

CONCLUSION

Next Steps for a Connected Canada

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Citizenship is digital, and Canada needs to understand the new digital context.

The aim of this collection is to help establish and expand a research and policy agenda for understanding citizenship in a digital context in Canada. We have created this collection with the hope that it can be a useful resource for policy-makers, civil society groups, and researchers, among others, as they advance their work in this area. The goal is to highlight gaps in what we know about how Canadians make use of and interact with digital tools, as well as how Canadians feel about various actors in society making use of digital tools and digital data. Building on the Connected Canada inaugural conference in 2017, which highlighted the value in bringing people together from various sectors, including government, law, journalism, civil society, and academia, this collection extends and broadens the conversations we started at the conference.

In the previous chapters, leading and emerging voices discussed some key and urgent research and policy issues which arise from enacting citizenship in a digital context. Contributors discussed the missing voices in typical conversations about citizenship in digital contexts; government service delivery and multi-stakeholder engagement in policy-making; and a selection of legal challenges for citizens and governments in the digital context. In this final chapter, we present and review their main arguments and identify

15 key recommendations for policy-makers to build a more inclusive, diverse, and safe connected Canada. We then discuss some of the limitations and research needs in order to propose ways to advance research and policy in the Canadian digital context.

Policy Recommendations for a Connected Canada

In this section, we review some of the key recommendations presented in each chapter, and draw links across the various arguments the authors put forward. Notably, we have firmly grounded this work in what is happening in Canada. Yet, there are opportunities for cross-national comparisons and to learn from other countries. For example, Canada and many other countries must grapple with the reality that major technology companies are typically multinational companies based outside their borders (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2018; Dubois et al., 2019). Canadians can learn from others outside of the country, and we believe that some of the recommendations presented in this book can also be useful to those outside of Canada.

In Part I, “Building an Inclusive Society in a Digital Context,” contributors mapped the landscape of civic participation in the current digital context. We sought to incorporate diverse voices and perspectives in order to shed light on some of the types of participation in and experiences of digital society which are less visible in popular discourse, academic research, and policy-making discussions. Our contributors each focused on the notion of equity as a central consideration in research and policy. To date there are voices missing in discussions about how to prioritize, what to spend limited resources on, and which policy issues are most pressing. The chapters focus specifically on a lack of visibility and power among many marginalized communities such as racialized individuals, LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth. This is because the Internet and related technologies are experienced differently, in part based on an individual’s social standing, identity, and relationships to those who currently hold positions of power.

Key recommendations derived from the chapters in Part I include:

1. Make explicit and intentional efforts to include missing voices, notably by incorporating a greater diversity of

individuals from the technology industry, the public policy sector, academia, as well as civil society groups and youth. In tandem, invest in initiatives led by people within diverse communities. In particular, invest in Indigenous-led initiatives, which can contribute to crucial decolonization of the digital sphere and economic reconciliation.

2. Increase access to the Internet and digital tools. Broadband access is still limited and often very expensive in rural and northern communities in Canada.
3. Increase digital literacy and skills through both education and regulation of technology companies. Digital literacy refers to a broad range of skills and might be accomplished in a number of ways, including: develop and implement a digital literacy strategy for K–12 students; require online platforms to be transparent and accountable for their data collection and privacy protection; focus on helping young people understand their digital identity and options for controlling it, including knowledge about datafication as well as privacy protections; fund digital literacy initiatives, particularly ones which are led by those within communities that are not already reached by current initiatives.
4. Make democratic institutions more accessible, representative, and responsive. Consider the ways in which technology can be harnessed to incorporate voices that are not typically included in decision-making processes. This must be balanced with increasing distrust for social media platforms and information found within these platforms.
5. Update existing regulations and implement new policy approaches in order to minimize harms and to respect digital rights. Canada's *Digital Charter* (Innovation, Science and Economic Development [ISED], 2019), for example, outlines broad ideas but implementation is unclear. Crucially, in doing so, policy-makers must consider day-to-day experiences of individuals as priority issues. For example, discrimination and corporate monitoring are routine but require serious consideration by public policy-makers.

