Chapter 2
Communication between Parliaments and Citizens

Advances in interactive and multimedia technologies have helped place the topic of communication between the electorate and its representative institutions high on the agenda of parliaments' leadership and members. These enhancements are occurring at a time of increasing citizens' distrust of politics and politicians, growing demands for more transparent and accountable institutions, and people's rising desire for greater civic engagement.

The nature of communication between parliaments and citizens is affected by technology at several levels: between members and the electorate; between committees and citizens, and between the institution and the society. These levels must be analyzed separately to understand the issues associated with each of them and collectively to appreciate their full effect on the work of the parliament and its members.

There are many ways in which dialogue between the electorate and its representatives occurs, beginning with the oldest and most fundamental – the process of election. In between one election and the next, parliamentarians who have tried to be responsive to their constituents have used a variety of communication methods such as letters, phone calls, petitions, and meetings. Technology, however, has now given citizens the opportunity to carry out the dialogue more actively and with continuity, for example by intervening through electronic petitions and online public debates.

One of the most significant impacts on legislatures has occurred because technology has increased the possibilities for two-way communication. While many in parliament have adopted technology as a convenient means for enhancing communication from members to citizens, it has been more challenging to employ ICT to support useful and informative dialogue from citizens to members. The very speed and convenience with which exchanges can take place can also create problems because of the sheer number of messages and comments that can be generated by the public.

The Internet revolution has increased the volume of correspondence dramatically. I have received over 50,000 letters this year, about 1,200 letters per week. Fortunately new technologies allow me and my staff to deal with them effectively. We log and track and respond to these letters in an organized and hopefully timely manner through a sophisticated correspondence management software programme.

David Price, Chairman of the House Democracy Partnership, U.S. House of Representatives
Statement at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009

In addition to the difficulties that the volume of exchanges can present to members, ICT-supported communication raises other concerns such as:

• Interaction – does the method support communication in one direction only or does it support interaction and exchange?
• Responsiveness – are members and institutions able to respond to citizens' comments and questions in a timely and effective manner?
• Representativeness – are there means to help members and institutions judge how representative the comments of the constituents they serve are?
• Value – how informed and useful is the input of citizens for determining policy?

Of particular importance is the question of how best to assess the significance of comments from the public and how these should inform the work of parliaments and the decisions of members. It can be difficult in fact to determine how representative the comments received are and on what information sources they are based on. Implicit in this concern is the question of the role that communications from citizens should have on the actions and votes of a member. Participants at the World e-Parliament Conference 2008,[1] for example, discussed at length whether members should primarily be conveyors of their constituents' opinions on policy issues or representatives who make decisions based on what they consider to be in the best interests of their constituents, taking the views of citizens into account as they deem appropriate.

Important policy issues are complex and even members must often specialize in certain areas. Since parliamentarians do not have the time to become expert in everything, they frequently rely on trusted colleagues, the party, or other sources to assist them in making decisions about what to support. This challenge is even greater for citizens, who rarely have the time or the expertise to understand the important differences among policy options, and must often rely on civil societies, lobbying groups, and others to keep them informed.

In addition, technologies that solicit citizen views can be subject to their own particular limitations. Open discussion forums, for example, can be dominated by a few articulate and adamant participants; online polls can be susceptible to electronic "ballot stuffing"; and large numbers of e-mails can be generated by outside groups that provide easy means for citizens to register their views in what can sometimes appear to be a robotic fashion.

Box 2.2

> *Over the last year I found myself as parliamentarian at the centre of a legislative issue that provoked global interest: the import of the products of seal hunting into the European Union. I must have had snail mail and e-mail from at least half of Canada, many people in the United States of America, most of Greenland, many indigenous peoples of the Artic and a few of my own voters in the United Kingdom. My frustration in all of that communication was that despite our attempts with videos and statements to get a real debate going, what we experienced instead was "astro-turf lobbying".*

Diana Wallis, Vice President of the European Parliament
Statement at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009

Many members have understandably faced problems adopting some of the newest technologies for communication. A recent Hansard Society report[2] found that members of parliament in the

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1   United Nations, European Parliament, Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, *World e-Parliament Conference 2008: 25-26 November 2008, European Parliament, Brussels; Report*, [New York]: United Nations, 2009 [http://www.ictparliament.org/worldeparliamentconference2008/].
2   Hansard Society, *MPs online: connecting with constituents*, London: Hansard Society Publications, 2009 [http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/1688/download.aspx].

United Kingdom are using the Internet primarily to inform their constituents rather than engage with them. The study reported that the most widely used digital media are those which are mainly passive in nature, such as websites. Interactive forms of media which could be used by members to develop a two-way dialogue with their constituents, such as blogs and social networking, are used less commonly. Where these tools are used, it is often in passive "send" mode with few members exploiting their full interactive potential. Key findings from the research showed that 92% of members use e-mail, 83% have a personal website, but only 23% use social networking and just 11% blog.

Taken together, these challenges help to explain why many political institutions have approached their use with caution and often have had mixed results. For its study of e-government, the United Nations has constructed an index that measures the "e-participation" level of countries. This index takes into account whether the websites of the governments provide information about opportunities to comment on policies and offer tools for citizens to register their views. It also assesses the willingness of governments to take citizens' opinions into account in the decision making process and subsequently inform citizens of how this was done. The 2008 study found that 82% of the countries surveyed rank in the lower one third in measures of utilization of e-participation technologies.[3]

Many parliaments have been similarly slow to adopt interactive technologies. The *World e-Parliament Report 2008* found that 88% of respondents reported that the public can contact the parliament by e-mail to express opinions, with chambers in the high and upper middle income groups reaching 100% and 97% respectively. However, only 23% had systems for managing these e-mails, suggesting that most parliaments lacked the tools to make effective use of these messages once they were received.[4]

Furthermore, the 2008 Report showed relatively low use of online discussion groups. Only 18% of respondents stated that citizens could express their opinion through such means. Parliaments in the high income group were more likely to have such systems, but this was the case for only 24%. Equally indicative of the uncertainty with which such technologies are viewed, almost 50% of parliaments in the high income group had no plans to implement online discussion groups. In a separate study of e-participation among 10 parliaments, Lasse Berntzen, *et al.,* concluded that "Most parliaments are still not using the full range of Internet technologies as participatory tools in order to involve citizens".[5]

The studies on e-government and e-parliament cited above suggest that in 2008 political institutions were taking a conservative approach to technology-based engagement with citizens. Findings from the 2009 survey, presented later in this chapter, do indicate greater activity among many parliaments as they expand their capacity in this area.

Examples of relevant initiatives were presented at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009.[6] The Parliament of Ghana made efforts to connect to the people through the use of technology.

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3   United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Public Administration and Development Management, *UN e-Government Survey 2008: From e-Government to Connected Governance,* New York: United Nations, 2008 [http://www.unpan.org].

4   United Nations, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, *World e-Parliament Report 2008,* [New York]: United Nations, 2008, p.138 [http://www.ictparliament.org].

5   Berntzen, Lasse - Healy, Mike - Hahamis, Panos - Dunville, Debra - Esteves, José, "Parliamentary Web Presence: a Comparative Review"*, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on e-Government: Pittsburgh*, *12-13 October 2006* [ed. by] Dan Remenyi, Reading: Academic Conferences Ltd, 2006, pp. 17-25.

6   Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana; and Mninwa J. Mahlangu, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces of South Africa. Intervention at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009, Washington D.C. [http://www.ictparliament.org/].

Among them the most innovative are a public-private partnership with a TV station to cover plenary sessions in full and the live broadcast of plenary meetings and committee hearings. The Parliament is also establishing resource centres in regions and districts to allow citizens to follow live sessions via computer or TV. Citizens can also use their phones to contact "call in" programmes where parliament and policy issues are being discussed. Other efforts include the development of the Parliament's own radio station to broadcast plenary sessions and the use of Facebook to hold open discussions on relevant topics once a week.

The Parliament of South Africa has recently implemented a programme, called "Taking Parliament to the People", that helps connect members of parliament and people in the nine provinces of South Africa to debate matters of local concern. Video and teleconferencing through satellite links allow all provinces to participate in the debate and share experiences. The programme is supported by radio interviews and phone-in programmes with members before and after the event.

The 2008 presidential election in the United States also provides an excellent example of innovative uses of technology to communicate with voters. Two observations about the election have been made that are of particular relevance to this discussion. First, the winning candidate made use of a broad range of techniques and did not rely on just one or two channels to communicate his message. These included web pages, e-mails, audio, video, and text messaging, as well as social networking resources. One of the purposes in doing this was to ensure outreach to as many as possible using the methods that were most likely to be used by the various recipients. With this same purpose in mind, the candidate also relied equally heavily on more traditional methods of communication, such as mailings, door-to-door canvassing, phone calls, and rallies. It was a campaign that took place on both sides of the digital divide.

