THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CITIZEN IN THE E-GOVERNANCE & E-DEMOCRACY EQUATION

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INTRODUCTION

Electronic Governance is a growing phenomenon within public sector institutions around the world and is emerging as a significant discipline within the field of public administration. It is the movement of governments online to deliver their services and programs, to provide government information, and to interact with the citizen, all electronically. This is resulting in the formation of new relationships between the citizen and the state. E-governance differs from e-government: the latter constitutes the way public sector institutions use technology to apply public administration principles and conduct the business of government; it is government using new tools to enhance the delivery of existing services (Okot-Uma, 2000). E-governance includes the vision, strategies, planning, leadership and resources needed to carry this out, i.e. the ways that political and social power are organized and used.

Included within the concept of e-governance is e-democracy, which deals with how the citizen interacts with government or influences the legislative or public sector process. It seeks to engage the citizen with governments and legislatures through the use of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is this new dynamic that is developing between the citizen and government that this thesis explores, and evaluates what impact, if any, the new ICTs are having on citizen participation in the government decision-making processes.

Much of what has been written on e-governance reflects that this development

is mainly concerned with how governments attempt to organize themselves for the delivery of their programs. Although there is a good deal of discussion about delivery of services to the citizen, there is little evidence that the citizen is having any significant input into how e-government will evolve. Nor does there seem to be as much concern about how these new technological tools might enable the citizen to have a greater input into the decision-making processes of government. There are some notable exceptions, but on the whole, the major concern is for greater efficiency in delivery of government programs and services, and the provision of more information from the government to the citizen, i.e. it is a "top-down" vision of the government-citizen relationship.

This vision perpetuates the "command and control" process whereby government decides what they think the citizen wants, then conducts surveys and focus groups on what the government perceives are citizens' needs, and implements the service or program based on those results. However, because of the increased use of ICTs by the citizenry, when a government service is now incorrectly or poorly introduced online by a department or agency, this can simply result in citizen apathy towards the service and a significant waste of taxpayer dollars, e.g. offering services online that are beyond the needs or wants of the citizen. One such example occurred in the state of Victoria, Australia, where instead of incrementally providing a variety of services that people could learn to use, the department responsible created a mammoth site with a plethora of unwanted options (Holmes, 2000: 25).

Knowledge is power, and when a government agency introduces these services online in an effective way this can result in giving some measure of power to the citizen, through the citizen's acquisition of information. The provision of government information on web sites now imparts a measure of greater power to citizens as they now have access to data that was known and used by government agencies, but was formerly difficult for the public to obtain. The distribution of knowledge results in some distribution of power and government knowledge is no longer restricted to the political and bureaucratic elite.

I will argue that true citizen empowerment, be it electronic or otherwise, would provide not only answers but would engage the citizen in the determination of what questions are to be asked and who decides the issues. Chapter Two will outline to what extent some countries such as Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Singapore, India and Australia, have implemented many electronic service delivery mechanisms, i.e. e-government. Chapter Three will assess to what extent, if any, governments in Canada, US and UK are engaging the citizen in terms of e-democracy, and what impact this might or might not be having on the democratic process. This thesis will not deal with the range of complexes nor structures of regulation that shape and manage the various aspects of our lives by the modern state. Rather than focusing on the use of these ICTs from the government perspective, this thesis will address their potential for effectiveness in increasing citizen participation.

By focusing on what way e-government redefines the traditional relationship

between the citizen and the state, my research will hope to answer the following question: *How has the use of the new information and communications technologies in e-governance changed the traditional relationship between the citizen and the state, and what are the potentials for future electronic participation by the citizen?*

CHAPTER 1: THE PROMISE OF E-GOVERNANCE

1.1 THE E-GOVERNANCE DEBATE

The debate regarding e-governance is most often polarized between those who feel that the new ICTs will enhance the participation by the citizen in the government policy decision-making process, and those who feel that it will simply be business as usual via a new medium. The arguments range from a promise that the new technologies will completely revitalize democracy, giving more power to the citizen, to the opposite position that it will do nothing more than enhance existing mechanisms to deliver government services in a more efficient manner. But, as the subjects of e-government and e-democracy are in their nascent stages, there appears to be very little empirical data to support either side of these arguments.

Occasionally, there are those who say that they do not wish to enter into the conventional debate and choose a different line of inquiry, as in the case of Pippa Norris. Norris collected some empirical data in support of her argument that new ICTs will simply strengthen existing democratic institutions (Norris 2001). She conducted an examination of 98 websites of the 179 democratic countries around the

world, regarding the quality of each website and the information provided on it – i.e. the "top-down" aspect of democracy in providing information to create an informed citizenry. However, her book was inconclusive regarding the equally important "bottom-up" aspect of providing a greater voice for the citizen in the decision-making processes of government. Additionally, she claimed that it was not the function of a parliamentary website to provide the bottom-up aspect.

There are two main avenues of citizen participation in e-governance that are currently being pursued by some governments: online voting and online consultation. However, there are other forms of participatory democracy, such as input into policy decisions, town meetings, online public hearings, and organization of like-minded individuals and groups through global networking and the building of online communities. This thesis will seek to determine what potentials the new ICTs have for the citizen in relation to this understanding of e-governance.

1.2 PROMISE OR POLITICS AS USUAL?

Current literature suggests that e-governance has to do with the ways in which public sector agencies will deliver government services to the citizen (Okot-uma 2000; Holmes 2001; Caston and Tapscott 1992). It also suggests that e-governance is about the ways in which public sector organizations might have to transform themselves because of the impacts ICTs are having on governments. These authors posit that the new ICTs will create change within government organizations as agencies and departments increasingly develop transactions with the citizen. The programs being

developed are mainly about how government will deliver services to the citizen, not how to bring the citizen into the democratic or decision-making process. There is less discussion on what the role of the citizen will be in these new environments or whether there may be a transformative process whereby tools will be developed to engage the citizen in the activities of government. The dominant discourse on e-governance is about mechanisms to deliver services and create transactions with the citizen, not about developing changes involving the citizen in government. [1]

The literature reflects mixed opinions as to how the new ICTs will impact on the forms of democracy. Clift believes that as governments deliver more services online there will be a dramatic shift in the willingness of citizens to use the various tools of e-democracy. [2] This stream of thought contends that the development of e-governance will inevitably lead to e-democracy. The belief is that an online population, using ICTs, especially the Internet in all aspects of their lives, will expect government itself to be more and more online, and will have greater expectations from government such as speed of access to information and services, interactivity, and security of information (Holmes 2001:10-11).

But simply because government engages in online activities with the citizen does not necessarily mean that mechanisms for e-democracy will follow. Many public servants see a number of administrative difficulties in doing even simple online consultations, and say that they are not ready for citizen participation (Human

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[1] <http://www.electronicgov.net> (June 6, 2003)
[2] <http://www.e-democracy.org> (November 15, 2002)

Resources and Development Canada 2001:16). Others, such as Ann Macintosh of the International Teledemocracy Centre in Scotland, argue that the development of online engagement tools will bring more citizens into the democratic process. [3] Yet the Scottish Centre, while not in government, is government funded and works closely with the Scottish Executive and local councils in developing tools and the appropriate questions to ask citizens regarding government policies for which government agencies are seeking input. These projects work on agendas that are set by government and do not reflect direct initiatives from the citizens themselves.

Individuals such as Clift and Macintosh work closely with governments to develop policies and tools to bring the citizen into the process of both getting information from government and contributing to the decision-making process at some level (Clift 2002; Macintosh 2002). They, along with a number of groups and individuals around the world, are actively working to develop such tools in the belief that this will lead to wider electronic democracy. However, Macintosh reports that "there is, as of yet, no formal link between technology, civic inclusion and participation" (Macintosh 2001).

Some believe that if parliaments and other elected bodies do not institute reforms to develop e-democracy mechanisms there will be severe political consequences. Such consequences could include failure of political candidates unfamiliar or uncomfortable with these technologies to be elected (Clift 2002;

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[3] <http://www.itc.napier.ac.uk> (June 12, 2002)

Rheingold 1993). These views are based on the belief that the online generation expect their leaders to communicate to them in this new generation's medium of use.

Such arguments assume that there are a host of citizens arming themselves with the tools to have a direct influence on legislative and policy development, and who also have the desire and ability to engage in the emerging e-democracy process. However, the current literature does not reflect any empirical evidence that there is a significant shift towards citizen engagement in the political process due to ICTs. In fact, democracy is equally threatened in developed countries by a laissez-faire attitude that leads to inequalities, and power becomes concentrated in the hands of specialized groups (Touraine 1997:17). Recognizing this to some degree, Clift has also focused on building online communities to mobilize like-minded individuals around the world, to increase their communication with each other in regard to current issues so that their voices may be heard (Clift 2002).

Officials in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are seeking ways to combat voter apathy, especially because of the declining engagement amongst young people. For example, in the UK, only 59.7% of voters voted in the last general election, and less than 30% of young people under 30 (*The Independent*, July 2001:12). Some argue that this is a political problem, and there will not be significant shifts to new forms of democracy or participation by the citizenry because of ICTs. They suggest instead that the new ICTs will serve only to strengthen

existing democratic institutions, though not dramatically change legislative bodies. (Norris 2001; Alcock 2001).

On the other end of the spectrum, some contend that while the Internet provides new sources of information for those who are interested in political affairs, they remain skeptical about its potential to transform the participation of the citizenry. They posit that it will be business as usual and that the new ICTs will not create the great revival of democracy as argued by proponents above (Davis and Owen 1998; Barney 2000). Others argue that social and economic biases will continue on the Internet, further marginalizing those who have little interest in or knowledge of public affairs. Margolis and Resnick insist that initial expectations for such a democratic revival were short-lived and simply produced "politics as usual" (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

1.3 GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENTALITY

The electronic form of governance emerges in the midst of various theories about governance, one of which is the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, wherein he articulates the kinds of rationality integral to the art of government (Foucault 1991:89). Foucault is concerned with the "how" of governing, and for him governmentality is a "way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government." He uses "rationality of government" interchangeably with "art of government", to include who can govern, what governing is, what or who is governed (Gordon 1991:3-7). For him the most significant development in modern government

is the introduction of economy as the main objective of political practice, and population as representing the end or goal of government, with the apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism (Foucault 1991:102).

Additionally, Foucault argues that the governmental state is no longer defined "in terms of its territoriality… but in terms of the mass of its population with its volume and density" (1991:104). This new object of the government regards members of the population "as resources to be fostered, to be used and to be optimized," and in the long process that Foucault terms the "governmentalization of the state", the various means of ruling the population become incorporated within the juridical and administrative apparatuses of the state (Dean 1999:20). These same characteristics, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, can be shown to apply to electronic governance as it is presently evolving. All of this, I submit, is relevant to the new ICTs, which take their place as a new element in the art of governing.

Foucault also advances the idea of an interdependence between the art of government and what he calls the "manifestation of truth". Power, knowledge and truth are inextricably intertwined, as we are both subjected to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. By "truth" Foucault means "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true." (Foucault 1980:94) Truth is not apart from power, nor lacking in power. It is truth which then makes the laws and develops the true discourse that influences the effects of power.

Foucault describes the "regime of truth" for each society, as that which it accepts, the means and techniques by which it sanctions what is true, and those who perpetuate that "truth". He states that the system of right is an instrument of domination, though not the domination of one individual over others, but rather the many forms of domination that can be exercised within society (1980).

In reference to Foucault's work, Nikolas Rose further posits that there has developed a new relation between government and knowledge. Government has become connected, so that knowledge within government flows around a wide range of apparatuses towards the "production, circulation, accumulation, authorization and realization of truth" (Rose 1996:45). With regard to electronic governance, the manifestation of truth will bear investigation as to who determines what is the "truth" and the techniques by which it is sanctioned.

Further, in Foucault's view, governance is always relational and is exercised, in differing degrees, by both those governing and the governed. According to Foucault, the sites of power are dispersed away from the top. This having been said, it is recognized that Foucault does not propose that such a dispersal of power would be spread out evenly. He further maintains that in the art of government, "the task is to establish a continuity, in both an upwards and a downwards direction." (Foucault 1991:91). It is this "upwards" aspect that I wish to explore with regard to current modes of electronic government.

Foucault views power, in the way that it is exercised, as multiple and decentralized, as productive of social structures and knowledge, and ultimately as a positive rather than negative force (Turkel 1990:170). In a disciplinary society, power works by what he calls 'capillary action', arising from a multitude of individual sources. He insists that power must be viewed as something that circulates, rather than being localized in one place or in somebody's hands; that it is never fixed, but endless and open. In a 1982 essay, "The Subject and Power", Foucault argues that power is only power when addressed to individuals who are free to act in one way or another. He defines power as "action on others' actions" and hopes to see "a practice of free dialogue between government and governed" (Gordon 1991). Rose articulates a summary of Foucault's concept of the "power of the State" as a result, not a cause, of the various associations of "actors, flows, buildings, relations of authority" (Rose 1996).

When I began this thesis, I found these concepts very inviting and felt that the new ICTs could facilitate the dispersal of knowledge and thereby increase the power of the citizen, with a resulting increase in the citizen's influence and affects which may be exerted upon those governing in a democratic society. However attractive this may be, the research, as outlined in the next chapter, demonstrates that the new electronic forms of governance are most heavily weighted towards power from the top down, with very little power being exerted from, or dissipating to, the bottom-upwards element.

This thesis will take issue with Foucault's view of the state that it is "no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think" (Foucault 1991:103). He argues that the state has no essence, but rather is a function of changes in the practices of government, and that political theory has been too concerned with institutions and too little with practices. Foucault applies the same methodological process to the subject of the state as he does to the subject of the prison in *Discipline and Punish,* i.e. practices are prioritized over structures. (Gordon 1991:5-7)

The state seeks to maintain control of the new ICTs through regulation, and it does so increasingly under the rubric of economic fraud and of security. Most recently, legislative proposals have been made in the United States and in Canada, among other countries, to grant the state access to all manner of electronic communications and transactions, private or otherwise, under the banner of measures necessary for the prevention of terrorist attacks. Historically, in a democratic society, the elected government of the day has set and controlled the agenda. With the advent of interactive technologies and of citizens actively seeking online participation or making use of a government service, the relationship between the citizen and the government is beginning to take on a new form.

Citizens have been empowered by the new ICTs through increased

communication abilities, access to worldwide information, the capacity to communicate and interact online, and a host of other experiences dependant on the capability and need of the individual, and on the economic means to access the Internet. Governments around the world have developed many programs to cross the digital divides in their own countries, but as to empowerment of the citizen in its relation to having an impact on government or the political process, there is still much to do.