In Part II, “Building Democratic Institutions in a Digital Context,” contributors reflected on the relationship between citizens and their political and democratic institutions. These chapters

show that as digital technology is embedded into the daily lives of individuals, their relationships to their government and journalistic institutions shifts. At the same time, the companies which develop and own these technologies have an increasingly important role to play in influencing these relationships. However, technology companies do not have the good of the Canadian public as their primary concern; governments must. While platforms should, and to some extent do, consider the good of the public in their choices, ultimately they must respond to their shareholders, and they must act in many different national contexts. In order to respond to the needs of citizens in a connected Canada, governments—who hold the public interest paramount—the technology industry, and other actors must work together. The chapters included in Part II consider this from the perspective of digital government and government service delivery, journalism innovation, and policy development around digital rights, but the lessons can extend to other areas. Ultimately, digital technologies are so deeply integrated into people's everyday lives, business, and government that we cannot adequately understand research or policy needs without collaborative approaches.

Key recommendations derived from the chapters in Part II include:

1. Develop partnerships between government and researchers in order to better understand knowledge gaps and opportunities for development of better government services, governance structures, and approaches to other digital government activities. Governments should be proactive in establishing these collaborations.
2. Examine where digital expertise currently lies and where more is needed across teams in various government departments and agencies. In order to address the cross-cutting impacts of digital technology, governmental teams need to have trusted members who are digitally literate and informed about related policy issues.
3. Increase research and education about the trade-off between embedding values such as procedural fairness, privacy, and transparency on the one hand, and fast and innovative approaches to government service delivery and policy-making on the other. Include research into how Canadians currently view this trade-off and what they would ideally like.

4. Embrace experimentation in order to develop innovative responses to new challenges in the journalism industry. This industry faces unprecedented challenges, and it, as well as the government, should experiment with new approaches, which will require research into what works and what does not.
5. Support research into which actors have power in policy-making related to the technology industry and to digital rights. Make efforts to include the voices and perspectives of those who do not have power in the current system.

In Part III, “Rethinking Legal Frameworks for the Digital Context,” contributors discussed the effectiveness and fairness of legal frameworks for the digital context. Each contributor focused on a specific issue, discussing challenges of the current framework and recommending key shifts. The chapters consistently noted an erosion of human and democratic rights online. Most current frameworks were initially designed in a commercial-only context, sometimes because of constitutional limitations. However, as noted across the chapters, policy-makers need to acknowledge the new reality: the digital context goes beyond commerce. This change calls for a series of paradigm shifts in policy-making approaches. All the chapters in Part III highlight the need to rethink our frameworks to ensure they adequately protect citizens and to set a level playing field for all actors.

Key recommendations derived from the chapters in Part III include:

1. Adopt a more nuanced, empirically based approach to identifying risks and challenges for meaningful evidence-based policy-making, rather than relying solely on corporate lobbying.
2. Design a comprehensive legal framework for platforms that would neither chill speech nor prevent innovation or access to justice. Platforms should not be immune from liability. Citizens need to be protected online in their everyday life activities without being policed or denied access to justice and privacy rights by non-negotiated contracts.
3. Redesign legal frameworks through a technologically neutral approach—not in favour or against the digital context, nor

to support or constrain a specific sector, industry, or actor. Against the backdrop of an unbalanced relationship between citizens and digital platforms, policy needs to support commerce and innovation; however, it should never do so at the expense of human rights.

4. Overcome federal-provincial/territorial jurisdictional issues to create strong and well-rounded pan-Canadian frameworks for the digital context surrounding consumer rights, privacy, taxation, and freedom of expression. If citizens and corporations, as well as Canada as a whole, are to thrive in the digital and global economy, legal certainty and consistency must be offered across provinces and sectors.
5. Learn from other comparative jurisdictions to build stronger frameworks in line with international standards, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel with complex regulatory schemes.

