

# Before e-Governance and e-Government, Back to Basics! The Case of the Caribbean

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## Abstract

This conceptual article discusses the opportunities and challenges presented by e-government and e-governance in the Caribbean. An understanding of the issues inherent in these phenomena is crucially important, particularly for the governance systems of small island developing states in the Caribbean. In practice, however, they are rarely discussed,—not least because their complexity is often misunderstood or inappropriately unacknowledged as new directions by political scientists and policy planners. Moreover, the foundational debate on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their impact on governance and the wider implications for development remain muted owing to the theatrical commotion in other “pressing” aspects of Caribbean political life. As a consequence, this article contextualizes the debate by bringing to the fore a discussion on the importance of understanding the broader political, social, and economic issues and the implications of the use of ICTs and development. In the analysis, a balance is struck to avoid the often disproportionate technocratic parables of a future technological cornucopia being peddled by some international development agencies and officials in the region. Such a macro discussion is necessary if as development advocates and citizens, we are to realize any gains while acknowledging the limitations an enabling e-government and e-governance environment could portend.

## Keywords

e-governance, e-government, Caribbean, developing countries, public policy, ICTs for development, CARICOM.

## Introduction: Technologies for Development

This conceptual article discusses the opportunities and challenges presented for e-government and e-governance in the Anglophone Caribbean. However, although an understanding of the issues inherent in these phenomena is crucially important, particularly for the governance systems of small island developing states (SIDS) in the Caribbean, in practice, such ideas have become little more than meaningless sound bites with little practical application. This is so not least because their complexity is often misunderstood and/or inappropriately unacknowledged as potential new directions by the general political science discipline and by policy planners. Furthermore, the foundational debate on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their impact on governance and the wider implications for development remains muted and/or ignored owing to the theatrical commotion in other “pressing” aspects of Caribbean political life. By extension, when attempting to highlight to the international community the impact these new technologies pose to these small societies, perhaps because they are objectified by the global media as peripheral “idyllic” regions and not considered as innovative in ICTs or in development, they are excluded from analysis in major academic journals. This

article therefore provides those who work within these areas a space for exposing their ideas to a wider international arena. That arena covers political scientists in the Caribbean academy who believe that the intellectual transactions of political science should revolve around more “pressing” problems such as electoral politics, the hackneyed regional integration project, the often dusted-off historical events and their implications for the present, naïve calls for the dismantling of the inherited British Westminster/Whitehall System of government even though its harshest critics have often significantly benefitted from its institutional arrangements, or some other social constructivist issue. For several social science scholars within the Caribbean, e-government and e-governance and their progenitor technology and politics do not warrant an investment in intellectual effort and are therefore ignored or marginalized by many. A review of the political science degree programs at the three campuses of the

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University of the West Indies shows that most individual courses in e-government are electives and the postgraduate programs in the area attract few candidates.

Similarly, those in the sub-discipline of management of information systems (MIS) treat both phenomena like an unwanted sibling in a “respectable family” by stripping the political and socio-technical gene from their work. The result is often a generic, mechanistic attempt at understanding the more profound phenomenon of the interaction of man with technology outside politics and society. As if these were not enough causes for concern, students will graduate in public-sector management having not read a single course in e-government or e-governance.

The emergence of the digital era is now the most pervasive and structurally distinctive influence on how governance arrangements are changing and facilitating an unprecedented universality and immediacy of information (Margetts, 2010; Scholl, 2008) in industrial states. The importance of government IT systems for societal development continues to grow. Modern ICT systems, based on the Internet, are increasingly underpinning trade, economic exchanges, and collective services (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006, p. 1). In core state functions, IT databases and central networks have become fundamental with developments such as e-borders transforming traditional administrative and legal operations (Dunleavy et al., 2006, p. 1; Margetts, 2010). Yet, despite these discernible global changes, a leading political scientist in the region once asked with eyes “wide shut,” “what is e-government?” This author found the question rather humorous particularly, from someone whose specialization is political-economy! Equally, others have asked at the university in the 21st century, “why is the university teaching courses on e-government and e-governance?”

