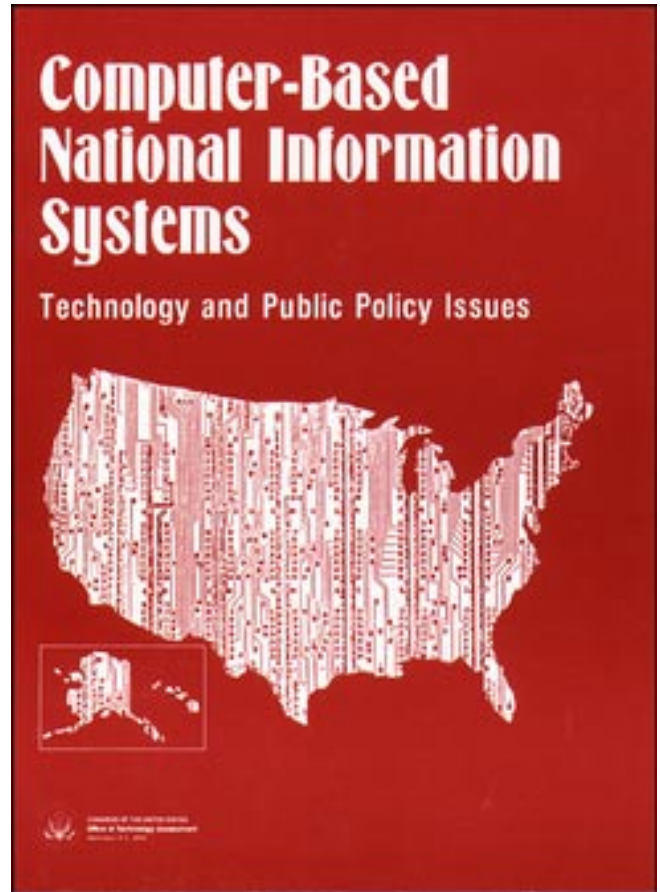


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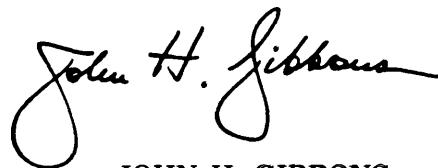
Foreword

This report presents the results of an overview study on the use of computer technology in national information systems and related public policy issues. The purposes of this study are:

- *To provide a general introduction to computer-based national information systems.*—Will help acquaint the nonexpert reader with the nature of computer-based national information systems and the role they play in American society.
- *To provide a framework for understanding computer and information policy issues.*—Develops a structure of information policy and presents brief essays on several of the more important issue areas, with an emphasis on how future applications of computer-based information systems may intensify or alter the character of the policy debate and the need for new or revised laws and policies.
- *To provide a state-of-the-art survey of computer and related technologies and industries.*—Highlights recent developments in computer and information technologies and describes the current status and likely evolution of the computer and information industries.
- *To Provide a foundation for other related studies.* While some observations can be made about national information systems in general, a full assessment of impacts and issues is best conducted in the context of specific systems. The report builds a foundation for three related OTA studies in the areas of computerized criminal history records, electronic mail, and electronic funds transfer. These three separate studies will be published later this year.

As a set, the four studies comprise the OTA assessment of Societal Impacts of National Information Systems that was requested by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, House Committee on the Judiciary, and House Post Office and Civil Service Committee. Supporting requests were received from the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights and the House Science and Technology Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology.

OTA appreciates the participation of the many advisory panelists and others who helped bring this study to completion.



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