Electronic government (or e-government) has come a long way since its modest beginnings a mere 10 or so years ago. Governments throughout the world and at all levels—national, sub-national (state or provincial governments), and local—have adopted some form or forms of e-government. As shown in the latest United Nations benchmarking report (U.N., 2005), the more developed nations, nations with stronger economies, and nations with democratic political structures tend to lead in e-government adoption.

Yet, the findings of that report as well as of other studies (e.g., Coursey & Norris, 2006) suggest that e-government has a long way to go to reach the predictions of its principal normative models (Baum & DiMaio, 2000; Layne & Lee, 2001; Hiller & Belanger, 2001; Ronaghan, 2001; Wescott, 2001). These models predict that e-government adoption will move from the informational to the interactive, transactional, integrative, and transformational. The available evidence, however, shows that for the most part e-government is and remains mainly informational with relatively little real integration and relatively few interactive and transactional functions or services available on governmental Web sites.

Finally, although numerous claims are made in the literature for the transformative capability of e-government, no studies have been undertaken to ascertain if such transformation is occurring as a result of e-government. Perhaps since e-government is only 10 years old, it is too soon to inquire about its transformative impact. It may also be that the transformation hypothesis itself is flawed (e.g., Danziger & Anderson, 2002; Kraemer & King, 2006; Coursey & Norris, 2006).

*Current Issues and Trends in E-Government Research* endeavors to bring to both scholars and practitioners the latest and best in research into the phenomenon of e-government. This volume presents a wide range of research studies about a variety of aspects of e-government.

*Assessing Digital Government at the Local Level Worldwide: An Analysis of Municipal Web Sites throughout the World*, by James Melitiski, Marist College, and Marc
Holzer, Rutgers University – Campus at Newark (USA), examines and evaluates the performance of the Web sites of 84 cities around the world. The authors used a five-stage framework employing 92 measures to analyze these Web sites. Their study found that Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore, New York, and Shanghai were the top five large cities in terms of the provision of on-line information and services.

The Impact of the Internet on Political Activism: Evidence from Europe, by Pippa Norris, Harvard University (USA) and the United Nations Development Program, addressed some of the political consequences of the rise of knowledge societies. Norris uses survey data and key measures of political activism from the 19-nation European Social Survey, 2002, in particular, to examine the capacity of the Internet for strengthening democratic participation and civic engagement. Her chapter summarizes current debate about the impact of the Internet on the public sphere. Norris argues that the main influence of this development, as it is theorized in a market model, will be determined by the “supply” and “demand” for electronic information and communications about government and politics. She predicts that the primary impact of knowledge societies in democratic societies will be upon facilitating cause-oriented and civic forms of political activism which will strengthen social movements and interest groups, versus impacts on conventional channels of political.

E-Government in Canada: Transition or Transformation? by Jeffrey Roy, Dalhousie University (Canada), examines e-government in Canada. Roy provides a definition (albeit somewhat normative) for this elusive topic, discusses certain conceptual dimensions of e-government, particularly those around service and security and transparency and trust, and assesses Canada’s public sector response to e-government. With respect to the latter, he notes the top-down (federal government) nature of e-government in Canada as well as barriers to the full implementation of e-government. Finally, Roy observes the political nature of e-government by noting that a change in party control of the federal government has the potential to change the emphasis if not the nature of e-government in Canada.

In Motives, Strategic Approach, Objectives and Focal Areas in E-Gov-Induced Change, Hans J. (Jochen) Scholl, University of Washington (USA), discusses an exploratory study of eight propositions derived from the private-sector literature that focus on business process change induced by e-government. Scholl employed a purposive sample to survey top managers in New York State government and in the governments of the city of Seattle, Washington (USA) and King County, Washington (USA) who had had responsibility for at least one e-gov project. His principal finding was that e-government does, indeed, induce major business process changes in governmental organizations as predicted by the private sector literature.

