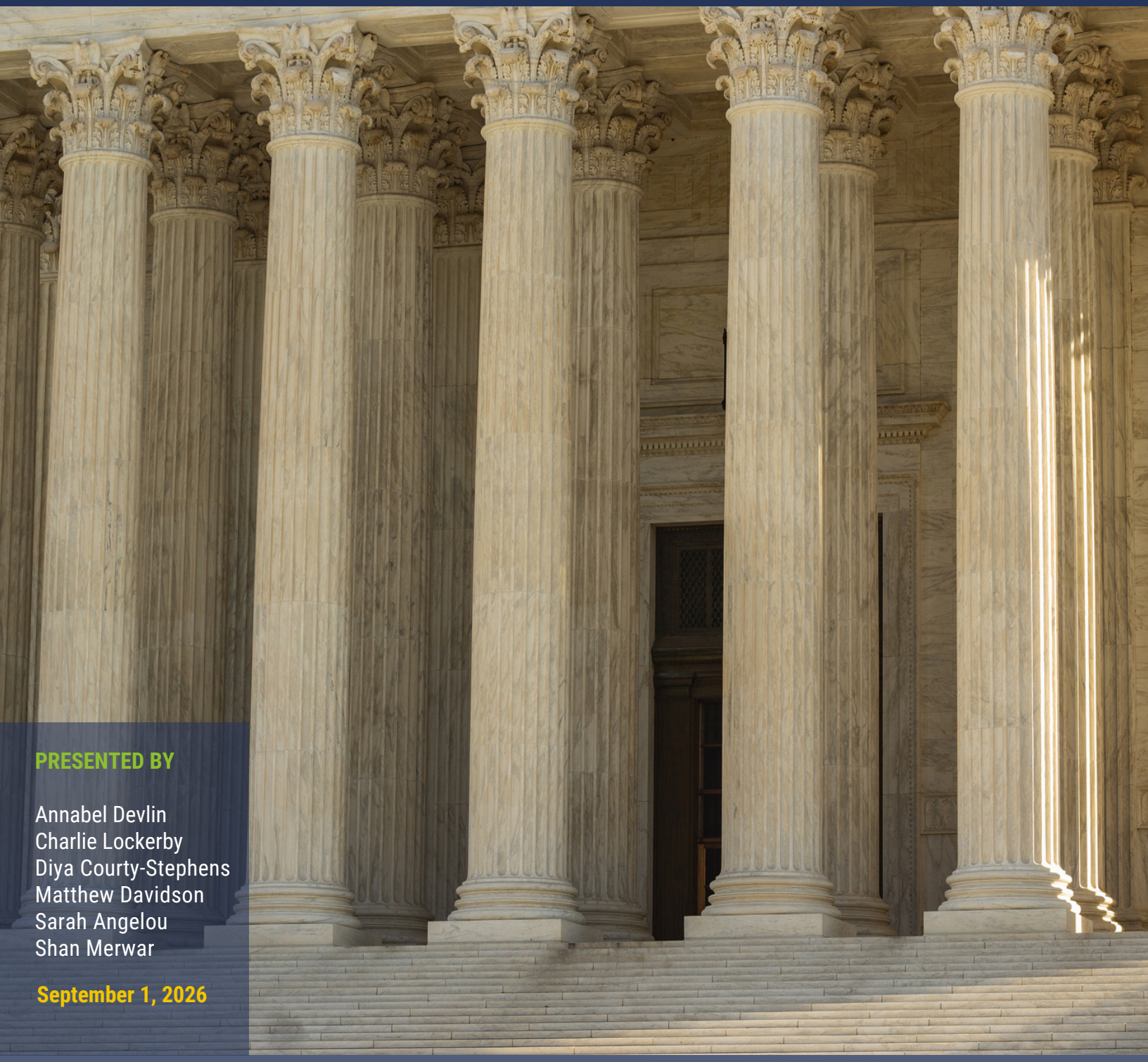
RE-IMAGINING DEMOCRACY

Exploring Alternative Governance Models and Their Application in Canada



PRESENTED BY

Annabel Devlin
Charlie Lockerby
Diya Courty-Stephens
Matthew Davidson
Sarah Angelou
Shan Merwar

September 1, 2026

Future of Law Lab
University of Toronto Jackman Faculty of Law

FUTURE OF LAW

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FACULTY OF LAW

About the Future of Law Lab

The Future of Law Lab is a platform for students, academics, lawyers, and other professionals to participate in collaborative initiatives exploring how the law will evolve in the future. We will dive into the intersection of law, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship, with programing dedicated to each of these streams. As a hub of interdisciplinary activity, we are dedicated to bringing together individuals from all backgrounds to examine the changing face of the legal profession.

About the Working Group

This report was written by Annabel Devlin, Charlie Lockerby, Diya Courty-Stephens, Matthew Davidson, Sarah Angelou, and Shan Merwar. It was edited by Julissa Gonzalez and Joshua Morrison.

This report explores alternative approaches to democracy and governance, drawing on historical and contemporary models to consider their potential application in Canada. It examines four distinct approaches—the Scandinavian governance model, technocracy, the Icelandic Althing, and sortition—highlighting their defining features, potential benefits, limitations, and relevance to the Canadian context. Through these models, the report considers how principles of technological innovation, institutional adaptability, public participation, and accountability could inform democratic governance in Canada.

About the University of Toronto Jackman Faculty of Law

Established in 1887, the Faculty of Law is one of the oldest professional faculties at the University of Toronto, with a long and illustrious history. Today, it is one of the world's great law schools, a dynamic academic and social community with more than 50 full-time faculty members and up to a dozen distinguished short-term visiting professors from the world's leading law schools, as well as 600 undergraduate and graduate students.

The Faculty's rich academic programs are complemented by its many legal clinics and public interest programs, and its close links to the Faculty's more than 6,000 alumni, who enjoy rewarding careers in every sector of Canadian society and remain involved in many aspects of life at the law school.

Re-imagining Democracy

Introduction

This report explores alternative approaches to democracy and governance, drawing on historical and contemporary models to consider their potential application in Canada. Through an examination of four distinct approaches—the Scandinavian governance model, technocracy, Althing, and sortition—the report considers how different institutional structures and principles could inform democratic governance in Canada.