This collection calls on policy-makers—at all levels of governments—to act to implement these changes, but many of the issues that these recommendations aim to respond to are cross-jurisdictional, highly political, and resource-heavy. This may require trade-offs, negotiation, and coordination among different actors. While policy-makers often need to lead, the implementation of these policy recommendations relies on input from experts and from the people the policies will impact. In the Introduction to this collection, we argued building a resilient and inclusive society in a digital context requires a multi-stakeholder approach. A recommendation implied across all chapters is a need to increase cross-sector collaboration in response to challenges and opportunities afforded by digital technologies. Indeed, the policy shifts recommended throughout this collection require political will—which academia, civil society, journalism, and political parties all play a major role in developing.

Multiple chapters in this collection discuss Canada's *Digital Charter* (ISED, 2019) which is one important political and policy initiative. The *Digital Charter* was released in May 2019 after a series of Government of Canada consultations about the potential need to reform Canadian legal and policy frameworks to respond to the challenges presented by a digital context. The *Digital Charter*, which offers a set of 10 foundational principles for Canadian society to thrive in a digital context, formed a part of the 2019 Liberal Party

of Canada's federal election platform. The principles in the *Digital Charter* are: Universal Access; Safety and Security; Control and Consent; Transparency, Portability, and Interoperability; Open and Modern Digital Government; A Level Playing Field; Data and Digital for Good; Strong Democracy; Free from Hate and Violent Extremism; and Strong Enforcement and Real Accountability.

As many chapters in this collection outline, these principles are indeed essential for a connected Canada. Though seen largely as a step in the right direction, the *Digital Charter* is quite broad, lacks commitment, and is non-binding. Many authors in this collection strongly recommend the government push forward and create more specific and actionable changes. As noted in Chapter 8, the *Digital Charter* lacks a proper implementation agenda and, more than a year later, seems to have dropped from the Liberal government's priority list. Consider, for example, privacy and data rights: actual enforcement powers for the regulatory agencies, and updates to the *Privacy Act* (1985) and *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (2000), are crucial, as noted in Chapters 2, 4, and 10. This is especially important because calls regarding privacy rights from academia, civil society, and even Parliament have long been ignored by governments (Martin-Bariteau, 2019).

Ultimately, we believe the policy recommendations highlighted in this collection can act as a compass for the implementation process and as a spark for the government to reignite important conversations about implementation of the *Digital Charter*.

Crucially, while the Government of Canada is an essential player, it cannot act alone. All levels of government must find ways to respond to Canada's digital context and implement the recommendations proposed in this collection. Provincial and municipal governments need to be part of the conversation as some key digital developments are within their jurisdictions and because they are developing digital infrastructures that will directly impact citizen's everyday lives, from digital government service delivery to smart cities.

Finally, as the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (2020) highlights, a foundational building block of a truly connected Canada requires governments to address the current digital divide in Canada and the lack of proper data about connectivity. This will rely on governments at various levels collaborating with the individuals and other actors who are impacted by policy changes,

including researchers, the technology industry, the journalism industry, and members of civil society. Canada also needs to build the legal framework for people to be safe online and to offer digital literacy programs to ensure that all people can be part of a connected Canada. It also must be recognized that full participation within a digital context is still a privilege. While everyday life is increasingly impacted by digital tools, a lack of connectivity, of digital skills, and of frameworks protecting vulnerable people within society means that Canada runs the risk of fostering a two-tier society, comprised of the *connected* and the *unconnected*.

What Is Missing: Research Needs for a Connected Canada

A focus on equity in both research and policy work related to citizenship in a digital context is crucial. A diversity of voices and perspectives are required from the very beginning in order to meaningfully incorporate and address equity and to avoid perpetuating existing inequalities. We must recognize that individuals experience the digital world differently, and that those experiences impact how they make use of digital tools, their trust in companies and government, and how data about them should be interpreted by researchers.

As noted in the Introduction, this collection should not be considered an exhaustive list of issues or challenges, and research needs to understand citizenship in a digital context through a particularly Canadian lens. We aimed to start a Canadian conversation and pointed to some of the most pressing concerns, highlighted in the *Canadians in a Digital Context* report (Dubois & Martin-Bariteau, 2018).