It is likely that another reason for the apparent success in using technology to communicate with voters during the election was the emerging receptiveness of many in the electorate to the use of these technologies. A study of the Pew Research Center found that "…74% of Internet users - representing 55% of the entire adult population - went online in 2008 to get involved in the political process or to get news and information about the election. This marks the first time that a Pew Internet & American Life Project survey has found that more than half of the voting-age population used the Internet to get involved in the political process during an election year".[7]

RESULTS AND FINDINGS FROM THE 2007 SURVEY

The findings presented in the *World e-Parliament Report 2008* provided an assessment of the state of communication technology in parliaments at that time. The Report concluded that while there had been some progress in using ICT to disseminate information to the public, there were few truly interactive parliamentary websites. They were primarily used as a one-way communication device by members, parliaments and political parties. Some experiments with blogs and other interactive features were underway, and there were several efforts in different countries to develop online discussions and receive citizens' comments on pending legislation and policies under consideration by parliament. The *World e-Parliament Report 2008* expressed the view that these initiatives, if carried out, could be helpful in identifying good practices for engaging citizens more actively.

7   Smith, Aaron, *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2009.

The 2008 Report also noted that:

- e-mail was the primary way for citizens to contact parliaments electronically;
- in 83% of parliaments someone within the legislature responded to e-mails from citizens;
- very few chambers had e-mail management systems in place and over 60% in the high income group had no plans to implement one;
- only 18% of chambers had the capacity for holding online group discussions;
- only 20% of chambers had other methods besides e-mail for enabling citizens to make their views known to the parliament; they viewed them as serving the goals of listening to the concerns of citizens and engaging them in policy discussions. Parliaments and chambers in the Latin American group reported the highest percentage of those providing such mechanisms for online citizen input (64%).

For member communication with citizens, the survey found the following:

- in 42% of the chambers members used websites to communicate their positions; however, there was a wide variation by income level with 73% in the high income group compared to none in the low income group;
- there was some experimentation by members using blogs to communicate ongoing activities to constituents, but the numbers were very small;
- only 16% of chambers and parliaments offered other electronic means for enabling members and parties to communicate their views. Traditional broadcasting through TV and radio programmes were identified most often, while some parliaments were making use of webcasting technology.

The 2008 Report cited a number of concerns that needed to be better understood and resolved in the future. In particular, it noted the potential for unmet expectations on the part of the public. If citizens believe that parliaments or individual members employ new technology but never take into account the public's input when developing positions, they could become disenchanted and further disengaged from parliament. The Report suggested that parliaments should pursue the use of ICT in a coherent, strategic fashion that invites public interaction with the parliamentary process and fosters effective multi-directional communication with citizens. They also have to consider what other factors beyond technology need to be addressed to help increase public trust in parliament as an institution.

27

RESULTS AND FINDINGS FROM THE 2009 SURVEY

Because communication technologies have been among the most rapidly evolving fields in ICT over the past two years, the latest survey investigated in greater depth several issues that had not been included in the previous one. It asked more detailed questions about the use of e-mail and websites by members and by committees (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the parliaments' websites). It added queries about a wider range of communication technologies and inquired about the purposes and objectives of their use. It also asked when, during the legislative process, the views of citizens were sought. As communication with young people is an issue of growing interest, two questions were also added about this topic. And because a great deal can be learned from sharing information about problems encountered, the survey asked about the challenges parliaments had experienced in using technology for communication. Finally, the survey inquired about the trends in communication with citizens once technology had been introduced by the parliament.

Members' use of e-mail

Of the parliaments responding to the survey, 78% reported that most or some members use e-mail to communicate with citizens, as shown in Figure 2.1. This included 41% stating that most members use e-mail, and 37% indicating that some members use it. In addition, 7% reported that members are planning or considering using e-mail. Only one chamber said no; the rest (13%) reported that the answer was unknown.[8]

Figure 2.1: Use of e-mail and websites by members and committees to communicate with citizens
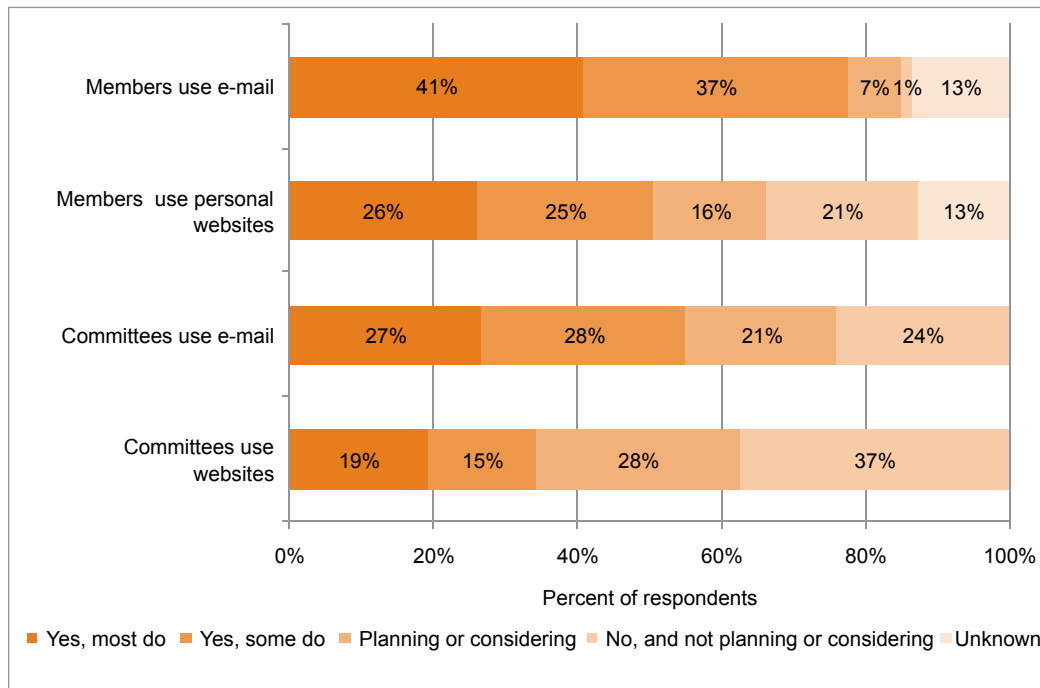
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Questions 1, 4, 7 and 9; 134 respondents)

In 2007 the survey asked whether citizens could contact parliaments via e-mail: 88% said yes[9] and 59% confirmed that members received these e-mails (as well as others, including parliamentary officials, committees, and parties).[10] Despite the slight differences in wording between the two surveys it seems reasonable to conclude that the use of e-mail by members is increasing.

In 2009, 88% of parliaments also reported that most (43%) or some (45%) members who use e-mail respond to messages from citizens.[11] In 2007, 83% of respondents said that members or others in parliament responded to e-mails.[12] The results from 2009, therefore, suggest that the responsiveness of members to e-mail has also increased. Although this is a positive finding, the characteristics of the response cannot be determined from these survey questions alone. For example, is the response a pro forma reply, is it a fuller reply, and is there an attempt to summarize the e-mails and share the results with citizens? Also, the survey did not ask how soon a message is answered.

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8   Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 4.
9   United Nations, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, [New York]: United Nations, 2008, p.128 [http://www.ictparliament.org].
10   *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, cit., p.129 [http://www.ictparliament.org].
11   Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 5.
12   *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, cit., p.129 [http://www.ictparliament.org].

Despite these positive indications of more use and greater responsiveness on the part of members, only 21% of parliaments reported having an automated system to support handling and answering incoming e-mail.[13] In 2007, the question about e-mail systems was not exactly the same (it included reference to the use of a "knowledge base") but it was similar enough to warrant a comparison. As seen in Figure 2.2, responses of the 2009:2007 Compare Group[14] suggest that there has been no improvement in this situation in the last two years.

Figure 2.2: Automated e-mail management system

Automated e-mail management system?	2007	2009
Yes	21%	21%
Planning or considering	32%	25%
No and not planning or considering	47%	54%

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 6; Survey 2007, Section 8, Question 5)

While it is not yet clear how significant a limitation this may be, the effectiveness of e-mail as a means of communication with citizens can be highly dependent on the availability of an automated system to assist members record, categorize, and respond to messages. There is also some risk that citizens may lose confidence if they have no indication that members are able to take their comments into account.

Committees' use of e-mail

Parliaments reported that committees also use e-mail: a combined total of 55% of respondents said that most (27%) or some (28%) committees use e-mail to communicate with citizens (Figure 2.1). In addition, 21% are planning or considering using it, but 24% are not.[15] In the 2007 survey, the comparable figure for committees using e-mail was 41%. As with members, therefore, it appears that committee use of e-mail is increasing. Also positive is the fact that a very high percentage report that most or some committees respond to e-mail (95% for committees versus 88% for members).[16]

It is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the 24% who say that committees do not use e-mail and are not planning or considering using it. For some, this may be an issue of rules or procedures; others may not see e-mail as useful or valuable for their work; for others, it may be a matter of resources.

Members' use of websites

As Figure 2.1 shows, 51% of parliaments reported that most or some members use websites to communicate with citizens. Although the questions were posed slightly differently,[17] the percentages for the 2009:2007 Compare Group - 50% and 45% respectively - reflect an increase in members' use of websites since 2007[18].

29

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13 Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 6.
14 As noted in the Introduction, the 2009:2007 Compare Group is comprised of those 87 assemblies that responded the survey in both years.
15 Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 9.
16 Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Questions 5 and 10.
17 2009: Do Members use personal websites to communicate with citizens; 2007: Do Members use websites to communicate their views on policy issues and proposed legislation. However, in 2009, the survey also asked what purposes members use websites for and 81% of parliaments said "Communicating the member's personal views".
18 *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, cit., p.135 [http://www.ictparliament.org].