Each section examines the defining features of these models, their potential benefits and limitations, and their relevance to the Canadian context. Particular attention is given to the roles of technological innovation, institutional adaptability, public participation, accountability, and democratic legitimacy. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for considering how existing Canadian institutions might incorporate elements of alternative governance models.

PART 1: SCANDINAVIA

Leveraging the Scandinavian Governance Model to Promote AI Development in Canada

Overview: Foundational Principles of the Scandinavian Model

Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, have a distinct governance model defined by the productive coexistence of market competition and social protection. Rather than treating social welfare and economic growth as contradictory, the Scandinavian model treats them as mutually reinforcing. Three pillars underpin this approach, discussed below.

a. High Taxation and Redistributive Capacity

Scandinavian nations consistently maintain among the highest tax-to-GDP ratios in the OECD, ranging between 40 and 46 percent.[1] These revenues fund expansive public services, such as universal healthcare, heavily subsidized post-secondary education, robust parental leave, and active labour market policies. These services reduce personal risk associated with economic participation. As a result, citizens are freer to take entrepreneurial risks, knowing that failure does not mean forfeiting access to basic social goods.

b. Enabling Entrepreneurship

Extensive social protection actively promotes entrepreneurial activity rather than suppressing it. Universal safety nets lower the opportunity cost of leaving stable employment to start a venture. Economic scholars such as Daron Acemoglu and colleagues have noted that inclusive economic

[1] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/revenue-statistics-2025_3a264267-en/full-report/tax-revenue-trends-1965-2024_98c75833.html#title-eea422594b

institutions, characterized by broad access to education, healthcare, and capital, generate more sustained innovation than extractive ones.[2] The World Intellectual Property Organization reported Sweden, Finland, and Denmark as among the ten most innovative economies globally.[3] The Scandinavian states' universal benefits reduce household-level risk, permitting citizens to engage in high-uncertainty activities like new venture formation.

c. Institutional Adaptability

Scandinavian governments embrace structural economic change rather than resisting it. For example, labour market "flexicurity" models, pioneered in Denmark, combine employment protection with generous unemployment insurance and active retraining programs.[4] Workers displaced by technological change are supported through transition, which reduces societal resistance to innovation. The state facilitates the movement of labour and capital toward more productive activities. As recognized in our previous research, this institutional flexibility is essential to sustaining legitimacy. Stable governance requires that institutions continuously renew their legitimacy through accountability, adapting to novel social needs, and responding to emerging challenges.

A Canadian AI Subsidy Program

Canada can adapt Scandinavian principles to the governance and production of AI. Canada already maintains universal healthcare, redistributes taxes to support social programs, and engages in government intervention in key industries. A subsidy program that embeds Scandinavian principles into existing Canadian institutions can foster AI use that improves productivity and welfare.

a. Subsidy Program Restricted to Socially Beneficial AI Use

Not all AI development warrants public subsidy. A prospective program should concentrate on three primary categories of AI application that generate clear social returns, including:

1. ***Improving social systems and public service delivery*** – tools that make public services more efficient and effective, such as healthcare, social benefit processes, etc.
2. ***Mitigating AI risk and build safety infrastructure*** – subsidizing safety could reduce the negative implications of AI use. Subsidies can support research on algorithmic accountability, bias auditing, and protection of confidential information.
3. ***Improving democratic participation*** – AI-assisted platforms that could increase meaningful access to political processes, such as regulatory comment systems and participatory budgeting applications.

---

[2] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/forward-thinking-on-technology-and-political-economy-with-daron-acemoglu

[3] https://unric.org/en/three-nordic-countries-among-ten-most-innovative-economies/#:~:text=Three%20Nordic%20countries%20among%20ten,Photo:%20Diego%20PH/Unsplash

[4] https://denmark.dk/society-and-business/the-danish-labour-market

b. Anticipated Benefits

For citizens to support public funding for an AI subsidy program, the government would need to articulate prospective benefits clearly. Such benefits may include, but are not limited to:

- ***Innovation and economic competitiveness*** – directed public investment in AI can establish Canada as a global leader for responsible AI development, attracting international talent and capital.
- ***Enhanced social assistance*** – optimized delivery of social programs could improve service accessibility and the distribution of benefits to those who need them most, directly benefiting vulnerable populations.
- ***Improved productivity*** – Canada faces challenges in declining productivity.[5] Canada has also recognized that AI adoption at scale can contribute meaningfully to long-term productivity.[6]
- ***Reducing power imbalances*** – using tools to increase participation in democratic processes can reinforce the ability to create agendas that best respond to the concerns of the majority, rather than small segments with concentrated power.

c. Limitations & Issues

- ***Public trust and technocracy issues*** – AI systems are difficult for non-specialists to understand. Like legitimacy deficits associated with technocracy, the public may not trust what they do not understand. This can be mitigated, though not completely, through transparent accountability regimes, such as mandatory impact assessments, public audits, and accessible plain-language disclosures.
- ***Expanded government interference*** – subsidy programs inevitably shape market structure. Incentivizing socially beneficial uses of AI may create unanticipated effects, such as slowing AI development in other Canadian industries.
- ***Labour displacement*** – even socially oriented AI generates displacement pressures. In the absence of complementary active labour market policies, the program risks accelerating job losses. This could be mitigated by drawing on the Danish flexicurity model for transition support.
- ***Undermining stability and tradition*** – rapid change, even beneficial, can be resisted due to discomfort with novelty. This is especially prevalent in democratic processes, which are traditionally rigid.
- ***Wealth inequality*** – productivity gains have historically accrued disproportionately to owners rather than workers. A subsidy program that does not adequately distribute the benefits of productivity to society at large may exacerbate inequality, even if it improves general economic performance.

---

[5] https://www.mckinsey.com/ca/overview/addressing-canadas-productivity-gap-a-journey-towards-global-leadership

[6] https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/sme-ai-adoption-blueprint

Implications for Democratic Governance in Canada

The Scandinavian governance model demonstrates how economic growth, social protection, and institutional adaptability can reinforce one another. Applied to Canada, the proposed AI subsidy program could support democratic governance by improving public service delivery and increasing meaningful participation in political processes through tools such as regulatory comment systems and participatory budgeting applications.

However, public trust and accountability remain important considerations. Transparent accountability measures, including impact assessments, public audits, and accessible disclosures, could help address concerns about integrating AI into government systems and democratic processes.

