Democracy Futures Toolkit

An Open-Source Digital Toolkit to explore the Future of Democracy in Canada.

The Future of Democracy

This work is presented by:

DemocracyXChange is the annual summit for Canada's emerging democracy sector and leaders from across Canada who want to help build democratic resilience.

OCAD U CO is the futures design studio of OCAD University, grown from the Strategic Foresight and Innovation graduate program – the first of its kind in Canada.

CREDITS

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Why Now?

In 2024, the state of democracy across the globe is characterized by a mix of progress and challenges. While many countries continue to uphold democratic principles and institutions, there has also been a notable rise in authoritarianism and erosion of democratic norms. Factors such as political polarization, misinformation, weakening of civil liberties, and the impact of global events like the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to this complex landscape.

Designed for the 2024 DemocracyXChange (DXC) Summit, OCAD U CO provides the following toolkit to empower citizens across Canada (and beyond) to convene groups and facilitate similar workshop sessions to explore the future of democracy.

Through a series of strategic foresight methodologies and building on last year's workshop, this toolkit invites participants to envision themselves in 2050—the time horizon for change—and consider possible futures of democracy through the following question:

How might we create a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in Canada?

What can participants expect from completing this workshop?

- Participants will learn the Three Horizons framework and the importance of leveraging strategic foresight methodologies when discussing the future.
- Participants will explore the current state of democracy in Canada, existing challenges and opportunities for change.
- Participants will collaboratively envision potential future scenarios for a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in 2050 and how to move towards a preferred future.
- Participants will identify strategies to enhance resilience and build actions towards a sustainable and successful future democracy.

Resources developed from past DXC workshops and background context are included in the toolkit appendix

Why Strategic Foresight

Strategic foresight is an approach to rigorously look at different possibilities of how the future may unfold over time, given the changing and dynamic drivers of change at work in our world today.

Foresight is used by governments, enterprises and academia around the world to explore shifts in the global landscape and identify possible ways forward. The use of foresight enables systemic and rich ways of thinking about the future, informed by research on today's trends and grounded in life-centred design methodologies including:

The **Cone of Possible Futures** illustrates a variety of possible futures that emanate from the current moment in time and the degree to which they diverge from the present scenario, while also illustrating biases against entertaining possibilities.

Cone of Possible Futures[1]
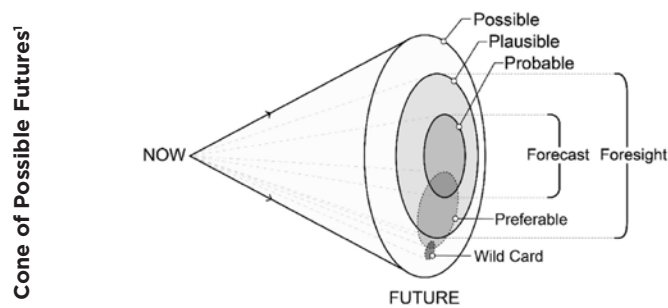
Three Horizons is a framework used to help discuss a current system, envision an improved system, and identify changes that need to be made to transition. It reveals forces that pull us further from an ideal and those that foster positive change.
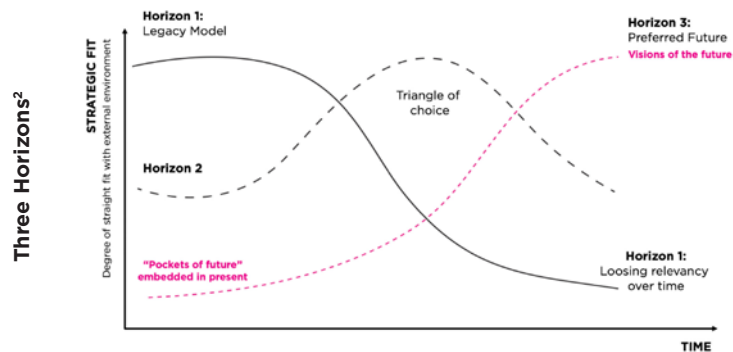
Three Horizons[2]

[1] *Adapted from: Hancock, T. & Bezold, C. Possible futures, preferable futures. Healthcare Forum Journal (1994). Vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 23–9.*

[2] *Hodgson and Curry (2008)*

The Cone of Possible Futures and Three Horizons frameworks are leveraged through this toolkit to guide participants through a series of strategic foresight activities.

Workshop: Pre-Work

In Preparation

TIPS AND TRICKS

Consider sending participants the Drivers of Change in advance.

If virtual - consider digital tools like Miro/Mural for collaboration, more breaks, and shorter duration for activities.

Some people may be uncomfortable talking about the future in the shareback – **Consider** an asynchronous or anonymous way for participants to share their thoughts.

Timing: We suggest a minimum of 30 minutes/activity. Final timing will be dependent on size of group. Block additional time for shareback after each activity.

This workshop is designed to scale – for individual reflection, small groups, or higher numbers, and is designed for scalable social discourse and collaboration. For this toolkit, the framing as follows will be referencing group collaboration.

What you will need:

- **Participants**: In a group setting, we suggest no less than 3 and up to 8 people, with the total number of participants to grow as needed based on number of facilitators available.
- **Facilitators**: We suggest 1 facilitator for a maximum of 8 people. If there are larger groups, more facilitators or designated scribes are recommended.
- **Resources:** Drivers of Change, 6 Actions, and Scenarios*
- **Worksheets:** Worksheets to accompany each activity are included in this toolkit. We recommend printing off worksheets for each group or exporting the digital versions to virtual collaboration boards. Worksheets should be large enough for groups to engage and collaborate with the content.
- **Workshop Artifacts:** Additional artifacts for activities are also included and can be used as optional takeaways for participants, and are designed for shareback between groups.
- **Facility space, tables, chairs****
- **Markers, pens, paper and post-it notes****

* Scenarios are to be used as an optional pre-workshop read for background context.
** If working remotely, try using a digital visual tool like Miro or Mural to conduct workshop.

Suggested Workshop Structure:

Introduction and Context Setting: Open workshop and welcome participants, introduce strategic foresight, goals and agenda of the day.

Activity 1 | Horizon 3 + Shareback: Introduce Three Horizons framework, present framing, Drivers of Change, complete Desired Future worksheet and Headline of the Future artifact.

Activity 2 | Horizon 1 + Shareback: Review Drivers of Change1 and complete Current State Assessment worksheet.

Activity 3 | Horizon 2 + Shareback: Review 6 Actions, brainstorm tensions, complete Getting from Here to There worksheet and Pockets of the Future artifact.

Closing: Facilitate final shareback, reflections, highlight resulting strategies, actions and closing remarks.

1 *Participants may alternatively use the 'What's on the horizon for democracy?' infographic as a reference*

Workshop: Three Horizons

Three Horizons is a framework whereby you can map the current state of democracy (Horizon 1), an ideal future state (Horizon 3), and how you might move from Horizon 1 to Horizon 3 (Horizon 2).

Use this framework to identify a preferable future state and identify capabilities, actions and strategies.

Ideal for aligning individuals around a preferred future and identifying how you might move from your current state toward that future.

To work towards a preferred future of democracy, follow these steps for the Three Horizons framework.

Activity 1: Envision Horizon 3, A Preferred Future

Starting at Horizon 3 helps participants engage with the research question (creating a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in Canada) to form ideas about possible futures and visions of a preferred future of democracy. The output of this activity becomes the "vision of the future".