20% of parliaments, however, indicated that members do not use personal websites and are not planning or considering doing it. There could be several reasons for this: they may not have specific constituencies they need to communicate with, they may lack the resources or the knowledge to create and manage a website, or they may not find such websites valuable.

Parliaments gave the following purposes for which members use websites (see Figure 2.3):
• Communicate member's personal views – 81%
• Seek comments and opinions from the public – 75%
• Communicate information about the work of parliament – 68%

The relatively high percentages for each of these purposes suggest that many members who do have websites are trying to use them for two-way communication, both to explain their own views on issues and to seek the views of the public. Because members are the most direct representatives of their constituents, this interactive use of websites can be viewed as a positive finding. However, it is important to point out that this is happening in only 75% of the 51% of chambers that report that members maintain personal websites. In other words, only 38% of parliaments (75% of 51%) report that members are using websites to seek comments and opinions from the public.

Figure 2.3: Purposes for which members use websites
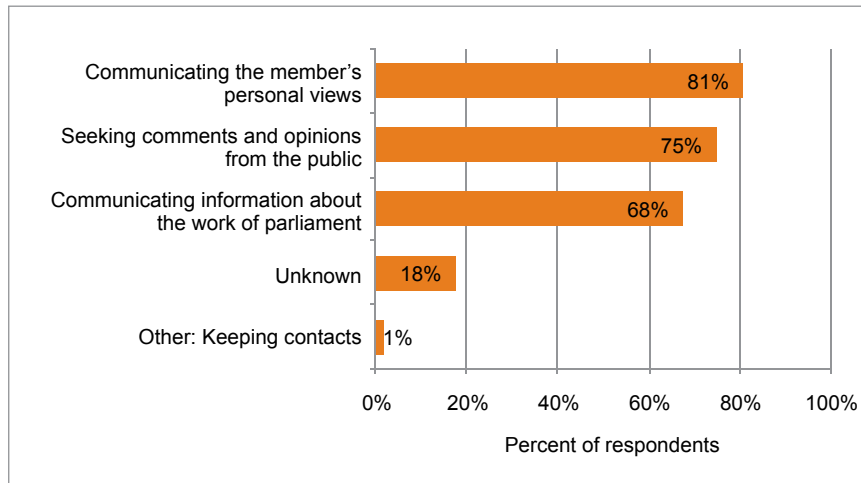
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 2; 68 respondents (51%) responding "yes" to Question 1)

Committees' use of websites

34% of parliaments reported that all or at least some committees use websites to communicate with citizens. An additional 28% said they are planning or considering it (see Figure 2.1). While these are positive findings, the survey could not provide any insight into why 37% of parliaments said their committees do not use websites and were not planning or considering using them (see Figure 2.1). It is possible that committees in these parliaments do not have significant legislative or oversight roles, do not value websites, or lack the technical knowledge and resources to support them effectively.

Of those that do use websites, 91% reported that their purpose was to communicate information about the work of the committee; and 59% said that it was to communicate the committee's position on issues. Just over half (52%) stated it was to seek comments and opinions from the public

(see Figure 2.4). This result, which compares to the one concerning the purpose for members' websites, could be interpreted as a missed opportunity of some significance for parliaments in which committees play a major legislative or oversight role.

Finally, it is worth noting that communicating information about the work of parliament was the last priority for both members and committees, although the percentage is much higher for members (68%) than it is for committees (39%).

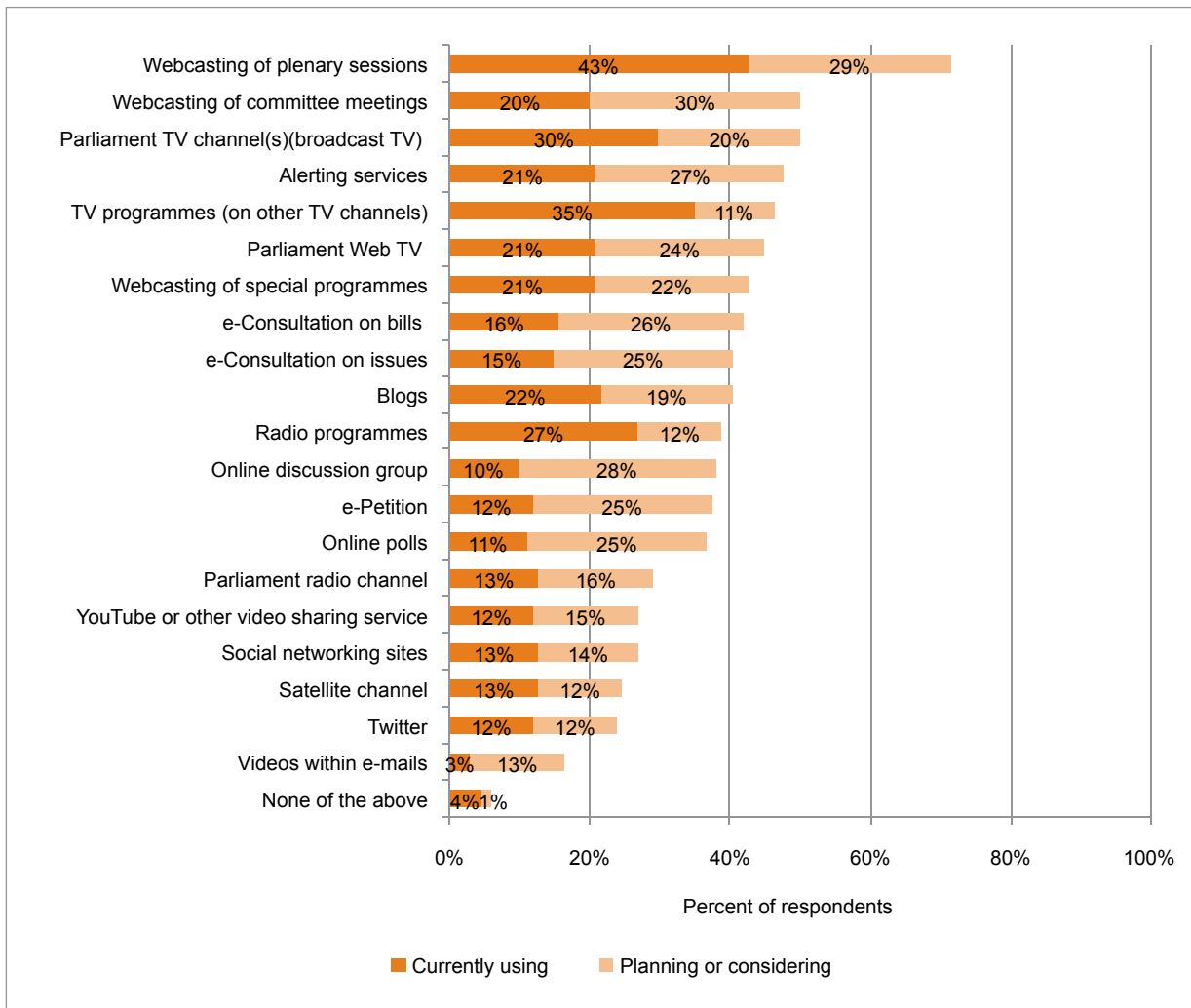Figure 2.4: Purposes for which committees use websites
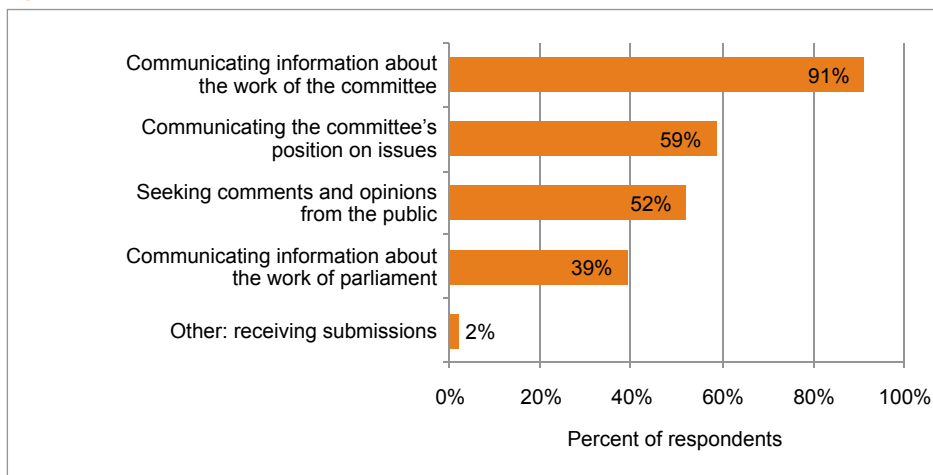
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 8; 46 respondents – 34% responding "yes" to Question 7)

Other methods being used

In addition to websites and e-mail, the 2009 survey asked what other methods parliaments or members were currently using or considering using to communicate with citizens. A list of twenty-one options was provided, including "None" which was selected by 5% of respondents.

