Electrifying Democracy? 10 Years of Policy and Practice

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THE British government has been keen to promote political participation, and strengthen democratic practices more generally, through the use of Internet-based technologies. This is unsurprising, perhaps, given the perceived crisis of Britain's traditional democratic institutions, highlighted by low electoral turnouts and declining trust in politicians. However, the very fact that we can talk of a decade of e-democracy experiments is itself a creditworthy achievement. Such experiments, although designed to support our representative form of democracy, have varied greatly with elements of both direct and deliberative democracy often to the fore.

This article analyses the policy behind, and practice of, *government-led* electronic democracy initiatives. The policy analysis focuses on the effects of the *In the Service of Democracy* Green Paper. The analysis of practical experiences with e-democracy initiatives will focus on Internet-based discussion forums, consultations and voting.[1] The article will also outline e-democracy initiatives at the local level, and their relationship with central government. Firstly though, it is necessary to outline the different theoretical accounts of how the Internet was expected to change politics.

Theorising the effects of e-democracy

Broadly speaking, there are three schools of thought about how the Internet will affect democratic politics. The first group suggests that the Internet will revolutionise democratic systems and is normally technologically determinist. Revolutionaries argue that the Internet can and will transform our democratic system. There will be a wholesale change to the functioning of democracy, facilitated by new technologies: 'the technical difficulties that until now have made it impossible for large numbers of citizens to participate in policy making have now been solved by the revolution in computer-communications technology'.[2] Similarly, Naisbitt has argued that the communication revolution is making representative democracy obsolete:

Today, with instantaneously shared information, we know as much about what's going on as our representatives and we know it just as quickly. The fact is we have outlived the historical usefulness of representative democracy and we all sense intuitively that it is obsolete.[3]

The second perspective suggests that the Internet will re-invigorate representative democracy by developing technical fixes to alleviate the problems. This can be either by strengthening the traditional practices of representative democracy or by using participatory and deliberative methods to support representative democracy (sometimes known as reformers). Put simply, people who argue for a technical fix believe it is possible to determine specific problems with democracy and develop technologies to alleviate them.[4] Unlike the revolutionaries, those who believe in the fixing power of technologies typically conceive technology as being a benign facilitator to progress and we must, thus, exploit its potential fully to protect democracy.

The third school of thought suggests that politics will normalise the Internet into its established structures, having limited impact.[5] There are established—and powerful—institutional arrangements and interests that both shape and resist change. This refers to what Winston terms the law of the suppression of radical potential, in which potentially revolutionary technologies are enmeshed into existing social processes.[6] This is because politicians, rather than shying away from new technology, actively incorporate it into the system so that its revolutionary potential is capped. If the technology is brought into the circle, it can be controlled and designed in a manner that suits the politicians. Bellamy and Taylor have summarised this position:

heroic scenarios for reinvigorating government through the application of ICTs are fundamentally misleading. The institutions of governance will mould and fashion the revolutionary potential of ICTs into an evolutionary reality. A polity is, essentially, a settled ordering of politics and government. As it evolves into an information polity, it may be expected to do so in ways which are generally inclined to replicate and reinforce, and only sometimes to rupture or depart from, existing practices and patterns of behaviour.[7]

Such arguments suggest that the facilitation of e-democracy by political institutions is contested: do institutions help or hinder, do they emancipate or emasculate? Such questions have long been the concern of democratic and institutional theorists. Taking a negative view of government intervention, Ithiel de Sola Pool argues that it is governments and not technology that we should fear; it is their policy that threatens freedom. ICTs, he suggests, are inherently democratising, because their design undermines centralised control over communication and politics.[8] Eli Noam[9] and Pippa Norris,[10] on the other hand, argue that governments must intervene with policies to increase access and diversity. Similarly, Caroline Needham has noted that

Whilst citizenship can flourish outside the institutional context [. . .] The extent to which technology will be democratising in its potential will depend in large part on the willingness of governments to act as leader and facilitator of expanded democratic participation.

Online discussion forums provide us with an interesting example of such concerns. Stephen Coleman has argued that 'Linking discussion to recognised channels of power has not tended to occur and this is why scholars have found so little debate of real value in forums that have been analysed'.[11] The implication of this statement is twofold. Firstly, people will take institutional online discussion more seriously, provoking higher quality debates. As Coleman puts it,

rational citizens seek outcomes from their participation and meaningful outcomes often depend upon there being a link between the virtual world of open discussion and the physical world of complex political relationships and institutions.[12]

Secondly, government-run forums are (arguably) designed and structured to facilitate more deliberation.[13] Although such questions are important, it is still necessary to discuss how and why the British government got involved in e-democracy.