Activity 2: Articulate Horizon 1

Horizon 1 articulates making sense of where we are today and analyzing current system context and conditions. The focus of Horizon 1 is to understand the current conditions and assumptions to support the system, and to begin considering what needs to change or stay. The output of this activity becomes the current state of democracy.
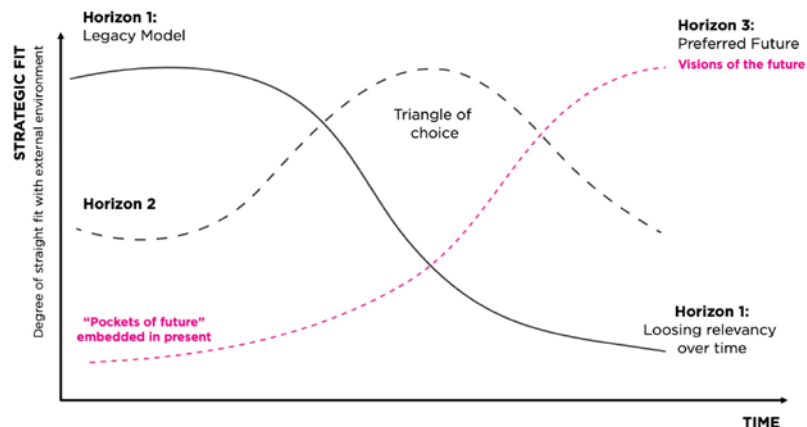
Activity 3: Map Horizon 2

Horizon 2 considers the path to move "from here to there". With an understanding of the current state (Horizon 1), participants can project where they want to be (Horizon 3) and begin to list the activities, initiatives, people and capabilities needed. These can be categorized as tensions, positive interventions, or conditions that detract from the successful fulfillment of the vision. The output of this activity becomes the basis of an action plan.

Step 4: Identify Pockets of the Future

Once the three horizons are mapped, participants can begin to identify current practices that hold promise for the future. Participants can think of these as "pockets of the future embedded in the present".

Horizon 3 Shared Vision of Democracy in 2050

Activity Timing:
Minimum 30 minutes

Resources needed:
› Drivers of Change
› Post-it notes
› Pens
› Desired Future worksheet
› Headline of the Future artifact

Pre-work

Before conducting Activity 1, your team should have access to the updated Drivers of Change as source material. Each group should have the worksheets and artifacts for Activity 1.

Introduce the framework
10 minutes

Begin by introducing the Three Horizons as a framework, using the **Methodology** and **Workshop: Overview** (pages 3 and 5) in this toolkit to help you frame the task at hand.

If working with groups that are unfamiliar to each other, we recommend conducting a round of introductions or a warm-up activity, i.e. a question asking participants what they're excited or alarmed about for the future of democracy.

Activity 1: How might we create a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in Canada?
50 minutes

In pairs, review the Drivers of Change and identify key elements that would need to be present in a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in 2050. Have pairs consider defining Drivers of Change that would need to be amplified or constrained to achieve that future.*

Then bring pairs back into their groups to identify and cluster key insights. Using these insights, complete the Desired Future worksheet and the Headline of the Future artifact** for shareback.

Share back
30 minutes

Come back together as a team and have each group share their Headline of the Future artifact**. Ensure enough time to allow questions and comments for each group.

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* If participants need further prompting, encourage them to think through this activity through the 5Ws (who, what, where, when and why).
**The Headline of the Future artifact serves as an optional resource to facilitate shareback among groups.

Desired Future:

How might we create a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy in Canada?

Scenario Title

Give your scenario of the future a fitting and memorable title

General Scenario Description

Describe your scenario. What does democracy look like? What principles or values uphold it?
How does it work or function? Who's involved?

What Drivers Define this Scenario?

- *What Drivers of Change help secure or bolster this scenario?*
- *What Drivers of Change, if reversed, are prevalent in this scenario?*
- *Consider 3-5 Drivers*

Headline of the Future: Democracy in 2050

Headline

What's a headline that is front-page newsworthy?

Summary:

Who is releasing this headline? What key elements have made 2050 a resilient, successful and sustainable democracy? What key activities have occurred that led to this democracy?

Quote

Identify a key stakeholder in this resilient, successful and sustainable democracy. What are they saying?

"

Horizon 1
Making Sense of Where
We Are Today

Activity Timing:
Minimum 30 minutes

Resources needed:
› Drivers of Change
› Post-it notes
› Pens
› Current State Assessment
  worksheet

Consider:
A brief break between activities

Pre-work

Before conducting Activity 2, your team should have access to the Drivers of Change. Each group should have the worksheet for activity 2.

Introduce Horizon 1
5 minutes

Begin by introducing Horizon 1 as a representation of current and dominant systems. Review the current context and conditions of democracy in Canada at present day.

Activity 2: What are the current conditions that support the democracy of today?
40 minutes

In pairs, review the Drivers of Change and explore the current state of democracy using the following prompts:

• What are the current characteristics or features of democracy in Canada today?

• What assumptions exist that uphold the current state of democracy in Canada?*

• Using the Drivers of Change**, Identify the possible:

   • **Warning Signs:** What needs to change? What do we need to address?

   • **Goalposts:** What needs to be preserved? What needs to stay?

Then bring the pairs back into their groups to identify and cluster key insights. Using these insights, complete the Current State Assessment worksheet.

Share back
30 minutes

Come back together as a team to discuss key insights based on their completed Current State Assessment worksheet.

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* Consider positioning the above questions through the iceberg model – with characteristics/ features as the tip of the iceberg, and assumptions as the beliefs that uphold the characteristics/ features.

**Use the Drivers of Change as inputs for this exercise, however participants can be encouraged to go beyond the provided Drivers of Change and incorporate their individual knowledge to answer the above questions.

Current State Assessment

Current State

What are the current characteristics and features of democracy in Canada today? What are the assumptions (i.e. what do we believe to be true)? Consider characteristics/features the tip of the iceberg, and assumptions serving as the beliefs that uphold them

Review Drivers of Change

What are the critically-important Drivers? Are there gaps within the Drivers?

! Warning Signs   *What needs to change? What do we need to address?*

+ Goalposts   *What needs to stay? What do we want to move towards?*

Horizon 2
Getting From Here to There

Activity Timing:
Minimum 30 minutes

Resources needed:
› Drivers of Change
› 6 Actions
› Post-it notes
› Pens
› Getting From Here to There worksheet
› Pockets of the Future artifact

Consider:
A brief break between activities

Introduce Horizon 2
5 minutes

Begin by reviewing the work completed in Horizon 3 and 1 in the previous activities. Then introduce Horizon 2 as actions to be taken in the present to resist change, adapt to change, or move towards change.

Activity 3: How do we bridge from where we are today to our vision of the future?
40 minutes

Introduce the **6 Actions** created from the previous 2023 DXC workshop and encourage participants to use these as reference material in building Horizon 2. In small groups (ideally 4-5), brainstorm tensions, positive interventions and negative interventions between the current state (Horizon 1) and the preferred future (Horizon 3).

Then bring the pairs back into their groups to identify and cluster key insights. Using these insights, complete the Getting From Here to There worksheet.

