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Digital State 2.0

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When Bruce Doern began studying public policy towards science and technology four decades ago, the technological fields that were of interest to policy makers included aerospace, energy, the environment, and health. Information technology (IT) would not have been on that list because it was essentially an administrative function involving the management of large databases on mainframe computers. Furthermore, the industry was a stable oligopoly, with IBM as the dominant firm. In the last three decades, however, the IT industry has been transformed through the advent of the personal computer – an invention originating in the private sector – and the development of email and the Internet, both of which had their start in basic research about communication among computers carried out in government labs and academe and funded by the US Defense Department’s Advanced Research and Projects Agency (DARPA). This transformation has democratized the use of IT, creating a potentially enormous impact on politics and government.

In our book *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, published in January 2007, my co-authors and I explored whether information technology (IT) is indeed transforming politics and government.² As a transformation necessarily unfolds over time, we did this by means of longitudinal research about the impact of IT between 2000 and 2005 upon the federal and Ontario governments, two widely considered to be at the leading edge. (For comparative purposes, the book also included chapters about the US and UK.) The transformation we were tracking was not in the essence of politics (seeking office and exercising power) or government (implementing policy and delivering service) but rather in how people understand and

perform these activities. Our research ended with the federal election of January 2006. The purpose of this chapter is to report on the evolution of the relationship between IT, politics and government in the last three years – a considerable period of time for rapidly-changing technology – focusing on the federal and Ontario governments, but continuing to pay attention to the US and UK.

The research for *Digital State at the Leading Edge* involved two surveys of federal and Ontario legislators, interviews of public servants in the IT area, and comprehensive tracking of party websites during several election campaigns. As the research funding had been exhausted by the completion of the book, it was not possible to replicate original studies. As a consequence, the research methodology for this chapter – while still taking advantage of the access to political and civil service networks gained in the original writing – was more informal. Returning to terrain already surveyed, I have looked for significant changes, and noted their presence or absence. What follows is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, a summary that is also an opening to further study.

In 2007, along with my co-authors, I gave numerous talks to public servants based on *Digital State at the Leading Edge* and incorporating my latest thinking. The reactions of attendees have been very helpful. In April 2007, I began a weekly blog focusing on the impact of technology on politics and government, which is now posted at www.sandfordborins.com. The blog served the dual purposes of stimulating my thinking about and observation of government IT and provoking reaction from readers. I observed the use of IT in political campaigning, particularly on party websites, YouTube channels, and Facebook groups in the 2007 Ontario election, 2008 federal election, and 2008 US primaries and federal election. Finally, I did considerable reading about IT, particularly in the newspapers of record in Canada (*The Globe and Mail*) and the US (*The New York Times*). One might argue that it would be preferable to focus on online resources, for example websites about politics (www.realclearpolitics.com, www.politico.com, www.Huffingtonpost.com). Focusing on the mainstream media, however, is a way of testing for changes in the *influence* of online technology beyond its self-defined purview. During the last three years, these two newspapers have been paying growing attention to IT issues, as well as expanding their online editions. It also appears that the online editions have become increasingly important to their readership. It is not uncommon to see hundreds of comments, some by well-known party activists, on lead

articles in *The Globe and Mail* by 6 a.m., just as the print newspaper is being delivered. These observations were validated by a recent Pew Research Center survey that noted that the US population's use of the Internet as the primary source of news increased dramatically from 24 per cent in 2007 to 40 per cent in 2008, thus for the first time surpassing newspapers, which held constant at 35 per cent.³ Arguably, this affects not only the timeframe within which political news is disseminated, but the news consumer's relationship to it. The speed of transmission is now matched by an immediacy, and variety of avenues of, response that is unprecedented. How this is changing the way citizens experience politics is a fascinating question.

This chapter begins by reviewing the conclusion reached in *Digital State at the Leading Edge* about the nature and extent of IT-based transformation in government as of early 2006. The chapter then presents evidence from the last three years that bears upon those conclusions. It starts with politics, focusing first on Barack Obama's successful campaign for the presidency, which represents the global leading edge of online campaigning, before moving to the federal and Ontario campaigns. While there was nothing in Canada comparable in its online comprehensiveness to the Obama campaign, the impact of online campaigning has been increasing in ways worth exploring. Shifting from politics per se to the interface between politics and government, it discusses evidence of the politicization of the online presence of Canadian governments, coupling this with a related phenomenon: the establishment of advocacy websites for government priorities. The chapter also deals with the use of online technology within the public service, and includes an overview of the state of online service delivery, as well as recent Web 2.0 initiatives undertaken by public servants. The chapter concludes with some speculation about the likely impact of IT on government in the near future, as well as a call for additional academic research in this area, particularly by younger scholars who are likely to be more familiar with emerging technology than scholars of earlier generations.

AN INCOMPLETE TRANSFORMATION

The over-arching conclusion reached in *Digital State at the Leading Edge* was that the IT-based transformation was incomplete, with more evidence of material change in some areas than in others.⁴ We begin where the difference has been most striking. Government workplaces now fully incorporate, and public servants use, up-to-

date IT. There has been a reduction in the ranks of clerical employees, with a concomitant increase in the ranks of the IT organization or, more generally, knowledge-intensive workers. Technology has heightened immediacy as an increasing proportion of public servants, especially senior managers, use BlackBerries or other personal digital assistants, with the consequence that politicians and public servants are constantly accessible to each other, the media, and citizens generally. Government websites are now the means of choice for the communication and accessing of government information. Information, as the digerati say, wants to be free, and citizens are making use of both official government information posted online and other information generated by or about politicians and available online in unanticipated ways, some of which have proven to be acutely embarrassing to governments and individual politicians.

The transformation is less complete in the area of service delivery and organizational restructuring. Service delivery by online transactions has grown rapidly, but the older media, particularly the telephone, remain popular. IT has the potential to restructure government based on integrated service delivery at the front end, joined-up policy making in the middle, and integrated procurement and support service at the back end. Restructuring initiatives such as Service Canada and Service Ontario have made some progress in that direction, but it is a reflection of their relative immaturity, that more needs doing in front-end integration and shared services. The organizational home and political reporting relationships of these initiatives are still unclear; Service Canada, for example, remains a component of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, though it could well lay claim to status as a department.

