

**Open Government and the 2.0 Model of Engaged Citizenship**

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Major Research Paper  
Submitted to the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs  
University of Ottawa  
March 26, 2014

## ABSTRACT

On President Obama's first day in office, he released a Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Transparency and Open Government, declaring his Administration's commitment to transparent, participatory, and collaborative government and making a strong link between these principles and public goods such as democracy, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness (Obama 2009). Tracing the theoretical and legal history of openness, civic republicanism, and the decline of traditional civic practices, this paper examines the citizen as it is imagined in the American vision of Open Government, in order to better understand the intended and actual impact of Open Government initiatives and web 2.0 tools on citizen participation and engagement. It proposes that the Open Government Memoranda presume a mirror-image model of digitally-enabled, engaged, responsabilized citizenship that is under-explained in government documents and under-theorized in academia: citizens that are willing and able to work together with government and other stakeholders to solve problems, to use the information government provides to hold government accountable, and to provide expert advice to improve government policies and programs. Using Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) as a framework, this paper critiques the discrepancies between the aspirational language of the Open Government Memoranda and the Obama Administration's initiatives to date. It proposes three areas for future research: the digital divide, the impact of web 2.0 on forms of traditional information dissemination, and the implications of this vision of citizenship on citizen autonomy and responsibility.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“..from the time of the debates about the ratification of the Constitution to the present, Americans have continued to imagine their nation’s polity.” – John G. Gunnell, 2004*

On January 21, 2009, his first full day in office, President Obama released a Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, declaring the Administration’s commitment to transparent, participatory and collaborative government. The Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government makes a strong link between these principles and public goods such as democracy, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, stating that “transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing”, “public engagement enhances the Government’s effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions” and that “collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government” (Obama 2009).

The terminology for this model of governance and government-citizen interaction remains contested. In the government and technologies sector, it is called “open government” or “government 2.0” (Mergel 2013b) based on its use of web 2.0 technologies. A report by the Netherland’s Scientific Council for Government Policy calls it Information Government (iGovernment), arguing that “the nature of government is changing dramatically under the influence of digitization” and that government is now “dominated by interrelated information flows” that “determine how government and citizens operate, as well as their dependencies and vulnerabilities” (Prins, Broeders, Griffioen, Keizer, Keymolen 2011). Sundstrom uses the term “Interactive Government” (i-government) to describe government’s use of mobile technology to connect citizens to

offline resources such as the location of sandbag distribution centres during a flood or hours of operation for government offices, “engage citizens in collaboration” such as reporting graffiti directly to the city public works department, “empower citizens as volunteers”, such as an app that notifies people who are trained in CPR when there is a heart attack nearby, and “enable citizens as watchdogs”, such as inviting citizens to report city workers neglecting duties (2012).

Though these terms give us a clear picture of government’s role in an open government, the role of citizens remains under-theorized. What kind of citizens does i-government seek to interact with? What motivates citizens to self-serve, collaborate, volunteer, monitor, and engage “in the work of their government” (Obama 2009) and how does the Obama administration seek to responsabilize the American citizenry in this way? What defines a virtuous citizen in the era of Open Government? Tracing the American history of openness and civic republicanism, the decline of traditional civic practices, this paper will examine the citizen as it is imagined in the American vision of Open Government, in order to better understand the intended and actual impact of open government initiatives and web 2.0 tools on citizen participation and engagement.

### **1.1 “We the people”<sup>1</sup>**

‘The people’ have always played a strong role in American political rhetoric, ideas and ideals (Morone 1990). American civic republicanism expressed citizenship as “duties and obligations to the community” and a shared “commitment to the political

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<sup>1</sup> From the opening preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

community's goals, gained through the process of education and active engagement" (Ravitch and Viteritti 2001). Citizens shared the "public life of civic duty" and their citizenship was "defined and fulfilled by participation" (Morone 1990). From the beginning, American colonial politics were "unsteady, fractious and open" (Morone 1990), a stark contrast to the formal, static 18<sup>th</sup> century British electoral system. The 1691 Massachusetts constitution required one representative for each town of 40 voters, resulting in a steady increase of Assembly seats. In Britain, electoral districts had been unchanged in almost a century. In America, the colonies held annual elections, often imposing residency requirements for representatives, and focused on local issues of land distribution, infrastructure and social and educational institutions. In Britain, the system hinged on the doctrine of virtual representation, where Members of Parliament were supposed to be an individual member of a deliberative national assembly, not an advocate for their local interests (Morone 1990). Morone argues that a strain of classical civic republicanism persists in contemporary America, a form of grass-roots democracy instead of rural freeholders, collectively organizing and celebrating civic community while remaining skeptical of centralized executive authority (1990).

In order to understand if and how new technologies are enabling governments to engage citizens, it is helpful to take a few steps back into the study of citizenship more broadly. In response to shifting academic, socio-economic, governing and political environments, modern Citizenship Studies and other scholars working at the nexus of government and society continue to re-draw models to better describe or predict the ways in which people feel a sense of belonging or responsibility to and interact with states. Engin Isin and Brian Turner, authors of the Handbook of Citizenship Studies (2002),

have argued elsewhere that modern citizenship was constructed historically “from a set of contributory rights and duties that are related to work, public service (for example, military or jury service) and parenthood or family formation. It defines belonging to a society through the entitlements associated with service” (Isin and Turner 2007). Cynthia Weber argues that “citizenship accords legal membership to a political community, and this membership confers rights, obligations and belonging in relation to this political community” (2008). At its most basic definition, the liberal tradition of citizenship “understands citizenship primarily as a legal status”, while the republican model describes “civic self-rule” and active participation in governing and government (Leydet 2014).

In a landmark article, published in 1969, Sherry Arnstein describes citizen participation in politics as “a categorical term for citizen power” (Arnstein 1969). It is, she writes, “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society” (Arnstein 1969).

Carpini defines civic engagement as a combination of “civic awareness” (knowledge, interest, concern and involvement in society) and “civic participation” (civic practices and actions, both individual and collective, that are designed to address public issues through civil society institutions) (2012). Civic practices can be understood as the

active manifestation of citizenship, and includes routine, reoccurring and formal actions such as voting; less frequent and ad hoc activities such as writing a letter to your Member of Parliament or participating in a demonstration; and both legally mandated requirements of citizenship such as jury duty and voluntary participation such as donating to an election campaign (Dalhgren 2012). Civic participation can seek to achieve instrumental goals such as impacting public opinion, legislation, and policies, or expressive goals such as making statements or coalescing a collective identity (Dalhgren 2012). Both categories aim to create visibility and amplify individual voices to participate in political discussion (Dalhgren 2012).

Today, traditional, formal, civic practices, such as voting, are generally declining in the United States (U.S.). Voter turnout for the presidential election fell from a peak of 81.2% (of the voting age population<sup>2</sup>) in 1860, to 73.2% in 1900, 62.77% in 1960 and an all-time low of 49.8% in 1996, rising to 57.48% in 2008 when President Barack Obama was elected for his first term (Woolley and Peters 2014). Based on national surveys by the Roper Organization (1973-1993), Robert Putnam argues that “by almost every measure, American’s direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply in a generation” (1995). Putnam links a decline in activities such as attending public meetings and political rallies, serving on the organizing committee of a local organization or working for a political party, with a decline in membership in religious organizations; unions; and traditional civic organizations such as the Shriners, Boy Scouts and the Red Cross. And he argues that the rise of mass-membership organizations (such as the Seirra Club, the National Organization of Women and the American

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<sup>2</sup> The Voting Age Population (V.A.P.) includes felons and other individuals who are ineligible to vote (Woolley and Peters 2014).

Association of Retired Persons) is a new form of civic engagement, one that lacks the “social connectedness” of local, participatory groups and where members have ties to “common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another” (Putnam 1995). In this view, civic engagement and participation requires face-to-face interaction and unmediated connections, building “networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995). Similarly, John B. Thompson, writing on the impact of mass communication in 1990, argues that “mass communication institutes a fundamental break between the producer and receiver, in such a way that recipients have relatively little capacity to intervene in the communicative process and contribute to its course and content” (Thompson 1990).

