The terms bureaucracy and democracy are usually thought of, both in the academic and the popular literature, as antithetical approaches to providing governance for a society (see Etzioni-Halevy, 1983). On the one hand public bureaucracies are typically conceptualized as necessary for the effective administration of public programs, but as being legalistic and largely indifferent to the wishes and demands of individual citizens. Bureaucracies also tend to be associated with hierarchical and even authoritarian forms of governing, even though at least part of the logic for institutionalizing the bureaucratic form of governing was to ensure equal treatment of citizens, and to provide clients with records and justifications for the decisions being made about them within the public sector.

On the other hand, democratic governance institutions are assumed to be responsive to the wishes of the public, and to be attempting to map those preferences of the public into positive outcomes for their citizens. Richard Rose (1974) and others have pointed out that the linkage between voting and policy choices in conventional representative democracy is not as clear as most democrats might like to believe. Further, the public may vote for inconsistent goals, or have unrealistic expectations that will require leaders—elected and bureaucratic—to make policy decisions on their own (Caplan, 2007). Still, for some good reasons, democratic governance is assumed to be able to adjust more effectively to the needs and wants of the public than most other forms of governing.

The relationship between bureaucracy and democracy is both paradoxical and complementary. The linkage between those two elements of governing is paradoxical primarily because an effective democracy may require an effective and well-functioning bureaucracy. Indeed, the emphasis on efficiency and the use of the market in public service delivery during the past several decades has demonstrated the extent to which the values of formalized bureaucracy may be important for a democracy to function well. The stereotype of rigidity in the negative descriptions of bureaucracy may, in fact, be the result of a well-functioning bureaucracy emphasizing equality, and attempting to ensure that all members of society receive the same treatment according to law, even if that style of delivery appears to be inefficient. Likewise, the formalization of public bureaucracies was adopted at least in part to provide citizens the capacity to keep track of their case as it moved through the labyrinth, and to be able to discover the reasons for a decision once made. In short, bureaucracy was put into place to minimize the arbitrary and capricious actions in which governments might otherwise be tempted to engage.

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1 These views are, of course, stereotypes and do not reflect the real nature of many or even most public bureaucracies (see Goodsell, 2004; Du Gay, 2000).
and in which markets may find it very appropriate to engage in order to maximize efficiency.

These two aspects of governing may be appear to be antithetical but they are both necessary for providing effective and responsive governing, and the two provide complementary benefits for society. The responsiveness of democratic governing must be balanced with the predictability and impartiality assumed to reside within bureaucratic institutions. Likewise, the democratic process\(^2\) is important to confer legitimacy on the governing process, although in some instances political systems--notably the European Union (Scharpf, 2007)-- are able to legitimize their existence through its ability to govern effectively, and to produce the outputs desired by the public. The complementary nature of democratic and bureaucratic forms of governance might be extended, but the basic point is that in contemporary political systems they are both essential for good governance.

Although they are complementary, the relationship between democracy as usually conceptualized and the public bureaucracy has been changing, and in particular the nature of democracy itself has been changing. This paper will present a general argument that public administration is becoming an increasingly important locus for democratic participation in the contemporary public sector. This argument will comprise four elements. The first is that the quality and efficacy of representative democracy in most European and North American political systems are increasingly questioned, and are increasingly weak. Participation in elections, membership in political parties, as well as many other conventional forms of democratic participation, continue to decline in almost all countries, indicating that the public may feel that these structures and processes are not able to meet their collective needs.

In addition, the delivery of public services has been becoming increasingly complex, and traditional accountability regimens that depended upon parliamentary institutions are incapable of monitoring those service delivery complexes effectively. These weaknesses in accountability are evident for both the marketized delivery of public services and for “governance” arrangements that involve civil society actors through networks and other participatory structures (see Peters, 2008). Likewise, the increased use of autonomous and quasi-autonomous organizations to deliver public services has also weakened conventional accountability. Citizens may also encounter some confusion when confronting contemporary service delivery but being closer to those services may invest more in monitoring.