Conclusion

The Scandinavian governance model offers Canada a potential template for public investment in AI. A program that ties state support to social benefit, pairs economic growth with welfare protection, and reinforces institutional adaptability. Translating this template requires articulating clear benefits to attain public support while being honest about its limits. Developing this idea further will require considering how AI programs created by private developers, related to government systems and democratic processes, would be integrated for public use.

PART 2: TECHNOCRACY

Integrating Technocracy into Canada

Overview

Technocracy places decision making authority in the hands of technical experts, scientists, engineers, and other professionals with specialized knowledge. A technocratic system places emphasis on technical criteria over non-technical values in policy and decision making.[7] This system prioritizes expertise, data-driven analysis and rational problem solving to guide policy decisions. This system can enhance trust in governments due to decisions being rooted in rationality, but it also creates concerns for accountability, representation, and inclusivity. It can overlook social, ethical, or cultural considerations, or foster elitism or detachment.

This section examines technocratic governance through the examples of Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan, before considering how these principles could be applied in Canada.

Core Features of Technocratic Governance

(a) Technical experts in positions of power

A key marker of a technocracy is putting technical experts in positions of power to make decisions based on objective, technical criteria.[8] The common thread is what Chalmers Johnson called the "pilot agency" model: a small, elite technocratic body with the authority and expertise to set the direction of the economy, operating at arm's length from the political process even within formally democratic systems.[9]

(b) A highly bureaucratic structure

To support a network of experts in government, technocratic systems rely on large administrative structures.[10] In post-WWII Japan, the bureaucracy had significant power and autonomy, running the country.[11] Ministries historically played a major role in policymaking, economic planning, and policy implementation and regulation. As economic growth slowed and the economy started to stagnate in the 1970s, the power of the bureaucracy decreased and its prestige diminished. While their reach has decreased, the ministries continue to play a political role in their own area and in creating policy.

---

[7] https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/5/4/194
[8] https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/59269?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[9] Johnson, C. (1982). MITI and the Japanese Miracle. Stanford University Press. https://www.sup.org/books/politics/miti-and-japanese-miracle
[10] Ibid
[11] https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/40699/chapter-abstract/348427694?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=true

(c) Skew towards merit-based government positions rather than democratically elected leadership

In all three cases, entry into the governing elite was mediated by competitive examinations and educational credentials rather than by electoral mandate alone, creating a structural bias toward technocratic rather than representative governance. The common dynamic across all three is the construction of parallel tracks of authority: a formal democratic channel (elections, legislatures) and a technocratic channel (examinations, credentials, expert bodies). In each case, real policymaking authority tilted toward the latter, at least during the high-growth decades.
Japan recruited its elite class of postwar civil service through a rigorous national examination process, dominated by law graduates from Tokyo University.

Singapore identifies and tracks high-performing students in high school to recruit them into its public service.[12] Ministerial salaries are benchmarked to private-sector equivalents, enabling the People's Action Party (PAP) to recruit across medicine, law, the military, and academia.

(d) Close collaboration with industry

Each of the three states developed institutionalised mechanisms for government-industry collaboration, but the form ranged from formal personnel exchange to co-investment and joint R&D. The common thread across all three is that the boundary between government and industry is deliberately permeable. Rather than operating at arm's length, the state in each case is embedded in the economy in ways that blur the distinction between public authority and private enterprise. This permeability is both a source of the developmental state's effectiveness and a recurring vector for the governance risks that critics of technocracy identify, such as cronyism and regulatory capture/failure.

(e) Insulation from short-term political pressures

A recurring structural feature across all three cases is the deliberate design of policymaking institutions to be shielded from electoral cycles and popular opinion.

In Japan, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) operated with a degree of autonomy that allowed it to pursue decade-long industrial strategies regardless of which faction of the LDP held the prime ministership at any given moment.[13] In Singapore, the PAP's near-total dominance of parliament from independence onward meant that technocratic plans rarely faced meaningful legislative opposition; the system was democratic in form but produced the policy stability associated with insulated expert governance. In Taiwan, the technocratic ministries operated under martial law until 1987, meaning that electoral accountability was simply absent during the most formative period of industrial development.

---

[12] Tan, K.P. (2008). Meritocracy and Elitism in a Global City. International Political Science Review. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249743396

[13]

The common design principle is that experts need protection from the short time horizons of electoral politics in order to make evidence-based decisions on infrastructure, education, and economic planning, whose payoffs materialise over decades.

(f) Long term planning

Closely related to insulation is the positive capacity these systems had for long-horizon, goal-directed planning. Japan's MITI produced successive industrial policy visions that guided credit allocation and technology policy over multi-decade arcs, targeting textiles, then steel, then shipbuilding, then electronics, then automobiles. Singapore has institutionalised this through its Economic Development Board's successive industrialisation phases and through formal exercises like the Economic Review Committee reports. Taiwan's government articulated explicit technology development roadmaps, from semiconductor incubation in the 1970s through to the "5+2 Industrial Innovation" plan under the Tsai administration.[14]

This is qualitatively different from the incremental, reactive policymaking typical of pluralist democracies: technocratic systems tend to produce coherent, integrated plans rather than disjointed, negotiated compromises.

(g) State Capacity and Administrative Competence as a Legitimating Resource

In conventional liberal democracies, government legitimacy rests primarily on electoral consent. In these three technocratic systems, a significant additional source of legitimacy is the state's demonstrated ability to perform, delivering economic growth, infrastructure, public order, and rising living standards.

The PAP's political dominance in Singapore has rested less on ideological appeal than on its track record of governance outcomes: GDP per capita, housing provision, and education quality. Japan's postwar bureaucracy derived its social prestige partly from its association with facilitating the "economic miracle" of post-WWII recovery. Taiwan's technocrats were legitimated by their role in the semiconductor industry's success. These systems encourage citizens to evaluate government on results rather than representation, a vastly different social contract.

Current Applications – Comparative Case Studies

(a) Japan

The emergence of technocrats was noted by C. Wright Mills after World War II as new technocratic-bureaucratic industrial capitalist economies emerged. Japan was left devasted after World War II and transformed its economy with focus on technology; technocrats were viewed

[14] 5+2 innovative industries plan-Introduction

as important resources in rebuilding the country[15]. Japan made significant advances in manufacturing, developing infrastructure, and in technological research and development[16]. Economic success seems very intertwined with the political decisions and great trust seems to be put in rational, objective decision making.