## **1.2 Web 2.0**

However, a growing body of online “web 2.0” technologies have introduced new ways for government and citizens to interact with each other and amongst themselves, including email, chats, online meetings and discussion forums, online service delivery, live videostreaming, blogs, wikis, e-voting, and e-petitions (Bolivar, Munoz and Hernandez 2013). Web 1.0 was the Internet of “static and non-interactive websites” that merely provided information for users (Mergel 2013b); Web 2.0 is made of both online and mobile user centred tools that “facilitate collaboration through interactive information production and sharing” (Mergel 2013b). Consider, for example, the difference between the online version of Encyclopedia Britannica (1.0) and the interactive, user-driven website Wikipedia (2.0). Web 2.0 technologies “allow users to actively create content and directly interact with each other, instead of a one-directional

content dissemination” (Mergel and Schweik 2012). Isis, Pifano and Miranda argue that “web 2.0 technologies have revolutionized not only the way people connect, but also how they perceive their power to form and voice an opinion and to make a significant contribution....Web 2.0 empowers individuals by providing them with the tools they need to become dynamic participations in society” (2012).

Because these tools are open to anyone, their usage is both citizen-driven and government driven. Studying citizen-driven online engagement would examine how citizens are using social media to engage in civic practices. For example, Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar’s study of Facebook as an “enabler of online civic engagement for activists” found that individuals conducting online civic engagement used Facebook to seek information (both to identify relevant articles and to inform themselves about events not reported in mainstream media), to appeal for donations, to generate awareness about events (such as crimes), to promote organized events on social issues, to facilitate discussions on social issues, to coordinate activities, and to lobby decision-makers and advocate for action (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar 2013). An analysis using this lens could study the potential of these tools to facilitate civic communications “enabling people and organizations to connect to each other to share information, provide support, organize, mobilize and develop and maintain collective identities” (Dahlgren 2012).

Studying government-driven online engagement would focus on how government is asking citizens to use the Internet and social media to engage in civic practices. This paper will focus on this aspect, in order to better hone in on the relationship between citizens and government and the expectations of government in this space. In many cases, these government initiatives intend to reach citizens on platforms where they are already

involved, harnessing already active and organized citizens and channelling that energy in towards specific (government) objectives. In Ines Mergel's study on social media adoption in the U.S. federal government's executive branch after the 2009 Open Government Memorandum, she found that the shift was partly market-driven: agencies seeking to represent themselves "on all potential interaction channels" and to be "where the citizens are" in order to reach a growing section of the public who use social media as their main resource to get information, disburse information and communicate (Mergel 2013).

Scholars remain divided on the degree and type of impact of the Internet and digital technology on citizen-state relations and civic participation but it is well known that a number of governments, with the United States at the forefront alongside the UK, are seeking to use online and mobile tools, not just to deliver services and information, but to increase citizen participation and collaboration in government affairs. The degree of citizen involvement or responsibility varies, from merely inviting citizens to ask questions of government officials to asking citizens to commit themselves to a geo-mapped police database of potential eyewitnesses (Meijer 2014) or compete to design military equipment (Challenge.gov). In the U.S., since President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, there appears to have been a shift in how the administration talks about openness, accompanied by changes to policies and regulations that seem to signal an operational and legal shift, moving to a more open information regime and more open public sector organizations, under the umbrella of Open Government. However, this has come coupled with the revelation of contradictory programs, such as the National

Security Agencies social media surveillance program, which had previously operated in secret and in the business of excavating secrets.

Tracing the theoretical and legal history of openness, civic republicanism, and the decline of traditional civic practices, this paper examines the citizen as it is imagined in the American vision of Open Government, in order to better understand the intended and actual impact of Open Government initiatives and web 2.0 tools on citizen participation and engagement. Using Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) as a framework, this paper critiques the discrepancies between the aspirational language of the Open Government Memoranda and the Obama Administration's initiatives to date. It proposes that the Open Government Memoranda presume a mirror-image model of digitally-enabled, engaged, responsabilized citizenship that is under-explained in government documents and under-theorized in academia: citizens that are willing and able to work together with government and other stakeholders to solve problems, to use the information government provides to hold government accountable, and to provide expert advice to improve government policies and programs.

The term 'responsibilization' refers "to a process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a state agency" (O'Malley 2009). Born in the governmentality literature, it gained prominence in analysis of crime control and policing, examining a trend towards the criminal justice system encouraging individuals and communities to take partial responsibility for their own protection, such as through neighbourhood watch programs, installing security systems, and avoiding high risk settings (O'Malley 2009). This is being accelerated through technology as police forces turn to online tools to engage

citizens directly in the work of policing, using web forums to seek layperson expertise or eyewitnesses or through Twitter announcements to raise public awareness of crimes (see, for example, Albert Meijer's 2014 work on the Dutch police force's coproduction of criminal justice with citizens). Post 9-11, scholars such as Petersen and Tjalve (2013) have traced the spread of responsabilization tactics and language into the broader fields of public and national security through programs such as "Be alert. Stay Awake. Speak Up." This paper argues that open government doctrine broadens the scope of citizen responsibility even further, into policy-making, program and service delivery, and government accountability, redefining and digitizing old forms of civic virtue. Finally, it proposes three areas for future research: the digital divide, the impact of web 2.0 on forms of traditional information dissemination, and the implications of this vision of citizenship on citizen autonomy and responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

## **OPEN GOVERNMENT**

Open government is a governing doctrine usually defined by its goals and objectives and the types of tools used to achieve them. Lathrop and Ruma suggest that open government "holds that citizens have the right to access the documents and proceedings of the government to allow for effective public oversight" (2010). The

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<sup>3</sup> A note on sources: Given the short timeframe this paper is focused on (2008 to the present), and the speed with which technology has changed in recent years, I have sought to emphasize the publication dates of all research referenced, to give readers a sense of the timeliness of the author's critiques and analysis. Similarly, I have focused on research on the American context, where relevant, as the Open Government initiatives in other countries have had different timelines and, arguably, different intentions and ideological histories. For example, in the UK the open data and digital government paradigms have come hand in hand with the UK's Big Society programme under David Cameron, described on the UK Conservative Party's website as "a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities" in which people are "encourage and enabled to play a more active role in society." The focus was not on technology, and greater government transparency was only one of a full suite of pillars including increased volunteering and charitable giving and support for social finance.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) refers to government initiatives that “strengthen the public debate to create ownership for objectives and methods used and demonstrate results for the purpose of being accountable and building trust” (2010). Beth Noveck (former Deputy Chief Technology Officer and Director of the White House Open Government Initiative) defines it as a strategy to create more effective institutions and a more robust democracy by using network technology to connect the public to government and to each other (2011). In a Whitehouse blog post heralding the publication of Open Government Plans by every executive government agency, Noveck writes, “tell us how we can do things better. In the process, we hope to reinvigorate a shared sense of civic virtue born out of a common love for this democracy” (Noveck 2010). Here technology is perceived to “reinvigorate” civic virtue and participatory citizenship, encouraging citizens to actively engage in government initiatives, not just in their own communities.

Open government aspires to provide citizens with the information and tools to participate directly in raising and addressing issues that are important to them. Born of the world of open data<sup>4</sup> and open software licensing and the long history of calls for greater transparency about government proceedings, “open government concepts seeks to include society in governmental processes to increase efficacy and efficiency as well as citizen satisfaction” and to leverage “information technologies to generate participatory, collaborative dialogue between policymakers and citizens” (Edelmann, Höcktl, and Sachs

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<sup>4</sup> **Open data** is a doctrine that argues that data and information should be freely accessible to anyone to use, re-use and republish, without copyright, patent or cost. In the context of government, it usually refers to the publication of government datasets and information in a machine-readable format, allowing for the data to be searched, analyzed, combined and repurposed by non-government actors. Many Open Government platforms require government agencies to proactively release datasets in this format (including the U.S. the U.K, and Canada).

2012). Common strategies and tools include “making government data open for public re-use and validation; collaboratively developing solutions with citizens; and fostering a culture of presumed, proactive transparency” (Lukensmeyer, Goldman, and Stern 2011). As the Internet and online tools has moved from static informational websites to multi-directional user-driven collaborations and dialogue, open government has moved beyond the public’s “right to access the documents and proceedings of government” (Lathrop and Ruma 2010) and refers more broadly to meaningful public participation in government: both informational openness and interactive openness (Meijer, Albert, Diedre, Maarten 2012).