As well as become more disaggregated the public sector has also developed a set of instruments that can be used to substitute for some aspects of conventional accountability. There has been, for example, an increased monitoring of the performance of individual facilities–schools, hospitals, etc.–and with that increased public mobilization around the performance of those facilities. More generally, performance management has enabled the public to assess the performance of the public sector and to place pressures on the poorly performing elements of the

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\(^2\)Of course, in non-democratic political systems that legitimacy must be conferred by some other political process such as charisma or the control of hegemonic political party/ caste.
public sector. The use of governance networks also provides mechanisms for public involvement with government, and especially the public bureaucracy.

Therefore, democracy have shifted significantly toward the output side of the public sector, and that change in turn implies that accountability has become an even more central instrument for democracy. The bureaucracy has become an important locus for public involvement and for democracy. Further, the nature of democracy itself may be shifting away from concern with making political inputs into decision-making toward more direct control over outputs. This form of democracy is significantly different from that which attempts to provide the indirect controls in more conventional models of democracy but perhaps is a more effective means of controlling public policy.

The Decline of Representative Democracy

The conventional working model of democracy has assumed that voters would control policy choices through voting for candidates who would in turn follow through by selecting policies that their voters preferred. The bureaucracy would then be expected to directions coming from those elected officials and to administer the law to the best of their ability. Thus, an important elements of the conventional model of democracy was that the elected politicians are responsible for making policy choice and the administrators are responsible for putting them into effect. This familiar Wilsonian dichotomy has been most clearly articulated in the Anglo-American democracies but some of the same logic is evident in all administrative systems except those that are directly fused with political parties.

The central actor in this democratic drama is the average citizen who is assumed to be interested in politics, or at least sufficiently interested to vote. The hero of this drama for many analysts would be the citizen who not only votes but also is sufficiently involved in politics to pay attention to media and other information and who would then make informed choices of political parties and candidates. Even if heroic characters of this sort are not encountered all that often then institutionalized political parties provide cues for the average voter. If nothing else their past behavior can be a good guide to their behavior in the future so that citizens can reduce their costs of being engaged in politics.

The problem for contemporary democracy is that there appear to be fewer and fewer citizens who are actively engaged in political life (Wattenberg and Dalton, 2002). With some notable exceptions, such as the French Presidential election of 2007 and the 2008 primary season in the United States, electoral participation has been declining in most democratic political systems. This drop in participation has been true even in political systems such as the Nordic countries

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3One indication of the changing nature of this relationship is the large number of articles found in major public administration journals that are attempting to conceptualize the nature of contemporary democracy in the complex of changing patterns of service delivery (see Fung, 2006).
that have long histories of active voting and other forms of political participation. I will not speculate at any length on the reasons for the declining levels of participation, but what is clear is that there are a number of “disaffected democrats” in the industrialized democracies (Pharr and Putnam, 200x).

The decline in citizen involvement in mass politics is evident in the declining levels of voting, and it is also apparent in the declining level of involvement in established political parties. In the first place, membership in parties has been declining. In most surveys citizens show a declining interest in political parties and often do not consider them relevant for effective governance, or relevant for the everyday lives of those citizens. Further, many traditional political parties have lost ground to “flash parties” that may reflect the appeal of an individual politician, e.g. Pym Fonteyn in the Netherlands or Naser Khader of Ny Alliance in Denmark, or may reflect the importance of a single issue such as immigration.

The decline in party membership and the increasingly floating nature of parties in many democracies is important for understanding the input side of contemporary politics. For our purposes, however, this change is more important because it reduces one of the important channels of accountability in democratic politics. Parties and party leaders that come and go will tend to be less effective, everything else being equal in enforcing accountability over public bureaucracies than will more established parties that have an electoral incentive. The single issue parties may be interested in accountability in that single policy area, but generally not in broader policy issues.

In short, somewhat paradoxically, in an era in which participation, broadly defined, has become an ever more important value for the public the level of participation in many aspects of political life has been declining. The institutions and opportunities that had motivated the bulk of political participation for decades appear to have become less relevant, with some citizens simply dropping out of political life. However, as we will be discussing below, alternative forms of participation are being developed and expanded so that democratic life can be rejuvenated, albeit in a very different form. I am less interested here in ideas such as direct democracy or referenda but rather more in the means through which citizens can participate with respect to programs that affect them directly.

