.

The pandemic has placed governments and other national decision makers under the microscope – resulting in a mix of **panic**, **error**, and **innovative action**. As leaders dig in for the long haul, the priority will be to create pressure, incentives, and space to act in the **public interest**.

National



Big Mother

Use data to monitor whether new government programmes are delivering results to people and communities, including groups that are left out. Advocate for accountability and transparency. Build openness to new approaches and partners.



Winning Ugly

Create a narrative that brings people together and amplifies marginalised voices. Provide platforms for problem-solving and participation. Celebrate successes and the people who made them happen. Actively reduce polarisation and marginalise disruptive actors.



Rise of the Oligarchs

Support islands of public sector effectiveness and showcase any new models that emerge. Keep civic space open and invest in change makers from outside government. Call out corruption and abuse. Protect human rights defenders.



Fragile Resilient

Withdraw from national politics if it's not making any difference. Create national networks of local activists, providing them with resources and the 'backbone' they need to be effective. Support humanitarian efforts and harm reduction strategies.

COVID-19 respects no borders. It demands that countries act in concert to **defeat** the virus, **rebuild** economies, **protect** the systems on which we depend, and **create hope** for a better future. But different levels and types of co-operation will be feasible in different futures.



Global



Big Mother

Build coalitions of countries who are prepared to invest in collective action. Focus international institutions on more ambitious responses to fewer priorities. Minimise investment in set piece summits that deliver declarations and not much else.



Winning Ugly

Implement global approaches to controlling and eradicating COVID-19. Prevent insecurity and violence. Protect critical global infrastructure. Offer a new deal to a new generation (education, jobs, and climate). Invest in multi-stakeholder platforms for action.



Rise of the Oligarchs

Invest in hard security and de-escalating tensions between major powers. Target international flows of illicit assets. Use global pressure to protect national and grassroots human rights defenders. Work with coalitions of the willing to create global public goods.



Fragile Resilient

Maintain humanitarian expenditure. Grow global networks of resilient communities. Develop models for rebuilding international co-operation in case a window of opportunity opens.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest chapter
in the long crisis of globalisation.



We all **own** this challenge.

Our response depends on the aggregation of choices made by
thousands of political leaders,
millions of communities,
and **billions** of people.

Will we break into a fragmented **Them and Us**?

Or will we come together in a **Larger Us**
that is more than the sum of its parts?

And finally...

Who We Are



www.longcrisis.org

www.globaldashboard.org



[@TheLongCrisis](https://twitter.com/TheLongCrisis)

[@GlobalDashboard](https://twitter.com/GlobalDashboard)

A **network of change makers** in politics, civil society, business, think tanks and more. We're working to develop the ideas, strategies, and coalitions that will equip the world to **shoot the rapids** in the age of COVID-19.



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Alex is founder of the Collective Psychology Project, a senior fellow at New York University, and author of *The Myth Gap: What Happens When Evidence and Arguments Aren't Enough?* He is a former Campaign Director at Avaaz, special adviser to two UK Cabinet Ministers, climate expert in the UN Secretary-General's office, and Research Director for the Business Commission on Sustainable Development.



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David is a senior fellow at New York University, where he founded the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, and a former senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was lead author for the ministerial Task Force on Justice for All and senior external adviser for the UN-World Bank flagship study on conflict prevention.

Local Trust

 www.localtrust.org.uk  [@LocalTrust](https://twitter.com/LocalTrust)

A **place-based funder** supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live.

We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of **local communities**, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live.

We do this by trusting local people.

Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, **resident-led funding** through our work supporting local communities to make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a **wider transformation** in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

We deliver the **Big Local programme**, providing at least £1.1m in funding to each of 150 communities in England through a resident-led programme creating lasting change.

Acknowledgements

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They are developed from [Shooting the Rapids – COVID-19 and the Long Crisis of Globalisation](#) – in particular, the analysis of risks in part 2. We thank [Wellcome](#) for its support for this paper.

Shooting the Rapids draws on [Confronting the Long Crisis of Globalization](#). We acknowledge the contribution of our Long Crisis co-author, [Bruce Jones](#), Brookings senior fellow and former Vice President, to the development of the Long Crisis framework.

The scenarios also draw from [Building Trust, Confidence and Collective Action in the Age of COVID-19](#) and [Planning for the World After the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), published by World Politics Review.

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Slide 5: Michael Savage (2020), Breaking point: the week when ministers struggled to keep pace with Covid-19 crisis. *The Guardian*, [online] 5 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/breaking-point-the-week-when-ministers-struggled-to-keep-pace-with-covid-19-crisis>

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Slide 16 – Blaise Pascal (1670), *Pensées de M Pascal*. (Paris)

Slide 44 – PressThink (2020), The plan is to have no plan. *PressThink*, [blog] 4 May. Available at <https://pressthink.org/2020/05/the-plan-is-to-have-no-plan/>

Slide 45 – Winning Ugly is the name of the style of play associated with the tennis player, Brad Gilbert. It is described in his book: Brad Gilbert and Steve Jamison (1994), *Winning Ugly: Mental Warfare in Tennis – Lessons from a Master*. (New York: Touchstone).

Slide 48 – Justin Gimelstob’s description of what it means to win ugly. Cited in: Joel Drucker (2010), Winning ugly: There’s nothing prettier. *ESPN*, [online] 22 July. Available at https://www.espn.com/sports/tennis/columns/story?columnist=drucker_joel&id=5402752

Slide 50 – a William Gibson quote with a complicated history, see: Quote Investigator (2012), The Future Has Arrived — It’s Just Not Evenly Distributed Yet. *Quote Investigator*, [blog] 24 Jan. Available at <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/01/24/future-has-arrived/>

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