One cannot ascribe blame for this condescension over the discourse on e-government and e-governance. Social science disciplines in the region have proven hardly receptive or attentive to the growing importance of the challenges and opportunities that ICTs present to governance. A number of factors have contributed to this under-appreciation. One prominent but obvious reason for this restraint lamented by Bishop (1998; personal interview, September 15, 2013<sup>1</sup>) is that many organizations and professionals in developing countries do not care to assess or know the potential benefits derived from ICT applications. Another reason might lie in the very complexity of e-government-related problems and phenomena, which crisscross the boundaries of organizational, social, and information sciences, statistics, law, and ethics in search of solutions to implementation challenges (Scholl, 2008, p. 23). Another could be a double-blind effect of prefixing the labels “e,” “electronic,” or “digital” before governance and government conjuring up images of hard-core engineering, sublimating the necessity for the complementary disciplines of public administration, public policy, and the like (Scholl, 2008, p. 23).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in some quarters, there have been signs of increasing weariness with new

technology-oriented business models, under the generic rubric of “business-process engineering,” emanating from the private sectors and schools of management, into the public sector without the promised political, economic, and social transformation. Yet, another reason could be that since the introduction of e-concepts such as e-business, e-commerce, e-government, and e-governance into the social consciousness, “e-ecitement” has spiraled out of proportion and the ever longer list of hilarious new e-words coincides with the growing academic and policy discontent (Scholl, 2008, p. 22; see also Schware & Deane, 2003) with them as nothing more than fads. For those who can discern the trends and transformations ICTs can have on governance, this is a cause for concern. This conceptual article serves as a wake-up call on the question of e-government and e-governance within the Caribbean’s intellectual discourse and, by extension, ICTs for development. It raises questions that academics, policy planners, and citizens must pose and answer.

## Making Sense of e-Governance and e-Government

Before discussing the concepts of e-government and e-governance, students must articulate on the more prominent and popular concepts such as the post-industrial society (Belle, 2006), the knowledge economy (Neef, 1998; Stehr, 1994), the information society (Webster, 2006), and the network society (Castells, 1998, 1999, 2005). This is followed by an examination of utopian and dystopian theories of the interaction of technology, politics, society, and development (McLoughlin, 1999; Webster, 2006). A foundational understanding of these building blocks is important to the question of what are the intended meanings and purposes of e-government and e-governance to our society. Because of time and space constraints, this article will not address these questions frontally, but rather will reflect on how government and governance should be conceptualized and organized in an increasingly technological world. Importantly, is it the intention of academics and policy experts when implementing or suggesting e-government projects to support technological/digital-citizens, reducing anxiety in the face of technologies, and increasing appreciation of ways that the public and public administrators can better communicate using existing and new information technologies? Equally, as a region, are we hoping to develop into knowledge societies, and/or to rid our countries of “neo-colonial” tendencies? Is our goal to conquer the “inconvenient truth” of wiring over intractable inequalities that exist within society? We cannot assume because some policy planners, academics, and citizens may have long-standing scholarly commitments and emphases on the centrality of ICTs to governance that everyone choruses with the same enthusiasm. So, before looking at any facet of e-government or e-governance, we must be clear on their definition, context and implications, and their intended meaning to our lives, and not attempt their

mastery without understanding the building blocks of ICTs for development that will determine their viability.

There is an acknowledged differentiation between e-government and e-governance, though they are often used by political writers and practitioners as if they were identical. In reality, they represent different concepts, and just as in the tactile world, government is not governance, the same definitional parameters must apply in the virtual world. A truer understanding of some of the most fundamental questions of political science also emerges with recognition of the distinction. The government is the collective name for the agency, magistracy, or organization through which the will of the state is formulated, expressed, and realized (Garner, 1910, p. 43). The government is an essential element or mark of the state, but it is no more the state than the board of directors is a corporation. Governments are the “contrivances” through which the state manifests itself (Garner, 1910, p. 44).

Governance, and by extension “good” governance, consists of three interrelated societal spheres: the political, administrative, and public (civil society, including individuals, organizations, and the media). These spheres differ in motivation, interests, focus unit, and mode of operation but essentially the idea of their collective action, as distinct from individual action, is captured in the term governance (Garner, 1910). Governance embraces a range of social projects, from the construction of “the good citizen” where it is implicated in diverse aspects of taste, moral choice, and personal regulation, to the daily disciplining of undesirable behaviors. Governance is an inescapable regime and therefore describes a complex multi-leveled reticular exercise of power in controlling and adjudicating the social and economic resources of a country, competence in public authorities’ formulation and implementation of policy, and the ability to fulfill their duties (Coleman, 2008). In essence, governance is the process by which society solves its problems and meets its needs. However, “government” describes a more centralized, linear notion of rule and is the instrument we use to effect governance (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993, p. 24). Thus, government and governance touch at many points and overlap in the phenomenon of the state. Failing to understand their natures and interrelation will affect our expectations of achievement.