It is still the state that decides which issues will be included and how e-government will evolve. Consequently, it is the state that determines to what extent e-government will be implemented, how it will impact on the citizen, and how, if at all, the use of the new ICTs in governing will enable the citizen to interact with government. It will be my contention that by both regulation of the medium and by setting the agenda for implementation of electronic government, the power of the state – though not necessarily that of a "monstre froid" – far exceeds whatever increased role may be given to the citizen through the use of the new ICTs. In this respect, while many of Foucault's theories have enormous value in attempts to understand the current electronic mode of government, there are some that are clearly incompatible with existing conditions.

1.4 THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The theories of democracy are as numerous as those thinkers who have written about

it through the ages. So too the concept of the citizen and exactly who is to be included within the term has changed dramatically since articulated in ancient Athens. There are many conflicting interpretations of what constitutes a democracy, the meaning of political participation, representation, and scope of citizens' capacity to choose freely (Held 1996:xi).

Historically, the City-State of Athens was the first democratic state that engaged in direct democracy. In the nearly 200 years that democracy thrived in Athens, it changed through several evolutions. At the height of their practices of democracy, 6,000 to 8,000 citizens of Athens would gather almost weekly to form a consensus on legislative issues.

On first blush it appears this system was an ideal democracy. However, this was not a true democracy as we understand it today, as vast numbers of Athenians were excluded. Those not participating were the slaves as well as members of families who were considered immigrants (an immigrant family could be one that arrived in Athens as much as four or more generations earlier). Women were also excluded, thus eliminating over half the population from the process. However, the democratic practice in ancient Athens is an early, though flawed, example of the practice of direct democracy through the reaching of consensus amongst the participants.

Throughout the centuries, democracy has undergone major changes. The

size of the citizenry has evolved from a narrow, exclusively defined body who participated in a collective will within a small city-state, to a genuinely universal suffrage in many countries. Ancient principles of democracy have undergone a metamorphosis into what is today called representative democracy. Robert Dahl argues that this latter form of democracy leads to both accountable and feasible government, with the potential of stability over larger territories and longer periods of time (Dahl 1989:28-30).

Carol Gould, on the other hand, maintains that a theory of democracy is necessary that both elaborates freedom and equality, and effectuates them in practice. She argues that this form of decision-making should be participatory, to the extent feasible, and representative otherwise (Gould 1998:25).

Alain Touraine, distrusting participatory democracy as lacking in wisdom, and dissatisfied with deliberative democracy, advocates the need for a liberating democracy – where there is a "democratic will to enable those who are subordinate and dependent to act freely and to discuss rights and guarantees on equal terms with those who possess economic, political, and cultural resources" (Touraine 1997:11). He proposes this as a limitation on what would otherwise lead to the omnipotence of those who control the financial and information resources.

In such a regime, the concept of citizenship is based on a guarantee that all citizens of a country have the same legal and political rights, regardless of their social, religious, or ethnic background. This concept also carries the notion of an

actively responsible individual, though he further cautions that in modernized societies, it is in danger of being reduced to the "freedom to consume in the political marketplace" (1997:19).

The theoretical framework that I wish to call upon is that proposed by Joseph Schumpeter, as outlined by Pippa Norris, who defines representative or liberal democracy in terms of its structural characteristics, as follows:

> " 1. Pluralistic competition among parties and individuals for all positions of government power;
>
> 2. Participation among equal citizens in the selection of parties and representatives through free, fair and periodic elections; and
>
> 2. Civil and political liberties to speak, publish, assemble, and organize, as necessary conditions to ensure effective competition and participation" (Norris 2001:102).

Pluralistic competition allows citizens to choose from alternative candidates. Participation through elections translates votes into seats in government, promoting transparency, so that representatives can be held accountable for their actions. Civil and political liberties allow for multiple sources of information so that citizens can make informed choices. This model of democracy is useful to a discussion of electronic governance in that it gives equal weight to the value of mass participation as to the other two key democratic functions of politics.

Within this framework, and reflecting the classical liberal view of the role of parliament in representative democracy, government websites (though not specifically envisioned by Schumpeter), as a means of creating an informed citizenry, should therefore ideally serve two primary functions: "the 'top down' provision of information from the legislature to the public, and a 'bottom up' channel of communication from the public to the elected members [her emphasis]" (2001: 136). There have been arguments for many ways in which government websites and other features of the new ICTs have the potential to increase the democratic participation of the citizen. The debate is heated but it remains difficult to find systematic comparative evidence.

James Fishkin outlines four conditions that must exist for a greater engagement by the citizen: political equality, deliberation, participation, and non-tyranny (that includes the tyranny of the majority). A system that achieves all four conditions simultaneously he calls a "democracy of civic engagement" (Fishkin 1995: 34-41).

The Public Administration (PUMA) Group of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, that has been conducting extensive studies on e-government and e-democracy, has articulated three main components required for online interactions between government and the citizen: information, active participation and consultation (OECD 2002). Many governments have pledged to move in this direction but movement is slow. This may be partly explained by the

hierarchical nature of organizations and the current role of representative government in these democracies. External groups and individuals on an international scale are working to change this dynamic (these will be outlined in Chapter Three on e-democracy). Governments continue to move at a slower pace and in a different direction than those groups and citizens who are using the Internet to try to influence governments in their program evolutions, policy and legislative implementations.

Interpretations of democracy are so varied and conflicting that Held maintains that, "Democracy, as an idea and as a political reality, is fundamentally contested" (Held 1996:xi). However, the above groups and individuals, upon whose theories of democracy this thesis will draw, stress the importance of participation as a fundamental element in their interpretations of democracy. It is this element, a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy, upon which this thesis will focus, exploring the potential of increased participation through the use of the new ICTs.

It will not be the purpose of this thesis to discuss the relative merits of the various forms of democracy, nor whether or not it would benefit the society for the citizen to have a greater role in the decision-making processes of government, but rather to explore whether there is a potential for increasing that role through the use of the new ICTs and e-democracy. Do such technologies have the prospect of increasing the completeness of the democratic debates or the public's engagement with them? And if so, are those who participate representative of the entire citizenry?

CHAPTER 2: E-GOVERNANCE vs E-GOVERNMENT

2.1 THE NATURE OF E-GOVERNANCE AND E-GOVERNMENT

This chapter will demonstrate the extent to which e-government has been developed and used in several jurisdictions – from the local to the national, from large economies to underdeveloped areas – as an infrastructure backdrop to a potential evolution of e-democracy. It will not deal with the aspect of e-governance called e-democracy, also known as e-participation. According to the definitions used in Chapter One, e-government and e-democracy comprise the two different branches under e-governance. For many years now e-governance has been coming into its own as a subject in the discipline of public administration.

However, general discussion of e-governance and e-government as two distinct concepts has become blurred, and these terms are often used interchangeably in the current literature, with e-democracy relegated to the sidelines. In a recent paper, Andrew Acland, of the UK-based Dialogue by Design, includes e-voting in his definition of e-government, apart from e-democracy, and reduces the problem of voting online to one of security, likening it to shopping online. [4] Chapter Three of this thesis will deal more fully with e-democracy as the other arm of e-governance, and the difficulties attendant in its implementation.

One of the key findings as outlined by Stephen Rosell in the 2000 report of a

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[4] <http://www.dialoguebydesign.com> (January 12, 2003)

Canadian federal Roundtable on Renewing Governance, stresses the importance of dialogue and that it should not be confused with decision-making: "Dialogue precedes decision-making…" and "Dialogue is needed, in particular, when people with different viewpoints, beliefs, problem-definitions, backgrounds, professions, interests, values or traditions must find common ground, must build a shared framework within which they can work together" (Rosell 2000: 27). His is an inclusive vision of a broad public contribution.

A July 2003 report from the E-Government Policy Network of the Privy Council Office (PCO), "Transforming Government and Governance for the 21st Century", asserts that in their examination of e-governance and e-government the PCO concludes that "trying to establish a single definition for such a complex and diverse set of issues and challenges may be unworkable at best and unhelpful at worst." [5]

The PCO report states that its aim is to provide a starting point for more dialogue and exploration, and liberally refers to Rosell's work. Yet by eliminating any definitions of e-governance and e-government, these remain elusive concepts. It will then result in those at the top who will be able to control what they mean and what they will be. More to the point, without a definition outlining specific parameters, the government cannot be held accountable for any non-performance or failure to meet such goals. And, although the conclusion of the report calls for a

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[5] <http://publiservice.pco-bcp.gc.ca/egov-cybergouv/> pg. 4 (July 20, 2003)

"broad dialogue…to develop a collective or shared understanding of the nature of the adaptations required of our institutions and processes of governance," there is no evidence or mechanism to assure the concerned citizen that such a shared understanding will be achieved by anyone other than the same elites.

The Pacific Institute of Management in India equates electronic governance with smart governance and uses **SMART** as an acronym to define e-governance as "application of IT to the process of government functioning to bring out **S**imple, **M**oral, **A**ccountable, **R**esponsive and **T**ransparent governance." [6] The government of India has used this as the basis for its vision statement for electronic governance and for the development of strategic initiatives and further objectives as outlined in what was termed an Indicative Roadmap to enact that vision.

The United Nations' Public Economics and Public Administration Division and the American Society for Public Administration conducted a global survey, which broadly defined e-government as:

> "including the use of all information and communications technologies from fax machines to wireless palm pilots to facilitate the daily administration of government. However, like e-commerce, the popular interpretation of e-government is one that defines it exclusively as an internet-driven activity that improves citizen access to government information, services and expertise to ensure citizen participation in, and satisfaction with the governing process." [7]

Although it speaks of e-government, the UN definition captures the essential role of e-governance and the evolving, new relationship of government with the

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[6] <http://www.pimanagement.org> (March 10, 2002)

[7] United Nations, *A Global Survey of E-government*, 2002. Online: <http://www.unpan.org/egovernment2.asp> (March 12, 2002)

citizen. E-governance results in the formation of new relationships with non-governmental organizations, citizens groups, unions, associations, volunteer groups, business, along with citizens and other levels of government. One aspect of the changing nature of this relationship is the capacity that citizens now have to access a wide range of services and information from all manner of organizations.

Governments are increasingly turning to online delivery of programs and services to the public, and new forms of getting their messages to the public, because of rapid rise in the last decade of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Edwin R. Black states, "The ever-spreading use of digital information technologies is transforming both how we are governed and the institutions of that governance" (Alexander and Pal 1998: xii). The diversity of technologies now available on the marketplace, and increasingly used by citizens to communicate and exchange information with each other continues to broaden. The desk top computer, the laptop computer that now contains multiple communication forms, cell phone technology that allows phone calls, messaging services, sending of voice and text messages, and, not least of all, the Internet, are changing the way citizens are thinking and acting.

It has been argued that the internet's influence on society is comparable to the introduction of the printing press in the 15th century and that the new ability to communicate, share information and create knowledge in the process, will have a

profound influence on the way governments interact and deal with the citizen. For example, information can now be distributed, exchanged, formalized, used, and networked at speeds never before experienced. While arguments might also be made that much information is really inconsequential or not of much use, the fact is that there are many using the Internet in a multitude of disciplines and in their daily lives (Riley 2003:2).

One of the most important developments to occur with the emergence of the Internet and other new ICTs are networks of online communities. The networked world allows the flow of knowledge and ideas in ways not known before. Leslie Pal succinctly summarizes the characteristics of networked interaction, of which the Internet is a prime example, as follows:

- "distributed intelligence in place of monopolies of information;
- flatter structure, as there is less need for layers of knowledge keepers and cultivators;
- simultaneous action;
- an exponential increase in actors and participants;
- a structure organized around flexible nodes of information and exchange replacing the conventional hierarchies;
- three-dimensional structure in the sense that a network as a whole consists of an almost infinite number of "layers" of other networks;
- non-differentiation in potential influence between organizations and individuals;
- interactivity, as information flows in all directions and is constantly exchanged, not simply channeled." [8]

While this development has created the potential for non-hierarchical activities that

[8] Leslie A. Pal, "Virtual Policy Networks: The Internet as a Model of Contemporary Governance", presented to Inet '97. online at <http://www.botany.uwc.ac.za/mirrors/inet97/G7/g7_1.htm> (January 16, 2002)

could lead to more distributed power from government – and give the government wider opportunities to communicate and interact with the citizen – it does not necessarily mean this is happening.

What we are witnessing on the Internet now is the ability of individuals to move more freely in and out of a variety of communities, defining themselves and their associations in more flexible terms. Bolstered by the capabilities offered by new ICTs, they readily form alliances within small and diverse groups to achieve their shared goals. Businesses, for their part, have embraced the cause of corporate re-engineering, and have adopted the "network values" of partnership, coordination, distributed intelligence and the flattening of administrative and hierarchical structures. As Paul Saffo states, "In a web-based structure, your title doesn't matter: your power is determined by whether you are a high-quality node on the network" (Saffo 1999:31).

Research conducted for the Commonwealth Secretariat [9] in London, UK, by the Commonwealth Centre for Electronic Governance (CCEG), identified key elements of the relationship between how government uses and disseminates their information and the effectiveness of e-government:

1. "The increasing numbers of new and innovative information technologies coming into the marketplace are changing the way government not only delivers services to the public but also administers itself.

[9] The Commonwealth Secretariat is the administrative body for the 54 member countries of the Commonwealth. Its mandate focuses on programs to improve and assist developing countries. Part of their mandate is to focus on good and effective public administration.

2. New technologies and the Internet have transformed the way members of the public interact and communicate with each other. This, in turn, is creating an interactive citizenry that is increasingly expecting more from government in the way of high tech solutions and ease of access, not just to government services, but also to the means to communicate with government on a wide range of issues." [10]

Not everyone appreciates the implications of e-governance. In the United States, for instance, congressional action is governed more by adverse publicity about abuses than by angry constituents. Nevertheless, the potential for interactivity can be identified as one of the most important elements in the way e-governance will change the nature of government. The issue here is that while the new ICTs represent the potential for governments to better interact with the citizen, governments may not be willing to do so.

Based on a content analysis of a random Internet survey of worldwide web sites devoted to e-governance (web sites of national governments, state/provincial governments, municipal governments, think tanks, and commercial vendors), two divergent themes emerge:

1) in order to succeed, e-governance must utilize the proper technology;
2) without attention to political problems e-governance will likely still fail.[11]

If ICTs are properly implemented, both internal and external government procedures could be noticeably enhanced. In terms of internal operations, documentation can be accessed in electronic rather than paper formats, so that

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[10] <http://www.electronicgov.net> (October 6, 2002)

[11] CCEG, excerpt from forthcoming book, *E-Government:International Comparisons,* 2003

workflow productivity can be improved through the sharing of these electronic documents. Regarding external operations, networked government can provide such common services as being able to order publications online, filing complaints, registering or renewing vehicle registrations, and ordering licenses. All these may be enhancements in terms of cost and efficiency but not necessarily in terms of active participation by the citizen in governance.