The roots and rhetoric of e-democracy in the United Kingdom

The roots of e-democracy can be traced back to the Blair government's broader 'modernisation' agenda. Blair stated in his manifesto-like book, *New Britain*, that New Labour wanted 'a new relationship between the individual and the state. We want to give power back to the people'.[14] This would require an extension 'to the relationship between central government and the people' and 'means changing how national government is run'.[15] In other words, New Labour wanted to 'redraw the boundaries between what is done in the name of the people and what is done by the people themselves'.[16] While the coherence of so-called 'Third Way' thinking as a guiding philosophy for government might be disputable, it provided a rationalisation for government-led initiatives to increase political participation—particularly between elections—so-called evidence-based policy-making. In 1998, Blair went on to argue that

The democratic impulse needs to be strengthened by finding new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that affects them. For too long a false antithesis has been claimed between "representative" and "direct" democracy [. . .] open, vibrant, diverse democratic debate is a laboratory for ideas about how we should meet social needs.[17]

E-democracy was seen as one way to develop this relationship and deepen democracy. Initially, e-democracy initiatives lagged behind ones in e-government. The first major policy document in the area, a green paper entitled *Government Direct: The Electronic Delivery of Government Services*, featured only one sentence that directly covered how new technologies (e-mail) might be used to increase participation, and this was replicated in most of the early documents.[18] According to Stephen Coleman, e-democracy 'might be expected to be the poor relation to e-government',

because people are more interested in services than consultations: 'The question is establishing it as any kind of relation at all'.[19] In formal policy terms, this occurred in October 2001 when the e-commerce minister, Douglas Alexander, (re)launched the government's e-democracy policy plans under the auspices of the UK Online campaign. Alexander stated that 'it is time to put e-democracy on the information age agenda and for governments to set out what they mean by e-democracy and how they intend to use the power of technology to strengthen democracy'.[20] This statement, and Needham's analysis of the early policy documents, suggests that the government had been inactive on e-democracy. Such a conclusion would be wrong. As outlined below, the government, building on Parliament's lead, ran a series of e-democracy experiments that went far beyond a rhetorical commitment but fell short of a coherent policy.

In conjunction with the (re)launch, a small team was established in the Office of the e-Envoy to develop and promote e-democracy initiatives. This team of four people was tasked with developing a green paper on e-democracy.[21] The very development of a policy paper on e-democracy was in itself an important milestone and led the way globally. Steven Clift argued that this was 'a completely new phase in the evolution of thought about government's democratic role in the information age – that of an initiator and actor and not simply a reactor to political and civic uses of the Internet'.[22]

The paper centred on democratic rather than technological aspects, arguing that the democracy in e-democracy should be of the representative form: 'e-democracy is neither an alternative to representative democracy nor a final replacement for existing forms of democratic participation'.[23] The Green Paper divided e-democracy into two policy tracks: e-participation and e-voting. The e-voting section prioritised remote Internet voting which, it was thought, would increase convenience and bring elections in line with the contemporary world (see e-voting section below). The e-participation section focused on developing interactions between government and citizens. A number of possible policies were suggested such as digital citizenship training, a network of e-democracy centres, award schemes and pathfinder initiatives. The paper argued that participation must be deepened 'beyond a single exchange to a more sustained, in-depth interaction'.[24]

The Green Paper did make some questionable assumptions. The principal one being that the public has a 'desire for new avenues in which to express their opinions'.[25] Similarly, the paper drew a presumptive analogy with 'interactive' television programmes, stating that it is 'evident that vast numbers of people are willing to use new technologies as part of a decision-making process. The success of interactive television shows such as *Big Brother* or *Pop Idol* is largely due to the technology in allowing a greater number of people to be directly involved'.[26] This is precisely the technology-centred stance that was

originally eschewed. That people are willing to use new technologies to make decisions—as evidenced by the *Big Brother* phenomenon—does not necessarily mean that they will want to use similar technologies to make political decisions.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the precise content was a matter of much contention between the various actors involved. The Paper took around 1 year to write and went through several drafts. There was considerable criticism of the published document. Stephen Coleman, for example, argued that the Paper was 'not particularly well written [. . .] setting out a not particularly inspiring set of ideas – making connections where some people think the connections ought not be best made'.[27] These arguments are supported by many of the submissions to the consulta- tion. The All Party Parliamentary Group on E-democracy, for example, criticises the document's 'top down, centralist approach' and because it 'fails to set out a vision' of how e-democracy will transform the rela- tionship between citizens and their representatives because of a mis- taken focus on e-voting.