Thus, e-governance is a broader topic of the usage and application of ICTs to the management of relationships and networks within society. e-Governance, then, is a wider concept that articulates the impacts of technologies on the practice of governments and the relationships between public servants and the wider society, such as elected bodies, not-for-profit organizations (NGOs), the private sector, corporate commercial entities, and international organizations (Heeks, 1999, 2001; Khan, 2002). The essence of e-governance is the communication between the “governing” and the “governed” and the test of “good governance” is a “harmoniously living society” (Vijayahankar, 2000).

e-Government is narrower in scope and refers to the development of online services to the citizen, the “e” on

government services—e-tax, e-transportation, or e-health. e-Government encompasses a series of necessary steps for government agencies to develop and administer to ensure successful implementation of e-government services to the public at large. e-Government is a procedural approach to co-operative administrative relations, that is, the encompassing of basic and standard procedures within the confines of public administration to ensure success of the delivery of e-services (Heeks, 1999, 2001; Khan, 2002). In this article, the terms will be differentiated and/or paired according to the issue being discussed.

### **Why We Need to Know the Troubling Face of Organized Alliance Capitalism**

The question regarding the value of e-government and e-governance to the Caribbean society is symptomatic of the region’s general nonchalant attitude toward technology applied to the process of development. It is important though that we step outside the blackboxes of e-government and e-governance for a while, and emphasize here the importance of ICTs to development if the reader is to fully grasp their meaning and complexity and the motivation for wanting to strategically deploy them in, or as, development strategies.

As we look across our “glocal” landscape, we cannot help but notice how ICTs have been instrumental in transforming capitalism, particularly its ability to facilitate the efficient accumulation of wealth. ICTs have become the handmaiden to organized capital to serve as the integral administrative bureaucratic apparatus which organizes, manages, and stabilizes capitalist society (Marcuse, 1964). Without this alliance of productive forces, global capitalism would have been more restricted. Early largely unsuccessful attempts to Taylorize white-collar work have been scientifically refined with the codification of the industrial process through such practices as business-process re-engineering inducing ICT-facilitated outsourcing. From the latter part of the 20th century until now, there has been an intensification of global firms investing in technological infrastructure through pursuing continuous ICT innovation involving partnerships and contractual arrangements with multiple ICT service providers across continents. This is to leverage not only strategic sectoral competitive advantage (Fountain, 2001; Robinson & Kalakota, 2004) but also the constant search for efficient processes, lower prices, and lower wages. Firms have, therefore, become globally decentralized “enterprise webs” of profit-centers, business units, spin-offs, licensees, and suppliers and distributors, such as Toyota or General Motors, to coordinate, for example, the production of the “global car” Martin (1994) or, with the growth of offshore and onshore outsourcing productive capacity, for the 24-hr coordination of business activities such as software design and engineering from multiple sources (Robinson & Kalakota, 2004). In the Caribbean, the call-centers are one example.

Firms once constrained by narrower national markets are also capitalizing on this alliance to reduce their dependency on any single resource supply or production location and participate in global markets in a more robust way. Technology alliances have emerged to share the cost of research and development (R&D) and ICTs have facilitated such alliances through immediate access to knowledge resources that require creativity, innovativeness, initiative, problem-solving, openness to change, and managerial skills (Castells, 1998; see also Castells & Cardoso, 2005; Dicken, 2011; Dunning, 1997, 2000). The economic priority is to access a new class of symbolic analysts (Reich, 2009), the information and knowledge specialists engaged in “managing ideas,” and possessing the “intellectual capital” crucial to success in the new “enterprise networks” of 21st-century capitalism (Reich, 2009, see also Castells & Cardoso, 2005; Powell, 2001; Robinson & Kalakota, 2004). This global production architecture presents opportunities and risks that require strategic managing at the levels of government policy and business management. As such, states have responded by introducing a raft of neo-liberal policies such as deregulating markets to facilitate the globalization of capital, global banking, and globally integrated money markets (Castells & Cardoso 2005; Dicken, 2011; Dunning, 1997, 2000).

The deregulation of the financial services industry and markets has also been coupled with the growth of new financial service instruments and virtual movement of stateless capital (Martin, 1994, Strange, 1997) institutionalized in the signature financial instrument of the 1990s: the “derivative,” (Roszack, 1994) and now the bitcoin. Bitcoin is the first decentralized digital currency generated through the Internet and transferred directly from person to person without having to go through the banking system and/or financial clearing houses (O’Brien & Tangel, 2014). As with the derivative defined by Roszack (1994), bitcoin is by far the most exotic and unregulated elusive entity ever to appear in the world of money (Roszack, 1994, p. xxxi).

