Canada in Transition:  
Policy Challenges and Opportunities for Canadian Governments

Forward

We are currently in the midst of a watershed moment in Canadian history. The results of the 2015 election has and will continue to shape the political landscape of our country for some time to come. Justin Trudeau’s Liberals rose to power on an ambitious reform agenda and a promise to bring in a more open and transparent style of governance. During their first few months in office, we have witnessed them begin to implement some of the biggest items from their election platform. Fittingly, the theme for the latest issue of our journal is Canada in Transition: Policy Challenges and Opportunities for Canadian Governments. We have asked graduate students of public policy from across the country to submit papers on what they believe to be the most pressing issues facing Canada today. Not all the chosen submissions cover topics that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, but all are equally important matters of public policy.

One of the issues that garnered national attention in the lead-up to the federal election was the controversy surrounding the Senate. The Senate scandal led some to call into question the method of appointing Senators; while others advocated for the complete abolition of the institution. Yet, in his paper, A Civic Senate for a New Era, Nick Vlahos proposes another alternative: transforming the Senate into a body for civic participation. By selecting fellow citizens to sit on the Senate, in much the same way as jurors are selected for jury duty, an element of direct democracy would be introduced into our parliamentary system. The paper raises some interesting questions about the role of the Senate in modern Canada and the potential for democratic renewal.

More local but no less controversial has been the issue of the steady rise in housing prices in major Canadian cities. In Addressing Housing-Induced Poverty: Vancouver, Julia Chappaz sets out to decipher the true causes of Vancouver’s housing price situation, examine existing housing policies and identify some viable government-led solutions. She finds that the price rises have four dimensions: finite available land, increasing shelter costs of all kinds, foreign speculation and a lack of tax incentives for rental development. Having surveyed existing policies, her recommendations ultimately span enhanced federal data collection on foreign speculation, affordable housing finance and developer incentives.

Another area where more construction is needed is in Canada’s public infrastructure. With
much of it having been first built in the mid-20th century, Canada’s infrastructure is often described as being in need of extensive repairs. But for the government, arriving at a development formula that respects value for money has been contentious. In *P3 Infrastructure Project Bundling*, Luke Tincknell proposes the Public-Private Partnership method of private sector risk-transfer contracting be extended to large-scale bundles of infrastructure road projects. His findings suggest that in this way the strongest value for money can be realized.

*Redefining Terms of Commitment: The Canadian Public Administration and Web 2.0* by Amanda Fone, speaks to the federal government’s promise to bring about a change toward a more transparent style of government. The internet and social media, in particular, provide an unprecedented platform for civic engagement. These tools have the power to transform governance into a two-way street where citizens are not just the recipients of services but can also have a say in their delivery. However, Fone makes the case that the government has thus far been unsuccessful in adopting these new technologies.

Similarly, Alexandra Wright’s *Communicating in the Dark* examines ways in which municipal governments can make use of these new technologies to improve the effectiveness of their communications in emergency situations. Through a study of the City of Toronto’s response to the 2013-2014 ice storm, Wright also comes to the conclusion that governments have been lacking when it comes to adopting new technologies.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the authors who submitted papers for this journal. We would especially like to thank the professors at the School of Policy Studies and our outstanding team of editors for their dedication and assistance throughout. At the Queen's Policy Review (QPR) we believe that there can be no better time to explore the essence of the challenges facing Canadian public policy. We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

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