Strengths:

- Utilizes predictable, rational problem solving
- Enhanced trust in governments due to decisions being rooted in rationality
- Technocratic societies tend to be economically successful

Weaknesses:

- Accountability – if technology and rationality is relied on, it can lead to a lack of accountability by leaders even though technical decisions still have an element of bias
- Representation – can overlook social, ethical, or cultural considerations
- Inclusivity – can foster elitism or detachment

(b) Singapore

After Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, it was facing economic and social issues, resulting in a low standard of living, community tensions and social unrest. The PAP emerged and prioritized industrialization and modernization. It populated leadership positions with the view of staring with intellectual ability before combing it with political consciousness. PAP has been in power ever since and continues to put leaders in power with the necessary skills, abilities, and education to pursue their goals. There is a sense that the "elite" are protected against the rest of society, giving them space to perform their task efficiently, rationally and effectively. PAP prioritizes rational and practical outcomes, which requires policymakers to engage in significant planning and analysis. The party utilizes utilitarian concepts to maximize both wealth and welfare.[17]

Strengths:

- Strong economic performance, taking advantage of the country's inherent strengths
- Meritocratic system that values achievements rather than political or economic influence or background
- Provides opportunities for talent development regardless of socio-economic backgrounds

Weaknesses:

- Currently only one dominant party – democratic values are compromised in some respects

---

[15] C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite – PS 361: Contemporary American Political Thought

[16] The Post-War Technological Progress and Government Policies | Technology and Industrial Development in Japan: Building Capabilities by Learning, Innovation and Public Policy | Oxford Academic

[17] https://www.researchpublish.com/upload/book/The%20Formation%20and%20Characteristics-03042025-2.pdf

- A meritocracy can reward only some, specific types of achievements, while discounting others

(c) Taiwan

Taiwan's political evolution from authoritarian rule to participatory democracy created a strong cultural emphasis on transparency, consensus, and civic trust. Unlike Western liberal models rooted in representation alone, Taiwan's democratic legitimacy increasingly depends on ongoing participation.

Platforms such as vTaiwan[18] institutionalize public deliberation in digital policymaking, including AI governance. This aligns with historical commons-based governance, where shared resources were collectively managed rather than privately enclosed.

Strengths:

- Embeds participation directly into governance processes.
- Counters technocratic AI governance by democratizing epistemic authority.
- Actively combats misinformation through "pre-bunking" rather than censorship.
- Builds trust by making decision-making legible and collaborative.

Weaknesses:

- Relies on high digital literacy and civic culture.
- Risk of exclusion for marginalized or offline populations.
- Scale and long-term durability remain untested under crisis conditions.

Key takeaway: Taiwan's approach demonstrates how democratic legitimacy can be strengthened through public participation, transparency, and civic trust. Through platforms such as vTaiwan, citizens can engage directly in policymaking, including AI governance. This model highlights how knowledge, technology, and governance can be developed collaboratively rather than centralized within government institutions.

4. Applying Technocracy Principles to Canada

Applying Technocratic Themes to Canada (procedural/substantive reforms)

(a) Technical Experts in Positions of Power

Technocracy would mean cabinet ministers appointed primarily for domain expertise rather than regional or political representativeness, such as a career economist as the Finance Minister, or an epidemiologist as the Health Minister.

Canada already has partial parallels:

[18] https://info.vtaiwan.tw/

- PM Mark Carney, a Goldman Sachs and Bank of Canada/Bank of England governor was brought directly into political leadership explicitly on the basis of his economic credentials.
- The Governor of the Bank of Canada, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and the Chief Public Health Officer all function as technocratic authorities with meaningful policy influence insulated from electoral politics.
- During COVID-19, Dr. Theresa Tam and provincial chief medical officers effectively set policy (such as lockdowns, vaccine rollouts, and school closures) with elected politicians largely ratifying their recommendations, a temporary but vivid example of expert authority displacing democratic deliberation.

(b) Highly bureaucratic structure

Canada already has one of the most developed federal bureaucracies among peer democracies. the Privy Council Office (PCO) and Treasury Board Secretariat function as powerful coordinating bodies that shape policy continuity across governments. The PCO's Clerk functions as a permanent technocratic spine of government, outlasting any individual PM. Canada's regulatory agencies exercise substantial rule-making authority with limited direct democratic accountability, a structural feature shared with all three Asian cases.

A more technocratic Canada would formalise and expand the coordinating role of these bodies, potentially moving more policy decisions out of Parliament and into expert regulatory processes.

(c) Meritocracy

This is the most culturally contested dimension for Canada. Canadian political culture places high value on regional representation, bilingualism, Indigenous consultation, and demographic diversity in government appointments, all of which are representational rather than technocratic criteria.

The tension is explicit in cabinet-making, where Canadian PMs are constitutionally bound by convention to balance regional, linguistic, and increasingly gender and ethnic representation, which directly conflicts with pure merit-based appointment. However, dissatisfaction with government delivery on measurable, concrete outcomes has reached historic levels, which creates a political opening for more competence-based leadership. The Carney government's brand is notably technocratic in this sense: competence, pragmatism, and crisis management credentials are prioritized over ideological vision or charisma.

(d) Government-industry collaboration

Canada has weaker institutionalised government-industry collaboration than the Asian cases. The arm's length tradition and concern about regulatory capture mean the kind of deliberate

permeability seen in Japan's amakudari or Taiwan's ITRI spin-offs is culturally and institutionally resisted.

Existing parallels include: the NRC-IRAP programme (National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program), SR&ED tax credits, and Invest in Canada. These are all mechanisms for channelling state resources toward private-sector innovation, though less directive than MITI or ITRI.

The Global Innovation Clusters[19] explicitly attempted the Taiwan/Singapore model of convening government, industry, and academia around national technology priorities, but have achieved mixed results thus far.[20]

A more technocratic Canada would likely deepen these industry partnerships, possibly modelling something closer to Singapore's Economic Development Board: a single strategic investment and industrial policy body with genuine convening authority.[21]

(e) Insulation from short-term political pressures

Canada's most technocratic institutions are already its most insulated: the Bank of Canada (operational independence since 1938), the PBO, the Supreme Court, and Statistics Canada all operate with formal independence from the government of the day.

