E-Government and Transparency in Georgia:
An Analysis of County Websites as Citizen Portals to Democracy

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

in the Department of Political Science
of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences

May 2025

Submitted by Elizabeth Kay Yaccarino

MPA, Valdosta State University, 2008
BA, Belmont University, 1985

This dissertation, "E-Government and Transparency in Georgia: An Analysis of County Websites as Citizen Portals to Democracy," by Elizabeth Kay Yaccarino, is approved by:

Dissertation Committee Chair

DocuSigned by:
Gerald Merwin
7A9CED3BF34D434...
Gerald Merwin, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Administration

Committee Members

DocuSigned by:
Robert Kellner
E6077B68A6EF4C5...
Robert Kellner, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Administration

Signed by:
F3A69FE8714E4AE...
John Bennett, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Administration

Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research

Becky K. da Cruz
Becky K. da Cruz, Ph.D., J.D.
Associate Provost for Graduate Studies & Research and Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date

12-2-2024

FAIR USE

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this (dissertation) for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by the library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature: _____Elizabeth Kay Yaccarino_____

I refuse permission for this (dissertation) to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature: _____

ABSTRACT

The Founding Fathers of the United States, concerned with protecting individual rights and responsibilities, provided checks and balances to ensure wise governance. As the nation matured, laws reinforcing the rights of citizens were passed to mandate that government functions be conducted in an open manner. As technology evolved, the legislative mandates did as well and today, the internet is considered an integral part of government, both utilitarian in its functions but also with respect to openness and transparency. The internet is also an integral part of direct government-to-citizen contact and interaction. Given that counties function as government entities, imbued with powers mandated by the state that exceed those granted to cities, and serving as the closest level of governance to all citizens in Georgia, 36 county websites are studied: three in each of the 12 Regional Commission districts, based on population size: small, median, and large. Each website is studied and graded according to a unique checklist developed specifically for this purpose, utilizing established guidelines for open governance and transparency. The results vary between the counties and regions, with factors such as size, location, education and affluence potentially affecting the outcomes. As no other transparency project of this scale has yet been conducted at the county-level in Georgia, this dissertation will fill gaps in knowledge for local, state and national governments and organizations seeking this knowledge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Gerald Merwin for not giving up on me and for his support throughout this long process. A sincere ‘Thank You’ goes to Dr. Robert Kellner and Dr. John Bennett for their years-long support, plus a posthumous appreciation to Dr. Nolan Argyle for beginning this journey with me. Despite adversities and life-changing events, this dissertation is now complete and I’m ready to move on to the next chapters of my life.

Dedication

To my late husband, Jimmy Yaccarino; my daughter, Emma Mize, and her husband, Stephen; my grandchildren, Lydia and Dean; and the rest of my support system of family and friends who saw me through until the end, I dedicate this work. I love you all and thank you!

Chapter I

Introduction

President Thomas Jefferson, one of our nation's most influential Founding Fathers, wrote these words in a letter to a friend 200 years ago:

> I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control [sic] with a wholsome [sic] discretion, the remedy is, not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power. (Jefferson, 1820)

The United States was founded on the principle that the ultimate power of government should always lie in the hands of the people with an informed public as the truest defense against corruption. "The consent of the governed" is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. The founding fathers were influenced by philosopher John Locke's writings as the original author of the phrase "consent of the people" in his Second Treatise of Government, which also included "The purpose of government is the good of mankind." Locke rhetorically questioned if it is better for mankind to be subjected to the endless will of tyranny or to live under a system that holds rulers liable when "they grow exorbitant in the use of their power" (Locke, 1690).

Centuries later, "consent of the people" remains one of America's most powerful

phrases. In 2009, Attorney General Edwin Meese III explained, “Consent is the means by which equality is made politically operable and whereby arbitrary power is thwarted.” According to Meese, the foundation of consent is based on the ability of the governed to “deliberate, debate and compromise” to form a consensus about “what constitutes the common good” (Meese, 2009).

The formation of the foundation of American government was a natural evolution over centuries, beginning in the time of Greek philosopher Aristotle, who believed there were six forms of government, either organized for the common interest or the interest of the ruler, divided by the one, the few, or the many (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E.)

Valdosta State University professor Nolan Argyle built upon Aristotle’s ideas, introducing the forces of reason and desire as interactions with the individual and communal views of society to create four frameworks of organization under which the business of the public would be administered. The marketplace view of an individualistic society dominated by reason, championed by Locke, appears to adhere closest to the Founders’ original intent (Argyle, 1994). The result may or may not be the “perfect union” envisioned by the Preamble to the United States Constitution, but it is the government we enjoy today as Americans. In a 1947 speech before the House of Commons, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, “No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Langworth, 2022, para. 1).

The possibility of attaining an ideal government, however remote, ensures that the struggle to do so may provide the means to maintain the proper democratic balance. A

government is not a static entity but a reflection of a nation's society and culture. While an administration is affected by ever-changing values and morals, perhaps the greatest challenge is keeping pace with the numerous technological advancements. From the light bulb to a rocket capable of landing on the moon, technology is the driving force behind the creation of thousands of government agencies and laws. Without automobiles, there would be no need for an interstate system; without crime, there would be no need for a prison system; without inventions, no need for a patent office; without rockets, no need for a space agency; so on and so forth. In terms of impact, arguably no technology has had a greater one than the invention of computers and the World Wide Web, along with ensuing advancements, such as cell phones, satellites, and geographical positioning systems. The integration of the internet into all aspects of administration has evolved into new iterations of government, with the term "electronic," abbreviated as "E," now attached to numerous terms, including commerce, democracy, and government. Navigating the new normal has added both complexity and simplicity to the democratic process, making it simultaneously easier and more complicated.

The federal government embraced the internet, passing laws which led to the creation of the current inter-connectivity between citizens, computer technology, and government administration. Continuing the principle of the American citizen-centric form of government, federal laws, such as the E-Government Act of 2002, have ensured "a framework of using Internet-based information technology to enhance citizen access to Government information and services" (E-Government Act, 2002).

As computers first came to be used in federal organizations in the mid-20th century, the study of government, computers, and the internet began decades ago. However, the

field of E-government is ever evolving and there remains a need for further examination, particularly on its impact on the nation's founding principles of citizen involvement and open governance. A new study of E-democracy at its grass roots, specifically at the local government level, will add to the current literature and expand academic knowledge, in addition to creating a framework for additional study and potential action.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Any examination of government in the United States relating to openness and transparency should begin with the reasons why these terms are of such vital importance to Americans today. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, democracy means "rule by the people," and more specifically states that the term was "derived from the Greek demokratia," a combination of "demos," or people, and "kratos," to rule, in the 5th century B.C. E. (Dahl, 2020).

Aristotle explained the democratic concept in "Politics," stating, "The true forms of government, therefore, are those in which the one, or the few, or the many, govern with a view to the common interest." Aristotle further stated that "if liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost" (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E.).

Fast forward almost 2,000 years and the idea of a democratic nation found its way from Greece to America, 130 years before the country could even call itself a nation. The earliest of European settlers already knew the importance of order and good governance, and in 1641, developed the first legal code in New England, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, stating that "every inhabitant of the countrie [sic] shall have free libertie [sic] to search and veewe [sic] any Rooles [sic], Records, or Regesters [sic] of any Court or office" (Ward, 1641).

The nation's presidents and Founding Fathers deemed an educated and informed citizenry to be an essential goal of any government body. In a letter to President James Madison in 1787, President Thomas Jefferson stated that "peace is best preserved" by giving "information to the people," and by educating "the whole mass" on the benefits of peace and order. "They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty" (Jefferson, 1787).

President James Madison explained and justified the need for checks and balances to ensure the engagement of citizens in the creation of a good government in an essay in the Federalist Papers in 1788. "If men were angels, no government would be necessary," stating that in the absence of heavenly oversight, a government must control the governed - and itself - while depending on "the people" as its primary control (Madison, 1788a).

President Abraham Lincoln's assurance that "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from Earth" (Lincoln, 1863), further emphasized this pillar of American democratic ideals, which has been reinforced in subsequent presidential administrations.

The necessity for laws to protect that ideal became evident almost before the ink was dry on the nation's newly adopted Constitution in 1788. Political scandals, including accusations of corruption, were rife in America's first administration under President George Washington, who served from 1789 to 1797.

Despite waging war to rid the country of British rule, many early Americans remained pro-British as members of the Federalist party, while the Democrat-Republican party members were generally anti-monarchy and supporters of the French Revolution. The United States Constitution was ultimately a compromise after many intense

disagreements, but its interpretation eventually led to the factions separating into two - one side supporting a strong central government and the other side emphasizing states' rights.

With Democrat-Republican Thomas Jefferson serving as Secretary of State under Washington and Federalist Alexander Hamilton serving as Secretary of the Treasury, conflicts between the two and their differing ideologies came to a head over the creation of the Bank of the United States. Hamilton submitted a plan to Congress in 1790, using the charter of the Bank of England as a model. After much debate, the Bank was ultimately approved by Congress in 1791 (Hill, 2015).

Jefferson opposed Hamilton's financial system, both the manner of its passage and its content. Jefferson wrote years later that the system had two objects – "to exclude popular understanding and enquiry," and to serve "as a machine for the corruption of the legislature," which was accomplished by appealing to legislators' personal interests. "Even in this, the birth of our government, some members were found sordid enough to bend their duty to their interest, and to look after personal, rather than public good." He further noted that its passage was kept secret, "known within doors sooner than without" (Jefferson, 1818).

The year following the Bank's creation, Washington wrote to Hamilton, expressing a lengthy list of objections to the manner in which the bank's business had been conducted, including allowing legislators to "buy in" to the Bank. It will be the instrument for producing in future a King, Lords & Commons; or whatever else those who direct it may chuse [sic]. Withdrawn such a distance from the eye of their Constituents, and these so dispersed as to be inaccessible to public information, and particularly to that of the

conduct of their own Representatives, they will form the worst Government upon earth, if the means of their corruption be not prevented" (Washington, 1792).

Hamilton provided a lengthy rebuttal to Washington and stated that those who raised objections were simply intolerant and ignorant, and members of Congress should be allowed to invest despite being entrusted with its oversight. "Can it be culpable to invest property in an institution which has been established for the most important national purposes? Can that property be supposed to corrupt the holder?" (Hamilton, 1792).

While Jefferson praised Hamilton as an honorable man, "duly valuing virtue in private life, yet so bewitched and perverted by the British example, as to be under thoro' conviction that corruption was essential to the government of a nation" (Jefferson, 1818). The two parties fought over this and other issues throughout the first, and through subsequent, administrations, but Washington's tenure faced other challenges as well.

In 1795, Georgia Governor George Mathews signed the Yazoo Act to sell 35 million acres in present-day Mississippi and Alabama to four private companies for $500,000, with bribes to legislators, newspaper editors and prominent Georgians paid by United States Senator James Gunn. Following public protests when the sale became known, the land deal was nullified in 1796. The participants eventually left office, and the United States government paid Georgia $1.25 million for the land in 1802 (Lamplugh, 2017).

And in 1797, Senator William Blount of Tennessee, a signatory of the Constitution, became the first politician to be expelled from the United States Senate for conspiring to help the British seize land in Louisiana and Florida from Spain for personal profit. An impeachment trial was dismissed, and although his Senate career ended, Blount was able to continue his political career at home (Andrews, 2018).

Despite these and other political scandals of the day, it took many years before the nation's political leaders began to police their own. An early attempt to establish some protections came with the passage of the Crimes Act of 1790 by the First Congress. Under the act, anyone offering a bribe to a judge and any judge accepting one were subject to fines and imprisonment (Crimes Act, 1790), but other than similar laws at the state level, the federal government was so consumed for decades with outside agitations and threats to the growing country that it took many years before legal protections against internal political corruption were enacted and enforced. Congressional leaders looked outside of their own auspices to find culprits, leading to the earliest example of censorship against freedoms of speech and of the press.

During the nations' second administration, under President John Adams, the two political parties became embroiled once again when the threat of a war with France became imminent. The result was the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, restricting immigration and making it a crime for American citizens to criticize the government. "And be it farther enacted, That if any person shall write, print, utter or publish, or shall cause or procure to be written, printed, uttered or published… any false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States, … with intent to defame the said government, or either house of the said Congress, or the said President, or to bring them, … into contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them, … the hatred of the good people of the United States," they would be fined and imprisoned (Fifth Congress, 1798).