Public feedback regarding the quality and quantity of electronic service delivery by government would be an extremely important stimulus for improvement. The best assurance that e-government applications are working would come from an active citizenry that uses electronic services, demands improvements when appropriate, and appreciates good efforts on their behalf.

Just as companies try to match or exceed the price and features of their competitors' products, so too in the political arena, often as a matter of image and prestige on the international scene, governments have tried to match or exceed the quality and accessibility of their electronic services compared to other governments. Singapore initially set its target to have all services delivered electronically by 2003; Canada set its target for 2004, Britain for 2005. The targets were then continually readjusted, depending on the progress made. However, the web site for Singapore gives no indication of whether or not they have met their target, for Canada it is now a “majority” of services by 2004, and the official figure in Britain is 80% by 2005 (*The Economist* 2003:23). Again, it must be noted that these targets are strictly for

service delivery, and do not include any programs for online citizen engagement with decision-making processes.

From the public perspective, the challenges for e-governance are to make the electronic products user-friendly, to widen the access to electronic government services, and to be more interactive with the citizenry. This last element appears to be the least put into practice. However, there are a handful of jurisdictions (examples of which will be given in Chapter Three), that are engaging in some form of e-participation.

Modern societies and governments have traditionally operated on a hierarchical model of information flow and interaction. So, for the most part, have traditional information technologies. Because new technologies have in the past influenced the evolution of society and, as a consequence, the nature of government, it is anticipated by many that ICTs will contribute to an increased interactivity with the public. The potential for wide change in the e-governance area now exists beyond simply e-government service delivery, but also in the promise of wider interaction with citizens. What this will entail and the speed with which it might be accomplished is still very uncertain. Indeed, evidence points to the lack of programs and initiatives in many jurisdictions for actively engaging the citizenry through electronic means, and speaks to its much lower priority for government than the electronic delivery of services. Such evidence fuels the assertion by many others that e-governance will simply be “business as usual” for governments.

On the other hand, the *Economist,* which surveyed a number of developments brought about by the new ICTs, emphasizes the promise and potentiality of these technologies to bring about a shift in power to the ordinary citizen:

> "…every big change in communication technology, from the printing press to television, has eventually produced big, and often unexpected, changes in politics. As the internet becomes mobile and ubiquitous, it will bring about changes of its own. Precisely what these will be is not yet clear, but the earliest claims of cyber-dreamers – that the internet will produce a shift of power away from political elites to ordinary citizens – may well become reality." [12]

No discussion of e-democracy would be valid without attention to the issue of the digital divide. There can be vast disparities amongst those who can benefit from access to the new technologies and those who do not have access or are technologically illiterate. Not only have the new ICTs changed the economy, whereby technological literacy and access have become more and more vital, but such a divide, perpetuated by economic barriers, will preclude many from engaging in the e-democratic process.

A report published by Citizens Online, a registered charity in the UK established to explore the social and cultural impact of the internet on society, revealed that three times as many well-off families in the UK are going online for the first time as those with low incomes.[13] Interestingly, this group, which is committed to universal access and tackling the issues of the digital divide, is funded by the

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[12] <http://www.economist.com/surveys/showsurvey.cfm?issue=20030125> (December 5, 2002)
[13] <http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/> (April 29, 2003)

private sector and not by government. Similar results concerning income-related home access were reported in a recent study done in Canada by the survey company Ekos: [14]

- while home access increased across all groups, growth rates were more significant in upper income households;
- a majority of upper income households (81% with $80-99K and 83% with $100K and over) and upper middle income households (60% with $40-59K and 72% with $60-79K) have home access;
- less than half (46%) of lower middle income households ($20-39K) and a little over one in three (35%) of lower income households (less than $20K) have home access;
- the division of home access based on income has continued to widen between upper and lower income households from a 39 point gap in 1997 to a 48 point gap in 2001.

Canada, the United States, Britain, Denmark and Sweden, among others, have implemented community access programs to attempt to bridge this divide in some measure. Although by no means do they fully resolve the issue of the digital divide, these programs seek to provide free internet access for every citizen by establishing hook-ups in public libraries, schools, community centers and kiosks. There are almost weekly press releases by Industry Canada announcing the establishment of more public access points in both rural communities and urban areas across Canada. [15] It is not the primary purpose of this thesis to debate the issue of the digital divide. However, it does have a bearing on the issues and difficulties in relation to e-democracy, which will be treated in Chapter Three.

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[14] <http://www.ekos.com/media/files/dualdigitaldivide.pdf> (June 6, 2003)
[15] <http://www.industrycanada.ca/cmb/welcomeic.nsf/ICPages/NewsReleases> (March 8, 2003)

2.2 PRINCIPLES FOR E-GOVERNMENT

There are many organizations on the Web that want to share their views of what governments should provide in the way of e-government and an evaluation of how government performance rates according to such standards. As there are far too many to review them all, it may be useful to concentrate on three important international organizations that are researching and implementing e-government principles in both the developed and developing world.

2.2.1 The United Nations Organization

The study of 190 member states conducted by the United Nations Organization [16] may be the most representative because the UN's membership includes the governments of most formally constituted nation-states of the world, and some aspirants besides. The following three lists were developed as a result of that survey:

A. The UN's Five Guiding Principles on E-government Objectives

1. Building services around citizens' choices
2. Making government and its services more accessible
3. Social inclusion
4. Providing information responsibly
5. Using IT and human resources effectively and efficiently

B. The UN's Eight Issues on the Content of Current E-government

1. Are governments doing enough to maximize the use of online services?
2. Coordination of e-gov initiatives among a country's levels of government
3. Implementing technology options, i.e. leapfrogging with wireless

[16] UN, *Global Survey of E-Government,* <http://www.unpan.org/egovernment2.asp > (Sept. 18, 2002)

communications
4. Legislative and policy-making environments
5. Policy initiatives governments are taking
6. Greater citizen participation in the policy-making environment (e-democracy)
7. Addressing the digital divide
8. E-gov participation: users and non-users of e-gov; measuring e-gov performance

While these questions focus attention on the background of the previous five principles, they raise other issues, i.e. budgets, timeframes, what social science personnel are available in the various countries to conduct the surveys needed to explore these issues?

C. The UN's Five Categories for Measuring Progress Towards E-government

1. Emerging Web Presence: one or a few websites offering static information
2. Enhanced Web Presence: growing numbers of web pages offering dynamic information
3. Interactive Web Presence: exchanges between users and governments (electronic forms)
4. Transactional Web Presence: services such as purchases (licenses) and payments (taxes)
5. Fully Integrated Web Presence: combination of information, exchanges, and services

These objectives and categories, though simply stated, do not spell out how such goals should or could be implemented, nor what the costs or impacts of doing so would be. Nor do they provide any information about how many countries are making the kind of progress towards e-government that these lists suggest, nor at what stage on the lists are the various governments.

2.2.2 The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Although the OECD began as an organization centered primarily in North Atlantic democracies, it has subsequently expanded to include market economies from every region of the world, conducting economic, social, and policy research on behalf of its members. Since both the commercial and political uses of the Internet began in market economies, the OECD has tracked these trends and suggested policies right from the technology's inception. The most recent result of the organization's policy deliberations on e-government, is a list of 10 recommendations. [17]

The OECD's Ten Guiding Principles on E-Government:

1. ***Commitment**:* proclaim feasible goals and provide financial support
2. ***Rights:*** assure access, privacy and confidentiality to all users
3. ***Clarity:*** adopt measurement standards for electronic service delivery
4. ***Time:*** provide long-term time frames - avoid artificial deadlines.
5. ***Objectivity:*** set criteria for network performance and user satisfaction
6. ***Resources:*** hire skilled personnel to design, implement, and operate facilities
7. ***Co-ordination:*** use common look & feel, and document content control
8. ***Accountability:*** be accountable for electronic service quality and quantity
9. ***Evaluation:*** conduct annual e-government audits and performance reviews
10. ***Active citizenship:*** encourage active use; incorporate suggested improvements

Like the UN goals, these principles are also very general, with no budget or timeframe estimates, no assessment of the potential implications or impacts, and no indication of which (if any) governments currently approximate or are approaching such objectives. Also, while there is talk of citizen engagement and citizen

[17] OECD, *Citizens as Partners,* Paris, 2002 <http://www.oecd.org/puma/citizens/01Nov02>

involvement in the e-government process (though it is of note that this merits only one item on the list for both organizations), there is little in the way of programs for member countries to implement these principles. Both these organizations are continuing their research and assessment of e-government, and these principles meanwhile provide value as limited benchmarks.

2.2.3 The Pacific Council on International Policy (PCIP)

As national borders have become more porous and traditional concepts of "public" and "private" blurred, the Pacific Council on International Policy, which is the west-coast partner of the US-based Council on Foreign Relations, conducted extensive surveys and research within developing countries as to the needs and wants of e-governments in different countries. As a result of a two-day conference in August of 2001 for a 13-member Working Group of representatives from Brazil, Chile, China, Denmark, Egypt, India, Israel, Mexico, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, the Council issued *A Roadmap for E-government in the Developing World.* [18] This roadmap phrased its recommendations in the form of 10 questions that any government of a developing country should ask itself as it explores the possibility of beginning an e-government project.

The PCIP's Roadmap for E-government in the Developing World
1. Why are we pursuing e-government?
2. Do we have a clear vision and priorities for e-government?
3. What kind of e-government are we ready for?
4. Is there enough political will to lead the e-government effort?
5. Are we selecting e-government projects in the best way?

[18] <http://www.pacificcouncil.org/pdfs/e-gov.paper.f.pdf> (July 21, 2002)

6. How should we plan and manage e-government projects?
7. How will we overcome resistance from within the government?
8. How will we measure and communicate progress? and How will we know if we are failing?
9. What should be the relationship with the private sector?
10.How can e-government improve citizen participation in public affairs?

Again, it is of note that there is only one item concerning citizen participation, and the last item at that. Because of the wide variability in goals and conditions of different countries, the Council felt that general principles rather than detailed suggestions would provide the most useful assistance. The study does recognize the chasm of differences, not just between developing and developed countries, when it comes to e-government and information and communication infrastructures, but to the differences amongst, and within, developing countries. It has become clear that the way e-government can be implemented within developing countries is through the understanding of their specific essential requirements, which could be as much at the local village level as the national. However, any kind of citizen consultation appears to continue to be given the lowest priority.

2.3 E-GOVERNMENT: AN EMERGING WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON

> "Using the Internet won't just make people's lives easier, it will change the way they think about government: Modern rather than institutional. Efficient rather than bureaucratic. On message rather than off base…. The web has the ability to reinvent government in a way that nobody could have imagined in the early 1990s, and in the way that matters most to the citizens and businesses who receive public services and to the taxpayers who pay for them" (Holmes 2001:17).

Holmes insists that it is necessary for countries in the developed world to get online.

He and other authors (Caston and Tapscott 1992; Alexander and Pal 1998) argue that the need for governments to go online with effective, efficient and wide-ranging services will be inevitable in societies where the majority of the population now live a good portion of their lives in cyberspace.

Holmes cites just a few examples (2001: i), culled from headlines in various publications around the world, of the value of e-government services in many countries:

- 75 percent of Australians file their income tax returns over the Internet.
- Singapore provides 150 public services from one portal.
- 8000 shipping consignments are cleared online through Dubai Customs every day.
- The US federal government annually makes four million online purchases for goods and services worth $US17 billion.
- Administrative costs in the US Department of Agriculture dropped from $77 per transaction to $17 after the introduction of an e-procurement system.
- It takes 25 seconds for police in Scandinavia to transmit a fingerprint image to another force.
- A traffic website for commuters in Minneapolis/St.Paul is viewed 300,000 times a day.
- One billion annual health insurance claims in France are now submitted electronically rather than on paper.
- Residents of Uppsala, Sweden can access their medical records online over a WAP (wireless) phone.
- University students in Germany register for exams and search for library books using wireless devices.
- Multimedia mobile units drive around Costa Rica, providing Internet access, email, and computer training to rural citizens.
- Monterrey Tech is the world's most geographically dispersed educational system, proving online courses to 43,000 students throughout Mexico and Latin America.
- Estonia had no privately owned computers in 1991. Today it is among the top 20 most connected countries in the world.
- Public petitions to the Scottish Parliament are created and submitted online.
- Brazilians vote electronically in all national and local elections.

These examples provide a good illustration of some of the means by which countries can implement specific service enhancing programs, which reduce costs and create efficiencies, while helping citizens in their day-to-day lives. However, they are all government-to-citizen projects, which comprise service delivery rather than a means of facilitating democratic participation by the citizenry. It is clear from current e-government developments around the world that many countries are establishing similar infrastructure and legal approaches to e-government, but only a very few make any provision in this infrastructure for the e-democratic process.

It is essential to assess and implement the basic principles, as outlined by the OECD and the UN, in alignment with the local economic, cultural, political, and ethnic sensibilities. The examples below, selected from different jurisdictions, illustrate this point. What is evident from Holmes' analysis is that the direction of e-government services is from the government to the citizen and deals little with the citizen-to-government side of the equation. At this stage, e-governance is mainly confined to governments developing changes to public administration principles resulting from changes being brought inside government through the application and implementation of ICTs, with very little citizen feedback or input.

The study above by the UN Division for Public Economics and Public Administration, which looked at e-government initiatives, found that, while a total of 169 member states were providing some degree of information and services online, there were only 17 countries that actually have fully developed integrated e-

government infrastructures. Many countries have sites that are static and inefficient, and remain far from achieving any form of viable e-government infrastructure. The study also found that of the total 50,000 online government web sites worldwide, 22,000 of those sites were from the United States. This suggests that e-government itself, let alone e-democracy, is a long way from wide implementation in many countries around the world. [19]

In developing countries the trend towards e-government implementation is marked by the use of available technologies for specific cost effective, pragmatic applications. In many respects, many counties, cities and towns are moving faster in e-government service delivery than are their national counterparts. This is partly due to the fact that local governments are closer to their citizens in terms of services needed; for example, one of the most popular e-government services is the registration of motor vehicles online. Information made available to the public by governments on their web sites about their data holdings vary widely. The sharing and distribution of government information online is becoming a priority for an effective web site. Yet, most governments are far from achieving this (Holmes, 2001:5).