## **2.1 Transparency**

The academic literature on open government tends to break ‘openness’ down into two dimensions: transparency and participation (Meijer, Albert, Diedre, Maarten 2012). Welch argues that “transparency and participation represent two different mechanisms through which public organizations can respond to stakeholders, demonstrate openness, and satisfy accountability demands” (2012). He defines transparency in open government as making information available on the organization and its activities and outcomes and participation as providing opportunities for outside stakeholders and the public to provide input into government policies, programs, and services (Welch 2012). The two are strongly linked, with information and transformation enabling and facilitating participation (Edelmann, Hochtl and Sachs 2012). However, these operational definitions are not anywhere near complex enough to encompass the connotations, denotations, tensions, and assumptions in these terms and how they are used by government.

In the introduction to a special Transparency issue of the journal *Cultural Studies* <=> *Critical Methodology*, Teurlings and Stauff note that “the meaning of the word transparency oscillates between something that *is* and something that needs to be *created*.” It is both “a property of things”, such as water or bureaucratic decisions, and “the result of a complex set of measures” with implicit or explicit politics, such as monitoring mechanisms, websites for publishing information, scrutinizing policies, and pressuring politicians to step forward (2014). Clare Birchall argues that the open government form of digitally-enhanced information transparency is seen as an inherently “neutral, automated, systematic, efficient, lawful, and regulatory mode of disclosure” and the “democratic tool *par excellence*”, grounded in law (e.g., the Freedom of Information Act) and both law-abiding and law-enforcing. It is literally sunshine combatting darkness (see for example the 1976 U.S. Government in the Sunshine Act). This stands in contrast to shadowy narrative-interpretive forms of disclosure such as leaks, scandal, gossip, and conspiracy theories, which operate at least partially outside of government control (Birchall 2014).

Archon Fung coined the term “democratic transparency” (2013), to describe an ideal model for public provision of information that is justified by both democratic goals and democratic means. In this model, “citizens can use information to exercise influence over the organizations that affect their lives and to navigate life choices in ways that are more likely to advance their own welfare and flourishing” and “it is only through the collective effort and authority of citizens—acting through the mechanism of their governments or through social action—that can compel public and private organizations to disclose information that would otherwise remain secret” (Fung 2013). Fung’s

democratic transparency is based on four principles: information should be available to citizens, in proportion to the risk to citizens by the organization disclosing, in formats that they can understand, and accompanied by a rearranging of political, social and economic structures to allow individuals to take action to use the information protect themselves (Fung 2013).

## **2.2. Participation**

Welch defines participation simply as opportunities for outside stakeholders and the public to provide input into government policies, programs, and services (2012).

However, the literature on citizen engagement (both traditional and online) describes a broad spectrum of depth and type of interaction between citizens and governments.

Archon Fung reminds us that “the multiplex conditions of modern governance demand a theory and institutions of public participation that are appropriately complex ... there is no canonical form of direct participation in modern democratic; modes of contemporary participation are, and should be, legion” (2006).

One of the most famous models for mapping citizen participation, Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” (1969), has eight rungs. At the bottom of the ladder, *manipulation*, citizens are disingenuously “placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards” intended to educate them or pretend that the initiative has grassroots support. “Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom run of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders” (Arnstein 1969). The second rung, *therapy*, involves “engaging citizens in extensive activity” that secretly intends to address a social illness. This could include public housing tenant

groups that are used to promote social programs or engineer behavior changes (Arnstein 1969). Rungs three through five include token citizen participation events in which participants have a voice, but no real power. *Informing* is a type of participation in which citizens are informed of their “rights, responsibilities, and options.” It can be a step towards legitimate participation, but Arnstein argues that it is often reduced to one-way information sharing from authorities to citizens, without feedback channels or the ability for participants to influence the process or outcomes (Arnstein 1969). *Consultation* invites citizen’s opinions through venues such as surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public hearings. Arnstein argues that “when power-holders restrict the input of citizens’ ideas solely to this level, participation remains just a window-dressing ritual” in which “people are primarily perceived as statistical abstractions” and participation is measured by the number of participants, not its impact (Arnstein 1969). *Placation* involves inviting some hand-picked citizens to sit as active members of public bodies or boards, but does not open the dialogue up to the broader public (Arnstein 1969).

Rungs six through eight involve a degree of citizen power. *Partnership* involves citizens and authorities agreeing to “share planning and decision-making responsibilities” through such formal structures with dispute resolution mechanisms such as planning committees (Arnstein 1969). She argues that partnerships work best when citizens are organized and have the financial resources to pay their leaders an honorarium and to hire additional expertise. *Delegated power* involves giving citizens decision-making authority over a particular program, or giving citizen-veto in a negotiation over a community project (Arnstein 1969), such as participatory budgeting in which citizens vote on the distribution of government budgets in a particular policy area. At the top of the ladder,

*citizen control* puts a sufficient degree of power in the hands of citizens to enable them to govern a program or institution. Citizens are put “in full charge of policy and managerial aspects” and are “able to negotiate the conditions under which ‘outsiders’ may change them” (Arnstein 1969). For example, this would include a neighbourhood economic development or housing corporation whose membership and board is comprised of representatives of community organizations (Arnstein 1969).

Published almost three decades later, Archon Fung’s “framework of participation in complex governance” (2006), sought to improve upon Arnstein’s ladder, reflecting advances in scholarship on participation and political theory as well as changes in mechanisms for including citizens. It also sought to develop a framework that did not give “normative approval” to individual influence over collective decisions by ranking the levels based on citizens’ power in the interaction (2006). His “Democracy Cube” has three dimensions: “the scope of participation”, “the mode of communication and decision” among participants, and “the extent of the participants authority” (Fung 2006). In the first dimension, participation may be open to any who wishes to attend (though in these cases the self-selected subset is usually not representative of the group as a whole). Alternately, individuals can be selectively or randomly recruited to participate either through targeted engagement, structural incentives, or invitations to paid or unpaid stakeholder representatives (2006). In the second dimension, Fung identifies six modes of communication and decision-making in citizen participation: listening as a spectator, expressing preferences, developing preferences, aggregating and bargaining, deliberating and negotiating, and deploying expertise. The third dimension “gauges the impact of public participation” (2006) and ranges from New England town meetings (where

participant decisions become town policy) to venues where participants have little or no expectation of influence but benefit personally from receiving information or fulfilling a civic obligation. It is clear from these diagnostics that it is insufficient to speak of citizen participation as either a monochrome objective or inherently a public good. Instead, it covers a broad spectrum of types of engagement, and participants. In the context of open government, it is necessary to consider if and how the 2.0 models of citizen participation fit into these frameworks.

### **2.3 Collaboration**

Along with transparency and participation, the Obama Administration's open government policies added a third dimension to openness: collaboration. The Memorandum on Transparent and Open Government declared that "collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government. Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector" (Obama 2009). This paper will not address internal cooperation within and between government departments but will focus on external collaboration with outside individuals and organizations. The Open Government Directive doesn't give much more detail, other than to specify that innovative methods can include "prizes and competitions" (Orzag 2009). This most likely refers to Challenge.gov, the U.S. government's online central platform that hosts "incentive prizes" and challenges put forward by Federal departments and agencies, inviting "citizen solvers" to compete to develop solutions. Launched in 2010, in its first

two years the site hosted 200 challenges from 45 departments and agencies and attracted 16, 000 participants (Dorgelo 2012). The site's tagline is "a partnership between the public and government to solve important challenges" and it aims to "reach beyond the 'usual suspects' to increase the number of minds tackling a problem, and bring out-of-discipline perspectives to bear" (Dorgelo 2012). Recent challenges include product design (such as a \$1,500,000 NASA challenge to an autonomous exploration robot), economic policy (such as a \$100,000 challenge posted by the Obama Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative for economic development proposals to help struggling municipalities) and social policy (such as a non-monetary Department of Health and Social Services challenge to increase children's enrolment in Medicaid). In the case of Challenge.gov, government defines the parameters of citizen-government collaboration, down to the specifics requirements of the device or software. Following the three dimensions of Fung's Democracy Cube (2006), we can note that though participation in these challenges is ostensibly open to anyone, in actuality participation often requires a high level of technical expertise or knowledge and substantial time and money to participate. Participants aren't expressing preferences or negotiating, they are merely deploying expertise and their degree of impact depends entirely on whether on not their proposal is accepted. Moreover, it is unclear the extent to which this can be considered collaboration, rather than merely an alternate form of procurement competition to supply government services. The website frames these challenges as vital services or technologies, that the public needs, but that government is not able to provide on its own. Through the act of inviting public competition, the site places responsibility on non-governmental actors and individuals to step up. One can see this as an extension of what

Isin and Wood call “shifting of responsibilities from government agencies and authorities to organizations without electoral accountability and responsibility” (1999), as governments move towards “enabling, inspiring, and assisting citizens to take responsibility” (Ilcan and Basok 2004), both for social problems in one’s own community and a broader spectrum of issues of governing.