At least 26 individuals were prosecuted under the Act, including newspaper editors, political candidates, and a "New Jersey resident who drunkenly jeered President John

Adams." The trials led to public outrage, and the Act expired without renewal in 1801, effectively also ending Adams' presidential tenure (Ragsdale, 2005).

While the ensuing years were not without various scandals, conflicts, and partisan politics, it was not until decades later that issues in the aftermath of the Civil War, including the excesses of tycoons and numerous incidents of greed and corruption, brought greater attention to abuses of power. Mark Twain co-authored, "The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today," in 1873 to satirize the corruption of the day, coining the term "Gilded Age" for the last decades of the 1800s, implying that the period was glittering on the surface but corrupt underneath (Twain & Warner, 1873).

Although political machines existed throughout the country, Tammany Hall in New York City was arguably the most powerful and long lasting. Founded when the first American administration took office in 1789, it was lauded for its support of poor and immigrant communities, but its tactics in controlling elections and financial scandals during the Gilded Age made it famous. Tammany Hall was lampooned for years, with Harper's Weekly political cartoonist Thomas Nast credited with exposing the misdeeds.

One of his more famous cartoons, which lampooned William "Boss" Tweed and his cronies concerning the theft of public funds, depicts them all trying to escape blame by pointing to each other. Tweed was ultimately tried and sent to prison in 1873 for stealing from the city and the taxpayers (McNamara, 2025).

Figure 1

Cartoonist Thomas Nast lampoons Boss Tweed in 1871.

Source: (McNamara, 2025)

Despite borrowing liberally from Philosopher John Locke in writing the Declaration of Independence and using many of his exact words, including Locke's belief that "the purpose of government is the good of mankind" (Locke, 1690), the Founding Fathers hoped for the best but also predicted this future turn of events in America. President John Adams based an essay on the notion that "all men would be tyrants if they could" (Adams, 1763), and President James Madison stated, "there is a degree of depravity in mankind" (Madison, 1788a), a week before he stated that the development of America's three branches – the legislative, judicial, and executive – coupled with the power of the citizens, were considered sufficient safeguards and the "means of keeping each other in their proper places" (Madison, 1788b).

And so it came to pass that citizens, tired of egregious abuses and the lack of civil rights for women and minorities, used social activism to usher in a progressive era in American politics by the dawn of the 20th century. A number of events, including World War I, women's suffrage, strikes by workers, prohibition, and attacks on minorities across the country kept the social movements fueled, but political unrest came to a new juncture with the Teapot Dome Scandal in 1922. President Warren G. Harding escaped investigation but not the blame when he passed away suddenly in 1923, and the man at the center of the scandal, Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall, became the "first Cabinet-level officer in American history to go to jail for crimes committed while serving in office" for accepting bribes for oil leases on government land at Teapot Dome in Wyoming. Considered the most serious political scandal prior to Watergate in the 1970s (Roberts, 2014), the illicit transactions that took place helped to focus more attention on the interior workings of government and renewed focus on the importance of accountability and oversight. Although citizens' rights were considered enshrined in the Constitution, it took nearly 200 years before the veil of government secrecy was ostensibly lifted following years of questionable practices.

One of the primary figures to address political wrongdoing was Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis. A lawyer at the time of its writing, Brandeis penned "Other People's Money, and How the Bankers Use It" in 1914, a collection of essays in book form, two years before being appointed to the highest court in the land. In the book, Brandeis railed against "a dangerous combination of avarice, lack of accountability and poor oversight" in the wake of a Congressional investigation into the predatory practices of J.P. Morgan and other large banks (Urofsky, 2009). Brandeis' most significant

contribution came from one of the essays, stating, “Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants” (Brandeis, 1914). The nation’s “Sunshine Laws,” referring to open government mandates, were so-named as a nod to Brandeis, and his policies attracted a great deal of attention, including from President Woodrow Wilson. Their collaboration resulted in the Federal Reserve Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act and the Federal Trade Commission, much as later, a collaboration with President Franklin D. Roosevelt would result in several New Deal initiatives, including the Securities and Exchange Commission. A champion for honesty and openness (Urofsky, 2009), Brandeis helped usher in a new era of transparency and open government reforms.

By the mid-1950s, issues with the way the federal government was handling documents in the post-war, anti-communist era became a major political talking point. California Representative John Moss organized the “Government Information Subcommittee” in 1954 and appointed Wallace Parks as chief counsel. An attorney and consultant to several members of Congress, Parks was charged with researching the issue, and in 1957, he authored a paper, published several months after his death, in the George Washington Law Review, “The Open Government Principle: Applying the right to know under the Constitution.” Parks is credited with adding the phrase, “open government,” to the common vernacular, stating,

> From the standpoint of the principles of good government under accepted American political ideas, there can be little question but that open government and information availability should be the general rule from which exceptions should be made only where there are substantial rights, interests, and

> considerations requiring secrecy or confidentiality and these are held by competent authority to over-balance the general public interest in openness and availability. (Parks, 1957)

Parks' research provided the base for the future Freedom of Information Act, but it would take nearly a decade of controversy before it was signed into law.

President Lyndon B. Johnson reportedly loved the limelight, so when he signed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1966, his refusal to make the signing a public event, issuing a press release instead, only served to highlight his reluctance (Electronic Frontier Foundation, nd). The original copy of that press release, with all of Johnson's hand-written changes, is now open to public review. In the release, Johnson states that he has "always believed" that freedom of information should only be restricted by national security. Perhaps, but his alteration at the end of the release may have betrayed his true opinions. The original version stated, "I signed this measure with a deep sense of pride that the United States is an open society in which the decisions and policies – as well as the mistakes – of public officials are always subjected to the scrutiny and judgement [sic] of the people." In the final version, Johnson changed the last words following "open society" to "in which the people's right to know is cherished and guarded" (Johnson, 1966), deleting an endorsement of the scrutiny of public officials, going against the wisdom of Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, who wrote a series of letters under the pen name of "Silence Dogood," that if officials were honest, it should be publicly known so they could be commended, but if they were "knavish," they should be exposed. "Only the wicked Governours [sic] of Men dread what is said of them" (Franklin, 1722).

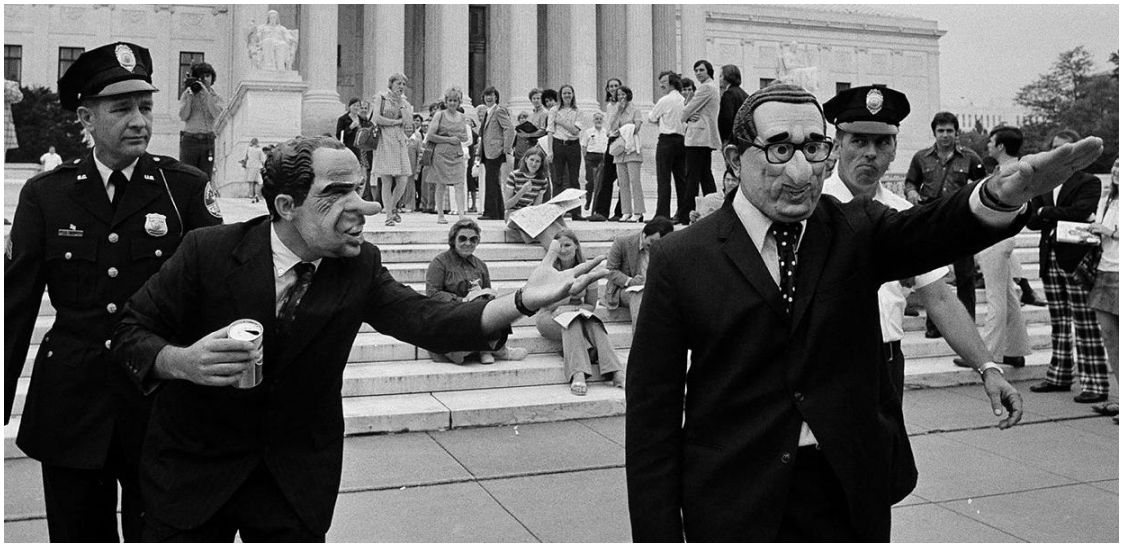
The law was a significant step, but subsequent events would call its enforceability

into question and continue to bring the issues of open government and transparency to the forefront of American consciousness.

An article in the Washington Post written 50 years to the day after the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive in 1968 states that the misinformation released by President Lyndon Johnson's administration led to the widening of "the already yawning 'credibility gap'" and set the groundwork for a decades-long erosion of public trust in government and public institutions (Zeitz, 2018).

Figure 2

Protesters wearing masks lampooning President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger demonstrate in front of the Supreme Court in 1974.



(Duricka/Associated Press, 1974)

Political events in the most recent presidential administrations have raised questions about transparency, but "skepticism about U.S. democracy is not a new phenomenon." The American National Election Study, a joint project of Stanford University, the University of Michigan, and the National Sciences Foundation, has polled citizens about their opinions on government every two years since 1948. Following the

Vietnam War, President Richard Nixon's administration, and the Watergate scandal, in 1974, 48 percent of those polled "thought crooks were running the government" (Anson, 2018), and public opinion led to an increasing scrutiny on political leaders.

Not learning from previous mistakes seems to be a common thread throughout history, including that citizens will revolt when they perceive their rights are being denied. The demand for openness and transparency continues to this day, and the credibility gap has continued to pervade national – and global – politics, with the United Nations (U.N.) emerging as one of the most vociferous and active proponents of the necessity for transparent governance. Defining open government and transparency as "the unfettered access by the public to timely and reliable information on decisions and performance in the public sector" (United Nations, 2015), the U.N. is leading the charge worldwide into increasing accountability in all governments, regardless of the political system.

In the United States, the concept of open government and transparency is considered an essential part of democracy by citizens, but studies show that public administrators are as, if not more, protective of their domain than politicians.

One study notes that the release of information is a voluntary choice made by governments. "Files do not open themselves. Increasing transparency requires that someone, somewhere, decides to hand over information" (Florini, 2002).

A 2013 article in the *PA Times* insists that transparency is not interchangeable with accountability as transparency is merely a method of opening records that does not necessarily correlate with a corresponding accountability. The authors state that government workers can game the system to avoid responsibility, and officials often rely on the fact that "very few citizens have the ability to analyze a local government budget"

(Gilman & Whitton, 2013).

Another article in a public administrator's publication, the *Public Administration Review*, states that transparency is "vastly oversold" as it does not take into account the lack of sophistication and education of the audience or the time involved in truly understanding public affairs. "The problem with this theory is that most people are busy making a living… and people do not have the training necessary to evaluate the relevant data" (Etzioni, 2014), implying that citizens are not educated enough to understand the intricacies of government.

In the American Bar Association's *Administrative Law Review*, a comparison is made between "transparency's obsessive concern with visibility" with 18th Century Philosopher Jeremy Bentham's concept of a panopticon (Fenster, 2010), a Victorian-era prison design which allows a watchman to observe prisoners without the prisoners knowing they are being watched, (Bentham, 1787). The Law Review article uses the metaphor in reverse, stating that transparency renders "the state a prisoner of the public's gaze" (Fenster, 2010).

A blunt assessment from a government official's standpoint comes from an article about a Washington think-tank training a group of Japanese officials on transparency in the wake of the passage of a new freedom of information law in their country and how best, or even if they should, implement it. According to the author, Ann Florini, one young official stated that if the government starts giving people information, they might want to do something with that information, "…and what if they use it the wrong way?" (Florini, 2004).

Florini also observed that making information public "often requires that agents act

against their own interests, disclosing information that can be used again them" (Florini, 2004), which is perhaps at the crux of the struggle between citizens and government officials. Only when public opinion turns on them do politicians appear to take action.

Amendments to the 1966 Freedom of Information Act were made in 1974 and 1976 under President Gerald Ford's administration, in response to Nixon's presidency and Watergate. "Displeasure with American democracy continued to rise (after Watergate), reaching an all-time high under President Bill Clinton" (Anson, 2018), coinciding with the next revision of the law.

Despite the ensuing revisions and improvements, a 2016 poll found that "59 percent of Americans thought the Obama administration had mostly failed at running a transparent administration" (Weldon, 2016).