Pockets of the Future
15 minutes

Once the group has mapped out their three horizons, participants can individually begin to identify current practices that are close to what they want to continue doing in the future. Complete the Pockets of the Future artifact and share with the larger group.

Final Share back
30 minutes

Come back together as a team to discuss key insights based on their completed Current State Assessment worksheet.

Getting from Here to There

Tensions

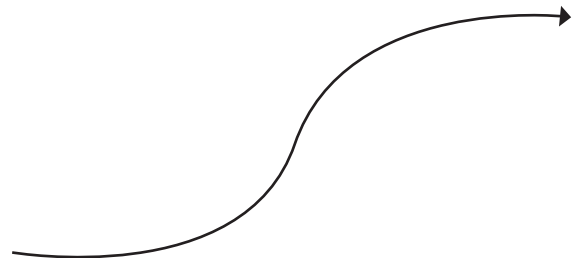**Where or what are the tensions?**

Between H3 (desired future) and H1 (current state)

Enable + Amplify

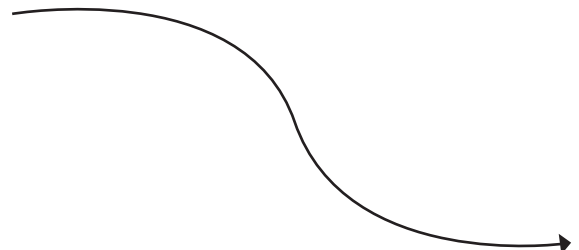**Where or what are the positive interventions?**

What can we continue to support, increase, amplify?

Wind Down + Block/Stop

Where or what are the negative interventions?

What can we diminish, reduce and constrain?

Pockets of the Future

Pockets of the future are events, actions and signals in the present and may have the potential to become more prevalent and impactful in the future.

What are the current initiatives that can be identified as a pocket of the future?

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-
-
-
-
-

Who are the key stakeholders involved in these initiatives?
How may we support them and amplify this work?

-
-
-
-
-
-

Resource Legend
Background Context

Drivers of Change

Horizon scanning is a strategic foresight research method that considers changes happening across social, technological, environmental, economic, and political domains and works to categorize these changes as either newly emerging signals, trends that are gaining momentum, or drivers of change with significant force.

Close to 100 drivers of change were identified as part of the horizon scan for the Democracy Futures Workshop in 2023. These drivers were categorized within the themes of the three critical factors, namely: trust in governance, social equity and integrity of information. A fourth category of climate change was also identified as significantly formative and critical to the conversation of what the future of democracy in Canada might look like.

These Drivers of Change were validated and leveraged at the 2023 workshop, then revisited, updated and refreshed in 2024. We have included them here in their entirety with the caution that it is a long list and, if used in its entirety, should be shared with participants beforehand. If workshop facilitators wish to use a condensed version, we recommend using the subthemes and critical factors only.

6 Actions

In the 2023 Democracy Futures workshop, participants ideated a long list of possible actions based on multiple possible future scenarios. These actions were stress-tested through a collective prioritization exerciseand among them, six main actions emerged as the highest priority to start pursuing in the short-term.

Future Scenarios

In the 2023 Democracy Futures workshop, participants created eight distinct possible scenarios for the future of democracy, each informed by the convergence of three different critical factors (Trust in Governance, Integrity of Information, and Social Equity) moving in either opposing or aligned directions.

The Drivers of Change are to be used across all workshop activities, and the 6 Actions are to be leveraged in Activity 2: Horizon 2. Scenarios are to be leveraged as a pre-workshop resource for participants wishing to gain further background context on how the 2024 Democracy Futures workshop is building off past workshop outputs.

Drivers of Change
Trust in Governance (1/2)

Subtheme: Institutional Reparations

Growing calls for accountability from governing bodies regarding past injustices, such as institutional racism and reparations, are impacting the credibility and trust in traditional institutions.

Institutional Racism at the Forefront

While institutional racism and harmful societal systems including education, housing, health, and employment have faced scrutiny and challenge nationwide, recent legal overturns have hindered institutions' ability to make concrete amends.

Increasing Unhoused Populations

As the cost of living and housing prices have reached critical levels, so too have the number of people experiencing houselessness in urban centres and economic hardship across the country. Greater awareness of the realities and root causes of houselessness and advocacy to move away from enforcement approaches leveraged by police have dominated the narrative.

Government Spending Constraints

Government spending and budgets are highly scrutinized as healthcare, education, arts, culture and community services continue to be constrained while infrastructure, police and transportation budgets grow year over year.

Reconciliation

An ongoing practice of constant evolution and acknowledgement of institutional harms toward Indigenous peoples and the move to correct the past, present and future wrongs.

Subtheme: Institutional Capacity

The "slow and steady" and resource-constrained approach of the public sector has some turning to alternative stakeholders for action, namely corporate entities.

Corporations Filling the Gaps

The growing frustration with governing bodies' cautious and bureaucratic approach to actions around climate, social issues and the pandemic has shaken the public trust in governance and shifted support and responsibility to non-traditional, non-state actors.

Indigenous Forms of Governance
Challenging colonial approaches and mindsets, Indigenous governance models are becoming more understood and respected. These include collective governance, syncretic democracies with 'two-eyed' seeing, and seven-generation principles.

Global Health
Global health concerns continue to challenge governments and the public around the world, while healthcare systems and infrastructure are struggling to provide care to those in need. Individuals are becoming their own care advocates with the democratization of healthcare through digital health solutions, backed by privately-held organizations.

Open Data and Transparency
Demands for greater transparency and access to data may push governments towards a more agile institutional structure, one where proactive action is taken in fast-moving areas such as technology, security, health and sustainability.

Subtheme: Political Polarization

The perceived and/or real ability for Canadians to trust in their government, its actions and its elections and ability to tackle the big, complex, long-term challenges facing the nation.

Rise of the Influencer

Alternative information sources, such as celebrities, podcasters and social media influencers are shaping the minds of their followers.

Partisanship

Divided party lines continue to conflict views, communities and institutions on issues such as reproductive justice, affirmative action, and climate change.

Foreign Nation Influence

Electoral fraud, cronyism and bribery continue to shake individual perceptions of and trust in government and the influence of foreign nations on government operations.

Economic Pessimism

The outlook on the economy is grim as concerns loom over economic inflation and recession cycles. Although perceived economic health may affect democratic outcomes and confidence, new economic models are being explored, including evaluation models beyond the financial.

Drivers of Change
Trust in Governance (2/2)

Subtheme: Trust in Institutions

Trust in traditional societal institutions, such as government, finance, media, and public health, has been on a decades-long downward spiral.

Civic Participation Transition

As social fragmentation increases, community organizations are struggling to bring in new members. Civic participation is on the decline at the community level, while online engagement is finding better reception in some areas.

Decentralized Finance

Circumventing banks, insurance and clearing houses, DeFi offers an alternative to centralized financial institutions. While blockchains may be improving transparency, traceability and cost savings, they may also open new pernicious activities such as money laundering and illegal exchange.

Self-Determination

The inherent right of Indigenous peoples to self-govern and the support, recognition and implementation of this right by other governing bodies has challenged laws and policies.

Big-Tech Power Influence

Big-tech companies have access to user data and can impact everything from legislation and economics to societal behaviours and individual choices.