Management consultants selling IT-solutions to government have emphasized its potential to affect enormous cost savings. Advocates within government have predicted transformative effects stemming from those savings. In reality, the impact of such savings is felt primarily on the twenty per cent of government spending accounted for by overhead costs. What is more, such savings are always at risk of being undercut by cost overruns on the complex IT projects on which they depend.

THE NEW PRIMACY OF ONLINE POLITICS

In the course of conducting the research for *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, several CIOs and politicians (among them former

Ontario CIOs Scott Campbell and Greg Georgeff and federal minister Reg Alcock) who were early adopters of IT were interviewed, and they often complained that most politicians, in their personal lives, were on the backward side of the digital divide and did not understand the potential impact of IT on government or politics.⁵ In the light of developments over the last three years, these statements now appear ironic, to the point that one might say to CIOs seeking more attention from politicians, “be careful what you wish for.” Indeed, the two surveys of politicians’ use of IT reported in *Digital State at the Leading Edge* showed increasing use of technology to the point that by 2005, over 90 per cent of federal MPs and Ontario MPPs were using email and the Internet daily, and a majority of both groups described themselves as either very competent or at least confident in their use of technology.⁶ More and more MPs carry BlackBerries and use them constantly to stay in touch with their parliamentary and constituency offices, their colleagues, and the bureaucracy.⁷

That IT is becoming increasingly important in political campaigning should not be surprising. Political campaigning is, in its essence, cut-throat competition; unlike the economic marketplace, politics is not focused on winning market share, but is winner-take-all. Political campaigns, because they involve long hours, little or no pay, commitment to a cause, and the prospect of rapid advancement if they are victorious, attract a disproportionate number of young adult participants (variously described as Generation Y, the Net Generation, millennials, or now Generation O).⁸ As they have become engaged in the high-stakes competition of politics, they have brought their IT-driven culture to it, thus rapidly increasing the technological sophistication of campaigning in particular.

This perspective on the use of IT in campaigning is clearly evident in Tom Flanagan’s *Harper’s Team: Behind the Scenes in the Conservative Rise to Power*. Flanagan describes a number of episodes including the development of a sophisticated electoral data base (the Constituency Information Management System) now used effectively for direct-mail fund-raising, website development, the growth of the “Blogging Tories,” and the use of the BlackBerry for immediate contact with the media.⁹ He generalizes from these experiences to the ninth of his ten commandments for Conservative politicians: “We are living in the biggest, fastest-moving communications revolution in human history. Each election campaign features new technologies. We must be at the forefront in adapting new technologies

to politics.”¹⁰ To paraphrase Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign: It’s the technology, stupid.

THE OBAMA PHENOMENON

The prospect of a little-known first term senator defeating a much better-known candidate, who had the support of the party establishment, and then being elected president, was very unlikely. But, in retrospect, it is clear that Barack Obama was able to capitalize on his own formidable strengths: rhetorical skill with large audiences, experience in community organizing, an ability to connect with younger voters, and a deep understanding of technology’s transformative potential. In addition, his message of change came at precisely the right time, with an administration discredited first by its mishandling of the war in Iraq and then by its mishandling of the economy, and an opponent for the presidency who ultimately could not credibly disassociate himself from the administration. The question for those interested in the digital state is what part online technology played in Obama’s improbable but resounding election victory.

Consider, first, the magnitude of the Obama campaign’s achievements. It raised nearly \$750 million from 4 million donors, 550,000 of whom were contributing for the first time.¹¹ It built huge online communities, with over a million subscribers to *www.mybarackobama.com*, two million to his Facebook group, and a million to his Myspace site. The ultimate achievement, of course, was his election victory, consisting of a convincing lead in both the popular vote and the Electoral College. From the digital state perspective, the most important aspect of that victory was his strength among Net Generation voters (defined as those between the ages of 18 and 29), who are the most active online. Their turnout increased from 48 to 52 per cent, and while John Kerry’s margin over George Bush among this group in 2004 was 9 per cent, Obama’s margin soared to a landslide-scale 34 percentage points.¹²

The Obama online campaign is now considered to be the true leading edge, the one that has made the greatest use of online technology and has done so most effectively. *Digital State at the Leading Edge* developed four key concepts for analyzing digital politics and government, and these can clearly be applied to the Obama campaign: digital leadership, procurement, organizational integration, and channel choice.¹³ The Obama campaign’s digital leadership

began with the candidate himself, who is a technically-sophisticated BlackBerry user (or even addict). He saw the political potential of the Internet, stating “one of my fundamental beliefs from my days as a community organizer is that real change comes from the bottom up. And there’s no more powerful tool for grass roots organizing than the Internet.”¹⁴ What is interesting about this statement is that Obama saw the use of the Internet not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. The end was winning power, the means was community organizing, and the Internet was a facilitator of community organizing; put differently Obama conceived of a continuum between online and offline political action.¹⁵ Community organizing revolves around direct contact among people: caucusing, meeting, door-to-door canvassing, and ultimately getting out the vote. In this view, online activities such as blogging or viewing videos on YouTube are useful to the extent that they lead to voting for Obama. Another aspect of Obama’s personal digital leadership is that, as he was launching his campaign, he sought out IT industry leaders, for example, Netscape founder Marc Andreessen, for their insights into how online technology could support his community organizing approach.¹⁶

Digital leadership leads to procurement, the second key analytic concept. What matters here is whom the Obama campaign used for its online services and here, too, Obama’s choice was fortuitous. Nine days before launching his candidacy in February 2007, Obama hired Blue State Digital (www.bluestatedigital.com) a web development company founded in 2004 by four Net Generation members of Howard Dean’s presidential campaign. The firm’s mission is to use online tools to mobilize support for progressive candidates, causes, and products. And they were not expensive, charging only \$1 million for services delivered between February 2007 and June 2008. In addition to Blue State Digital, Obama engaged 24-year-old Chris Hedges, cofounder of Facebook, as New Media director.¹⁷ The contractors at Blue State Digital set out to advance the techniques used in the Dean campaign, taking advantage of the latest technological developments. Thus, www.mybarackobama.com was modeled on Facebook (which was launched in 2005), but with the goal of making available online political tools (for example personal fundraising) and activities (calling voters, hosting meetings or parties).