High-speed computerized operations have also expedited the proliferation of information services, for example, in accounting, design, engineering, legal services, telemarketing, web-design, management, and Internet software, to become one of the fastest growing global industries. The Internet has been a driving force in this rapid growth with virtual instantaneous daily transfer of billions of dollars in today’s international economy and trans-border data flows accounting for US\$1.5 trillion annually (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2012). As a consequence, institutions such as central banks, and by extension governments, are provided with governance challenges, particularly the inability to collect tax and monitor financial transactions. More importantly, as with bitcoin, there is widespread concern about its potential impact on national currencies, criminal misuse, and ability to impose taxation (Hill, 2014). The lack of regulation and the anonymity also permit unscrupulous markets to easily emerge in

“commodities” and “services” such as drugs and child pornography (Carmody, 2013; Stross, 2014). The simple fact is that the computerized hand can move faster than the regulatory eye (Roszack, 1994, p. xxxi). Practitioners of e-government and e-governance must therefore not just be concerned with implementing efficient processes through choices of method of payment but realize that the technology plays an increasing role through policies that are thoughtful, effective, and timely (Hill, 2014).

### **Organized Alliance Capitalism + Consumerism + Materialism = Electronic Colonialism**

The use of science and technology by industrialized societies continues to shape the techno-industrial capacity to serve existing systems of production and consumption in the “technological society” (Marcuse, 1964). Although prophetic at that time, Marcuse’s (1964) analysis of the use of science and technology by organized alliance capitalism in manipulating human needs, culture, and thought through mass media marketing, propagating mass consumerism, and materialism has come to pass. Castells (1999, 2005) echoes Marcuse (1964) several years later and provides a comprehensive analysis of the network society by describing how capital’s use of technology is restructuring labor and leisure, influencing life from the organization of labor to modes of thought. Thus, organized alliance capitalism relies on ICTs to open up new markets for further capital accumulation. European and other transnational corporations join and/or fight with their American counterparts in selling a proliferation of standardized consumerism as well as Anglo-Saxon business style and linguistic conventions. MTV and Direct TV beam a staple diet of channels to Asian, Caribbean, and Latin American audiences. For some, such cultural homogenization indicates the emergence of new creative lifestyles, vastly extended opportunities for cultures to meet and understand each other, and the creation of new virtual communities across the traditional borderlines of age, gender, race, and religion (Castells, 1996, 1997; Hamelink, 1998). For others, cultural adaptation is also the key aim and objective of the advertisers calling up concepts from psychological research and pre-testing campaigns attempting to engineer public support by information persuasion and adjustment. Broadcast ratings endeavor to differentiate types of audience, behaviors, and preferences, and market research increasingly feeds survey literature, census data, and social science techniques into commercial strategies. What before was impossible to firms even in authoritarian societies is now possible “brought to you courtesy” of ubiquitous mobile devices (Schiller, 2000), inevitably facilitating new forms of electronic neo-colonialism (McPhail, 2008) that promote an insatiable consumerism for foreign goods and services by perpetuating already burdensome public debts that these countries can ill-afford to repay even under the most stringently imposed and accepted structural adjustment programs of creditor agencies.

As such, “the Caribbean remains vulnerable to public debts at record highs of almost 100 percent of GDP in tourism-dependent countries, and 140 percent of GDP in Jamaica” (Lagarde, 2014). These challenges have further exacerbated their own political, economic, and social importance within the global economy and the difficulty the countries have in finding and adopting innovative solutions to these new geopolitical and strategic configurations. As such, for developing countries such as the Caribbean, e-colonialism and what it signifies must therefore be an issue for consideration by proponents of e-government and e-governance because in the present system of global governance, the scope and direction of national ICT strategies are strongly influenced by the interests of industrial countries and transnational corporations (Hamelink, 1998). This realization must be acknowledged within the context of designing policies with a more adequate representation of all parties involved so that any advantages of development redound to the benefit of all.

