

Use of digital technologies by government

Government use of digital technology

There is modest level of public interest in governments making greater use of digital technologies, especially in terms of access to information, delivery of public services, access to elected officials and consultation.

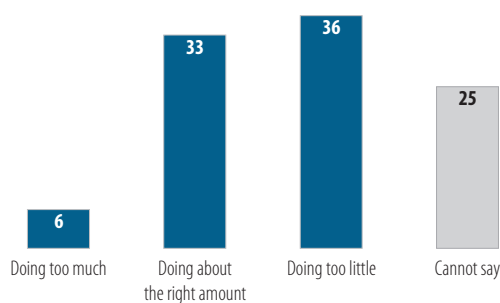
One of the hallmarks of the early 21st century is the rapid spread of digital technologies throughout all spheres of society and life. The primary impetus is coming from the private sector, but what about the way in which governments utilize digital technologies in their operations and delivery of services?

Are governments in Canada today doing enough to integrate digital technologies in the way they operate?

There is no public consensus on this question, but most Canadians are divided between those who say governments are not doing enough (36%) and those who believe they are doing about the right amount (33%). Very few (6%) believe governments are making too much use of such technologies, while another one in four (25%) are unable to offer an opinion.

This balance of opinion largely applies across the country. Those who say governments are doing too little to adopt such technologies tend to be men (43%), Canadians who are highly engaged (42%), and those who believe governments are completely broken (46%). Few in any group believe governments are doing too much in this area, but this view is most apt to be expressed by Canadians 18 to 29 (10%; versus 4% of those 45 years and older) and those with the lowest incomes. Having no opinion on this question is the most prevalent response among women, Canadians 60 plus and those with the lowest engagement.

Use of digital technologies by governments in Canada today



Q.24

Do you believe governments in Canada today are doing too much, doing too little, or doing about the right amount in using digital technologies?

Expanding government use of digital technologies. Where might governments expand their use of digital technologies?

Those who say governments are doing too little were asked (unprompted) to identify areas where they would like to see governments do more. Fewer than half could come up with any suggestions, the top responses being electronic voting (9%), better websites (e.g., security) (6%), communications with the public (6%), soliciting public opinion (3%), and health care or medical services (3%). Six in ten (60%) are unable to offer any ideas. This suggests that the Canadian public may not be fully aware of the potential governance applications of digital technologies (e.g., providing more effective means to gather public input, analyze policy implications, harness data, etc.) and their possible benefits for governance.

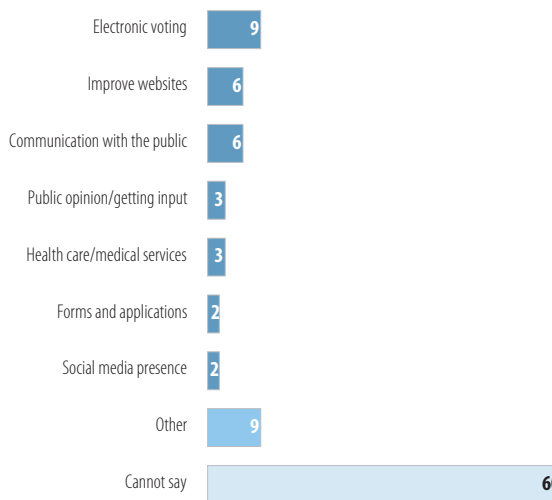
While many Canadians may not have given much thought to areas where governments might expand their use of digital technologies, most have opinions about specific areas when prompted. The survey presented five ways in which governments might do more with such technologies, and all are well-received, although some more widely than others.

Among the five areas, there is the strongest public support for governments to expand their use of digital technologies to provide citizens with access to government information and data (73% support, versus only 6% who oppose). Almost as many endorse expanded digital technologies for the delivery of public services in such areas as employment, taxation and social services (69%), providing citizens with more direct access to elected officials through online platforms (69%), and expanding consultation with citizens through digital media (62%). Very few oppose any of these ideas, with another one in five saying it would depend on the details. Support is somewhat lower for governments expanding the information provided by governments and elected officials through social media; half (51%) endorse this idea, compared with 13 percent who oppose it.