The concept of organizational integration has a slightly different meaning in this context than in government departments, for which it was used in *Digital State at the Leading Edge*. Here it means

integration of the various components of the election campaign. To cite two examples: Drawing on his rhetorical ability, Obama often spoke at large rallies. To get a ticket, supporters were asked to provide their email address, zip code, and telephone number. From this minimal but critical personal information, the Obama campaign built up huge email and telephone banks, creating a flexible and invaluable data arsenal. A second example is get-out-the-vote telephoning on Election Day. A friend recounts that she went to Buffalo to contact voters. New York was already firmly in the Democrats' column, so volunteers in New York were provided with phone numbers from swing states such as Nevada and North Carolina. In *Harper's Team*, Tom Flanagan discussed to-the-minute reallocation of volunteers where needed as something the Conservatives hoped to do in the future.¹⁸

The final concept is channel choice. The Obama campaign operated on all channels, both traditional and online. Candidate speeches at large rallies is a political tradition in both the US and Canada, though, as will be discussed in the next section, Canadian campaigns have forsaken it for speeches to small groups of party faithful intended to produce thirty-second video clips and sound-bites. Ultimately, the Obama campaign involved huge amounts of face-to-face activity: participation in caucuses in the states that held them, meetings, and door-to-door canvassing. The online operation supported these activities by giving volunteers information and by fundraising. Those who signed up for *www.barackobama.com* (which I did) received repeated messages detailing the broad outlines of the campaign's rhetoric, new videos available online, and appeals for frequent small donations. The latter were almost always presented in terms of a specific cause (such as fundraising for a certain state in the primaries or the general election), a specific amount of money – especially if small donations were being matched by large donors – and a deadline. The online campaign was also waged in a wide variety of media, including *www.barackobama.com*, *www.mybarackobama.com*, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a YouTube channel with hundreds of videos. Some of the YouTube videos contributed by supporters themselves became immensely popular: Will I Am's "Yes we Can" gained 14 million views, Obama Girl's 13 million views, and Sarah Silverman's "The Great Schlep," over one million. The different online media were so seamlessly

linked that, during the campaign, an enthusiastic supporter could have all Obama all the time.

The Obama campaign showed how to integrate the entire online package both internally and with traditional face-to-face community organizing and campaigning. It had its roots in the Howard Dean campaign of 2004, but went far beyond the Dean campaign in two respects. First, Obama was a much more convincing orator. Second, the Dean campaign seemed to be using online technology for its own sake, for example in its plethora of meetups and online blogs, while the Obama campaign focused its use of online resources on mobilizing support for and participation in traditional face-to-face politics.¹⁹ In contrast to Obama's integrated online vision, the 2007 Ontario and 2008 federal campaigns show that in Canada all the pieces are there, but they still do not add up to a coherent whole – or a digital vision.

THE 2007 ONTARIO AND 2000 FEDERAL CAMPAIGNS ONLINE

None of the party leaders in the Ontario or federal campaigns adopted a mass mobilization approach comparable to President Obama's campaign. Instead of taking their message to the masses, their preferred platforms are speeches in small rooms to the party faithful. The standard format is for the leader to speak in front of visual props and representative individuals (police, firefighters, nurses, teachers) reflecting the theme of the speech. The objective of such a speech is to produce short clips that network television could use or that could be posted online. It was not ever thus in Canadian politics, and indeed the tradition into the seventies was for party leaders to speak in large venues open to all, including hecklers. As a teenager, I recall my father taking me to hear Lester Pearson – hardly a charismatic orator – speaking to a packed house of 15,000 at Maple Leaf Gardens in 1963. Similarly, Allan Blakeney reminisced about the final rally of the 1971 election campaign, drawing a crowd of 5000 in the much smaller city of Regina.²⁰ The rubric that comes to mind for appearances by Canadian politicians now is “boy in the bubble,” to signify the desire to keep tight control over the event, avoiding anything that could disrupt the intended message.²¹ A second great difference between the Obama campaign and Canadian

campaigns is that Obama caught on with young adults in a way that no Canadian party leader since Pierre Trudeau at the height of Trudeaumania in 1968 has done, with the consequence that Canadian campaigns have not reflected as clearly the online behaviour of young adults.

Canadian party websites contain considerable content similar to American party websites such as information about the leader, the platform, and the party and lots of video, in particular advertisements that have aired on television.²² The material about the leader (for example the Ontario Liberals' *www.dalton.ca* and the federal Liberals' *www.thisisdion.ca*) was generally intended to humanize him or her, for example by emphasizing his/her childhood and youth, family, and leisure interests. The party websites also include a page for press releases; for example, the Ontario Liberals posted as a sidebar all their 126 press releases, about one-third of which were attacks on the Conservatives. The parties often hive off separate sites to attack their rivals' policies and in particular their leaders' capability: in the recent federal election, attack sites included the Conservatives' *www.notaleader.ca* and the Liberals' *www.scandalpedia.ca*. The attack sites often appear to be aimed at younger voters with ironic and irreverent features the Net Generation is assumed to prefer. Where the websites fall far short of the Obama campaign is in the area of citizen engagement. Available activities are limited to joining the party, donating money, getting a sign, or volunteering for the local constituency. The two most advanced were the Ontario Conservatives' *www.leadershipmatters.ca*, which included a competition among volunteers to recruit friends, and the federal Conservatives' "My Campaign" page, that provided text for letters to the editor of local newspapers and scripts for calls to local talk radio. The sites usually have blogs, but only the NDP, Greens, and Bloc Quebecois had their leaders post entries and permitted citizens to post.²³

Despite the limitations of the party websites, there was considerable online activity in the federal and Ontario elections, much of it initiated by citizens, rather than party leaders' campaigns. It occurred in a number of areas, and reveals some of the changes the Internet and related technologies have generated in the world of election campaigning.²⁴

In the federal campaign there was a great deal of online vetting of local candidates by rival party organizations and citizen journalists, with the result that discoveries of embarrassing information

online compelled several candidates to resign or to be dropped by the national party. This is an extension of the tendency in the 2006 election campaign, commented on in *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, for party activists to seek and find information online that would be damaging to their opponents.²⁵ This illustrates that, while individuals may control their own websites, they cannot control the information about them posted elsewhere. It also illustrates a stark difference from politics before the Internet. In the past, vetting was done primarily by party offices for their own candidates; now vetting is done – using online searches – by local constituency organizations about their opponents and by citizen journalists regarding all candidates. The level of scrutiny has dramatically increased and, not surprisingly, skeletons are being found in the online closets of more candidates.

