

CANADA 2030

SCAN OF EMERGING ISSUES

GOVERNANCE

Today, we find ourselves with political systems based on 18th century philosophy, run with 19th century administrations, built on 20th century technologies, attempting to confront 21st century challenges.¹

Canada is experiencing significant societal and technological changes that could disrupt some of the roles and structures of government. As a result, there is growing pressure to rethink how government could meet the needs of the 21st century.

In this context, the next 10 to 15 years could be a transformative period for the relationship between Canada's government and broader society. This scan of potential disruptive changes highlights Policy Horizons Canada's initial exploration of this issue and introduces next steps.

WHAT IS CHANGING?

New actors (digital communities, decentralized autonomous organizations, emerging megacities, state-like private companies, transnational institutions, civil society organizations, crowds, and individuals), aided by the use of technologies like social media and blockchain, are impacting governments at local, national, and global levels. These influences are largely “external” to government, meaning that citizens and companies could have new avenues to influence government decision-making or provide public goods in new ways. At the same time, these technologies could be used by governments to reform “internal” processes and structures.

Boundaries and borders are less relevant to an increasing number of citizens who frequently travel, work, or virtually telework from outside their home jurisdiction and expect access to information and services anytime, anywhere. For government to adequately respond to their needs and expectations, local, national, and global boundaries may become more fluid, transforming the responsibility and scope of government organizations.



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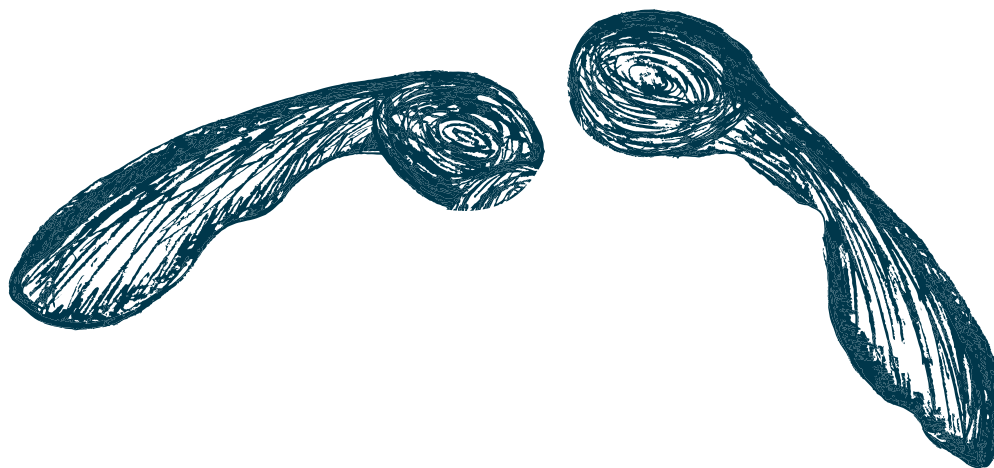
Canada

Technological developments such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and virtual telepresence could disrupt the environment within which government operates. Government could transform its organizational design and its roles and responsibilities (e.g. highly responsive policy development, personalized and customizable services, real-time feedback, direct and open consultations, platform-based government-citizen interactions, etc.).

Many parts of Canadian society are transforming. Family structures, living arrangements, gender identity, biological sex determinants, and employment models are all undergoing fundamental changes. As a result, many current government assumptions about “average” Canadians and Canada’s social fabric may be disrupted.

The rise of a data-driven knowing society is changing the relationships between individuals, information, and privacy. As a result, citizens may expect greater accessibility, more personalized and flexible government service, while also expecting increased privacy protection. Government could use data to improve policy (conception, implementation, evaluation) or to transform it (e.g. China’s reputation system), while managing privacy concerns.

Government roles are changing. What, how, and why the government legislates and regulates could change. For example, the ability of the different levels of government to provide economic opportunity and stability could be impacted by an emerging global digital economy that calls into question many longstanding economic and regulatory levers. The role of the government in providing public goods could be impacted by the growing prominence of the private sector in shaping what public goods actually look like. Additionally, the government’s role in fostering national identity could be impacted by an increasingly digital and globalized world.



NOTE

1. Richard Lum, <http://www.slideshare.net/richardl91/designing-native-hawaiian-governance>

CANADA 2030 SERIES

Canada is experiencing significant social and technological changes that could disrupt many aspects of society. In this context, the next 10 to 15 years could be a transformative period for the relationship between Canada's government and broader society. This Scan is part of a series developed by Policy Horizons Canada on a variety of topics.

WHO WE ARE

Policy Horizons Canada (Horizons) is a strategic foresight organization within the Public Service of Canada with a mandate to help anticipate emerging policy challenges and opportunities and to experiment with methods and technologies to support resilient policy development. Horizons is exploring plausible futures for Canada over the next 10 to 15 years in the areas of governance, sustainability, infrastructure, and the digital economy. With the active participation of experts from governmental and other organizations, Horizons identifies the key factors driving change, looks for potential surprises, explores plausible futures in the form of scenarios, and surfaces key emerging policy challenges and opportunities.

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