A report published in June 2002 by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) and the Society of IT Management (Socitm) discusses the findings of 36 case studies of local governments in 17 countries (2002:9). The report outlines

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[19] <htttp://www.nuasurveys.org> online newsletter, June 24, 2002: 2

the many ways in which e-government is being driven, and how it reflects the cultural, political and economic circumstances of the various countries. The approaches to delivering local e-government fell into three broad categories:

1. **e-services** – securing and providing government services by electronic means: 11 out of 17 countries.

2. **e-governance** – linking up citizens, stakeholders and elected representatives to participate in the governance of communities by electronic means (including e-democracy): 4 out of 17 countries. However, 11 of the 36 local jurisdictions provided for some form, however limited, of citizen engagement.

3. **e-knowledge** – developing the skills and the ICT infrastructure to exploit knowledge for competitive advantage: 2 out of 17 countries.

2.4 E-GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES FOR LARGE JURISDICTIONS

> "Today, people adapt to technology. We accept that it is often difficult to use. Soon, technology will adapt to people and become much more intuitive and easier to use. In many cases, you won't even realize you are using it. It will be natural. Technology will learn how to interact and adapt to you. The content available to us will become richer and more meaningful, and the delivery of that content will mirror much more closely the interactions that we experience in everyday life." (Caldrow 2002:1)

Janet Caldrow, Executive Director of the Institute of E-Governance at IBM in the United States has identified the following seven milestones needed for the transformation to e-government.

Milestone One: Integration
Milestone Two: Economic development
Milestone Three: E-democracy
Milestone Four: E-communities
Milestone Five: Intergovernmental
Milestone Six: Policy environment
Milestone Seven: Next Generation Internet (2002:2)

Many countries have achieved some of these Milestones but none have attained all of them. The results vary in the 17 countries that do have fully integrated e-government infrastructures. E-democracy, Policy environment, and Next Generation Internet appear to be the least applied principles to date with Intergovernmental to follow.

A number of international organizations, such as the OECD, the G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force, [20] and the World Bank [21] have conducted studies, surveys, and analyses of the essence of a successful e-government program. All these stress the importance of information sharing with the public. Most of the international and national studies on e-government have articulated some very basic principles to ensure the success of e-government implementation, at whatever level. The principles include:

- vision
- strategic plan
- leadership
- information sharing
- feedback mechanisms
- realistic budgets for implementation
- cross government cooperation
- adaptation of appropriate technologies
- information management
- accountability mechanisms

These major precepts can apply across the e-government border. But while it is necessary to identify particular principles for successful implementation, it is just as important to ask the right questions as to why e-government application is needed

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[20] <http://www.onlinepolicy.org/divide-pub-old.shtml> (September 14, 2002)
[21] <http://www.worldbank.org/devforum/ongoing.html> (January 18, 2003)

in a particular jurisdiction. This is a point that is stressed, especially to developing countries that are beginning implementation of e-government infrastructures at differing levels within their countries. In many countries it is the small applications that are making a significant difference and where the involvement of the citizen can be found.

An assessment of state government approaches to web sites in the United States, by the American company called Ezgov, shows a different set of criteria for success than that used by either international organizations or national governments working to implement e-government principles. Many different themes as to how governments are approaching e-governance emerge. Three distinct trends are:

1. "Citizen participation in the process of e-government will be inevitable if programs are to succeed.
2. E-democracy is a growing trend amongst outside groups but most governments are still very much struggling with the concept.
3. E-governance is changing the ways in which government does business with the public and, in the process, is creating demand for some form of participation from the citizen. This gives some credence to the ongoing thinking that e-governance will eventually incorporate some form of e-democracy." [22]

2.5 GOVERNMENT ONLINE (GOL) : WEB PORTALS

The importance of proper utility of government information to serve the citizen is dependant on being able to access information across a full range of government departments. As observed by Holmes: "Through a portal, the information systems of

[22] <http://www.ezgov.com/index_flash.jsp> (March 15, 2002)

all departments and agencies can be linked to deliver integrated services in a way that avoids citizens having to understand the complicated internal organizational structures of government." (2001:21)

In 2001 the US National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (NEC3) put forward definitions for e-government portals based on five levels, i.e. the five ways in which the web will develop: [23]

- The first-level portal provides information or services easily, hiding organizational complexity and showing government as the citizen wants to see it.
- The second-level portal offers online transactions such as vehicle registration, business licensing, tax filing, and bill payment.
- The third-level portal lets people jump from one service to the next without having to authenticate themselves again.
- The fourth-level portal draws out data needed for a transaction from all available government sources. [24]
- The fifth – and highest – level portal adds value and allows people to interact with government on their own terms, providing aggregated and customized information and services in subject areas corresponding to the citizen's own particular circumstance.

P.K. Agarwal, past Chairman of the US NEC3, has said that the level-five portal is hard to imagine because of what it will be able to do. "A level-five portal will be a complex, growing organism, rich in data, transactions and multi-media – it

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[23] <http://www.ec3.org/InfoCenter/02_WorkGroups/2000> (January 21, 2002)

[24] The Federal government of Canada is striving for this with what it calls a "federated architecture", comprising both shared departmental and government-wide components separate from the systems that individual departments use for their own needs. All departments will be able to rely on the new architecture to share information and provide integrated services directly to Canadian citizens. Canada was rated first by Accenture, the international consulting firm, in their scoring of countries' progress in

will almost replicate a society. It is hard to visualize because it will be nothing like today's websites" (Holmes 2001:24).

2.5.1 Canada

The Government of Canada's GOL website [25] introduces the project to the public with a statement of guiding principles:

1. Accessible to all, easy to use and organized to meet Canadians' service priorities
2. Less time-consuming and costly to use
3. Higher quality and more comprehensive
4. Private and secure
5. Responsive to what Canadians want

The stated rationale for the federal government's approach is to provide an all-encompassing overview of the federal government to the public, i.e. what is termed "one-stop shopping", where hyperlinks connect common themes or similar programs regardless of what department within the government created the information. Prior to this project, individual departments and agencies had each developed their own web sites with their own design and methods of navigation. Canada's GOL takes a "whole government approach" by striving to be:

- Centrally co-coordinated**,** to achieve progress across the entire government;
- Collaborative across departments and agencies, and across jurisdictions, involving the private and not-for profit sectors;
- Transformative**,** by encouraging the re-engineering, consolidation and integration of services where it makes sense;
- Innovative, using proven best-of-breed technologies and private sector partnerships.

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implementing e-government for this reason. See Accenture Report on E-Government Rankings 2002 online: <http://www.washingtontechnology.com/news> (March 30, 2002)

[25] <http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/pub/serv-can/serv-cantb_e.asp> (September 21, 2002)

The provision of accessible, correct and useable information is vital for any citizen going to a web site. The use of web sites is driven by information needs and the provision of services that the citizen is seeking. Web sites are used in different ways: many are dynamic and functional, while at the opposite end of the scale there are government web sites that are indifferent and lacking in any useful application. The nature of web sites is constantly evolving and is central to the implementation of e-government in most developed countries that have a fully integrated e-government infrastructure.

2.5.2 Singapore

Singapore's e-Citizen Center portal is considered by many to be closest to the level-5 portal. Their government web site can integrate information, determine the speed of a person's connection when a request comes in, identify who the person is making the request and then do an automatic search which profiles the person. Students can come online to register for university, someone else can see a birth certificate, another be directed to make an appointment with a doctor or request a health service. People can apply for a TV license, change their address, or receive information on a variety of government services, such as renting or buying flats (the government owns 80% of all flats in Singapore). (Holmes 2001:24-25)

A citizen can perform almost any function of life in relation to government, including filing taxes or applying for a passport or an exit visa. But even on this site it is the government of Singapore setting the agenda. The citizen is pro-active only to

the extent that a service is chosen or bill paid or request for information is made. This is a top down, government-to-citizen site. Additionally, the lack of privacy laws in Singapore enables the government to collect, store, collate and disseminate personal information in ways not possible in countries where privacy laws are more stringent. In Canada, for example, federal government departments must conduct privacy impact assessments before implementing e-government programs.

An experiment, modeled after Singapore's portal, in the state of Victoria, Australia, has met with more problems, due to the much larger jurisdiction. Victoria's "maxi system" was launched on a large scale, but has had difficulty acquiring sufficient content for the site in order to attract citizen participation. In retrospect, officials suggested that a more gradual approach on a smaller scale might have been more successful. (Holmes 2001:25) This illustrates both how careful planning can avoid costly mistakes and what works in one jurisdiction cannot simply be transplanted to another.

2.5.3 India

There are other examples of the importance of seeking community specific applications. In India, for example, the District Council of Dhar in the state of Madhya Pradesh was able to put up a networked intranet to help farmers and poor villagers to transact their services online with the government of the province and district councils. To accomplish this, the government used a local e-commerce supplier (not a huge, expensive western supplier or high-priced consultancy form) and

developed intermediaries to deliver the services. These intermediaries were young people starting out who had some computer skills. An agreement was made with the local banks to let these intermediaries take out loans to buy the necessary equipment, and open what were, essentially, local cyber cafés. The district council covered the costs for the Internet connectivity.

The intermediaries (known as soochaks) then opened up the cafés to provide a local service and be the intermediary for access, through the government constructed intranet, for computer illiterate customers, or as a service for those who could go online themselves to conduct a transaction (the latter being in the minority). The government installed all the required technology, the construction of the intranet and programs. The intermediaries then charged the citizen about 50 cents for a transaction and were allowed to keep 90 percent of the fee with the remaining 10 percent going to the district government who then used this money to expand the network. It was estimated the cost of building and implementing this program was only US$57,000. The program has been a success, as the locals now do not have to travel to the capital to transact with the government, thus saving themselves many valuable workdays and travel costs. This system helped to avoid the earlier delays while bureaucrats processed their requests which would require them to wait there up to four days to be issued the licenses that farmers needed to obtain annually.

The implementation of this very economical program was invaluable in the annual renewal of required licenses or land deeds. The District Councils continue to

add more services: application for caste, income and domicile certificates; email communication between connected villages; and the sending of public grievances to district headquarters with an email reply assured within seven days (2001: 26-27). Another merit of this program implementation was that it lessened feuding amongst the villagers, as well as eliminated the middleman for farmers by the provision of daily commodity prices and volumes.

This local Indian experiment is an example of a valuable service not reliant on a large infrastructure program but it relies instead on citizen initiative and input into the e-government application. There are numerous examples in India and other developing countries where localities are taking advantage of the new technologies and bypassing the old, bureaucratic systems to improve their conditions.

For instance, in the Bay of Bengal an Internet connection was set up in a building at the wharf of a fishing village. Fishermen consistently lacked information on tidal conditions and movement of sea currents in their fishing area and this had a serious impact on the local economy. A few volunteers set up an Internet connection but, as the majority of fishermen could not use the facility due to illiteracy, the data was found by one of the volunteers each morning through an Internet search. The results were then broadcast over a loudspeaker, as the fishermen were about to depart. The lot of the fishermen improved as did higher average daily catches (*New Scientist,* June 2002).

2.5.4 Borough of Newham, London, England

Another case study is the Borough of Newham in London, England, [26] which is committed to achieving the UK government's target for Electronic Service Delivery by 2004. Almost every page of their **A**ccessible, **P**ersonalized, **A**utomated **W**eb **S**ite (Project APLAWS) set up to deal with council business and inform the citizen of every detail of local council programs and services, directs enquirers to call a number if they cannot find what they are looking for – unlike many other government web sites where a phone number is nowhere to be found for the hapless citizen who may not be able to navigate the way to a desired service.

Officials have established a call center where staff are readily available to handle an average of 2,000 calls a day between 8am and 8pm, using the phone and the web to answer queries, or send people to the right place on the web site to complete the business they need to transact with the Borough, or to deal directly with their requests. Calls are answered within five seconds and across-the-counter traffic has been reduced from several hundred a day to 60. These facilitators save the citizen considerable time and money for themselves and their employers. Citizens can go online to handle their local government requirements without having to take time off work. Putting services online streamlines and creates efficiency in the government through eliminating the duplication of services, which in turn saves tax dollars. Many jurisdictions around the world, including municipal levels in Canada, are moving in this same direction.

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[26] <http://www.newham.gov.uk> (June 22, 2003)

2.5.5 US States of Pennsylvania and Washington

The states of Pennsylvania and Washington in the United States are considered two of the most active online governments in the world. Each of these states offer multiple levels of transactions, from paying taxes, ordering birth certificates, reserving campsites, registering their children in school, registering motor vehicles, to being kept informed about legislative developments. Pennsylvania actively promotes its web site, which went online in 1995, by putting its URL site on every vehicle license in the state. [27] A look at its site illustrates how the state government has designed the site for a combination of both life events and practical subject matters for citizens, including a key word search. The state also does periodic surveys of citizens to ensure satisfaction and any needed changes. The site is continually being improved and more services added.

The state of Washington has two main sites. The first, Access Washington, [28] provides a wide range of services and transactions for both citizens and businesses (similar to the state of Pennsylvania). The site is an exhaustive one. Their second main site, Experience Washington, [29] focuses on tourism and attracting business to the state. Both Pennsylvania and Washington states allow for a multiple of transactions to help citizens conduct their business with government, as well as including feedback mechanisms and access to public officials.

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[27] <http://www.state.pa.us/> (June 22, 2003)
[28] <http://access.wa.gov/> (June 22, 2003)
[29] <http:www.tourism.wa.gov/> (June 22, 2003)

2.6 WHAT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION?

All of these examples clearly demonstrate that simple ICT applications can have widespread impacts when the appropriate needs of the community in which they are to be applied are addressed. Doing this for jurisdictions with large national populations is a more difficult challenge. However, what is clear from a review of the many surveys and studies conducted, is that the majority of the e-government applications, as well as discussion of their successes and failures, revolve around the effectiveness of ICTs in reducing costs and increasing efficiency of government service delivery programs. Even where there is recognition of the need for greater citizen participation if all aspects of e-governance are to be achieved, there is a noticeable lack of direction or programs for implementation of this dimension.

It is also evident that the movement towards citizen participation is limited in larger jurisdictions, though there may be more engagement of citizens in local jurisdictions that are closer to the public. Nevertheless the danger in the tendency to merge e-governance and e-government, and to use the terms interchangeably has the effect of discounting e-democracy – and true citizen e-participation – from the e-governance equation, where it then may be given an even lower priority by government.