The method in use by the largest number of parliaments (43%) is webcasting of plenary sessions. This technology was also selected by the second largest number of parliaments (29%) that are planning or considering using other methods of communication, a result which reflects the growing popularity of webcasting among legislatures (Figure 2.5). Given that the technology for webcasting has become easier and less costly over time, and considering the importance of plenary sessions, this finding is not surprising. If all those that are planning or considering this technology are able to implement it, webcasting of plenary sessions will be provided by over 70% of parliaments in the next few years. This will have an important impact on transparency. It could also support citizens' understanding of the legislative process, as more advanced legislative information systems are now able to link the text of proposed bills to video records of the debate on those bills in plenary.

Figure 2.5: Communication technologies used or planned/being considered by parliaments

Webcasting of plenary sessions	43%	29%
Webcasting of committee meetings	20%	30%
Parliament TV channel(s)(broadcast TV)	30%	20%
Alerting services	21%	27%
TV programmes (on other TV channels)	35%	11%
Parliament Web TV	21%	24%
Webcasting of special programmes	21%	22%
e-Consultation on bills	16%	26%
e-Consultation on issues	15%	25%
Blogs	22%	19%
Radio programmes	27%	12%
Online discussion group	10%	28%
e-Petition	12%	25%
Online polls	11%	25%
Parliament radio channel	13%	16%
YouTube or other video sharing service	12%	15%
Social networking sites	13%	14%
Satellite channel	13%	12%
Twitter	12%	12%
Videos within e-mails	3%	13%
None of the above	4%	1%

Percent of respondents

■ Currently using   ■ Planning or considering

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 11; 134 respondents)

After webcasting of plenary sessions, the next most popular methods in use are:
• TV programmes (on channels other than a parliamentary TV channel) - 35%
• A parliamentary TV channel - 30%
• Radio programmes (other than on a parliamentary radio channel) - 27%

These are relatively well established technologies and it is understandable that they have come to be used by a quarter to a third of parliaments. However, it is important to note that all of them are uni-directional – from the parliament to the citizen - and do not foster interaction.

A group of relatively newer methods is currently used by approximately a fifth of responding parliaments (between 20% to 22%):

• Blogs - 22%
• Alerting services - 21%
• Parliamentary web TV - 21%
• Webcast of special programmes - 21%
• Webcast of committee sessions - 20%

Three of these make use of webcasting, which together with the top choice (webcasting of plenary sessions), is another indication of the growing use of this technology. The Parliament of Finland offers an example of effective use of webcasting. Figure 2.6 presents a view of the architecture that the Parliament has implemented to webcast its plenary sessions. The system is particularly notable for its use of XML to integrate metadata with the video and make it available on the Internet.

Figure 2.6: Webcast architecture of the Parliament of Finland
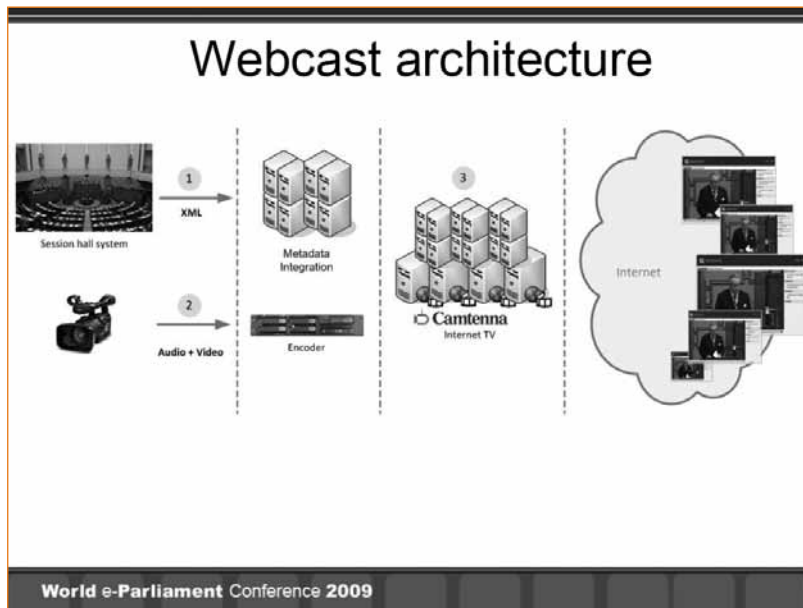
(Source: Presentation by Juha-Pekka Leskinen, IT Manager, and Petteri Nyman, Web Producer, Parliament of Finland, at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009)

A special event on Parliamentary Web TV, held at the World e-Parliament Conference 2008, provided an opportunity to showcase the efforts of several parliaments in broadcasting the activities of their institutions to the public. For example, on its Web TV channel the Chamber of Deputies of Chile provides live broadcasting of plenary sessions as well as material for civic education. Programmes are indexed so that they can be retrieved at any point in time making it possible to locate segments where a particular parliamentarian is speaking. In order to facilitate access by citizens with auditory impairments, closed captioning[19] is made available.

33

Webcasting can be a particularly effective mechanism for reaching the public when the population is broadly dispersed over a large geographic area and there is widespread penetration of the Internet. In the case of Brazil the large size of the country and the substantial number of homes with cable TV and Internet access made WebTV an attractive mechanism for distributing broadcasts from the Parliament. The latest features of their system include search capabilities, links to other available information, and video chat that allows people to ask questions during committee meetings. Likewise, the newest version of the European Parliament's Web TV is designed to reach a broad audience across the many countries within the European Union. A special feature of their broadband-based system is the ability to provide information in multiple languages. Viewers are able to select particular programs and see them at their convenience rather than having to adhere to a preset schedule. In addition to coverage of plenary sessions and an

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19 Closed captioning is the text of the words being spoken in a video which appears at the bottom of the screen. It allows those with auditory impairments to understand what is being said.

increasing number of committee meetings, the European Parliament's Web TV offers additional channels with programming for schoolchildren, special topical programmes that feature citizens offering their views, and programmes that feature members and their views on issues before the Parliament.

Finally, there are 10 technology-based methods currently in use by the fewest parliaments (between 10% to 16%):
• e-Consultation on bills - 16%
• e-Consultation on issues - 15%
• Parliamentary radio channel - 13%
• Social networking such as Facebook - 13%
• Satellite channel - 13%
• e-Petition - 12%
• YouTube or other video sharing service - 12%
• Twitter - 12%
• Online polls - 11%
• Online discussion groups - 10%

Of these ten, seven are interactive. These also include some of the most recently developed technologies, such as social networking, Twitter, and YouTube. Given their relative newness, it is understandable that fewer legislatures are currently making use of them, especially because their value to parliaments, compared to other approaches such as webcasting, is yet to be determined.

An example of the use of Facebook was provided by the European Parliament (Figure 2.7) at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009. The communication campaign for the recent election of the European Parliament used several interactive tools such as MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter. The MySpace profile of the European Parliament featured daily blogs, online widgets, videos and slideshows, and provided information on the campaign activities going on all over Europe. However, Facebook was considered the most successful of the tools and was used to post parliamentary news and to host debates. In conveying effectively its message, and to build reputation and trust with the public, the Parliament placed particular emphasis in communicating as a non partisan institution, using an informal tone and generating content easy to share.

Figure 2.7: The Facebook page of the European Parliament

(Source: http://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament)

Methods used by income groups

In light of the pre-ceding discussion, it is useful to note the relationship between income levels and the methods currently in use. Figure 2.8 shows that a larger percent-age of parliaments in the low income group use TV programmes (on other TV chan-nels) and radio pro-grammes (on other ra-dio channels) than do parliaments at higher income levels. They are also more likely to use a satellite channel. There are several pos-sible explanations for why these technolo-gies are in greater use in developing coun-tries. It may be that they are leveraging existing infrastructure already in place and able to reach more citizens. Compared to broadband, TV and radio probably have a much higher level of penetration. Also, there may not be ad-equate understanding of how some of the newer technologies can be implemented with reasonable in-vestments.