A second area of online politics involves the use of YouTube. Founded in early 2005, YouTube first came to political prominence with a video in the 2006 Virginia senatorial campaign showing Republican incumbent George Allen referring to a cameraman hired by the Democrats by the racial epithet “macaca.” The video, downloaded 500,000 during the campaign, contributed significantly to Allen’s unexpected defeat.

Since then, YouTube has come to serve a variety of political functions, including parties using it as an alternative channel for their advertising, parties and citizens using it to post candidates’ gaffes (which reinforces the tendency discussed above of Canadian parties to run “boy in the bubble” campaigns), and citizens using it to advocate on behalf of candidates or causes. Some recent Canadian instances include *www.torytube.ca*, a YouTube channel created by the Ontario Liberals to display policy attacks upon and campaign gaffes by Conservative leader John Tory, Quebec singer Michel Rivard’s *Culture en Peril* video attacking the Harper government’s cuts to arts funding, and a televised interview in which federal Liberal leader Stephane Dion stumbled answering a question about how he would handle the economic slowdown. ToryTube, while not achieving large view counts, helped the Ontario Liberals create the impression that John Tory was not a credible leader. *Culture en Peril*, with one million views in three weeks, and the Dion interview, with 300,000, both went viral, the former contributing to the Conservatives’ failure to improve their showing in Quebec in 2008 compared to 2006, and the latter contributing to the damaging and ultimately fatal perception of Stephane Dion as a weak leader.

The widespread use of YouTube in both the American and Canadian election campaigns gives rise to the hypothesis that it has become the current political killer app (that is, a software application so popular that it transforms online political discourse). YouTube poses significant advantages: anyone, whether highly organized political parties or individuals working at home, can post at no charge. Anyone can watch, as it has no membership requirement. It is easy for individuals to email YouTube videos or post them on other websites, hence facilitating their viral spread. When journalists refer to YouTube videos, they need not publish or display a complicated URL as is often the case with web pages, but need only refer to the creator or subject of the video: the reader can readily find it using YouTube's internal search engine. Finally, the developers of YouTube were proactive in contacting the presidential candidates in the primaries about how they could use it and in forging a partnership with CNN for candidate debates, in which questions were submitted on YouTube and posed to candidates on CNN.²⁶

A third online aspect of the federal and Ontario elections consists of a variety of activities that could be referred to under the rubric of citizen engagement. These include issue-oriented websites, such as those supporting and opposing proportional representation in the Ontario referendum on electoral reform and those endorsing and opposing public support for faith-based schools; political blogs, such as those linked to the blog consolidator *www.bloggingtories.ca*; and citizen initiatives, such as the Facebook group Fair Vote Canada that facilitated strategic voting by supporters of the Liberals, Greens, or NDP designed to block a Conservatives majority. Citizen opposition to the television networks' decision to exclude Green Party leader Elizabeth May from the leaders' debates was quickly expressed in emails and postings on the Green and NDP blogs, and led the networks to an overnight reversal of their decision.

The emergence of a Liberal-NDP coalition and the prorogation of Parliament in early December 2008 generated comparable on-line activity. *The Globe and Mail's* lead news story posted at 1:30 pm on December 4, "Parliament Shut Down till January 26," attracted over 1600 comments by 5 am on December 5. Stéphane Dion's amateurish response to Harper's speech to the nation drew 10,000 views on YouTube on December 4, the day it was posted. The Facebook group "Canadians Against a Liberal/NDP Coalition Government" had

113,000 members within a day, and an opposing group, “Canadians United Against Stephen Harper” had 20,000 members.²⁷

While no Canadian campaign was comparable to Obama’s, there was still considerable online activity in the federal and Ontario campaigns. What is difficult to determine is how significant it all was. The Canadian government does not require the detailed month-to-month campaign donation reports that presidential candidates must file, and Canada has nothing comparable to *www.techpresident.com*, which tracks statistics such as YouTube views, Facebook supporters, and MySpace friends for the candidates, and hosts discussion of online politics. There is also no data available about party website traffic or donations made online. The one longitudinal indicator that could be accessed was the Canada Election Study which in 2004 and again in 2008 asked voters what was their main source of election information. In 2004, 55 per cent said television, 21 per cent newspapers, 12 per cent radio, and 3 per cent the Internet. In 2008, this had changed to 55 per cent television, 19 per cent newspapers, 8 per cent radio, and 8 per cent the Internet. This does show Internet use beginning to cut into radio and newspaper.²⁸ Clearly, this is an area where more longitudinal information would be valuable.

POLITICIZING GOVERNMENT’S ONLINE PRESENCE

Tom Flanagan’s ninth commandment to the Conservatives – It’s the technology, stupid – raises the question of how IT-savvy politicians will use the government portal when they come to power. They will likely view the portal as an important opportunity to sell their political message to the voters. During the Chretien and Martin governments the Government of Canada home page (*www.gc.ca/home* or *www.canada.ca/home*) emphasized service delivery, with most space given to the links to three service gateways (service to Canadians, service to business, service to non-Canadians), and only a small postage-stamp sized link in the top left corner to the prime minister’s page. In April 2006, the Harper Government unveiled a totally revamped three-column home page, with news about the government, usually featuring the prime minister, in the dominant central column; a right sidebar with links to government priorities such as Canadian Forces recruiting, the Speech from the Throne, and the budget; and a left sidebar with a variety of links, including three

small ones to the service gateways. The home page is bold, forceful, and brightly coloured and, not surprisingly, contains considerably more blue than during the years of Liberal governments. The Service Canada site (www.servicecanada.ca) provides an interesting contrast. It emphasizes connectedness by presenting services in terms of recipients rather than providers, and has an inclusive and friendly look and feel. As discussed in *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, the Service Canada site is a descendant of the Gateways and Clusters project, which utilized collaborative inter-departmental work teams with a higher than expected proportion of women.²⁹ If the Canada site is Mars, then the Service Canada site is Venus.