CHAPTER 3: ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

3.1 DEMOCRACY TO E-DEMOCRACY

An examination of the key elements of democracy is helpful in order to assess the value of ICTs in the development of electronic democracy. David Held traces the development of democracy from the classical idea of democracy in Athens to modern liberal or representative democracy of the 21st century, with all models including, among other things,

> "an elected government; free and fair elections in which every citizen's vote has an equal weight; a suffrage which embraces all citizens irrespective of distinctions of race, religion, class, sex; freedom of conscience, information, and expression on all public matters broadly defined; the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office; and associational autonomy" (Held 1996: 120).

Held himself believes that the most defensible and attractive form of democracy is one in which citizens could, in principle, extend their participation in decision-making in a number of areas, but there is no one existing model which "provides a satisfactory elucidation of the conditions, features or rationale of this democratic form" (1996: 9).

For the purposes of a discussion of e-democracy, Schumpeter's model of democracy is useful in that he attributes equal weight to the value of participation as he does to the other two elements of pluralistic competition and civil and political liberties. This element of participation is also articulated by the OECD in studies on e-government and e-democracy, and is given equal importance to the other two

components: information and consultation.

While the previous chapter demonstrated how the new ICTs have been used by government to increase the provision of information to the citizen with the result of a better informed citizenry, this chapter will examine to what extent, if any, the use of ICTs thus far has been successful in promoting an increased level of participation among the citizenry, as well as the amount of government consultations with citizens.

UK e-democracy 'guru', Stephen Coleman, noted that there is a current democratic deficit facing many governments and that two key questions in relation to the nature of democracy were: "How to make the political process more participatory; and how can public engagement in policies that affect everyday life become more deliberative?" (Coleman 2003) He believes that the new ICTs could contribute to a renewed faith in government bodies through the creation of a more transparent, interactive government engaged in wide dialogue with an interactive citizenry.

I would suggest that the rise of ICTs offers some hope in that they may be used to facilitate a greater participation of the citizen by providing:

1. access to more government information and interactivity through use of online government services, thereby contributing to the creation of a more informed citizenry.
2. a forum for the free exchange of ideas and the ability to share informed debate on issues of the day;
3. input by citizens, through online consultations, into the decision-making process of government on those issues that directly affect them;

4. opportunity to obtain information online about candidates and to vote online for candidates of choice;
5. ability to share information faster with like-minded groups and individuals, creating networks of community in order to influence politicians, legislators and public officials.

Coleman argues that increased engagement by the citizen will only be brought about through the actions of Parliament, that Parliament must be the central player, as they are there to articulate the voice of those who elected them. True, there is a need, he states, to reconceptualize engagement to include many voices and the Internet is a stage for this to be played out. But he maintains that the direction and dialogue must proceed from Parliament; the new ICTs must be a complement to other practices, not replacements. So although he speaks of power shifting to the "users", he asserts "it doesn't happen without political leadership" (2003).

Indeed there has been some reluctance by politicians to use the new ICTs, as they fear that an increased direct participation by the citizen with government will diminish their role. However, Coleman points out that the other side of the argument is that it could increase their ability to interact with constituents and to use the ICTs as a communication tool for re-election (2003).

3.2 E-DEMOCRACY: WHAT IS IT?

There are as many interpretations of what constitutes e-democracy as there are interpretations of democracy. And because e-democracy is in its early stages, there

remains much confusion about what it encompasses and how to clearly define it.

Clift describes e-democracy as referring to "how the Internet can be used to enhance our democratic processes and provide increased opportunities for individuals and communities to interact with government and for the government to seek input from the community." Characteristics of the Internet which he claims facilitate e-democracy are those which provide opportunity to participate in debates as they happen. This e-participation is less limited by geography, disability or community networks, and facilitates the access to information and provision of input by individuals and groups who previously had not been included in these debates (2001).

The International Teledemocracy Centre in Scotland specializes in e-democracy. Their stated goal is to strengthen democracy through the use of innovative ICTs to deliver improved democratic decision-making processes, thereby increasing citizen participation specifically through the use of electronic consultation and electronic petitions (Macintosh 2001). This is undertaken within a backdrop of the devolution of control for its own domestic legislation to the Scottish Parliament. The Centre takes its cue from the OECD study referred to in Chapter Two, concentrating on the last two of the three types of interaction outlined in that study, namely, a two-way relationship where citizens are given the opportunity to give feedback on issues. Furthermore the Centre strives to promote a citizen/government relationship based on partnership in which citizens are actively engaged in the policy-making process.

The UK-based Dialogue by Design, defines e-democracy as "the use of computers to enhance the democratic process." As a proponent of its own data management software to be used in the e-consultation process, it is clearly unapologetic in its view that ICTs have the potential to transform the political world as dramatically as the invention of the printing press did over a thousand years ago (Acland 2003: 3). However, Acland notes that because Coleman, who is considered the authority on e-democracy in the UK, advocates that Parliament must be the central player, this presents a real barrier to the wider uptake and use of online consultations by the public service in the UK.

Åke Grönlund, from Umeå University in Sweden is concerned that definitions of e-democracy often focus on ICT use and projects, rather than on democratic processes and institutional innovation (Grönlund 2002:1). In order that the term 'e-democracy' does not become merely a convenient shorthand for ICT use in democratic processes, he argues that it should be assessed in terms of its defining processes, not to what extent ICTs are used. He notes that as e-government is still in its early days, e-democracy is a marginal occurrence, but he does not discount its potential for the future, though which initiatives will be successful and which directions e-democracy will take will depend on the actions by many different actors.

3.3 RELATIONSHIP OF E-DEMOCRACY TO E-GOVERNANCE

One of the proponents of e-government in Canada, the Centre for Collaborative Government, has dispensed with the term 'e-governance'. It uses e-government to

encompass all such electronic activities and programs, with e-democracy included as a 'growing' part of e-government. Terms such as 'digital government' and 'digital voice' have also come into use (2003 11:18-20). E-democracy is treated more as a result of e-government rather than an equal part of the equation. The Centre's emphasis on the use of ICTs by government and elected officials often overshadows the real difficulties involved in online citizen engagement, which is presented as if it were merely an extension of more traditional consultation methods.

The Centre's latest report has an admitted focus on members of parliament and representatives from government departments. A pilot program was recently completed in conjunction with the Department of Canadian Heritage to develop and test the concept of a 'Digital Commons': to provide "a place where Canadians can openly discuss, debate and share issues and experiences electronically in an open forum." The discussion agenda, determined by the government, was strictly monitored and controlled by them, with the "focus on the role of government and of elected officials as participants in such a space." While the final report from the Centre contains recommendations for an e-democracy framework through further pilot programs, the emphasis of both the pilot and the report was from the viewpoint of "government comfort and familiarity with online citizen engagement" rather than the citizen's participation in governance.[30]

Theirs appears to be a method of enabling government to adapt gradually to

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[30] See web site <http://www.crossingboundaries.ca> (May 29, 2003)

the idea of citizen engagement. It may well be argued that such an approach is necessary in order to move government and politicians towards an acceptance of this new reality. The downside, however, is that although their report constantly speaks of increasing citizen engagement, it proceeds from the top-down perspective rather than incorporating the citizen's viewpoint. Indeed at the May 2003 "Crossing Boundaries" conference in Ottawa advocating greater use of ICTs towards e-democracy, there was no citizen voice represented.

Gilles Paquet, of the University of Ottawa Centre on Governance, views governance in relation to organizations, moving from centralized to distributed governance. In his view,

> "*e-government* presents a real transformation in democratic governance, including design, decision-making and service delivery capabilities. *E-governance* refers to new processes of coordination made possible or even necessary by the advent of technology – and the spreading of online activities in particular. As a result, e-government refers to an IT-led reconfiguration of public sector governance – and how knowledge, power and purpose are redistributed in light of new technological realities." [31]

The Internet has in one respect brought about a decentralization of power. In the wired world, individuals can now make their own choices as to which authoritative information sources they will accept. It may be argued that this is leading to a greater democratization of knowledge, empowerment of the individual, and the potential for more informed interactions between the citizenry and organizations, including government. Moreover, because individuals now have ready access to a variety of information resources, governments have to adopt new proactive measures to compile

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[31] <http://www.governance.uottawa.ca/English/Publications/Downloads/Paquet/2002>(May 2, 2003)

and disseminate information in a competitive information environment, due to extensive technologies on the Internet, such as the Google search engine, that provide access to information resources world wide.

In practice, one of the primary functions of government has been the creation and dissemination of information. Governments have always been considered to be the largest data resource in any jurisdiction because of their enormous information holdings. Perhaps the Internet is now the largest library in the world given the billions of web pages, linked chat rooms, newsgroups, listservs, etc. As a result, a citizenry that is able to seek and obtain information and knowledge from any place in the world through the Internet will, in all likelihood, also expect more from government (Clift 2001).

Indeed, there is a concern by some that this very characteristic of the Internet – providing a multiplicity of choice for the individual – makes governance of the citizen even more difficult, as individuals now have the option of "opting out". This has the potential of undermining the capacity of traditional governments to govern at all and may well serve to reinforce Marx's rejection of liberal democracy – that the central idea that the state represents the community or public as a whole is illusory; and there is no clear distinction between the private and the public, between the realm of civil society and the political. (Held 1996:129-130)

Many citizens may not necessarily be interested in participating in

government consultations nor in using online government services. Nevertheless, they are able to share information with each other online almost instantly and mobilize like-minded groups to put pressure on governmental powers, protesting or even curtailing undesired government actions.

3.4 CULTURAL CLIMATE FOR E-DEMOCRACY

Discussion of e-government and e-governance inevitably leads to the question of citizen participation. This can take many forms and different subject headings, such as participatory democracy, e-participation, teledemocracy, or e-democracy. The latter has come to be the overall term for citizen participation in the political, bureaucratic and legislative process.

While there are many sites on the Internet where citizens may organize their own petitions, some governments such as those of Scotland and Queensland (in Australia), are exploring ways to adapt the legal right to petition the government to the online medium. One regional government in Jutland, Denmark is building a system whereby local citizens will be notified by email when the government plans to take action on an issue in which they have indicated an interest. (Clift, 2002)

Stephen Coleman and John Gøtze argue that the main thrusts of e-democracy for legislators and public administrators will be online voting and online consultations.[32] The latter is restricted mainly to the bureaucratic side of government

[32] <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/bowling.pdf> (April 19, 2003)

in many countries, but in jurisdictions like the US, the UK, and Sweden, it refers to consultations between the citizenry and the political side of government as well.

The e-democracy movement is driven by the emergence of ICTs that allow swift exchange of communications, the ability to share information and build communities of networks of people and groups who, amongst other things, share common interests and ideologies. What once took months or years to develop into a major issue can now occur more rapidly. The Internet is more and more becoming an important organizational tool for groups and citizens who, in the past, had difficulty either being heard by the government or influencing policy.

Both the size and timeliness of the international protests over the globalization policies of the OECD and the WTO were due to groups being able to organize themselves over the Internet, mobilize support for the issues, and exchange information and communicate messages in real time. In Seattle, Washington, and Prague, the initial G8 protests were organized both off line and online, but it was the Internet that gave this movement the international momentum to make it the effective demonstration, and the somewhat collective voice of outsiders, that it became. It has become the symbol not only for the voices able to speak from the Internet, but of the fact that the citizenry has found a tool by which they can bypass all the normal channels of government.

Many people talk about the “individual” being in control, or having great power because of the ability to tap into the world through the keyboard. It has also

been identified as the power of consumers to buy the product they want, or to read the online newspaper of choice (Clift 2002).[33] But more central to this development is the degree to which people can communicate, form opinions, make judgments from available data, and then act upon them. The Internet is a medium that allows ideas to flow among thousands of channels, a form of "capillary action", that Foucault views in the multiple and decentralized way that power is exercised (Foucault 1972).

People are empowered not because one can get onto the Internet and buy a product, read a newspaper or research some topic, but by the ability to talk back (true interactivity), dialogue, and go to whatever source an individual chooses. In today's wired world, with the increased demand for more and faster information, many would say that the interactive citizen has evolved from what Castells termed "virtual communitarians" – people who use ICTs for social organization – (Castells 2001), and that the Internet has put new power and knowledge into the hands of the citizen.

Current research indicates that at this stage few governments have effectively been able to involve their citizenry electronically in the democratic process. Many governments have reached a stage where they are able to dispense information more effectively, which often passes as a means of enhancing the democratic process. But there are also some government initiatives seeking to help citizens to get online, obtaining feedback on government reports, and developing listservs and discussion groups to elicit the views of the citizens. There are many groups actively

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[33] See <http://www.dowire.org> (February 13, 2003)

participating in online activities in the hope of influencing government policies. One of these is Open Democracy, which describes its goal as a "true arena for democratic change, for closing the distance between people and power, influencing global policy and … share[ing] knowledge across borders and differences." [34]

Those engaged in online activities advocating social or political change see the Internet as a medium to foster, enhance and change the way people have traditionally engaged in the democratic process (Clift 2002). The Internet is a medium that could result in people around the world participating in the political process as citizen politicians. However, the reality and the promise of what could occur are far apart.

There is the question as to whether citizens would in fact use the Internet tool to become more involved with the decision-making process of government, if they were given the opportunity. This question may likewise be reflected in an emerging trend, which surfaced in a sample survey, showing that people are increasingly spending more time in isolation sitting in front of their terminals. A survey in 2000, of 4,113 adults, conducted by Stanford University's Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society, found that "55% of Americans have access to the Internet at work or at home, and approximately 20% of regular Internet users spend more than 5 hours a week online. Of those 20%, 13% spend less time with family and friends, 8%

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[34] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/about/index.jsp> (June 21, 2003)
See also Appendix A for list of web sites promoting/engaging in e-democracy.

attend fewer social events, and 25% spend more time working at home in addition to spending a full day at the office." [35]

Another finding of that study corroborates the UCLA's Center for Communication Policy's latest study of Internet usage, that the more than 70% of Americans who use the Internet now consider online technology to be their most important source of information, ranking it higher as an information source than all other media, including newspapers and television. [36] Indeed, a majority of US Internet users (surveyed by the Markle Foundation as part of their Internet Accountability study) viewed the web as a "library" and not as an online shopping mall (Clift 2001).