Overall, the precise impact of the Green Paper (and the consultation more generally) has been at best mixed. The Green Paper recognised that it was a stepping-stone to developing a detailed e-democracy pol- icy, but this has not happened. Exactly why this occurred is disputed. On the one hand, it has been suggested that changes in the Strategic Policy Unit and the move of Robin Cook cost e-democracy the needed political/ministerial support to drive the agenda beyond the Green Paper. On the other, some interviewees suspected that, even before it was released, the Green Paper had lost the confidence of Government decision-makers beyond the Office of the e-Envoy and was effectively moribund when it was launched. *In the Service of Democracy*, though important as a policy strategy, is not the be all and end all of e-demo- cracy in the United Kingdom. Several initiatives have been conducted, both before and after its publication. Practical examples of e-democracy are discussed below, starting with large-scale government-run online discussion forums.

Large-scale online discussion

The notion that deliberation can improve the quality of decision- making has gained increased acceptance. Alex Allan, Britain's first e-envoy, has suggested that online tools will be key to this because the 'online consultations and forums that the Internet offers' create 'truly novel means of communication. A means of communication where messages and themes can emerge in ways that may not be expected, as the participants bounce ideas off each other'.[28] To this end, Britain's political institutions have developed and operated numerous online discussion forums, of various shapes and sizes, to facilitate deliberation and dialogue with citizens. Many of these forums have a clear policy context.

It would be fair to characterise the period from 1996–2001 as one of experimentation. While it is easy to criticise the errors that were made, the fact that the government was willing to take risks—often considered anathema—must be given due recognition. In taking risks, mistakes were always going to be made. Indeed, I would argue that they were *necessary* for the Internet to be used 'radically'. The criticisms are necessary, of course, so that the lessons are learnt and the agenda moved forward.

One of the earliest attempts by a government to run online discussion forums was on the Downing Street website. On 10 February 2000, the website was re-launched with the addition of two discussion forums: Speaker's Corner and Policy Forum. The aim was 'to create a two-way link between government and people'. The discussion forums were very popular, receiving 110,258 posts by 6781 users. In practice, however, analysis has shown that only around 0.3% of messages on Speaker's Corner were Official Responses, and these were made by the web-team, primarily in response to criticism of the website.[29] The issue was complicated further by accusations of censorship by the site's moderators (the web-team) in the media.[30] Analysis has shown that there were examples of questionable removals—indeed some 53.9% of all messages were not visible at the end—but that the main reason for this was very poorly designed and advertised rules for moderation.[31] This created a sense of cynicism amongst participants and considerable bad publicity. Downing Street's forums were replaced by Citizen Space when they closed on 4 December 2000. According to the government, this was because the Policy Forums and Your Say sections outgrew the Downing website and, secondly, the UK Online site was more suited to the cross-governmental nature of the discussion forums.

Citizen Space was an overarching portal intended to provide a locus for government-run discussion. The title Citizen Space brings to mind Habermasian notions of a public sphere where people can communicate freely and easily, debating the issues of the day before coming to considered decisions. It was established as part of UK Online in 2001 as a base from which to build an e-democracy strategy. When the discussions were closed for the 2001 election campaign, there was a sharp drop in activity on the website, suggesting they were popular.[32] Like the Downing Street website, it is said that summaries of the posts were made and sent to the Prime Minister. However, Catherine Needham has quoted one anonymous interviewee as saying this was 'nonsense'.[33]

As with Downing Street's forums, Citizen Space was plagued by problems. The initial forum software was redesigned even before it went live with a view to bringing it down and undertaking further re-structuring later. The perceived problem was a complaints-oriented design. Once live, the flaws were exposed and led to the eventual

withdrawal of the forum—just prior to the Green Paper—so that the structure could be re-thought.