Table 1

Summary of Freedom of Information Acts and Laws

Law	Year	President	Key Points
Freedom of Information Act	1966	Lyndon B. Johnson	Gives citizens the legal right to access records
Amendments to Freedom of Information Act	1974	Gerald Ford	Addressed issues with fees, time delays, and enforcement
Government in the Sunshine Act	1976	Gerald Ford	Provides for open meetings, minutes, proper notice
Electronic Freedom of Information Act	1996	Bill Clinton	Extends FOIA to include electronic records

E-Government Act	2002	George W. Bush	Moves FOIA under OMB; requires use of technology to promote access
The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act	2007	George W. Bush	Provides limits on lobbying, gifts, and promotes disclosure
FOIA Improvement Act	2016	Barack Obama	Established the presumption of openness to limit disclosure denials
Open, Public, Electronic, and Necessary Government Data Act (OPEN)	2019	Donald Trump	Mandates federal agencies to publish information as open data in standardized formats

Despite the many criticisms of President Donald Trump's presidency, the Open, Public, Electronic, and Necessary Government Data Act, or OPEN, passed under his administration in 2019, which strengthened requirements for the publication of open data by federal agencies (OPEN, 2019).

The continued public interest in open government and transparency has led to the creation of freedom of information, or "Sunshine Laws," in all 50 states, with varying results. Considering that the E-Freedom of Information Act of 1996 and the subsequent E-Government Act of 2002 require federal agencies to make records available electronically via their websites, it seems a reasonable expectation that other American governments would follow suit. Unfortunately, while state governments appear to have done so, an unknown number of local governments have not.

E-Government Explained: Putting the "E" in government and democracy

The dawn of the electronic information age brought both joy and consternation to the federal government. During World War II, the Electronic Numeric Integrator and Computer (ENIAC) was developed for the War Department's Ballistic Research

Laboratory, and was soon followed by the Universal Automatic Computer (UNIVAC) for use by the Census Bureau to crunch volumes of data in 1951 (United States Census Bureau, nd), reducing the time needed for compilation by months and in some cases, years.

In the early 1950s, the United States had only 100 computers, but by 1965, there were 22,300 in use in both government and industry (Rothman, 2015). A study of state governments in 1965 showed that virtually all computer technology was rented, with 245 computer rentals combined in the 50 states, nearly all from IBM. Three states reported they had no computers at that time – Arizona, Rhode Island and Wyoming – while California was using the most, with 30, followed by New York, with 24. At the time, Georgia reported 10 rentals in use (Mulvihill & Price, 1965).

By 1980, 15,800 computers were in use by the federal government, primarily in data processing and record keeping, and technology was being lauded for reducing both time and the personnel necessary to complete tasks (Staats, 1980).

Technological advancements brought the size and cost down to the consumer level, and personal computers were becoming ubiquitous at the beginning of the 21st century, bringing information and access into American homes and a corresponding surge in use by governments. The International City/County Management Association and Public Technology Inc. conducted E-government surveys of local governments in 2001 and again in 2011. Of the responding governments in the first survey, 83 percent had a website, with two thirds less than three years old, with 10 percent reporting plans to create one within the year (Holden et al, 2001). In the 2011 survey, 97 percent of responding governments had an official website, with the average year of creation in

2002. When asked, “Why does your local government provide e-government applications and services? Click all that apply,” 97 percent checked “citizen access to local government information,” followed by citizen access to appointed and elected officials, citizen participation, and to save money (Norris & Reddick, 2011).

As technology spread, so did the use of the term “electronic” as the new buzzword prefix in front of government, commerce, and democracy. The term “E-government” is considered to have evolved naturally to describe the new, historic phase (Scholl, 2017).

The United Nations became one of the first to embrace E-government and recognized the importance of studying it as a new field of public administration in a global context. In the early 2000s, E-government was defined as exchanging “information and services electronically with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government.” The discipline has been redefined and expanded, and today E-Government is defined as the application of information technology in government operations to achieve “public ends by digital means.” Through its implementation, governments are expected to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and to promote transparency and accountability to “restore the trust of citizens in their governments” (United Nations, 2020).

As with any new academic field of study, scholars have attempted to define the pinnacle of E-government by modeling the various stages. In 2002, J. Jae Moon conceived of “5 Stages of E-Government,” moving from information to two-way communication to transactions to integration to political participation, (Moon, 2002). Many other theorists subsequently developed models, and by 2014, the “E-Government Maturity Models: A Comparative Study,” examined 25 different models, concluding that there were numerous similarities between them (Al-Qutaish et al, 2014).

Turning again to the United Nations, the basic 4-stage model developed for its bi-annual E-Government Survey was used for years. A pyramidal structure, the base begins with Emerging Information Services, with government websites offering information and links to departments, followed by Enhanced Information Services, which includes simple two-way communication between citizens and government, including downloadable forms. The third level of the pyramid, Transactional Services, is a step higher in the implementation of two-way communication, with additional financial transactions available, and at the top of the pyramid, Connected Services, which includes active citizen participation, the solicitation of citizen input, and involvement of citizens in decision-making, (United Nations, 2014). As systems improved globally, this model was set aside for a circular one, the more formal, measurable index called the EGDI, or E-Government Development Index, a weighted average of three normalized scores on three indicators - quality of online services, infrastructure, and inherent human capital. After the Z-score standardization, the average sum is considered a "good statistical indicator, where 'equal weights' truly means 'equal importance' " (United Nations, 2020).

Beginning with its benchmark study in 2001, and continued every two years, the United Nations EGDI showed the following results:

Table 2: *United Nations EGDI country ranking*

Country	**2022**	**2020**	**2018**	**2001**
Denmark	1	1	1	9
Finland	2	4	6	13
Rep. of Korea	3	2	3	15
New Zealand	4	8	8	3
Sweden	5	6	5	11
Iceland	6	12	19	29
Australia	7	5	2	2
Estonia	8	3	16	32
Netherlands	9	10	13	8

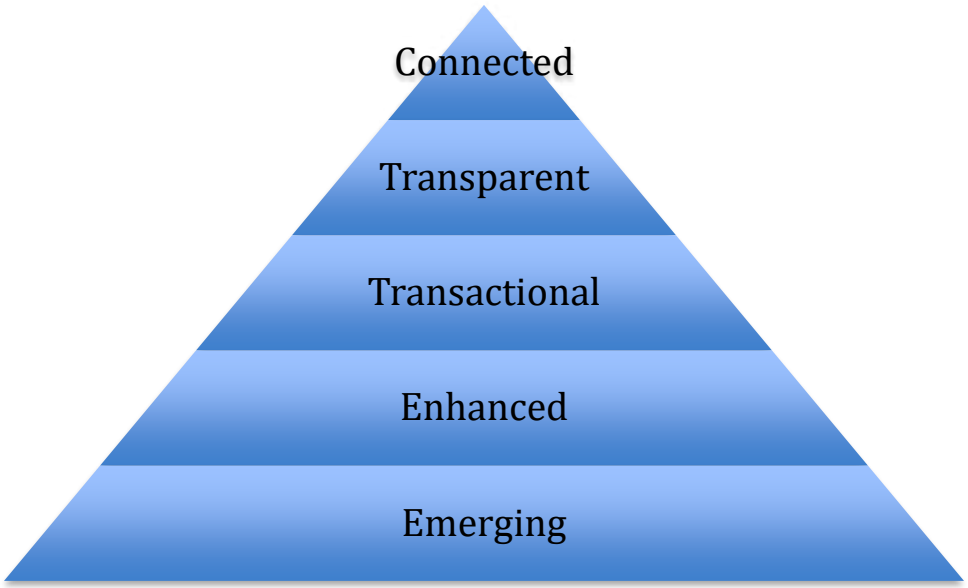
USA	10	9	11	1
UK	11	7	4	7
Singapore	12	11	7	4
UAE	13	21	21	21

Source: United Nations (2001, 2018, 2020, 2022)

For the purposes of this study, as the United Nations original pyramidal four-stage model appears to more accurately describe the present state of small, local governments, it will be used as a base with an author-addition of a fifth stage inserted before the top level– Open Government Services, or Transparent.

Figure 3

Yaccarino 5-Stage E-Government Model



Source: Yaccarino, 2025, based on United Nations Four-Stage Model, 2014)

For society to be truly connected with its government, the government must be open and transparent to its citizens. Connectivity cannot be realized until transparency is achieved.

Privacy, protection of data, and security

Long before computer technology became a factor in government administration,

the question of the protection of privacy, data and national security were consistently raised throughout the nation's history. When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Freedom of Information Act in 1966, he included in his press release statement that national security and individual rights must be protected, and, "Officials within government must be able to communicate with one another fully and frankly without publicity. They cannot operate effectively if required to disclose information prematurely," opening the door to non-disclosure (Johnson, 1966).

The issue of the public's "right" to know has been a continual balancing act between security and privacy since America's earliest days. In 1793, tensions were rising between France and the United States, which had chosen to remain neutral in the war between France and Great Britain. In 1797, President John Adams made an effort to restore peace by sending a diplomatic delegation to meet with France's foreign minister, Charles de Talleyrand, but he refused to meet the Americans. Instead, Talleyrand sent three agents to inform them that in order to meet with him, they would have to pay a large bribe, among other conditions. When members of Congress learned of the insult, they requested the diplomats' reports, but when Adams turned them over, he replaced the names of the three French agents with "X, Y, and Z" (Nix, 2018), becoming what is perhaps the first documented government redaction in the nation's history.

In the United States, open records laws include the right to withhold information, with some more limiting than others. The original Freedom of Information Act, which became public law in 1967, allowed documents required by Executive Order to be kept secret "in the interest of the national defense or foreign policy," as well as trade secrets, documents related to litigation, personnel and medical files, and geological information,

"including maps, concerning wells." No information or public records could be withheld under the Act, other than the reasons specifically stated, concluding with the ending caveat, "This section is not authority to withhold Congressional information from Congress" (Freedom of Information Act, 1967, p. 54).

Over the next 50-plus years, the interpretation of terms such as national security, privacy concerns, and trade secrets has been defined and redefined, resulting in numerous court cases, with the advent of information technology making the issue even more complicated. An Associated Press article in 2019 dubbed America as the "redaction nation" (Italie, 2019), while a National Security Archive article states it has numerous examples of documents being redacted that had already been released in full, or different portions redacted at different times, calling the process highly subjective (Blanton et al, 2019).

Using technology to circumvent the law, whether intentional or not, was demonstrated by a memo from Environmental Protection Agency officials to the Archivist of the United States reportedly stating there has been "a practice in place since the 1990s wherein the agency has provided EPA administrators with secondary, internal email accounts." Other examples cited by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press include New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's use of a messaging system "that leaves no electronic trail," or written record, and a case in Kentucky where officials apparently believed that if they refused to physically possess a report, it would then not be subject to the open records law, prompting media attorney Jon Fleischaker to comment, "When officials bend over backwards and turn themselves into pretzels to try to avoid the public records law," they are essentially telling the public that government "is none of your

business" (Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 2013).

Legitimate or not, loopholes may be ethically questionable but are not going to disappear from the freedom of information landscape. One reporter summed up the issue, stating that "millions of documents each year continue to be classified," and it is an "exhausting process" to keep up, (Italie, 2019).

Information technology may have reduced costs, improved efficiencies and reduced personnel needs, but as with any silver lining, there is always a black cloud. Forty years ago, as computers became increasingly essential for government use, the United States Comptroller General, Elmer B. Staats, raised concerns about the need to safeguard against misuse, calling for better management and control to ensure privacy and security (Staats, 1980). Unfortunately, technological advances outpaced security measures.

Local governments may or may not play games with citizen requests for information, but they are increasingly becoming victims themselves of another type of game being perpetrated by criminal enterprises, primarily for financial gain. Although the federal government has seen its share of cyber-theft and security issues, including 2013's National Security Agency's classified leaks by former employee Edward Snowden, federal agencies have deep financial means to counteract attempts. However, for state and local government websites, "Hacking, ransomware and other attack vectors are a constant threat" (Van Wagenen, 2017). Small governments are targeted for personal information, by activist groups, and sometimes to create confusion or to damage their image (Marninio, 2019), but also increasingly for money. In one case, a foreign group ran a "phishing" campaign by creating replica government websites to solicit bids on local government contracts to gain sensitive information from businesses. Among the

governments targeted in this scam were Tampa, Florida, North Las Vegas, Nevada, and San Mateo, California (Freed, 2019). Larger cities may be targeted more frequently, but small governments are increasingly under assault, with Bingham County, Idaho, population 46,000, paying more than $3,000 in ransom after an attack on its servers, (Rockefeller, 2017), a paltry sum compared to the $460,000 paid by Lake City, Florida, with a population of only 12,000 (Raphelson, 2019), and Riviera Beach, Florida, with a population of 34,000, paying $600,000 to get its systems back, (O'Flaherty, 2019).