But whether this will translate into a greater involvement in political or government affairs remains to be seen, and there is conflicting evidence. A survey conducted in 2002 by the Forrester Consultancy Group found that, despite the numerous programs to implement e-government in Great Britain, only 10% of the population are going online for government services, while at the same time online retail sales have skyrocketed to one billion pounds sterling a year. Clearly, the British would rather go shopping.[37]

Without doubt, the Internet has been a tool of enrichment for large numbers of

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[35] <http://www.Stanford.edu/group/siqss/press_release/Preliminary_Report.pdf> (June 21, 2003)
[36] <http://www.ccp.ucla.edu/pages/internet-report.asp> (Feb. 3, 2003)
[37] *The Economist,* January 4, 2003: 23

the population. It has allowed diversity, the rise of the entrepreneur, the mushrooming of home businesses, the bringing together of family and friends through instant communications. It has also been a voice for many who previously did not have the means to express themselves because prior communication media have been controlled by the few. But the question remains as to whether the Internet too will eventually become another medium of expression controlled by a select few or a free-for-all of opinion and bias not grounded in factual or thoughtful discussion. While the Internet has become more and more an intrinsic part of our cultures, nevertheless there are serious issues to be dealt with, especially that of the digital divide, as can be seen by the figures in the Ekos survey presented in Chapter Two.

A Report released by the US Census Bureau in February, 2002, entitled a *Nation OnLine* shows that the vast majority of Americans now have access to computers and the Internet on a daily basis. While it paints an optimistic picture of Internet usage, it does not deal with the digital divide.

- "The rate of growth of Internet use in the United States is currently two million new Internet users per month. More than half of the nation is now online.
- Children and teenagers use computers and the Internet more than any other age group.
- 90 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 17 (or 48 million) now use computers.
- 75 percent of 14-17 year olds and 65 percent of 10-13 year olds use the Internet.
- Households with children under the age of 18 are more likely to access the Internet (62 percent) than households with no children (53 percent).
- Computers in schools substantially narrow the gap in computer usage rates for children from high and low income families.
- Approximately 24 million of the 65 million employed adults who use a computer at their job also work on a computer at home." (2002:2)

A study by the Washington, Pew Internet & American Life Project, released in April, 2002, illustrates the extent of e-government usage in the country:

> "While many government site users focus on their personal needs in dealing with government agencies, there is abundant evidence that a new "e-citizenship" is taking hold:
> - 42 million Americans have used government web sites to research public policy issues.
> - 23 million Americans have used the Internet to send comments to public officials about policy choices.
> - 14 million have used government web sites to gather information to help them decide how to cast their votes.
> - 13 million have participated in online lobbying campaigns."[38]

A similar study of e-government usage in 27 countries around the world was conducted by the European firm, Taylor Nelson Sofres, with the following findings:

- 26% of people globally have used the Internet to either access government information, provide personal information to the government, or transact with e-government services.
- e-government usage varies globally: Norway and Denmark have the highest at 53 and 47% respectively, Finland and North America are at 46%, US 34%, France 18%, Germany and Korea 17%, and Great Britain only 11%. [39]

Yet, in stark contrast, the Internet's reach in most of the developing countries ranges from only 1-5 % of the total population. For example, in the Philippines it is currently put in the range of 2-3 % and in Nigeria 0.1 %. [40] While some developing nations such as Malaysia, Brazil and Taiwan have made substantial progress, approximately 87% of people online live in post-industrial societies. There are twice as many users in Sweden than across the entirety of Sub-Saharan Africa (Norris,

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[38] <http://www.pewinternet.org/> (May 6, 2002)
[39] <http://www.europemedia.net/shownews.asp?ArticleID=6556> (November 10, 2003)
[40] <http://www.comminit.com/st2002/sld-5325.html> (November 10, 2003)

2001:15).

Likewise, there is an inequality of women using the Internet. A May 2003 study done by Nielsen/NetRatings found that 42% of European users were women, up only 2% from the previous year, and projected that at this rate it could be another seven years before men and women were using the Internet in equal numbers in Europe.[41] The same study found that the sites attracting women included shopping, travel, education, health and beauty – neither government nor politics were on the list.

The potential is also there for the Internet to become dominated by a few large, corporate interests, or subsumed by government regulation that could inhibit the freedoms offered by this new technology. There are efforts by many governments, worried about the potential freedoms a medium such as the Internet brings, to curtail both access and content on the Internet.

Since September 11, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and many other countries have implemented laws making it possible to engage in wide surveillance of citizens. In the United States the government is planning to converge databases of public and private sector organizations, in order to track its own citizens both in the US and abroad, as well as citizens of other countries who enter the US and who are suspected of any connection to terrorist groups. In his 2002 annual report, the former Privacy Commissioner of Canada warned that privacy rights have been under assault as a result of these new laws.[42] All these inhibiting

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[41] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3019710.stm> (November 10, 2003)
[42] <http://www.privcom.gc.ca/information/ar/02_04_10_e.asp> (February 25, 2003)

legislative and regulatory changes could potentially create a climate in which citizens become anxious about their online activity.

In Malaysia, that government closed down an Internet publication, *Malaysiakini*, that advocated e-democracy and robust online public discourse. The Malaysian government has stated its commitment to e-government and freedom on the Internet through its e-government strategy. Yet, according to the publisher of *Malaysiakini*, it appears the government was nervous about an outlet that did not express views it endorsed. In other words, the clear message from government officials was that it was they alone who would set the agenda. [43]

From her prespective through the lens of the digital and democratic divides, Norris argues that optimistic claims that the new ICTs will facilitate a new era of direct democracy, "like a virtual Agora, while attractive… are implausible in practice as soon as we understand who becomes involved in digital politics." She maintains that it will simply reinforce the activism of the activists, and it is unlikely it will reach the "disengaged, the apathetic, and the uninterested," further increasing the divisions between the actives and the apathetics (2001: 18).

While the ICTs may have set the stage for the potential of e-democracy to take hold in society, there are many uncertainties and questions that still remain. Is there significant progress towards an e-democracy culture, and will it truly provide

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[43] *Bala Pillai*, "The Malaysiakini Affair". Online at <http://www.ryze.com/go/bala> (June 2, 2003)

representation for all citizens, when there is both unequal access to the technology and unequal technical capabilities of citizens? The figures above show that there is a definite culture of Internet usage emerging that creates the environment for e-democracy, but how realistic is it that it will come into being? Will e-democracy simply be another method of voting, and be used as a limited means for governments to consult with people on different political and public sector issues? Will there be a new form of democracy emerging, or will it be an augmentation of representative democracy with an "e" added on? Will people engage themselves in political and government issues, and will their voices actually be heard and taken into account, or will the Internet be simply another tool for politicians and governments to enforce top-down decisions?

No treatment of e-governance and e-democracy could help but raise these questions. However, they represent much broader issues than can be effectively covered in this thesis, which instead, will be limited to the role of the citizen in the evolving e-governance structure. The issues above address some of the limitations, but one must also consider those means that are currently being used in an attempt to engage the citizen in the decision-making process.

3.5 THE CITIZEN'S ROLE IN GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Our representative form of democracy in Canada – as in other parliamentary governments around the world – has resulted in the development of specific practices

on how to consult with the public on issues of the day and the development of legislation. Parliament and provincial legislatures create legislation through the Committee process of their respective assemblies. These Committees invite members of the public to submit briefs and comments on the bill being considered. In some instances, Parliamentary committees will travel across the country, holding public hearings to get input from professional groups and associations, non-governmental organizations, academics, and citizens groups and individuals with expertise in the specific subject of the proposed legislation.

This process is also followed when the government releases White papers (legislative proposals) or Green papers (a discussion paper of the various alternatives the government is considering on a specific issue). In Canada they are generally announced in the *Canada Gazette* and details given on how to provide input. Ministers' staff and public administration officers also ensure that the White paper or Green paper is circulated to people who should know about it and whose input the government is seeking. This is a very controlled mechanism run from the top. On important pieces of legislation, concerted efforts are made by the government in power to seek input from specific groups or allies of the legislation.

Since Confederation, a system has evolved of public sector officials seeking out representatives of vested and specific interest groups from the different regions of the country, who would be invited to Ottawa to take part in discussions. The system tends towards elitism, as the practice has been for favourites to be selected for their

input. Except for public meetings, sometimes required by law, and committee meetings across the country on major political issues of the day (such as with the ongoing debates on the Canadian Health Care System or the Constitutional discussions in the late eighties), the average citizen has not been a major factor in public input into legislative and public sector debates.

In the last twenty years, the use of opinion polls and focus groups by public sector organizations has become common, but this involves only limited input from the citizen. Television provides a public forum where current political issues may be discussed, and phone-in shows allow people to express their opinions. But media programs, including the radio talk shows, are more a medium for listeners to sound their opinions than they are a venue for government to have an educated debate for input on their agendas.

The United States has similar mechanisms as Canada to create public debate or provide a forum for this debate, but, in addition, has had a tradition of town hall meetings as a means for obtaining local public input into the democratic process. These town hall meetings, originating in the New England states over two centuries ago, have spread across the country. Politicians from the local and state levels are very involved in the process. Town hall meetings are convened on any issue that is relevant to the local town or county. It has been a tradition that robustly involves people in the democratic process. In fact, there has been some suggestion that the

wide interest in e-democracy in the United States, where there is growing involvement, stems from this tradition of the town hall meeting.

3.6 APPROACHES TO INVOLVING THE CITIZEN ONLINE

An online organization in the US, called Teledemocracy Action News and Network, describes their purpose as follows: "We are primarily dedicated to the creative use of modern technologies (ICTs) and face-to-face deliberative techniques in all forms that directly empower citizens to have authentic input into political systems at all levels of governance around the world." [44] Other groups, such as the Centre for Democracy and Technology in Washington, have a similar goal of getting people more involved in the democratic process through the use of new technologies.[45]

There is the potential to achieve such a goal, as can be seen by examples below of people who are working to get governments to move online and engage the citizen in the process of government. But for the moment, most of those groups working in an e-democracy environment are reliant on government and react to what government is doing to create input. There are many others who play active roles but two of the better-known approaches in developing online communities of e-democracy participants are those pioneered by e-democracy experts, Steven Clift and Ann Macintosh.

The Clift approach is to build a community of networks in which people can

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[44] <http://frontpage.auburn.edu/tann/> (June 27, 2003)
[45] <http://www.cdt.org> (June 27, 2003)

engage in political discourse, develop ways to input into government policy and decision-making, send people to appropriate sites, and recommend ways to use technology to be able to influence the process of government. Much of what he does is from his own perspective, using the means through his newsgroup wire list, Democracy Online newswire ('do-wire')[46] tracking developments in e-democracy and sharing them with colleagues around the world. Clift works with governments to encourage them to get online, use tools to engage citizens, and use the Internet as a tool for online voting.

The Macintosh approach has been a traditional one of working with governments from an academic institution to develop tools to help legislators and administrators obtain public input on issues of the day. Through her International Teledemocracy Centre she has been engaged in online consultations on a number of policy issues for the Scottish parliament, developed tools to obtain public input, including programs directed specifically at youth, and has also worked with the Greater London Council on recent transport issues. She also does work with the European Union on their e-democracy project.

Although her work is set by the government agenda, she differs from Clift in that much of her e-democracy research is done from the perspective of an academic researcher. She provides in-depth analysis, based on extensive research, on the different projects in which she is engaged. Clift writes papers and proffers tips and

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[46] <http://www.e-democracy.org> (June 25, 2003)

advice from his own perspective, as an effective advocate who has been responsible for building an international community of networks dealing with some form of e-democracy. His 2650-member do-wire list serves to keep the interested subscribers up to date, posts notices of important events, and points people to web sites, articles, and other newsgroups and listservs of interest. Clift is proactively developing a culture of e-democracy whilst Macintosh contributes through the input of researched papers and online consultations developed through government funding. Her role is not so much an advocate as a facilitator, creating an information base of knowledge on the subject matter, which is made available through the ITC's web site. [47]

Some argue that the current focus of governments on providing easily accessible online services drives the push to e-participation, in that it presents a challenge to governments: whether the public is viewed as a consumer or as a citizen. In the case of the former, implementation is focused on services, if the latter, the focus is on policies which promote e-participation and democracy (Roy 2001). E-democracy advocates consider the fact of governments putting their legislation, legislative proposals and background documents on certain issues online to be a start towards bringing more citizens into the process, because it makes government more transparent and documents more widely accessible. But this is still very much a top-down approach by government, as the groups and individuals mentioned above, who are engaged in e-democracy initiatives, mainly rely on the agenda set by government and react to what government is doing to create input.

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[47] <http://www.itc.napier.ac.uk> (June 12, 2002)

In Canada there have been tentative steps towards citizen engagement at the federal level by Human Resources and Development Canada, who conducted a series of workshops in 2001-02 on the possibility of developing online consultations, but these were based solely on the perspective of members of parliament and of the public service. Other departments and agencies such as the Law Reform Commission, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Health Canada, Statistics Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Library of Parliament have all conducted some form of online consultation over the past 2 years. [48] The number of responses were not large nor necessarily a representative sampling of the population, but nevertheless they are a beginning in the evolution of wider online consultations.

The Ontario government's website proclaims its strategy on citizen engagement, claiming they are "committed to" greater citizen involvement, and outline "possibilities" of what could be done, with no indication of when or how they intend to develop these, let alone implement them.[49] A brief online consultation was utilized in Ontario to gain citizen input for the drafting of the Premier's throne speech, and again the numbers responding demonstrated that this method of engaging the citizen is still in its infancy.

A recent attempt in Canada at building an inclusive e-governance and fostering citizen engagement was the e-consultation "Dialogue on Foreign Policy", on

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[48] <http://www.crossingboundaries.ca> (May 29, 2003)
[49] <http://www.cio.gov.on.ca> (`June 9, 2003)

the revision of Canada's foreign policy, conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) in partnership with a civil society think-tank, the McLuhan Global Research Network. In addition to traditional channels, such as hearings, town halls, mail and phone, a web site was set up as an electronic channel whereby citizens were asked to take part, for four months in early 2003. [50]

The web site included the publication of a Dialogue Paper which could be downloaded, background information and resources to be accessed, terms of engagement, and posed 12 questions for discussion in an online forum or in one's own time (links were marked 'Answer/Discuss/View Answers'). As well as the online site, 19 roundtables were convened around the country, numerous town halls, hearings and meetings with Federal ministers and provincial governments. There were a total of 63,000 visits to the site, 1.5 million hits, 25,000 downloads and 7000 submissions, 500 of which were considered serious submissions, all of which were analyzed. 2000 individuals registered to participate in the online discussions. Weekly summaries of contributions were posted on the site, as was the final report and recommendations (Jeffrey 2003).