The moderation of Citizen Space exacerbated these problems. Moderation was conducted by an independent company appointed by the Cabinet Office, and they adopted a policy of silent moderation. This had a disastrous effect as moderators could not respond to questions or even explain why they were not responding. According to Coleman *et al.*,

Users of the site have developed a conspiratorial picture of the moderators. Much of the discussion is about the moderators and how to beat them. . . This is unavoidable unless the current policy is abandoned and the moderators become vocal participants with an accountable role.[34]

One moderator even received a death threat.[35] Coleman *et al.* concluded that Citizen Space 'lacked a clear purpose or connection to Government policy-making. For a handful of enthusiasts, it provided an outlet for ill-informed opinion, prejudice and abuse. For most users, it held out the promise of interaction with Government, but proved to be a one-way street leading nowhere'.[36] These views are confirmed by Ian Johnson, Head of Democratic Engagement in the Department for Constitutional Affairs:

there were no policy owners for each of those threads to work out how they wanted to manage the interaction with the public, both in terms of setting specific issues in terms of moderating, adding information resources to the discussion, but, most importantly, in responding, in closing down particular issues, interacting with people so that the government was seen to be part and parcel of the process. In essence it was like turning the bath tap on and then walking away.[37]

There are no immediate plans to bring a large-scale discussion forum back. Johnson believes the 'government would find some purpose in retaining something like the Downing Street site' because you can 'get some idea of what public opinion might be on the big issues of the day'.[38] However, the general view is that one 'of the least useful ways of using' a discussion board is:

putting up big issues for people to discuss. Those people who log on and have their say, or very often their rant, and nobody is listening to them, nobody cares and nothing gets done and it just trails on off into oblivion. That use of discussion forums can be quite destructive of the trust between government and citizens which it is trying to build up.[39]

Partly in response to these problems, the government has subsequently focused on smaller scale, policy-linked forums. These are, effectively, a discursive consultation tool.
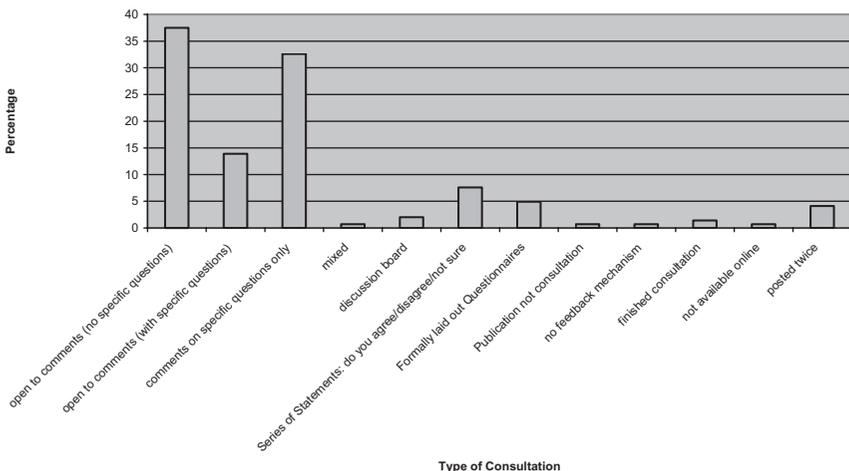
Online consultation

E-consultation is seen by the government as a crucial method by which people can participate in the policy-making process. The Green Paper

argued that it 'wishes to [. . .] change the culture of consultation' making them more interactive with responses during the process and not just once all viewpoints had been collated at the end.[40] This, it is hoped, will open up the consultation process to more people. Given the focus on interactivity, this section will concentrate on analysing exactly how interactive 'online' consultations were. The analysis focuses on Citizen Space's consultation section.

Links to three consultations were advertised on the front page of Citizen Space at any one time. There was a separate consultations index too: in January 2003, 168 were visible. These were from all parts of the United Kingdom and from various levels of government. Finally, Citizen Space had an archive of finished consultations and this contained a further 326 cases. All live consultations were analysed to determine the method(s) chosen for eliciting responses. The underlying logic was that different forms of consultation require different levels of input and produce different levels of output. Moreover, it was necessary to examine how interactive consultations were given the claims made in the Green Paper. The analysis was conducted alphabetically (as listed on the site) between 23 October and the 28 October 2002. The results are presented in Figure 1.

The results highlight one dominant pattern, the lack of interactivity. In fact, 95.8% of consultations offered only one-way communication. Although there were several different methods, they all followed the same basic pattern. Government departments were consulting, but the culture of consultation mentioned in the *In the Service of Democracy* consultation document had not changed. Only around 2% offered some form of two-way communication. The remaining consultations

1. Types of Consultation

were either repeats, had actually finished, or offered no feedback mechanism. The findings show that in placing consultations online, government agencies generally chose methods that normalised rather than re-invigorated or revolutionised existing arrangements.