**The Complexity of Service Delivery**

In the traditional model of government and service delivery there is a more or less linear relationship between a public organization and a service. As Walsh and Stewart (1994) pointed out one of the characteristics of traditional public management was that the State was self-sufficient and would deliver its own services. Except in those countries, such as Sweden, that

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4To some extent the “post-material” politics of Inglehart have been achieved and participation in an important value, in the abstract. In practice, however, many members of the public do not appear interested in the participation opportunities conventionally available in the public sector.
early adopted the agency model for service delivery most of the action of providing public service was housed in ministries directly linked with political authority. This linear relationships between voters, ministers, their civil servants and the service delivered made enforcing accountability over programs relatively easy (Day and Klein, 1987).

Although the traditional service delivery model might be seen to be capable of enforcing accountability rather well, it was also a hierarchical process, and appeared to exclude the public from any effective involvement. The public was involved at the level of selecting (albeit indirectly) the minister through the electoral process, as above, but even the clients would be excluded from any direct involvement in designing the services.\(^5\) This model of governing assumed that the public had little of importance to say about the policies being delivered to them, and that their involvement actually might undermine both the technical quality and the legality of the services being rendered.

The ministerial model of service delivery has now been transformed drastically. One of the central ideas motivating the (in)famous New Public Management is that government organizations should “steer and not row”, meaning that the public sector was perceived to be better at making policy decisions than at implementing decisions. The familiar arguments about the weaknesses and inefficiencies of bureaucracy (Osborne and Gaebler, 19xx) have been taken to justify the use of instruments such as contracting, partnerships and voluntary agreements to deliver public services. Further, even if the service delivery function were retained in the public sector the prevailing wisdom was that it should be delegated to autonomous or quasi-autonomous organizations usually referred to as agencies (see Pollitt and Talbot, 2004), thereby enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the services.\(^6\)

The move away from the direct ministerial provision of services has weakened the traditional mechanisms of accountability, and forced the creation of alternative formats for holding public organizations accountable (see Considine, 200x). In general, the shift has been away from hierarchical forms of accountability toward competitive, and mutualistic forms for accountability (Hood et al., 2004). These less conventional forms of accountability require the involvement of the clients of programs, as well as the general public.\(^7\) Those citizens would need become involved in identifying and evaluating the outputs of public programs, as well as in mobilizing to complain about inadequate performance.

\(^5\) Indeed the clients might be very explicitly excluded in the case of many social policies that might have some control as well as beneficial functions. Of course, for policies such as taxation

\(^6\) One of the assumptions of the use of agencies with single functions is that monitoring their performance and their use of funds is easier than with large multi-service ministries.

\(^7\) The hierarchical forms of accountability have been dominant, but the alternatives are hardly completely new. Indeed, some of the oldest forms of accountability have depended upon mutualism, or two or more actors or institutions watching each other.
As well as a decline in the direct connections of services to ministries and the problems of political accountability associated with that change, the movement toward alternative forms of service delivery and the complexity of that provision has tended to create confusion among the population. For many nominally public services it is difficult to determine who really is responsible, and citizens may not have a clear conception of what government does any more. Again somewhat paradoxically the attempt to create more efficient services may have in the process weakened the public’s idea of what those services are and actually reduced the perception of an effective and benevolent public sector.  

In addition to the general loss of clarity for citizens, the various means that the public sector and its partners have devised for delivering public services present a variety of accountability challenges, as well as challenges for democracy considered more broadly. Although a common reaction to the perceived need for change, marketized delivery of services may be the most difficult format for which to enforce public accountability. The dominant logic in moving services into contractual relationships, or other market formats, is in fact to reduce control from political forces and from the public (other than in their consumer role), and to permit other types of criteria govern the organization and delivery of the service. Contracts for public services are notoriously difficult to write in a way that can ensure the type of performance envisioned by the public organization writing the contract, and the associated lack of specificity makes attempting to control them all the more difficult.

On the other hand, however, the use of “agencies” and other devolved organizations within the public sector may offer several avenues for accountability. For example, although the agency may be to some extent hived-off from the ministry and political control, that control can not be eliminated entirely, and some levers for control tend to be retained, whether personnel, legal authorization, or usually the budget (Verhoest, et al., 2004). Further, many agencies have at least a second dimension of accountability, often more closely related to the public than the traditional vertical form through parliament or through legal structures such as a Conseil d’Etat. Boards composed of experts, officials and the affected interests formed an alternative line of accountability for agencies in the original Swedish model, and in other cases the boards may even be elected, whether at large or from among clients.