## **2.4 From the Enlightenment to the Internet**

Scholars working at the intersection of government and technology have drawn the historical thread from the late Enlightenment turn to transparency, openness, and the spread of information, to modern iterations of freedom of information and open government. As Lathrop and Ruma note in the introduction to their book, *Open Government: Collaboration, Transparency, and Participation in Practice*, “the idea that the public has a right to scrutinize and participate in government dates at least to the Enlightenment and is enshrined in both the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution” (2010). Michel Foucault describes the Enlightenment turn towards lightness as intending to “eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented” (1980). Claire Birchall (2011) notes that “the case for open and honest social communication was made forcefully by 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers such as Kant - arguing against secret treaties in ‘Perpetual Peace’” and by Anders Chydenius’ in his *Ordinance Relating to Freedom of Writing and of the Press* (1766). The Ordinance is considered the first Freedom of Information Act, adopted by the Swedish parliament in 1766 (Mustonen

2006). The Ordinance abolished the Office of the Censor and declared that it was no longer the Chancellory's responsibility to "supervise, approve or disallow" printed text (1766). It also declared that a "lawful freedom of writing and of the press" would allow citizens to "gain improved knowledge and appreciate of a wisely ordered system of government" and improve "morality and promote obedience to the laws" (1766).

Similarly, there are strong echoes of the Founding Fathers' declaration that government must communicate with the people in the Obama Administration's call for a transparent, participative, and collaborative government. Malamud (2010) names "Three Waves of Change" in American history. First, the Founders' wave, when "printers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine...published opinions about how government should function, the policies it should follow, daring even to say that the people should go so far as to select their own leaders." Second, the Lincoln wave, "which established the principles of documentation and consultation." And third, what Malamud names "the Internet wave", "where the underpinnings and machinery of government are used not only by bureaucrats but by the people" (2010).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were a number of key events in the history of transparency and open government in America. Birchall highlights Woodrow Wilson's presidential campaign, which called for government reform and financial reform; the Federal Register, which has been the official journal of the federal government since 1936; the 1946 Administrative Procedure Act; the 1966 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); and the 1976 Government in the Sunshine Act, which required the proceedings of official (government agency meetings be open to public observation with advance notice (Birchall 2011).

Yu and Robinson pinpoint the post-WWII decade as a pivotal era in open government, the start of a shift away from the opacity and secrecy of wartime, with the term ‘transparency’ beginning to be used in print by individuals such as Wallace Parks, counsel to the Special Subcommittee on Government Information (2012). “Over the next several decades, policy stakeholders used the term “open government” primarily as a synonym for public access to previously undisclosed government information” including in the 1974 Congressional amendment to the FOIA and the Privacy Act of 1974 (Yu and Robinson 2012).

In an overview of the American experience of secrecy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, The Senate Report of the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy (U.S. Senate 1997) states that “much of the structure of secrecy now in place in the United States Government took shape in...the spring of 1917” beginning with the Espionage Act introduced in the House of Representatives on April 2; the same day that President Wilson asked Congress for a Declaration of War against Germany, in response to perceived and real internal threats to the country among both the citizenry and the civil service itself. The report traces the history of internal threats and the government’s response throughout WWI, WWII and the Cold War and argues that “never before, never since, has the American government been so aroused by the fear of subversion, the compromise of secrets, the danger within” and links the American public’s distrust of government to the “century of real and imagined conspiracy, most of it cloaked in secrecy” (U.S. Senate 1997). The Report identified a need for a stable and reliable system of classifying and declassifying secrets and recommended a series of principles to base it on, including that “information shall be classified only if there is a demonstrable need to

protect the information in the interests of national security,” taking into consideration “the benefit from public disclosure of the information,” and establishing systematic declassification schedules (U.S. Senate 1997).

Evans and Campos pinpoint the emergence of the most recent open government movement in the US to the shift to e-government<sup>5</sup> (electronic government) in the mid 1990s (Evans and Campos 2013). E-government began as simply displaying government information on static websites, and has since moved towards online self- service (Sundstrom 2012; Dawes 2009) such as printing government forms, or submitting paperwork online. Key acts driving e-government in the U.S. included the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and the E-Government Act of 2002 (Evans and Campos 2013).

On January 21, 2009, on his first full day in office, President Obama released two Memorandua for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies: the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government and a Memorandum on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), declaring that the FOIA “should be administered with a clear presumption: In the face of doubt, openness prevails” (Obama 2009b). Two further related proclamations followed. In March 2009, the Attorney General Eric Holder issued new guidelines on the FOIA, strongly encouraging agencies to proactively make discretionary disclosures of information and systematically post information online in advance of public requests (Holder 2009). On December 8, 2009, Paul Orszag, Director of the Office of Management and Budget<sup>6</sup> (OMB) followed the Presidential

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<sup>5</sup> Also spelled eGovernment.

<sup>6</sup> According to their website, the OMB reports directly to the President and supports federal executive departments and agencies in implementing the President’s commitments, priorities and vision. Along with other areas of responsibility, the OMB delivers Executive Orders and Presidential Memoranda to agency heads and officials. These are the mechanisms through which the President directs government-wide actions in the Executive Branch.

Memorandum with the publication of the Open Government Directive, defining specific actions that government departments and agencies must take to implement the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration and encouraging them to go beyond the letter of the law and advance their own open government initiatives outside the Directive's deadlines (Orzag 2009). The Directive echoes the values of the Memorandum, declaring in similar aspirational terms that "transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing. Participation allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society. Collaboration improves the effectiveness of Government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the Federal Government, across levels of government, and between the Government and private institutions" (Orzag 2009). However, the Directive focused primarily on improving the quality and frequency of published information and reporting processes for the Open Government initiative and not on how to engage citizens in the work of government. The Directive required executive departments and agencies to:

- 1) Publish, preserve and maintain government information online in a timely proactive manner; and in a machine-readable "open" format that can be downloaded, indexed, searched and programmed (Orzag 2009).
  
- 2) "Improve the quality of government information" by designating a high-level senior official responsible for the quality of federal information for the

department and developing a framework for the quality of publicly disseminated spending information (Orzag 2009).

- 3) Publish the agencies Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report online and reduce the FOIA backlog by 10% annually (Orzag 2009).
- 4) “Create and institutionalize a culture of open government” and “incorporate the values of transparency, participation, and collaboration into the ongoing work of their agency” by drafting and publishing an Open Government Plan and allowing the OMB to track their progress on a central public dashboard (Orzag 2009).
- 5) Launch an Open Government Webpage that allows the public to give feedback on the quality of the information made available, which information should be made available and the agencies Open Government Plan and commit to responding to public input regularly (Orzag 2009).

The Directive also committed the OMB itself to further action including:

- 1) Creating an online Open Government Dashboard that publicly tracks each department and agency’s progress (Orzag 2009).
- 2) Establishing an Open Government working group with senior representatives from across government to share best practices in transparency, participation and

collaboration including “system and process solutions for information collection, aggregation, validation and dissemination” and “how to experiment with new technologies, take advantage of the expertise and insight of people both inside and outside the Federal Government, and form high-impact collaborations with researchers, the private sector, and civil society” (Orzag 2009).