E-democracy in local government

E-democracy initiatives have proliferated at the local level. That the majority of the consultations analysed above were organised at the local level is testament to this. Survey evidence has shown that the number of local authorities with website grew exponentially in the mid-1990s and that although the majority were primarily either PR tools or one-stop-shops, a minority did attempt to promote local democracy by providing wide-ranging policy information as well as opinion polls and online forums.[41] Two questions stand out: why has there been an interest in e-democracy and who has driven this? One of the main reasons is concern over decreasing turnout in local elections; it has dropped from an average of 41% between 1976 and 1996 to just 29.6% in 2000. Such concerns have been married with a raft of policies to 'modernise' local government by increasing public participation. Citizen input in decision-making was deemed necessary, because council activities need to reflect the wishes of the people they serve. This was in line with the government's drive towards 'best value': if citizens are to get best value from local authorities, the authority needs to be aware of people's wishes.

The White Paper, *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*, created a policy context by putting modernisation on the agenda and shaped subsequent developments. It stated that 'the Government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils' and that it should be 'valued, with strategies to inform and engage local opinion'.[42] To achieve its aim, the government placed a duty to consult on local authorities. The government made this a requirement because of a fear that bureaucratic forces, as well as a perceived culture of conservatism, might inhibit the development and use of new technologies across local government. Within the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), the local and regional government group was given the responsibility for dealing with e-modernisation and provides around 80% of central government funding at the local level.[43]

Central government is often criticised for placing local government in a straightjacket though by not giving it the freedom to act independently. Perri 6 *et al.*, for example, argue that the centre believes 'only the most relentless regime of inspection, incentive, sanction and discipline will produce effective action'.[44] A postal survey of local authorities suggests a more complicated picture: central government was ranked the third most important factor stimulating participation behind the meeting of statutory requirements.[45] This is supported by a survey of local authority Chief Executives that found 'a latent disposition within local

government for much greater public involvement' and that the 'participation agenda is being driven more by local internal factors than by external imposition. There is, therefore, a strong sense of ownership of these initiatives'.[46] Lawrence Pratchett and Steve Leach have fairly characterised the central–local relationship as one of 'choice within constraint', arguing that this was not merely a top-down process, 'significant scope remains for choice within it'.[47]

This is not to underestimate the influence of national government on e-democracy at the local level. Central government controls the competitive bidding process. This control is both in terms of which agendas are put forward and which are subsequently accepted. And similar to developments at the national level, e-government took priority. Tim Anderson, e-government Officer at Norfolk County Council, has stated that

The songwriter Sammy Kahn, when asked whether the lyrics or the tune came first, used to answer that what came first was the phone call offering him a commission. In Norfolk, if you asked whether policy imperatives or technological changes drove the adoption of new technology in public services, the answer would be that what came first were the bidding opportunities.[48]

Herein lies the influence of central government on local e-democracy initiatives.

The first sustained attempt to centrally fund e-democracy initiatives at the local level (with the exception, arguably, of the e-voting trials discussed below) was the National Local E-democracy project. This was one of 22 local 'e-government' projects; it received £4 million (from an £80 million pot), funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The project funded a plethora of initiatives from surveys of e-usage to experiments in blogs and local issue (discussion) forums over the course of 1 year. These were both top-down and bottom up (although the degree to which they were truly bottom up is questionable). It has also produced a guide for local authorities that covers the problems and possibilities of different technologies. The independent reports that were commissioned suggest a mixed bag of results and raised several issues for further consideration. It is too early to say whether such tools will reinvigorate democracy at the local level.

E-voting

Given the declining electoral turnouts discussed above, it is unsurprising that politicians have become interested in the potential for new technologies to make the process of casting and counting votes easier. This is because, in line with the rational choice thesis, if the costs associated with voting are reduced, the likelihood of someone voting should increase. Similarly, if votes can be counted in a more accurate and timely manner, given the recent voting scandals such as during the American presidential elections, trust with the voting system can be maintained or increased.