In addition to the somewhat passive idea that the development of agencies and other devolved formats for service delivery create new opportunities for accountability, they may also create a more pressing need for public participation. That is, if these organizations are hived off from ministerial lines of control then if the public is to have much influence over them they may have to find avenues for more direct involvement. This involvement will not, of course, be done by the average citizen acting autonomously but rather will be done by organized groups, whether in network structures or through a more pluralistic manner requiring some competition for access (McFarland, 2007).

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8For this reason the notion of *services publiques* in the French model has tended to create a clearer picture of responsibility and to prevent some of the excesses associated with Anglo-Saxon reforms.
Another important aspect of contemporary patterns of service delivery is that even if they are complex they do tend to become institutionalized. Indeed, often because they are complex they tend to be institutionalized if only by default and because the transaction costs of negotiating new relationships between public and private sector actors is high. Institutionalized patterns such as partnerships (see Pierre and Peters, 2008) are the products of often extended bargaining among the actors and involve developing “logics of appropriateness” within the structure that provide means of guiding behavior. While that institutionalized logic may enable the members to function more effectively, it may also exclude non-members from any real involvement.

Creating Democratic Politics

Although they are readily important for delivering public services, public bureaucracies have a second, often unrecognized, role in democratic governance. These organizations function as the principal interface between State and society, so that citizens are more likely to come into contact with a bureaucrat of some sort than they are to come in contact with their democratically elected officials. These contacts may be important for determining how well the services are delivered, but they also play a major role in defining how the public considers government and the legitimacy of the public sector. Most citizens rarely meet their elected representatives but they almost daily will encounter some member of the public bureaucracy, and those encounters can help to legitimate, or delegitimate, the state to the public (see Katz, 1975; Yackee and Lowery, 2005). There is increasing evidence that these relationships are important securing public trust in the public sector (Christensen and Laegreid, 2005).9

In addition to the downward legitimation function performed by the public bureaucracy those organizations also can be the means of processing inputs coming from the public, notably their clients. Street level bureaucrats are in daily contact with their clients and often attempt to feed the information they collect from those interactions into the political process (Smith, 2004). That representational role for public servants can be seen as an inappropriate form of politics by many citizens but it is an alternative route for influence which segments of a society who might not otherwise be represented. Street level bureaucrats in social service agencies, and the police in different ways, have much greater contact with “the least, the last, and the lost” in society than do conventional political institutions and hence may be able to channel rather different types of information into the policy-making system.

Although market devices and some of the other products of the enthusiasm for New Public Management may have been able to enhance the efficiency of public services, other aspects of the transformation of the public sector have been able to create alternative mechanisms for democracy. To some extent this shift in the locus of democracy has involved the creation of

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9The good news is that most evidence shows that citizens tend to regard these contacts positively, although unfortunately at the same time they may not generalize from those positive contacts to a generally positive view of the public sector.
opportunities for participation, while in other cases that participation has virtually been mandated by the public sector. In both types of changes, however, the conception of democracy shifts away from representative, electoral versions of that value toward more indirect and particularistic versions.

The nature of changes in accountability in themselves have had the effect of shifting forms of democracy. For example, the increased emphasis on measuring performance and “naming and shaming” organizations that have not been performing well has embedded within it a strong assumption about participation. That assumption is that when an organization providing public services does not perform well, whether that organization itself is public or not, then the clients of that organization will mobilize and place pressure on the organization to perform better. For example, when schools do not perform well the assumption is that parents will become active in attempting to improve the school.\(^\text{10}\)