Other governments have refused to pay, including New Bedford, Massachusetts, which was attacked on July 4, 2019. Unfortunately for the hackers who did not pay attention to the date, the malware affected only four percent of the city's 3,500 computers, as most were turned off over the holiday, and the city was able to recover the data without paying the $5 million ransom (Raphelson, 2019). For Atlanta, Georgia, though, the refusal to pay a $50,000 ransom resulted in more than $2.6 million in costs to recover from the attack (O'Flaherty, 2019).

Local governments are being urged to take advantage of a variety of security measures, with one of the simplest, yet most difficult, remedies being to train personnel not to click on unknown email links, which allow hackers into the system, and which are blamed in more than one of the ransomware attacks. Other measures include having backup systems, using firewalls, keeping systems updated, and offsite web hosting (Marninio, 2019).

The federal government is trying to assist by encouraging local governments to use the ".gov" domain for their websites. Long encouraged but seldom used, with only 23 percent of local governments using the domain in 2011 (Norris, 2011), a new DotGov

Program introduced in June 2020 preloads the HTTPS, (hypertext transfer protocol secure), onto all websites registered with the .gov domain to provide a higher level of security (DotGov, 2020). Local governments using other domains still have layers of protection, but they are not considered to be as effective against cyber-attacks.

Georgia, Counties, and Special Districts

For at least 20 years, the study and application of E-Government practices on a global, national, and even state level has become an integral part of public administration, but local governments are largely left out of the literature, particularly in the area of open governance.

The existing research has been limited in scope. Examples include Aroon Manaharan, who conducted two studies of county e-government in the United States, first in 2012 and again in 2013, relying on surveys sent to the respective governments with no objective study and a less than 15 percent participation rate (Manaharan, 2012, 2013).

Another study conducted at the United States county level sought to examine fiscal transparency, specifically, but used a random sampling of fewer than 14 percent of counties (Bernick et al, 2014).

Other researchers have examined the nation's 20 largest cities (Carrizales et al, 2011), all counties in Arkansas (Harder & Jordan, 2013), and all municipalities in New Jersey, (Chapman, 2017). The most comprehensive research is a transparency study of the counties of 12 Midwestern states as compared with the results found by the Sunshine Review and a cross reference to internet accessibility (Lowatcharin & Menifield, 2015).

For its part, the Sunshine Review, which merged into Ballotpedia in 2013, has undertaken a transparency survey of all of the nation's municipalities and counties

(Ballotpedia, 2020) but it is far from complete, with large gaps in the survey data.

Understanding the time and resource limitations, such a comprehensive study is apparently a challenge even for large entities, but the importance of studying local government remains, particularly in the area of transparency. To narrow the focus and scope of this study, the state of Georgia was selected, based on a number of factors, including the research gap in information, but also because Georgia is at the forefront of digital states. In the Center for Digital Government's 2018 Digital States Survey, Georgia is one of only five states which received an A-grade, due largely to its construction of a $100 million cyber center in support of the U.S. Army Cyber Command's move to Georgia, along with ensuring that the university system and the private sector has an educated, future workforce of engineers and support staff (Stone, 2018). Former Georgia Governor Nathan Deal was instrumental in the center's construction as well as efforts to strengthen the state's information technology infrastructure, work that has been carried on by Governor Brian Kemp through the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative, which will facilitate the extension of internet services to underserved areas in the state (Kemp, 2020).

The literature and research on Georgia government and transparency issues is almost nonexistent. One study examines how citizens initiated contact with various local governments in a small, random sample of state residents (Streib & Thomas, 2003), and another study looks at the development of E-government in Georgia in a random sampling of 20 counties (Goings et al, 2005).

In 2007, *Public Administration Review* staff authored an article about the importance of studying county governments following a meeting at the University of Georgia. The

article states that there is a disconnect between academics and practitioners, with a need for more, practical studies on issues and challenges facing counties, (Public Administration Review, 2007).

A Focus on Georgia Counties

There are 3,007 counties in America (United States Geological Survey, 2020), with Georgia claiming 159. The Constitution of the State of Georgia states that the government originates with the people, and counties are "a body corporate and politic," as governing authorities (Georgia Constitution, 2022). The original document, signed on Feb. 5, 1777, specifically gave counties all authorities not under the state's direct purview, with jurisdiction over crime, courts, schools, and elections. Article L (50) states, "Every county shall keep the public records belonging to the same," an early nod to the importance of recording government actions and retaining the documents, specifically at the local level (Georgia Constitution, 1777).

The United Nations recognizes the importance of these official governing bodies, as, "People tend to have more direct interaction with local governments… as local governments deal directly with issues affecting their daily lives" (United Nations, 2020). While a large percentage of America's population is located around cities, every citizen in the country lives in a county or its equivalent.

Counties have long been considered important centers of life for citizens, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in 1835, "As we leave New England, therefore, we find that the importance of the town is gradually transferred to the county, which becomes the center of administration, and the intermediate power between the Government and the citizen" (Tocqueville, 1835).

The state of Kentucky is third in its number of counties, with 120, following only Texas, with 254, and Georgia, with 159. During a time of upheaval in the Bluegrass state, the 1799 Constitution was passed, stripping power from the governor and handing it to county magistrates, making the counties instantly powerful for a period in which they were often referred to as "little kingdoms" (Bolin, 2014). Even after this decision was set aside, counties still reigned supreme in the state through the 19th century and for most of the 20th century, with the "courthouse crowd" granting favors and selecting the candidates for office. Although some of their power has diminished, county machines still effectively govern in many areas, with "powerful political dynasties" that have lasted for generations (Bryant, 2005), a description not limited to Kentucky.

Over the years, researchers have continued to assert the importance of county governments. An early 20th century essay states that the county "is widely used as a unit (in various forms) of legislative representation, and of administrative activity, throughout the country" (Bailey, 1913).

A mid-century review in American County Government states that both the number and size of counties across the nation has remained relatively unchanged since 1900, stressing their importance due to the services counties provide to rural areas (Snider, 1952).

In "The irreducibility of the county in the south and America, past and present," the author makes the case that counties hold tremendous sway over citizens, but scholars overlook its importance, as some consider counties "too small and trivial" (Hutton, 2013).

In Georgia, counties may be small but they are certainly not trivial. The state steadily increased the number of counties for more than a century, from the original 8 in 1777, to 24 in 1800, to 145 in 1904, and then swelling to 161 in 1924, (Jackson, 2018) until finally landing on its current 159 counties in 1983. According to anecdotal history, Georgia established enough counties so that a farmer traveling by mule-driven buggy could go to the county seat, take care of business, and return to his farm the same day. More importantly, on a political level, each county has at least one representative in the General Assembly, giving smaller counties and rural areas greater representation on a state level. "Counties were created by a rural society that looked to government to keep the records straight and the justice swift" (Vyas, 2002).

Georgia has seven consolidated city-county governments, including Athens-Clarke, Cusseta-Chattahoochee, Statenville-Echols, Columbus-Muscogee, Augusta-Richmond, Georgetown-Quitman, and Preston-Webster, (Tisdale, 2013), but consolidation does not diminish the continued importance of the counties.

In addition, as the number of counties has remained relatively unchanged for a century, a study of these local governments is considered the only way to cover the entirety of the citizenry of the state and be inclusive of city-dwellers and rural residents alike.

Special Districts and Authorities act as Shadow Governments

One major aspect of Georgia government, often ignored, are the numerous special districts and authorities that the state constitution allows and in some cases, mandates, cities and counties to create. These districts, authorities, boards and commissions include everything from airport and hospital authorities to industrial development and port

authorities. According to the National League of Cities, all special districts are governed by a board, with some members elected by the public, but the majority of which are appointed by the city or county which created them (National League of Cities, 2016).

In Georgia, some special governments are considered quasi-governmental entities, which means generally that they have taxing authority, while others are under the umbrella of the government that created them. The United States Census counts all governments every five years, with one count for all cities, towns and counties, and one count for all special governments. According to the latest report released in 2019 with data from the 2017 count, Georgia has 689 cities, towns, and counties, and 691 special districts, including school boards (Maciag, 2019). In addition, according to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, there are approximately 837 authorities established by cities and counties that must report annually to the state (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2020).

All of these entities use public money to perform a variety of functions and provide services, but appear to have not received the same level of scrutiny given to the local governments. According to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), special districts are "the most common form of government" in the U.S. today. Referring to them as "shadow governments" because they frequently operate in the dark, the ICMA recommends that each maintain a website, at a minimum, preferably attached to the local government's website, and provides a lengthy list of information that should be included, from budgets to current and archived minutes of meetings. "Public organizations have an obligation to provide the types of transparency that promote accountability in local governance. Special Districts (SDs) should not be an exception to

the rule" (International City/County Management Association, 2017).

One study reported that special districts are "poorly understood by the public," and they often do business without transparency, which has created more concerns in recent years among watchdog groups and state agencies. The study reviewed a random sampling of the nation's 38,000 special districts, finding that despite spending an estimated $200 billion annually, "the vast majority do little to inform citizens about how they spend money" (Cross & Surka, 2017).

Examining one type of special government, a recent study looked at Georgia's rural hospital authorities, finding, "like many other special districts in Georgia and the USA, Georgia's rural hospital authorities often act more like private entities than the public organizations they are," concluding that despite the limited study, the data supports the finding that there is a "lack of accountability and transparency" in many special district governments (Wickersham & Yehl, 2018).

In Georgia, the Open Records Act applies to "anyone who possesses records of the county," including boards, commissions, authorities and similar bodies (Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, 2016), seemingly mandating that they abide by the same policies and procedures regarding transparency and public access as the counties.

Citizens are clamoring for more information and transparency from their governments, whether it is in a local Georgia community or another country. The United Nations E-Government Survey in 2016 shows that worldwide, an "honest and responsive government" ranked as the fourth highest overall priority for citizens, one place higher than food, and below only education, healthcare and jobs. In the United States, the survey put the same response as second overall for American citizens, below only education, and

two places higher than food (United Nations, 2016).

As former Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens, who advocated for the passage of House Bill 397 in 2012, which increased fines for violations, said, “transparency and access to government are critical to a thriving democracy” (Olens, 2014).

A transparent and open government is essential, and as many federal and state agencies have been mandated for more than 20 years to provide open access to citizens via the internet, a study of the process through official county websites in the state of Georgia is long overdue to fill a gap in knowledge as well as setting the stage for future studies.

Understanding the Challenges of E-Government in Georgia

Studying the status and transparency of e-government in Georgia’s counties is important, but would be incomplete without also studying factors that may influence their overall success or failure to participate in open government practices. Understanding the challenges affecting the successful interaction between citizens and local governments, such as literacy, education, poverty, and connectivity, is essential in order to produce meaningful research. Statistics are only numbers unless they are presented against the appropriate backdrop for context.

To understand this context, it is important to note that in American society, the right to equality was promised in our Declaration of Independence. However, equal does not always mean fair, as author George Orwell pointed out in “Animal Farm,” published in 1945 to parody communism and the Russian government. At the novel’s beginning, the society of animals established seven commandments, including “All animals are equal.”

By the end of the novel, only this one commandment remained, with the addition of the words, “But some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell, 1945).

For Americans, there has historically been a perception of superiority to other countries with our democratic society providing “equal” opportunities for everyone, but not always with the comprehension that there is no corresponding guarantee of success. If everyone has equal access to education, then why is the literacy rate falling, not rising? When citizens are treated equally, that only means that everyone is treated the same, regardless of their needs or abilities. If only roughly a third of citizens can read with comprehension, giving everyone the same book may be equal, but it is not fair.

In Georgia, the percentage of the population lacking basic literacy skills was 17 percent in 2003, as measured by the National Center for Education Statistics, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The center has since changed its methodology and no longer reports the data annually, but rather as an average of the data collected in 2012, 2014, and 2017 in the most recent report, released in 2019. In the report, 24 percent of Georgians lacked basic literacy skills, a fairly significant increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), which may or may not be related to a corresponding decrease in education funding. The state’s General Assembly “underfunded schools every year since 2003,” cutting $9 billion from its “Quality Basic Education Formula” (Suggs, 2016).

According to The Washington Post, achievement gaps in schools are “completely accounted for by poverty” (Meckler, 2019). The New York Times reported that although racial disparities in education “have narrowed significantly,” the achievement gaps between more affluent and less privileged children “is wider than ever” (Porter, 2015).

Although income inequality largely affects those at the bottom level, the article, "How rising inequality hurts everyone, even the rich," states that the resulting decrease in income from the corresponding lack of education also decreases productivity and economic growth, affecting those at the top. "If you are a billionaire owner of a retail or manufacturing company, you want people to be able to afford the stuff you're selling," adding that Henry Ford paid high wages for the time, not from "any altruistic impulse but because he wanted them to buy his cars" (Ingraham, 2018).