The Conservative rebranding of the Canada site is not unique. When Gordon Brown took over as the UK's prime minister in June 2007, I observed that his predecessor Tony Blair, while a masterful communicator through traditional media, had little facility with new media, and the prime minister's site (www.number10.gov.uk) paid as much attention to the history of Number 10 Downing Street and former prime ministers, in particular Winston Churchill, as it did to the current prime minister.³⁰ A little over a year later, the Number 10 website was revamped to emphasize Prime Minister Brown, his policies, and news about him, and the historical material was relegated to a link at the lower right corner.³¹

Some governments, such as those of the US and UK, have both a political portal (www.whitehouse.gov and www.number10.gov.uk, respectively) and a service portal (www.usa.gov and www.directgov.gov.uk, respectively). To an extent, the federal government is evolving in that direction, with the Canada portal and the prime minister's home page looking very similar, and three service portals, the most prominent of which is Service Canada's. In the provinces, the obvious URL for a portal is [www.gov.\[name\].ca](http://www.gov.[name].ca) where the province's abbreviated name falls in the middle. The question then arises of how much of any province's portal is used for political purposes (photos of the premier or other ministers, news, political priorities, policy initiatives) and how much for governmental purposes such as links to services and departments or travel information for visitors. During summer 2007, a research assistant measured political content, so defined, versus governmental content for the federal government and the provinces and territories. Using the crude metric of surface area on the computer screen (without, for example, trying to weight space by proximity to the top of the page), considerable variation

was observed. Three jurisdictions had a high percentage of political content (British Columbia, 62 per cent; Newfoundland and Labrador, 58 per cent; and the federal government, 48 per cent); three provinces and two territories (Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and Nunavut) showed a medium level of political content (between 20 and 35 per cent); and five provinces and one territory (Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories) had political content of less than 20 per cent. Three hypotheses were formulated to explain this variation: the younger the premier, the greater the political content; the closer to the end of the mandate, the greater the political content; and the smaller the margin of victory in the previous election, the greater the political content. Each hypothesis was tested separately and found not to be statistically significant, possibly because there were only 14 observations.

In addition to the sharing of space on the portal there are other issues that have emerged concerning the limits of political use of the government's property in cyberspace, with politicians demanding more, and public servants quietly resisting. Practices that have been worked out between politicians and public servants represent what in the online world is called netiquette. Basic elements include the understanding between politicians and public servants that the content of the government portal is frozen when an election campaign begins, so that the sitting government loses the advantage of incumbency³²; material created at the political level for the government website (for example, a premier's video-blog) may not be transferred to the governing party's website (though there is nothing to stop it from linking to the government website); and a new government may not use the government website to criticize its defeated successor (say under the rubric of correcting the misguided policies of the past). The Harper Government, controversially, posted links to its 2007 Speech from the Throne on frequently-visited government services sites such as the Environment Canada weather site (*www.weatheroffice.gc.ca*); it did not do so for the November 2008 Throne Speech.

ADVOCACY WEBSITES

Michael Prince, in his chapter in this volume, discusses exhortation as one of government's policy instruments. Increasingly, governments have been turning to the Internet as a vehicle for their hortatory

messages. *Digital State at the Leading Edge* profiled Steven Green, manager of creative services and new media in the Ontario Cabinet Office, who described one of his major functions as the development of “eye candy” websites.³³ By this, he meant Ontario government websites using leading edge technology and attractive graphics to communicate the government’s messages to citizens, often advocating certain ideas or exhorting them to certain behaviours. A research assistant surveyed the federal government and provincial government portals for such sites in summer 2007. The sites are generally linked to tabs on the right sidebar of the governmental portals. At that time, the topics of such sites included public services and lifestyle information for youth (5 cases), healthy lifestyles (4), equalization (2), combating domestic violence (2), economic opportunities (2), the environment (1), and medical wait-times (1). While writing this chapter the federal, Ontario, and British Columbia portals were revisited to observe their most recent advocacy websites.

The Canada site in November 2008 includes tabs for the Speech from the Throne, awards for military valour, information for Canadians travelling abroad, and ecoAction, which deals with energy conservation and reduction in carbon emissions. The Ontario portal contains tabs for Fairness, Ontario’s position on equalization; a progress report on achieving government goals; and investing in Ontario. The premier’s page also includes links to a site on climate change and ONzone, a site with information about government intended for teenagers. British Columbia was by far the biggest developer of these sites, with a long list of tabs down the right sidebar including: Health Link, a health advisory program; the budget; the Speech from the Throne; climate change; healthy living; assistance for forest industry workers; infrastructure development; advice for immigrants to BC; and even pride in the province (www.bestplaceonearth.ca).

Looking at these sites together, a number of patterns appear. The sites are often, as Green says, “eye candy,” making use of video and eye-catching graphics. This is particularly the case with sites aimed at the Net Generation. (The exception is Ontario’s www.fairness.ca, which presents its case solely by text.³⁴) Most of these sites are on “transmit” rather than “receive”: they provide information for all visitors but do not disaggregate information locally, provide transactions, or permit dialogue. The sites are likely not too expensive to develop and can readily be contracted out. When the sites go live,

they are often accompanied by a launch intended to attract mainstream media attention to show that, by creating a website, a government is taking action about a problem. The launch might also be accompanied by television or print advertising intended to drive viewers or readers to the site. Thus, if exhortation is a policy instrument, then governments will take credit for using it. In some cases, though, government's urge to take credit might be at odds with the desired impact; the Ontario government's teen anti-smoking site, *www.stupid.ca*, in an attempt to be cool, downplays its origins.

A final concern with advocacy sites is their evolution. After being developed outside the government, a site may start out with a grand launch supported by a marketing campaign and linked to a button on the portal. Over time, government priorities change, and its button on the portal will give way to buttons for the latest priorities. If an older eye-candy site is not to die, it must be kept current and must have an institutional home. It is therefore likely it will migrate back to some departmental site, and give up its distinct look and feel and high online profile in exchange for regular updating. One such example is an Ontario site about medical waiting times that started as *www.waittimes.net*, and now has been integrated into the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care website at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/wait_times/wait_mn.html. Given the nature of the exercise, it is essential that the data be kept current, and one could not imagine that happening without the cooperation of the ministry.

