with no loss in the quality of medical services if the program could be administered as well in every region of the country as it is in the ones where service is most efficient.

Even the U.S. Postal Service has had successes. Despite an increase of seven million since 1999 in the number of addresses it serves, the Postal Service "has saved $5.5 billion by replicating the best practices of the best sorting plants and by improving its delivery and counter operations." Productivity has increased by six percent, and "customer satisfaction ratings are at all-time highs."

New competition has spurred the Postal Service to improve, and governments could use a stiff dose of the same stuff. Outsourcing, which can put everything from paper clip procurement to schooling in the hands of private contractors, is one way to go. But more can be done even when there's no competition to be found. Conducting customer satisfaction surveys, publicizing the results, and establishing "metrics" to gauge improvement would prod government agencies to perform better.

Admittedly, the task is difficult. It's one thing to pass good legislation, the authors note, another to put in the sustained and thankless effort needed to make it effective. But if the Postal Service can do it, why can't everyone else?

The Christian Gender Gap

If religious voters are more conservative than others, and if women tend to be more religious than men, why is there a "gender gap" in national elections that leaves the women's vote tilted toward the Democratic Party?

It could be that religious commitment influences the partisan leanings of only the most devout voters. But that's not the case, according to Kaufmann, a University of Maryland political scientist who analyzed public opinion surveys from the four presidential elections between 1988 and 2000. Among the highly devout (as measured by such factors as weekly church attendance), the gender gap persists: 59 percent of men, but only 49 percent of women, identified with the Republican Party.

Perhaps religious commitment has a stronger effect on men than on women, making the men more conservative? No, says Kaufmann. On a range of issues—from defense policy to gay rights and other cultural issues—religious belief pulls men and women to the right in equal measures.

But that rightward shift still leaves a big gender gap on one question: attitudes toward the size and nature of the welfare state. Women, Kaufman says, "are simply more liberal than men on questions of social welfare." And for many religious women, social welfare policies are a more important determinant of voting behavior than the hot-button cultural issues that are said to animate so many religious voters.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Army Lite

In April 2003, an armored battalion of the Third Infantry Division was at the tip of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Racing toward a key bridge near Baghdad, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest Marcone, the battalion commander, had one problem: He knew very little about the strength of the Iraqi opposition. After seizing the bridge on April 2, Marcone received intelligence that a single Iraqi brigade was moving toward his position. His unit would actually confront three brigades, including 5,000 to 10,000 troops and dozens

High-tech equipment is supposed to help troops track down the enemy in Iraq, but frozen software, long downloads, and other glitches have hampered its effectiveness in combat situations.

of armored vehicles, in the largest Iraqi counterattack of the war. Although Marcone's unit won the battle, its experience, according to Talbot, a senior editor of *Technology Review*, reveals a much larger problem for the American military: The Pentagon's high-tech "force transformation" has serious shortcomings.

The U.S. military has been investing heavily in force transformation for a decade. At a cost of more than $100 billion, 25 partner companies are building a suite of manned and unmanned machines, loaded with the latest sensors and communications technology, that will be linked together in a "system of systems" reaching all the way down to troops in the field. Planners hope that these technologies will support a lightly armored and more mobile American military. If, for example, the army can replace heavily armored tanks with light Stryker troop carriers that use digital information to evade enemy fire, it could fly—rather than sail—to war.

The Pentagon points to force transformation's many successes in Iraq, from the ability to bomb enemy positions through blinding sandstorms to the lack of friendly-fire incidents. Earlier achievements in Afghanistan, where U.S.

Special Forces coordinated precision attacks against Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters using digital information networks, also indicate that force transformation is working.

But many frontline commanders in Iraq repeated Marcone's experience: digital images of the battlefield and other crucial information never reached them, sensors failed to detect the enemy, software froze, and downloads took hours. The army's microwave-based communications system, designed for a European campaign, required vehicles to come to a halt in order to download information, leaving them vulnerable to attack.

"It was a universal comment: 'We had terrible situational awareness,'" says a RAND Corporation researcher who is working on a study of the Iraq campaign. He sees evidence of a "digital divide" between the battlefield and headquarters units, which sometimes received so much information that they had to pull the plug on the influx.

The Pentagon is committed to building a lightly armored, highly mobile U.S. military, with the expectation that "information armor" will compensate for reduced physical protection. But, as Talbot concludes, "what protected Marcone's men wasn't information armor, but armor itself."