Figure 2.8: Communication methods being used, by income groups
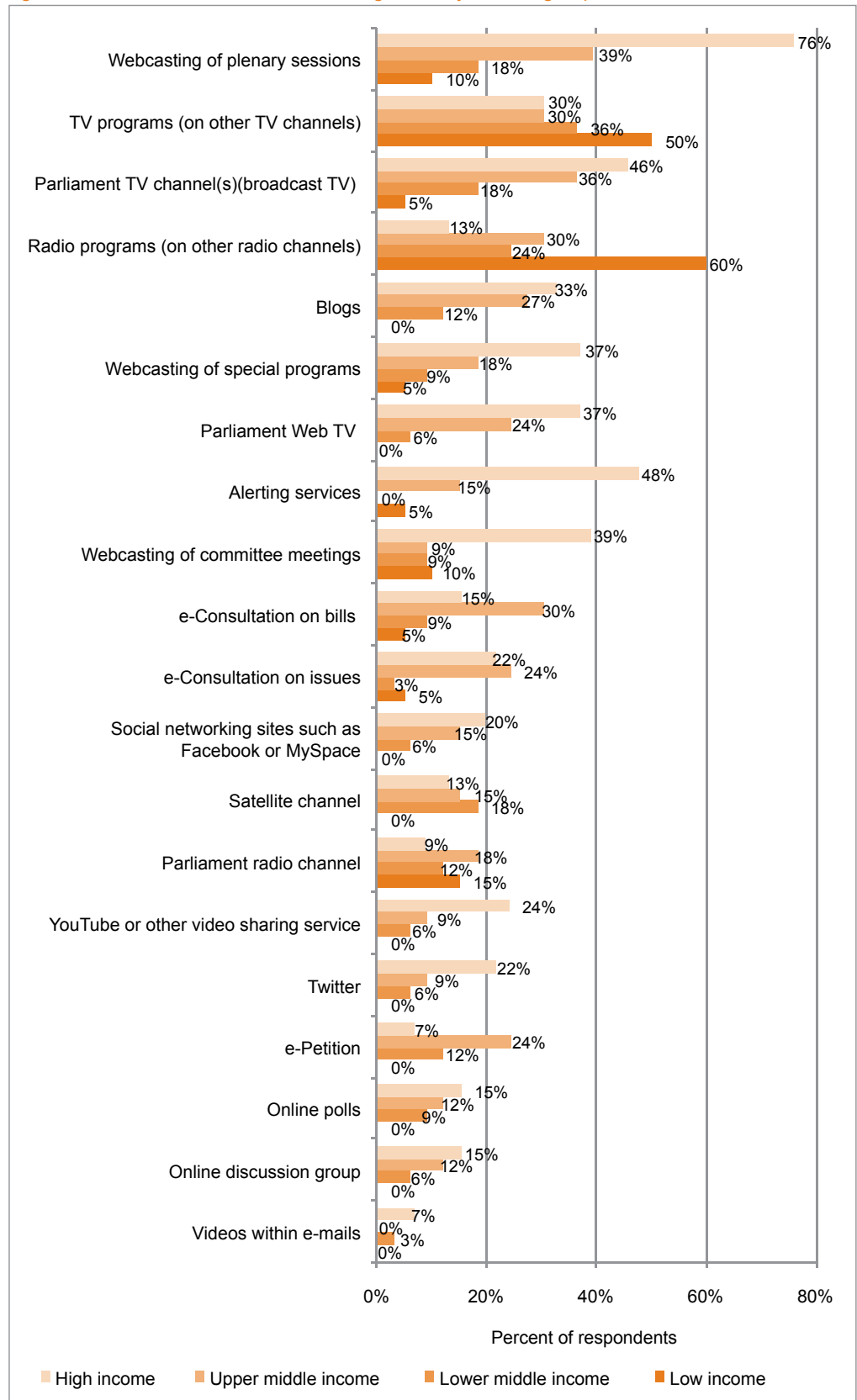
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 11; 134 respondents)

Methods being planned or considered

The order of the top 10 methods for all respondents changes when looking at those which parliaments are planning or considering using:
• Webcasting of committee sessions – 30%
• Webcasting of plenary sessions – 29%
• Online discussion groups – 28%
• Alerting services – 27%
• e-Consultation on bills – 26%
• e-Consultation on issues – 25%
• e-Petition – 25%
• Online polls – 25%
• Parliament Web TV – 24%
• Webcasting of special programmes – 22%

These methods are evenly divided between those that are one-directional and those that are two-directional or interactive. The five interactive ones – online discussion groups, e-consultation on bills and on issues, online polls and e-petition – are designed purposefully to obtain citizen input. And four of the one-directional methods involve webcasting, again reflecting the growing popularity of this technology.

Methods that will be used the most in the near term

By combining the percentages for the methods being used now and those being planned or considered, it is possible to estimate those that will be used by the most parliaments in the future. Not all parliaments will be able or will decide to implement all the methods they are planning or considering, but the resulting scores provide an indication of their relative popularity in the next years. As previously noted, webcasting of plenary sessions occupies the number one spot.
• Webcasting of plenary sessions – 72%
• Webcasting of committee sessions – 50%
• Parliament TV channel(s) (broadcast TV) – 50%
• Alerting services – 48%
• TV programmes (on other TV channels) – 46%
• Parliament Web TV – 45%
• Webcasting of special programmes –43%
• e-Consultation on bills – 42%
• Blogs – 41%
• e-Consultation on issues – 40%

Video technologies predominate in this list: six of the top seven involve webcasting or broadcasting. In addition, the top seven are all uni-directional; only the bottom three are interactive. It thus appears that for the near term, methods that are uni-directional will still be the ones used by the most parliaments.

Technologies projected to have the largest rates of growth

It is also possible to estimate the future rate of growth in usage for each technology in parliament by comparing the percentage of parliaments reporting that they are planning or considering using it with the percentage that are currently using it.[20] Calculating this number for all technolo-

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20 For example, 20% of parliaments reported that they are currently webcasting committee sessions; 30% reported that they are planning or considering doing it. By dividing the percentage planning or considering (30%) by the percentage currently using (20%), the projected growth for webcasting committee sessions is estimated to be 150%.

gies makes it possible to estimate those technologies that will grow the most among parliaments based on their current level of usage. The results for the top 10 are as follows.[21]

- Online discussion groups – 280%
- Online polls – 227%
- e-Petition – 208%
- e-Consultation on issues – 167%
- e-Consultation on bills – 163%
- Webcasting of committee sessions – 150%
- Alerting services – 129%
- YouTube/other video sharing service – 125%
- Parliament radio channel – 123%
- Parliament Web TV – 114%

In this list the top five methods projected to have the highest percentage of growth are all interactive. The bottom five are all uni-directional. One conclusion is that while uni-directional communication technologies will be used by the most parliaments in the near term, more interactive technologies may be used by many more parliaments in the longer term. Based on the estimated growth of mobile phones, especially in developing countries, it is possible that methods for communicating with citizens using this technology will also become available in many parliaments.

Evaluation of methods

As noted in Chapter 1, one of the most pressing needs is for more research and evaluation of the efficacy of various technology-based methods of communication. In the 2009 survey only 23 parliaments (17%) reported that they had conducted any formal or informal assessments, although 51% were planning or considering doing it.[22] Of those that had conducted evaluations, the survey asked which methods had been found to be *very valuable*, *sometimes valuable*, and *not valuable*. With so few respondents to this question, the results must be viewed as interesting, possibly indicative, but certainly not authoritative. Only three methods were assessed by more than 15 parliaments; the results for these three are shown in Figure 2.9.

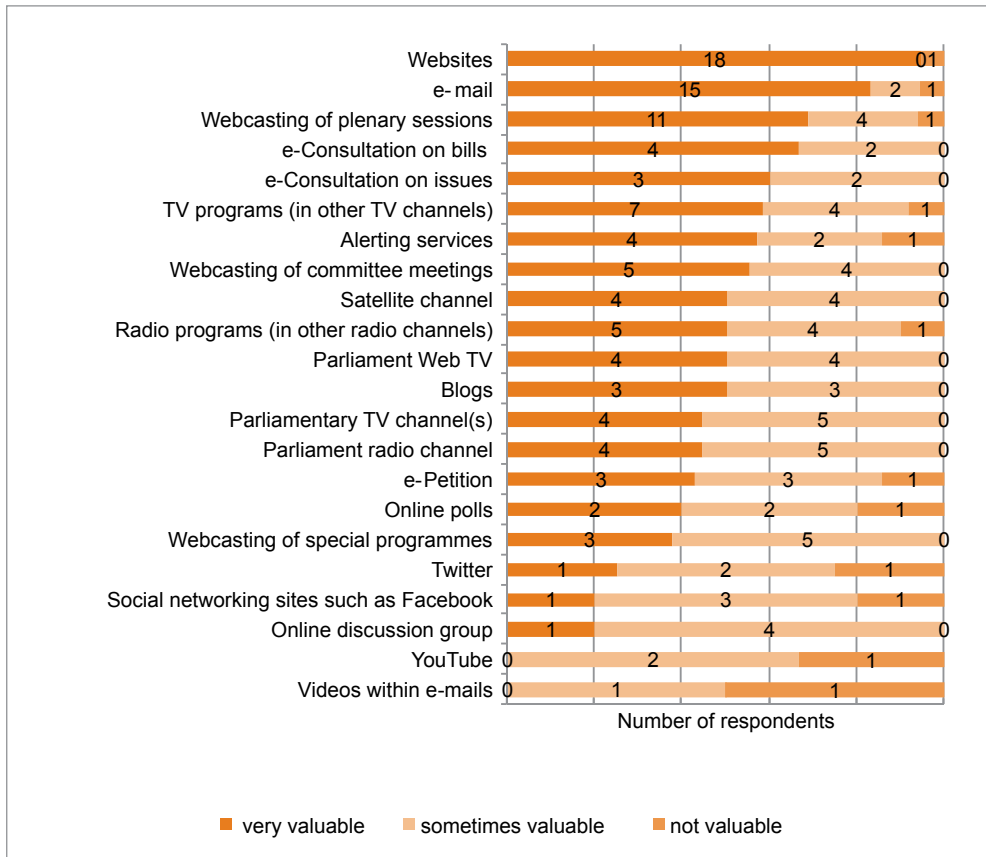Figure 2.9: Evaluation of technology-based methods of communication

Method	Number of parliaments that ranked method as:		
	Very Valuable	Sometimes Valuable	Not valuable
Websites	18	0	1
E-mail	15	2	1
Webcasting of plenary sessions	11	4	1

Given the large percentage of parliaments that employ these methods, the number of those that found them *very valuable* seems logical. Of the remaining methods, only one was assessed by more than ten parliaments; all the rest by nine or fewer, making the results too small to generalize. For future discussion and comparisons the ratings for all technologies are shown in Figure 2.10.