The average annual income of the top one percent nationally is $1,316,985, compared to $50,107 for the remaining 99 percent. In Georgia, the top one percent makes $995,576, compared to $44,147 for everyone else (Price, 2018). The state's capitol has the title "no city wants," as Atlanta was named the city with the "greatest income disparity in America," for two years in a row, (WXIA, 2019).

Although other perspectives point out that a great number of Americans have improved their lot in life, it is perhaps the exception, not the rule.

The simplest perspective is that wealth has its advantages, the poor have fewer, and of all the playing fields that should be leveled to give everyone equal access to more opportunities, it is one that will bridge the digital divide.

The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to telecommunications and information technologies, and those who do not, with access to broadband, or high-speed internet, the predominant issue currently. In America, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was created in 1934 under the Communications Act to "make available...to all people of the United States…a rapid, nationwide, and worldwide…service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges,"

referring at that time to wire and radio communications, but which has since been expanded to include the internet (Rachfal, 2021).

Unfortunately, over the decades, the challenge of creating such a comprehensive network for all emerging technologies has not proven successful. Accessibility and affordability remain obstacles in many areas. At least 10 percent of Americans do not have access to broadband, and those in rural America are disproportionately affected. Without internet, access to job opportunities and applications, education and training, public school classes, healthcare options and government services are limited, further widening the inequality gaps (McFarland, 2018).

In Georgia, 70 percent of the locations lacking access to broadband are in rural areas, (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2020), and for many residents in the unserved areas of the state, Georgia's library system has been their only means of access. The state was one of the first to have high-speed internet access in every public library, and is the only state that completely covers its libraries internet service bills (Georgia Libraries, 2020).

For Georgia's Monroe County, the state's new Broadband Initiative is a lifeline for the largely rural area. Greg Tapley, chairman of the Monroe County Commission, said residents have been living in the "dark ages. Two cans connected with a string would be faster than what we have. It is an internet desert out here" (Niesse, 2021).

The Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative was introduced in 2018 when the General Assembly passed the "Achieving Connectivity Everywhere" Act. The multi-agency collaboration produced a map of the state that is a more accurate reflection of the areas currently without broadband (Kemp, 2020), and Georgia is partnering with internet

providers to find solutions. Despite allowing electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) to sell internet services along with power in 2019, the results were not what state legislators were hoping for, as rates for attaching to utility poles for the state's EMCs and companies such as Georgia Power and AT&T were vastly different (Bunch, 2020). In 2020, Kemp signed the Georgia Broadband Opportunity Act to lower those rates in an effort to encourage telecom companies to expand in rural areas (Willams, 2020). By the end of 2020, five counties and five cities in Georgia were certified as Broadband Ready Communities by the state's Department of Community Affairs, including Banks, Evans, Harris, Lumpkin and Oglethorpe counties, and the cities of Claxton, Dublin, Fitzgerald, Hiawassee, and Woodbury (Lassiter, 2020).

The relationship between local government and internet accessibility continues to evolve. A study conducted in 2009, "The Impact of the Digital Divide on E-Government Use," found that income, education and age were significant predictors of e-government use, while ethnicity and gender were not factors (Belanger & Carter, 2009). In 2012, a random sample of 344 counties in the U.S. found that counties with lower median incomes and higher poverty rates were less likely to have a web site in 2010, showing that a different type of digital divide "may continue to exist if counties with less wealthy citizens cannot find ways to overcome barriers," to offering e-government services (Baird et al, 2012). In 2015, 1,000 counties in 12 Midwestern states were studied to determine if a correlation between internet accessibility and government transparency exists. The researchers found that urban areas with higher levels of internet access "had greater government transparency on county government websites," but increasing access in areas with lower education levels did not help transparency, as "education level is an important

factor in whether citizens seek to access government information online" (Lowartcharin & Menifield, 2015).

Despite the challenges presented by literacy rates, poverty, and connectivity, the International City/County Managers Association states, "Technology is your… best answer to creating a culture of trust in government." By providing government documents and data online, it gives citizens the opportunity to become better informed and educated (Wagner, 2019).

As Georgia continues to embrace information technology and connectivity, its commitment to open and transparent access to state documents and data is apparent through the website, www.opengeorgia.gov. All 159 counties in the state are believed to currently have a web presence, although they vary greatly in sophistication and access. The official Annotated Code of Georgia includes laws governing open meetings and open records (Georgia General Assembly, 2020), and encourages, but does not require, local governments to provide access online.

In order to examine the issue of e-government and transparency in Georgia, a comprehensive analysis of 36 of Georgia's county websites was conducted to determine if they are portals through which citizens may actively participate in local government and the democratic process. The first study was conducted in the spring of 2021, followed by a repetition of the study in the spring of 2024, to ensure the validity of the results and to prevent the prevalence of COVID-related information in 2021 from skewing the overall study.

Specifically, the project addresses the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Do all 36 Georgia counties in the study sample maintain public websites?

This study will determine if the counties in the research sample maintain websites.

2. Is the information provided on the state's county websites in accordance with accepted best practices and guidelines, as determined by a unique survey?

A unique survey, developed by the author, will be used to determine if the county websites in the study use accepted best practices and guidelines, including to what degree and how effectively.

3. Do demographic factors affect county websites' evaluations, such as population size, income, education, and citizen internet access?

Demographics will be compiled on each of the 36 counties to determine if there is an association between the overall scores each county receives and the demographic factors.

4. Are Georgia counties following the state's open records law and the principles of open governance and transparency?

Through the study, the author will determine if each county is following the state's open records laws, in addition to practicing open government and transparency.

5. Are Georgia counties open and transparent regarding special districts, boards, and commissions?

Every county in Georgia is believed to have at least one special district, board, or authority, either solely or in partnership with another county or region. This study will determine if these quasi-governmental institutions can be said to be following the sane

principles of open government and transparency that are expected in the county governments under which they operate.

Chapter III

Methodology

Using guidelines developed by the ICMA, the United Nations and the Sunshine Project, along with independent observations, a quantitative analysis and evaluation of each website studied is conducted using a scoring instrument specifically designed to evaluate the websites of county governments in Georgia. The survey (Appendix A), includes suggested desirable website features from the ICMA, items from the Sunshine Project's 10-Point Transparency Checklist (Ballotpedia, 2020), and the 4-Point United Nations E-Government model (United Nations, 2014). A total of seven research areas were then developed and each of the studied websites were scored, graded and ranked according to the results.

The results from the surveys are cross -tabulated against United States Census data on population size, poverty level, internet access and education level, as well as data from the Georgia Broadband Initiative on connectivity, and literacy rates from the National Center for Education Statistics.

For the purposes of this study, a representative sampling of Georgia counties serves as the control group. As the state of Georgia has divided all 159 counties into 12 distinct regions, each served by a Regional Commission, three counties in each region are studied, for a total of 36, determined by population size. In each region, the small, median and large counties are evaluated.

The state of Georgia established the Regional Commissions under the auspices of the Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions to assist local governments with comprehensive planning in areas such as transportation, as well as the administration of state and federal programs. Initially created in the 1960s as area planning and development commissions, the original 18 eventually became 12 Regional Commissions. All 159 counties are members of their respective commission, with areas for each determined by geography to simplify the planning process for joint transportation, workforce development, and business development projects, among others, (Walker, 2018).

The 12 Regional Commissions and the three counties to be studied in each region are (Appendix B):

- Region 1: Northwest Georgia. Dade, Gordon and Paulding counties.
- Region 2: Georgia Mountains. Towns, Habersham and Forsyth counties.
- Region 3: Atlanta Regional Commission. Rockdale, Clayton, and Fulton counties.
- Region 4: Three Rivers. Heard, Spalding and Coweta counties.
- Region 5: Northeast Georgia. Jasper, Oconee and Clarke counties.
- Region 6: Middle Georgia. Twiggs, Baldwin, and Houston counties.
- Region 7: Central Savannah River Area. Taliaferro, Burke and Richmond counties.
- Region 8: River Valley. Quitman, Crisp and Muscogee counties.
- Region 9: Heart of Georgia Altamaha. Treutlen, Appling, and Laurens counties.
- Region 10: Southwest Georgia. Baker, Grady and Dougherty counties.
- Region 11: Southern Georgia. Echols, Pierce, and Lowndes counties.
- Region 12: Coastal. Screven, Bulloch and Chatham counties.

Figure 4: Georgia Regional Commissions

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs (2021)

The 36 county websites in the study sample are evaluated according to a unique Georgia Transparency Study Checklist, a survey developed by the author specifically for this study, using quantitative methods. On the date of each website's evaluation, a screen shot of the main page was taken to provide a reference point and serve as verification of the data collected and its subsequent grading to ensure that the process is objective and fair. Each website is graded on Accessibility, Open Government, Finances, Open Records/Freedom of Information Act, Citizen Interaction, Service Delivery, and Boards and Authorities, with 25 criteria in total. Each of the areas of study are 0 to 4 points, on a 100-point scale, with the final tabulation graded on an A, B, C or F grading scale accordingly.

Although the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires accessibility to government websites for the disabled, due to the increasing litigiousness over the issue, the Department of Justice reaffirmed in 2018 that there are no set guidelines for compliance (Vu, 2018). This flexibility coupled with the necessity of special equipment to test the various hearing, speech, and other options, an analysis of ADA compliance is outside the abilities and parameters of this study.

All 36 county websites were initially evaluated and graded in the same period, from April 20 to April 29, 2021. A second study of a dozen counties, or one third of the sample, was conducted from February 1 to February 9, 2023, and upon finding no appreciable differences in data, all results are based upon the original 2021 data and survey findings.

Chapter IV

Results

The unique survey instrument (Appendix A) developed for this study includes seven primary categories, subdivided into a total of 25 areas of interest, as follows:

1. Accessibility. This area of study encompasses the ease of finding the website and identifying the leadership in each county, with grading focused on web address, information about elected officials, and information about administrators, primarily the city manager and department heads;
2. Open Government. Each county studied was evaluated on whether its website contains vital information for citizens to participate actively, including a current meeting agenda, archived minutes and agendas, and guidelines for citizen engagement during meetings.
3. Finances. To evaluate transparency, financial information is essential, with websites evaluated to determine if the current year's budget is accessible, if the site includes archived budgets, and if bids and contracts are easily found.
4. Open Records/FOIA. According to Georgia guidelines, each website should list the current law, the name of the compliance officer, and a link to file a request.
5. Citizen Interaction. To determine the ability of each website to engage with its citizens as a portal, the sites were evaluated on information about voter registration, elections information, online payment options for county-provided

services, and citizen input.

6. Service Delivery. Counties are mandated to provide public services, with the following evaluated: tax information, water/sewer/waste, public safety (law, fire, and courts), culture (libraries and parks), planning (building, zoning, unified land development code).
7. Boards and Authorities. County websites were evaluated to determine if information on boards and authorities is easily accessible, including a list of all boards, authorities and commissions, the administration and board members, meeting notices, agendas and minutes, and budgets.

Each of the 25 criteria is weighed equally and awarded from 0 to 4 points each and tabulated by categories. Overall scores were given by category and by accumulated total for each website, with an A for a score of 90 to 100, a B for 80 to 89, a C for 70 to 79, and anything 69 and below considered an F. Of the 36 counties evaluated, one received an A, seven received a B, seven received a C, and 21 received an F. The highest overall score of 100 was awarded to Coweta County in Region 4, the Three Rivers, and the lowest overall score of 16 was awarded to Echols County in Region 11, Southern Georgia.

Table 3: Results

Region	**County**	**Score**	**Grade**		**Region**	**County**	**Score**	**Grade**
One	Dade	80	B		Seven	Taliaferro	27	F
	Gordon	78	C			Burke	74	C
	Paulding	70	C			Richmond	65	F
Two	Towns	22	F		Eight	Quitman	47	F

	Habersham	76	C			Crisp	70	C
	Forsyth	63	F			Muscogee	88	B
Three	Rockdale	58	F		Nine	Treutlen	24	F
	Clayton	80	B			Appling	24	F
	Fulton	74	C			Laurens	54	F
Four	Heard	62	F		Ten	Baker	41	F
	Spalding	85	B			Grady	43	F
	Coweta	100	A			Dougherty	64	F
Five	Jasper	58	F		Eleven	Echols	16	F
	Oconee	80	B			Pierce	56	F
	Clarke	85	B			Lowndes	86	B
Six	Twiggs	28	F		Twelve	Screven	32	F
	Baldwin	64	F			Bulloch	76	C
	Houston	57	F			Chatham	63	F

Population was the determining factor in selecting the 36 websites for study, with three in each of the 12 Georgia Regional Development Commission Regions – the smallest, the largest, and the one with the mean population. Of the 12 smallest counties, all but one had a failing grade – Dade in Northwest Georgia, which earned a B. Of the 12 median counties, three received a B grade, five received a C, and four received an F. Of the 12 largest counties, one received an A, three a B, two a C, and six received an F.