E-Government-Induced Business Process Change (BPC): An Empirical Study of Current Practices presents Scholl’s follow-on and companion piece to the previous chapter. Here, using the same methodology and research propositions as in the previous chapter, Scholl asks whether e-government related BPC practices are different from or similar to BPC practices in the private sector. Among other
things, he found considerable similarities between BPC practices in the public and private sectors. However, one important difference stood out—the importance of stakeholder involvement in successful e-government projects. He attributed this to the differences in governance in the two sectors. Scholl argues that because of this difference, BPC projects are more complex and take longer in the public sector, but also are more likely to succeed.

*Computer Security in Electronic Government: A State-Local Education Information System*, by Alison Radl, Iowa Department of Human Services (USA), and Yu-Che Chen, Iowa State University (USA), examines security issues associated with e-government projects. The authors employ the CIA (confidentiality, integrity, and availability) model to examine factors affecting security through a case study of an educational information system in Mid-Western American state involving a state department of education and 370 local school districts. Radl and Chen examined a number of factors potentially associated with security (e.g., district size, software selection, technology staffing, technology competence and support, and others). They found that technology support was an important factor in security but that other hypothesized factors did not achieve statistical significance.

*Measuring and Explaining the Quality of Web Sites in the (Virtual) House of Representatives*, by Kevin M. Esterling, University of California, Riverside, David M. J. Lazer, Harvard University, and Michael A. Neblo, Ohio State University (USA) examines how members of the U.S. House of Representatives use the Internet to provide information and services to and promote interaction. They used data from the 2002 Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) evaluation of Congressional Web sites. They also developed three measurement tools from the 37 variables examined in that study (overall quality, content quality, and usability). They then conducted multiple regression analyses using a variety of independent variables (e.g., tenure in office, margin of victory in last election, political party, Internet connectivity of district, median district income, and others) to predict Web site quality. The authors’ principal findings were that shorter tenure in office, closer electoral margin, internet connectivity of constituents, and socioeconomic status of district were all correlated with high-quality Web sites.

The next four chapters address aspects of what has come to be known as e-democracy, or the use of electronic means to encourage citizen participation in governmental programs, activities, and decision-making. E-democracy is predicted by some of the normative models of e-government to be an “end-state” of e-government.

In *Electronic Democracy at the American Grassroots*, I examine local e-democracy in the U.S. using data from focus groups with officials from 37 leading edge municipal and county governments from across the U.S. My principal questions were: why American local governments adopted e-government and whether e-democracy was among the reasons for its adoption; whether e-government had produced or affected local e-democracy; and what plans, if any, these governments had with respect to e-democracy in coming years.
I found that American local government adopted e-government mainly to deliver governmental information and services and to provide citizen access to governmental officials. Local e-government did not operate in a manner that either produce or impact local e-democracy (at least, as I define the term). Finally, few American local governments have any plans whatsoever regarding e-democracy—it simply is not on their radar screens.

Next, in *A Brave New E-World? An Exploratory Analysis of Worldwide E-Government Readiness, Level of Democracy, Corruption and Globalization*, Zlatko J. Kovačić, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (NZ), employs a number of data sources to examine the relationship between e-government readiness, level of democracy, corruption, and globalization for 191 nations. He hypothesizes that more democratic nations, those with less corruption, those with higher international economic integration would be more positive toward increasing the level of e-government readiness. He also hypothesizes that nations that actively work to increase their levels of e-government readiness would have higher democratic ratings. He found, for the most part, moderate support for hypotheses. However, globalization did not appear to contribute to e-government readiness.

*Scenarios for Future Use of E-Democracy Tools in Europe*, by Herbert Kubicek, University of Bremen, and Hilmar Westholm, Institute for Information Management Bremen, (GmbH) (Germany), present possible scenarios for the future of e-democracy and the use of ICTs to facilitate e-democracy in Europe. Their chapter is based on work undertaken by scholars at RAND Europe, the Danish Technological Institute and the Institute of Technology Assessment of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Kubicek and Westholm present and describe three plausible future scenarios titled “A more prosperous and just Europe,” “A turbulent world,” and “Recession and reorientation,” and examine the implications of these scenarios for the use of ICT tools for e-democracy. They note that different scenarios result in different mixes of the use of e-democracy tools and different outcomes. However, they also found that in none of the scenarios are ICTs “the key to solving the problem of political apathy.”