The Directive gave agencies six months to comply and the administration issued a progress report nine months later, adding additional instructions that made citizens more central to the open government initiatives (Evans and Campos 2013). The report declared that “government should provide citizens with information about what their government is doing so that government can be held accountable”, “government should actively solicit expertise from outside Washington so that it makes policies with the benefit of the best information” and that “government officials should work together with one another and with citizens as part of doing their job of solving national problems” (Obama 2009c).

Since then, the Obama Administration has launched a number of technology-driven initiatives to increase participation and collaboration in governance and policymaking. For example, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has worked with third party social media parties (Youtube, Facebook, Myspace, etc) to sign Terms of Service agreements that would allow federal agencies to use these tools and created the GSA Center for New Media and Citizen Engagement, which seeks to support and accelerate “government-wide new media and citizen engagement solutions, making it easier for the government and the public to constructively engage”(Sadeghi, Ressler and Krzmarzick 2012). As well, on January 24, 2014, the White House held the first virtual

“Big Block of Cheese Day”, in which White House officials held an all-day open house, answering questions from the public on Twitter, Facebook, Tumble, Instagram and Google+ Hangout. According to the event’s website, it sought to demonstrate that “the White House is truly “The People’s House” (Lindsay 2014). The name referenced both a literal event held by President Andrew Jackson (featuring a 1,400 pound block of cheese given out to thousands of citizens) and the television version on the West Wing (Lindsay 2014). In a similar tactic (leveraging online tools to increase individual input), the administration set up We the People, an online platform for gathering signatures on petitions and submitting them to the White House. According to the White House’s We the People website, to date 140 petitions have received an administrative response. Other initiatives move beyond input and call for public design and delivery of services, programs and products. For example, all government agencies have been encouraged to use prizes to “spur innovation, solve tough problems, and advance their core missions” (Office of Science and Technology Policy 2013) through open competitions on the Challenge.gov website.

## **2.4 State and municipal governments**

Some state and municipal governments in the U.S. have also turned towards open government, whether in response to the federal politician direction or in response to citizen demand and financial constraints (or both). A full inventory is beyond the scope of this paper but it will be helpful to give a sense of the types of initiatives, as it gives some indication of both citizens’ comfort level and interest in online civic engagement. Some initiatives aim to improve the interface between citizen complaints and government

action. Private companies such as SeeClickFix, CitySourced, GoRequest, Nixle and Tip411 offer cities a readymade system that allows citizens to identify and map local problems (such as graffiti or potholes) to an online site which automatically communicates the issue to the appropriate government agency<sup>7</sup>. The agency can use the site to respond directly to citizens and keep them updated (Slotnik 2010; Sundtrom 2012). Some initiatives aim to facilitate citizen volunteerism in their community, such as city-run mobile apps to notify citizens trained in CPR if there is an emergency within walking distance or to reach volunteer firefighters (Sundtrom 2012). Others enable citizens report crime or suspicious activities from their smartphone, like a modern neighbourhood watch program (Sundrom 2012).

### **3. DIGITAL CITIZENS**

Contemporary society is, in part, the product of interactions of digital avatars who can transcend geographic barriers and limits. The Internet can “facilitate horizontal or civic communication” linking people and organizations with each other to share information, provide support, organize, mobilize or solidify their collective identities (Dahlgren 2012). Much like the impact of print, radio and television media, digital media and the Internet has had a strong impact on citizens’ information on, connection to, understanding of, and participation in events and politics in other jurisdictions, nations or at the global level. Today, one’s political community isn’t necessarily the same as one’s

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<sup>7</sup> According to its website, **SeeClickFix** is available as a free iPhone application in five languages and used in cities across North America. Users can earn “civic points” for reporting and commenting on issues, providing photo or video evidence, getting issues resolved, and getting other users engaged in your issue. When navigating the site, users civic points are translated into titles: ranging from Street Smart Citizen or Municipal Avenger, Digital Superhero and the ultimate title (10,000+ points), Jane Jacobs, named for the influential urban studies scholar and activist.

geographic community. Citizenship was once rooted in “residence in, and service to, a city or state” (Luke 2011). Today “cybercitizens” can “interact anytime from anywhere in ways that challenges the traditional notions of fixed citizenship” (Luke 2011). Many expat and refugee communities are thriving through online networks and media publications, such as the Electronic Intifada, a non-profit online publication whose website describes it as publishing news on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (in the Middle East and abroad) from the Palestinian perspective. Even traditional government’s online presence can’t be limited by geographic constraints. Government websites in democratic countries are open to anyone with an Internet connection and when politicians engage with individuals online through Google Hangout chats or an AMA’s (“Ask Me Anything”) on Reddit, the conversation can’t be limited to citizens of their nation or district.

Early scholarship on the impact of the Internet on citizenship emphasized global connectivity. Future “netizens” (net citizens) were imagined as “citizens of the world” (Hauben 1997). A decade later, Arjun Appadurai wrote that “we live in a world of unprecedented connectivity” with “unprecedented levels and varieties of circulation” (2007). Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2007) defined digital citizenship as “the ability to participate in society online”. Their digital citizens “use technology frequently”, “for political information to fulfill their civic duty” and “at work for economic gain” (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal 2007). However, the analysis referenced above predates the rise of the Open Government movement in both the United States and the United Kingdom and the mainstream use of interactive social media and web 2.0 tools,

among both political and civic actors. In this context, it is useful to examine if this terminology remains accurate, and if not, to propose new terms.

Writing in the year President Obama was elected, Cynthia Weber argued that “a new design principle for safe citizenship emerges each time a new form of state/citizen relations emerges” (2008). Defining “safe citizenship” as the way in which citizenship is packaged “as part of a design for safe living” (2008), Weber identifies three shifts in the form of state/citizen relations and the corresponding design principle, noting that as new forms emerge, former design principles remain, overlapping, competing, and interacting with each other. In the Hobbesian sovereign society, “the state’s design principle for safe citizenship is expressed as the obligation of citizens to die for their country” (Weber 2008). In the Foucauldian disciplinary society, citizens are given more responsibility for the “safe functioning of their state and society” and “are called upon to care for the body politic as a way of caring for themselves” (Weber 2008). And in today’s “network society ... safe citizens are expected to immerse for their country, by being one with and of state/society networks” (Weber 2008). Weber borrows the concept of network society from Manuel Castells, who defines it as “a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronic processed information networks” (Castells 2001). Weber’s netizens are expected to immerse themselves in online state and social networks, carrying their citizenship digitally, translated into electronic passwords or digital fingerprints (Weber 2008).

### **3.1 Engaged and responsabilized citizens**

The Open Government Memoranda and subsequent Obama administration documents outline a model for open, transparent, collaborative government that engages and collaborates with citizens. But, it makes a number of assumptions about citizens and citizenship in a 2.0 era. What kind of citizens does i-government seek to interact with? What motivates citizens to self-serve, collaborate, volunteer, monitor, and engage “in the work of their government” (Obama 2009)? Is the use of digital technology to participate in online society (as in Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal’s definition) a sufficient demarcation for digital citizenship or does open government ask for greater involvement? Weber’s depiction of a digitally-enabled and immersed netizen denotes a passive citizenship, embedding and submersing themselves into civil and government networks. But in Malamud’s description of “the Internet wave”, opening up government allows the public to be active users of the “machinery of government” alongside bureaucrats, not merely passive immersers in government networks (2010).

I would argue that the Open Government Memoranda presume a mirror-image model of citizenship that is under-explained in government documents and under-theorized in academia: citizens that are willing to work together with government and other stakeholders to solve problems, willing to use the information government provides to hold government accountable, and willing to provide expert advice to improve government policies and programs (Obama 2009c). The ideal citizen in an open government world is informed, active, digitally literate and educated, with sufficient trust in their government to participate in co-developing and co-delivering government programs, policies and services. This model responsabilizes (Garland 2001) citizens not just to take care of the country by taking responsibility for themselves (as in Weber’s

Foucauldian safe design principle), but to take care of the country by assisting in the development and delivery of government services, programs and policies. Citizens are invited to “create digital neighbourhoods where they can actively take on some of the problems of government and help to enhance the civic life of their communities” (Mergel 2013b). Thus, I would like to propose an alternate terminology that better captures the active role that ‘open’ governments expect (or at least describe in aspirational terms) from their digital citizens: **engaged citizens**. The word “engage” comes from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, meaning “to pledge”, “to employ”, “to be occupied” (by something), “binding” (as in a pledge) or “interlocked” (as in gears) (Harper 2014). To quote President Obama in the Open Government Memorandum “collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their government” (2009).