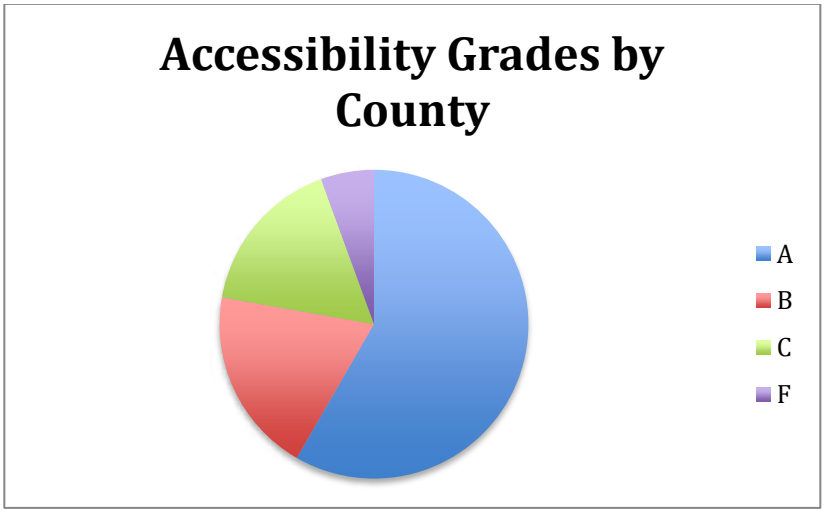
Results by Research Questions

The first question, "Do all 36 Georgia counties in the study sample maintain public

websites?" the answer is affirmative. All 36 counties maintain a website, although varying in degrees of effectiveness and complexity.

The second question, "Is the information provided on the state's county websites in accordance with accepted best practices and guidelines, as determined by a unique survey?" the answer is a bit more complex. As 21 of the 36 counties received a grade of "F", the majority of the sites, 58 percent, do not appear to follow accepted best practices and guidelines. While only 42 percent meet accepted best practices overall, examining the results by subject area does demonstrate that almost all of the 36 websites meet the accessibility parameter. The criteria for accessibility are web address, determining if the website at least includes the county name, as well as the elected officials and administrators, determining if the site includes the names and contact information for those responsible for managing the county, both elected and professional employees. Only two of the 36 counties failed, or 5.5 percent, with 34, or 94.5 percent passing, and of those, 21, or 58 percent, received a grade of "A", seven received a "B", and six a "C".

Table 4: Grades by County Accessibility



For the third research question, "Do demographic factors affect county websites' evaluations, such as population size, income, education, and citizen internet access?" each factor is examined separately.

Population

The 36 counties in the study diverge greatly in terms of population size, with the lowest at 1,537 for Taliaferro and the greatest at 1,063,937 for Fulton, a variance of 1,062,400. More than half of the sample, 20 counties, have a population less than 50,000, with 11 between 50,000 and 200,000, and five greater than 200,000.

Table 5: Results by Population

Population Size	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
Less than 50,000	0	2	3	15
50,000 to 200,000	1	4	3	3
200,000 plus	0	1	1	3

While the survey results do not appear to show agreement between a larger population and a higher grade, the results do appear to demonstrate agreement between a smaller population and a lower grade. As only 25 percent of the counties with a population less than 50,000 received a passing grade, and 75 percent failed, it does appear that there is a association to population size. However, greater population size did not have a positive impact on the results, as only 40 percent of the five largest counties, with populations greater than 200,000, received a higher grade.

Income

According to the United States Census figures, the 36 counties in the study range from a poverty level of five percent, in Forsyth County, to 29.5 percent in Dougherty County. Grouping by counties with a poverty rate less than 10 percent, from 10 to 20 percent, and from 20 percent and higher, the results demonstrate that counties with a higher poverty rate fared poorly on the survey, with those with the lowest poverty rate scoring relatively well.

Table 6: Results by Poverty Rate

Poverty Rate	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
Less than 10 percent	0	1	1	1
10 to 20 percent	1	3	3	7
20 percent and higher	0	3	3	13

As with the population demographic, a higher poverty rate appears to be associated with lower grades, while a lower poverty rate appears to have a lesser impact.

Education

Utilizing the United State Census figures of the percentage of a county's population ages 25 years plus with a bachelor's degree or higher, the six counties with fewer than 10 percent all failed the survey. Of the 14 with 10 to 20 percent, seven of the 14 had a high grade while the other seven failed. And of the 16 counties with 20 percent or more with a bachelor's degree, one received an A, three received a B, three received a C, and nine received an F. While higher education percentages were not associated with higher scores, a lower education percentage appears to be associated with a failing score.

Table 7: Results by Education

Percentage of population with bachelor's degrees	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
Less than 10 percent	0	0	0	6
10 to 20 percent	0	4	3	7
More than 20 percent	1	3	3	9

Citizen Internet Access

Using United States Census figures for the percentage of households in each county with a broadband subscription, the results demonstrate a potential association for those counties with the lowest percentage. Of the nine counties with 40 to 60 percent, only one received a passing grade of C while the remaining 8 all failed. Of the 20 counties with 60 to 80 percent, four received a B, four received a C, and 12 failed. Of the seven counties with greater than 80 percent, one received an A, and two each received a B, C, and F. In this final demographic, having a broadband subscription in a household resulted in 71 percent receiving a passing grade. There are other factors at play as well, though, as Taliaferro, with only 42.5 percent, had the lowest number of broadband subscriptions while Forsyth had the highest at 92.6 percent, but both received an F.

Table 8: Results by Households with Broadband

Households with Broadband	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
40 to 60 percent	0	0	1	8
60 to 80 percent	0	4	4	12
80 percent and up	1	2	2	2

Examining the demographics of population, income, education and internet access, and the corresponding grades of each of the 36 counties, a potential negative association is demonstrated, while a positive association is not fully supported, therefore neither supporting or rejecting the research question.

Open Governance

The fourth question, "Are Georgia counties following the state's open records law and the principles of open governance and transparency?" is subdivided into two questions. Regarding the first, open governance, the criteria used in the survey graded if counties posted current agendas, archived agendas and minutes from meetings, and guidelines for citizens wishing to participate. Of the 36 counties, 85 percent, or 29, received high grades, with only seven failing. In the question of open records and Freedom of Information Act compliance, counties were graded on if the current law and guidelines are posted, along with the name of the compliance officer and a link to file a request. In this case, only 10 counties, or 28 percent, scored higher than an F, with 26 counties, or 72 percent, scoring an F.

For the transparency portion of the question, two criteria were judged, including finances – if the county posted the current budget, archived budgets, and bids and contracts – and if the county included information on service delivery, grading by tax information, water/sewer/waste, safety (law, fire, courts), culture (library and parks), and planning, building and zoning. The 36 counties fared well overall, with 67 percent receiving an A, B or C for finances and 33 percent failing, while 83 percent received an A, B, or C for service delivery information versus only 17 percent receiving an F.

Table 9: Results for Open Governance and Transparency

	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
Open Government	9	2	18	7
Open Records	7	1	2	26
Finances	22	1	1	12
Service Delivery	12	13	5	6

Regarding the research question, the surveyed counties can be said to have met the open government and transparency portions overall, but not the open records portion, with such a large number failing the survey.

For the final question, "Are Georgia counties open and transparent regarding special districts, boards, and commissions?" the results do not show a positive association overall. Of the 36 counties studied, 67 percent received a grade of F, with only 33 percent receiving an A, B, or C grade.

Table 10: Results for Boards and Authorities

Number of Boards, etc.	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade F
Fewer than 5	0	1	4	15
5 to 10	0	1	1	8
More than 10	1	2	2	1

Every county surveyed has at least one board, special district or authority listed with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, with the group with the highest number receiving the highest grades. Of the six counties with more than 10, 83 percent scored an A, B, or C, with only one failure. Of those with fewer than five boards, 75 percent

received an F, and of the 5 to 10 group, 80 percent received an F. Cross referencing with population, the counties were mixed in size by category, with no clear indication of smaller versus larger counties' compliance.

Chapter V

Discussion

Studying a representative sample of 36 counties in Georgia, varying in size, population, location, income and education, is a solid first step to determine how the state's 159 counties would fare with the same criteria.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the demographic factors of income, poverty, literacy and access to broadband do not necessarily lead to a higher grade, but they do appear to indicate a potential association with a lower grade. The smallest counties performed poorly, comparatively speaking, to their larger neighbors.

Table 11: Results of Small Counties

County	Accessibility	Open Government	Finances	Open Records	Citizen Interaction	Service Delivery	Boards, Authorities
Dade	A	A	A	F	B	B	F
Towns	C	F	F	F	F	F	F
Rockdale	A	C	A	F	B	C	F
Heard	B	C	F	F	A	A	F
Jasper	A	C	A	F	C	B	F
Twiggs	C	C	C	F	F	F	F
Taliaferro	A	F	F	F	F	B	F
Quitman	A	F	F	F	B	B	F
Treutlen	A	F	F	F	F	F	F

Baker	F	F	F	F	B	A	F
Echols	C	F	F	F	F	F	F
Screven	F	A	F	F	F	C	C

The smallest county by population size in each of Georgia's 12 Regional Districts fared well overall for accessibility, with 83 percent receiving an A, B, or C grade, while all but one county received an F grade for openness regarding boards, authorities and commissions. The counties were split evenly for open government and citizen interaction, and both large and small did relatively well for service delivery, with 67 percent receiving a higher grade. Unfortunately, every single one received an F for open records. Size appears to have at least some association with the state's smallest counties, regardless of region.

Table 12: Results of Median Counties

County	Accessibility	Open Government	Finances	Open Records	Citizen Interaction	Service Delivery	Boards, Authorities
Gordon	A	C	A	A	B	B	C
Habersham	B	C	A	A	B	B	F
Clayton	A	C	A	F	A	A	B
Spalding	B	A	A	A	A	A	F
Oconee	C	B	A	F	A	A	B
Baldwin	A	C	A	F	A	C	C
Burke	A	A	A	F	B	A	C
Crisp	A	A	A	F	B	B	C
Appling	B	F	F	F	F	F	F

Grady	A	C	F	F	C	C	F
Pierce	A	A	F	F	B	B	F
Bulloch	A	C	A	B	B	B	F

In the 12 counties statewide that constitute the median population of the Regional Commissions, results overall were higher than the small counties. All 12 received an A, B, or C in the areas of accessibility and all but one did as well in the areas of open government, citizen interaction and service delivery for a total of 92 percent. In all three cases, the county receiving an F was Appling. The results were mixed for finances, either receiving an A grade, 75 percent, or an F, at 25 percent. For open records, only 33 percent had a positive grade, and the results split evenly for boards and authorities. The larger counties outperformed the small counties in every category.

Table 13: Results of Largest Counties

County	Accessibility	Open Government	Finances	Open Records	Citizen Interaction	Service Delivery	Boards, Authorities
Paulding	B	C	A	F	A	B	F
Forsyth	C	C	A	F	A	A	F
Fulton	A	C	A	C	B	B	C
Coweta	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Clarke	C	B	A	A	A	B	B
Houston	B	C	A	F	C	B	F
Richmond	B	C	A	F	A	A	F
Muscogee	A	A	A	A	B	A	B
Laurens	A	C	F	C	B	F	F

Dougherty	A	C	A	F	B	A	F
Lowndes	A	A	A	A	A	A	F
Chatham	A	C	B	F	B	C	C

For the 12 largest counties in the study, the results were higher than for both the small and median size counties. One county, Coweta, received the highest score in the study, an A overall, Fulton and Clarke both receiving only positive results of all A's, B's, and C's with no F's. Lowndes received all A's with only one F, for boards and authorities, and Chatham received only one F, in open records. No counties received an F in accessibility, open government and citizen interaction, and only one F, Laurens, in both finances and service delivery. Overall, the larger counties in the state's 12 Regional Commissions fared better than their smaller counterparts.