Public support for these forms of expanded government use of digital technologies is strong across the population, with few in any group opposing any of them. Support is generally stronger among Canadians with higher levels of education and income (which also includes most with high engagement). Support for expanding access to government information and more access to officials through online platforms increases with age, while it is the youngest cohort

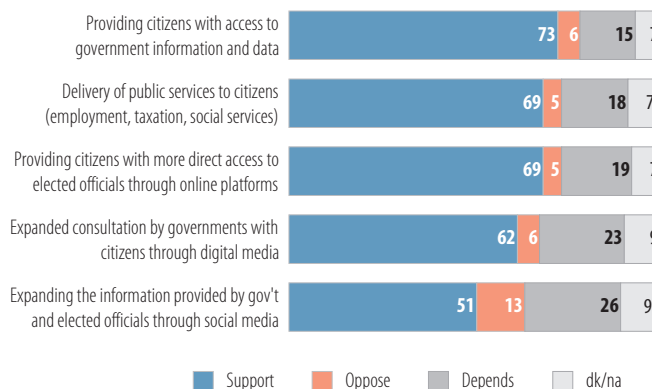
Where governments should make greater use of digital technologies

Those who say governments doing too little



Q.26
In what specific areas or type of services, if any, would you like to see governments make greater use of digital technologies?

Expanding use of digital technologies in specific areas



Q.27
Would you support or oppose greater use of digital technologies by governments in each of the following areas ... ?

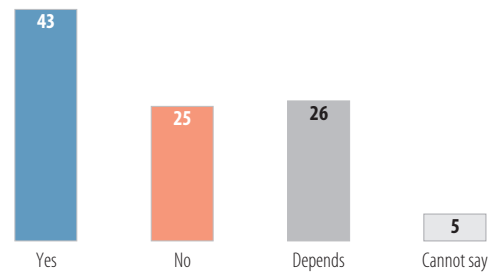
(ages 18 to 29) expressing the most interest in getting more information from governments and elected officials through social media. Use of digital technologies in the delivery of public services is somewhat more apt to be favoured by urban residents than those living in rural communities.

Text messaging by government. In some other countries (e.g., Great Britain), citizens are offered the opportunity to communicate directly with government agencies using text messaging, for services such as tax returns, employment insurance and passport renewals. This type of service has not yet been introduced or even widely discussed in Canada, and the initial public reaction is positive.

More than four in ten (43%) Canadians say they would be personally interested in using text messaging to communicate with government agencies, compared with 25 percent who say no; the balance say it depends (e.g., which services) (26%) or have no opinion (5%).

While text messaging has become an almost ubiquitous form of communication for youth, interest in government text messaging services is only marginally higher among Canadians 18 to 29 (52%) than among those 30 to 59 (44%) or those 60 plus (38%). Interest is also marginally higher in Quebec (50%) and among Canadian men (48% versus 39% of women).

Personally interested in text message communications for government services



Q.28

In other countries such as Great Britain, citizens can communicate directly with government agencies using text messaging for services in such areas as tax returns, employment insurance and passport renewals. Would you be personally interested in using text messaging to communicate with government agencies in Canada?

Concerns about potential risks

Public interest in expanded use of digital technologies by governments notwithstanding, most also express concerns about potential risks to the privacy of their personal information from deliberate or unintentional leaks, and to a lesser extent from government intrusiveness and poor policy decisions.

The survey confirms broad public interest in governments making greater use of digital technologies in a number of ways. Are there also concerns about potential risks associated with how governments use such technologies? The survey explored this question by asking about four specific types of risks.

Canadians are most likely to say they would have a big concern with the risks to privacy of their personal information from outside hackers (57%), and to a lesser extent when it comes to the privacy of this information that might be

compromised through unintentional leaks (51%). There is somewhat less concern about the integrity of their personal information being threatened by governments becoming overly intrusive (43% say this is a big concern) or that governments will end up making poor decisions because of the undue influence of social media (42%). In all four cases, very few (no more than one in ten) say the risk would be of no concern.

Public concerns across the four types of risks are more apt to be emphasized by women, by older Canadians, those with lower levels of education and income, and those who believe the federal government is broken. For instance, strong concern about outside hackers increases from 50 percent among Canadians 18 to 29, to 71 percent among those 60 plus.

Concerns about risks with government use of digital technology



Q.29

To what extent, if at all, do you have any of the following concerns about the use of digital technologies by governments in Canada ... ?