As well as providing rather stark stimuli for citizens to become mobilized, changes in accountability regimens, and in norms of participation, have created other incentives for democratic involvement. Simply by de-emphasizing the legalistic and hierarchical elements of governing changes in the public sector have tended to create opportunities for political involvement around the individual organizations. Those opportunities are driven in part by the devolved structures themselves. The devolved organizations and “implementation structures” (Hjern and Porter, 1980) need the political support from groups and citizens given that they are not tied directly to conventional forms of political support.\(^\text{11}\) In some cases the rights of clients, other affected citizens, and perhaps the public as a whole may be mandated but even when it is not the organizations may want to foster such involvement. While we can extol all these opportunities for democracy, the type of democracy that has been created may be rather suspect. The mobilization assumption that is embedded in the competitive idea of accountability depends upon the political competence of the clients involved, and any optimism that this may be a general phenomenon often is misplaced. For example, lower quality public services are often found in the neighborhoods that are less affluent and also less capable of being effective politically (Friedrichs, Galster and Musterd, 2005). Thus, depending upon political mobilization may simply perpetuate inequalities rather than create any viable means of reducing those inequalities. Representative democracy has been criticized as perpetuating the power of the more affluent because of the importance of money in politics, but the consequences of changing the style of democracy may not necessarily produce any real

\(^{10}\)No Child Left Behind in the United States, on the other hand, did not have the mobilizational assumptions as much as individualistic assumptions that parents would exercise the option of moving their children to better performing schools.

\(^{11}\)The devolved organizations are in much the same position as independent regulatory organizations in the classic models of capture in the United States and elsewhere (see James, 2000). That is, the organizations are divorced from political linkages to the ministries or departments and must develop their requisite support by serving, perhaps too well, their constituents.
change in the distribution of power and influence. The only significant difference may be that the public servants who are involved with providing services in the less affluent areas, or to less powerful citizens, may themselves have internalized some of the norms of equity (Smith, 2004).

In addition to some of the difficulties encountered with political mobilization of many segments of the population, the mechanisms of “New Governance” may privilege certain types of actors. This privilege is perhaps most apparent for an instrument such as public-private partnerships that involves a private actor directly in the delivery of the service. While the public sector is, of course, able to leverage resources through such arrangements it also loses some of its autonomy. The suspect nature of democracy in such settings is all the more apparent because of changes in the prevailing political cultures of many governments, having shifted rather dramatically to “economistic” (see Painter, 2003) and corporate values rather than corporate values as a result of the spread of NPM ideas.

**Output Democracy**

The above changes appear to sum up to a shift from democracy that is focused on inputs to democracy that is focused on outputs. This is perhaps inevitable given that a good deal of the reform of the public sector under New Public Management has been concerned with managing the output of programs. Performance management in particular has emphasized the need to measure what the public sector does. Part of that measurement is the measurement of citizen satisfaction with the services provided, a form of measurement that invites public participation and can serve as one form of democratic input, albeit perhaps a rather passive one.

The assumption of conventional democratic formats was that input democracy would be able to control the outputs of the public sector (see Goodin, 2004), and provide the types of programs that the public wanted from their government. That control would either be primarily *ex ante*, even given the numerous barriers that may prevent that from of democracy working effectively. Further, if the input side of the democratic equation failed to produce the desired benefits for citizens, accountability systems relying on the representative institutions could intervene to rectify the problems.

Although there is the natural tendency to think that everything change we observe in governing reflects something new, it is clear that many aspects of output oriented democracy have been in existence for decades if not centuries. Patterns of corporatism and especially the corporate pluralism of the Scandinavian countries (Rokkan, 1967) also provided opportunities for political participation on the output side of the public sector that complemented participation through voting and political parties.

It follows from the line of argument above that the nature of democracy has been changing. The representative institutions remain in place but many of their functions have been weakened, just as the connection of many citizens to the institutions have been weakened. This shift implies that democracy will become more concerned with accountability and with *ex post* judgements on the performance of the public sector than on attempting to control the initial policy choices.
Further, the accountability regimen that is created will tend to be highly particularistic and segmented, rather than the more comprehensive assessment of performance that might be associated with retrospective voting for sitting governments (Reiter and Stam, 2002).

The consequences of the shifting nature of democracy are manifold. The most obvious is that it institutionalizes some of the reduced guidance and control capacity for the input institutions of the public sector. The structural changes that create agencies and empower networks and partnerships (to name but a few of the changes in service delivery) do “decenter” the policy process substantially. The attachment of democratic elements and direct linkages with the public tend to give those structural changes greater meaning and make their decisions more resistant to attempts at control from other institutions. The representative democratic institutions can claim a legitimate right to intervene, but the service delivery structures can also claim a legitimate right to do what they and their clients want.