Although some critics called for broader and deeper reviews over an extended time frame, the overall process was viewed by DFAIT as a successful effort. Key elements found to enhance the democratic experience were:

1. multiple channels for dialogue and interaction;
2. partnership between government and a civil society group;

[50] <http://www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca> (June 15, 2003)

3. terms of engagement made clear at the start – government shares in the risk but can reach out to some not normally reached. If the process is to be credible, it must be reciprocal;
4. even though not every suggested solution could be implemented, active listening is important, giving citizens the feeling their opinions are valuable;
5. fostering of civic literacy, with abundant information and background materials provided, and time for deliberation;
6. transparent dialogue where answers of others could be accessed (if permission to publish was given); and
7. active moderation by the research group according to civil rules (which were published on the site) so that the discussion could not be hijacked nor turn into a free-for-all. (Jeffrey 2003)

Future e-consultations would benefit from a greater "lead-up" time to market and publicize the proposed consultation in order to increase the number of participants so that the process is more representative. An attempt to remedy this has been a pilot "Consultation Portal", launched in February 2003 by the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada, to help Canadians learn about public consultations, provide information on various consultations, both online and offline, across federal departments, with direct links to online consultations. [51] But the portal is difficult to find on the overall government of Canada web site unless one knows about it, and thus it suffers from the same lack of promotion that it was designed to correct. Ironically, I learned of the portal from Clift's 'do-wire' listserv, which originates in Minnesota.

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[51] <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/report/gol-ged2003/> (June 15, 2003)

3.7 ONLINE CONSULTATIONS

Online consultation is a methodology that includes the use of ICTs as part of the process for obtaining input from the citizen into government policies and initiatives. It continues to use other traditional offline methods of submitting input, by complementing, rather than replacing, existing structures with ICTs. There is a multitude of activity in the United States, especially at the state and local levels. France has many online consultative activities, as do the Scandinavian countries (see Swedish example below). The State of Queensland in Australia is also developing extensive e-participation tools through use of web sites, kiosks and other mechanisms to extend e-participation. The British government reports that it is actively pursuing ways and means to change the current methods of representative democracy and to bring people into the system through the use of the new ICTs.

In July 2002, the UK Government released their e-Democracy Consultation Report, *In the Service of Democracy: A Consultation Paper on a Policy for E-Democracy*, outlining their strategy on how they intend to modernize electoral procedures, and encourage greater citizen participation in policy-making and the processes of democracy:

> *The Government's e-participation strategy seeks to find ways in which new technologies can be utilised in the democratic process to connect politicians and the public between elections. The proposals seek to provide greater opportunities for consultation and dialogue between government and citizens.*[52]

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[52] <http://www.edemocracy.gov.uk> (September 19, 2002)

The report emphasized that the goal remained the improvement of democracy not the promotion of technology. They see technology as an enabler, a tool to achieve policy goals, as opposed to the solution to a problem.

The paper is a consultative document and funds have been allocated for both the consultation process and the follow-up reports and implementation. It encourages citizens to send their comments on the proposals to the government, and offers the options of online or offline input. The consultation paper was an ambitious first step towards some form of democratic change from a national government. The two main thrusts of their democratic reform agenda are e-Participation and e-Voting, and the paper makes a clear distinction between them as follows:

> **"e-Voting –** the use of ICT to facilitate participation in elections or other ballots under statutory control. This comprises e-voting in:
> - elections to the UK, Scottish and European Parliaments, the devolved assemblies and local councils;
> - referendums;
> - private ballots under statutory control.
>
> This track also includes online registration of voters and online application to be an absentee voter.
>
> **e-Participation -** the use of ICT to open new channels for participation in the democratic process between elections. This comprises e-participation of citizens in:
> - government's policy process;
> - the processes of policy-making, law-making and scrutiny by elected representatives;
> - the processes of policy formulation in political parties; and other civil society organisations." (2002:18-19)

While there have been several e-consultations, as well as an experiment with e-voting in some local counties, the Office of the e-Envoy has been disappointed with the utilization of these electronic methods both by government departments and by

the citizen. British MP Edward Leigh, chairman of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, reported that "Where take-up figures are available they often tell a depressing tale of low usage." (*BBC News*, December 13, 2002)

With the aim of intensifying the engagement of its citizens, the city council of Kalix in Sweden conducted an experiment in online deliberation. It enabled the citizens to have online discussions with local politicians and each other and to give their opinions on the renovation of the town centre. Over a two-week period citizens could participate through the Internet, as well as through traditional means of communication such as the telephone, post and fax. Most (86%) of those participating chose to use the Internet. The citizens were also able to vote on the issue online. To ensure that only those entitled to do so could vote and that they voted only once, the council set up a password-protected website and issued a password to registered voters. For citizens without computer access the council arranged for PCs to be made available at schools and libraries. Approximately 1,200 of the 15,000 inhabitants participated, 72% of whom reported the experience as a valuable democratic initiative. [53]

In November 2001, the government of Queensland, Australia approved a comprehensive community engagement policy and e-democracy policy framework. The Queensland Government is committed to exploring the many new opportunities the Internet brings and to discovering ways in which this medium can strengthen

[53] <http://www.votia.com/english/index.html> (June 18, 2003)

participative democracy within Queensland. Their commitment, through a three-year e-democracy trial, is to extend opportunities for community participation in the democratic process via the Internet, and includes measures to:

- post a number of issues on the website on which the government desires wide consultation and feedback;
- provide online access to government consultation documents relevant to those issues, such as discussion and policy papers, and draft bills;
- broadcast parliamentary debates over the Internet; and
- develop a system to accept petitions to the Queensland Parliament online.

An examination of their website shows an e-Democracy Unit established in the Office of the Premier. They have broadcasts of parliament online and an online petition system is operational (launched August, 2002). An online community consultation trial was launched in November 2002 to develop a standard model, and these are expected to be running by mid-2003. [54]

Coleman reported that ten online consultation experiments were undertaken in the UK (all of them initiated by Parliament) which produced some positive results. They found that the public: 1) is interested in political issues that directly affect them; 2) wants to be heard but not necessarily take over the political process; 3) feels the political elite is difficult to reach; and 4) considers themselves "outside the equation". He argued that just because a government has implemented online service delivery does not mean this will automatically lead to greater democracy. There is definitely a potential for the new ICTs to invigorate democracy but only if harnessed to achieve a "two-way accountability" (Coleman 2003).

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[54] <http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/about/community/democracy.htm> (January 14, 2003)

In the second part of its consultation paper, the UK Government laid out seven criteria of online consultations, which form part of the Code of Practice on e-democracy developed by the Office of e-Envoy UK:

- Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.
- It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
- A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
- Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and should be effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.
- Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.
- Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.
- Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated. [55]

Despite the promises of the above paper, to date there have been very few consultations within government departments and the number of responses has been extremely low (Acland, 2003).

The 2002 study undertaken by Socitm and IDeA (see Chapter Two)

[55] <http://www.edemocracy.gov.uk> (October 10, 2002)

discovered that e-democracy initiatives carried out in smaller, local jurisdictions were much more successful than in larger states. An excellent example is ongoing in the town of Jesi in Italy, where the development of a civic network has created a democratic space for discussion and interaction between citizens and government, and where the high number of visits to the web site and of citizen participation to the open debate testify to its success (2002:95).

A second example, in the town of Grefsen-Kjelsås in Norway, demonstrated that although there is a high level of Internet usage and literacy, combined with an affluent, active and involved population, this does "not necessarily ensure swift take-up of e-democracy" nor result in a wave of democratic renewal. Their e-consultations exposed the limitations of this method, showing that the Internet will play only a partial role in the consultation process (2002:122).

3.8 ONLINE VOTING

One of the main drives behind the UK initiatives on e-democracy has been the concern over declining citizen participation in government, especially in voting, which has dropped radically over the past decade.[56] The British Government's latest Report lays out plans to move towards more effective online voting as well as to engage more of the public in consultation over government policy. They note that whereas democracy requires the involvement of the public, participation in the

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[56] The turnout of voters in the UK general election in 1992 was 78% as compared to the turnout of 57% in 2001. Source: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, <http://www.electronicdemocracy.gov.org> (June 12, 2003)

traditional institutions of democracy is declining, and therefore they see the use of ICTs as offering new channels of communication between citizens, elected representatives and government that may help to engage citizens in the democratic process (2002:28).

The government has maintained, since the last General Election in June 2001, that one of their main goals is to bring youth into the democratic process. The paper sees e-Voting and e-Participation through the use of ICTs as means to engage this age group. In the UK general election of 2001, although 57% of the total registered population voted, only 40% of those between the ages of 18-24 voted. Given the nature of the Internet and the age groupings of those who use it (80% of the age group 16-24, 70% of the age group 25-44) the government hopes that ICTs could be an application to bring the younger voters into the democratic process in order to improve representative democracy.

But participation overall was poorer than expected when online voting was tried in a number of electoral wards, in the May 2002 local elections across the UK. For example in Swindon, which mirrored most areas, only 10.8 percent of the voters chose to cast their votes via the Internet from home, local libraries and council-run information kiosks (2002:52). The 2002 Report nevertheless remains optimistic about the potential of online voting, although it recognizes there are other factors to be addressed as well.

A recent study commissioned by Elections Canada, and conducted by Jon

Pammett and Lawrence Leduc, which surveyed those who did not vote in the 2000 Canadian federal election, produced even more surprising results. They first qualified the 960 non-voters into those who: 1) had access to a computer; 2) were "very or fairly likely" to vote via the Internet if this were possible; and 3) were "very or fairly interested" in the 2000 election. The survey found there would be only a potential rise of 2.82 % in the voting rate if Internet voting were implemented.[57]

The United States federal government and many states, especially California and Arizona, are working towards developing methodologies to achieve online voting. However, as the system of registration of voters is much different in the United States than in parliamentary democracies (the political parties register the voters in the U.S. not electoral commissions), online voting is seen as being further away from reality. [58]

In the US presidential election 2000, the Federal Voter Assistance Program conducted a pilot of remote Internet voting among US military officers overseas. It used the Department of Defense's public key infrastructure to provide authentication. The pilot raised many issues, not least how to increase the size of the system for a larger population and how to ensure the usability of the chosen security system. [59]

Brazil, the world's third largest democracy, has been using computer-based

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[57] <http://www.elections.ca> (June 23, 2003)
[58] See <http://www.publicus.net> (April 28, 2003)
[59] A full evaluation report is available at <http://www.fvap.ncr.gov/voi.html> (February 19, 2002)

tabulation to monitor the integrity of their elections for a number of years. In the 1990 general election in the state of Santa Catarina, the Brazilian government first introduced the concept of electronic voting by having citizens cast their paper ballots and election workers entering the results into a computer system for tabulation. By 1996, after presenting identification at polling stations to verify eligibility, citizens used electronic voting kiosks to choose their candidates nationwide. By 1998, almost two-thirds of the voting population had cast electronic ballots in federal, state and local elections (Holmes, 2001). While this is not strictly online voting, it does enable the results to be published more quickly and accurately, and serves to educate the public in the skills needed for future online voting.

Despite the fact that some governments are experimenting with online voting in the hope that more citizens will vote, it remains inconclusive whether online voting will help to facilitate a greater civic participation in the electoral process, and indeed the Pammett/Leduc study suggests it will be minimal. There is no evidence as yet that the use of ICTs will rekindle involvement in representative democracy. What seems to be very much needed is a renewal of the debate on the nature of democracy itself that will lead to a re-engagement of the citizen in the political process.

Responding to government-initiated consultations is the most common means of trying to influence policy. However, ICTs offer the possibility of much wider and varied forms of participation. For the purposes of the proposed e-participation policy, the UK consultation paper sets out four main types of political activity and

interaction:

1) Citizens and government.
2) Citizens and representatives.
3) Political parties.
4) Civic activity. (UK Report 2002:28-29)

The paper recognizes that it is important to ensure that all sectors of society are brought into this new vision. It also addresses the issues of trust, privacy and security, three issues about which people have expressed anxiety when asked about their online activities. To this end it articulates very specific principles that need to be incorporated, and recognizes the importance of the inclusion of all, the building of trust, and the necessary policy issues to ensure that citizens will become engaged and that the goals of e-democracy will be achieved (2002:21).

CONCLUSION

How much of the above constitutes real engagement? True, networked communities are evolving through the Internet. Citizens are increasingly using the new ICTs to organize themselves so that their voices can be heard, as well as to develop tools to attempt to influence government policy and programs at the political and public administration levels. However, more fundamental questions are raised: Does the public want to be engaged in government, or do they only want the opportunity to make their views known every once in awhile? If governments do engage the public more frequently into public debate, how often do they do this and what subject matters should be considered priorities? What institutions need to be set up to make the wider transition to e-democracy beyond online voting and online consultations? These too are well beyond the scope of this thesis, but are being mentioned because it is clear that the use of ICTs alone will not solve the democratic deficit.

My analysis of the e-democracy phenomenon, and the role ICTs play in this, is based in the context of a particular approach to democracy. In Schumpeter's model of democracy, participation is given equal weight to two other key elements of pluralistic competition and civil and political liberties. Darin Barney argues that because ICTs do not provide an equal ability for all citizens to participate meaningfully in the democratic process, the technology is not inherently democratic (Barney 2000:22-25).

The examples in Chapter Three, together with the extent of the digital divide, voter malaise, disinterest, and the public's cynicism about and distrust of their politicians and governments, indicate that it may be doubtful that the new ICTs will create any environment other than what we have come to see as 'politics as usual.' Although the ICTs may have the potential to strengthen and perhaps reform already existing democratic institutions, participation by the majority of citizens using this medium, in those decisions that directly affect their communities, is unlikely unless existing circumstances change significantly.

However, I am one of those "children of Prometheus" posited by Barney (2000:264), who maintains a hope – although mine is not a blind hope, but one tempered with reality – that current barriers to such participation may be overcome in the future. The new ICTs are not the solutions to a wider participation but only the tools, and tools are only as effective as they are applied in the context of overall programs and put into practice by conscientious actors. These tools may be utilized to increase citizen participation, but there are many other factors involved which affect that utilization, and because of those factors, one cannot accurately predict future changes and consequences that may be wrought by new technology. However, I cannot accept that the hope is a delusory one.

It is clear that any significant evolution of e-democracy will depend first and foremost on the desire and interest of citizens, rather than simply on computer access and literacy. Whether citizens will want to engage more in democracy or simply be

satisfied with pursuing their own interests, whether it be online shopping, sharing emails with family, or engaging in online pornography, will be decided through overall applications of these technologies to activities that directly affect their lives. A movement towards e-democracy would also depend on the type of programs that citizens, groups, or governments develop to stimulate online participation between the citizen and the government. Active participation is likely to be in proportion to the value that will be accorded the ICTs by citizens and institutions alike in relation to their own pursuits.