Beyond active participation in their communities, engaged citizens are asked to develop active relationships with government at all levels. Monitoring and commenting on government action (through websites such as Regulations.gov and USAspending.gov); developing innovative applications based on government data (Data.gov); serving as volunteer corps supporting government programs (e.g., SeeClickFix). As Linders, Copeland Wilson and Carlo Bertot write, “open government is not so much an end in itself as a means to fundamentally evolve the relationship between governments and their citizens towards a collaborative partnership: (Linders, Copeland Wilson, and Carlo Bertot 2013).

Open Government initiatives in the U.S. “sparked a global movement around innovative new ways to partner with citizens and deliver public services...transforming the role of citizen from customer to collaborator” (Linders, Copeland Wilson, and Carlo

Bertot 2013). The key word here is ‘collaborator’, denoting an active partner, not a passive data point. Collaborative, transparent, and participatory government has the very small-r republican goal of increasing citizen engagement in the state by connecting citizens to the government and building civic virtue, moving beyond what Tim O’Reilly calls the “vending machine” model (2009) of government in which citizens are merely taxpayers and service-recipients. These are not citizens “immersing” for their country (Weber 2008) in a digital stateless network. In fact, I would argue alongside Clarke (2010) that technology is merely “accelerating an existing government shift in recent decades towards enrolling ordinary people in the production of government and governing beyond neoliberal individualism.” Online platforms and social media are just one method to reach out to citizens “where they are” using multiple channels of communication (Mergel 2013). For example, the British Columbia Provincial government website<sup>8</sup> invites citizens to participate in public consultations using multiple mediums (including online, email, phone and in-person) and lists volunteer opportunities in their community. Weber’s language doesn’t sufficiently capture the sense of active agency that citizens are perceived as having and that government expects. In this model, the public isn’t immersing in technology at government’s request, they are already there, deeply immersed, and willing to engage.

Moreover, the Internet is not a medium operating in isolation from other networks and communities. Today, technology is accelerating the capability of citizens to have a direct impact on their own lives. They can use online networks to build and sustain communities and manage and mobilize offline resources include money

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<sup>8</sup> GovTogetherBC: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/index.page>

(e.g., Kickstarter.com), spaces (e.g., Couchsurfing.org or Airbnb.com) and people (e.g., Quebec Student Strike, Occupy Wall Street or Shop Local "cash mobs"). Studies have found the Internet and other ICTs are being used to “regenerate geographically based community identities” and are transforming “how we define, attach to, and retain communal activity across online and offline venues” (Haythornthwaite and Kendall 2010). The Internet has de-localized, de-placed and displaced the relationships between citizens and government and between citizens themselves, and users that are immersed in online worlds are also deeply connected and entangled in the world offline.

### **3.2 Evaluating Open Government**

In theorizing citizenship in a 2.0 model of governing, we should make sure we look beyond the assumptions and rhetoric in government documents and statements and examine the way in which the open government vision has been (or has failed to be) implemented. There are a number of known challenges to Open Government. Government agencies can’t simply provide an online platform and invite citizens to participate and collaborate; online discussion has to be driven and guided, users need sufficient information and trust to participate, and all parties need to build and strengthen their relationships (Edelmann, Höcktl and Sachs 2012).

Writing in 2012 on the challenges of citizen participation in open government initiatives, Evans and Campos argue that Open Government in the U.S. has over-emphasized data, information and technology and has not “significantly increase(d) citizen understanding of the complexities of issues and policies or their participation in relevant deliberations” (Evans and Campos 2012). They suggest that the short time

frames in the Directive (agencies had less than six months to comply) and absence of specific guidance may have “inadvertently limited the creation of new ways to make government more transparent, collective, and participatory” (2012). In reviewing individual agency websites, they found that agencies have “attempted to honor the three goals set forth in President Obama’s Directive: transparency, collaboration, and participation” but have mainly focused on providing information (facts, statistics, programs, and services information) and collecting information from citizens (feedback and comments on policies and programs). Mergel and Schweik agree, noting that the U.S. government’s online initiatives remain focused on Internet service delivery and not on two-way interaction between governments and stakeholders; citizen users are not contributing content and there is a relatively low level of interactivity (Mergel and Schweik 2012). However, they observe a rise in public use of free, interactive, third-party online tools to interact or connect with government (Mergel and Schweik 2012). For example, citizens may use Twitter to discuss issues outside of official government channels, or Wordpress to host a blog that raises issues to the attention of government officials (Mergel and Schweik 2012). Charalabidis, Koussouris, Lampathaki and Misuraca suggest that though the use of user-driven ICT tools to address public service delivery and administrative processes are thriving, most of the initiatives are small-scale experiments operating on the margins and there are a number of challenges to fully actualizing the potential of collaborative technologies to drive citizen empowerment and participation (2012). Other scholars argue that open government is not a result in and of itself, but that each initiative should be evaluated based on the public value it creates (Harrison, Guerrero, Burk, Cook, Cresswell, Helbig, Hrdinová and Pardo 2012).

Given the public and stakeholder interest in Open Government, a number of organizations have sought to evaluate the Obama Administration's progress. For example, [OpentheGovernment.org](http://OpentheGovernment.org) (OTG) is a US advocacy coalition calling for transparency and openness in government and composed more than 20 civil society organizations including the PEN American Centre; the Sunlight Foundation; the U.S. Public Research Interest Group; the American Associations of Librarian, Publishers, News Editors; and a number of local open government organizations with a stake in American participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). According to its website, the OGP is a "multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen government."<sup>9</sup> It was launched in 2011 with 11 original members (U.S, UK, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines and South Africa) and is overseen by a steering committee of member countries civil society organizations. The U.S. is the main driver behind the partnership ([OpentheGovernment.org](http://OpentheGovernment.org) coalition 2013). To become a member, countries have to endorse the Open Government Declaration and announce their country action plans. In March 2013, the coalition produced a comprehensive report evaluating the U.S. National Action Plan. The report outlines that the U.S. government has "met the letter of its commitment" in 19 out of 25 concrete commitments but that the commitments do not put the US on the path to quickly achieve the Plan's broader goal (2013).

Other organizations have used different measures to track effectiveness and implementation. The GovLab at New York University and the Knight Foundation

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<sup>9</sup> All information in this paragraph on the Open the Government initiative comes from [OpentheGovernment.org](http://OpentheGovernment.org).

launched Open Data 500<sup>10</sup>, an inventory of how the private and non-profit sector in the US has used open government data (including federal, state and municipal). According to its website, the Open Data 500 list includes SpotCrime, a crime mapping and alert website with over half a million subscribers; Mercaris, a company that supports the sustainable and specialty agriculture sector providing market data about the sustainable and specialty agriculture sector including cash market prices, trade statistics and processing capacity, and provides an online venue for buyers and sellers; and Great Schools, a non-profit website which provides data to parents to help them select a school including crowd-sourced school reviews and ratings.

It remains an unanswered question whether the Obama Administration's regulations and rules will actually impact institutional behavior and push American public sector agencies towards more transparent, participatory, and collaborative relationships with citizens and stakeholders. As Alasdair Roberts points out, in his essay on governments' adaptation to Freedom of Information law "experience has shown that the governing institutions in Westminster systems are particularly resilient, and capable of rejecting alien transplantations such as FOI laws, or of developing new routines designed to minimize the disruptive effect of these laws" (2006). He argues that Anglo-American democratic systems responded to the "introduction of FOI laws" by either "attempt(ing) a direct challenge to the right to information, by amendment of the law or regulations" or putting in place "informal administrative responses which, while maintaining a public pretense of conformity to the law, have the effect of limiting its significance" (Roberts 2006). It is, as of yet, too soon to evaluate American public sector

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<sup>10</sup> [www.opendata500.com](http://www.opendata500.com)

agencies response in these terms.