(f) Long-term planning

In stark contrast with the Asian models, Canada has rarely sustained coherent industrial strategy across electoral cycles. While the CANDU nuclear programme[22] and the development of the oil sands through AOSTRA[23] both reflect attempts at longer-horizon planning, they are sectorally-confined. A genuinely technocratic Canada would require something like a standing Industrial Strategy Council with real cross-sectoral authority rather than merely advisory status.

Potential for Advancements in Key Areas

Real world applications of technocracies are typically focused on economic development as the main goal, but modern applications can focus on specific pursuits, such as climate protection or public health. The following examples outline potential areas in Canadian governance where technocratic principles can be utilized.

---

[19] https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/global-innovation-clusters/en

[20] https://universityaffairs.ca/features/whats-happening-with-canadas-superclusters/

[21] Tan, K.P. (2023). Culture of Meritocracy, Political Hegemony, and Singapore's Development. International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10767-023-09458-x

[22] https://natural-resources.canada.ca/energy-sources/nuclear-energy-uranium/canadian-nuclear-energy-technology; https://cna.ca/history-of-nuclear-in-canada/

[23] https://www.history.alberta.ca/energyheritage/sands/underground-developments/energy-wars/alberta-oil-sands-technology-and-research-authority.aspx

(a) Environmental Protection

Modern applications of environmentally oriented technocratic principles have been attempted in various countries. In 2019, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey introduced the Green New Deal (GND) intro congress which was inspired by President Frankline Roosevelt's original "New Deal". The strategy is to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in 10 years while creating prosperity and security for people in the United States. The project is at a national scale and attempts to decarbonize economies, adapt to climate change, mitigate disruption, and advance environmental justice. [24] The deal plans to raise money from taxes, fees, and borrowing before spending it on projects. [25]

The GND has a large scale and complexity which requires core elements of technocratic governance models to implement, such as expert-driven planning, scientific modeling, and technical administration. Implementing a GND would likely involve expanding roles for experts in government, implementing an evidence-based policy design, and using a bureaucratic administrative principle for organization. [26]

Using technocratic principles to implement complex, environmental change can make the process smoother and more successful. Large scale project implement requires subject matter experts and a bureaucratic structure that is core to technocracies.

Large scale environmental reform using technocratic principles can have limitations or drawbacks:

- Large scale, complex solutions can be costly or difficult to implement.
- The success of the solution relies on countless variables and complex scientific knowledge that is subject to evolution. Investing in and relying too heavily on this may be risky.
- Individuals or corporations in the private sector may be resistant to such drastic change for various reasons, such as fear of technology, reliance or non-environmentally friendly infrastructure.

(b) Healthcare Optimization

The Canadian healthcare system struggles with lack of resources, long wait times, healthcare worker shortages, and limited hospital capacity. Research is being done on how to best optimize these systems and utilize data to make significant changes to healthcare. [27] Some of these approaches include AI supported clinical decision tools, operations research initiatives to

---

[24] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379756326_Green_New_Deals_in_comparative_perspective
[25] https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The_Green_New_Deal_in_the_United_States_What_it_is.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[26] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379756326_Green_New_Deals_in_comparative_perspective
[27] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2514664524012748

optimize resource allocation and simulating hospital systems to reduce inefficiencies. Government intervention through technocratic principles can utilize this research and implement it in a comprehensive way. The current challenges include merging human and technological systems seamlessly and efficiently and creating widespread change across Canada. Technocratic principles can attempt to solve these challenges.

Healthcare improvements are better suited to integrated systems of processes and infrastructure, rather than isolated clinical decisions.[28] National data can be more useful and optimization strategies can be used across entire health care systems. Patient demand, funding, and resources vary widely across the country and more bureaucratic, big-picture solutions can have a more widespread impact.

Additionally, data-driven technology and AI can be used to solve system issues and decision making in healthcare systems.[29] For example, AI can be used to improve diagnosis accuracy, hospital resource allocation, patient monitoring, and predictive health risk assessment. [30] [31] This can increase efficiency and accuracy in healthcare. These technologies allow healthcare administrators to optimize system performance using large-scale data analysis, a key technocratic principle.

While there is potential to utilize technology in healthcare, there can be drawbacks and limitations:

- Healthcare is fundamentally human oriented, and it is important not to lose that nuance when making decisions relating to public health.
- Adoption of new systems or on new technology can be slow or difficult.
- Cost of creating large scale solutions or implementing new systems can be high.

(c) Incorporating AI into Policy Making

Policy making has the capacity to be more efficient and effective using AI tools, such as using data analysis, forecasting, and policy simulation.[32] Potential can also be unlocked in assessing the success of programs through evidence-based evaluation and monitoring.

---

[28] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2514664524012748

[29] https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/12213/chapter/5

[30] https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/12213/chapter/5

[31] https://arxiv.org/abs/2209.05457

[32] https://www.datatopolicy.org/ai-for-policy?utm_source=chatgpt.com

One application example is using AI for the accessibility and distribution of a large amount of policy documentation. The European Commission is using eSummary[33], a tool developed by the EU's Directorate-General for Translation, which uses AI to condense policy documents and generate summaries across all official EU languages. This tool will improve efficiency and accessibility of policy documents, which can increase decision support for evaluators over the EU.

Another application is using AI to evaluate policy. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses AI for environmental policy evaluation. It assesses over 1,500 environmental policies across 41 countries to identify key policy combinations that reduce emissions and offer new insights for climate governance.[34]
Sequential decision-making (SDM) algorithms can assist policymakers in recommending courses of action based on data analysis in various contexts, such as regulatory analysis, resource allocation, infrastructure planning, and healthcare.[35] Assisted decision-making can help governments optimize policies around public health, tax administration, and environmental protection.

While relying on AI in policymaking can increase efficiency and the success of projects, it is important to note that it is still limited by AI technology:

- AI is constrained by the type and quality of available data and bias in algorithms.
- Policymakers also may rely to heavily on technology, not checking the outputs sufficiently or avoiding accountability for decisions made.

Review
The deepest structural obstacle to technocracy in Canada is federalism. The Asian cases all involved either unitary states (Singapore) or systems where the central government had overwhelming fiscal and regulatory authority (postwar Japan, KMT-era Taiwan). Canada's division of powers places healthcare, education, housing, and municipal governance -- areas where technocratic planning would be most consequential -- primarily at the provincial level, with 13 separate political systems each responding to their own electoral pressures. Any serious Canadian technocracy would have to solve the intergovernmental coordination problem first, and that is an inherently political rather than technical challenge.