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21 Video within e-mails was omitted from this calculation because it has such a low level of usage (3%) that its projected growth (433%) based on the percentage planning or considering it (13%) is judged to be not relevant for this discussion.
22 Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 15.

Figure 2.10: Ratings of technology-based methods of communication

	very valuable	sometimes valuable	not valuable
Websites	18	0	1
e- mail	15	2	1
Webcasting of plenary sessions	11	4	1
e-Consultation on bills	4	2	0
e-Consultation on issues	3	2	0
TV programs (in other TV channels)	7	4	1
Alerting services	4	2	1
Webcasting of committee meetings	5	4	0
Satellite channel	4	4	0
Radio programs (in other radio channels)	5	4	1
Parliament Web TV	4	4	0
Blogs	3	3	0
Parliamentary TV channel(s)	4	5	0
Parliament radio channel	4	5	0
e-Petition	3	3	1
Online polls	2	2	1
Webcasting of special programmes	3	5	0
Twitter	1	2	1
Social networking sites such as Facebook	1	3	1
Online discussion group	1	4	0
YouTube	0	2	1
Videos within e-mails	0	1	1

Number of respondents

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 16; 134 respondents)

Objectives of parliaments in using technologies for communication

Parliaments that use or are planning or considering using ICT-based methods to communicate with citizens were asked to name their three most important objectives.[23] The ones cited by the largest number of parliaments were:

- Inform citizens about policy issues and proposed legislation - 67%;
- Explain what the parliament does - 59%;
- Engage more citizens in the political process - 54%.

Although the question about the objectives of communication methods had slightly different options in 2007 and in 2009, both surveys did contain one answer that was the same: "Inform citizens about policy issues and proposed legislation". In 2007, 28% of respondents selected this as one of the objectives; in 2009, 67% selected it. This suggests a greater awareness and commitment today, compared to two years ago, on the part of parliaments to use communication tools to provide more information to citizens and to be more transparent.
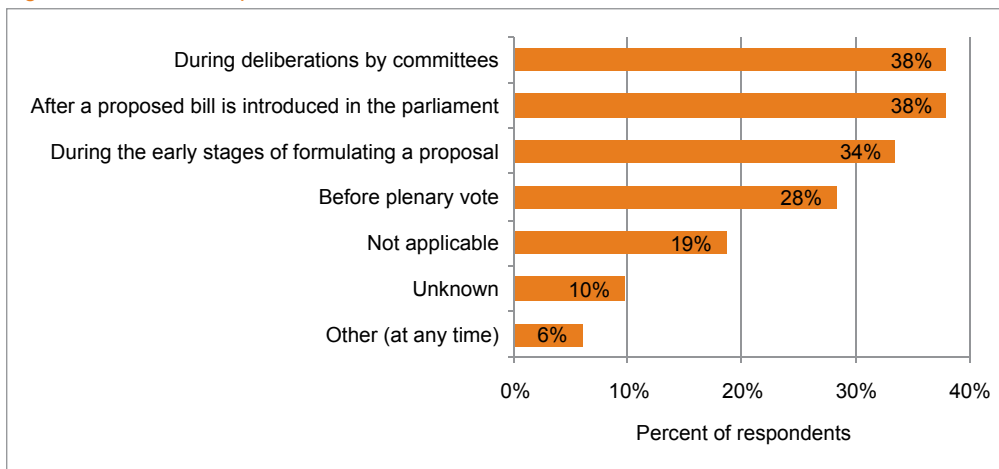
When do parliaments consult citizens?

It is useful to know when parliaments use ICT-based tools to consult with citizens. Their answers to this question are shown in Figure 2.11. Two points are worth noting about these results.

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23 Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 17.

Figure 2.11: When do parliaments consult with citizens?

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 12; 134 respondents)

First, parliaments consult throughout the process, but more of them consult in the early stages of the legislative process – during the early stages of formulating a proposal (34%), after the proposal has been introduced in parliament (38%), and during deliberations by committees (38%). Somewhat fewer (28%) said during plenary vote.

Second, the percentages are relatively evenly distributed among the various stages; no one stage is indicated significantly more often than another, suggesting that there are several useful times during these early periods for parliaments to seek the views of citizens.

<div style="text-align:right; color:orange;">Box 2.3</div>

The e-Democracy programme
Digital participatory lawmaking process in Brazil

Launched in June 2009 by the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil, the "e-Democracia" programme aims to engage the public in the law-making process in order to achieve concrete legislative results.

Relying on the use of social media, combined with offline legislative events (e.g. committee hearings, conferences), the initiative is intended to reach a broad audience that includes citizens, parliamentarians, civil servants, researchers, non-governmental organizations, and interest groups.

Such a programme is driven by a belief that the lawmaking process can benefit from the convergence of political representation and citizen participation, in a virtuous cycle where one model strengthens the other.

The backbone of the initiative is its website (http://www.edemocracia.gov.br) which provides a multiple participatory mechanism that allows users to be involved in three core moments of the law-making process:

• The sharing of information about a problem that needs to be addressed by law;

• The identification and discussion of possible solutions to the problem; and

• The drafting of a bill itself.

How would the participation in the policy-making process be possible in such a complex legislative work? People in contemporaneous societies are very diverse in terms of interests, experiences, expertise, and values. The great challenge of making social participation possible is to find out how to take advantage of such diversity in a way that is very useful to the policy-making system. It has been called 'non-structured qualified participation': the kind of participation which allows people to share their professional experience, expertise, interests and values a) in different scales, b) in all policy-making cycle phases, and also c) for different purposes.

It is a way to apply crowdsourcing for legislative purposes. The "e-Democracia" programme website provides management tools to assemble the diffuse participation by regular citizens and minority groups. The main goal is to facilitate access to the decision-making process by people not associated with strong groups of interest and corporations that have access to the centre of power in Brazil using the traditional ways to influence politicians.

> Cont'd
>
> *Since June 2009, five thematic legislative virtual communities were created as well as a "Citizen Room", a free virtual arena to discuss any legislative subject. 2,900 members were registered. Eighteen thematic forums and 50 sub-forums were created with about 450 contributions.*
>
> *Among the five legislative virtual communities the most successful one so far is the "Youth Statute community" whereby some ideas and suggestions delivered by youngsters throughout Brazil were taken seriously by policy-makers and reflected in the bill draft text.*
>
> *For example, youngsters posted ideas about the need to offer professional programmes during undergraduate courses in colleges. These suggestions were transformed into legal text and the congressmen in charge of that subject have approved their inclusion in the final draft. This text is under consideration to become a law.*
>
> *In addition to increasing citizens' participation, "e-Democracia" programme has brought great improvement for transparency. Participants and the overall society could finally better understand the legislative process that is normally complex and confusing.*

(Source: Andréa Perna, Manager, Legislative Governance Bureau, and Cristiano Faria, co-Developer of the e-Democracia programme, Chamber of Deputies of Brazil, Contribution to the *World e-Parliament Report 2010*)

Challenges

Parliaments, committees and members face a number of challenges in using the newest communication technologies. As shown in Figure 2.12 the problem mentioned by the most parliaments is that *members are not familiar with these technologies* (37%). This finding underscores the point made by a number of speakers at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009 about the need of more orientation and training for members of parliaments in the use of ICT. In addition, over a quarter of parliaments stated that too much effort and resources are required to implement ICT systems. The internal problems for parliaments, therefore, are the needs for increased training and technical support.

Figure 2.12: Challenges in using communication technologies
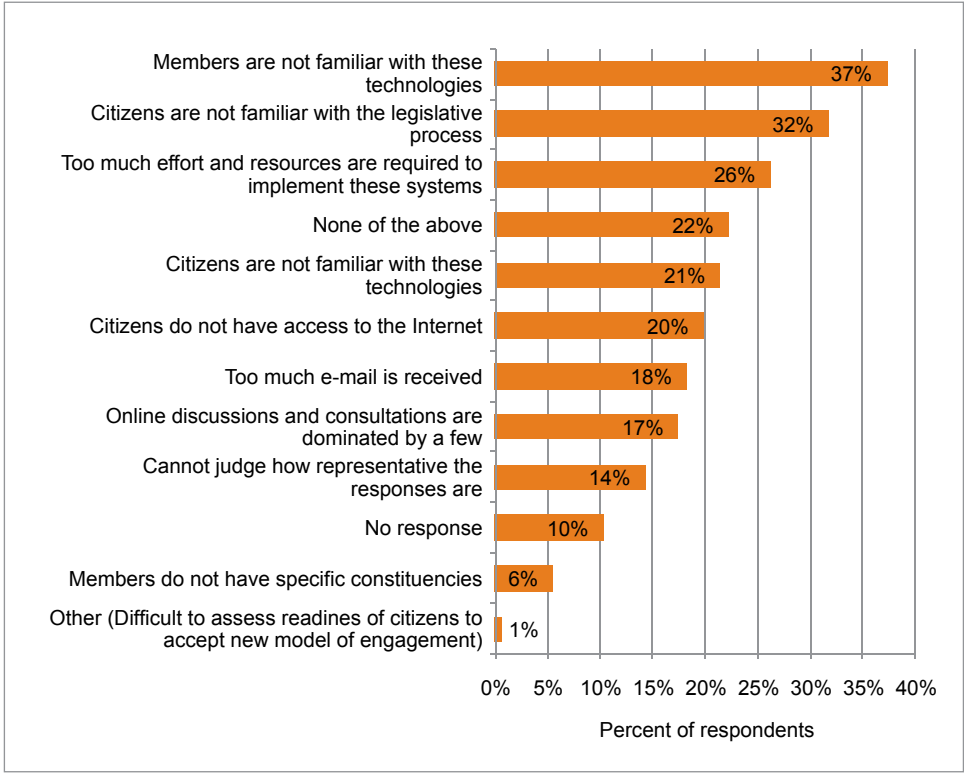
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 18; 126 respondents – 94% responding "yes" at least once in Questions 1,4,7,9 and 11)

The challenge for citizens cited by the largest percentage of parliaments is that they are not familiar with the legislative process (32%). It would seem incumbent on parliaments to address this problem through more targeted communication campaigns and effective explanatory material on their websites, an issue that will be examined in Chapter 3.