#### **4. THE CONTEXT**

In order to better understand the modern American iteration of open government, it is helpful to examine what could be or is claimed to be precipitating the US Administrations actions and the rise of open government initiatives and rhetoric at this point in time including the political context during the 2008 Obama campaign, the 2007/2008 economic and financial crisis, the bottom-up drivers coming from citizens, and the top-down drivers coming from government.

##### **4.1 The Political Context**

The Obama Campaign of 2008 was praised for unprecedented levels of community and online engagement and for adeptly using social media tools (Fox 2012). President Obama joined Twitter in early 2007 and by Election Day he was one of the most popular users, with more than 118, 000 followers. His campaign circulated 14.5 million hours of official video footage on Youtube, created an entirely new social media platform (My.BarackObama.com) and announced the Vice Presidential nominee by text message to supporters (Fox 2012). According to Arianna Huffington (editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post, a popular online news site), “were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be President” (quoted in Miller 2008). On arriving at the White House, President Obama already had a vibrant online constituency and active voter base, more than any other president in history (Fox 2012).

As you will recall, President Obama published the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government and Memorandum on the Freedom of Information Act on his first full day in office<sup>11</sup>, declaring that the administration would be “ushering in a new era of open and accountable government meant to bridge the gap between the American people and their government” (Executive Office of the President 2009). A Congressional Report on the “Obama Administration’s Open Government Initiatives” notes that “some scholars argue that these memoranda were a significant break from the policies of the previous administration” (Ginsberg 2011). In fact, reversing the Bush Administration’s policies and stance on government openness was a key Obama campaign promise during the 2008 election (Coglianese 2009), and he critiqued the Bush Administration as “one of the most secretive, closed administrations in American history” (Obama 2007). All of the major candidates in the presidential primaries made transparency and good government a campaign issue and a number of advocacy and professional groups developed recommendations on transparency for the new administration (Coglianese 2009). This includes OMB Watch, which commissioned an independent task force to develop nonpartisan recommendations on transparency and participation in government and the American Bar Association’s ad hoc Committee on the Status and Future of Federal e-Rulemaking focused on improving the Bush Administration’s website regulatory consultation platform Regulations.gov (Coglianese 2009). A 2009 poll suggests that about 80% of Americans view increasing federal government openness and accountability to be an important priority (Lake Research Partners/Topos Partnership 2009).

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<sup>11</sup> The third presidential Memorandum announced a pay freeze for the President’s senior aides (Coglianese 2009)

In preparation for the Obama-Biden transition, the team convened Policy Working Groups on Economy, Education, Energy & Environment, Health Care, Immigration, National Security, and Technology, and Innovation and Government Reform (The Obama-Biden Transition Project). The Innovation and Government Reform Working Group was tasked to prepare “the incoming Administration to implement the Innovation Agenda, which includes a range of proposals to create a 21st century government that is more open and effective; leverages technology....and catalyzes active citizenship and partnerships in shared governance with civil society institutions” (The Obama-Biden Transition Project). On his first day in office, in addition to the two Memorandums on Open Government and Freedom of Information, President Obama issued two Open Government executive orders. The first revoked a President Bush-era executive order that allowed former Presidents to limit public access to their official documents and allowed the National Archives to more easily release these records, even if a former president objected. The second imposed a lobbying ban on officials once they leave the administration and ethics requirements on incoming executive officials (Coglianse 2009).

However, since 2009 there have been a series of events that signaled if not a full shift in the Obama Administration’s calls for openness and transparency, then at least the frame of the outer boundaries. For example, after the initial WikiLeaks publication (and mainstream media analysis) of thousands of secret government documents, including U.S. diplomatic cables, President Obama sought to reframe the narrative as one in which the government had nothing to hide from the people, stating that while he was “concerned about the disclosure of sensitive information from the battlefield that could

potentially jeopardize individuals or operations, the fact is, these documents don't reveal any issues that haven't already informed our public debate on Afghanistan" (de Nies and Miller 2010). In June 2013, former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden's leaked documents to the media making public the Prism Program, a system that the NSA uses to access the private communications of users directly from servers of nine online companies, including Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Yahoo under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, enacted in 2008 (Lee 2013). In response to public and media outcry, President Obama announced some changes to NSA monitoring in January 2014 (Landler and Savage 2014).

#### **4.2 Citizen Disengagement**

According to Neil Nevitte's analysis of the World Values Survey from 1980 to 2006, citizens in every advanced industrial state surveyed are becoming simultaneously and paradoxically less confident in government institutions and more interested in politics (Nevitte 2011). Some citizens are seeking to both scrutinize government behavior and be more involved in policy design and implementation (Charablidis and Koussouris 2012; Wimmer, Furdik, Bicking, Mach, Sabol and Butka 2012) while becoming involved in "bottom-up, non-profit kind of initiatives, addressing concrete needs rather than ideological issues" (Charablidis and Koussouris 2012). Others are channeling their disenchantment with government institutions into grassroots political movements that are deeply grounded in ideology such as the Tea Party or Occupy Wallstreet. As mentioned above, traditional civic practices, such as voting, are declining in the U.S., as is participation in traditional in-person political activities such as party membership. In this

context, some governments view “technology-enabled citizen engagement” as “capable of improving “the degree to which government decision-making processes live up to democratic principles” and “their ability to deliver tangible positive outcomes for the society” (Loukis 2012). Neubauer, Vuga and Ilc argue that in recent decades government use of new information communication technology is “perceived as central for addressing crucial issues of liberal democratic governments and governance” such as “democratic deficit”, “citizen apathy and disengagement by increasing government responsiveness and communicativeness” (2012). In this new paradigm, the “issue of participation is understood pre-dominantly in a sense of motivating and facilitating those who have access as well as the knowledge that is necessary in order to use these technologies for political participation”(Neubauer, Vuga and Ilc 2012).

### **4.3 The Economic Context**

Some scholars and analysts link the most recent turn to greater openness and public participation in governance and policymaking to the economic and financial crisis which resulted “from our inability to predict dramatic changes in the economy and society and/or from ignoring those few individuals who had been warning the governments from these threats and negative trends” and “sheds light on an urgent need for more effective and efficient processes of governance and policymaking” (Wimmer, Furdik, Bicking, Mach, Sabol, and Butka 2012). Under economic pressure, governments are seeking innovative and more efficient ways to develop policies and deliver programs and services (Edelmann, Höcktl and Sachs 2012) and new partnerships to delivery programs and services (Linders, Copeland Wilson, and Carlo Bertot 2013). The

environment of fiscal austerity is pushing government organizations to eliminate some non-essential operations and is one factor driving them to provide online “platforms for different stakeholders to collaborate, participate, share resources to undertake work traditionally seen as the sole preserve of the public sector (Weerakkody and Reddick 2013). However, open government, at least in its ideals, moves beyond a simple economic view of citizenship, to evoke citizen participation as a civic virtue and a cornerstone of democratic government. At least in external publicized accounts, participation in open government initiatives is measured in numbers of participants and the depth of their engagement, not in the dollar value added or saved.

#### **4.4 Technological Advances**

Scholars and analysts also note the role of technological advances in ICT, offering “a new interactive, cheap, inclusive and unconstrained by time and distance environment for public political communication” (Coleman and Gotze 2001). ICT advances, particularly in the domain of social media, have provided new tools for information exchange, platforms for online communities, and methods for government to involve a broader group of citizens and stakeholders. We have seen “a historically unprecedented increase in the capacity to process information, not only in the volume of information, but in the complexity of the operations involved, and in the speed of processing, including the speed of communication” (Castells 2004). Writing more than two decades ago John B. Thompson describes it as a world in which the “transmission of symbolic forms becomes increasingly mediated by the technical and institutional apparatuses of the media industries” (1990). This analysis holds true today. As Manuel Castell describes, we

are in a new communication realm and a new medium “whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive” (2007).