ONLINE SERVICE DELIVERY

In *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, David Brown discussed Government On-Line, the initiative of the Chretien and Martin governments to increase the availability and quality of online delivery of major federal government services.³⁵ The program involved providing online information and transactional capability for 135 federal services, organized by three gateways and 31 clusters. It also included the creation of the Secure Channel for transmission of financial and personal data between government and individuals. One external measure of the effectiveness of this initiative is that Canada consistently ranked first in Accenture's annual surveys of e-government maturity in national governments in economically advanced countries.

Government On-Line reached its mandated sunset date on 31 March 2006, which turned out to coincide with the election of the Harper Government.

An ongoing legacy of Government On-Line was the creation in February 2005 of Service Canada, an agency reporting to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), with the responsibility of providing integrated services to Canadians through the in-person, telephone, and Internet channels. Thus, it was given responsibility for the federal government's 23 call centres as well as the management of what was the service to Canadians gateway on the Canada site. At approximately the same time, the Government of Ontario established ServiceOntario, also an integrated service delivery agency, and located it in the Ministry of Government Services, together with the government's human resources organization, IT organization, and common procurement organization.

One way of measuring progress in online service delivery is the biennial Citizen's First survey undertaken by Erin Research for the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service on behalf of a consortium of agencies at all levels of government. The most recent survey, Citizens First 5, interviewed 6700 Canadians in fall 2007. It found a dramatic increase in the use of the online channel between 2003 and 2008, with the percentage indicating that they used the Internet in a recent service experience rising from 30 to 47 per cent and the percentage using email rising from 8 to 13 per cent. In contrast, telephone use stayed constant at 55 per cent and in-person service at government offices at 48 per cent. These percentages sum to more than 100 per cent, and indeed 59 per cent used two or more channels to receive service. Thus, the growing use of the Internet and email has complemented rather than displaced the other channels. The Internet has become the dominant channel for securing information and forms but service is often completed through one or more of the other channels. In terms of service quality, the Internet did very well, but telephone, while the most popular, continued to be the most problematic, with low satisfaction rates due to busy lines, lengthy waiting times, and trouble with automated systems.³⁶

Service Canada has now been in existence for almost four years. It has grown to include 22,000 employees at 595 points of service throughout the country, and its 1-800-O-Canada call centre takes 55 million calls and the Service Canada website receives 22 million visits annually. By applying IT, it achieved savings of \$300 million

in its first year through streamlining, for example consolidating 23 call centres, and reducing benefit payments made in error due to fraud. It has put in place performance standards and league tables for all its service centres and call centres. It has also started a service excellence certification program based in Regina, and by mid-2007, 50 per cent of all front-line workers had completed it. It has established a number of partnerships, for example, an agreement with Service Ontario by which parents registering a newborn can receive both a provincial birth certificate and federal Social Insurance Number within two weeks.³⁷

Despite the progress Service Canada has made, improving service delivery does not appear to be one of the major interests of the Harper Government. Service Canada still has a somewhat anomalous and unresolved existence within HRSDC. It is understandable that it started its life within HRSDC, its first major client. But as Service Canada has begun to deliver services on behalf of an increasing number of departments, there is a rationale for making it a free-standing department or agency. Service Canada undertook one major advertising campaign, in spring 2007, using unexpended funds at the end of the fiscal year. The campaign has not been repeated. The e-pass, the electronic certificate developed by the Secure Channel initiative to support data exchanges and transactional services, is now readily available but it has not been supported by an awareness campaign. It would appear that the Harper Government is satisfied if Service Canada is running smoothly, but has made no attempt to invest in it in a way that would lead to displaying it as a major accomplishment.

A final concern of the Harper Government is that enhancements in online service delivery would require investments in large IT systems. Such investments carry the risk of cost overruns and delays, failures which can be embarrassing to the minister(s) responsible. The Conservatives are also familiar with the large project syndrome, having experienced it with their own Constituency Information Management System, which Harper has referred to as the Conservatives' own gun registry.³⁸

FROM E-CONSULTATION TO WEB 2.0

Digital State at the Leading Edge chronicled the federal and Ontario government's early attempts at e-consultation. The federal government

initially focused on regulatory issues, while the McGuinty Government in the first year of its mandate (2003–04) consulted on a wide range of issues. The federal government built a low key consultation portal, *www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca*, while Ontario's McGuinty Government launched a relatively high profile portal, *www.townhallontario.gov.on.ca*, but then scrapped it when turning from consultation to implementation in the middle of its mandate.³⁹ It did facilitate e-consultation late in its mandate regarding the recommendation of the Citizen Assembly on Democratic Renewal to elect the legislature using a form of proportional representation, but this was handled on the Democratic Renewal Secretariat website, rather than on the consultation portal. The federal government's portal is still active, though it is not linked to high profile portals such as the Canada or Service Canada sites and, at time of writing, hosts only 10 mainly technical consultations.

The last three years have seen rapid growth in the popularity of social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube) and wikis (most notably Wikipedia). As discussed above, politicians have embraced them enthusiastically as a way of spreading their message, particularly to Net Generation voters. In addition, citizens have used them as a way of mobilizing support on particular issues in the context of the policy process. A video of the tasing and death of Robert Dziekanski, a Polish citizen attempting to enter Canada in October 2007 at Vancouver International Airport, was posted on YouTube and received over 700,000 visits and thousands of comments were posted. Professor Michael Geist, an opponent of the copyright legislation the Harper Government proposed in December 2007, posted a YouTube video outlining his arguments. Immediately a Facebook group, Fair Copyright for Canada, was started; it now has 92,000 members and local groups throughout the country. On November 16, 2008, the Ontario Government introduced a number of restrictions on young drivers, one of which would have prohibited drivers in the first year of their licence from transporting more than one unrelated teenaged passenger. Within a few days, a Facebook opposition group – Young Drivers against New Ontario Laws – was formed and it quickly grew to 150,000 members. On December 8, a mere three weeks later, the government rescinded this proposal.⁴⁰