### **Managing Organizational Change: Shifting Boundaries Beyond Bureaucracy**

These changes being wrought by ICTs are felt at the macro level of the nation state and at the micro level within organizations. This new logic of organizing involves changes in the standard recipes for jobs, organizations, and industries (Powell, 2001). Traditionally, public administration, public management, and organization theory have focused on the Weberian rational bureaucracy with attention to the human side of government organizations—selection, socialization, management of personnel, configuring of organizations, and physical processes of production (Bissessar, 2000; Caribbean Centre for Development Administration [CARICAD], 2001; du Gay, 2000; Hope, 1983; Mills, 1984; Ryan & Bissessar, 2002). With ICTs, organizational configurations have transitioned beyond hierarchical machine bureaucracies into adhocracies of which privately designed, built, and run IT systems are key components in modern public management (Clegg, Harris, & Hopfl, 2011; Grey, 2007; Pollitt, 2003). Behind the divergent monikers (infocracy, information-age bureaucracies, hetararchy, technocracy, virtual organization, network enterprise), one can discern the outlines of a fundamental change in the way work is organized, structured, and governed (Clegg, 2011). Nohria and Berkley (1994) summarize the essence of these virtual organizational forms in

1. The disappearance of Weber’s material “files”—the very ontological stuff of organizations—and their reappearance in flexible and electronic form.
2. The replacement of face-to-face communication in the primary activities of the organization with computer-mediated communication requiring a concomitant increase in informal face-to-face communication to maintain organizational coherence.

3. The transfer of organizational structure from the organization of human beings to the organization of information and technology so that the functioning of the organization appears spontaneous and paradoxically *structure-less*, while the functioning of information systems seems all-pervasive and magical.
4. The networking of individuals from technically separate firms (suppliers, customers, and competitors) to the extent that clear external boundaries of the organization become difficult to establish in practice.
5. The implosion of bureaucratic specialization into “global,” cross-functional, computer-mediated jobs, such that individual members of the organization may be considered holographically equivalent to the organization as a whole.

In a like manner, human resources are being forced to change and adjust to the new configurations. The Internet has been much heralded for its capacity to facilitate innovation by lowering social boundaries and expanding equity, freedom, and openness, values challenging long-held views in traditional Caribbean society, characterized by deference to authority, an emphasis on seniority, and status (Bissessar, 2000; Farrell, 1993). As a consequence, the “ideal type employee” must demonstrate new organizational “values” such as independence, initiative, responsibility, and risk taking; be enterprising and oriented toward citizens conscious of the quality as well as the costs; be flexible, communicative, committed, and willing to admit mistakes for the sake of progress; be able and ready to learn, full of confidence and self-assurance; and be collegiate and collaborative. The specialized departments now responsible for their results and resources will be freed from unnecessary interference and able to take decisions on resource use and work completion independently. Staff members have wider latitude for creativity and will become more independent and responsible. Citizens will get information about what is achieved with their tax money, what the different administrative services really cost, and they can confidently expect as efficient a performance as possible with the administration taking their wishes and needs into account (Castells & Cardoso, 2005; Neef, 1998; Pracher, 1996; Reddick, 2011). Power remains crucial, but it is used to enhance reach and access, and to compete in high-speed learning races (Powell, 2001). Heckscher and Donnellon (1994), in a similar analysis of what they characterize as the post-bureaucracy, acknowledge that like employees, management will need to develop skills that recognize that

1. Rules are being replaced with consensus and dialogue based on personal influence rather than status. People are trusted to act on the basis of shared values rather than rules.
2. Responsibilities are being assigned on the basis of competence for tasks rather than hierarchy, and employees are treated as individuals.

3. The organization has an open boundary, replacing full-time permanent employment with part-time, temporary and consultancy arrangements, with people coming flexibly into and out of the organization, and
4. Work is no longer done in fixed hours or at a designated place.

These characteristics are also central to the development of rationalization and modernization processes critical to the whole economic and social performance of digital era governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006; see also Heckscher, 1994). Importantly, however, these transformative changes have fostered bureaucratic contradictions in both the public and private sectors (Heckscher, 1994). Where in one instance, employees have seen these new forms of management as empowering, in another they have been seen as too normative, reducing the bureaucracy to excessive intrusion of strident personal and party politics leading to disruptive interventions (Nation Newspaper, 2014a). For instance, during the conduct of public-sector reform exercises, employees have expressed grievances of marginalization and unfair treatment at the hands of employers (Bissessar, 2001). Such practices are being challenged by key institutions in the Caribbean like the inveterate trade union movement still referencing the turbulent political struggles of the 1930s, by advocating for the retention of the bureaucracy of the assembly line with its rigid vertical integration and mass production. Indeed, those who participate in and administer the organizations through which so much of our society's activity takes place, must know the anatomy and pathology of these new organizational forms emerging within and outside government that are being wrought by ICTs.