Final Synthesis: Technocracy and Canada
The comparative examples examined in this report suggest that technocratic governance exists on a spectrum rather than as a single institutional model. Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan each

[33] https://interoperable-europe.ec.europa.eu/collection/it-ai-justice-toolbox/solution/esummary
[34] https://oecd.ai/en/gov/issues/policy-evaluation?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[35] https://arxiv.org/pdf/2112.06833

incorporated varying degrees of expert-led decision making, bureaucratic capacity, long-term planning, and government-industry collaboration. Despite their differences, all three cases demonstrate the potential advantages of specialized expertise in addressing complex economic and social challenges. At the same time, each case highlights recurring concerns regarding democratic accountability, representation, inclusivity, and the concentration of authority within expert institutions.

The Canadian examples discussed throughout this report indicate that technocratic elements already exist within a number of major public institutions, including the Bank of Canada, the public service, regulatory agencies, and public health administration. These examples demonstrate how expertise can play a significant role in governance while operating within a democratic framework.

A recurring theme across both the international and Canadian examples is the tension between expertise and democratic legitimacy. While technocratic approaches may support evidence-based decision making, long-term planning, and policy coordination, they may also raise concerns regarding accountability, public participation, and representation. The experiences examined in this report suggest that the effectiveness of technocratic governance depends not only on technical expertise, but also on the ability of institutions to maintain public trust and legitimacy.

PART 3: ALTHING

The Icelandic Althing as a Governance Model for Canada

Introduction

Founded around 930 AD at Þingvellir, the Althing is one of the world's oldest continuous democratic institutions.[36] While it was reformed, its foundations continue to be used in Iceland as their democratic system today. The Althing emerged during the settlement of Iceland, when thousands of immigrants arrived during the landnámperiod, roughly 870–930 AD.[37] With no indigenous population, Iceland was a country made of immigrants and were free to create their own governmental model rather than importing an imperial structure.

Core Features of the Historical Althing

The historical Althing was structured as an annual assembly attended by all goðar (leaders chosen by the farmers) and some of their followers, known as thingmen. The goðar were not land-owning lords, rather, they were often farmers themselves who represented relatively small political groupings made up of free farmers. The assembly met for about two weeks in June.
A central institution within the Althing was the lögrétta, the legislative council. This body reviewed existing laws and created new ones. A notable feature was the public nature of the Althing. The meetings took place in the open air, which meant ordinary people could observe the discussion of matters that affected them. That openness strengthened transparency and supported the legitimacy of the system.

Judicial administration in early Iceland was structured differently. Courts were first established on a local basis as parts of regional assemblies. This made local dispute resolution more practical and responsive. However, as disputes arose between different regions, national courts were created. Judicial nominees could be disqualified for reasons including kinship. The seating of judges discouraged regional bias by exposing participants to disputes from other parts of the country. The ability for the democratic system to evolve to changing circumstances was a major reason for the Althing's success.

Mapping the Althing onto the Canadian Context

The Althing does not map neatly onto Canada, but it does offer several principles that could be adapted.

One obvious similarity is that both Iceland and Canada are societies shaped by immigration. That makes the Althing relevant as an example of how a political system can emerge from a relatively new and diverse settler society. At the same time, this comparison has limits. Unlike Iceland at

---

[36] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Althing
[37] Ibid.

settlement, Canada was already inhabited by Indigenous peoples, and any attempt to draw on the Althing as a governance model would have to account for the constitutional, political, and moral significance of Indigenous sovereignty, treaty relationships, and section 35 rights. In Canada, reform must operate within an existing constitutional order that recognizes Aboriginal rights. There is also a loose analogy between the goðar and Canadian elected officials such as MPs and MLAs, in the sense that both function as intermediaries between the public and political decision-making. But the differences are revealing. In Iceland, leadership was tied more closely to interest-based followings than to fixed territorial districts. In Canada, by contrast, representation in the House of Commons and provincial legislatures is overwhelmingly regional and constituency-based. That raises an interesting institutional question: should Canada continue to rely almost entirely on territorial representation, or should it experiment with some form of interest-group or functional representation alongside regional elections?

The Althing also has a stronger connection between the people and their elected leaders. Leaders were not distant national figures managing massive bureaucracies; they were closely tied to smaller communities and more directly exposed to public scrutiny. Canada, by contrast, has large electoral districts, highly professionalized political parties, and institutions that can feel remote from ordinary citizens.

Finally, the Althing's ability to adapt stands in contrast to Canada's constitutional structure. One of the recurring themes in Canadian politics is that the Constitution has become very difficult to change. The Constitution Act, 1982 sets out several different amendment procedures, including the general 7/50 formula, rules requiring unanimous provincial consent for certain changes, and limited unilateral amendment powers for Parliament and provincial legislatures in specific areas.[38] The result is a system that protects stability but often makes major reform politically and procedurally difficult.

What Would Implementation in Canada Require?

Canada could not simply adopt the Althing in its original form. The historical Icelandic model developed in a small, relatively decentralized society, whereas Canada is a large, federal, constitutionally entrenched state with a far more diverse population and a much more complex institutional structure. However, modern technology makes it more realistic to adapt some of the underlying principles of the Althing.

1. Digitally enhanced proximity between representatives and the public

One of the strengths of the Althing was the close relationship between leaders and their communities. In Canada, physical distance makes that kind of connection harder to achieve. However, technology could help to reduce that gap. Digital forums, social media apps, and online surveys could allow MPs, MLAs, and local representatives to maintain more direct

[38] https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/const_index.html

communication with constituents. AI could support this process by helping governments organize large volumes of public input.

2. Greater public access to deliberation through digital transparency
The Althing's open-air proceedings symbolized a form of government that was visible to the public. In Canada, that same principle could be updated through digital means. Rather than relying only on formal parliamentary broadcasts or written reports, governments could expand public access through livestreamed hearings and AI-assisted summaries of legislative debates that make complex proceedings easier for ordinary people to follow. This could deepen democratic transparency by allowing more Canadians to observe and understand decision-making instantaneously, regardless of where they live.