The 'e' in e-voting refers to a range of technologies: remote kiosk voting; Internet voting; telephone voting; text messaging; digital television; or some form of electronic vote casting machine based within a polling station to help with the counting or administrative side. The focus here is on how the Internet is being used to facilitate voting in elections. A Caltech/MIT report states that 'Internet voting is here' and holds 'immediate promise for lowering the obstacles experienced by some voters'.[49] Dick Morris takes this further, arguing deterministically that the 'speed and interactivity of the Internet will inevitably return our country [USA] to a de facto system of direct democracy by popular referendum'.[50]

There are, however, a number of potential problems and risks involved with any form of e-voting. According to Rebecca Mercuri,

Computer-based Internet voting offers the promise of easy access and speedy tabulation in exchange for a variety of risks that were either not present or are far worse than ones found in manual balloting systems. Some problems, such as those involving large-scale fraud, denials of service, and the incompatibility of anonymous balloting with audit trails, [are] inherently unresolvable [. . .] Certain technologies, such as Internet voting and remote voter authentication, are particularly vulnerable to these risks, as well as other sociological problems (like voter selling and coercion), and should not be used at all.[51]

Problems have occurred during e-voting trials. In Holland an e-vote on the choosing of a name for two merged towns was abandoned after it was discovered that turnout was above 100%.[52] While in America, it was discovered after an election result was given that the machines had not counted all the votes cast and that this may have affected the result.[53]

In the UK, a series of e-voting trials have been held during local elections under the auspices of the Electoral Commission. The most recent trials were held in 2003. The trials were on a much larger scale than in previous years and with a bigger range of technologies: there were 59 pilots covering over 14% of the eligible electorate. Of these, 14 pilots featured remote electronic voting (REV), the majority of which were conducted across the whole authority (in 2002, with the exception of Swindon, REV was only conducted in two or three wards in each local authority).[54] Within this sample, several variations were conducted so that different practices could be compared, such as different technologies and registration systems, and differing voting times (some allowed Internet voters to vote on the day of the election). The context for this expansion was the aim of having an e-enabled general election after 2006 put forward in the Green Paper.

The official reports suggested a generally positive outcome: 'Overall the e-enabled elections operated successfully again in 2003, with over 160,000 voters casting their vote by electronic means'.[55] Specific positive findings included that security was adequate, given the risks generated

by this scale of e-voting; there was no evidence of malicious fraud; people preferred to vote via the Internet than by phone and kiosks and most users were satisfied with their experience.

A number of security concerns were raised as well though, particularly by the opaque counting processes and limited paper trails; tight timetabling, which led to inadequate implementation of quality assurance exercises and the need to transfer voting data by e-mail. Overall, the Electoral Commission concluded that 'we are clearly some way from the prospect of an e-enabled general election'.[56] This is because the security risks that were deemed acceptable for the local trials would be unacceptable on a national scale. Returning to the cost benefit ratio, the benefits do not appear to have outweighed the risks as turnout increased by less than 5%. When compared with the highly successful (and arguably more secure) postal voting trials, the e-voting trials were often considered a failure. Subsequent e-voting trials have been cancelled on advice from the Electoral Commission. A tender inviting companies to run e-voting trials between 2006 and 2010 has also been cancelled. This occurred as the responsibility for such trials moved from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the Department for Constitutional Affairs. It would appear that e-voting has a mixed future in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

The British government has often led the way in the field of e-democracy, no other government has funded or conducted e-democracy initiatives on a similar scale. This is to their undoubted credit as such innovations are inherently risky and governments are often perceived as both technology illiterate and risk averse. It is unsurprising that progress to date has been patchy: the policy is being adapted as technologies develop; it is still very much a work in progress. Initially, the view was often we have got 'this technology, let's put it in, as opposed to saying what's the problem either in terms of getting public views on issues, or building trust with the public between government and citizen.'[57] Recent approaches have sought to 'grow things organically rather than having a big bang magic solution' because 'technology, and people's interaction with it, evolves very, very quickly and things change'.[58] This suggests greater government involvement in the funding and development of technologies. Indeed, the National Local E-democracy project and the Department for Constitutional Affairs' Innovations Fund were largely set up to fund the development of e-democracy tools within a governmental framework.

The most noticeable finding from the analysis of practical experiences with e-democracy was how fast change occurred. The Downing Street forums and Citizen Space (as well as the UK Online website) have now closed, and it appears that for the foreseeable future, the government will not be offering a similar large-scale open discussion forum. This is telling as the development of Citizen Space and indeed e-voting were the

backbone of the *In the Service of Democracy* Green Paper—yet both have stalled. There has been an increasing emphasis on smaller scale policy-linked consultations, though the analysis has found that these generally had only limited opportunities for interaction and discussion. Returning to the different theories of technological impact, the findings suggest that, to date, the radical potential of the Internet has largely been normalised to support existing processes. Innovations such as the Downing Street website and other online forums do have the potential to radically alter the relationship between government and citizens. However, the analysis to date suggests that a rhetorical commitment to two-way communication with citizens remains largely rhetorical.

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