Subtheme: Geopolitical Constraints

Geopolitical tensions, including armed conflict, access to resources, production and supply of energy and control over territory, may seem far away but have very real implications on Canadian soil.

Multi-Polar World

A new multi-polar world is emerging, defined by an ever-shifting set of allegiances and agreements between wealthy and emerging countries seeking to benefit from global trade, shared values, and warfare. As a result, Canada is called upon to be held accountable on an international stage.

Energy Transition

Shifting priorities, investment in innovative solutions and economic tensions are empowering renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydrogen, which are now poised to compete at par in global energy markets with non-renewables like oil and gas.

Surveillance State

The rise of government monitoring of the populous, especially in the digital realm, has some concerned for the consequences of commercial surveillance.

Fourth Industrial Revolution

Representing a shift in the way companies create, exchange and distribute value, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will merge our physical, digital and biological worlds into one, calling for governing bodies to empower collaboration across nations.

Drivers of Change

Integrity of Information (1/2)

Subtheme: Information Literacy

The influx of and sheer amount of information accessible to people, and consumed daily has never been greater, all while our ability to separate the truth from fiction or research from opinion continues to decline.

Misinformation Grows + Malinformation Increasing

Misinformation, false information that is spread either intentionally or not but does result in misleading the viewer (and possibly causing harm to people, systems and institutions), is a growing concern, especially amplified during the pandemic and the Trump era.

Malinformation, although stemming from the truth, is often used to exaggerate and mislead, and intentionally causes harm in cases such as doxing or phishing.

Digital Literacy

In today's world, having the skills to use digital tools and navigate online spaces is crucial. With the vast range of information sources and agendas online, individuals and communities with lower digital proficiency may face more challenges than those who are digitally literate.

Data-Informed Decisions

Data and technology are driving decisions and actions in industries across the globe, leading to greater emphasis on ethical data practices and transparency.

Surveillance Capitalism

The exploitation of personal data, typically by big tech for their revenue-generating purposes, but also undermines personal autonomy and democracy by predicting and shaping individual behaviour.

Subtheme: Polarized Positions

Increasing polarization and social divides inhibit the democratic process from reaching consensus and taking action on major issues, further exacerbating the problems themselves and inflaming division.

Partisan competition

Organized competition between media and news outlets along party lines continues to divide views, communities, institutions and nations.

Rise of the Influencer

Alternative information sources, such as celebrities, podcasters and social media influencers, are shaping the minds of their followers.

Declining Journalistic Pillars

The five pillars of journalism ethics are truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and accountability. Growing competition and misinformation spread from media outlets are challenging the very definition and integrity of traditional media and pushing viewers towards alternative new sources.

(Algorithmic) Echo Chambers

When one's social media becomes an echo chamber content is algorithmically tailored and curtailed, often by the user's past choices and online searches. It de facto eliminates opposing viewpoints and differing voices.

Subtheme: Data Integrity

The realities of a digitized world require systems and processes to control, fact check and regulate information (and its sources) for truth and integrity.

AI Biases

Machine learning and AI are being used across nearly every industry. These data-informed algorithms are everywhere in our everyday lives. If and when these massive data sets are incorrect, incomplete or biased, the result can target harm and disproportionately impact minorities.

Data Policies

Current global data policies and regulations protect data within private and public institutions, limiting the opportunities for a more human-centered approach, while working towards greater data protection and necessary security regulations.

Big-Tech Power Influence

Big-tech companies have access to user data and can impact everything from legislation and economics to societal behaviours and individual choices.

Cloud Migration

Increasingly, companies are leveraging the scalability and agile services of the cloud, which can come with its own challenges and vulnerabilities.

Drivers of Change
Integrity of Information (2/2)

Subtheme: Information Dissemination

In today's information-driven society, the sharing of information continues to grow in scope and the range of information (from useful, to harmful) and how it is shared and by whom, has great influence and divisive implications.

Algorithmic Curation

Social media platforms use algorithms to track user preferences and tendencies, to curate targeted feed content and channel users toward content bubbles.

Backlash Against Science

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the cracks in today's information-sharing realities (and implications). Conspiracy theories and disinformation have informed an anti-science movement, where science ceases to be the objective and trusted field for information and direction. Some worry that 'Big Business' benefits are behind science claims.

Fact Flow Checking

The screening and evaluation of content to confirm or refute its accuracy has never been more important. Neutral fact-checking services, such as Snopes explore misinformation, address rumours and gut-check memes. Flows are also monitored by non-profit groups such as The Rappler's newly formed The Nerve consultancy to understand spread.

Propaganda Campaigns

The strength and divisiveness of propaganda campaigns continue to rise, dividing individuals through coordinated efforts to disseminate information intended to entrench a particular point of view.

Subtheme: Global Digitization

The digital transformation provides greater opportunities for global inclusion and participation, while simultaneously forcing governing bodies to react to new digital challenges.

Deep Fakes

Deep fakes are videos in which AI technology uses a process called, "deep learning" to digitally alter media (pictures, audio, videos, etc.) and, in essence, create false quotations, incidents or events, often intended to mislead or influence people on political topics.

AI For Hire

An increasing number of industries are leveraging artificial intelligence and replacing human labour with technology, specifically for repetitive and easily automated tasks such as manufacturing and fast-food workers. Though in the early stages, areas such as professional services are also moving towards leveraging artificial intelligence to complete higher-order tasks.

Digital Identity + Divide

As digital interactions increase at an unprecedented rate, an estimated one billion people have no legal proof of identity, and another 3.2 billion are not effectively able to prove their identity online, exacerbating inequality and issues of access and governance. The gap between those with affordable digital access and those without grows, the latter often being underserved members of society, even though civic participation and a functioning livelihood increasingly depend on them.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity models continue to evolve to protect people, organizations and nations from the ever-present and evolving threats in a digital world. As the world digitizes and advancements are made in AI, IoT, cloud use and remote work, the opportunities for attacks will also continue to grow.

Drivers of Change
Social Equity (1/2)

Subtheme: Social Connection

Rising isolation, digital influences and fragmentation of society continue to fray the threads of community and social connection, while communities advocate for greater opportunities to bring people together and digital spaces pop up to create social connection online.

Rise of Digital Worlds

The growing presence of digital worlds (via social media, video gaming, VR/AR, etc) can create connections between strangers, while also drastically reducing in-person human contact and connection as many are reaching their "social quotas" online.

Urban Decay

With many people moving away from the city, prompted by the pandemic and affordability crisis, the political power map may potentially change and services (including funding for education and infrastructure) might diminish in the core, leading to the erosion of agency within marginalized and lower income groups.

Greying Populations

As society ages, governments need to balance the increasingly diverse needs of younger and older populations. A large older adult population may dominate politics and elections, shaping government to align with the desires and needs of their generations.

Spaces to Foster Community

New or renewed spaces to encourage social connection and community continue to be critical, including physical hubs with programming, services, and amenities such as libraries, that may also function alongside or in addition to other growing online/digital creative, activist and social communities.

Subtheme: System Reform

Greater knowledge, recognition and acceptance of individual identities, diverse experiences and needs are increasingly important in our globalized societies.