#### **4.5 Improving Policy-Making**

Governments are increasingly acknowledging that they are facing new complex policy problems that are beyond the scope of action for a single national government and require collaborative solutions and outside expertise (OECD 2005; Charablidis 2012; and Muir and Parker 2014). For example, in a 2007 report titled *Tackling Wicked Problems*, the Australian Public Service Commission (APS) declared that wicked problems (those that are “highly resistant to solution”) can require “broader, more collaborative and innovative approaches,” “working across organisational boundaries both within and outside the APS” and “effectively engaging stakeholders and citizens.” Similarly, a 2013 report by the European Commission on *Powering European Public Sector Innovation* declared that there are public policy domains that are “so interdependent and complex that no single entity can tackle them.” In the Twentieth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council recognized that “Canadians ...expect us to collaborate with other governments, the private sector and voluntary sectors, and citizens themselves to tackle the multi-faceted challenges confronting Canada today” (2013). A recent report by the UK-based Institute for Public Policy Research (Muir and Parker 2014) proposed that complex policy problems require a more relational state, with stronger relationships and networks. A relational state “creates public service systems that are more interconnected, allowing problems to be

addressed holistically” and “forges deeper relationships on the frontline, which allows for more intensive and personalized engagement” (Muir and Parker 2014). The report suggests that citizens themselves are demanding this: seeking personalized services, with deeper (not merely transactional) relationships between front-line public servants and clients, delivered through institutions that have strong relationships with each other to improve coordination (Muir and Parker 2014). Governments are recognizing the need to work with non-governmental actors to understand and address these complex challenges and involve citizens directly in the governance and decision-making process (Charablidis 2012). Though some traditional stakeholders (e.g., unions, interest groups, professional associations, etc) have always been included in democratic policymaking, not all members of society have been represented (Edelmann, Höcktl and Sachs 2012). Web 2.0 tools are one method to potentially open the tent and bring in outside experts, stakeholder organizations and the broader public in the policymaking process “in order to achieve and produce better solutions and outcomes” (Edelmann, Höcktl and Sachs 2012). It can provide a platform for individuals to contribute to large-scale projects. Outsiders are invited to help identify, organize, prioritize and solve “problems that government does not have the resources or knowledge to solve on its own” (Mergel 2013). However, this also shifts the relationship between government and non-governmental actors, as individual citizens do not have the same lobbying or organizational capacity and expertise as a traditional stakeholder organization. As Arnstein noted in her 1969 Ladder of Participation, partnerships between citizens and authorities work best when citizens are organized and have the financial resources to pay their leaders an honorarium and to hire additional expertise. Arguably, the bulk of web 2.0 engagement operates in the realm of

what Arnstein calls ‘consultation’, inviting citizen opinions but measuring participation based on the number of participants, not their impact on policymaking or program design.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Though a full analysis of the American context is beyond the scope of this paper, I will outline some areas for future research and provide highlights of some of the work already in place.

As the platform for public dialogue shifts from town halls to social media platforms, it will be necessary to carefully examine the impact of the digital divide on civic participation. In the European Union, the European Commission has repeatedly called for research in social inclusion in the context of public service transformation and the shift in government in the digital era (Weerakkody and Reddick 2013). “In order to prevent digital divide and social exclusion in terms of using e-government services, it is necessary that citizens from all facets of society are equipped with basic ICT skills as well as access to high-speed Internet connections” (Weerakkody and Reddick 2013). Internet use and access in the United States is not yet even or equitable. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 67% of African Americans had Internet access, compared to 79% of Whites and 84% of Hispanics. 92% of young adults (age 18-29) were online, but only 42% of those older than 65 (2009). Only 39% of American adults (66% of social media users) participated in a political activity using social media in the last year (Smith 2013). Moreover, smart phone use (mobile phones with Internet access) is not even across demographics with higher rates among Hispanics, young adults, college-educated individuals and those who live in urban areas. As of January 2014, 53%

of white adults reported owning a smart phone, compared to 59% of African-Americans adults and 61% of Hispanic adults. 83% of adults age 18-29 own one, compared to 19% of those 65 and older. Smart phone ownership was 47% for those with a household income under \$30,000/year, compared to 81% of those with a household income of +\$81,000; 44% of those with a high school education or less; compared to 71% with a college degree or more; and 64% of urban dwellers, compared to 60% of suburban dwellers and 43% of rural dwellers (Pew Research Internet Project 2014). Bertot, Jaeger and Greene draw on the Public Library Funding and Technology Access study (2010-2011) and note that though many communities have commercial establishments that offer wifi access, most do not provide public access to computers (2013). In contrast, 99.3% of public libraries surveyed in the U.S. offer public Internet access (computers, not wifi); 64.5% report that they are the only provider of free public computer and Internet access in their community; 38% offer formal training in information technology; 78.8% offer “point-of-use assistance” and 29.5% offer online training materials (Bertot, Jaeger and Greene 2013). 89.7% of libraries reported helping people understand and use government websites, 80.7% reported helping people apply for services, and 67.8% helped people complete forms (Bertot, Jaeger and Greene 2013). “The rise of e-government as a core library function has coincided with a dramatic spike in patron needs related to a traditional library function – seeking help with employment” (Bertot, Jaeger and Greene 2013) and many users are seeking assistance with online job searches and employment assistance.

It is as yet unclear what the impact of what Aeron Davis calls “Internet-mediated democracy” is on the average citizens’ access to information through traditional media

(2010). Writing about the UK context, Davis argues that new media is driving two conflicting political trends, building a “thicker, broader form of elite polyarchy” (2010). First, it is increasing the engagement of political actors operating at the edge of the UK political process through online spaces and communication exchanges developing around the centre, thickening ties *between* political participants. Second, it is increasing the distancing of unengaged citizens as insular elite online media (such as political party discussion forums and political blogs) edges out offline news media (Davis 2010). Through interviews with politicians, political journalists, bloggers, and parliamentary and civil service officials, he found that “new media is playing a growing part in intra-party participation, exchange and deliberation and in ways that are more open to back-bench MPs and ordinary party members” through blogs run by high-profile politicians and unofficial party chat rooms, such as Conservative Home or Guido Fawkes (Davis 2010). As a result, new media is making the “insider political process a little more accessible and transparent”, but only for those already in the know, and is not yet “re-engaging the mass of citizens who have turned away from party and institutional politics” (Davis 2010). I was unable to find a similar study for the American context, but it is a question worth pursuing further.

Beyond the technical and social aspects, there are broader questions around the implications this model of citizenship could be having on citizen autonomy and responsibilities. Writing about the U.S. Customs and Border Protection slogan in airports, “Be alert. Stay Awake. Speak Up.”, Petersen and Tjalve argue that the American government has “mobilized private citizens to share in the anticipation and shouldering of elusive security responsibilities” (2013). In this framing, security tasks are transferring

from government to citizens, while framed as a “shared responsibility” (Petersen and Tjalve 2013). They propose the concept of “a neo-republican mode of security governance”, to describe the way in which this “public responsabilization” uses “the republican language of community, sacrifice, virtue and civic self-regulation” (Petersen and Tjalve 2013). I would argue that the Open Government paradigm in the US draws on the same language and shares the same republican roots and ideology, using technology to support the transfer of responsibility to citizens. Birchall, referencing Deleuze’s essay Postscript on the Societies of Control (1992), argues that e-transparency is “a clear expression of the control society”, one that is “populated with dispersed mechanisms of power” because “in opening up government, it ensures that the business of governance is without boundaries or end” (2014). Under Open Government, she argues, citizens are called on to be perpetually vigilant auditors of their government and innovative entrepreneurs laboring to produce capital out of freely available government information (Birchall 2014).

Even if Web 2.0 tools have the capacity to empower “individuals by providing them with the tools they need to become dynamic participants in society” (Isasis, Pifano and Miranda 2012), it remains unclear if government has placed responsibility on the shoulders of citizens without empowering them. Though Open Government ostensibly seeks to actively engage citizens in the work of their government, the vast majority of Open Government initiatives led by the Obama administration operate in the lower rungs of Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (1969), in which government *informs*, *consults* and *placates*, rather than the upper rungs, in which citizens and government are *partners*, sharing responsibility for planning and decision making. At this point, Open

Government's engaged 2.0 citizens, who participate in and collaborate with their government, may only exist in rhetoric.

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