In *The Quest for Advocates: Exploring the Missing Political Good Will for E-Democracy in Europe*, Harald Mahrer, Vienna Institute of Economics and Business Administration & METIS Institute for Economic and Political Research (Austria), reports on a case study of 220 parliamentarians from 25 EU countries regarding their views toward e-government and e-democracy. In particular, he was interested in learning whether parliamentarians were supportive of efforts toward e-democracy or whether they exhibited characteristics of what has come to be known as the “middleman paradox.”

Mahrer found that while parliamentarians generally were quite supportive of e-administration and felt that current barriers to achieving more complete diffusion of it, they were not as sanguine about e-democracy. Here, he noted that the parliamentarians believed that there were numerous barriers to achieving e-democracy,
that overcoming the barriers would difficult, and that, in any event, they were uncomfortable with the prospect of being replaced by forms of digital democracy. These findings clearly suggest the existence of the middleman paradox regarding e-democracy across Europe. Finally, Mahrer noted some differences between the orientations of Eastern (former Communist) and Western European parliamentarians toward e-democracy.

E-Gov Research 2003-2006: Improvements and Issues, by Åke Grönlund and Annika Andersson, Örebro University (Sweden), assesses the maturity of the field of e-government research through examination of papers presented at leading e-government conferences (HICCS 2003, European Conference on Electronic Government 2003, and EGOV 2003, 170 papers; and HICCS 2006 and EGOV 2005, 117 papers). After an exhaustive examination of the contents of these papers, Grönlund and Andersson report that the maturity of the field has, indeed, improved during this period. Papers presented in the later conferences exhibited greater consistency with research publication standards; were more closely linked to the literature; had fewer dubious claims; and were more empirical. However, they also noted continuing limitations in this literature, including an increase in purely descriptive works and only a slight increase in theory creation and testing.

E-Government Research: Capabilities, Interaction, Orientation, and Values, by Kim Viborg Andersen and Helle Zinner Henricksen of the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, provides an in-depth analysis of recent literature about e-government, particularly to understand the conceptual domains and application areas being examined. Building on the framework developed by Danziger and Andersen (2002), the authors reviewed 110 articles in peer-reviewed journals, Andersen and Henricksen found that this research focuses mainly on e-government capabilities and interactions and less frequently value distributions and policy orientations. Their key finding is that this orientation suggests that e-government research follows in the path of previous IS research and that little research into e-government is being conducted from more of a public administration or government perspective.

Finally, in E-Government Adoption in Canadian Municipal Governments: A Survey of Ontario Chief Administrative Officers, Christopher G. Reddick, The University of Texas at San Antonio (USA), examines citizen-initiated contacts with government as the result of e-government. Reddick surveyed the chief administrative officers of Ontario municipalities with populations of 10,000 or greater. His survey achieved a response rate of 74%. Among other things, he found that municipal Web sites in Ontario, not unlike those in the U.S. are mainly informational, with few transactions. Additionally, he found that the chief administrative officers believed that e-government has increased citizen contact with government. However, he did not find that factors typically associated with citizen-initiated contact explained increased contact in Ontario municipalities. Municipalities with more on-line services and separate IT departments reported increased citizen initiated contact arguably more than other municipalities.
Electronic government has been around for only slightly over a decade. This means that research into e-government is also fairly new. Hopefully, the research reported here, which is on the leading edge of contemporary e-government research, will not only be informative to readers but will also stimulate further research into this exciting and important new governmental phenomenon.

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References


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**Endnote**

1 While Pippa Norris and the editor of this volume share a surname, they are not related.