Decolonization

Colonial ideologies about the superiority and privileges of Western thought and approaches, which often exclude rather than include, are being deconstructed and challenged in systems and institutions.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The number of diversity, equity and inclusion policies has grown over the past few years, leading to greater representation, inclusion and protection of marginalized workers, while many have struggled with the implementation and impact of these policies. With an economic downturn resulting in widespread layoffs, DEI initiatives across institutions are being re-considered and de-prioritized.

Living Wage

The rising cost of living, inflation and labour shortages have brought the need for a living wage to the forefront of labour discussions. The 'living wage' is a contrasting concept to minimum wage, which increasingly does not afford the basic needs of workers.

Youth Fear No Future

Young people are increasingly disturbed about the environmental crisis they are growing up in, resulting in existential anxiety and trauma. Many feel let down by their governments for not taking action to secure a viable future for them and leverage social media to address and action their concerns.

Subtheme: Global Health

Global health concerns continue to challenge governments and the public around the world, while healthcare systems and infrastructure are struggling to provide care to those in need.

Mental Health Crisis

With the isolation of the pandemic and the rise of social media, there has been a marked decline in mental well-being and a rise in awareness and the need for greater mental health support, which were already scarce and difficult to access.

Increasing Climate Emergencies

The rise in frequency and intensity of catastrophic climate events disproportionately impacts people of colour, increasing homelessness and contributing to the perpetuation of generational economic trauma.

Declining Access to (Universal) Healthcare

Globally, the ability to access essential health services continues to be a challenge. In Canada, access to family physicians continues to decline, resulting in long waitlists and Emergency Room visits. Privatization moves forward threatening larger economic and geographic health divisions.

Rise of Virtual Care

The ability for healthcare practitioners to provide access to care virtually increased dramatically over the pandemic when it was a necessity. Many practitioners continue to offer this service, reducing the barriers to accessing care as long as individuals have digital access.

Drivers of Change

Social Equity (2/2)

Subtheme: (Resource) Scarcity

High demand and use of basic necessities - such as clean water, housing, food and more - are leading to greater resource scarcity and rising prices.

Clean Water Emergency

Nearly 1/6 of the planet cannot easily access clean water, a number that is steadily rising, and disproportionately impacts low-income and Indigenous communities in Canada.

Economic Pessimism

The outlook on the economy is grim as concerns loom over economic inflation and recession cycles. Although perceived economic health may affect democratic outcomes and confidence, new economic models are being explored, including evaluation models beyond the financial.

(Affordable) Housing Crisis

Growing housing interest and utility rates are leading to generational shifts in home affordability, as many young adults are being outpriced. The increasing cost of ownership along with new monetization services such as Airbnb have created a crisis in many Canadian cities, leading to greater housing precarity and houselessness.

Food Insecurity

Lack of access to, or ability to afford, enough food for every person in a household has grown drastically as the cost of living increases, especially impacting healthy and high-protein foods, and disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalized households.

Subtheme: The Great Divide

The gap between the world's wealthiest individuals and everyone else grows dramatically larger.

Wealth Inequality

The gap between the richest and the poorest continues to widen dramatically, squeezing out the economic middle class. The top '1%' continues to have great power in shaping our futures.

Universal Basic Income

Growing advocacy of universal basic income, where every adult resident of a country or locale is given an unconditional monetary allotment, has led to multiple pilot programs across the globe.

Cost of Living

The rising cost of living, including skyrocketing housing and food prices has drastically pinched budgets, creating a deeper divide between those worried about 'making ends meet' and those who aren't.

Digital Divide

The gap between those with affordable access to Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and those without grows, the latter often being underserved members of society, even though civic participation and a functioning livelihood increasingly depend on them.

Drivers of Change

Climate Change (1/2)

Subtheme: Shifting Business Values

Recent awareness of the harm caused by previous, extractive and growth-centric operating models is under scrutiny and new models built on the values of resilience, sustainability and the human-nature relationship are growing.

Stakeholder Capitalism

Stakeholder capitalism is designed to benefit and provide value to all stakeholders and the environment, as opposed to simply benefiting shareholders. A version of this is triple bottom line valuation and b-corps. Advocates believe true change and progress in this realm could mean healthier nations, greater sustainability, and equality.

Circular Economy

The circular economy narrative offers the opportunity to rethink and reconceptualize the current economic approach, which relies heavily on hyper-consumption and waste, and redesign it to better address human and environmental needs.

Fourth Industrial Revolution + Late Stage Capitalism

With late capitalist systems shifting the way companies create, exchange and distribute value, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will merge our physical, digital and biological worlds into one, calling for governing bodies to empower collaboration across nations.

Environmental Impact Data

To achieve impact with environmental and social initiatives, organizations will require ethically sourced, accurate and complete data to inform and report on impact.

Subtheme: Critical Energy Needs

The impacts of climate change and weather emergencies are being felt around the world and impacting society at all levels. The need for reliant, resilient and sustainable energy has never been higher.

Renewable Energy

Shifting priorities, investment in innovative solutions and economic tensions are empowering renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydrogen, which are now poised to compete at par in global energy markets with non-renewables.

Cryptocurrencies

Mining cryptocurrencies requires around-the-clock, high-intensity energy usage, which has many criticizing its vast server "mines," while others believe that crypto mines could be powered by clean power (such as hydro) and help drive the global adoption of renewable energy alternatives.

Infrastructure Concerns

Critical health, communications, energy, safety and transportation infrastructure are feeling the effects of climate change. New infrastructure builds must prioritize sustainability and climate resiliency while applying those mindsets to existing infrastructure can support a more resilient and sustainable future.

Net Zero Cities

Urban centers could be key players in the net-zero transition, considering that much of today's energy usage and carbon emissions originate in global cities. Innovative technologies, transportation, waste reduction and partnerships could be vital to moving the needle.

Drivers of Change
Climate Change (2/2)

Subtheme: Ecosystem Collapse

The health of the Earth's biodiversity and ecosystems is vital to ha ealthy future for all species on the planet and has social, economic and political implications.

Biodiversity Concerns

Biodiversity is the life-supporting systems and life on earth that support clean water, air, soil, food and more, and it is under threat. Millions of species are at risk of extinction and, yet, extraction continues.

Ecosystem Health Awareness

The loss of natural habitats is a key driver of diseases, with forest and farm practices impacting water and food supplies, and trees alleviating pollution and heat islands. The relationship between humans and nature is deeply intertwined and a healthy ecosystem can boost human mental and physical well-being.

Agri-Innovations

Smart technologies, such as CRISPR, can help reduce agricultural emissions, make crops more resilient to future climate events and help every global nation grow food at a local level to feed generations to come.

Nature-Positive Practices

Nature-positive is a goal, approach and business model to halt destructive practices and shift to an operating model of regeneration, resilience and recirculation, aiming for a resilient biosphere recovery by 2050.

Subtheme: Human-Nature Relationship

The relationship between humans and nature is interdependent and, as climate impacts increase around the globe, so too will the impacts on humans.

Food Shortages

Flooding, droughts and unseasonable weather have caused drastic food shortages and soaring costs around the world, with many Canadian food banks seeing unprecedented demand.

Climate Impact Inequality

Climate risk disproportionately impacts marginalized communities and nations in the Global South. An intersectional approach is required to understand the realities of inequality, biodiversity loss and climate risk and pave a way forward that takes into account all people and nations across the globe equally.

Sick Cities

Urban populations increasingly contend with climbing food costs, air pollution, rapid loss of green space, and crumbling infrastructure.