The question governments are pondering is how to respond to spontaneous citizen, especially Net Generation, use of social networking sites for policy discussion. Unlike the politicians, the

bureaucracy has been wary of these sites. The Ontario government, seeing Facebook as a potential distraction from work, has blocked public servants accessing it. In addition, there is a likely bias in the public service against involvement by public servants with such sites even in their private lives. Having a high online profile, especially one that is controversial, is seen by some public servants as inconsistent with the traditional anonymity and non-partisanship of the career public service and, in the federal public service, as possibly at variance with the Values and Ethics Code.⁴¹ Despite the official position, public servants seem to be coming to the realization that social networking sites cannot be ignored, especially if they are where the citizens are. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade – which is among the most liberal in terms of staff Internet use policy – has developed its own YouTube Channel and Facebook groups. While internally oriented, a number of departments have developed wikis for staff dialogue. Two notable ones are GCPEDIA, developed by the Treasury Board Secretariat's Chief Information Officer Branch and intended for the entire public service, which at the time of writing had approximately 1600 users and 1400 articles, and the Natural Resources Canada wiki, which is used by approximately 2000 of its 5000 person staff.⁴² Mike Kujawski, a Net Generation “marketing specialist and social media expert,” has compiled a list of federal, provincial, and US government Web 2.0 initiatives, posted at <http://government2obestpractices.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>.

The overall impression is of a public service that is now groping for answers about how to fit into Web 2.0. For example, the Ontario Cabinet, including Premier McGuinty, saw the Net Generation response to the proposed driver's license restrictions as a wake-up call. Consultation under the government's rules on its tame e-consultation sites may work for highly organized groups such as regulated industries, but not for the large communities that form quickly about controversial topics. How does a government analyze, evaluate, and respond to something like the 15,000 wall posts on Young Drivers Against New Ontario Laws? Governments appear to be on the verge of lifting their bans on public servants visiting social networking sites, but they are still wary of the outspoken commentary found on them. Public servants are establishing wikis for internal use, but are not yet opening them up to the public. The advent of social networking sites in the last three years clearly has the potential

to transform public consultation, but the politicians and public servants involved in policy-making are not yet as ready to jump into the unpredictable and fundamentally uncontrollable world of social networking as avidly as politicians seeking office.⁴³

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK AND FORWARDS

Looking back over the last three years, there have been a number of very significant developments in the ongoing IT-based transformation of politics and government.

- The increased use of social networking sites (YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, twitter, Wikipedia), led by but not restricted to the Net Generation, in political campaigning and in citizen-initiated policy dialogue
- The experience of the Obama campaign in linking online campaigning with community organizing that will now serve as a model for other politicians and other campaigns
- The more aggressive use by Canadian politicians of government websites for political messaging
- The increased use by Canadian governments of advocacy websites
- The greater use of online delivery of public services by Canadian citizens, even in the absence of high profile government initiatives in that area
- Canadian governments' growing experiences with integrated service delivery agencies or ministries.

Clearly, the leading edge of the digital state has advanced significantly in the last three years, with the growth of social networking technologies as an important driver of change.

The four basic concepts of digital leadership, channel choice, IT procurement, and organizational integration – applied earlier in this chapter to the Obama campaign – can also be applied to the current situation in Canada. The Harper Government has shown digital leadership in the sense of energetically exploiting government websites for political messaging, and some provincial governments, most notably BC Premier Gordon Campbell's, have done likewise. The question we might ask is whether they have been too aggressive. If Harper at some point in the future were replaced by a Liberal government relying on ongoing support from the NDP and the Bloc, the

Canada site might be purged of aggressive government party messaging. This might lead, as will be discussed below, to digital leadership shifting back in the direction of enhanced service delivery. From the standpoint of channel choice, it is clear that the growing political involvement of the Net Generation is leading to more utilization of the online channel, particularly in terms of leading edge social networking sites, but also in terms of more popularity for online media and government services. Under procurement, we note that advocacy websites are reasonably compact IT projects with high political salience that can readily be outsourced. On the other hand, large IT projects, which often must be outsourced, still raise political concerns in terms of the likelihood of politically embarrassing cost overruns or delays. The final concept, organizational integration, comes into play in the growth of integrated service delivery organizations such as Service Canada, but it also speaks to their efforts to enable users to integrate the various services available to them, for example through information shared among government services accessible by e-pass on the Secure Channel.

In as swiftly changing an area as this, prediction, especially for the long term, is difficult, so we will focus only on some evolving issues, best considered as open questions. Barack Obama's two months as President-elect and the first months of his presidency show his continued desire to advance the frontier of online governance. At the personal level, he has been able to resolve the security issues posed by continuing to use his BlackBerry to keep in contact with his closest friends and associates.⁴⁴ His organization created the first-ever website for the office of the President-elect with the revealing title *www.change.gov and housed* on the US Government's official portal. The website retained the look and feel of the campaign website, in particular incorporating lots of video and capacity for users to send messages. When he became President, the official website *www.whitehouse.gov* was revamped to increase transparency. An Office of Public Engagement has been established within the White House to promote dialogue with citizens. President Obama has updated the traditional presidential Saturday morning radio address to a Saturday morning video address posted on YouTube. The Obama campaign organization has been renamed Organizing for America and has been folded into the Democratic National Committee. It continues to contact its 13-million person email list, for example encouraging supporters to hold house meetings to discuss economic

recovery at the same time (February 8 and 9) the House and Senate were debating recovery legislation. There remain many questions about the Obama Administration's ongoing use of the Internet.⁴⁵ Will contact with his national constituency about policy issues translate into effective pressure on marginal legislators – moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats – that will help push Obama's agenda into law? Will the White House website be open to public consultation in the way Obama's campaign and President-elect sites were? Will Obama's supporters start to display "mobilization fatigue"? Will the websites for departments and agencies reflect the new tone of the White House site? Will the US government hire a cadre Net Generation of "new media" directors and staff who will set in motion a comprehensive Web 2.0 transformation in Washington? All these questions deserve careful scholarly attention.