3. New forms of representation beyond geography
The Althing was not organized strictly around territorial representation like in modern Canadian institutions. The goðar led groups based on allegiance and shared interests. Technology could make it easier to adapt this principle to the Canadian context. Digital platforms allow people to organize around common interests, identities, or policy concerns even when they are geographically dispersed. This raises the possibility of supplementing Canada's region-based representation with advisory or participatory structures that reflect interests and communities that cut across provincial or electoral boundaries. A more extreme reform could be regrouping constituencies by interests rather than geographical regions.

4. More adaptable institutions through faster feedback and reform
A major reason for the success of the Althing system was its openness to change. Canada's institutions, by contrast, are slower to adapt. Technology could help address part of this problem by enabling faster feedback between the public and governing institutions. Governments can now collect, analyze, and compare public responses much more efficiently than in the past, and AI could make it easier to identify patterns in what Canadians actually want reformed.
The Althing model suggests that institutions should not become static over time. In a world where people are more connected, informed, and capable of participating directly in public discussion, there is a strong case for reviewing existing institutions. In fact, there may be less of a need for a representative democracy as people are able to vote on many issues within seconds of receiving a notification. Some institutions are too rigid for a society in which citizens can communicate instantly.

5. Safeguards against the risks of digital governance
At the same time, implementing the Althing in a modern technological society would require safeguards. Higher digital participation does not inherently produce better democracy. AI systems can reflect bias, privilege certain voices over others, or make opaque judgments. Online participation can also amplify misinformation and manipulation. There are also concerns about

equal access. Not everyone is equally digitally literate, which may cause some voices to be heard over others. As a result, any Althing-inspired reform in Canada would need to treat technology as a tool for strengthening democratic participation, not as a substitute.

PART 4: SORTITION

Design Lessons from Historical and Contemporary Examples

1. Representativeness of Sortition Bodies

Sortition is the random selection of citizens to compose a decision-making body. One of the primary criticisms of sortition is that random selection may yield such a body that is not sufficiently qualified or unbiased to make an informed decision. In a modern context, this criticism has often been directed at juries, particularly when the accused comes from a group unrepresented by the jurors. In *R v. Stanley*, the accused was acquitted of the murder of Colten Boushie, a 22 year-old Indigenous man, by an all-white jury.[39] The mechanics of jury selection were scrutinized in *R v. Kokopenace*, where the Supreme Court held that Ontario took sufficient steps not to exclude Indigenous jurors.[40]

a. *R v. Stanley,* [2017] SKQB 366

On August 9th, 2016, Colten Boushie, a 22 year-old Cree man, was shot and killed by Gerald Stanley, a farmer whose property he had entered. Stanley's second-degree murder acquittal was made all the more controversial by the jury, which was "all white-appearing."1 The Crown had facilitated this fact, intentionally or not, through peremptory challenges: the ability for counsel to dismiss a juror without giving a reason.[41] Through this process "all Indigenous-appearing potential jurors were excluded." Two months after the acquittal, Parliament passed Bill C-75, which prohibited the use of peremptory challenges. This legislation is an example of a reform of the selection process for juries, a sortition body whose decisions can produce impactful and controversial consequences.

b. *R v. Kokopenace*, [2015] SCC 28

The accused, an Indigenous man from Northern Ontario, appealed his manslaughter conviction on the grounds that the province's jury selection process violated his *Charter* rights. In a district whose Indigenous population accounted for roughly 30% of the total, only 4% (29/699) of the jury pool was Indigenous.[42] However, the Supreme Court held that "an accused has never been entitled to a jury of any particular composition."[43] They further held that mandating representation "would spell the end of the jury system as we presently know it." At the time the jury was selected, the province used property tax assessments, a method which excluded

---

[39] https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/skqb/doc/2018/2018skqb27/2018skqb27.html
[40] https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/15373/index.do
[41] Supra note 36.
[42] Supra note 37.
[43] Ibid.

Indigenous people living on reserve.[44] Today, health cards are generally used, which tends to be more representative. This case highlights the importance of the selection methods in sortition bodies.[45]

2. Mandate and Authority of Sortition Bodies

When a sortition body has been selected, it must then get to work on its designated issue, whether it be a criminal trial or a citizens' assembly. When its decision is made, whether this choice becomes policy or merely a recommendation depends on the mandate and authority of the body. As a design lesson, citizens' assemblies tend to have greater authority over local matters, whereas broader recommendations require legislative or public approval. The latter situation occurred over electoral reform in British Columbia, while Europe favours the former approach.

c. British Columbia Citizen's Assembly (BCCA), 2003

In 2003, B.C.'s provincial legislature approved a citizens' assembly, a randomly-selected body of 161 British Columbians, to study and provide recommendations regarding the electoral system the province should use.[46] In December of the following year, the BCCA's report recommended the province adopt the single-transferable vote over the existing first-past-the-post system. The assembly was noted for its independence; many observers predicted the BCCA would recommend proportional representation instead.[47] However, STV was never adopted in B.C. because the legislature required the issue receive 60% public approval in a 2005 referendum, with the BCCA's recommendation falling just short at 57% of the vote.[48] Subsequent referendums, in 2009 and 2019, have only endorsed FPTP by increasingly large margins. This case demonstrates the conflict that often arises between sortition and existing governance structures; though the BCCA has been credited with making citizens' assemblies more popular in other jurisdictions, including Europe.

d. Citizens' Assemblies in Europe

Sortition, classified as a form of deliberative democracy by the OECD,[49] has become more integrated into traditional governance structures, particularly in Europe. In Belgium, for instance, the country's parliament adopted a new form of committee, called Deliberative Committees, in

---

[44] 5. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, No Aboriginals Necessary: The Case of *R v Kokopenace," Centre for Constitutional Studies*, August 2015, https://www.constitutionalstudies.ca/2015/08/ladies-and-gentlemen-of-the-jury-no-aboriginals-necessary-the-case-of-r-v-kokopenace/?print=print.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Amy Lang, "But Is It for Real? The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly as a Model of State-Sponsored Citizen Empowerment" in *Politics & Society* 35, no. 1 (2007): 36.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Mauricio Mejia, "2023 Trends in Deliberative Democracy: OECD Database Update," *Medium,* December 7, 2023, https://medium.com/participo/2023-trends-in-deliberative-democracy-oecd-database-update-c8802935f116.

