Editorial

This journal's sub-title '*The International Journal of Government and Democracy in the Information Age*', intentionally strikes a balance between matters that might be considered predominantly to do with government and those predominantly to do with democracy. Of course, in many respects the distinction between government and democracy is an artificial one. From the perspective of the citizen, for example, experience of government is largely as consumer of services, and the democratic relationship as voter and wider participant is both necessarily and constitutionally coloured by their experience as consumer. Only analytically, perhaps, can we usefully separate the citizen's consumption experience from their experience as participant in democratic processes.

On the 'production side' of the governmental and democratic equation this separation makes more practical sense perhaps. We can see how governments world-wide have invested hugely in delivering their services in new electronic forms. Many of the articles that have already been published in this journal have described and analysed the attempts of governments in these respects, all of them pointing to the pitfalls, dilemmas and failures that governments have encountered on the way. What is also evident however is the imbalance that has occurred in most countries between zeal towards the development of e-government on the one hand and relative indifference to the development of forms of e-democracy on the other. In the UK, for example, only in the last two years has the government begun to experiment with new forms of e-voting, and in local governments too, progress towards electronic forms of democratic engagement has been comparatively slow.

Thus far in the short life of this journal the *de facto* balance that has been struck has been towards government rather than democracy. Articles submitted have taken us in that direction. In this particular edition, however, the overall balance of the journal shifts markedly as all five articles take on themes and issues that centre upon innovations in the democratic sphere of nation states.

The first of the articles in this edition, written by Jorgen Svensson and Ronald Leenes, centres upon issues surrounding the implementation of e-voting in European countries. It takes forward two major debates in so-doing. First, they differentiate 'electronic machine voting' from 'electronic distance voting', creating a useful distinction that enables more effective *a priori* and empirical evaluation of voting-in-the-booth and voting-at-a-distance. Secondly, their article provides additional support for an interpretation of decision making as being 'situational' rather than universalist or objective. Thus, whilst a technologically determinist view would suggest that forms of e-voting would roll out into polities on more or less the same lines, these authors demonstrate significant differences in adoption of e-voting systems, country by country. To explain this finding, the authors rely on structuration or institutional theory. Thus, they argue that the national institutional context, rather than the technological context, determines national willingness to adopt e-voting and that this is especially the case in distance voting. Low voter turnout is more likely to influence governments in adopting e-voting solutions than technological logic.

In the second article, Marcel Boogers and Gerrit Voerman provide evidence from a survey of political websites that they undertook during remarkable events at the Dutch General Election of 2002. The work they report is remarkable for two reasons. First it provides methodological insights into conducting web based research on political campaigning. By gaining access to party and non-partisan sites these researchers were able to conduct a large scale survey of people visiting the sites. Secondly, the article

provides substantive evidence that such web-sites currently have only modest impacts on the electoral process. Perhaps their strongest finding is that these sites do appear to act as a draw to younger voters to become engaged in the electoral process. Ultimately however, they conclude that "*People who are more politically active turn out to be more active on the Internet too*".

In the third article of this edition Jakob Jensen explores a Danish case study on the creation of an Internet space for conducting dialogue between politicians and citizens. His findings are in one respect surprising and in another they conform to what has become the norm. The surprise from his data is that the experiment worked in many respects and, indeed, it was deemed a success. The less surprising conclusion is that the Internet space did not attract new groups into the political debate, a finding that accords with others who have undertaken similar studies (*pace* Boogers & Voerman and young voters).

Jens Hoff, Karl Löfgren and Lars Torpe provide further insights into forms of Danish e-democracy with their overview article looking at "the State we are in ...". Whilst they find some examples of 'progress' towards the creation of 'e-conditions' for strong political dialogue, for the most part their findings once more point up the conclusion that '*plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*' is an appropriate descriptor. They find no evidence of what they call 'cyber-democracy', some small evidence of the embedding of 'neo-republican' or strong democracy, and the main democratic types that are currently to be found most evidently are the 'demo-elitist' and 'consumerist'.

Finally, Albert Meijer provides insights into government processes that are re-shaping as new information resources become available in government organisations. He argues that both parliamentary and legal accountability are being enhanced through these processes of *informatisation*, and the increased transparency of government that results is both an unintended and welcome consequence.

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