

## ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MAP LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

**BULLETIN****The data is falling!****GIS Trends**

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**Review**

At the risk of typecasting myself, this GIS Trends column offers another angle on data preservation (see my "[Here Today, Here Tomorrow...](#)" piece from the Summer 2024 issue, linked in the references section below). While last time we discussed the loss of research outputs and the data hosted therein with the retirement of Esri's "Classic Story Maps", today we discuss the loss of more "stable" data sources, namely government sources. As we've seen, even something as simple as the name of a place (see Treisman, 2025 on the Gulf of Mexico) can be changed, though even that can lead to a question of changed for who (see Thiessen, 2025 on Denali).

GIS work is conducted by collecting, overlaying, and the interaction between multiple sources of trustworthy and/or authoritative data. Much of this data is produced by governments as part of their work that plays out within the tension of power in society. Government manages the tools and information that allow freedoms within society, be that freedom of life, liberty, and security of person; freedom of learning about and engaging with the structures that maintain our way of life; or the freedom to reject or resist the imposition of ideals contrary to the freedoms to which we have a right. Within that broad and nebulous point of discussion, it is necessary that we can trust a government to act in good faith and provide the information needed to support our knowledge. Information restrictions, like our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, evince the tensions involved in this, and we accept the need for such restrictions while engaging with the question of where the

line of restriction ought to lie – a prime example being the Globe and Mail's Secret Canada reporting and database of Freedom of Information requests.

Recent geopolitical events have brought many changes, concerns, and problems to the fore in our ability to engage with governments, be they internal or international. Our colleagues in the United States, faced with conflicts between governing members and their bureaucracies, have engaged in various data preservation and rescue efforts, capturing data and housing it in institutions external to those now under threat – see the SDOH & Place Project {Healthy Regions & Policies (HeRoP) Lab. (n.d.B)}. Geospatial and other data under threat have been stored in various locations, including institutional repositories and server spaces. Access being maintained relied, and relies, on the ability to find, collect, and organize the information before it disappears (which implies some foreknowledge that something might disappear), as well as the courage to present information that people with agendas and money to influence those agendas desire to threaten. Ultimately, strength lies not in suppressing information but in making it available, even if it may create a problem for those making it so.

As noted, these issues are currently happening in the United States, but similar things can occur in Canada. With the spread of political tactics through groups such as the International Democracy Union – an ironic name indeed – and the movement toward more autocratic rule, the availability and preservation of data is no longer solely under the basic threat of destruction due to supersession or through standard rot of electronic ephemerality, but also through the concerted efforts to undermine the ability of the populace to learn about, and potentially challenge, the powers above. In short, we are losing power over data availability, and without concerted effort preservation is less and less of a guarantee.

So, where does this leave us? Well, now is a good time to review modes and methods of preserving data and to begin the process, not just relying on services such as the Internet Archive (under regular threat) but through other modes of preservation. And dispersing that preservation across multiple modes, as day by day there seems to be more of a threat not just to that being preserved, but to those who do the preserving. Perhaps that is hyperbole, and I am merely Chicken Little shouting about a falling sky; I'm sure our friend the fox will invite us to join them for a bit of reason.

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