Mass Migrations

Climate disasters trigger the majority of new displacements worldwide. The scope and scale of human migration due to climate change are predicted to test the limits of national and global governance as well as international cooperation.

6 Actions (DXC 2023)

The 2023 DXC Democracy Futures workshop prioritized a list of actions that can be undertaken to move towards a more desirable democracy.

Participants identified six high potential actions to consider prioritizing to move closer to a more desirable democracy:

Regulating Capitalists/ Capitalism

Having to do with decentralized capital, competition laws, limiting lobbying and better regulations that don't preclude innovation.

Better Labour Laws & Organizing Workers

Having to do with better collective action, portable pension plans, and moving from a minimum wage towards a thriving wage.

Combating Misinformation

Having to do with funding and supporting local and non-profit media and pursuing information and data literacy.

Meaningful Action on Climate

Having to do with introducing incentives for climate action, lowering the voting age and increasing media literacy and training for all ages.

Creating More Responsive & Representative Systems of Power

Having to do with education about different systems of power and having decisions tables be representative of electoral reform.

Holding Tech Companies Accountable

Having to do with incentivizing more transparency, breaking down monopolies, shifting business models, and overall making tech companies more accountable

Future Scenarios

Eight scenarios were developed in the 2023 DXC workshop by orienting three critical factors–Trust in Governance, Integrity of Information and Social Equity– at cross-sections to become the axes of a cube. By labelling each polarity of the critical factors as either increasing or decreasing, the eight corners of the cube emerge as being defined by unique combinations of the polarities. Each of these corners represents one of the scenarios.

Future Scenarios
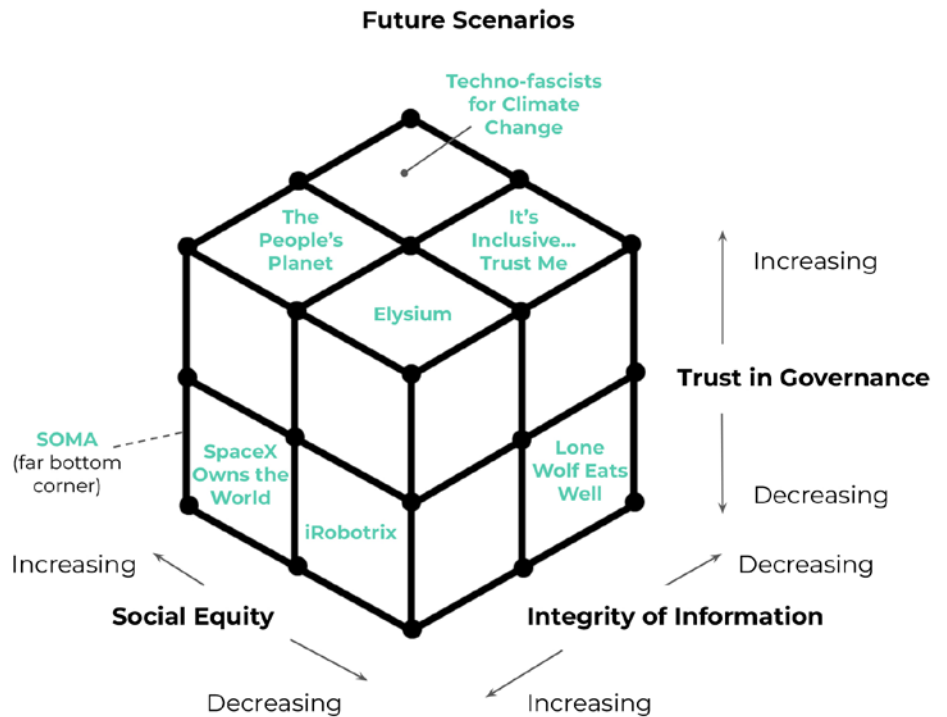
Scenario 1: Elysium

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

• Increasing Trust in Governance

• Decreasing Social Equity

• Increasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

• Mismanagement of alternative energy resources

• Rise of micro-governments

• Information is more transparent but less accessible

• Food inequality has become more extreme

• Inequality is a primary driver

Scenario Description

Elysium is a world in which there is widespread increase in trust in governance, but polarizing issues have encouraged the rise of micro-governments within localities and communities.

There is a general trend of increasing integrity of information, open data and more significant transparency of information but because of the widespread decrease in social equity this has effectively made vulnerable communities and minorities more aware of the rising inequality and has led to more social unrest. Nevertheless, in many circles, this unrest is placated by immersive entertainment experiences and alternative realities in the metaverse made possible by hyper-growth of high tech.

On the climate front, alternative energy sources are on the rise and becoming decentralized, but governments at all levels are managing them poorly and in ways that do not benefit everyone equally. One significant outcome is poor food security for all communities across Canada, except the ultra-rich. Overall, democracy in Elysium is faring well although there are undercurrents of impending threat due to continued rise of inequality.
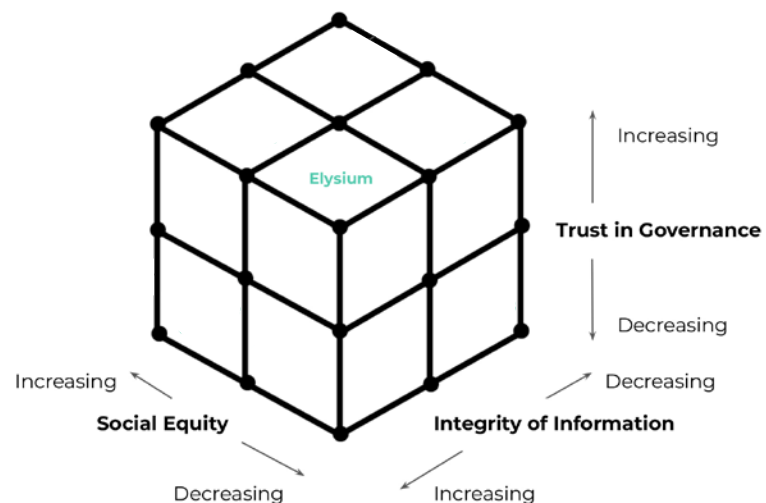
Overall, democracy in Elysium is faring well although there are undercurrents of impending threat due to continued rise of inequality

Scenario 2: The People's Planet
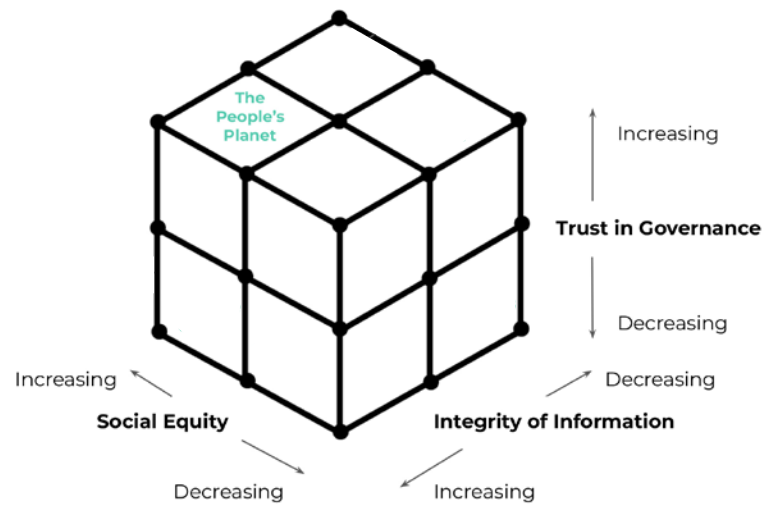
KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Data / Education
- Decolonization
- Decommodification
- People-led

Scenario Description

The People's Planet is a world in which there has been significant progress made on decolonization and there is widespread and equitable access to literacy and resources. As a result, social equity and integrity of information is on the rise.