While the study did not delve into reasons for the low scores, which could be attributed to a variety of factors, including resources, personnel, and management, it does demonstrate that size does appear to matter when it comes to county websites. Websites in larger counties scored better than their smaller regional counterparts in virtually every category. However, the scores overall reflect poorly on Georgia regarding open government and especially on openness and transparency when it comes to the state's numerous quasi-governmental agencies.

Chapter VI

Conclusions

This study is a solid initial step towards understanding Georgia's counties and transparency, but future studies are recommended. Given the numerous scandals that have beset the nation, and the state, since the country's founding, an understanding and appreciation for transparency remains lacking.

Georgia can no longer afford to be the state that willfully and openly defies the law. Former Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed's well-publicized contempt for the press came to the forefront in recent years when a federal corruption investigation in 2018 revealed that his former press secretary, Jenna Garland, directed staff to not comply with open records requests, directing them to, "drag this out as long as possible," and "provide information in the most confusing format available" (Fausset, 2019).

Not content with openly defying state and federal law, the city of Atlanta has since tried to eliminate portions of Georgia's open records laws. In 2021, the City "committed to spending endless taxpayer dollars to dismantle key provisions of the Georgia Open Records Act" (Cardinale, 2020).

With the leadership of the state's capital actively violating and attempting to dismantle the law, the eyes of the rest of the state's governments tend to follow suit. Transparency should be an ingrained part of good governance and if anything, Georgia's open records laws are weaker than they should be and in the case of the shadow governments, nearly

non-existent. Referring again to the Kentucky attorney who stated, “When officials bend over backwards and turn themselves into pretzels to try to avoid the public records law,” they’re telling citizens that government is none of their business (Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 2013).

Whether or not Georgia’s counties are fully compliant with open records laws and transparency, further study is needed to determine if it is on purpose, such as the Atlanta example, or an accident born of lack of resources and knowledge.

References

Adams, J. (1763). An essay on man's lust for power. *Founders Online of the National Archives.* https://founders.archives.gov/?q=democracy&s=1111311121&r=7&sr

Al-Qutaish, R., Cheikhi, L., Fath-Allah, A., & Idri, A. (2014). E-government maturity models: A comparative study. *International Journal of Software Engineering & Applications*. Vol. 5 (3). http://airccse.org/journal/ijsea/papers/5314ijsea06.pdf

Andrews, E. (2018). Eight early American political scandals. *History.com*. https://www.history.com/news/8-early-american-political-scandals

Anson, I. (2018). Americans distrusted US democracy long before Trump's Russia problem. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/americans-distrusted-us-democracy-long-before-trumps-russia-problem-100082

Argyle, N. (1994). The Emergence of the American Administrative State: The Intellectual Origins. *Handbook of Bureaucracy*. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315093291/handbook-bureaucracy-farazmand-ali

Aristotle. (350 B.C.E.). *Politics*. (B. Jowett, Trans.) Massachusetts Institute of Technology. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.5.five.html

Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, (2016), Georgia's open meetings and open records laws. https://www.accg.org/library/legal/Open Meetings and Open Records Laws 2016.pdf

Bailey, W. L. (1913). The county community and its government. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 47*, 14-25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1012730

Baird, J. E., Booker, Q. E., & Zelin, R. C. (2012). Is there a digital divide in the provision of e-government services at the county level in the United States? *Journal of Legal, Ethical, and Regulatory Issues, Vol. 15* (1). https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-2750826321/is-there-a-digital-divide-in-the-provision-of-e-government

Ballotpedia. (2020). Comparison of each state's county websites. https://ballotpedia.org/Comparison_of_each_state%27s_county_websites

Belanger, F. & Carter, L. (2009). The impact of the digital divide on e-government use. *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 52 (4). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220421422_The_Impact_Of_The_Digital_Divide_On_E-Government_Use

Bentham, J. (1787). Panopticon or the inspection house. *Online Library of Liberty*. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1925/0872.04_Bk.pdf

Bernick. E. L., Birds, J. M., Brekken, K., Gourrier, A. G., & Kellogg, L. D. (2014). Explaining county government fiscal transparency in an age of E-Government. *State and Local Government Review*. 46 (3). pp. 173-183. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24638890

Blanton, T., Byrne, M., & Harper, L. (2019). Redactions: The declassified file. *National Security Archive*. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/foia/2019-04-18/redactions-declassified-file

Bolin, J.D. (2014). Kentucky's four constitutions. *Murray Ledger.* https://www.murrayledger.com/opinion/columns/home_and_away/kentucky-s-four-constitutions/article_1703ef02-bc0c-11e3-b9b5-0019bb2963f4.html

Brandeis, L. D. (1914). Other people's money and how the bankers use it. *Project Gutenberg*. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/57819

Bryant, R. (2005). What would Kentucky be like without its large number of counties. Kentucky Secretary of State. https://www.sos.ky.gov/land/resources/articles/Documents/Counties.pdf

Bunch, R. (2020). State tries boosting rural broadband. *The Valdosta Daily Times.* https://www.valdostadailytimes.com/news/local_news/state-tries-boosting-rural-broadband/article_a9d9ad90-5e24-5a21-aef5-8e43ba50e083.html

Cardinale, M.C. (2020). Atlanta seeks to gut provisions of Georgia Open Records Act. *Atlanta Progressive News*. https://atlantaprogressivenews.com/2020/09/23/atlanta-seeks-to-gut-provisions-of-georgia-open-records-act/

Chapman, S. J. (2017). What's in a website? E-Government scores and municipal characteristics. *Public Administration Quarterly*. 41 (2). pp. 360-385. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26383417

Crimes Act of 1790. First Congress, Sess. II, Ch. 9 (1790). https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/1st-congress/session-2/c1s2ch9.pdf

Cross, R. & Surka, M. (2017). Governing in the Shadows: Rating the Online Financial Transparency of Special District Governments. *Georgia Public Interest Research*

Group.

https://georgiapirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/GAP%20FollowMoney17%20Report%20Apr17.pdf

Dahl, R. A. (2020). Democracy. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.,*

https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy

DotGov. (2020). Making .gov more secure by default. DotGov.

https://home.dotgov.gov/management/preloading/dotgovhttps/

Duricka, J. (1974). Protesters (Photograph). Copyright by Associated Press. Adapted from Anson, I. (2018*).* Americans Distrusted US Democracy long before Trump's Russia problem. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/americans-distrusted-us-democracy-long-before-trumps-russia-problem-100082

Electronic Freedom of Information Acts Amendments of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-231, 110 Stat. 3048 (1996). https://www.congress.gov/104/plaws/publ231/PLAW-104publ231.pdf

E-Government Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-347, 116 Stat. 2899, (2002).

https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ347/PLAW-107publ347.pdf

Electronic Frontier Foundation. (nd). History of FOIA.

https://www.eff.org/issues/transparency/history-of-foia

Etzioni, A. (2014). The limits of transparency. *Public Administration Review*. 74 (6). 687-688. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24029489

Fausset, R. (2019). Drag this out as long as possible. *New York Times*.

https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/08/us/georgia-open-records-jenna-garland.html

Fenster, M. (2010). Seeing the state: Transparency as metaphor. *Administrative Law Review*. 62 (3). pp. 617-672. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25758547

Fifth Congress (1798). Alien and Sedition Acts. National Archives. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/alien-and-sedition-acts

Florini, A. (2002). Increasing transparency in government. *International Journal on World Peace*, 19 (3). 3-37. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20753362

Florini, A. (2004). Behind closed doors: Governmental transparency gives way to secrecy. *Harvard International Review*. 26 (1). pp. 18-21. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43649051

Franklin, B. (1722). Silence Dogood, No. 8. *Founders Online of the National Archives*. https://founders.archives.gov/?q=silence dogood&s=1111311111&r=8

Freed, B. (2019). Phishing campaign spoofs local government websites to rip off small businesses. *Statescoop*. https://statescoop.com/phishing-campaign-spoofs-local-government-websites-to-rip-off-small-businesses/

Freedom of Information Act. (1967). Public Law 90-23. 81 Stat. Section 552 (1967). p. 54. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-81/pdf/STATUTE-81-Pg54.pdf#page=3

Georgia Constitution. (1777). Constitution of the State of Georgia. *The Avalon Project.* https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/ga02.asp

Georgia Constitution. (2022). Constitution of the State of Georgia. Georgia Secretary of State. https://sos.ga.gov/search?division=&board=&type=&query=constitution

Georgia Department of Community Affairs. (2020). Listing of FY 2018 registered local authorities. https://www.dca.ga.gov/node/5594

Georgia Department of Community Affairs. (2021). Regional Commissions. https://www.dca.ga.gov/local-government-assistance/planning/regional-planning/regional-commissions

Georgia General Assembly. (2020). Official Code of Georgia Annotated. Section 50-18-71. https://law.georgia.gov/sites/law.georgia.gov/files/imported/vgn/images/portal/cit_1210/62/51/186385699r1.pdf

Georgia Libraries. (2020). Georgia's public libraries fill in gap in internet access. Georgialibraries.com. https://georgialibraries.org/public-libraries-public-places/

Gilman, S. C., & Whitton, H. (2013). When transparency becomes the enemy of accountability: Reflections From the Field. *PA Times*. https://patimes.org/transparency-enemy-accountability-reflections-field/

Goings, C. A., Goings, D. A., & Vanjani, M. B. (2005). Status of E-Government in Georgia. Communications of the IIMA, Vol. 5 (4). https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/ciima/vol5/iss4/4

Hamilton, A. (1792). Enclosure: Objections and Answers Respecting the Administration, 18 August 1792. *National Archives*. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-12-02-0184-0002

Harder, C. T., & Jordan, M. M. (2013). The transparency of county websites: A content analysis. *Public Administration Quarterly. 37* (1). pp. 103-128. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24371990

Hill, A. (2015). The First Bank of the United States. *Federal Reserve History*. https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/first-bank-of-the-us

Holden, S.H., Fletcher, D., & Norris, D.F. (2001). Is your local government plugged in? International City/County Management Association, https://icma.org/sites/default/files/106198_egov2000web.pdf

Hutton, T.R.C. (2013). The irreducibility of the county in the south and America, past and present. *American Nineteenth Century History*. *15* (1). http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2014.885179

Ingraham, C. (2018). How rising inequality hurts everyone, even the rich. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/02/06/how-rising-inequality-hurts-everyone-even-the-rich/

International City/County Management Association. (2017). Hidden government. https://icma.org/articles/article/hidden-government

International City/County Management Association, (2011), E-Government survey, https://icma.org/documents/icma-survey-research-e-government-2011-survey-summary

Italie, H. (2019). Redaction nation: United States history brims with partial deletions. *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/1c3d1b8d106f41c6bf2e15e49ee1dc4b

Jackson, E. (2018). A brief history of Georgia counties. Georgia Info. https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/topics/history/article/progressive-era-world-war-ii-1901-1945/a-brief-history-of-georgia-counties

Jefferson, T. (1787). From Thomas Jefferson to Uriah Forrest, with Enclosure, 31 December 1787. *Founders Online of the National Archives*. https://www.founders.archives.gov/?q=%22peace%20is%20best%20preserved%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=1&sr=

Jefferson, T. (1818). Thomas Jefferson's explanations of the three volumes bound in marbled paper (the so-called "Anas"), 4 February 1818. *National Archives*. https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Project%3A"Jefferson Papers" anas Author%3A"Jefferson, Thomas"&s=1511311111&r=82

Jefferson, T. (1820). From Thomas Jefferson to William Charles Jarvis. *Founders Online*, *National Archives*. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-1540.