The emphasis on output democracy may further institutionalize the narrowing of interest of the public in political life. The focus on a limited number of often extremely local public institutions may simply reinforce the “narrow-casting” images of political interest and information found in contemporary society. That is, democracy may exist around programs or even around particular service delivery facilities, but any sense of broader social involvement in the decisions may be reduced. If governing is about setting collective goals and attempting to resolve the differences among those goals then this shift in the form of democracy may limit the capacity to govern in the more extensive manner.

In addition, these changes in service delivery do alter rather fundamentally dominant notions of accountability, they may reflect a more positive shift toward thinking about those central political institutions more as “meta-governors” rather than as institutions involved with more mundane compliance issues (see O’Toole, 2007; Peters, 2008). Representative political institutions may not be well-suited to managing compliance over every potentially minute aspect of service delivery. That having been said, however, those compliance and accountability issues often were the source of much of the power of political institutions, especially legislatures.12 The meta-governance role may suit prime ministers and central agencies (Wanna, Jensen and De Vries, 2004) but they may not suit legislatures so well.

Yet another consequence for the shift to output democracy may be the increasing segmentation of governing and administration. The public sector is almost inherently composed of specialized organizations, creating the familiar coordination problems in governing (Peters, 1998; ). The formal differentiation among public organizations may be exacerbated by the democratic support

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12 Much of the political effectiveness of legislatures comes from their ability to provide “constituency service”, and to assist their constituents with the problems generated by the bureaucracy (Chubb, 1963). If the accountability regimen changes and that role is played more directly then some of the already weakened political support for legislatures as institutions will be eliminated.
structure that is being created through the focus on participation from the bottom up. The representative democratic institutions often were capable of providing some coordination through cabinets and central agencies, but as these have become weaker then coordination also is likely to become weaker.

Finally, these shifts in the nature of democracy, and in the linkages between citizens and their service delivery structures, may exacerbate existing social inequalities. Effective control over service delivery in this model of “output democracy” depends upon the capacity of clients to provide that control, but that capacity is far from evenly distributed throughout society. The poor and less educated segments of society may not be able to place pressures on schools or hospitals or social service organizations as effectively as can middle-class clients of these programs. In the past, as already noted, street level bureaucrats ( ) were able to perform a function as advocates and intermediaries but that capacity may be diminished significantly by the shift toward service delivery through contract personnel.

I have been discussing these changes in democracy primarily with reference to social policies and other local services to the public. Some of the same logic, however, might apply to the involvement of the public sector in economic services, especially local economic development. To the extent that these activities become hived off into agencies or partnerships, some of the capacity for imposing broader democratic priorities on these services becomes limited (Pierre and Peters, 2008). Most partnerships will tend to involve private sector actors with actors within government who may have adopted some of the same business ethos as their partners in the private sector. This agreement of values, in turn, makes effective control and accountability less probable although it may facilitate the internal functioning of the partnership.

**Conclusion**

Conventional format for democracy and public participation appear to be threatened increasingly in most of the industrial democracies. For a variety of reasons citizens have been less likely to turnout in elections and membership in established political parties has been dropping even more rapidly than has turnout. In an era in which higher levels of education and increased availability of political information might have thought to produce more active public involvement in the political process exactly the opposite has been true and most forms of public participation have been dropping, sometimes precipitously.

The changes in public participation may be associated, directly or indirectly, with the numerous evolving forms of service delivery in the public sector. As the public sector has moved away from the direct delivery of services through ministerial organizations, then democracy has also had to move and to adapt to the changes. The argument presented here is that there has been a shift from input-oriented forms of democracy toward a form of democracy more tied to the outputs of policymaking. Further, this shift is more than merely a minor change in orientation. In addition to altering the types of actors involved in democracy, the change also represents some diminution of the capacity of democratic structures to steer in a more comprehensive and integrated manner.
The interpretation of the arguments here is that there is good news and bad news for democracy from the shifts to output democracy that appear to be occurring. On the one hand democratic practices have adapted and citizens have found ways of having an impact on the programs of government that concern them, even if those programs are not being delivered directly. On the other hand, the style of democracy that has emerged is certainly not what would be advocated in the civics books. The involvement of citizens is becoming more limited to particular programs and not be civic in any more comprehensive sense. These changes in democracy may lead to the public “voting alone” rather than participating in a more inclusive civil society.

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