2020. Either initiated by Members of Parliament or a citizens' petition, single-issue committees are formed and composed of 15 MPs and 45 randomly-selected citizens.[50] The committee's recommendations are then put to a vote of Parliament as a whole, with MPs' votes made public to ensure accountability.[51] Moreover, deliberative democracy has also been put into action at a supranational level. The European Commission has emphasized citizen involvement in environmental policy, convening a 150-member citizens' assembly to provide recommendations to reduce food waste in 2021.[52]

Therefore, in reforming systems of capitalism and democracy, it may be more feasible to start small, with bodies designed to address local and single-issue matters, and build from there. Moreover, the most impactful reforms may begin by working within the existing system.

Applying Sortition to Canada

Sortition would not necessarily require replacing Canada's existing representative institutions. Rather, contemporary examples suggest that randomly selected citizen bodies can be integrated into existing democratic systems to provide additional avenues for public participation and deliberation. The experiences of juries, citizens' assemblies, and deliberative committees indicate that sortition may be particularly useful when governments seek public input on complex, technical, or politically contentious issues.

Canada already has some experience with sortition-based governance. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform demonstrated that randomly selected citizens can study complex institutional questions and develop coherent policy recommendations. At the same time, the Assembly's experience illustrates an important design consideration: the relationship between a sortition body and existing political institutions often determines whether its recommendations ultimately influence policy.

One possible Canadian adaptation would be the use of advisory citizens' assemblies to examine issues that are difficult to resolve through ordinary electoral politics. Electoral reform, climate policy, housing affordability, healthcare reform, artificial intelligence governance, and democratic participation are all examples of policy areas that could potentially benefit from structured public deliberation. Such assemblies could provide governments with informed

---

[50] 14. Ieva Cesnulaityte, "Deliberative Committees: When parliament and citizens work together," *Medium,* March 8, 2021, https://medium.com/participo/deliberative-committees-when-parliament-and-citizens-work-together-f3e3e2444a6b

[51] Ibid.

[52] 16. "Conference on the Future of Europe follow-up: Commission hosts first European Citizens' Panel on food waste reduction," *European Commission,* December 15, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7734.

recommendations while allowing citizens to engage directly with policy questions after receiving expert evidence and participating in facilitated discussion.

Another possibility would be the incorporation of mixed deliberative committees similar to those used in Belgium. These bodies combine elected representatives with randomly selected citizens to examine specific policy issues and generate recommendations. Such an approach could provide a mechanism for integrating public participation into existing legislative processes while preserving the accountability of elected officials.

At the provincial and municipal levels, sortition may be particularly suited to issues that have direct and visible impacts on citizens' daily lives. Matters such as transit planning, zoning reform, public health delivery, environmental initiatives, and local budgeting could potentially benefit from deliberative bodies designed to reflect a broad cross-section of the population.
If sortition-based institutions were expanded in Canada, questions of institutional design would likely be significant. Existing Canadian experiences with jury selection demonstrate that selection methods can affect the perceived legitimacy and representativeness of randomly selected bodies. Policymakers might therefore consider mechanisms that promote demographic, regional, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity while ensuring that participants have access to balanced information and neutral facilitation. Another design consideration would be the extent to which governments are expected to respond to or act upon recommendations produced by sortition bodies.

Potential Benefits

- **Enhanced legitimacy and public trust** – Sortition may increase confidence that policy discussions reflect the perspectives of ordinary citizens rather than organized interests, political parties, or policy elites.
- **Greater representativeness** – When carefully designed, randomly selected bodies can incorporate a broader range of demographic and social perspectives than many traditional political institutions.
- **Reduced polarization** – Deliberative processes encourage participants to engage with evidence, discuss competing viewpoints, and seek compromise rather than adopt adversarial positions.
- **Improved policy deliberation** – Citizens' assemblies often provide participants with substantial time, information, and expert support, creating opportunities for informed discussion of complex issues.
- **Increased civic engagement** – Direct participation in governance processes may strengthen civic knowledge and foster greater public engagement with democratic institutions.

Limitations and Challenges

- **Representation concerns** – As demonstrated by cases such as *R v. Stanley* and *R v. Kokopenace*, selection methods may unintentionally exclude certain groups if they are not carefully designed.
- **Questions of authority and accountability** – Unlike elected representatives, participants in sortition bodies are not directly accountable to voters, which may raise questions regarding the appropriate scope of their authority.
- **Administrative and financial costs** – Meaningful deliberative processes require participant compensation, expert input, facilitation, and organizational support.
- **Public acceptance** – Some citizens may question whether randomly selected individuals should play a significant role in policymaking.
- **Implementation challenges** – If governments are not required to meaningfully consider recommendations, sortition processes may have limited practical influence despite generating thoughtful proposals.

Conclusion

The experiences of juries, citizens' assemblies, and deliberative committees suggest that sortition can provide a useful mechanism for incorporating citizen perspectives into governance. Existing examples indicate that its effectiveness depends less on the principle of random selection itself than on institutional design choices concerning representation, mandate, transparency, and authority. In the Canadian context, sortition could potentially complement existing democratic institutions in areas where public trust, deliberation, and broad participation are particularly valuable. At the same time, questions regarding accountability, representativeness, and implementation costs would remain important considerations in assessing any future expansion of sortition-based governance mechanisms.

Conclusion

The four governance models examined in this report offer different approaches to democratic governance and potential lessons for Canada. The Scandinavian model demonstrates how economic growth, social protection, and institutional adaptability can reinforce one another, including through public investment in AI. Technocracy highlights the role of specialized expertise, long-term planning, and government-industry collaboration, while raising concerns about democratic accountability and representation. The Icelandic Althing emphasizes public participation, transparency, and the ability of institutions to adapt to changing circumstances. Finally, sortition offers a means of incorporating citizen perspectives into governance through randomly selected assemblies and deliberative committees.

In the Canadian context, these models present opportunities to incorporate different governance principles into existing institutions. The report considers how technology could improve public service delivery and democratic participation, how expert-led decision-making could support policy development, and how alternative forms of representation and public deliberation could strengthen citizen engagement.

Across these approaches, recurring considerations include public trust, democratic legitimacy, accountability, and institutional adaptability. Each model also presents limitations related to representation, implementation, and Canada's existing political and constitutional structures. Together, these examples provide different perspectives on how Canadian democratic institutions could evolve while balancing the benefits and challenges of alternative governance approaches.



Future of Law Lab



HENRY N.R. JACKMAN
FACULTY OF LAW
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

University of Toronto Jackman Faculty of Law