In terms of governance, there has been a marked shift to local-led representative governments. There is considerable civic engagement across the country and in general, communities and societal initiatives are very much considered "people-led". Overall, trust in governance is steadily increasing.

Economically, there has been an important shift towards decommodification. This is in large part due to how youth and young people have stepped up and demanded greater action to mitigate climate chaos. Increased access to and understanding of data, paired with new models of education have helped facilitate this direction.

Overall, democracy in this world is doing very well.

Scenario 3:
It's Inclusive... Trust Me

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Increasing Trust in Governance
- Decreasing Social Equity
- Decreasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Malinformational algorithmic echo chambers
- Rise of digital world
- Open data and transparency

Scenario Description

It's Inclusive... Trust Me is a world defined by increasing trust in governance but decreasing social equity and integrity of information. Digital technologies and social media are being used to confuse people and to promote mis- and mal-information. As a result, certain communities with high digital literacy are having their needs met while others are facing hardship and polarization.

Across the board, society is facing a total loss of integrity of information. Collective action, dialogue and working through differences to find common solutions are no longer possible as everyone has a different version of reality and truth.

Locally, there are primarily smaller government powers across Canada. On an international scale, capital has co-opted many governments leading to compromised decisions that primarily serve the interests of large corporations.
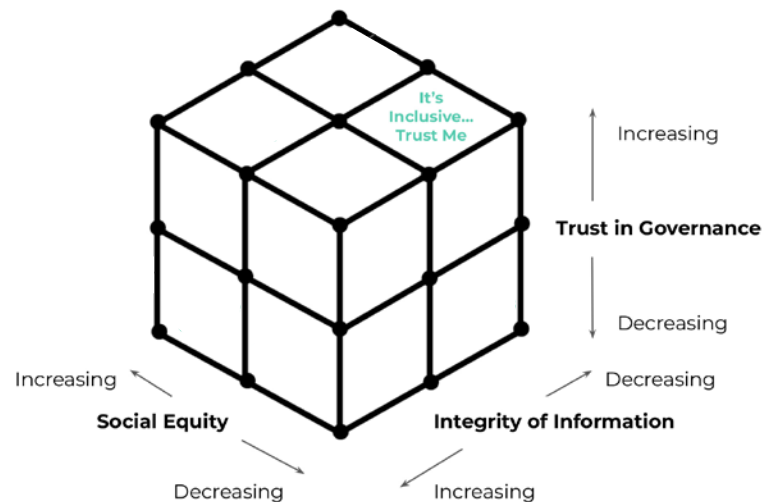
Overall, democracy in this future is functioning but struggling and lacking resiliency.

Scenario 4: Techno-fascists for Climate

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Increasing Trust in Governance
- Increasing Social Equity
- Decreasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Energy transition
- Big tech/markers
- Housing/health/UBI
- Role of literacy
- Education/propaganda
- Consumer mindset
- Solidarity

Scenario Description

Techno-fascists for Climate is a world in which there is increasing trust in governance as well as an increase in social equity, but significant decline in integrity of information.

In Canada, governance has become authoritarian. There has been significant crackdown on and removal of any channels of dissent as well as overwhelming deterioration in the ability for individuals to think for themselves. Across the board, there is reduced agency and autonomy.

At the same time, there are basic universal supports in place so that Canadians have all of their core basic needs met in terms of housing, food security, and more. Society is not as hyper-connected as it was in the 2020s. Instead, there has been a rise in hyperlocal communities, initially spurred by the Covid-19 global health pandemic in 2020. Nevertheless, there are many individuals who are generally disengaged and distracted.

Because of its authoritarian government, Canada has been able to take significant action on climate change and has seen successful energy transition in many sectors.
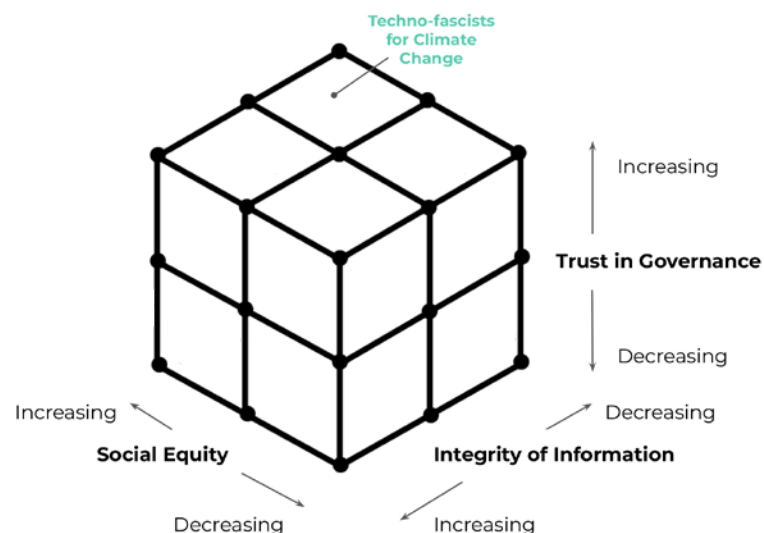
Overall, democracy is not faring well in this world except in Indigenous communities where Indigenous sovereignty has been restored.

Scenario 5: iRobotrix

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Increasing Trust in Decreasing Trust in Governance
- Decreasing Social Equity
- Increasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Echo chambers
- Trust without data
- Wealth inequality
- Polarization
- Dishonesty
- Poor resource management
- Ethical data practices
- Integrity of data
- Data policies

Scenario Description

iRobotrix is a world defined by social inequity and high economic disparity. Across Canada, there are significant concentrations of power, while decreased social capability has led to reduced social capital and a lack of community structures.

In terms of governance, the Canadian government is lagging behind in all measures of democracy, resulting in continued lack of trust in governance across the board. At the same time, there is an increase in integrity of information and ethical data practices. This has evolved in parallel with advances in AI which has enabled sophisticated social organizing and rebellions. Of course, there are also instances of nefarious outcomes including technology-controlled crime.
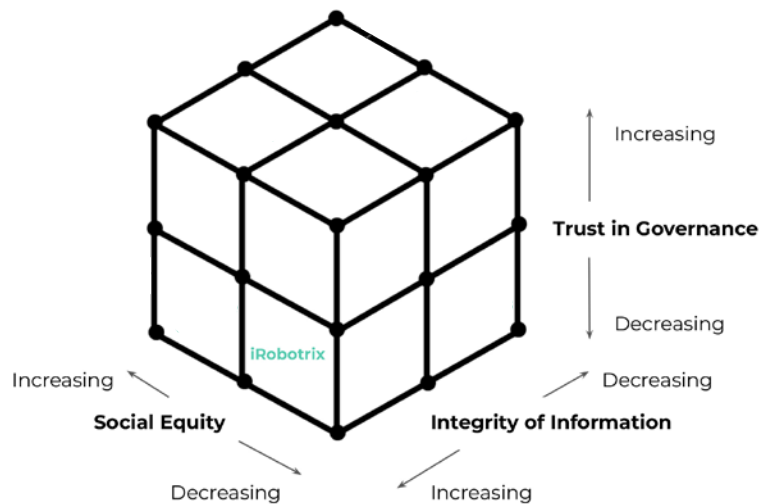
Overall, democracy in iRobotrix is fractured. Across the country, there is a presiding pessimism and lack of hope that we will realize a better future.

