

“How Are Governments Responding to a Digital Society?”

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Thank you to the Centre for Media, Technology, and Democracy for hosting me, Professor Taylor Owen for sponsoring me, and Director Supriya Dwivedi for supervising my research!

Research Question

“How Are Governments Responding to a Changing, Digital Society?”

My research at the Centre was part of the Journalism track—that is, it focused on journalism in the context of media, technology, and, of course, democracy. However, the question that hovered in the background of most of my work was how governments are responding to the digital age. This was a common theme throughout all three of my major assignments at the centre, most prominently in Assignments 2 and 3.

The main way I analyzed this in my research was through examining legislation and comparative policies regarding the focus of each assignment. That is, to understand governmental responses, my work had to specifically analyze what “best practices” often looked like, how proposals made their way through legislative bodies, and even trace the roots of policies in some countries to their implementation in other states. It was my first encounter with public policy work, and I found it very rewarding.

Assignment 1

Modernizing the CBC and Updating its Mandate

The first piece of work I had was examining comparative policies towards public broadcasters across a couple different states. Several patterns emerged that I identified as potentially useful for use in updating the CBC’s mandate, an ongoing goal of the current Liberal government.

Role & Mandate:

- Structures varied wildly; US was decentralized, Switzerland and Belgium had multiple broadcasters for each language spoken, etc.
- No specific recommendation emerged here, but helped make sense of how each type of structuring produced comparative advantages

Funding Models:

- License model recommended for the CBC here
- Reliance on advertising fails to deliver CBC’s mandate—it should not want to be competing with private companies! That has never been its goal.
- Different administrations give different funding, potentially disrupting operations and quality from year to year.
- Licence model provides autonomy and freedom from political interference.

Inclusivity & Regionalism:

- Current mandate calls for French and English emphasis; update should include greater focus on production of content in indigenous languages!
- Production of local content is a strength of the CBC; however, laying out specific goals of how much content hours are made in certain regions or languages could strengthen its representation of all Canadians
- Potentially allocate money by language and population, giving a disproportionate amount according to a funding key to indigenous languages to ensure quality programming

Cultural Promotion:

- Canada’s greatest weakness—continual cuts to Radio Canada International (only has 9 employees now!) while countries like the US expand their cultural influence via branches like Radio Free Asia
- No way to achieve a real impact in terms of promoting Canada’s culture and image abroad unless the government is willing to back more funding for Radio Canada International, preferably via licencing model

Assignment 2

“Ancillary Copyright for Press Publishers” or the “Link Tax”

My next assignment was on the implementation of the so-called link tax in the EU and Australia, and burgeoning proposals in Canada, the US, Brazil, and the UK. The idea is fairly simple; if platforms display snippets of news from publishers, they have to pay to do so. Many news publishers are struggling to make money and publish quality news while platforms make money off the backs of their articles. Governments have had enough of that. Yet platforms began to fight back...

Initial Wave:

- Germany, EU take up ancillary copyright as a major cause, passing it into law
- However, platforms fought back massively, threatened to stop their operations in Europe, and even sponsored waves of protests (you may remember “Article 11” and “Article 13” from an EU copyright initiative in the late 2010s and how sites like Reddit protested these changes; Article 13 was the ancillary copyright proposal!)
- Platforms fail, but EU countries have not all transposed the EU legislature into their own laws... Google and Facebook fighting tooth and nail in lawsuits in France and Germany to not have to pay, or at least pay as little as possible

Currently:

- Facebook retaliated against Australia when their own version of Article 13 was passed but this backfired
- Now, major countries like the US and UK are looking to implement their own, improved versions—Facebook’s move seems to have drawn negative attention instead!



Protests in Hamburg, Germany, opposing the copyright directive in which Article 13 was included.

Assignment 3

The American Response to Platform Companies

My final major assignment at the Centre was examining the response of Congress to platforms, elaborating on what I had touched on in article 2 with regards to America introducing its own ancillary copyright bill.

Findings:

- Anti-big tech sentiment among Republicans has boosted Democratic efforts in this most recent Congress
- California Democrats are less supportive of initiatives over all, because they could harm Silicon Valley and thus the state’s economy
- However, if the bills are not passed before the end of the current Congressional term, they die...
- Looks likely that most of a large series of anti-monopoly and anti-big tech bills will meet that fate
- This does still show that there is some appetite among American legislators for these sorts of initiatives
- With that being said, it’s likely that Republicans and Democrats control 1 half of the legislature each next Congressional term, dooming any anti-big tech bills due to Congressional gridlock

Assignment 3 (cont.)



Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar and Representative David Cicilline, two significant figures in the formation of antitrust legislative proposals against platform companies in the most recent session of Congress.

Extra Work

I also had the opportunity to do two other things of note for the Centre! Firstly, I gathered bios for speakers for a recent roundtable discussion they hosted, which gave me insight into the types of work done by typical policy analysts. This gave me time to consider what careers I might wish to pursue in the future.

I also gave an overview of pertinent legislation making its way through Canadian Parliament to a member of the British House of Lords, mainly regarding privacy and safety, especially as it related to children. While it wasn’t the most challenging pieces of work, preparing a document for someone of such stature felt really amazing, and it also meant I got to examine current legislation that are very likely to become laws.

Sources

The [image](#) of protests in Hamburg, Germany by Wikipedia user [Markus Göllnitz](#) was obtained from [Wikimedia Commons](#) under a [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) license.

The images of [Senator Klobuchar](#) and [Representative Cicilline](#), also obtained from [Wikimedia Commons](#), are in the public domain.