Inequity in our social, political, and economic systems continue to impact our experiences of the digital world and limit the participation of some groups of people (Wijesiriwardena, 2017). We take this inequity seriously and have aimed to include research by and about a diverse array of citizens. For example, in Chapter 1, Alexander Dirksen offers a compelling reframing of issues related to digital inclusion in order to underscore the continued role of colonization in digital spaces and to empower Indigenous populations as digital technologies are increasingly integrated into daily life. Other work focuses specifically on the experiences of young people (Chapter 3) and on online harassment which disproportionately impacts marginalized communities (Chapter 11). Over half of our authors identify as women, many currently or have previously lived outside of central

Canada, and they come from a range of academic and professional backgrounds. For each chapter, we also sought out reviewers who reflect Canada's diversity.

That said, work remains to be done. There are a limited number of experts on the Canadian digital context, all of whom are in high demand. This made it difficult to recruit contributors in some cases, and we want to highlight some of the ways this may lead to gaps in the research and policy agenda we have put forward. For example, none of our pieces focused primarily on LGBTQ2S+ communities or the issues faced by individuals in those communities, nor are there LGBTQ2S+ community leaders as authors of our chapters. Similarly, none of our chapters focused specifically on racialized communities or the experience of racialized individuals. Considering specific concerns around personal data, privacy, and identification practices online (Gutierrez, 2018; Manning, 2016; Sanders & Hannem, 2012; Simonite, 2019), and given that we expect some communities to be differently impacted in these cases, this gap needs to be addressed in future work.

We also have limited regional representation among our authors and have not attempted to include local case studies. Often those who focus on regional issues are siloed away from those who focus primarily on national-level issues or from those with regional focuses. This presents a limitation for policy-makers aiming to develop responses which can work cross-nationally and for researchers aiming to learn from the best practices of each other. Connectivity, access, and skill levels with digital technology vary greatly across Canada. In particular, we are missing perspectives on the experiences and impacts of digital technology in the North. We are also missing work that focuses on the experiences of linguistic minority communities that are found across Canada.

Further, we intentionally left aside some discussions that were previously highlighted as essential (Dubois & Martin-Bariteau, 2020). For example, we do not focus on electoral politics and participation, as Elizabeth Dubois co-led another project that addresses key issues related to political uses of digital media during the 2019 Canadian federal election, such as mis- and disinformation, political advertising, and online harassment (Dubois & Owen, 2020). We also leave out a discussion of ethical hacking, whistleblowers, and freedom of the press, as Florian Martin-Bariteau is researching the appropriate framework that will ensure an open, fair, and safe society, and safeguards citizens' digital rights and security.

Important work remains to be done; nonetheless, with this work we have attempted to bridge gaps and include diverse perspectives. We believe that further collaborative efforts such as this book, conferences, and other opportunities for those working in different areas to share their knowledge and experience would go a long way to alleviating the tension between the work done and work that still needs to be done.

The Way Forward for a Connected Canada

The agenda put forward is ambitious. It cannot be tackled by a handful of actors alone and requires a multi-stakeholder approach. More and better data about Canadians' uses and preferences in this digital context are needed. To develop better policies, tools, and research, we need to understand how individuals enact their citizenship.

The Connected Canada conference confirmed that academia, civil society, and government are ready to work together, and this edited collection, as well as related research, demonstrates that a transdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach is possible, as well as needed. Collaboration is key to tackling the many challenges and opportunities of an increasingly digital context and to providing access to more and better data about citizenship in a digital context.

Unlike citizens of other countries, Canadians are missing a forum for such a conversation. Certainly, some existing think tanks or university-based research institutes can support this kind of work and could be used to connect communities, promote opportunities, and facilitate the sharing of datasets. However, these kinds of initiatives would be best supported by a non-partisan, pan-Canadian consortium wherein multiple stakeholders, from academia, civil society, governance, and the corporate world contribute their knowledge, experience, and data sets.

We need a multi-stakeholder, pan-Canadian research and policy network for a truly connected Canada.

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