### **ICT Paradoxes: Some Inconvenient Truths of ICTs and Development**

The intention of this article is not to present a technocratic utopia of ICTs for development, for in the midst of this excitement, there remains a great disparity and persistent digital divide that constrain the opportunity for developing economies to govern with their use. Although there are correlations between ICTs and economic and social progress, there are some important trade-offs between equity, well-being, and the unhindered development of ICTs. ICTs continue to alter the character of political life. Their diffusion and use present a number of intractable challenges which must be considered in the full extent of e-government and e-governance as development strategies. It is a truism that every major technological and social innovation is attended by unforeseen risks and disadvantages. In introducing technology for governance, we must assess the usefulness of technological innovation and similar developments before plunging headlong into the latest technological abyss. We cannot escape the fact that in developing regions like the Caribbean, social, political, and economic inequalities are

being reproduced online. There can be perceived and real loss of status and power in departmental "turf wars," or negative impacts on staff when processes are redesigned to support a network governance model (Dutton & Peltu, 2007, p. 22). Likewise, government organizations face greater levels of uncertainty in developing and providing e-government services because of the deeply entrenched organizational routines (Dimaggio, 2001; Mansell, Avgerou, Quah, & Silverstone, 2009), the complexity of the technology, and great diversity in the acceptance or non-acceptance of the value of the concept of ICTs (Bishop, 1998; International Telecommunications Union [ITU], 2006).

ICTs are two-edged with the capability for both welcome and unwanted content. This makes it difficult for government to achieve an acceptable balance for all stakeholders, leading governments sometimes "to be damned if they do and damned if they don't" (Dutton & Peltu, 2007, p. 26). There is little dispute about the intricate and ambivalent ways that ICT determines and enables: It centralizes by decentralization, it upgrades and downgrades human labor, and it offers unsurpassed possibilities for privacy protection while also simultaneously being considered its greatest enemy (Snellen & Van De Donk, 1998). ICTs have made spatial barriers less important, but in doing so, organizations and poorer countries unable to access knowledge resources are being left out when providers locate their services and information networks in affluent communities, bypassing less affluent and populous areas. Digital exclusion can reinforce social or economic regional and internal disparities of inequality (Cairncross, 2001; Mansell et al., 2009).

Information is now a tradable commodity and has become one of the structural determinants of economic competitiveness (Downes, 2010; Drucker, 1998; Nora & Minc, 1980). Inability to purchase results in information poverty to the disadvantage of vulnerable states through curtailed knowledge of local and international markets, reduced bargaining power in negotiations, and entities with more access to remote sensing satellite information about oil or minerals than policy planners (Hamelink, 1998). This has been further compounded by the complex regulatory mechanisms imposed by new information and communication channels, particularly in terms of access conditions, media content, competition rules, and technical standards. The substantial benefits of many new databanks are cost prohibitive, preventing many policy planners from making informed choices about their resources and thus undermining self-reliant national development strategies (Dutton, 1996, Hamelink, 1998). The resulting information poverty is endemic at every level of society but not always controlled by vested external interests. Utopian scenarios offer access to information that will bridge the gap between the governed and governors. One of the most critical challenges facing e-government implementation and the realization of e-governance in Caribbean societies is the lack of accurate information and the unavailability of timely information or no information,

which undermine the whole edifice of government functioning. Information/content is germane to both; yet, its importance seems to have been lost on too many decision makers always ready to shelter behind the official secrets act or avoid the media for fear of being misrepresented. Promises of fulfilling the Freedom of Information Act (Nation Newspaper, 2014b) are a misnomer. More succinctly, what you get from e-government systems can only be as good as what you put in and this must be an issue for the public sector and e-government (Heeks, 2006; see also Heeks, 1999).

In addition, the region must guard against technological amnesia. The costs of this reality are clear, but there are broader social costs as well. The assumption that every digital transaction is preserved somewhere and that if data can be copied, it can live forever, is true to some extent. However, our inability to keep abreast of the dynamic innovations and inventions in hardware and software could disable our ability to maintain sensitive data (Winter, 2007). Search engines, online vendors, cellphone companies, and surveillance camera services can wipe their data out after a certain span of time (Winter, 2007); sheer unanticipated tragedy can do the same as in Nevis, where a major fire damaged the government's treasury department and the Department of Inland Revenue. The fire destroyed important financial records, computer servers, and computer services critical to the government's operation and led the premier to comment that "the government's heart really has been devastated" (Frederick, 2014). The implications for a developing region embarking on e-governance or e-government strategies are that in not developing the technological capacity to anticipate technological changes, and not investing in strategic plans to manage knowledge through the retention of requisite technologies, can lead to these technologies locking away the past and with them vital aspects of a region or nation's culture. The important lesson of this irony is for policy planners in e-governance to think about the life span of the information and the technologies and reintroduce into our consciousness the importance of securing national memory in all its forms.