Scenario 6: SpaceX Owns the World

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Decreasing Trust in Governance
- Increasing Social Equity
- Increasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Literacy (Civic information and data)
- Government inaction, especially on economy and climate change
- Strong social movement
- Economic pessimism
- Increased trust in data over other knowledge systems

Scenario Description

In the scenario, SpaceX Owns the World, we see continued decreasing trust in governance with increased social equity and integrity of information. As a result, there is poor trust in organizations broadly speaking but more trust in data. Data is prioritized over other ways of knowing, meaning certain communities of people are trusted over others and over other knowledge systems. There continues to be significant polarization because everyone uses their own data, but AI is capable of comparing data extremely quickly.

In terms of government, Canada has seen an increase in populism. Corporations are also significantly influential which has had a detrimental impact on the environment. Climate chaos is wreaking havoc on communities across the country. There is generally poor government action so communities themselves are organizing in various ways to meet their own needs.
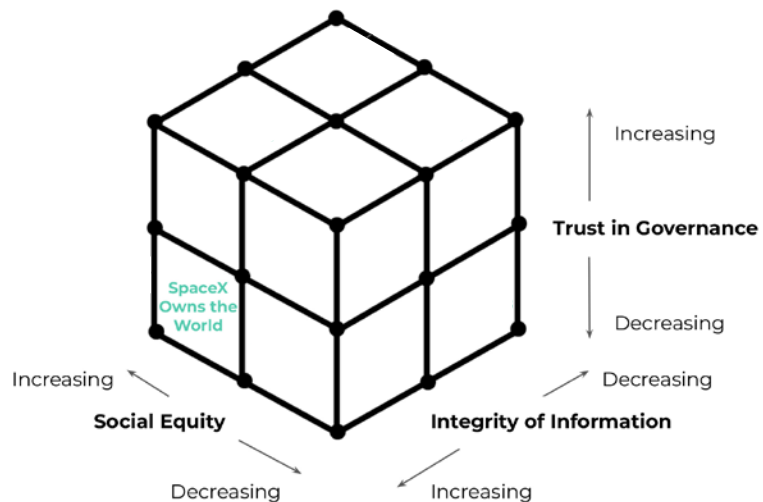
Overall, democracy in SpaceX Owns the World is fragile and experiencing many fractures.

Scenario 7:
Lone Wolf Eats Well

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Decreasing Trust in Governance
- Decreasing Social Equity
- Decreasing Integrity of Information
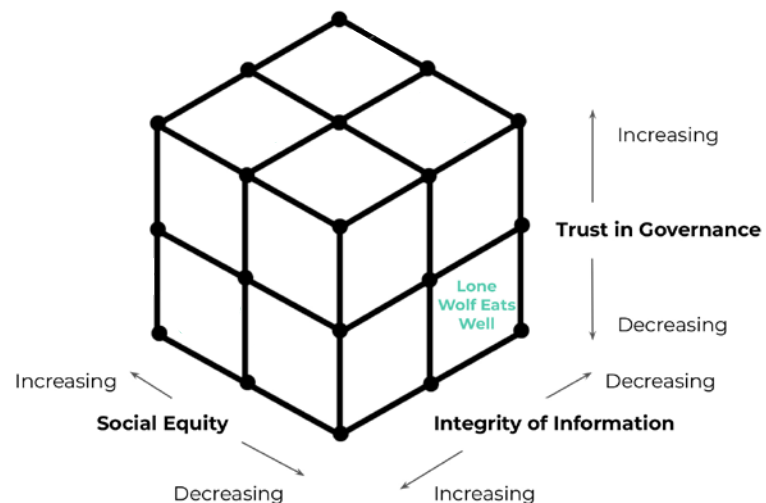
KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Atomization
- Concentration of power
- Collapse of social systems
- Unaccountable tech
- Increasing accountability of governance
- Wealth inequality

Scenario Description

Lone Wolf Eats Well is a world in which trust in governance, social equity, and integrity of information have all continued to decline. There are significant concentrations of power, both within governing bodies and corporate entities. Notably, there is no accountability for large tech companies.

Across Canada, there is increased violence and polarization and significant collapse of social systems. There is no public access to data. There is a lack of access to healthcare and adequate housing across the country, causing intersecting and rolling crises. Overall, there is a loss of trust in institutions and leaders, due in part to unmatched manipulation from seemingly anyone in power.

Generally speaking, there is no sense of solidarity which has led to deeply entrenched individualist mindsets and a vilification of any type of group action.

Overall, democracy in Lone Wolf Eats Well is barely functioning.

Scenario 8: SOMA

SCENARIO DIMENSIONS

- Decreasing Trust in Governance
- Increasing Social Equity
- Decreasing Integrity of Information

KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Social justice movement
- Governance and policy reform for wealth distribution
- Unaccountable actors
- Lack of critical thinking and engagement
- Dishonesty and corruption

Scenario Description

SOMA is a world akin to what Aldous Huxley described in Brave New World. There continues to be declining trust in governance and poor integrity of information and as a result, there is effectively no critical thinking across the population.

The government is thoroughly corrupt but the general public are unaware. This is in part because of how embedded corporations are with the government, working to prop up narratives that support their own interests. Society at large is complacent and the elite rule. And yet, there has been a general increase in social equity.

In terms of technology, the metaverse has proven critics wrong and is well-established in day-to-day life, working to facilitate the necessary facade for government and corporations.
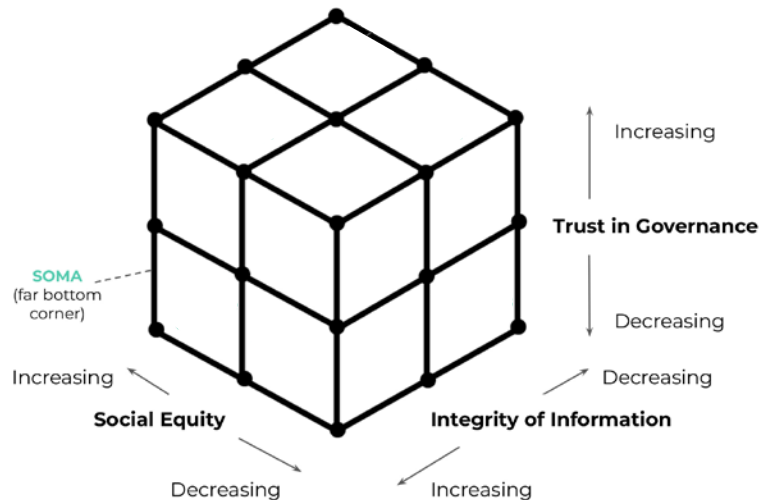
Democracy in SOMA is functioning on the surface but for anyone with a critical eye, it is evident that it is fraught with issues.