

**Ideal World:**

High speed, mostly unencumbered, internet provided as a free or low-cost utility to all citizens. Independent agencies regulate the top-level domains to ensure partially that the internet is relatively safe to use (this is already somewhat the case in the US, but not abroad).

Digital rights are constitutionally, or at least legislatively, protected.

Net neutrality is codified.

Digital Bill of Rights that includes the right to:

- Know when and how your private data is being accessed by any party on the internet
- Deny the sale of your personally data easily and comprehensively
- Opt out of sharing any data at all
- Control fully what data is shared
- Monetize your private data
- Know where your data is stored by internet marketers and advertisers
- Easy, secure access to that data
- Delete all private data on a given website
- Browse securely and without surveillance by corporate or governmental entities

**Practical World:**

(I'm feeling pessimistic this evening.)

Free or low-cost high speed internet is a reality for only a handful of people in this country. ISPs fight hard to prevent governments from declaring them utilities and [have repeatedly shut down local government efforts to provide high speed internet as a service to citizen](#). Dark money from ISP lobbies and intransigence in national politics make a comprehensive, nationwide initiative unlikely.

Special interests are an enduring problem in American politics, not exclusively but especially with the Republican Party. If the filibuster rule in the US Senate is not eliminated a legislated digital bill of rights is unlikely. I think it's a safe bet to say there will never be a constitutionally protected right to digital privacy. I have no expectation that any of those rights listed above could be codified in the near future.

If marketing and advertising become too intrusive, luxury privacy software and hardware markets (similar to current VPN markets) will further develop to protect the digital privacy of those who can afford the services. For folks without the means to pay to protect their digital privacy, they will fall victim to depraved online marketers, scam artists, and electioneers who can use finely tuned algorithms to target unsuspecting digital citizens. It will be a digital hellscape. (This is really positive stuff, huh?)

Net neutrality is probably the most attainable piece in the next election cycle, if Ajit Pai is replaced as FCC chairperson and the legislative chambers agree to take on new legislation. I still have my doubts.

The reality is that we cannot expect this government or any government so infiltrated with dark money to protect our digital rights. To protect their privacy, folks will have to rely on VPNs, non-tracking browsers, and take meticulous care when accessing websites. The [NYC Mesh](#) is a promising development that could circumvent ISPs in the region.

**Most Important Thing to Teach Our Students**

In addition to the points I made in the async channel on Slack: I would teach my students that nothing is free. They are paying for an app or service with their personal, private data and that they should be discerning when making those decisions. Unfortunately, many of my students live well below the poverty line so they can't also afford to pay for those services with cash or credit, so it's important to be sensitive about that situation and steer away from judging and toward informing.