The Caribbean has also found itself with the long-standing dilemma of structural high unemployment with abundant but inadequately educated labor for which governments have always found space in the public sector. The conundrum is, "Should the government use the newer applications of technology to correct inefficiencies and promote competitiveness but with unemployment, or maintain employment levels, declining productivity, and global uncompetitiveness with older technologies?" Very seldom has there been a comprehensive analysis of needs and alternatives or any concerted public consultation on choice. Trade unions have been recalcitrant and silent in the application of newer ICTs for the sake of social justice and in some instances have secured from governments tacit and overt politically expedient approval for this stance. The end result has been sluggish, bloated, centralized hierarchical bureaucracies, preoccupied with rules and regulations, often wasteful, that are unwelcoming of online

innovations that are needed to support any changes in demand that the online move could bring (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993; Sutton, 2006).

The scope and quality of the e-government offerings also deserve attention. Full and successful implementation of e-government services will be inherently affected by the [re] current challenges afflicting the public sector throughout the Caribbean made worse by the global economic recession. Changes in the global institutional arrangements have seen the introduction of new bureaucratic practices such as new public management encouraged and facilitated by international organizations and groupings such as the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The central hypothesis of this strategy is to introduce market-oriented "best-practice" strategic approaches such as downsizing, privatization, and the creation of public-private partnerships to administrative governance. As a result of this new focus, many governments, generally the largest employer and the largest procurer of goods and services in these countries, have had to restrict their acquisition and delivery of these said services to their citizens. The irony is that these changes, designed to restructure the state to make the government more efficient and accountable to improve governance (Sutton, 2006), have also reduced access and choice to services restricting the best interests of stakeholders. In essence, the region runs the risk of having e-government with fewer services to offer.

Understanding why some countries have moved ahead in digital politics while others lag behind raises complex developmental, technological, and democratic issues. Some of the key concerns for policy planners wishing to implement e-government or govern cyber-society are for whose benefit and under whose control will they be implemented and governed? What opportunities do people in the Caribbean have to access and apply them? Thus, we need to look at structural features such as patterns of ownership—analysis that assists understanding the effects of technology on enlarging or closing the rift between the "information-poor" and the "information-rich" countries (Laver, 1989, p. 41).

As we gaze outward, power, control, and national interest still remain salient. Global inequalities are being reinforced by the production and appropriation of ICTs that mirror and reflect the global stratification of the societies that produce and use them. Over the past decades, prevailing international policies on transfer of technology have erected formidable obstacles to the reduction of North-South technology gaps. Today, there is no indication that the current restrictive business practices, the constraints on the ownership of knowledge, and the rules on intellectual property rights that are adverse to developing country interests are radically changing. In addition, there are presently no realistic prospects that the relations between ICT-rich and ICT-poor countries will soon change (Hamelink, 1998, 1999, 2000; Mansell et al., 2009). More than this, these trends are also instructive to us

who study e-government and e-governance to be wary of spending too much time in deterministic accounts of the changes they threaten. Neither can we just offer *vignettes* of best-practice strategies of implementation to ameliorate these challenges. A suggestion would be to become equally savvy in discussions theorizing the new forms of organization and the accompanying social and political adjustments these structural characteristics signify for the region's future development. Theorizing is useful for providing us with logical frameworks and useful explanatory gravitas in making causal connections of the effects of certain predictive phenomena (Strange, 1988). For ICTs and development, no dominant theory exists. However, dependent on the ascendant theoretical perspective and its methodological approaches within the academic and/or policy community, the ability or inability to theorize may be determined by the shared perspectives, causal connections, and hopeful prospects that can shape and influence policy and the research agenda. Equally, theories are also embedded in ideological orientations and, depending on the emphasis, can decide whether we will perpetuate digital divides across traditional borderlines of place, space, age, race, gender, and religion (Ebo, 1998). Alternatively, they can assist in developing a space where we can "leapfrog" toward an independent technological structure that considers the importance of integrating technological development and absorption within a broader socio-political framework. The latter requires enveloping the appropriate institutional change of national ensembles of practices, institutions, and political cultures (Avgerou, 2000; Dimaggio, 2001).