Citizens face other problems as well. A fifth of all parliaments reported that citizens are not familiar with the technology and an equal percentage stated that they do not have access to the technology. These two well documented aspects of the digital divide represent a significant difficulty, especially for developing countries. But as Chapter 1 suggested, the growth in the use of mobile phones may be one of the solutions in the next ten years, at least for accessing the necessary technology. And access should help to improve the problem of familiarity with the technology.

Three challenges that are inherent in communication technology were cited by a small but significant percentage of parliaments: too much e-mail is received (18%); discussions can be dominated by a few (17%); and, it is difficult to judge how representative the responses received are (14%). There are proven solutions to some of these problems, including better tools for managing e-mail and moderation of discussion groups. Determining the representativeness of responses can be more difficult, but some potential solutions, such as registration of participants, are possible. In this context, it is important to note that only 30% of parliaments always (10%) or sometimes (20%) use special tools to help collect citizens' comments and categorize them more efficiently.[24] Sharing of knowledge by those with experience using these tools could be helpful, especially for the 40% of parliaments that reported to be planning or considering their use.

It is worth noting that 22% of parliaments stated that they experienced none of these problems.

Communication with young people

Initiatives to communicate with young people are clearly of interest to a number of parliaments. When asked whether the parliament or members use ICT-based methods for this purpose, 50 respondents (37%) replied positively, and another 48 (36%) indicated that they were planning or considering doing so.[25] Just over one quarter (27%) replied no and that they were not planning or considering it.
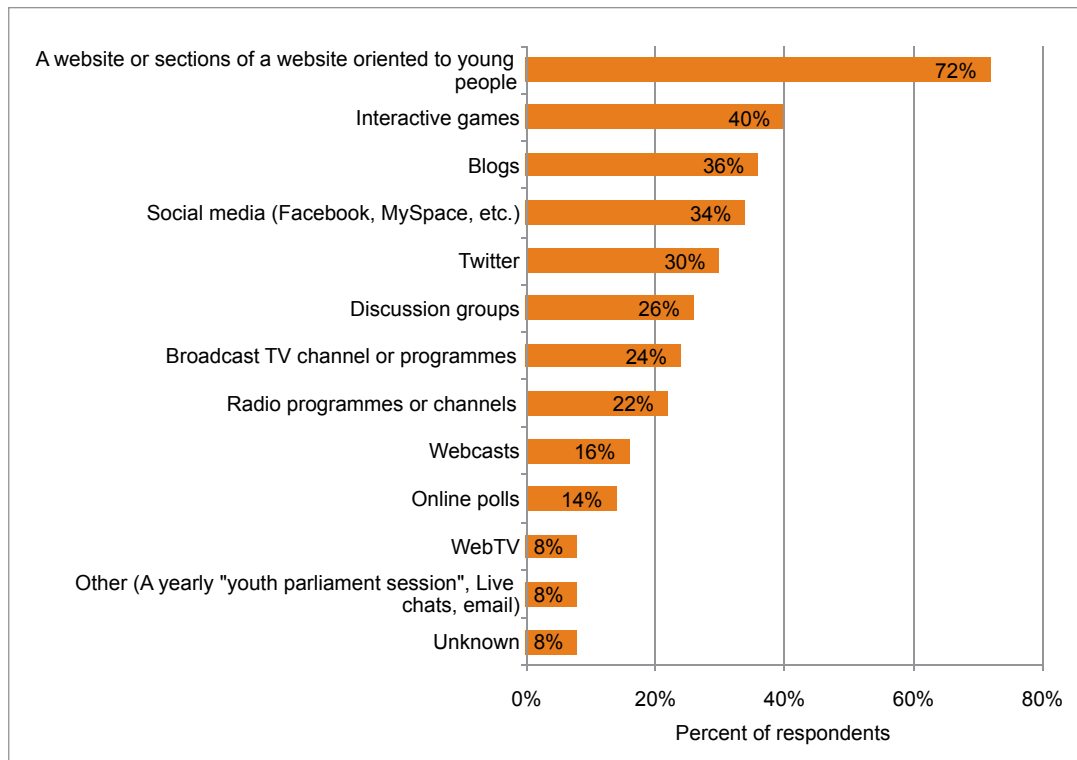
Figure 2.13 shows the methods currently being employed by the 50 parliaments that have initiatives underway. Almost three quarters (72%) use a website or sections of a website oriented to them. As an indication of the perceived value of a dedicated website or page(s), this approach is used by more than twice as many parliaments as almost any other method. The exception is interactive games, which are used by 40% of those trying to engage young people.

It is particularly interesting to note that after websites, the next four methods used by the most parliaments are all interactive in some form: interactive games (40%); blogs (36%); social media such as Facebook (34%); and Twitter (30%).

41

Figure 2.13: Methods used to communicate with young people

Method	Percent
A website or sections of a website oriented to young people	72%
Interactive games	40%
Blogs	36%
Social media (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)	34%
Twitter	30%
Discussion groups	26%
Broadcast TV channel or programmes	24%
Radio programmes or channels	22%
Webcasts	16%
Online polls	14%
WebTV	8%
Other (A yearly "youth parliament session", Live chats, email)	8%
Unknown	8%

Percent of respondents

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 14; 50 respondents – 37% responding "yes" to Question 13)

As Figure 2.14 shows, the use of these methods to communicate with young people is in sharp contrast to the percentage of parliaments that use them on their website to communicate with the general public. The implication of these findings is that parliaments are sensitive to the needs of the audience. They adapt their methods of communication to those preferred by younger generations, and are developing their outreach programmes accordingly.

Figure 2.14: Comparison of methods used to communicate with citizens and with young people

Method	Percent of parliaments communicating with young people	Percent of parliaments communicating with citizens
1. Websites	72%	97%
2. Interactive games	40%	(not asked in survey)
3. Blogs	36%	22%
4. Social media	34%	13%
5. Twitter	30%	12%

(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Questions 1, 11, and 14)

As illustrated in Box 2.4, an interesting example of two-way communication with young people, which used mobile and fixed phone-based polls, took place in Namibia under the aegis of the Parliament.

Box 2.4

The "Listen Loud Campaign" Project

The Project aimed to capture the voices and the perspectives of children and young people of Namibia regarding the issues that affect their lives through mobile phone-based opinion polls.

During the 5 weeks prior to the presidential and parliamentary elections in Namibia in November 2009, young Namibians could call a toll free number to express their views on themes such as Education, HIV/AIDS, Health, Child Protection, Employment, Participation and Environment.

The opinions collected will be presented to the Children's Parliament in 2010 where young people themselves will discuss these topics and make recommendations to the parliamentarians for consideration. With the inception of the new Parliament, these recommendations were expected to form the starting point for appropriate guidelines and action in favour of children and young people, reflecting issues that affect their well-being.

The Project was implemented by the Namibian Institute for Democracy (NID) under the auspices of the Unicef office in Namibia, the Parliament of Namibia, and the Regional ICT Strategy of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

The project implemented an innovative and creative way to deploy opinion polls through VoIP (voice over IP) applications and to collect opinions of the citizenry through mobile phones. The technological core of the project was Interactive Voice Response (IVR). This is a web-based technology which allows a caller to make toll-free calls, listen to instructions in the languages of one's choice, and choose the opinion that is closest to her/his view.

The project in numbers:
- *Number of calls received: almost 20,000 in 5 weeks of campaign (an average of 4,000 calls per week);*
- *Number of SMS received: 250 messages over four weeks period;*
- *Duration of the project: 7 months.*

(Source: Namibian Institute for Democracy, *Catching the voice of the Born-free generation of Namibia through mobile phones*, [ed. by] Theunis Keulder, Regional Director, Swakopmund: Namibian Institute for Democracy, 2009)

Citizens' use of technology to communicate with parliaments

The survey asked parliaments about the trend in citizens' use of the various ICT-based communication methods since their introduction. Percentages are based on the number of parliaments (99 of the 134) that said they are actually using technology for this purpose.