The Canadian political party facing the greatest challenges is the federal Liberals, who are deeply in debt, and who have chosen a new leader without the benefits, in terms of both public visibility and internal policy development, of an open leadership campaign. Will necessity in this case become the parent of innovation? Will the Liberals make creative use of the Internet for fundraising, for example by setting both immediate and long term collective goals as well as encouraging and rewarding party members for achieving personal goals, earmarking funds raised for specific purposes, and incorporating matching donations? Will they open their policy development process, for example through the use of online discussion forums, wikis, and other social networking tools? Will the Liberals use social networking technology to enlist the Net Generation as a strong support base, as Obama has so successfully done?

The use of Web 2.0 social networking sites for policy dialogue, particularly by the Net Generation, will continue to grow. The overnight growth to 150,000 members of a Facebook group opposing Ontario's proposed law changes for young drivers demonstrates how quickly that constituency can mobilize when its interests are challenged. Undoubtedly, there will be other issues where social networking sites are used for instant mobilization about policy issues. While Canadian politicians have used social networking sites without a great deal of popular response (as measured by the membership of their Facebook groups), some public servants have been denied access to Facebook, on the grounds it would be a distraction. Net generation public servants, where encouraged by their senior managers,

are experimenting with social networking approaches such as departmental Facebook groups and internal wikis. While the online component of public consultations was, in the past, handled by government websites, the public service is likely to turn to popular private sector social networking sites as part of its consultation and outreach initiatives. The Harper and McGuinty Governments might provide an interesting contrast, in that the former has exerted tight central control over its message, while the latter has often encouraged open public dialogue as an important component of policy development.

What can we expect for the future development of integrated service delivery agencies such as Service Canada and ServiceOntario? In his recent study, Kernaghan mentioned a number of unresolved issues.⁴⁶ Will governments require that departments transfer their service delivery operations to these organizations, or will they be contestable, in that departments can retain their own service delivery operations unless the government-wide service agency can do it better? Will the agencies remain as operations within a particular ministry, as is now most commonly the case? Or will they become ministries in their own right? Will they be able to co-operate across jurisdictional boundaries (both geographically and by level of government) to offer truly seamless service? Will they be able to put in place identity management and authentication systems that protect users' privacy, thereby convincing them to agree to share their data across programs?

A radically different alternative to governmental integrated service delivery agencies such as Service Canada would be a Web 2.0 approach.⁴⁷ Government would attempt to meet citizens wherever they are online, and make extensive use of intermediaries. The intermediaries could be social networking sites or entrepreneurs who could combine government content and transactions with private sector content to develop business models that meet user needs. Examples of the latter could include banks acting as intermediaries for government financial transactions such as taxation and benefits in combination with their own financial services, or travel agents integrating their services with government online health and travel advisory services. For this to happen, government must be willing to make its online services available, in a fine-grained form, for intermediaries to combine with their own content (or mashup, to use contemporary terminology). The same questions that were posed about Web 2.0 consultation are relevant here. Governments have

built their own websites to combine messaging about services, policy, and politics. Intermediary-developed services would likely undercut the cyberspace identity governments have worked so hard and spent so much to build since the dawn of the Internet age. A second consideration is whether intermediary-delivered services would meet the same standards of privacy and confidentiality that governments have developed on their own websites. One indication that this approach is under consideration in the US is that the incoming Obama administration announced that it would operate *www.change.gov* under the Creative Commons approach, in which its content is freely available for reuse. So Web 2.0 may have major ramifications in the delivery of public services, just as in politics and policy-making.

Canada is now in a deep and possibly long recession. One of the ways the Harper Government's January 27, 2009 budget intended to stimulate the economy was through investment in infrastructure. The budget defined infrastructure broadly to encompass IT as well as bricks and mortar. Programs that will support the IT industry include a temporary 100 per cent capital cost allowance (depreciation) rate for computer hardware and software systems purchased after January 27, 2009 and before February 1, 2011 and allocating \$225 million over three years for broadband coverage of unserved communities. The only major provision to support the online delivery of public services is an allocation of \$500 million in 2009–10 to Canada Health Infoway in support of the goal of having 50 per cent of Canadians with electronic health records by 2010.⁴⁸ The government, however, could have made other investments in improving the delivery of public services. As discussed above, telephone service delivered by government call centres needs to be improved, and initiatives in that area could create jobs. Service improvement will require large IT projects, and those projects would provide support for the IT industry at a time when private sector demand is likely to weaken. In a recession, many more people will turn to the government for services, and so improvements in the quality of these services, for example the speed with which EI payments are delivered, could emerge as quality-of-life issues for the electorate.⁴⁹ If the economy remains in recession, the Harper Government might turn to these initiatives in future stimulus packages.

What, then, is the future of public administration scholarship about IT and government? When Bruce Doern began to study science policy four decades ago, very few Canadian policy scholars were working in that field. Despite its enormous impact on government,

there are still few Canadian public administration scholars working on IT and government. Significant research opportunities wait in this field. Some scholars of the baby-boom generation working in this field include Kenneth Kernaghan and John Langford, focusing on the role of IT in integrated service delivery and David Brown, studying the federal CIO as an instrument of governance. What the study of IT in politics and government needs is more participation by scholars who are themselves members of the Net Generation. Scholars of the baby-boom generation, myself included, are not likely to be current with the latest technology and software, and may well have made lifestyle choices not to engage those technologies. On the other hand, scholars of the Net Generation are more likely to be current with these technologies, and therefore to understand, from their own lived experience, how their impact on politics and government. There are a few members of a younger generation – most notably Cynthia Alexander at Acadia, Patrice Dutil at Ryerson, Cosmo Howard at Victoria, Kathy McNutt at Regina, and Jeffrey Roy at Dalhousie – whose scholarship encompasses this field. But the field is wide enough, and the questions are of sufficient importance, that there is ample room for others. A *festschrift* intrinsically deals with the continuity of scholarship from one generation to another. It is thus a perfect forum for this call for younger scholars to engage themselves in study of the impact of IT on politics and government – which ongoing study and observation has convinced me is the future of governance and citizenship.

NOTES

- 1 The research assistance of Laura Sampson is gratefully acknowledged. Comments on drafts of this chapter were provided by David Brown, Steven Green, Beth Herst, Kenneth Kernaghan, Laura Sampson, Evan Sotiropoulos, Ericka Stephens-Rennie, and Brigitte Torok-Watkins.
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