## Conclusion

The development and diffusion of ICTs is significantly altering the structure of our society. ICT-enabled governance offers one possibility of good governance, fusing both processing and communication technologies to integrate people, processes, information, and technology toward achieving

1. *Governance that is cheaper*: producing the same outputs at lower total cost;
2. *Governance that does more*: producing more outputs at the same total cost;
3. *Governance that is quicker*: producing the same outputs at the same total cost in less time;
4. *Governance that works better*: producing the same outputs at the same total cost in the same time, but to a higher quality standard; and
5. *Governance that is innovative*: producing new outputs

ICT-enabled e-government offers a plethora of significant services in e-administration aimed at reducing the costs and increasing the speed of processes and decision making, and/or creating more flexible and responsive processes (Heeks, 2001; Khan, 2002).

But enumerating and exploring the benefits will not have created significant growth toward their realization. Hence, this article has not focused on e-government and e-governance alone but, more generally, has explored the inextricably linked wider issues of the ICT and development debate that must be in consonance with the broader vision commensurate with the implementation of e-governance and e-government strategies in the Caribbean. For those who may wish to argue that the challenges and opportunities presented here are inapposite within and to Caribbean society, this author disagrees with such claims. The Caribbean has always had to voluntarily adapt or forcibly succumb to global trends and transformations, and those presented here are already endemic and rapidly becoming so even on a microscale. This article therefore does not present a naive instrumental rationality of e-government and/or e-governance where they are conceptualized and operationalized as merely methods and processes for the reduction of transaction costs, collecting taxes, and enabling faster processing time for welfare grants and claims to clients. This article urges us also to reflect on the complexity of the contemporary polity before we become totally enamored with the technologically ingenious and overlook the all-important business of rationally assessing the value and merits of the technological devices (Postman, 1993), how we harness them to raise the ability of governments to govern, serve the citizenry, and ultimately improve human development (ITU, 2006; Nath, 2014). As presented here, the power and reach of ICTs have wrought enhanced changes in production, consumption, culture, thought, and the accumulation of wealth in which the production of needs and aspirations by the prevailing societal apparatus integrates or marginalizes individuals into the established societies. But at the same time, such changes epitomize the Trojan *double entente*, which is that these developments cannot be seen as entirely beneficial because they raise new challenges for governments and their ability to govern. Thus, to the scholarly community, this article not only answers the question what is e-government and e-governance but also provides a comprehensive justification for why we need to understand and participate in the important ongoing debate about governance of the Internet as a negotiated, political, economic, and social space. This discussion also legitimizes a *raison d'être* for their introduction and study in the academy. In this regard, we must be reminded from time to time of what our role is in the academy and society:

Political scientists are actively involved at every phase of the decision process of the commonwealth at all levels—national, international, and subnational. Although every phase of decision is directly or indirectly affected by what they say or do, the chief professional role of students of government is most immediately linked with the functions of intelligence and appraisal. As teachers and research workers, political scientists are responsible for presenting an inclusive, reality-tested image of the changing role of government in the social process of every community. Their responsibility includes the linking of descriptive and explanatory

knowledge and estimates of the future with clarified interpretations of community goals and evaluations of major policy alternatives. (Lasswell, 1962, p. 26)

As such because of the gravitas of these developments, academics, policy planners, and citizens alike need to be both more sensitive to and more eager to correct the biases and blind spots that can only impede an understanding of the key drivers of social and political change. Demas (1975) was therefore prophetic in his warning of technology to us:

It is one of the great tasks of the New Caribbean Man to escape this trap. From the very beginning, the New Caribbean Man must see and put technology in its true place as a servant of human values. To say this is not to adopt a romantic attitude or to reject the desirability of material progress. Rather, what I am suggesting is that we so construct our economic, political and social institutions that our New Society is susceptible to control by our own human will and conscious activity rather than by the blind force of technology. (p. 3)

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### Notes

1. Personal interview with Mr. Stewart Bishop, senior lecturer, University of the West Indies, at Cave Hill, Barbados, former president and co-founder of the Information Society of Barbados.
2. The widely held mistaken view often expressed by prospective undergraduate and graduate students and of concern by visitors alike attending academic fairs is that prima facie courses and programs regarding e-governance and e-government seem very technical, and it is difficult for them to see past this perception that there is no need to master a lexicon of software programming and computer science terminology before undertaking such a course of study.

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