The results, shown in Figure 2.15, are very promising: 85% of parliaments reported that the use of ICT methods by citizens for communication had increased since their introduction; 14% said it had remained steady; and only 1% reported that it was decreasing. Other positive findings regarding the use of technology to conduct town hall meetings with hundreds of citizens were noted in Chapter 1. Results from a study[26] revealed that this technology-supported method was very popular among participants and it attracted a diverse array of constituents who showed increased engagement after the meeting. The findings from this study and the results from the 2009 survey shown in Figure 2.15 offer good reasons for parliaments to be optimistic about the potential of ICT to improve communication with citizens.

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26 Congressional Management Foundation, *Online Town Hall Meetings: Exploring Democracy in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Management Foundation, 2009 [http://www.cmfweb.org].

Figure 2.15: Trend in citizen use of technology-based communication methods

- Increasing usage
- Usage has remained steady
- Decreasing usage

1%
14%
85%
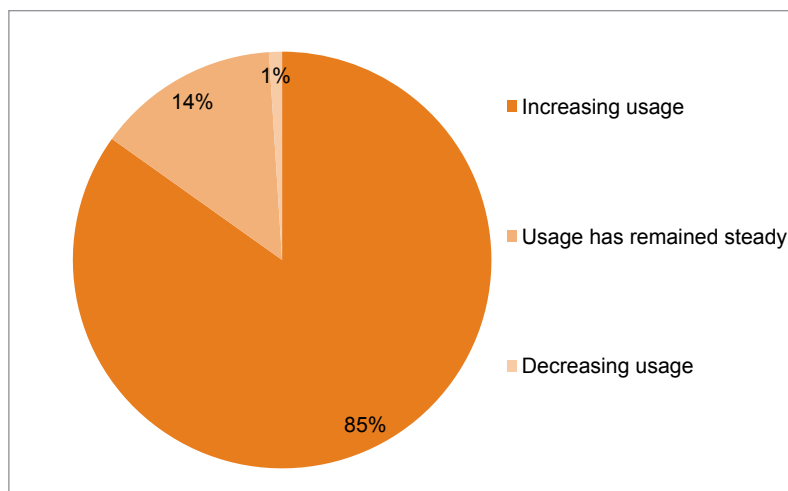
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 6, Question 21; 99 respondents who use ICT for communication)

Members, committees, and parliaments

The findings from the 2009 survey reflect a number of the differences in the ways that members, committees, and parliaments communicate with citizens. Perhaps most significant is that members in a larger percentage of parliaments seek the views of the public than do committees or parliaments themselves. This finding is logical if it is assumed that within the legislative body it is the people's representative – the member of parliament - who most often has direct interaction with citizens. It is the member to whom citizens would reasonably turn to express their views. This is also a positive finding. It means that in many parliaments, members are actively using communication technology to engage the public and seek their opinions.

It is probable that the institution of the parliament itself is seen as less approachable. While the Speaker or President represents the institution at the highest level, it is doubtful that most citizens would address their concerns directly to the institutional leadership, and it is likely that there are few exchanges between the public and the legislature itself. It is therefore understandable that most parliaments, as institutions, use ICT to inform citizens about policy issues and proposed legislation and to explain what the parliament does rather than try to engage them in dialogue.

Committees have a different role and potentially a different reason for communicating with citizens. To the extent that they play a significant part in policy making and legislation, they are in a position to benefit from the use of technology to obtain citizens' views, particularly if the process can be well managed and results in informative comments. This is a substantial challenge, however, and it may help to explain why committees in only 34% of all parliaments were reported to use websites. And just over half of this already low percentage reported that committees use websites to seek comments and opinions from the public. As illustrated in Box 2.5, an example of the way committees can solicit opinions by the public comes from the system established by the Senate of Chile called the Virtual Senator.

> **The Virtual Senator**
>
> *Through this system, individuals can register their vote and can provide comments or proposed text to a bill. Registered users are notified by e-mail if the bill in question has been voted on in Senate sessions or in a committee meeting, and when a new bill is published on the Virtual Senator website for discussion and voting. The results are made public once the designated period for the discussion is over. They are then forwarded to the relevant Senate entity responsible for consideration of the bill. Citizens take their participation through the Virtual Senator seriously; to date the system has registered over 16,000 users, most of whom are active participants. The Senate is now preparing a new version of the software to be launched in 2010 which will take into account the results of a poll taken last year. The outcome showed that registered users would like to have the chance to debate among themselves, as well as to have statistics that relate to their contributions.*

(Source: Presentation of Mr. Patricio Alvarez Cabezas, Director of IT of the Senate of Chile, at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009)

Most parliaments report that one of their top objectives is to explain the workings of the parliament itself. Consistent with this is the finding that uni-directional communication technologies will be dominant in the near term. If, as many parliaments suggest in reporting on their plans, interactive technologies become more prevalent over the long term, it will be interesting to observe how they will be used by the institution, and if they will be used in equal measure by committees and members.

Given these comparative differences among members, committees, and the parliament, the finding of most concern is that the challenge in using ICT for communication cited by the most parliaments is the lack of familiarity of members with the technology. Parliaments and many committees often have resources to help them overcome this barrier. Members in many parliaments, however, will need additional help beyond their own means to deal with this problem.

Finally, an opportunity for members, committees, and the parliament alike is the projected growth in the use of mobile phones. This technology has the potential for informing and engaging citizens in innovative ways, and it is relatively inexpensive, easy to use, and rapidly becoming ubiquitous.

SUMMARY

Communication technologies have undergone a number of significant advances in the last two years, and their impact - both actual and potential - on the interaction between parliaments and citizen is considerable. So too are the challenges inherent in these new methods as legislatures, committees, and members try to utilize them in the most constructive ways. The ease with which these technologies can be used to generate messages and comments can sometimes overwhelm the resources that parliaments have for dealing with them. It can also be difficult to determine how representative such views from the public are and how informed they may be. This has led in the past to a certain caution in their adoption by members, committees, and parliaments.

The findings from the 2007 survey concluded that while there had been some progress in using ICT to disseminate information to the public, there were few truly interactive parliamentary websites. There were some experiments with blogs and other interactive technologies underway, and there were efforts in a few countries to develop online discussions and to receive citizen comments. The findings from the 2009 survey, however, suggest this situation may be changing and that a greater number of parliaments, committees and members are trying to use these technologies more effectively to engage with citizens.

In 2009, 78% of parliaments reported that most or some members use e-mail to communicate with citizens, an increase over the findings from 2007. 88% reported that most or some of the members who use e-mail reply in some manner to these messages, suggesting that the responsiveness of members to e-mail has also increased in the last two years. Nevertheless, only 21% of parliaments are using an automated system to support handling and answering incoming e-mail; 27% said they were planning or considering such a system; but 52% said no and that were not planning or considering it.

Slightly more than half of the parliaments responding to the survey reported that members use websites. The reason listed most often was to communicate the member's personal views. However, three quarters also said that members sought comments and opinions from the public, a positive finding that can affect citizens' perceptions of the accessibility of their representatives.

More parliaments than in 2007 reported that committees use e-mail, although their percentage (55%) continues to be smaller than the percentage for members (78%). A large number of legislatures stated that committees do respond to these messages. However, only a third of parliaments reported that committees use websites, and 91% stated that the purpose was to communicate information about the work of the committee. Just over half (51%) said that it was to seek comments and opinions from the public.

Besides e-mail and websites, parliaments use, or are planning or considering using, a variety of other methods to communicate with the public, but no single method is currently in use by half or more of all parliaments. The method implemented by the largest number of parliaments (43%) is webcasting of plenary sessions. The next most popular methods utilize audio or video technology. Of the ten methods in use by the fewest parliaments (between 10% to 16%), seven are interactive and include some of the newest technologies, such as Twitter and YouTube. Based on what parliaments are currently using and what they report that they are planning or considering using, it is likely that audio- and video-based, one-way technologies will be predominant for the next few years. However, of the technologies that have the largest projected growth, the top

five are all interactive. Because these technologies are starting with the smallest installed base among parliaments, they will come online over a longer period of time. Very few parliaments have conducted assessments of these new methods – clearly an opportunity for sharing experiences and perhaps collaboration. Also, given the growth of mobile phones, future surveys will need to address how methods of communication are being adapted to this increasingly prevalent technology.

Parliaments are confronted with a number of significant challenges in implementing new communication technologies. First is the fact that in many legislatures (37%) members are not familiar with the technology. Citizens are also challenged by the technology, both in terms of familiarity (21%) and access (20%). But for the public, the problem noted by the largest number of parliaments (32%) is their grasp of the legislative process. This is an obvious challenge, but also an opportunity for parliaments, committees, and members in their collective efforts to make the legislature more transparent by making it more understandable.

Parliaments also want to engage with young people. Over 70% reported that they have initiatives underway or are planning/considering them. Most use web technology for this purpose, combined in many cases with some form of new interactive technology, such as games, blogs, and social media. In fact these technologies are used by more parliaments to communicate with young generations than they are to communicate with the general public.

The most positive finding is that among parliaments that have implemented ICT-based methods for communication, 85% reported increased usage by citizens. This suggests that there are good reasons for parliaments to be optimistic about the potential of ICT to improve communication and to engage all citizens in the public life of their nation.