Viewed historically, when any new technology has been embraced by the public at large, there is what may be called an adoption curve whereby the usage of the technology reaches a critical mass. When these technologies become the norm and are used by the majority of the population, this creates a multifold of consequences for that technology (Richard Sclove 1995: 4-9). The law of unintended consequences comes into play. Consequences are unimaginable when a new technology first emerges. For example, the invention of the telephone went from limited landline usage in addressing communication difficulties in households, to a universal instrument for voice, mobile and text messages in the developed world (although in the developing world, usage is still limited due to economic and literacy factors). The diversity of changes brought about in our culture as a result of the cell phone could not have been foreseen.

Electricity had limited usage when first invented because only the privileged

few could be serviced, and most rural areas were excluded until the mid-twentieth century. Today it is almost universal in all regions of the developed world. Electricity changed society, allowing the development of new technologies and new machineries (many of which have physical benefits for the comfort levels of society), mass communications, the rise of the cinema, television, and automated factories, amongst others. The same may be said of the automobile, which revolutionized transport and travel. The car, and the development of the airplane, created the mobile society, yet who would have envisaged the sports utility vehicle and 'soccer mom' society as a result of the invention of the automobile?

When television began to emerge in the 1950's, the medium was predicted by many as a tool to create an educated and enlightened citizenry through the sharing of knowledge and the broadcast of educational programs. What developed instead was an intellectual wasteland. Popular programs, such as sitcoms, were first viewed on a few channels by audiences who had shared interests in these programs. Today there are more than one hundred channels, with an array of programs seeking to satisfy almost every conceivable interest.

None of these technologies were static inventions. Each went on to create results, usages, extrapolations, and consequences, not fully envisioned by their inventors. The refrigerator was simply an extension of the ice-box. Yet, the development of refrigeration has not only changed the way food is packaged, distributed and sold, but has permanently altered the stay-at-home-wife culture and

spawned the TV-dinner, fast-food society. The current ICTs are simply in the early stages of technology development, and have already created a revolution in the way information and knowledge is shared. Yet one can only speculate what shall emerge in the future as a result of their application. Even a cursory analysis of the above examples illustrates that one may equally predict the growth of e-democracy in the future, or the disappearance of the subject and replacement by political ennui, or a host of other permutations and combinations.

As valid as the argument may be that the e-democratic potential of ICTs is merely a delusory hope for the future, I maintain that it is an equally valid conclusion that the activity on e-democracy and online consultations taking place not only in government or legislative and political bodies, but with groups and individuals outside of government, suggests that ICTs could play a stronger role in e-democracy. Indeed, the digital divide, the democratic deficit, and the political will of the leadership are all major impediments that will need to be addressed and overcome for the adoption of ICTs by the citizen in the process of government.

Research considered in this thesis shows that citizen participation at this point in time is very limited and does not embrace a wide constituency of the general public in those countries where some form of e-democracy is practiced, because government itself does not provide sufficient means for it. If government agencies truly desire to engage the citizen in online debate and citizen consultation, marketing programs will be necessary to bring people into the consultation process, including not only the

creation of web portals to allow people to take part, but to secure enough promotion of them for citizens to learn of their existence. The required technical tools for use in these consultations must be developed to ensure people can express their views. The necessary human and financial resources must be allocated so that thorough and proper consultations and ease of engagement may take place, combining the use of online and offline tools.

Officials in the public service have the mandate to engage in online consultations because they are empowered by elected governments with the responsibility of bringing online services to the public and developing e-government programs. Authority for the use of online consultations is also received from the government, as consultations are sometimes part of the process whereby public sector officials gain public input on proposed regulations, programs and policies. Thus, although government officials are engaged in the democratic process, they are not the primary drivers of democratic expression.

There is a need for a fuller discourse on the role of parliaments and democratic institutions. Elected officials rely on many sources of input into the parliamentary process, and in the system of representative democracy, they have the most power to determine the direction of that society. While there have been arguments that e-democracy is also a process outside the political system, the reality is that the right to rule lies within our elected representatives and the majority that form the government of the day. For the success of an e-democracy evolution, it is

imperative that these officials become skilled in the use of online tools, as engagement of elected representatives is the first stage towards creating an interactive environment between them and the public. Politicians will have to become willing participants and contributors to that evolution. A failure to adopt an e-democracy infrastructure to its fullest potential would curtail the development of e-democracy.

Brian Winston argues that every innovation throughout history becomes co-opted by the government in power to consolidate and extend that power through regulation or control of that innovation (Winston 1986). The same could be said to be occurring with the subject of e-governance, and with those who wish to dispense with the term 'e-governance'. Examples such as the Crossing Boundaries conference in Ottawa, the Privy Council Office report, and the Parliament-controlled online consultations in the UK (all discussed in Chapter Three), are but a few examples that clearly show to what extent the power of the state may be exercised, not necessarily through force, but by co-opting what might otherwise have the potential to reform the ability of ordinary citizens to exert a greater influence over policy decisions that directly affect their lives. Governments do not bring about revolutions. Revolutions change the power structure, and those who hold power do not wish to divest themselves of that power.

Like other new technologies in the past, there is a point that is reached in their usage when government deems that the new technology is desired by the populace at large or is necessary for efficient governance, then institutes regulation of the

distribution and usage of that technology, and either licenses or allocates grants for its wide deployment. As with all past technologies, governments will have a significant influence on the outcome of the new ICTs, by licensing and dispensing them to the public through the filter of government regulation. We are already witnessing this in attempts to bring copyright to the online world, in the pursuit of pedophiles, in the restriction of pornography in some countries, and the control of information released online by governments.

Urging politicians at all levels of government to become familiar with and to use the new ICT tools to engage their constituents was one of the key issues addressed at a recent conference at which Coleman spoke, where he argued that using the Internet to bring Canadians into the policy-making process would go a long way to restore Canadians' growing mistrust and cynicism about government (Ottawa Citizen, Saturday, May 10, 2003 A6).

At the conference, there were several examples presented of online consultations undertaken by the Canadian government in the previous year. However, no representative from any citizen's group, nor from those working with grassroots movements in e-democracy was invited to speak. Those who were the supposed recipients of the benefits of this dialogue and consultation were completely omitted. Nor was there any mention made of the numerous online sites created by citizens, public interest groups, unions, associations, and NGOs dedicated to debate and development of e-democracy (see Appendix A – by no means an exhaustive list).

Once again the agenda was controlled and propelled by the same actors from the top down: politicians, government bureaucrats and corporate players, to the exclusion of the citizen voice.

Providing the short answer to the question about the citizen's role in the e-governance equation, Coleman, in his opening address to the conference, summed it up when he warned that citizens felt they were "outside the equation", a situation that must not be allowed to persist in the quest for a vibrant democracy. Ironically, it was Coleman who said in an online debate on new methods for democratic decision-making, "All of this must be conducted by trusted bodies. Neither government nor commercial firms are sufficiently free of interests to enable them to build such trusted structures." [60]

The evolution of ICTs is continuing. Democracy itself is a fluid and evolving subject, but if it is to be a truly inclusive democracy, the citizen must be brought more fully into the equation. For e-democracy to be viable in a growing and continuously changing environment, governments and elected officials will need to be flexible and capable of adapting to new technologies that arise. Whether people will utilize these new technologies to come together for a common cause, and seek to create change and input on policies being developed by governments, will primarily depend on the willingness of government and groups to provide the necessary tools for citizen engagement and to educate citizens on the importance of that engagement. No tool is

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[60] *E-Government Bulletin,* Issue 87, May 2000 <http://www.headstar.com/egb> For full report of the debate see <www.netecon2000.com>

inherently democratic, efficient, good, or bad. Rather it is how and to what extent the tool is used that determines the effect that will be created. Traditional offline tools and strategies are needed to influence the online world and the new culture and ethnic evolving on the Internet. Such programs will take commitment, resources, personnel and financial means.

If citizens are to be engaged online, the tools need to be provided, the issues broadcast widely, the facts made clear and stated in an understandable form. Access to the means for input must be provided to those who will be directly affected by the issues, a safe public space made available for an informed debate, and rational incentives for the ordinary citizen to enter into them. There is some limited evidence in several countries around the world, as shown in other examples above, that if the leaders and politicians make the effort, people will respond.

E-democracy is in its nascent state and while one may not be able to predict accurately what shape it will take in generations to come, there will be some kind of change. The key to its success will be the willing and vigorous participation by a large part of the citizenry. It will also depend on mechanisms developed by a grassroots movement of citizens to drive the process of online consultation from the public to the government, thus making this a truly interactive dialogue between government and the citizen.

However, in the final analysis, it is the democratic deficit that must be

addressed by all levels of society through a renewed debate on democracy itself in order for the new ICTs to assist in the growth and expansion of e-democracy. The establishment of citizen groups and safe spaces for this debate to take place are necessary, as well as some motivation that will make citizens feel that it is worthwhile for them to enter into the debate. The evolution of democracy, whether participatory, direct, or representative, must also occur in a way that avoids the tyranny of the majority.

Changes in the forms of democracy have often come from thinkers and philosophers, based on the social conditions of the day. Thinkers and ideas have shaped the world. While grassroots movements are needed in order to create change in participation, in the past these activities have been galvanized by a comprehensive philosophical approach to new forms of democracy. Current forms are in need of that philosophical approach, and in the resulting galvanization of those who would bring about change, the new technologies have the potential to play a major role.

Part of the problem lies with the Internet 'disease of immediacy' wherein the individual demands a service, access to information, or answer to a question instantly. This often makes it difficult for political or public administrative bodies to meet such short-term expectations. A long-term strategy needs to be articulated by governments and citizens in order to make citizens feel there is value in their personal participation in the democratic process. The continuation of the existing top-down scenario will only serve to sow further cynicism and distrust amongst the public and to widen the

democratic deficit. Electoral and parliamentary reform, and additional mechanisms of accountability governing those in power, would help to alleviate citizen attitudes about the lack of effectiveness of both the vote and the competitiveness of political parties, as well as growing political disinterest.

A culture that widens the consultation process with the public, and especially with youth, for the development of policy and regulation, could contribute to the strengthening of the democratic sphere at all levels and to the evolution of an e-democracy environment. A public commons for citizens to access government online, to find information to download, and to leave comments on the issues of a particular department, could also assist in changing the attitudes of people towards government and democracy. Citizen groups of all types should be encouraged and embraced in the consultation process. A level playing field to allow any interest group or individual member of the public to participate is vital. As part of the new reality of building e-democracy, policy makers will have to be familiar with the tools available and be part of a continuous learning curve to keep up with the new technologies and a changing culture incorporating these technologies.

The ICTs are available to build the necessary platforms and to function as the tools to facilitate e-democracy. Best practices need to be evolved and implemented by government, which emphasize educational programs that bring the citizen into the online participatory world. That which is unworkable would be eliminated, and that which is workable augmented. There are many groups and individuals, including

some within governments, who are working to make e-democracy become a reality. Its future will be determined by the extent of the energy and practice from both government and the public in the years to come. The ICTs, if creatively utilized, could be a significant tool to address the democratic deficit and to expand e-democracy. While I may not be able to predict exactly what that role may be, belief in that role is nevertheless based on a rationale beyond delusory hope.

APPENDIX A

E-DEMOCRACY WEB SITES

Alan Mather's egovernment blog <http://www.diverdiver.com/egovblog.html>

Balanced e-government <http://www.begix.de/en/index.html>

Berkman Center for Internet and Society <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/>

Bloggin e-government e-democracy and other e's
<http://slashdemocracy.org/gotzespace/>

Centre for e-government
<http://www.centre-for-egovernment.com/>

Democracy and Internet Working Group
<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~eumansky/net.dem.html>

Digital Governance: building and Sustaining Democratic and Accountable Governance Structures using ICT
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/digitalgov/gov-menu.html>

edemocracy in practice <http://www.svekom.se/skvad/E-democracy-en.pdf>

eDemocracy Network: List of eDemocracy researchers
<http://www.models-research.ie/projects/ed.html>
<http://www.models-research.ie/projects/edlist.html>

E-government Bulletin <http://www.headstar.com/egb/>

e-government Observatory
<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida/jsps/index.jsp?fuseAction=showChapter&chapterID=140&preChapterID=0>

E-gov Firststop <http://www2.ctg.albany.edu/egovfirststop/>

Electronic Democracy
<http://www.democraciaweb.org/demoeng.htm>

Evaluating practices and Validating Methods in E-Democracy
<http://www.eve.cnrs.fr/>

Forum for Europena e-public services <http://www.eu-forum.org/>

Government and Democracy in the Information Age
<http://www.cos.dk/gadia/gadia.htm>

Governments Online International <http://governments-online.org/>

Homepage: Dr Karin Geiselhart, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow (E-Business), School of Business, Information Technology, RMIT University (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), Australia <http://www.bf.rmit.edu.au/kgeiselhart/>

IBM: Institute for Electronic Government <http://www.ieg.ibm.com/>

IDEA: Democracy and the Information Revolution
<http://www.idea.int/frontpage_forum2001.htm>

Interchange of Data between Administrations
<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida/jsps/index.jsp?fuseAction=whatsnew>

International Teledemocracy Centre <http://www.itc.napier.ac.uk>

In the service of democracy <http://www.edemocracy.gov.uk/>

IPPR:Digital Society
<http://www.ippr.org.uk/research/index.php?current=34&detail=intro>

i-vote <http://www.internetwahlen.de/>

Katherine Reilly: Canada/Latin America <http://katherine.reilly.net/index.html>

LSE/UCL Government on the web
<http://www.governmentontheweb.org/>

Netpolitique <http://www.netpolitique.net/index.php3>

OECD:Government – Citizen Relations
<http://webnet1.oecd.org/oecd/pages/home/displaygeneral/0,3380,EN-home-460-9-no-no-no,00.html>

Participation, Political Organisations and the impact of the internet
<http://www.esri.salford.ac.uk/ESRCResearchproject/links.html>

PolitikDigital.de <http://www.politik-digital.de/e-demokratie/>

Process Models and Software for eDemocracy and eGovernance
<http://www.discourse-systems.de/>

Teledemocracy Action News and Network <http://frontpage.auburn.edu/tann/>

The Center for Digital Government
<http://www.centerdigitalgov.com/>

The Development Gateway: E-Government
<http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130619/>

The e-government debate and E-democracy World Map
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/issue.jsp?debateId=85&id=8>
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article.jsp?id=8&debateId=85&articleId=772>

The Work Foundation of I-wire <http://www.theisociety.net/>

The Voxpolitics e-democracy blog <http://www.voxpolitics.com/index.shtml>

UNESCO: E-government
<http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php?URL_ID=3038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201&reload=1042467335>

University of St. Gallen's EGov Centre <http://www.electronic-government.ch/>

Vecam: Reflexion et action pour l'internet citoyen <http://www.vecam.org/>

World eGov Links <http://www.egovlinks.com/world_egov_links.html>

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