Johnson, L. (1966). Statement by the President upon Signing S. 1160. Press Release, Office of the White House Press Secretary. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu

Kemp, B. (2020). State launches broadband availability map. Georgia Technology Authority. https://gta.georgia.gov/press-releases/2020-07-06/state-launches-broadband-availability-map

Lamplugh, G.R. (2017). Yazoo land fraud. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/yazoo-land-fraud

Langworth, R. (2022). Churchill's "Democracy is the worst form of government…", para.1. https://richardlangworth.com/worst-form-of-government

Lassiter, D. (2020). Broadband ready: Community certification makes communities viable for economic development. *Georgia County Government magazine.* https://www.gacountygovernment-digital.com/acgq/0420_winter_2020/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1643298&app=false - articleId1643298

Lincoln, A. (1863). Gettysburg address. Library of Congress. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.4356500

Locke, J. (1690). Second Treatise of Government. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/interactives/declaration-of-independence/consent/enlarge5.html

Lowatcharin, G., & Menifield, C. (2015). Internet accessibility an important factor in government transparency. *Science Daily*. 47 (2). https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/08/150803155324.htm

Madison, J. (1788a). The Federalist Papers, No. 51. Founders Online of the National Archives. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0279

Madison, J. (1788b). The Federalist Papers, No. 55. Founders Online of the National Archives. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0204

Manoharan, A. (2012*).* A study of the determinants of county E-Government in the United States. *American Review of Public Administration*. 43 (2). pp. 159-178. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0275074012437876

Manoharan, A. (2013). A three dimensional assessment of U.S county E-Government. *State & Local Government Review*. 45 (3). pp. 153-162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42002377

Maciag, M. (2019). Number of local governments by state. *Governing.* https://www.governing.com/gov-data/number-of-governments-by-state.html

Marninio, J. (2019). Importance of Website Security for Local Government. Whiteout Press. https://www.whiteoutpress.com/importance-of-website-security-for-local-

McFarland, C.F. (2018). Bridging the urban-rural divide. National League of Cities. https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/nlc-bridging-the-urban-rural-divide.pdf

McMullan, T. (2015). What does the panopticon mean in the age of digital surveillance? *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/23/panopticon-digital-surveillance-jeremy-bentham

McNamara, R. (2025). Thomas Nast's campaign against Boss Tweed. ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/thomas-nasts-campaign-against-boss-tweed-4039578

Meckler, L. (2019). Achievement gaps in schools driven by poverty, study finds. *The Washington Post.* https://www.augustachronicle.com/news/20190923/achievement-gaps-in-schools-driven-by-poverty-study-finds

Meese, E. (2009). The meaning of the Constitution. *Heritage Guide to the Constitution*. https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/the-meaning-the-constitution

Moon, J.J. (2002). The evolution of e-government among municipalities: Rhetoric or reality? *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 62 (4). https://www.jstor.org/stable/3110357

Mulvihill, D.E. & Price, D.G. (1965). The present and future use of computers in state government. *Public Administration Review*, 25 (2), pp. 142-150.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/973807

National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). State and county estimates of low literacy. NCES. https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Comparison charts of state and county estimates. NCES. https://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap

National League of Cities. (2016). Cities 101 – Types of local U.S. governments. https://www.nlc.org/resource/cities-101-types-of-local-governments/

Niesse, M. (2019). Georgia unveils plan for internet service in rural areas. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. https://www.ajc.com/news/state-regional-govt-politics/georgia-unveils-plan-for-internet-service-rural-areas/

Niesse, M. (2021). Fast rural internet gets a big boost. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. https://www.ajc.com/politics/fast-rural-internet-to-be-built-by-middle-georgia-power-companies/

Nix, E. (2018). What was the XYZ affair? History.com. https://www.history.com/news/what-was-the-xyz-affair

Norris, D.F. & Reddick, C. (2011). E-Government Survey 2011. International City/County Management Association. https://icma.org/sites/default/files/302947_E-Government%202011%20Survey%20Summary.pdf

O'Flaherty, K. (2019). Florida city agrees to astonishing payout. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/kateoflahertyuk/2019/06/20/florida-city-agrees-to-astonishing-600000-ransom-payout/?sh=414cd5b22ac6

Olens, S. (2014) Georgia's sunshine laws: A citizen's guide to open government. Office of the Georgia Attorney General. https://law.georgia.gov/key-issues/open-government/faq-open-government

Orwell, G. (1945). Animal Farm. Project Gutenberg Australia. http://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100011h.htmlOPEN Government Data Act, Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, Section 3502 of Title 44, (2019). https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ435/PLAW-115publ435.pdf

Parks, W. (1957). The open government principle: Applying the right to know under the Constitution. *The George Washington Law Review*. 26 (1). pp. 1-22.

Porter, E. (2015). Education gap between rich and poor is growing wider. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/23/business/economy/education-gap-

Public Administration Review. (2007). County Government: The Final Analysis. *Public Administration Review*, Nov. – Dec., 2007, Vol. 67, No. 6, pp. 991-992. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4624658

Rachfal, C.L. (2021). The Digital Divide: What is it, where is it and Federal assistance programs. Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46613

Ragsdale, B. (2005). The Sedition Act Trials. Federal Judicial History Office. https://www.wethegoverned.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Federal-Judicial-Center-2005-article-about-the-Alien-and-Sedition-Acts.pdf

Raphelson, S. (2019). Town avoids paying massive $5 million ransom. National Public Radio. https://www.npr.org/2019/09/06/758399814/town-avoids-paying-massive-5-million-ransom-in-cyberattack

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. (2010). Governments continue to come up with new ways to prevent access to records. https://www.rcfp.org/journals/governments-continue-come-n/

Roberts, P. (2014). The Teapot Dome Scandal. Wyoming State Historical Society. https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/teapot-dome-scandal

Rothman, L. (2015). This 50-year-old prediction about computers will make you sad. *Time Magazine*. https://time.com/3754781/1965-predictions-computers/Ryan, P. (2011). How class warfare weakens America. *The New York Post*. https://nypost.com/2011/10/27/how-class-warfare-weakens-america/

Scholl, H.J. (2017). E-Government. *Oxford Bibliographies*. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0186.xml?rskey=AezTOf&result=2&q=egovernment#firstMatch

Snider, C. F. (1952). American county government: A mid-century review. *The American Political Science Review*. 46 (1). 66-80. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1950762

Staats, E.B. (1980). Computers in government: We couldn't do without them. U.S. Government Accountability Office. https://www.gao.gov/assets/112745.pdf

Stone, A. (2018). Digital states survey 2018: Raising the bar. *Government Technology*. https://www.govtech.com/computing/Digital-States-2018.html

Streib, G., & Thomas, J. C. (2003). The new face of government: Citizen-initiated contacts in the era of E-Government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. 13 (1). pp. 83-101. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3525618

Suggs, C. (2016). Georgia education budget primer for state fiscal year 2017. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. https://gbpi.org/georgia-education-budget-primer-for-state-fiscal-year-2017/

Tisdale, N. (2013). Consolidated city-county governments in Georgia. About Forsyth. http://www.aboutforsyth.net/v3/viewtopic.php?t=7412

Tocqueville, A. de. (1835). Democracy in America. (H. Reeve, Trans.) Project Gutenberg. https://gutenberg.org/files/815/815-h/815-h.htm#link2HCH0011

Twain, M. & Warner, C.D. (1873). The Gilded Age. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3178/3178-h/3178-h.htm

United Nations. (2001). Benchmarking E-Government: A Global Perspective 2001. United Nations, New York. https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/Benchmarking-E-Government-2011

United Nations. (2014). United Nations E-Government Survey 2014. United Nations, New York. https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2014-Survey/E-Gov_Complete_Survey-2014.pdf

United Nations. (2015). 2015 World Public Sector Report. United Nations, New York. https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2015-world-public-sector-report.html

United Nations. (2016). United Nations E-Government Survey 2016. United Nations, New York. https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2016-e-government-survey.html

United Nations. (2018). United Nations E-Government Survey 2018. United Nations, New York. https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2018-Survey/E-Government Survey 2018_FINAL for web.pdf

United Nations. (2020). United Nations E-Government Survey 2020. United Nations, New York. https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/publications/un-e-government-survey-2020

United Nations. (2022). United Nations E-Government Survey 2022. United Nations, New York. https://desapublications.un.org/publications/category/Public%20Administration#popup

United States Census Bureau. (ND). History: UNIVAC I. https://www.census.gov/history/www/innovations/technology/univac_i.html

United States Census Bureau. (2019). From municipalities to special districts, official count of every type of local government in 2017 Census of Government. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/2019/econ/from_municipalities_to_special_districts_america_counts_october_2019.pdf

United States Constitution. (1789). United States. (1776). Declaration of Independence. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/interactives/declaration-of-independence/consent/enlarge5.html

United States Geological Survey. (2020). How many counties are in the U.S.? https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/how-many-counties-are-united-states?qt-news_science_products=0#qt-news_science_products

Urofsky, M. (2009). The value of 'Other People's Money.' *New York Times.* http://inside.sfuhs.org/dept/history/US_History_reader/Chapter8/brandeis.htm

Van Wagenen, J. (2017). Four ways to protect local government websites. *State Tech.* https://statetechmagazine.com/article/2017/11/4-ways-protect-local-government-websites

Vu, M. N. (2018). DOJ says failure to comply with web accessibility guidelines is not necessarily a violation of the ADA. Department of Justice. https://www.adatitleiii.com/2018/10/doj-says-failure-to-comply-with-web-accessibility-guidelines-is-not-necessarily-a-violation-of-the-ada/

Vyas, A. (2002). Georgia's County Governments. New Georgia Encyclopedia. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/georgias-county-governments

Wagner, S. (2019). Why creating a culture of trust is key for local government boards. ICMA.org. https://icma.org/blog-posts/why-creating-culture-trust-key-local-government-boards

Walker, B. (2018). Regional commissions of Georgia. *New Georgia Enclycopedia*. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/regional-commissions-georgia

Ward, N. (1641). The Massachusetts Body of Liberties. Hanover Historical Texts Projects. https://history.hanover.edu/texts/masslib.html

Washington, G. (1792). From George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, 29 July 1792. National Archives. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-10-02-0401

Weldon, K. (2016). The public and its right to know. *Huffpost.* https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-public-and-its-right_b_10703864

Wickersham, M.E., & Yehl, R. (2018). Georgia rural hospital authorities as "shadow governments." *International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior.* https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJOTB-03-2018-0021/full/html

Williams, D. (2020). Governor Kemp signs broadband bill focusing on rural Georgia. *Capitol Beat*. http://capitol-beat.org/2020/08/gov-kemp-signs-broadband-bill-focusing-on-rural-georgia

World Population Review. (2020). How many cities are in the U.S. http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/how-many-cities-are-in-the-us/

WXIA. (2019). New report says Atlanta has greatest income disparity in America. *WXIA/ 11 Alive*. https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/new-report-says-atlanta-has-greatest-income-disparity-in-america/85-ef4cb169-ff15-44b4-8a94-5b707daff64f

Zeitz, J. (2018). How Americans lost faith in government. *Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/01/30/how-americans-lost-faith-in-government

Appendix A

Georgia Transparency Study Checklist

Appendix A

Georgia Transparency Study Checklist

Accessibility
1. Web Address
2. Elected Officials
3. Administrators

Open Government
4. Current Agenda
5. Archived Agenda/Minutes
6. Guidelines for Citizens

Finances
7. Current Budget
8. Archived Budgets
9. Bids and Contracts

Open Records/FOIA
10. Current law
11. Name of Compliance Officer
12. Link to file a request

Citizen Interaction
13. Voter Registration
14. Elections Information
15. Online payment options
16. Citizen input

Service Delivery
17. Tax Information
18. Water/Sewer/Waste
19. Public Safety: Law, fire, courts
20. Culture: library, parks
21. Planning: building, zoning, ULDC

Boards and Authorities
22. List of Authorities, Boards and Commissions
23. Administration/ Board Members
24. Meeting Notices, Agendas, Minutes
25. Budgets and Financials

Scoring = 4 Points Each: 100 Total
A: 90-100 B: 80-89 C: 70-79 F: 0-69

Appendix B

Regional Commissions and Counties: Small, Median, Large, by Population

Appendix B

Regional Commissions and Counties: Small, Median, Large, by Population

Region One
Northwest Georgia
Dade: 16,116
Gordon: 57,963
Paulding 168,667

Region Two
Georgia Mountains
Towns: 12,037
Habersham: 45,328
Forsyth: 244,252

Region Three
Atlanta Regional
Rockdale: 90,896
Clayton: 292,256
Fulton: 1,063,937

Region Four
Three Rivers
Heard: 11, 923
Spalding: 66,703
Coweta: 148,509

Region Five
Northeast Georgia
Jasper: 14,219
Oconee: 40,280
Clarke: 128,331

Region Six
Middle Georgia
Twiggs: 8,120
Baldwin: 44,890
Houston: 157,863

Region Seven
Central Savannah River
Taliaferro: 1,537
Burke: 22,383
Richmond: 202,51

Region Eight

River Valley
Quitman: 2,299
Crisp: 22,372
Muscogee: 195,769

Region Nine
Heart of Georgia Altamaha
Treutlen: 6,901
Appling: 18,386
Laurens 47,546

Region Ten
Southwest Georgia
Baker 3,038
Grady: 24,633
Dougherty: 87,956

Region Eleven
Southern Georgia
Echols 4,006
Pierce: 19,465
Lowndes: 117,406

Region Twelve
Coastal
Screven: 13,966
Bulloch: 79,608
Chatham 265,128